Dear Gillian,

Community Wellbeing Public Engagement

The Local Government and Communities Committee undertook a major listening exercise on community wellbeing last winter, to find out from the public what they wanted us to focus on. It was important to the Committee that any future work we do in this area is informed by what the public felt was key in making happy and thriving communities. At the centre of this was our use of an innovative digital engagement platform, backed up by a number of community events across Scotland and promotion of our platform via social media.

During this time, the Committee received over 220 separate ideas and suggestions from over 700 people from a wide range of backgrounds, ages and locations. Members of the public used the YourPriorities tool to feed in their views and it was also used to capture some of the key issues raised in the community events. We were very pleased overall by the number of people our engagement reached, and the number and strength of responses.

Contributions were analysed by the Scottish Parliament’s Information Centre which produced a summary paper of the key issues raised. A paper summarising the community events is also attached to the analysis and you can read the paper on the Committee’s website here: https://www.parliament.scot/S5_Local_Gov/Inquiries/KeyThemesPaper.pdf

For information, the main workstream arising from our engagement is intended to be post-legislative scrutiny of some of the main elements of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, in order to assess, 5 years on, how well it is working for local communities. (Unfortunately, the current Coronavirus 19 emergency means that the launch of this work is, for the time being, postponed.)
A number of points were raised as part of the digital engagement process that fall outwith the remit of our Committee, but were relevant to the work of other Committees, including the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee. We well appreciate that you have a very busy work programme, which has been made even more challenging to deliver by the current emergency. We felt, however, that it was important that other committees had the opportunity to see first-hand the issues that members of the public told us were important and which fall within their remit, as community wellbeing is a truly cross-cutting issue. We therefore undertook to share with you, and other committee conveners, a SPICe paper setting out the key themes arising from our engagement within your remit, which is attached to this letter.

I do hope that your find this summary of possible use in informing your current and future work. If you have any questions about the exercise or are interested in how your Committee could benefit from this type of engagement work in the future, then please do not hesitate to contact the Clerks to the Committee for further details.

Yours sincerely,

James Dornan MSP
Convener of the Local Government and Communities Committee
Key issues for the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee from the YourPriorities digital engagement exercise.

Many suggestions linked strongly to issues around climate change and sustainability, specifically in terms of travel, green spaces and energy.

People called for pedestrian spaces, footpaths and better cycling networks, and better charging networks for electric vehicles. Traffic-calming measures such as reduced speed limits were also a popular theme.

Participants wanted to see planning decisions which encouraged renewables (such as onshore wind farm developments), supported biodiversity, and led to re-wilding where possible.

Other suggestions included –

- Forest schools for adults, where adults can come together in an outdoor setting to learn about and take responsibility for green environments.
- Investment in local hydropower projects.
- Banks and Pension funds that only invest in ethical investments.
- Creation of community orchards and allotments.
- Reducing free parking in residential areas. As might be expected, there was both support and opposition for this suggestion, and one participant noted that investment in public transport may be needed first.
- Divest from fossil fuels and mining.
- The climate emergency should be considered in all aspects of decision making. There were particular concerns for the impacts on the marine environment and on farming.
- Concerns about odour pollution from local recycling plants.

Statements include –


“There is a direct link from people/community/wellbeing and climate change. We see that temperature changes, wildfires, floods are starting to impact people around the world and her in Scotland. This is only likely to get worse. We need to plan and invest now, to be prepared and save money later. e.g. flood planning is easier and cheaper than repair after a flood.”

“The health benefits of more trees and greenspace (even if viewed from a window) are well documented. New developments should also be forced to include community electric car charging points and all new homes equipped with renewables (Solar, ASHP, GSHP etc.) instead of gas oil... did someone say something about a climate emergency?”