

Dear Kate

Thank you for your letter of 18 April. I am only too happy to provide the information requested for your members.

1. Protecting public services when local government is inevitably going to face significant budget cuts imposed by Holyrood in the foreseeable future is going to be incredibly difficult. Being an independent I don't have to spend my time justifying these cuts but, if elected, I will do my best to ensure that everything that can be spent on public services is spent on public services and not on excesses and the pet projects of the political parties. In my opinion, further development of collaborative and collegiate working between the various agencies is worth pursuing. Please be assured however that I am very wary of terms like "greater flexibility" and "value for money" because all too often they are used as a cover for axing jobs and that does not necessarily guarantee greater efficiency. I will be vigilant in ensuring that false economies are avoided. I am only too aware that cuts in public services impact disproportionately on those in most need and the most vulnerable in our society.
2. More often than not privatisation results in a worse service at a greater cost – not to mention poorer pay and working conditions. Key council services should be democratically accountable.
3. See answer to question 1.
4. Difficult for me to answer this question but I don't see why funding to support the elderly and disabled should be cut. As a society we have a duty to care properly for those in need and I would work with Unison and others to ensure that such provision is at least adequate.
5. Yes.
6. Definitely. I know only too well the contribution made by classroom assistants to the education of all children but especially those with additional needs. If deployed effectively their contribution really can change lives. Cutting classroom assistants is a prime example to a false economy: the true cost – financial and social - of failing to provide an appropriate education only becomes apparent many years later.

7. I will do what I can but I suspect that local government will find it difficult to plug this gap. In my opinion, it is unfair that some of the costs of these reforms will have to be picked up by local authorities in extra expenditure at the same time as central government funding is being reduced so the parties in power in Westminster can claim they are cutting the deficit.

8. No. It's galling to see ordinary people having their living standards cut while those who caused the problem in the first place with their incompetence and greed appear to suffer no adverse consequences.

9. Yes but with the proviso that such negotiations are not used as a cover for unjustified cuts.