

Cross-Party Group in the Scottish Parliament on Industrial Communities

Tuesday 24th October 2023 at 6.00pm in
Committee Room 4 at the Scottish Parliament

Present

MSPs

Colin Beattie MSP and Alex Rowley MSP.

Invited Guests – None.

Non-MSP Group Members

Cllr. Russell Imrie, Ian McCrory, Bob Young, Pauline Grandison, Keith Robson, Chris Whitwood and Roddy MacDonald.

Apologies

John Mason MSP, Richard Leonard MSP, Cllr. Altany Craik, Cllr. Debbi McCall and Professor Steve Fothergill.

AGM Agenda item 1

Colin Beattie MSP welcomed all present to the meeting.

Agenda item 2

Privacy Notice – Cross-Party Group on Industrial Communities.

This was noted by all present.

Agenda item 3

Minutes approved. Bob Young, Trustee of the CRT, raised continuing concerns around Scottish Government interfaces and outstanding budgetary issues. Of additional concern was the Scottish Government's response to the CRT Small Grants. It was agreed to write to Joe FitzPatrick MSP and Minister to seek clarification on this issue.

N.B. Letter sent on the 30th October 2023, and a response received on the 30th November 2023. Both letters are included in the papers for this meeting.

Agenda item 4

Vocation, Vocation, Vocation – Making the apprenticeship system work for Britain's older industrial areas – Chris Whitwood, National Secretariat.

Chris provided a detailed overview of the document focussing on the key aspects of the report. Namely,

- This report supports the call for apprenticeships and vocational training to be placed on an equal footing with academic qualifications.
- Establish a national partnership bringing together employers, unions and government (including devolved administrations) to provide oversight on skills policy.
- Remodel the Apprenticeship Levy as a skills fund to give employers flexibility on how Levy funds are spent.
- Reserve the 'apprenticeship' label for higher-level training.
- Establish an expert body to oversee investment in skills.

Discussion then took place on the future of the Flexible Workforce Development Fund. It was agreed to engage with the Scottish Government on this topic.

N.B. Letter sent to Graeme Dey MSP and Minister on the 2nd November 2023 with responses received on the 24th November 2023 and the 20th December 2023. The letters are included in the papers for this meeting.

AGENDA Item 5

Local and Regional Development: The Case for Longer-Term Funding – Paper for Consideration by HM Treasury – Alliance Secretariat.

The following key points were outlined.

- The current system has profound disadvantages which has provided an obstacle to longer-term projects both capital and revenue.

- What is needed is a pragmatic compromise that balances the need to maximise local and regional benefits with the Treasury's need to maintain financial control.
- The way forward is a longer-term approach which would commit a portion of planned spending beyond the end of each Spending Round.

Following detailed discussion, it was agreed to share the paper with Neil Gray MSP and Cabinet Secretary to seek a Scottish Government perspective.

N.B. A letter was sent to Neil Gray MSP and Cabinet Secretary on the 30th October 2023 and a response was received on the 17th November 2023. Both letters are included in the papers for this meeting.

AGENDA Item 6

The UK Government Plans for Towns – Alliance Secretariat.

The following key points were made.

- On the 1st October 2023 the UK Government published what it called 'Our Long-Term Plan for Towns'.
- The plan is to invest £1.1bn into 55 towns across England, Scotland and Wales.
- Each town will receive a ten-year endowment style fund worth £20m. 75 percent of the funding is expected to be spent on capital projects.
- The shortcomings of this investment strategy include the coverage, selection, inadequacy of the quantum and the marginalisation of Local Authorities and the by passing of the Devolved Administrations.

It was noted that the areas in Scotland to be included are the following.

- Greenock
- Irvine
- Kilmarnock
- Coatbridge
- Clydebank
- Dumfries
- Elgin

Following detailed discussions on how to take this forward Roddy MacDonald agreed to engage with his counterpart Mierion Thomas, Director of Alliance Wales to gain an additional perspective.

N.B. Meirion Thomas, Director of Alliance Wales, has been invited to the next meeting to share a Welsh perspective.

AGENDA Item 7

The only additional business is the possibility of the next Cross-Party Group being held in a hybrid format. It was agreed that Roddy MacDonald and Doug Lyons would explore the possibilities.