

ADVERTISING FEATURE

# Leader has authority to set new direction

Management aptitude and an ability to lobby will be vital skills for COSLA's new chief executive, says **Ken Mann**

**S**PEAKING to Rory Mair, the retiring chief executive of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), provides a refreshingly open personal view of the professional background of his eventual replacement; the post is now being advertised.

In some other scenarios, and whether necessary or imagined, there can be much talk of intangibles such as vision and blue sky thinking. As a conversation unfolds, so too does the less aspirational collective view of selection committee hiding unsuccessfully behind the rhetoric; the likely scope of the search criteria may indeed be a narrower version of the stated mission.

None of that appears to afflict Mair's straightforward standpoint. "I think the professional background of a particular candidate is much less important than the three main skills I see for successfully doing the job," he asserts.

"In my mind these are, firstly, the ability to lobby on behalf of COSLA's membership, secondly, to have some idea or experience of what running a

membership organisation entails and lastly strong leadership skills in terms of setting an agenda and taking people with you.

"I think it would be wrong to limit the potential field to candidates who only have a local government or indeed a public sector background and I believe that any candidate who shows these three attributes would be worthy of consideration for the job."

That candid proposition modestly plays down a likely need for balance in a style of leadership that embraces an innate sense of pragmatism and firm brand of diplomacy.

COSLA is first and foremost a polit-

**'There is not only one tightrope to be walked, there are several – including a political tightrope'**



MAP THE FUTURE: As a political lobbying force, COSLA can claim a strong voice for member councils through negotiation with the Scottish Government.

ical lobbying organisation, looking for the best possible deal for its membership of Scottish councils. It has a staff of 75 distributed across four locations in Edinburgh, Glasgow, East Renfrewshire and Brussels (COSLA claims a "very strong" voice in Europe making the Scottish Local Government case in Europe).

The organisation is divided into themed policy teams, including Education and Young People, Health and Social Care, Development, Economy and Sustainability and Community Well-being as well as a Local Government Finance Team, the Local Government Employers Function, Business Gateway, Image, Media and Communications, Trading Standards, Migration, Population and Diversity and myjobscotland (a search engine dedicated to Scottish local authority jobs).

There has been previous publicity focused on wrangles between the organisation and members. Agreement on action points – or an absence of it – between members, and outcomes that please some but not others are inevitable relationship

considerations in such a structure. That scenario reflects the central debating role of a membership organisation dealing with vital matters of moment. Its ultimate potency inevitably relies upon a broad spirit of co-operation. Four of Scotland's 32 councils have departed, at least for the time being.

"In my view COSLA is as relevant today as it was when it was formed in 1975," Mair adds. "The need for unity between the membership and for local government to speak with a strong, single voice has never been more important. Yes we have four member councils out at the moment but we still represent the vast majority of Scotland's Councils."

"It cannot be denied that we would much rather have all 32 Councils as part of COSLA and it is for this reason that we have always adopted an open door policy in relation to them in terms of returning to the fold. It is also worth pointing out that the Scottish Government have said that whilst they will speak to anyone, they will only negotiate with COSLA."

There are understandable moments of partisanship among peer member representatives.

At times, a tightrope may have to be walked, but Mair underlines professional rewards and recounts achievements that underscore the value of the post.

He says: "There needs to be a real recognition from the potential candidates that, as chief executive of COSLA, there is not only one tightrope to be walked, there are several, including a political tightrope in terms of our political make-up at present."

"However what I would say is that if you can walk the tightropes and balance the political priorities then the rewards of the job in terms of delivering for the membership are well worth it."

"I could pick many (achievements) but I'll stick with three. Firstly, Health and Social Care Integration: when we stood up for our member councils against all three main political parties in Scotland who wanted to go down the route of a new agency (quango) for Health and Social care.

"Secondly, a pay deal in which we successfully balanced the needs of both our workforce and our member councils at a time of public sector pay restraint.

"And, finally, our ability to get, through our successful lobbying, our share of the Scottish Block (councils' annual grant funding from the grant made by Westminster to Scotland) maintained."

The current CEO points to COSLA's Vision, a campaign towards increased democratic functionality, as a demonstrator of its continued drive.

He concludes: "The Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy, which was born out of COSLA's Vision, can certainly be described as both radical and ambitious. The main theme to emerge from it was our assertion that Scotland would benefit from much more localism, both in terms of decentralisation and local communities being more empowered."

