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Your ref: CEO/CH  
Our ref: 2019/0029682  
29<sup>th</sup> October 2019

Dear Graham

Thank you for your letter of 2 October to the First Minister, regarding the global climate emergency. As the Cabinet Secretary responsible for climate change, the First Minister has asked me to respond.

Despite challenging fiscal circumstances, Scotland has already succeeded in almost halving emissions since 1990, while at the same time growing the economy and increasing employment and productivity. Local authorities have made good progress on emissions reduction to date, and can play a crucial role in delivering on Scotland's net-zero ambitions. For example, West Lothian Council's most recent report (made under The Climate Change (Duties of Public Bodies: Reporting Requirements) (Scotland) Order 2015 ) shows a decrease of around 17% in emissions against the Council's 2013-14 baseline. Achieving such significant progress is an impressive achievement but there is still much work to do. We have been clear that reaching net-zero emissions will require different and more difficult choices than has been the case to date, and public sector has a duty to lead the way.

The Scottish Government's 2019-20 Budget will provide local government with an additional £298.5 million resource funding for day to day services and an increase of £207.8 million capital funding in 2019-20. As well as this funding increase we have given councils the flexibility to increase council tax by up to 3 per cent in real terms. Taken together with actual council tax increases, councils will have access to an additional £602 million (5.7 per cent) in 2019-20 compared with 2018 19.

West Lothian Council will receive £350.5 million to fund local services in 2019-20. Combined with the decision to increase council tax by 3 per cent in real terms, West Lothian Council will have an additional £19.3 million (5.8 per cent) to support services compared to 2018-19.

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The Scottish Government's policy towards local authorities' spending is to allow local authorities the financial freedom to operate independently. As such, the vast majority of the revenue funding is provided by means of a block grant. It is the responsibility of individual local authorities to manage their own budgets and to allocate the total financial resources available to them, on the basis of local needs and priorities, having first fulfilled their statutory obligations and the jointly agreed set of national and local priorities.

The joint Local Governance Review with COSLA provides an opportunity for local councils and their partners to submit place specific proposals for changes to how power and resources are shared between national and local government, and with communities. We will be interested in proposals which demonstrate strong potential to improve local and national outcomes.

I recognise that Scotland's response to the Global Climate Emergency must be based on solid foundations of dialogue, collaboration and consensus. The Scottish Government is committed to working closely with local authorities to facilitate high ambition, so that we all benefit. You may be aware that I launched a consultation ("[The Role of the Public Sector in Tackling Climate Change](#)") in September and I hope that West Lothian Council will take part.

I plan to meet with Councillor Steven Heddle, COSLA's Environment and Economy Spokesperson, in the coming weeks. I am looking forward to this opportunity to discuss how best the Scottish Government and Local Authorities might work together to tackle climate change.

Yours



**ROSEANNA CUNNINGHAM**

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