

PE1747/C

COSLA submission of 8 November 2019

Thank you for asking COSLA to provide a response on the above Petition. COSLA and all our member local authorities are fully committed to the provision of Additional Support for Learning and to Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) by providing the right kind of support to enable all children and young people to be fully included and to achieve the best they can.

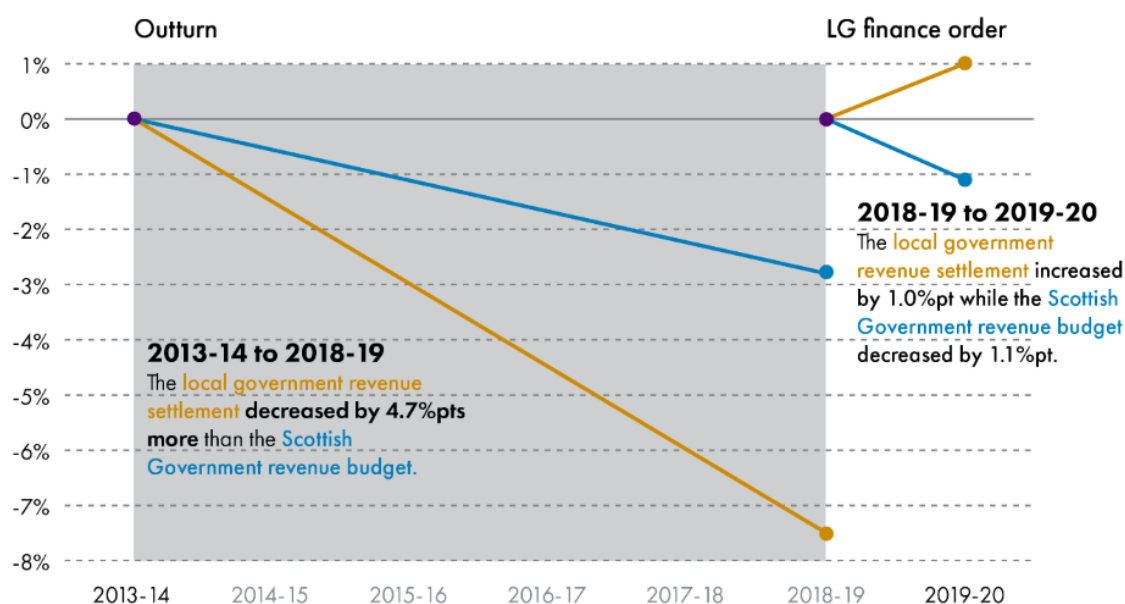
In this response we would like highlight two areas:

- I The impact of a declining core budget and increasing ring-fencing
- II The independently Chaired review of additional support for learning

The Impact of a declining core budget and increasing protections

The petitioner makes a number of references to Local Authorities not being adequately funded- this is a point we concur with. However, the proposal to resolve this by the provision of funding that is essentially 'ring- fenced' is in our view not the solution and will simply lead to cuts in other areas. Local Government should be adequately funded so that it can decide the best way to provide the wide range of services for our communities; many of these services are outwith schools and support children and young people with Additional Support Needs.

Local Government budgets have decreased significantly over a number of years. As SPICe highlighted in their most recent report on Local Government Finance, between 2013/14 and 2019/201, Local Government has been passed a disproportionate cut in comparison to budget reductions the Scottish Government has faced:



Source: SPICe

Over this period, Local Government's share of the Scottish Government budget has fallen from 34.8% to just 33%. Although reported as a 1% increase for local

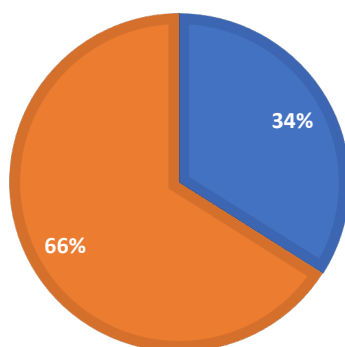
authorities between 2018/19 and 2019/20, this was linked to new policy commitments and principally related to the ring-fenced funding for early learning and childcare (discussed in more detail below).

