

From the President Councillor Pat Watters



26 August 2008

To : Police & Fire Joint Board / Authority Conveners

Cc : Leaders

Dear Councillor,

The purpose of this letter is to follow up recent discussions concerning greater integration of lobbying and policy development on issues relating to police and fire services. As you will now be aware following the Convention's consideration of a report on this issue COSLA had wished for that discussion to happen in some detail at a meeting between Police Conveners and the COSLA Presidential Team on 15th August (and in a separate meeting with Fire Conveners, probably held around the FITG). In practice there was a very limited rehearsal of the issues at the meeting with Police Conveners. I will address the factors behind the gap in expectations for that meeting in a separate letter to them as whilst unfortunate, it does now sit in the past and although important to bottom out cannot take precedence over future actions which serve to move us forward.

I have to say that the Vice-Presidents and myself were surprised at some of the comments made at the 15th August meeting by Police Conveners and the fact that emotions seem from all that we have heard to have been running high ever since. As a result, I have quite deliberately taken some time to stand back from this issue and then revisit the Convention report which forms the basis for these discussions. Having done so, I have to be quite frank with you and say that the response from Police Board Conveners does seem to be out of all proportion to the proposals outlined in the report.

Before we meet to discuss this further at any future meetings, I wanted to take the opportunity to circulate the Convention report again and to summarise the key intentions of it. You will see from the report which is attached to this letter that it summarises the ways in which the external world has changed since lobbying and policy development on police and fire services was conducted separately. There are some clear risks to continuing with a separate approach in the face of these changed circumstances and therefore integration of police and fire issues into the mainstream local government family is proposed. Some structural changes are suggested which would provide a greater political involvement from police and fire across the full range of COSLA political forums from Executive Groups up to Leaders and the Convention. That is a summary of what the report does. Let me just be clear about what it does not do. It does not amount to the abolition of joint boards or police authorities. Nor does it amount to a "takeover". The conclusion to the report clearly proposes a process of **joint** development with you to work up a position of principle.

In essence, these changes amount to much better joint working and more effective lobbying activity on a joint basis. This is an exact parallel with the situation of the constituent authorities of COSLA. All 32 local authorities being part of COSLA does not alter their own identity and structure but enables local government to act collectively on key issues. Under

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the proposals outlined, these strengths would be extended to the world of police and fire. Clearly we go into this with our eyes open. There will be difficult issues but the experience of local government has been that the balance of issues that unite us far outweighs the few occasions where there is a difference of opinion and differences are resolved within COSLA amongst political colleagues and are not imposed.

As I said earlier, I intend that we will shortly be able to re-convene the discussion we started on 15th August and we cover these issues in much more detail then. In the meantime, I wanted to have communicated directly with you on the exact nature of the proposals. I hope this has been helpful and please do get in touch with me if you want to discuss any of this.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pat Watters', written over a horizontal line.

Councillor Pat Watters, CBE
President of COSLA