

## **CSPP's Richard Kerley Gives Parliamentary Talk on Coming Challenges for Local Government**

Edinburgh, (CSPP) - 16/4/15. Yesterday afternoon the chair of the Centre for Scottish Public Policy (CSPP), Professor Richard Kerley, delivered a talk to the Scottish Parliament's Information Centre (SPICe) on the challenges facing Scottish local government, and the need for the principal of localism to form part of the response to these.

Speaking to parliamentary staff, Professor Kerley outlined what he called "Known Knowns", "Known Unknowns" and "Unknown Unknowns" to describe the challenges facing local government and public service provision in the coming period.

The "Known Knowns" included continuing financial pressure on local authorities, reductions in staffing and services, integration of health and social care, cross party review of the Council Tax / residential property taxes, and attempts to empower communities via the Community Empowerment Bill.

Professor Kerley highlighted potential issues for changes to local services, such as that the integration of health and social care could create additional centres of authority with distinct interests to those of existing health boards and local authorities. He also warned that if proposed enhanced childcare provision only covers the school week then this will not meet the needs of workers on more flexible shift patterns.

Meanwhile in terms of potential challenges described as "Known Unknowns", the CSPP chair pointed to the continued ad-hoc removal of local services to more centralised bodies, the need to address community empowerment in light of the limited role played by community councils, and the importance of addressing the imbalance in Council Tax bands and the skewed incentives these create.

### **What would be brave?**

In light of these scenarios, Professor Kerley advocated instilling the principal of localism in the running of local affairs. By this he meant that in a mature democracy decisions should be taken locally unless required to be taken centrally, with the exception of critically overriding circumstances.

"We need to think very hard about what levels of decision making are appropriate. What decisions and competences do we give to a geographically defined community?" he said.

A possible outcome of such an approach would be to introduce local referenda and "affirmative voting" on big capital projects and other important local initiatives.

Further measures could be to give local councils discretionary powers over what taxes and charges they levy, remove the need for central government approval over much of local authority decision making, and to look at how to better promote community empowerment.

At the same time, Professor Kerley warned against the dangers of "maxi-minimalism" whereby overly asymmetric and autonomous local authorities can lead to poor management or corrupt practices, such as in the example of the "Missouri Mess".

The talk was followed by a question and answer session during which those present discussed the points raised further.

Professor Kerley was invited to speak as part of a week of SPICe events looking at the challenges facing Scottish policymaking moving toward 2020.

Such parliamentary presentations are one of many ways the CSPP works with its members to foster debate, undertake research and promote innovative thinking and solutions for public policymaking in Scotland.

ENDS

Website

link:

[http://www.cspp.org.uk/cspp\\_s\\_richard\\_kerley\\_gives\\_parliamentary\\_talk\\_on\\_coming\\_challenges\\_for\\_local\\_government](http://www.cspp.org.uk/cspp_s_richard_kerley_gives_parliamentary_talk_on_coming_challenges_for_local_government)