

Dear Kate,

Thank you for your letter of 18 April. In answer to your questions:

1 - Clearly, the public finances are in a difficult position and sadly, local government is no exception. The best way to protect local services is to ensure that local authorities are pursuing genuine efficiencies, eliminating waste and seeking value for money within their budgets.

In so doing, I believe that it is important for council workers to be assured of their job security. For that reason, I am pleased to support my party's commitment to operating a policy of no compulsory redundancies in Aberdeenshire if it forms an administration.

2 - I would not support the privatisation of key services.

3 & 4 – I would refer you to our Aberdeenshire and national manifestos to see proposals for social care, available from <http://changeaberdeenshire.blogspot.co.uk> and [www.snp.org](http://www.snp.org)

5 - Aberdeenshire SNP supports the introduction of a living wage of £7.20 ph for those earning below that level currently.

6 – I am happy to support the contribution made by classroom assistants. While we welcome the new pupil support assistant role, the SNP will ensure that there will always be sufficient pupil support where a need has been identified.

7 – We want to ensure that people claim the benefits to which they are entitled. I am pleased that the Scottish Government and COSLA have reached agreement that the Westminster cut to council tax benefits will not be passed on to those who benefit from it.

UK Government reforms to housing benefit will see future benefit levels increased in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) of inflation, which tends to be lower over time than other measures of price increases. At a time of tight pay settlements, we believe it is important to keep housing as affordable as possible. We therefore undertake to investigate the possibility of aligning future Council house rent increases with the CPI rather than the RPI.

8 – No. However, tax policy and overall levels of public spending are not something within the control of a local authority, which has to manage within the resources available to it.

9 – This sounds like an interesting idea and I would, if elected, welcome the opportunity to discuss it further.

I trust this is in order. If I can be of any further help, please feel free to contact me directly.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Thomson

SNP candidate – Ellon & District