



Scottish Rural Parliament

Pàrlamaid Dhùthchail na h-Alba

Action Plan

2015-16



Overview

The Action Plan arising from the Scottish Rural Parliament 2014 is the result of consultation with potential delivery partners following the inaugural event in November 2014.

There were many recommendations and potential actions arising from the Rural Parliament and this document distils those into practicable and workable actions that Scottish Rural Action can undertake over the next 18 months. It is important to us at Scottish Rural Action that we work with, and not in opposition to, other agencies and organisations to make progress towards the changes people in rural communities need in order to thrive. This post-event work

has been vital in determining where our limited resources are best applied. We will not be the lead organisation for many of these actions, but aim instead to support other organisations in their undertakings.

We thank those who have been involved and apologise to those who have been unintentionally omitted. There are many more actions that people from rural communities and other organisations in attendance at the Rural Parliament will also be taking forward but they are outside of the scope of this document. We thank those rural community activists, organisations and agencies too.

The view of the Scottish Rural Parliament 2014

1. Scotland needs new democratic structures decided, agreed upon and led by communities.
2. Rural communities should be empowered to take action for themselves.
3. Rural areas require their own set of outcome measures, monitoring arrangements and measures of deprivation.
4. Rural businesses need to be effectively supported to survive, grow and thrive.
5. Rural communities need to be well connected to services through integrated and affordable transport.
6. Broadband and mobile phone signal are essential services which should be available to all.

Throughout 2014 we consulted with rural communities about the key issues which affect them and helped them to identify solutions to those issues. We celebrated the many successes our communities have in tackling these issues through the Rural Innovators Award.

We explored the seven 'top' issues people voted for in more detail at the inaugural Scottish Rural Parliament national meeting in November 2014. At the 2014 Scottish Rural Parliament people agreed that rural communities need to be more:

EMPOWERED	CONNECTED	SUSTAINABLE
Stronger local democratic structures	Access to superfast broadband and 4G mobile phone signal	A baseline of services allowing monitoring and intervention
A local visioning process	The Scottish Rural Parliament and other mechanisms connect people across rural	Employment, education and business opportunities
Access to assets	Effective and affordable transport	A good quality of life
The ability to influence 'big policy'		Opportunities to live sustainably

Reforming Local Democracy

Local decision-making processes and democracy emerged as a cross-cutting theme throughout 2014 in preparation for the inaugural Scottish Rural Parliament in November that year and was the strongest message arising from the event.

Scotland needs new democratic structures that are decided, agreed and led by communities

Scotland is one of the most centralised countries in Europe with local authorities 45x the geographical size of the European average.

Communities do not always feel able to influence decision-making in their local area or at a national policy level. There was a strong message from the Scottish Rural Parliament that without making fundamental and probably structural changes in Scotland, the impact of our other activities would be significantly impeded.

"Radically transforming local democracy is not just an aspiration – it is absolutely vital"

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OBJECTIVE 1: Rural communities are engaged in a productive national conversation about how local democracy can be revitalised, what the nature of democracy is and what structures and activities are best suited to deliver it.

We are seeking:

Further grass-roots debate on local democratic reform which is coordinated and inclusive and which seeks to communicate and build on existing proposals, identifying the next steps for empowering communities and fostering local democratic collaboration.

Active engagement by the Scottish Government in the growing movement for change around local democracy, including addressing concerns about community council powers and budgets, community planning partnerships and the transparency of local decision-making.

Increased understanding and development of participatory democracy as an approach, building on the example and practice of the Scottish Rural Parliament.

We will:

Engage with relevant partners, including Scottish Government, to broaden and deepen debate on revitalising local democracy:

- Improve understanding of issues around local democracy within rural communities by publishing a pamphlet with a series of democracy-related essays from a wide range of thinkers by January 2016.
- Run a series of at least 20 events in rural Scotland to examine issues of local democracy by June 2016.
- Identify our collective and informed view on the next steps to take towards reforming local democracy by Oct 2016.

OBJECTIVE 2: Concerns about community councils are addressed.

We are seeking:

Scottish Government to respond to the concerns of rural communities about community councils.

We will:

Prepare a statement which reflects the differing views of people in rural Scotland about community councils and submit this to Scottish Government by October 2015, and ask for a formal response to the concerns raised before determining what further action to take.

Communities Leading

To empower communities you have to sustainably and adequately resource social enterprises.

Enabling rural communities to choose their own priorities and solutions, and supporting them to work on these appropriate solutions, creates resilience and sustainability. A lot of issues can be addressed by communities and in order to do that they need to have the tools and capacity to do it. However, it is important to recognise that some communities are less able to access support and these should be particularly supported with the intention of reducing inequalities of access and leadership. Support for communities needs to be tailored to that community.

Rural communities should be empowered to take action for themselves.

The final draft of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill is currently passing through the Scottish Parliament and should become an Act later this year. The Act will give new powers to communities, both urban and rural. It will take some time for all of the opportunities to become available.

