



Finlay Carson MSP
Convener, Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural
Environment Committee

By email: rural.committee@parliament.scot

11 November 2022

Dear Finlay,

I am writing to you following the publication of the Scottish Government's proposal for a Rural Visa Pilot on 27 September 2022 to discuss how we work together to raise awareness and understanding of the proposal, and why delivery of the proposed scheme is urgently needed.

The [proposed pilot scheme](#) – entitled the Scottish Rural Community Immigration Pilot (SRCIP) – has been designed collaboratively with a range of local authorities, industry partners and key representatives from employers and partners based within remote, rural and island communities. The proposed scheme has the goal of facilitating migration to these areas and strategically meeting the labour market and community sustainability requirements of identified areas.

It presents a distinctly new community-driven and employer-based migration scheme, based upon similar models which have already been successfully implemented in Canada and which is operable within the current UK immigration framework.

The proposal was endorsed by a [clear majority in the Scottish Parliament](#) as part of a parliamentary debate on Scotland's Population on 27 September. This demonstrates a clear cross-party consensus for tailored, differentiated migration schemes which will target Scotland's distinct demographic needs, for the benefit of our communities.

In 2019, the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) [recommended that UK Government](#) pilot a scheme to attract and retain migrants in remote areas, highlighting that the current immigration system is '*not very effective*' in doing so; this recommendation was subsequently accepted by the then-Home Secretary, Sajid Javid.



The Scottish Government therefore committed, as part of our [2021 Programme for Government](#), to design a practical and deliverable pilot proposal which will best reflect and address the specific needs of these communities.

Over the past few decades, inward migration has sustained Scotland's population growth, however from 2028 this is expected to no longer be the case, and our population is projected by National Records of Scotland to start declining from that point onwards. It is therefore of vital importance for Scotland's demographic outlook that we are able to attract and retain new people to enable our communities to flourish. The risk posed by a declining working age population presents fundamental challenges to the future resilience and sustainability of our rural and island communities. It is for this reason that we need to be able to pilot a targeted migration solution within these communities, attract people to move here and contribute to our communities, and in doing so, sustainably support local economies and public services.

In addition to acute demographic challenges, our remote, rural and island communities are particularly dependent on a number of sectors which have been disproportionately hit by Brexit such as tourism, fisheries, aquaculture and agriculture, and also are renowned contributors to our food and drink success story. The SRCIP has been designed with the flexibility to allow local communities to target these shortages and to identify which skills and job roles would be of most benefit to the growth and regeneration of the local area, thereby supporting a range of sectors upon which the Scottish economy is particularly dependent.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the proposal in more detail, given the overlap in policy interest. In particular, we would be keen to discuss how the proposal has been developed in collaboration with key local authorities, business sector organisations and community representation groups to respond to demographic challenges and skills shortages in our remote, rural and island communities, particularly in sectors such as agriculture and fisheries.

If you accept our offer to meet and discuss this important subject for remote, rural and island community sustainability in Scotland, our officials will be delighted to arrange a time for us to meet.

Yours sincerely,



Mairi Gougeon, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands
Neil Gray, Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development