Within this pattern of reductions, not only have local authorities been tasked with delivering an increasing number of Scottish Government priorities, Councils have absorbed the impact of inflation which last year alone was calculated to be £294m, as well as coping with increases in demand totalling £255m in 2019/20. Councils are undeniably doing more with less.

As explained more fully in [COSLA's submission](#) to the Local Government and Communities Committee, protections within 'core' budgets are continuing to increase which impacts Local Government's ability to plan strategically and holistically. In the 2019/20 budget, protections had reached a point where 61% is protected with only 39% unprotected (see charts below) – a shift in balance even since 2018/19. Our Committee submission made it clear that this is not sustainable.

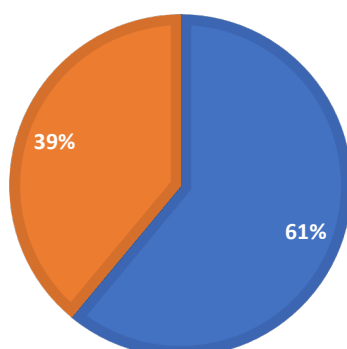
2013/14

■ Protected ■ Unprotected



2019/20

■ Protected ■ Unprotected



As well as protected money such as Pupil Equity Funding (PEF), this year has seen other examples of policy-specific funding for local authorities, presented as additions to the core. Whilst the policy intent is valued and the funding welcomed, they are essentially ring fenced for a specific purpose:

- Access to Counselling in Schools- an additional £12m was provided in 19/20, with another £4m for 20/21, seeing £16m added to core budgets but to be used for a very specific purpose. Whilst agreement was reached on local flexibility in relation to delivery, the funding comes with an administration and reporting burden for all Local Authorities.
- Additional Support for Learning – an additional £15m recurring funding has been committed as part of the 2019 Programme for Government but with very specific requirement around support staff, employed using the funding, being additional, committing local authorities to maintaining existing numbers of ASL staff thereby ringfencing local authority funding out with this £15m package. This reduces their ability to set their own budgets based on the entirety of demand for all local authority services, not just Additional Support for Learning.

The independently Chaired review of additional support for learning

The review is a direct result of a motion in the Scottish Parliament, the review will make recommendations by February 2020.

Following a motion and debate in the Scottish Parliament on 28 January 2019 the Deputy First Minister agreed to the setting up of an independently Chaired review of Additional Support for Learning. Scottish Government Officers held a series of discussions with COSLA and ADES to shape how the review will work, and the Remit for the review was developed. The review will report jointly to COSLA and Scottish Government.

The review is founded on a continued commitment to a presumption to mainstreaming and on the need to ensure that children and young people's additional support needs are met. And will consider current evidence and engage with a range of people and groups to identify good practice and areas for further improvement in the ways that children and young people with additional support needs progress in their learning.

The review will consider:

- how ASL works in practice, across early learning and childcare centres, primary, secondary and special schools (including enhanced provision, services and units)
- where children and young people learn within the balance of the provision set out above, recognising that not all authority areas have all of those provisions
- the quality of learning and support, including overall achievement and positive destinations achieved post-school
- the different approaches to planning and assessment to meet the needs of children and young people
- the roles and responsibilities of support staff, teaching staff, leadership role, education authorities and national agencies
- the areas of practice which could be further enhanced through better use of current resources to support practice, staffing or other aspects of provision

Conclusion

The result of the reduction in local authorities budgets and more protected priorities from the centre are impacting on local authorities' ability to deliver key services. The solution to this is to make sure that Local Government receives a fair settlement. A review of additional support for learning is taking place, this was instigated by the Scottish Parliament. The review will make recommendations to COSLA and Scottish Government in February 2020. The Public Petitions Committee may wish to let the review conclude rather than accepting the petitioner's asks for the Scottish Parliament to seek further ring-fencing within Local Government budgets.