

Programme for Government 2017-18:

Our View

As the Scottish Parliament reconvened after the long summer break, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announced the work the Government intends to get through in the forthcoming parliamentary year. This is known as the Programme for Government. This paper picks out the parts of the programme which impact on rural communities and sets out the ways in which we look forward to working with the Scottish Government to best serve the interests of Scotland's rural communities.

New Education Bill – new Regional Improvement Collaboratives will be established to provide support to teachers, including access to teams of attainment experts and subject specialists. The First Minister said “Our clear purpose is to ensure a first-class education for all young people, no matter the disadvantages they face.” **We hope this bears out with the commitment to the Further Education in particular, where we know there is a need for improved access for young people in rural areas.**

Research and Development – will see an increase of £300m over the next three years. **Whilst Edinburgh will be the international hub for R&D, we expect due consideration of how this funding will benefit rural enterprise.**

Scottish National Investment Bank – its remit, governance, operating model and approach to the robust management of financial risk will be consulted upon and planned. **We look forward to engaging with the creation of this bank to ensure that it takes particular consideration of the unique needs of rural communities and businesses to ensure that they can operate on a level playing field.**

ScotRail franchise – the Scottish Government will seek out a public body to bid for the next franchise. **Taking the profit making out of transport and reinvesting in the network and**

infrastructure could have massive benefits for rural communities and could even pave the way for end-to-end journey times being the new measure of success in public transport.

Climate Change – new petrol and diesel car sales will be phased out by 2032. Whilst we welcome this step towards a cleaner future, we also recognise the challenges this will bring to rural drivers. We will push to ensure that the necessary infrastructure will be in place to ensure rural communities are not negatively and disproportionately impacted by this change.

Social Security Bill – this is in reference to new powers given to Holyrood which will give more powers over the amounts claimants receive. Rural communities face unique geographic, poverty and deprivation challenges which we hope to see addressed through the Bill, as well as assurances that rural communities are able to access the information and benefits they need, for example by using online tools.

Period Poverty – schools, colleges and universities will help bring this issue to an end as they will supply personal hygiene supplies to pupils and staff. Poverty manifests differently between rural and urban communities, so SRA welcomes this step which will help reduce poverty.

Citizens Basic Income – the Scottish Government will research through local authorities the implications of such an income to help shape future policy. We will work to ensure that there is a particular focus on rural communities and that local authorities with high rural populations are part of the research where possible.

Ending Homelessness Together Fund – a £50million fund over 5 years to support anti-homelessness initiatives. Efforts to address homelessness must address the hidden issue of rural homelessness which presents unique challenges and requires unique solutions, as highlighted through our recent Action Plan. Our Land working group will be keeping a close watch as the Fund develops.

Child Poverty Bill and Fund – targets to address child poverty will be set with funds available to support innovation in tackling child poverty. SRA welcome this Bill and Fund, but caution that it needs both targets for and suitable measures of rural deprivation and poverty. Issues with using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation to measure rural deprivation have been highlighted by us since the first Rural Parliament. We need alternatives to ensure support is available for those who need it and to accurately measure the impact of the Bill and Fund.

Planning Bill – to increase the number of housing developments. SRA continues to input into the Planning Bill via the Planning Review Working Group to advocate on behalf of rural communities and ensure measures are taken to increase rural housing provision.

Rural Economy – increasing digital connectivity and technological advances, which allow us to better harness our natural resources, hold enormous potential for our rural communities. **With geographical barriers becoming less important, we must support our rural areas to secure vibrant communities, deliver big ideas and drive economic growth. SRA welcomes this approach and will push to ensure the government delivers on these promises. We are also looking forward to inputting into the legislation for the future of the south of Scotland enterprise agency, as we have advocated for since the first Rural Parliament.**

Brexit – a National Council of Rural Advisers has been established to help shape the government’s policy. To replace EU funding losses, the Scottish Government will begin planning a unitary fund, which will invest in rural, coastal and marine enterprises. **SRA has been invited to engage with this process and we will be inputting to discussions on the future of rural funding, particularly for infrastructure and community-led activities, such as those funded by LEADER, in addition to economic impacts.**

Repopulation – was recognised as a key issue. The Scottish Government will seek to build sustainable modern and affordable housing, and rural populations will benefit from 100% access to superfast broadband.

Mental Health – in rural areas will continue to receive support through the National Rural Mental Health Forum. **We look forward to seeing how this develops, particularly in regards to improving support services, as a member of the Forum.**

Digital connectivity – there is an ongoing commitment to reaching 100% of premises with superfast broadband (30Mbps) by 2021 which is reaffirmed in this PfG. **SRA has a representative on the Scottish Government’s digital expert panel for superfast broadband where we are advocating for an ‘outside-in’ approach to reaching the premises outwith the current delivery programme. It is also welcome news to see a commitment to mobile phone connectivity where the Scottish Government can have a significant impact and will be taking forward it’s Mobile Action Plan.**

Free bus passes – for Modern Apprentices. **SRA looks forward to seeing how this scheme develops and hope that it paves the way to a transport allowance for all young people in education and their first years of work.**

Ferries – recognition of the negative as well as the positive impacts on local communities of an increase in uptake in ferry services. **SRA hope to see action to address these concerns, and the concerns of other communities who are also adversely affected by the concentrated increase in rural tourism.**

Crown Estate Bill – will be introduced to establish a long-term framework for the management of Crown Estate assets in Scotland. This will provide opportunities for local management following devolution, to benefit communities and the economy. **This is a potentially exciting opportunity for rural communities to benefit substantially from the Crown Estate assets.**

Local Democracy Bill – decentralising power to a more local level. **A reform of local democratic structures and processes has been a consistent ask of rural communities since our first Rural Parliament and we will be advocating the views of rural communities throughout the process.**

Questions? Feel free to get in touch our Policy and Communications Officer

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