

Scottish Government submission of 22 March 2023

PE1966/E: Formally recognise and incorporate local knowledge in Scottish Government policy

The Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee considered the above petition at its meeting on 21 December 2022.

The Committee is keen to understand:

- The Scottish Government's view on whether there are differences in the consideration given to local knowledge and scientific knowledge;

All responses to consultations are considered and responded to as outlined in the Scottish Governments best practice handbook on consultations. The type of consultation and the questions asked will greatly influence how responses are considered, meaning there is no simple or binary answer to whether local knowledge and scientific knowledge are considered differently . For consultations that actively seek public opinion there may be greater emphasis placed on local knowledge or local opinion when considering responses to a question. Whereas responses to consultation questions that specifically seek scientific evidence or knowledge will be considered on the basis of their scientific robustness. Regardless, all responses will be considered and responded to.

- How the Scottish Government ensures those with poor internet access, particularly in rural areas, are given an opportunity to respond to its public consultations;

Best practice for consultations is to use methods appropriate to the audience that is trying to be reached. In addition to online consultation responses, the Scottish Government consultation guidance includes an in-depth discussion about tailoring methods to the audience you're trying to reach, and suggests other engagement approaches can include face-to-face engagement events, social media, and deliberative methods. All consultation leads must consider this guidance when planning a consultation.

A tailored approach to consultation is taken, with each policy team responsible for planning and implementing the consultation to reach their intended audience. For rural communities, the Scottish Government is aware that households in rural areas are less likely to have access to superfast broadband, however, use of consultation websites require only basic access, and that is broadly comparable between rural and urban Scotland.

The guidance also states that a postal address should also be provided so that people who are not online can respond to the consultation.

- What changes to engagement practices, including in the development and delivery of conservation policy, are intended following the report of the Independent Working Group on Institutionalising Participative and Deliberative Democracy.

In the most recent Programme for Government, we committed to publishing a response to the report of our working group on Institutionalising Participatory and Deliberative Democracy (IPDD), setting out how we can involve people and communities, government, and children and young people in democratic decision making.

We are in the process of carefully considering this further, assessing the new activities and skills that would make this a success, and taking account of the resource demands that this would create.

In keeping with the scope of the IPDD working group's recommendations, our response will take a government-wide approach. Specific policy areas, such as conservation, will then consider the applicability of this to their work.