

Scottish Leaders Forum online event 18 November 2024
In Conversation with Mr McKee and Cllr Heddle

With thanks to 130+ people who joined us yesterday for our online session hosted by Sara Thiam, CEO of Prosper and two of Scotland's most high-profile reform leads - Minister for Public Finance, Mr Ivan McKee and COSLA Vice President, Cllr Steven Heddle. Thank you first to Sara for excellent hosting and some great questions for our two guests.

We heard a lot that resonated with our previous events on place leadership, and systems leadership for public bodies reform clusters. It is clear that place, collaboration, and partnership remain important to SLF members and are surfaced consistently in the conversations we host.

We were also really pleased to see people reaching out to each other and connecting in the chat with offers of help to move work forward.

Our event began with some brief reflections from Mr McKee and Cllr Heddle on what is important to them and the role of reform in terms of both fiscal sustainably and the quality of our public services. Both Mr McKee and Cllr Heddle took the opportunity to reflect on the ongoing legacy of Christie, acknowledging the role efficiencies but with an emphasis on learning, collaboration and sharing resources wherever possible. The emphasis was on a landscape of services that works efficiently and delivers what people need. Achieving that needs partnership, learning, and understanding that different places have different needs. It was clear that both local and national government have a lot in common, as well as areas where there are differences.

The conversation often touched upon the Local Governance Review, single authority models and the importance of communities having more control and more of a say in what happens locally. If you are interested in finding out more, please follow this [link](#).

Chatham House rule applied, but here are some key points from the discussion:

Continuous improvement & focus on communities

- Reform is a process, not an event ... we remain on the reform journey because there is always more to do, even if we are moving less quickly than we would like.
- The importance of leadership in creating the conditions for reform and the emphasis on achieving efficiencies as a continuous journey because there are always opportunities to improve performance. However, this is not just about costs.
- Communities need to be central to this process, and we need to recognise that requires investment. Sustaining our communities is of priority, and policy approaches through community wealth building, place-based approaches, etc., are key. Public service jobs are essential to sustaining our communities.

Whole system leadership with a shared vision

- It is critical that we see beyond the public sector and learn from all parts of our public services system, including the third and voluntary sector, private sector and businesses. We all have much to offer and experience to share.
- An emphasis on leaders as system entrepreneurs, needing to be able to look at the bigger picture, reaching across boundaries to help change happen and to jointly work out how to do things more cost-effectively. This needs to come from Scotland's leadership and not be 'done to' wherever possible.
- Agreeing shared priorities is a common enabler. This has been important in working on the Scottish Estate for example.

Local vs national approaches

- There were questions about the tension between what is seen as a push to centralise to achieve efficiencies and the need to be led by local needs and ambitions. An emphasis on celebrating local differences, sharing standards but doing what is right for communities and places. Local and national can work together, it is not one or the other, it is a matter of when one approach may be more appropriate.

If you were there, what did the session spark for you? We are always open to ideas for future sessions, so do please share your ideas with us.