



Scottish **Rural Action**

Iomairt Dhùthchail na h-Alba

DRAFT

Action Plan

2017 - 2019

INTRODUCTION

Scottish Rural Action (SRA) was established in 2013 with the working name of Scottish Rural Parliament and with two aims:

- *To encourage and actively support the development of an inclusive and sustainable Scottish rural movement that is rooted in Scotland's rural communities and empowers and connects them.*
- *To support the organisation of a Scottish Rural Parliament that meets with the purpose of giving a stronger, more coherent voice to Scotland's rural communities and enabling them to engage more effectively with government at all levels.*

As SRA has sought to take forward and develop these activities, it has become clear that there is a need for SRA to be a proactive influencer in policy and decision-making, with the driving force for this direction coming from both rural communities and wider stakeholders.

We are consistently being told that policy does not translate to a rural context, and our rural communities feel disempowered and disconnected from decision-making processes and the opportunities to change that. Our rural communities are being asked to deliver more, and given greater powers to do so. Some of our communities have risen to this challenge and are at the helm of transformation for their community. Other communities are getting further and further left behind and facing serious challenges including poverty, depopulation and declining services.

The wider context of political change is having an impact on rural Scotland too, with greater powers devolved to the Scottish Government and our likely exit from the European Union, providing both opportunities and challenges for rural Scotland. Where legislation and policy are being written or re-written, we need to ensure that they meet the needs of rural communities.

Our draft Action Plan crystallises our shift in focus to being a powerful voice for the people of rural Scotland. We have had a number of successes over the past few years, but we need to see a step-change in our ability to influence and to better evidence our success in order to meet the needs of rural communities.

We have therefore prioritised policy areas and actions within those policy areas, to identify those that we feel will have the greatest impact. Despite this, there are still more activities within the draft Action Plan than we are currently resourced to deliver, and we need to ensure that we use our resources wisely.

We welcome input from stakeholders by 26th April which identifies potential collaborations, information on where we may be at risk of duplicating work, and any other comments which will help us to finalise our Action Plan for publication in May 2017.

Please call or email Emma Cooper at emma@scottishruralparliament.org.uk or 07896 216236 to comment on the Action Plan or to arrange a suitable time for further discussion.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Scottish Rural Action aims to be a powerful voice for the people of rural Scotland. In 2017-2027

Scottish Rural Action is focusing on two strategic objectives:

OUTCOME 1: There is a powerful voice for the diverse people and communities of rural Scotland, particularly those not already represented by other interests, to assure that policy and decision-making meets the needs of rural Scotland.

OUTCOME 2: Scottish Rural Action will be a sustainable, independent and effective organisation with a clear vision for our future.

We work by:

1. Identifying and sharing issues of concern to rural communities and sourcing evidence to support those concerns.
2. Engaging rural communities in identifying key issues and solutions to those issues, and in advocating or campaigning on those issues.
3. Providing a high-profile platform for focused discussion and collaboration on rural issues for rural communities and decision-makers through the Rural Parliament.
4. Working with policy and decision-makers at an early stage in the policy process to ensure the needs of rural communities are being met.

A commitment to supporting a Rural Parliament for Scotland was made in the Scottish Government's in the Programme for Government 2016-17.

ACTION PLAN

We will focus our activities on six policy areas in 2017-19 and a number of cross-cutting activities. Each policy area has an over-arching objective to make progress on delivering our [Manifesto for rural Scotland](#) and the specific remit has been developed to reflect those areas of work we feel we can deliver and will have the greatest impact.

Each working group consists of people and organisations with an interest or expertise in the policy area, the majority of whom are volunteering their time and expertise. The membership of these groups is fluid and by invitation of the Chair and membership for 2017 has not yet been agreed. You can express an interest in joining any of the working groups by contacting Emma Cooper, emma@scottishruralparliament.org.uk. Cross-cutting activities are predominantly delivered by the staff team.

POLICY

A. Transport

Chair: Emma Cooper

The Rural Transport Working Group will work with partners to deliver the following:

1. Input into the Scottish Government's National Transport Strategy throughout 2017- 2019 from a rural perspective to ensure that it explicitly considers and addresses the needs of rural communities, as distinct from those of urban communities.

