The Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee is launching a Call for Evidence to help inform its scrutiny of funding and performance in two priority areas within its remit – forestry and digital connectivity. The aim of this activity is to inform the Committee’s scrutiny of the Scottish Government’s draft budget later in the year.

**Written evidence**

The Committee invites written evidence on the specific issues detailed below.

**Forestry**

The Forestry Commission budget has fallen in both cash and real terms in recent years. However, a report on the Economic Contribution of Forestry in Scotland found that the sector contributed nearly £1 billion to the economy in 2012/13. Employment levels have also increased with over 25,000 FTE now working in the sector. Forestry also makes a significant contribution to meeting Climate Change targets.

The Committee would be interested to hear your views on:

- Sales and acquisition of Forestry Commission Scotland assets
- Planting targets and whether there is funding and incentives available to meet them.
- Challenges from pests and diseases in the face of climate change, and what funds are being directed towards addressing these challenges
- The potential impact of Brexit in relation to SRDP funds from the EU.

**Broadband connectivity**

The Scottish Government has committed to spend £90m to deliver superfast broadband access to at least 95% of premises in Scotland by the end of 2017, and 100% by 2021. The Scottish Government also intends to publish a refreshed Digital Strategy in 2017 to set out how it will reach these goals.

The Committee would like to hear your views on:

- The speed and access standards required to meet the needs of consumers and businesses and the funding necessary to meet these standards.
- The impact of restricted access to high speed internet on the rural economy. In particular tourism and local small businesses.
- Future funding for Community Broadband Scotland and funding related performance of community broadband projects.
- The level of investment required to meet the Scottish Government’s commitment to provide access to next generation networks to 100% of premises by 2021

**How to submit your evidence**
Before making a submission, please read our Policy on Treatment of Written Evidence by Subject and Mandatory Committees.

Please send your views no later than 2 December 2016.

Responses should be sent, wherever possible, electronically and in MS Word format to: Rec.committee@parliament.scot

Hard copy responses may be sent to: Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee, T3.60, Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh EH99 1SP

Ideally, responses should be no more than four sides of A4 in length.

All written evidence received may be published by the Parliament and will be treated as a public document. If you wish to submit evidence in confidence or anonymously please read the policy at the link above or contact Heather Lyall, details below.

Contact

Should you require alternative formats of this information or further assistance in making a written submission to the Committee, please do not hesitate to contact the clerking team of the Committee.

For Committee information, contact: Heather Lyall, tel 0131 348 5229, email: heather.lyall@parliament.scot

For further information, the media contact is: Cat Synnot, tel 0131 348 5605, email: cat.synnot@parliament.scot

For public information enquiries, contact: 0131 348 5000

For general enquiries, contact: 0845 278 1999 (local call rate), email: sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk