Dear Edward,

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/Key_themes_paper.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 Rural Economy and Connectivity 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 you 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 Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee from the YourPriorities digital engagement exercise.

Many transport and rural issues noted could be said to connect to local government responsibilities, but in the interest of giving a comprehensive overview, the following issues were mentioned –

- Bus services were the most popular topic for discussion on transport, particularly in the context of rural settings, including transport links to hospitals. There were multiple well-supported calls for community transport.
- Affordable public transport.
- 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.
- Cycleways, and bike storage and lock-up facilities.
- Traffic-free zones and times, including safe routes to schools and encouraging active travel. Linked to this, however, was a call for pedestrian spaces and routes to be accessible, including ramps, benches and handrails.
- Guidance for multi-use paths in rural areas (i.e. off-road paths that are used to connect villages in rural areas, which may go over private land).
- Reduction of haulage vehicles passing through rural villages, and traffic in villages and town centres, and better enforcement of parking restrictions. It should be noted that some users argued that car use should be accepted as the norm and is crucial in rural town for business, and should not be limited by measures.
- A 20MPH speed limit in rural villages.
- Electric vehicle infrastructure should be improved. Opposition to this suggested that the focus should be on improving public transport rather than focusing on car ownership. One participant suggested that responsibility for the EV charging network should not lie with local authorities.

Statements include –

“Proving funding for more community transport is one of the very simple things that the Scottish Government could do which would make a huge difference to people in communities immediately."

“Too much emphasis is on urban transport, tackling rural transport would not only alleviate some of the urban issues but would improve Scotland’s connectivity and future health as a nation."

“Connection and good transport is essential for healthy communities. It is vital for people to move around to access services, but also to feel connected. Our dial a bus service is overloaded. It is a great service but we need more of it. This is essential for people without private transport, older people, younger people and people on lower incomes."

“A network of segregated urban cycle paths will reduce motor traffic, enable healthier life choices, provide a significantly safer space for active travel for all.”