As a statement, it seems also to chime with many voters' perceptions of democracy in action.

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Closing date 6 November 2015, interview date 27 November 2015

**Chief Executive**  
 Edinburgh  
 Salary: £124,349

COSLA, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, is the representative voice of Scottish local government, lobbying on behalf of our members. As a membership organisation, one of our highest priorities is to maintain and enhance our relationship with member councils. Our major priorities include promoting the role of local government as a vital part of the government of Scotland and championing local services, local leadership and local accountability. COSLA also works directly with the Scottish Government and Parliament to influence public policy and practice, and to ensure that local government has the necessary resources to implement policy on behalf of its communities.

To carry on our work and to ensure that local government's voice continues to be heard, we are looking for the highest calibre individual who is capable of building on the strong foundations developed by the retiring Chief Executive and COSLA's current political leadership. The successful candidate will play the key leadership role within COSLA supported by the existing Senior Management Team and will provide the focus and drive necessary to ensure that we achieve our goals.

To meet the requirements of this role, you will already be moving at a high level in local government or public sector circles, combining your impressive leadership and communication skills with a strong track record in public policy development. You will be experienced in the lobbying process and you must have a clear understanding of the dynamics of funding local government. No doubt you are already energetic, enthusiastic and committed to public services in Scotland. However, if you are seeking a new challenge, plus a chance to move onwards and most definitely upwards, this outstanding opportunity will meet your ambition.

Further information on the role, including how to apply, is available at [www.aspenpeople.co.uk/cosla](http://www.aspenpeople.co.uk/cosla) If you would like a confidential discussion about the role please contact Ken Dalgleish or Donogh O'Brien at our recruitment partners, Aspen People, on 0141 212 7555.

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**Secretary to the Council of Assembly**  
 £65,904 - £70,203  
 Edinburgh

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Further information on the role is available at [www.aspenpeople.co.uk/cofs](http://www.aspenpeople.co.uk/cofs) For a confidential discussion contact Catriona Mackie on 0141 212 7555. Closing date: Friday 13th November 2015

It is an occupational requirement in terms of the Equality Act 2010 that job applicants for this post must have a personal commitment to the Christian faith expressed through active membership of a Christian denomination.

The Church of Scotland is a charity registered in Scotland SC011353.

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*Bi thu an urra ri libhrigeachd Ar Plana Gàidhlig, a' brosnachadh buannachdan eaconomach, sòisealta agus coimhearsnachd bhò na cothroman a tha co-cheangailte ri Gàidhlig.*

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Highlands and Islands Enterprise  
 Ionar na Gàidhealtachd 'n nan Eilean

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Closing Date 31st October 2015  
 No Agencies please.

**Lowland Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association**  
 Head of Finance

Lowland Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association is a supporting organisation of the Reserve Forces and Service Cadet organisations in the Lowlands of Scotland.

A vacancy exists for the post of Head of Finance reporting directly to the Chief Executive. The successful applicant must have the experience, qualification and capability to manage a substantial, multi-faceted business operation to support an extensive estate portfolio, marketing and communication activities and support to Service youth organisations.

The successful applicant will have sound accounting and budgeting experience and, as a minimum, membership of the Association of Accounting Technicians. Full membership of one of the accounting bodies would be an advantage. They should be capable of managing bills and invoicing, completing payroll activities including PAYE and NI, spreadsheet management and use of Microsoft-based IT systems and managing both internal audit and presentation of annual accounts for external audit. Previous experience of operating public funds and knowledge of the Armed Forces would be beneficial but is not essential; an interest in business development is desirable. Applicants must be capable of working in a small team and display a flexible approach.

The salary is £30,424. Annual leave, excluding public holidays, is 25 days rising to 30 days after 5 years' service. Previous service in the public sector will count towards qualifying years' service. There is an RFCA Pension Scheme, entrance to which is subject to the rules of the scheme.

Potential applicants should request an application form and job description by email ([fo-commsasst@rfca.mod.uk](mailto:fo-commsasst@rfca.mod.uk)) or telephone (0141 945 6753). Application forms with CV should be submitted by email by 5pm Monday 2nd November. Interviews will be held in the week commencing 16th November with a start date in early December.

For further information on Lowland Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association, see: [www.lowlandrfca.org.uk](http://www.lowlandrfca.org.uk)

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