

## Specimen Response for Study Theme 1A

### STUDY THEME 1A: DEVOLVED DECISION MAKING IN SCOTLAND

#### Question

To what extent are the functions of local authorities limited by the Scottish and United Kingdom Parliaments? (15 marks)

#### Response

*There is some degree of evidence that the functions of local government are limited by the UK and Scottish Parliaments.*

*The devolved powers of the Scottish Parliament gives it control of Local Government and therefore can limit its functions. The Scottish Parliament has control over a wide range of areas: health, education, Law and Order, Social Work, housing and environment. At present there is a coalition Government with Jack McConnell, Labour as First Minister, and until recently Jim Wallace, Liberal Democrat as Deputy First Minister. The majority of MSPs support Labour and most of the local councils are controlled by the Labour Party. So there is good cooperation between COSLA and the Scottish Executive.*

*COSLA (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities) has existed since 1975. It played a crucial role in the fight against the policies of the Conservative governments in the period 1979 – 97 and in the struggle for a Scottish Parliament. It represents local government interests to the Scottish Executive.*

*The present structure of Local Government was set up in 1996. There are 29 all purpose councils on the mainland with three island authorities. Some of these authorities are very small and they do not have the influence on Central Government that Strathclyde Region had. This was why the Conservative governments brought in these small authorities to weaken their powers and functions.*

*Local Councils play an important role in the everyday lives of the Scottish public. Schools, roads, refuse collection, street lighting and housing are just some of the services provided for people by their local councils. Some of the services such as education are mandatory and councils are required to provide a specific service and structures. Local Authorities cannot decide to raise or lower the school leaving*

age. This is decided by the government. They can close schools but parents can appeal to the Scottish Parliament.

Other services provided by Local Authorities are discretionary. These are services which councils can decide to provide but do not need to e.g. a swimming pool or tennis courts.

One way in which the decision making functions of local councils are limited is finance. While Local Authorities receive money from Council taxes and services the vast majority of the money over 70% comes from the Scottish Parliament through grants. This gives the Government the power to limit what local councils can do with the money as they control it.

The Scottish Parliament decides how much spending they will give to local authorities and this can lead to local councils having to cut back on their services which makes local people very unhappy. Local Authorities feel that the creation of a Scottish Parliament has diminished their power and functions.

In conclusion Local Authorities have many functions which are very important. However these powers are limited because they are controlled by the Scottish Parliament who also control the money.