

WRITTEN EVIDENCE FROM SOUTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

**Affordable Housing and Housing Generally**

The funds available for affordable Housing has been increased by £39 million in this area. Further discussions are on-going within the Scottish Government as to how to allocate these resources and are due to be completed by the end of the calendar year. These discussions are welcomed. The Budget also is expected to contribute to supporting first time buyers through mortgage indemnity schemes and again this is welcomed.

**Active Travel and Transport Generally**

Consistent with the Christie Commission principles driving public sector reform much is made of investment in “preventative” spend. In terms of health expenditure, active travel has a significant role to play in getting people active and keeping us fit and healthy. Against this policy objective the support for sustainable and active travel appears, in real terms, to be fairly static (other than a spike in 13/14 which appears to be funding for Fastlink in Glasgow). It is suggested that this is a missed opportunity relative to the cycling success of the UK athletes at the Olympics, including the particular ‘Sir Chris Hoy factor’, and the further opportunities the 2014 Commonwealth Games will offer.

It is questionable whether support for free concessionary travel (as well as the other free schemes) is sustainable in the long term. It is also unclear how in real terms the financial support for this can be reduced while the policy is sustained, against the background of an aging population.

The investment in trunk road maintenance looks like it is reducing in real terms against a background of a recent Audit Scotland Report (Maintaining Scotland’s Roads – A Follow Up Report) which highlighted that the fastest rate of deterioration (road condition) was on the trunk road network.

The continued funding for Walking, Cycling and Safer Streets is welcomed albeit the dip in funding in 2013/14 is disappointing.

Duelling of the A9 is being accelerated without adequate consideration of other alternatives, average speed cameras in particular, to address high accident rates. Average speed cameras have proved successful at reducing accidents on the A77. While duelling of the A9 is undoubtedly desirable, given the prevailing pressure on maintenance budgets and the continuing deterioration in the condition of the existing road network, it is questionable whether this investment is justified at present.

Radical streamlining of procurement processes is to be welcomed.

Rail investment is welcomed but as well as improving strategic links this should include efforts to make rail travel more accessible particularly in our rural area.

The commitment to the M8/M73/M74 Raith Improvements is to be welcomed.

Road Safety investment is reducing in real terms despite extremely challenging accident reduction targets have been set out by the Scottish Govt in its 2020 Framework.

**Capital Investment**

The Council has taken advantage of Schools Programme funding for future years, but will receive no benefit from the additional funds made available. Acceleration of capital schools funding would have been more advantageous.

**Digital Infrastructure and Broadband**

Due to the increasing importance of digital connectivity to the economic and social development of communities across Scotland, the Council welcomes the Scottish Government's broad aims and objectives in supporting increased investment in Next Generation Broadband across Scotland. In this respect, the Council has to date responded positively to the Step Change to 2015 agenda by identifying areas within its boundaries which it would deem to be priorities for investment due to their potential to maximise economic benefits. This includes part of our extensive rural area and it is hoped that the Scottish Government would consider rurality as an important factor in any decisions that it takes over where it invests the national fund available to deliver the Step Change 2015 Programme.

The Council notes that £40 million within the Local Government portfolio already forms part of this national fund and remains willing to discuss the possibility of extending planned coverage by the commercial sector within its area. However, the Council has yet to confirm any investment support and any decision on this would need to be made in the context of the total funding required to enable the step change and extent of potential benefits accruing to local businesses and communities.

**Fuel Poverty and Energy Assistance**

In South Lanarkshire around 48,000 households – 36.6%, were living in Fuel Poverty – spending at least 10% of their household income on energy. This was above the Scottish average of 27.6%. A total of 17,000 households – 12.4% in South Lanarkshire – were in Extreme Fuel Poverty (spending over 20% of their household income on energy). This compares to only 8% in Scotland as a whole.

For social rented housing, the main focus in achieving and improving housing quality is achieving the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) by 2015. The main focus of the Council's programme is currently on improving the energy efficiency and heating elements of the housing stock, which is also one of the most significant contributions that the Council can make to tackle and reduce fuel poverty.

For many households on fixed or limited incomes, fuel costs are compounded by higher tariffs for prepayment power cards which enable them to use only what they can afford. This and the non use of heating systems can impact on health as well as property condition.

The proposed expenditure of around £200 million in this area appears to be a very good opportunity for Councils to access additional funds to assist residents (public and private

sector) and indeed businesses in this area. Council officers have already met contractors in this area with the aim of taking some initiatives forward. □

Some general feedback in relation to the Govt programmes would be that they should target those in most need (this has not been the case in the past).

Householders in the rented sector as well as homeowners should be assisted – they often pay the highest rates for energy. In particular there should be consideration of those on pre-paid meters.

All partners involved in the development and delivery of energy efficiency programmes should be seeking to maximise the creation of job and training opportunities. Our own Energy Academy seeks to create quality opportunities for those out of work in South Lanarkshire.

The Scottish and UK Government should be seeking to lower energy bills by working with providers to reduce tariffs as well as reduce use/build efficiency.

Provision of information, advice and guidance for householders, particularly those in or at risk of fuel poverty, is key and advice services will already be under huge pressure due to Welfare Reforms.

### **Scottish Water**

The Councils link to Scottish Water includes recovery of water charges via Council Tax, and in working with Scottish Water to progress Infrastructure works on projects being undertaken by the Council. The Council would welcome any move to ensure that the partnership with Scottish Water strengthens to further enhance the progression of such works with minimal inconvenience and delays.

### **Public Procurement**

The Consultation on the Procurement Reform Bill is ongoing. The Council will respond to this consultation under separate cover, however, there is a balance required between achieving the aims of Reform (which are welcomed) and maintaining an efficient and compliant Procurement delivery model within Local Authorities.