

# The Highland Council

Agenda Item	<b>13.</b>
Report No	<b>RES/29/24</b>

**Committee:** Corporate Resources

**Date:** 11 September 2024

**Report Title:** Publication of Decisions at COSLA Leaders' Meetings

**Report By:** Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate

## 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on an exchange of correspondence between the Council Leader and the President of COSLA in relation to the publication of decisions reached at COSLA Leaders' meetings.

## 2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. **Note** the report.

## 3. Implications

3.1 **Resource:** There are no specific resource implications arising from this report.

3.2 **Legal:** There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

3.3 **Risk:** There are no specific risk implications arising from this report.

3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people):** There are no specific Health and Safety implications arising from this report.

3.5 **Gaelic:** There are no specific implications for the Gaelic Language Plan.

## 4. Impacts

4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3 This is an update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

## **5. Introduction**

- 5.1 At the Council meeting on 9 May 2024 Cllr Christie asked whether the key decisions taken at COSLA Leader's meeting could be published. The Council Leader advised that it was not appropriate to detail the decisions taken by COSLA where matters on the agenda have been held in private. In response to the supplementary question regarding whether a system of briefing could be introduced that would enable Members to be kept informed of the Highland position at COSLA meetings, the Council Leader indicated that if these briefings were in line with COSLA's policies regarding confidentiality, then they would be considered.
- 5.2 Subsequently at the Council meeting on 27 June 2024, Cllr Christie asked for an update as to what solutions could be put in place to address this matter.
- 5.3 The Council Leader advised that he wrote to Cllr Shona Morrison, President of COSLA (copy attached at **Appendix 1**) in which he indicated that while he recognised the need for confidentiality, there was also a need to ensure transparency and openness in decision-making and asked whether she could consider options which would enable Members to have a greater awareness of decisions taken at COSLA Leaders' meetings.
- 5.4 In response to the supplementary question, it was agreed that this would be an item for the Corporate Resources Committee once a reply had been received from the President of COSLA.

## **6. Response from COSLA**

- 6.1 On 5 July the President of COSLA replied (copy attached at **Appendix 2**) to the Council Leader's letter indicating that they consider very carefully whether agenda items need to be taken in private, depending on the policy being discussed and where they are in relation to political negotiations with either UK or Scottish Governments. Allowing Leaders to consider items in private allows for robust discussions and for COSLA to establish negotiating positions, always focused on the benefits for communities across Scotland.
- 6.2 Following decisions at Leaders, many of COSLA's agreed positions move immediately into the public domain. However, some policy areas require more work and negotiations - consideration in private allows for this to continue, without jeopardizing Local Government's position.
- 6.3 Nevertheless, the President advised that she had reflected on the Council Leader's letter and, to enable all members to have a greater awareness of the decisions taken at meetings of Leaders, COSLA's Member Support team will circulate a summary of all recommendations agreed by Leaders to all Chief Executives within 3 working days of the conclusion of the meeting.

6.4 Where some recommendations need to stay confidential due to the timing of negotiations, this will make that clear. It will then be for Chief Executives to circulate to elected members as appropriate. A full minute of the meeting will be circulated as normal with the next meeting's agenda, for agreement by Council Leaders.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate

Date: 15 July 2024

Author: Gordon Morrison, Policy Manager

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Letter from Cllr Raymond Bremner, Leader of the Council  
Appendix 2 – Letter from Cllr Shona Morrison, President of COSLA

Cllr Shona Morrison  
President  
COSLA  
Verity House  
19 Haymarket Yards  
Edinburgh  
EH12 5BH

Foighnich airson/Please ask for: **Councillor Raymond Bremner**

Àireamh fòn/Direct phone: (01463) 702856

Ur n-Àireamh-iùil/Your ref:

Ar n-Àireamh-iùil/Our ref: RB/rm

Ceann-latha/Date: 17 June 2024

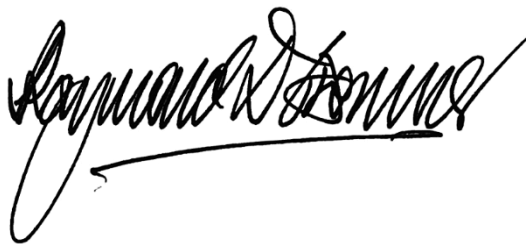
Dear Shona

At our last Council meeting in May, the Leader of the Opposition asked whether it would be possible for me to detail the key decisions taken at COSLA Leaders.

In response I advised that documents and items relating to COSLA Leader's meetings where matters have been agreed to be in the public domain are available on the COSLA website and that it would not be appropriate for me to detail the decisions taken by COSLA where matters on the agenda have been held in private.

While I recognise the need for confidentiality, there is also a need to ensure transparency and openness in decision-making. Consequently, I wonder whether you could consider options which would enable members to have a greater awareness of decisions taken at meetings of COSLA Leaders.

Yours sincerely / Leis gach deagh dhùrachd,



Councillor Raymond Bremner  
Leader of The Highland Council

An Comhairliche Raymond Bremner  
Ceannard Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd

**Councillor Raymond Bremner**  
Leader of The Highland Council

The Highland Council, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness, IV3 5NX

**Tel no:** (01463) 702856 Mobile: 07787 836402

**e-mail:** [raymond.bremner.cllr@highland.gov.uk](mailto:raymond.bremner.cllr@highland.gov.uk)

**An Comhairliche Raymond Bremner**

Ceannard Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd

Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd, Rathad Ghlinn Urchadain, Inbhir Nis, IV3 5NX

**Fòn:** (01463) 702856 **Fòn-làimhe:** 07787 836402

**Post-d:** [raymond.bremner.cllr@highland.gov.uk](mailto:raymond.bremner.cllr@highland.gov.uk)

From COSLA President, Councillor Shona Morrison



5<sup>th</sup> July 2024

Cllr Raymond Bremner, Leader of the Highland Council  
By Email: [raymond.bremner.cllr@highland.gov.uk](mailto:raymond.bremner.cllr@highland.gov.uk)

Dear Raymond,

Many thanks for your letter on 17<sup>th</sup> June regarding greater awareness of the key decisions taken by COSLA Leaders each month.

To work as effectively as possible on behalf of our members, the Vice President, COSLA's Senior Management Team and I consider very carefully whether agenda items need to be taken in private, depending on the policy being discussed and where we are in relation to political negotiations with either UK or Scottish Governments. Allowing Leaders to consider items in private allows for robust discussions and for us to establish negotiating positions, always focused on the benefits for communities across Scotland. Following decisions at Leaders, many of COSLA's agreed positions move immediately into the public domain. However, some policy areas require more work and negotiations - consideration in private allows for this to continue, without jeopardizing Local Government's position.

With COSLA officers and our professional associations, I have reflected on your letter and, to enable all members to have a greater awareness of the decisions taken at meetings of Leaders, COSLA's Member Support team will circulate a summary of all recommendations agreed by Leaders to all Chief Executives within 3 working days of the conclusion of the meeting. Where some recommendations need to stay confidential due to the timing of negotiations, we will make that clear. It will then be for Chief Executives to circulate to elected members as appropriate. A full minute of the meeting will be circulated as normal with the next meeting's agenda, for agreement by Leaders.

I hope this addresses your concerns, but I would be very happy to discuss this matter with you further if required.

Yours sincerely,



**Councillor Shona Morrison**  
**COSLA President**