2. Proactively encourage high levels of rural community engagement into the public National Transport Strategy consultations in 2017-18 by working with others to provide information about rural transport issues and raise awareness of the consultation.
3. A report into rural transport needs, concerns and solutions, from the perspective of members of rural communities, for feeding into the development of policy and practice across Scotland.
4. Share good practice and innovative solutions and signpost community groups to funding to inspire and encourage effective community-led solutions to meet transport needs.
5. Input into the Scottish Rural Infrastructure Plan 2017 to ensure that the views and needs of rural communities are understood.

B. Business, Employment and Enterprise

Chair: Mary Williams Edgar

The Business, Employment and Enterprise Working Group will work with partners to deliver the following:

1. An investigation into the potential for reinvigorating empty retail and commercial property using the same principles as the successful Empty Homes Scheme.

2. Share information and best practice in the implementation of community benefit clauses and Fair Work practices as in the Scottish Government procurement guidelines to encourage greater take-up.
3. Collate information and case studies on the impact of Universal Credit on micro and small rural businesses to ensure that future roll-out of Universal Credit meets their needs.
4. Consider the potential for a Universal Basic Income to better support those in low-paid, seasonal, and insecure work in rural communities.
5. Raise awareness in rural areas of Individual Learning Accounts to promote greater take-up of training and development opportunities.

C. Land

Co-Chairs: Simon Brooke and Vanessa Halhead

The Land Working Group will work with partners to deliver the following:

1. Share information and encourage debate on land use and reform.
2. Compile and present evidence on rural homelessness and housing stress.

3. Collect and disseminate information regarding community land buyouts.
4. Promote the carbon neutral economy to rural communities including practical guides and advice.

D. Democracy & Governance

Chair: Amanda Burgauer

The Democracy & Governance Working Group will work with partners to deliver the following:

1. Produce a report that clearly outlines the problems facing rural communities in Scotland in relation to local democracy, including some real examples of how the current system does not work, and highlight possible preferred options or make recommendations as to the way forward towards better democracy for the people of rural Scotland.
2. Raise awareness of opportunities to participate in democracy, including reminders to register to vote.
3. Engage rural communities in the development of the local democracy bill.

E. Digital Connectivity

Chair: Amanda Burgauer

The Digital Connectivity Working Group will work with partners to deliver the following:

1. Continued engagement with Scottish Government to ensure the recommendations from our 2016 Broadband Report, agreed with the Digital Policy Team, are enacted, including participation in a National Broadband Conference.
2. Monitoring and sharing of information on the progress made towards broadband rollout across rural Scotland.
3. Run an awareness-raising campaign for members and the public explaining the role of an Internet Service Provider and how to switch for the best deal.
4. Investigate mobile connectivity in rural Scotland and engage with mobile suppliers to gather information that will be relayed to the SRA membership and the public.
5. Address the 5G sell-off and examine other aspects of 5G including potential reserving of the 700MHz spectrum and other options, and the new 5G Technology Centre.
6. Run an open Digital Connectivity forum with free registration on the new SRA website to engage the public and other stakeholders in discussions related to all aspects of Digital Connectivity.

CROSS-CUTTING

F. Why Rural Matters

Action: Scottish Rural Action will work with partners to deliver a report into the importance of rural communities and areas, and the contributions they make to our national economy and wellbeing. Following the publication of the report we will run an awareness raising campaign promoting our findings.

Purpose: We seek to make a case to protect sources of funding for rural infrastructure and services to decision-makers and the wider population, irrespective of our membership of the European Union or the United Kingdom.

G. Online Forum

Action: Scottish Rural Action will create and promote an online forum for rural communities.

Purpose: Provide an online platform where communities can discuss matters of importance, share ideas and knowledge and connect with one another, SRA and decision-makers.

H. Volunteers

Action: Scottish Rural Action will recruit, train and support a network of volunteers.

Purpose: Create networks of volunteers to collect evidence and campaign on issues affecting rural communities, build our membership and reach and increase our sustainability.

I. European Rural Parliament

Action: Scottish Rural Action will input into the Rural Services and Infrastructure work stream arising from the 2015 European Rural Parliament and send a delegation to the 2017 European Rural Parliament.

Purpose: Continue to build relationships across Europe both within and outside of the European Union, share knowledge and learn from other countries. Through the European Rural Parliament, seek to influence policy and decision-making at the European level.

J. Members Day and Scottish Rural Parliament

Action: Scottish Rural Action will host a member's day in 2017 and the third Scottish Rural Parliament in 2018.

Purpose: Bring rural communities and decision-makers together to share knowledge, learn new skills, exchange ideas and identify solutions to the challenges facing rural communities.