

# SNP tells councils to use reserves to fight coronavirus

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The SNP finance secretary has told councils to use their own reserves to pay for the fight against coronavirus.

Kate Forbes wrote to Cosla in response to calls for her government to pass on all £155 million in Barnett Consequentials intended for local authorities.

But instead of promising to send the cash on, she advised councils to raid their own savings, despite Audit Scotland repeatedly warning that many local authorities were running on empty.

She said: *"I also want to consider what further reprioritisation we could undertake jointly to free up resources to meet the cost challenges now and in the future, along with the use of local government reserves and applications to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (e.g. for ALEOs) to help contain the costs."*

Councils, all of whom were already under severe financial pressure, have struggled to find the cash to ensure health and social care work continues to be resourced.

It comes as care homes continue to struggle to access vital protective equipment for staff.

And previously Audit Scotland warned: "We urgently need much faster progress in the reform of our health and social care services. The current position is increasingly unsustainable.

**Scottish Conservative leader Jackson Carlaw said:**

"Councils came into this crisis ill-equipped to cope after years of the SNP slashing their budgets to the bone.

"Now, instead of passing on the money they need, the finance secretary is telling them to raid their reserves even further.

"Some local authorities barely have any reserves left thanks to the SNP's botched approach to funding.

"And rather than hand over all the Barnett Consequentials in full – money that was specifically targeted for local authorities – the SNP wants to short-change councils even more severely."