

Recognising the value of local authority services - the...

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I attended the [annual awards dinner of COSLA](#) last night. I would stress that I was simply a guest, having [spoken at the COSLA conference](#) earlier in the day. And I admit I enjoyed the evening.

COSLA is the Scottish local authorities association. The awards celebrated those who deliver services that too many ignore, or are even unaware of. There were youth services in the mix, and a refuse collection team; an innovative teacher training programme; a community cafe helping those recovering from addiction, and my own favourite, which won the Chair's award, which was a programme from Dundee that put benefits advisers in GP surgeries to ensure that the vulnerable were getting the financial as well as the medical help that they need because the two go hand in hand to deliver well-being. This service delivered a staggering £38 of benefits assistance to vulnerable people who might not otherwise have been reached for each £1 the service cost.

I read a great deal of cynicism from those who claim they do not believe in the services government supplies as a result of writing this blog. I often wonder about the sheltered and ill-informed lives many of those offering such criticism must lead. I'm staggered that they can live in families that have never needed support. And that, apparently, they exist in a world without vulnerability. And that they also know nothing of the education, local environmental services and so much more that local authorities deliver, and which are essential even if they're not always glamorous.

And I was delighted to witness the enthusiasm, as well as the dedication and downright excitement (in most cases) of those winning the awards. As one person said to me before the evening began 'these are our Oscars'. And they were right. They are.

But overall that undersold the event. Because last night was about the people who work for a sector that is too easily forgotten, which all too often underpays in proportion to the skills demanded and dedication offered by staff, and on which we all depend in some way. That can't be said of the Oscars. Importantly too, this was about the frontline and not the politicians, although I'll quietly applaud their role as well.

People who do important things that can change lives - as those up for awards clearly do - deserve recognition. I was delighted to be there. [Look at the web site](#). Feel just a little bit better about the human spirit as a result, I suggest. And, candidly, understand that the spirit of innovation, value added and enterprise can exist wherever people work.