

# **Cross-Party Group in the Scottish Parliament on Industrial Communities**

Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> February 2022 at 6.00pm via Microsoft Teams

## **Present**

### **MSPs**

Colin Beattie MSP, John Mason MSP.

### **Invited guests**

### **Non-MSP Group Members**

Cllr. Altany Craik, Cllr. Peter Henderson, Laura Cunningham, Ian McCrory, Malcolm Leitch, Stuart Douglas, Keith Robson, Kenny Lean, Bob Young, Dr, Joan Dixon, Roddy MacDonald.

## **Apologies**

Cllr. Robin Currie, Cllr. Mohrag Fischer, Cllr. Russell Imrie, Prof. Steve Fothergill.

## **Agenda item 1**

Convener Colin Beattie MSP welcomed all present to the meeting.

## **Agenda item 2**

Privacy Notice – Colin Beattie MSP read through the Privacy Notice for the Cross-Party Group on Industrial Communities.

## **Agenda item 3**

Minutes of the previous meeting and Matters Arising.

The Minutes were proposed by Cllr. Altany Craik and seconded by Bob Young with no matters arising.

## Agenda item 4

Subsidy Control Update – Malcolm Leitch, Glasgow City Council.

Malcolm Leitch provided an update.

- ‘Subsidy Control’ is the UK Government’s replacement for EU State Aid rules intended to govern public financial support to private sector businesses This is important for Alliance areas because the rules set the framework for aid to help create and protect jobs in less prosperous parts of the country.
- There are no substantive changes at Westminster. However, there are Scottish Parliament legislative consent issues to be addressed.
- The Economy and Fair Work Committee has had several evidence sessions to which Professor Fothergill has given evidence. This session was held on-line on the 12<sup>th</sup> January 2022. In advance he was invited to submit written evidence.
- The Alliance perspective received a good hearing. In particular the Committee members grasped the need for greater operational details, for consultation on the part of the UK Government, and for an Assisted Area Map.
- The Committee is now producing its report which will now go before the Scottish Parliament.
- Royal Assent at Westminster is due on May 22, 2022.

## Agenda item 5

Green Ports – Economic Growth? Cllr. Peter Henderson, Leader of South Ayrshire Council.

Cllr. Henderson provided a comprehensive overview of the key issues.

- The Scottish Government are currently focussed on Net Zero and Fair Work considerations. However, Freeports do not recognise Trades Unions.
- Accountability is a key concern. What controls will be in place to protect the environment and the health and safety of those who work there?
- Local Government issues require to be addressed. Who clears up the mess if something goes wrong?
- What are the benefits to the Scottish Economy and our areas?
- Key issues such as ‘displacement’, ‘maintaining boundaries’ and ‘controls’ require to be addressed.
- Notwithstanding the above the UK Government will proceed with this initiative.

## Agenda item 6

Levelling Up White Paper – Dr. Joan Dixon, GB Secretariat.

Dr. Joan Dixon provided an overview.

- It is ‘an odd piece of work’. Basically a ‘rehash’ of UK Government previous announcements on regional Economic Policies, State of the Nations, Consultation/Engagement issues.
- Scotland is mentioned in only 2% of the document – pages 305-307.
- Notwithstanding this, there is the potential for a major impact on the economy.
- How do we, in practical terms ensure that the Local Authorities and Partners such as City Deals work together to optimise the impact on our communities?
- There was consensus among those present that the document was ‘padded out’ with little substance or direction.
- The GB Secretariat will develop a response and a meeting of the Policy Advisory Group will be convened to garner views across Alliance representatives.

#### Agenda item 7

Beyond the Pandemic – Report Commissioned by the Coalfields Regeneration Trust and the Industrial Communities Alliance – Dr. Joan Dixon, GB Secretariat.

Dr. Joan Dixon provided an overview.

- The UK economy experienced a rollercoaster ride during the Covid-19 pandemic. Output fell by more than any time in the last hundred years and at a peak almost a third of all employees were furloughed. Like the rest of the country, older industrial Britain shared this unprecedented turmoil.
- Yet as the UK economy has reopened what is striking is how over the course of the pandemic, so little has really changed. In key respects the economy is back to where it started.
- By the Autumn of 2021 the total number of employees in the UK, which fell by a million during 2020, had returned to and even slightly exceeded pre-pandemic levels.
- There is no evidence that the closure of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, at the end of September 2021, has led to an increase in unemployment.
- There is also little evidence that the pandemic has led to significant long-term shifts in the economic geography of the UK.
- Although there is clearly a handful of high-profile occupations in which labour shortages are real and disruptive, they should not mislead about the overall state of the labour market, especially in older industrial areas.
- The significance of the above observations is that older industrial Britain entered the pandemic lagging behind on a wide range of social and economic indicators, was then hit hard during the pandemic and is now emerging still lagging behind.
- The impact of the pandemic has in no way diminished the case for the Levelling Up Agenda to which the UK Government is committed.

## Agenda item 8

Alliance Scotland – Land & Property Development – Exchange of Letters with the Cabinet Secretary – Roddy MacDonald, Alliance Scotland Director.

The exchange of letters was noted. It was confirmed that Alliance Scotland would be submitting a response to the Scottish Government NPF4 Consultation which would include references to land & Property Development. The approved Alliance paper will be shared with the Cross-Party Group.

## Agenda item 9

AOCB and Date of Next Meetings.

Keith Robson advised of an Open University and Holyrood Events Webinar on the 16<sup>th</sup> March 2022. Roddy MacDonald will share the details.

Date of Next Meetings

The following dates have been agreed.

- Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> March 2022 at 6.00pm; Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2022 at 6.00pm – this will also be the Annual General Meeting.