

Cross-Party Group in the Scottish Parliament on Industrial Communities

Tuesday 28th September 2021 at 6.00pm via Microsoft Teams

Present

MSPs

Colin Beattie MSP, Alex Rowley MSP, John Mason MSP

Invited guests

Sequoyah S.V. Hilton, Janice Connelly

Non-MSP Group Members

Cllr. Russell Imrie, Cllr. Robin Currie, Cllr. Altany Craik, Cllr. Peter Henderson, Ian McCrory, Malcolm Leitch, Laura Cunningham, Stuart Douglas, Prof. Steve Fothergill, Roddy MacDonald

Apologies

Cllr. Jim Dempster, Cllr. Alex Gallagher, Cllr. Margot Russell, Julie McLachlan, Bob Young

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 Initial Meeting of the Cross-Party Group held on the 23rd June 2021 and Matters Arising.

The Minutes were proposed by Alex Rowley MSP and seconded by John Mason MSP with no matters arising.

Agenda item 4

Levelling Up – Ten priorities for the Spending Review and White Paper – discussion led by Professor Steve Fothergill.

Professor Fothergill noted that the paper was now adopted by the GB Alliance and outlined the ten priorities.

- No return to austerity – in the long-run the avoidance of a return to austerity should leave public finances no worse. The UK Government just needs to be patient.
- New funding for Levelling Up – if the UK Government is serious then it needs to back up its commitment with extra cash. The additional money could be delivered across a range of new and existing budget lines.
- A UK SPF that's fit for purpose – allocations to local areas need to be determined by a formula and not competitive bidding, which is wasteful of time and resources, open to favouritism and poor at delivering better outcomes.
- A budget line for business support – to match the support previously provided by the Regional Growth Fund would require a budget line for England worth around £650m a year.
- A fairer distribution of R&D spending – a comprehensive and ambitious R&D Place Strategy has been promised but so far nothing has appeared.
- Investment and infrastructure – much spending on infrastructure is a devolved matter. If the UK Government is serious about Levelling Up, in England it needs to make a start in delivering larger projects as well as smaller schemes that can be financed from existing funding streams. Through the Barnett formula, this spending would also deliver additional funding to the Devolved Governments.
- Gap funding for property development – the UK Government needs to make sure that there is plenty of scope to provide gap funding for land and property development within its various levelling Up budget lines.
- More funding for local authorities – getting local authority funding right is central to the delivery of services and to levelling up the quality of life for disadvantaged and vulnerable residents.
- Devolution to local leaders – a corollary of greater local authority funding is that councils should have greater responsibility for the services they provide. This again is a devolved matter, but in England the Levelling Up White Paper provides the opportunity for change.
- A long-term commitment – to have a real chance of success, the policies to deliver Levelling Up need to be right and sustained.

Colin Beattie MSP thanked Professor Fothergill for his presentation and offered to circulate the Report more widely at Holyrood through his Parliamentary Office.

Agenda item 5

Land & Property Development – A Scottish Context – Discussion led by Roddy MacDonald

Roddy MacDonald noted the following points.

- Gap funding for land and property development is clearly a significant element in efforts to promote economic development in our areas.
- The key building blocks to recovery include using all the armoury available in Scotland. This includes Community Wealth Building, the Scottish Futures Trust/SNIB, Scotland specific funds, UK Wide funds and Local Authority and City Deals.
- It was noted that a paper on a series of 'Asks' of the UK and Scottish Governments is currently being drafted for the Alliance Scotland meeting in November 2021. Roddy MacDonald will provide an update to the next Cross-Party Group.
- It was also proposed by the Convener that the Alliance in Scotland should consider engaging with key Scottish Parliament Committees to help to shape their agendas. The Alliance Scotland will consider this proposal at their next meeting in November 2021 and feedback thereafter to the Cross-Party Group.

Agenda item 6

Future Topics for this Session.

Roddy MacDonald, following detailed discussion agreed to circulate a list of potential topics for the consideration of MSPs. The list which was issued following the meeting included the following.

- Green/Renewable Issues.
- Greenports.
- Regional Economic Policy in the context of the Scottish Government's Programme.
- Employability and Skills – focus on re-training/Fair Work.

Agenda item 7

AOCB

It was agreed to write to the Minister for Just Transition, Employment & Fair Work regarding some pertinent concerns around the UK Renewal Fund. A copy of the letter will be enclosed with the papers issued for the meeting to be held on the 23rd November 2021.

It was noted that the next meeting will be held on Tuesday 23rd November 2021 at 6.00pm via MS Teams.

The Convener thanked all present for their contributions to the meeting.