The Land Reform Bill will also provide new powers and opportunities to communities and is going to be presented to the Scottish Parliament later this year. It will be open for consultation before it is finalised and passes through Scottish Parliament. We do not yet know what is going to be in the Land Reform Bill.

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OBJECTIVE 1: Increased awareness and engagement amongst communities with the new opportunities available through the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill and the forthcoming Land Reform Bill.

We are seeking:

Relevant organisations to take a coordinated approach to ensuring communities are aware of and have the capacity to access the opportunities available.

Rural communities' take-up the opportunities offered and share successes and challenges with each other.

We will:

- Work with partners to raise awareness of the opportunities offered by the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act and forthcoming Land Reform Act and provide encouragement and support for communities to ensure good uptake of the opportunities by February 2016.
- Feed into the regulations and guidance following the passing of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill between June 2015 and October 2016.
- Gather and promote case studies of empowered rural communities by Oct 2016.
- Facilitate inter-community networking and knowledge exchange by Oct 2016.

People empower themselves and their communities – legislation cannot do that for us.



OBJECTIVE 2: Funding for community projects and initiatives is available to community organisations in advance of projects making expenditure.

We are seeking:

A change of policy within the public sector to pay funding for community-led projects in advance of expenditure being made, wherever this is not dictated by EU or other externally controlled rules.

Inclusion of concerns about the payment in arrears of EU grant funds to small projects within the report from the European Rural Parliament.

We will:

- Advocate on behalf of rural communities for payment in advance of expenditure to be the norm within the public sector by February 2016.
- Make a submission to the European Rural Parliament to this effect, asking them to lobby for changes on our behalf and on behalf of other countries for whom this is also a concern, by July 2015.
- Represent rural Scotland at the European Rural Parliament in November 2015.

OBJECTIVE 3: Communities are funded and supported to develop a vision for their local area.

We are seeking:

Best practice guidance, funding and support are available to each community in developing their own vision for the future.

We will:

- We will work with partners to review the impact of prior community-led planning and visioning work and identify the most effective methods of conducting this work by Dec 2015.
- We will work with partners to establish the case for local community visioning and the resources required to achieve this by Oct 2016.



We're successfully managing a community-owned superfast broadband project and have a great events programme covering 9 villages.

Measures and Monitoring

Rural areas require their own set of outcome measures, monitoring arrangements and measures of deprivation.

The impact of our work and that of others can only be effectively measured if the ways in which

we measure change are suitable for rural areas. The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, for example, is used to make decisions about funding for rural areas but does not always capture smaller pockets of deprivation within a wider area.

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OBJECTIVE: A range of rural outcome measures and monitoring arrangements are available and utilised to effectively evaluate the impact of legislation and other activities on rural communities.

We are seeking:

A range of rural outcome measures and monitoring arrangements are available and utilised to effectively evaluate the impact of legislation and other activities on rural communities.

We will:

Review the efficacy of existing outcome measures and monitoring arrangements by October 2016 with a view to ensuring these arrangements are suitable for rural areas.



Business and Employment

Collaboration & support forums/networks are really lacking.

This is a key issue for rural communities with some areas reporting unemployment in excess of 50% of the working population. Rates of under-employment, part-time working and out-migration of working age people are concerning and likely result in distorted unemployment figures.

Being able to work locally enhances rural economic and social resilience and strengthens the population base. Scotland's rural economy is vital not only for sustainability of rural areas but to the country as a whole. Further business diversification needs to be encouraged, with support from planning. Broadband and transport links are essential.

Rural businesses need to be effectively supported to survive, grow and thrive.

The business support offer is tailored to the needs

of different regions of Scotland. This allows for the specific needs of an area to be addressed by enterprise support services such as Scottish Enterprise (SE, which works all across Scotland), Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE, which predominantly offers services in a restricted area) and Business Gateway (which offers services through each local authority).

It is a concern of people in rural Scotland that the decision about which area receives which services may be out-dated and no longer effective in meeting the needs of businesses. It was a particular concern that the social remit of HIE should be offered across Scotland rather than being restricted to specific areas.

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OBJECTIVE: Coordinated and accessible enterprise services are available which reflect the needs and the economy of different regions of rural Scotland.

We are seeking:

A review of the current economic needs of different regions of Scotland, available wider support mapped across all partners and enterprise support services which reflect these needs.

We will:

- Work with partners to collate and extend existing research, including case studies, of the different enterprise needs to rural communities.
- Prepare a case for review of enterprise services and submit this to Scottish Government by June 2016.

Building supportive strategic infrastructure eg smaller scale abattoirs and product dev(elopment) premises is crucial.

Need to focus on what a business needs to be able to operate in a particular location.

Transport Infrastructure

Scotland's rural communities often feel they are severely penalised through lack of a proper integrated transport infrastructure and affordability.

"It is almost impossible to get around D&G by public transport. Try getting the ferry at Cairnryan on a Sunday. You can get a bus to Stranraer, train to AYR and then bus back to Cairnryan. Madness."

Rural communities are more reliant on private transport and expensive fuel costs, pay higher delivery charges, are unable to access essential services and our businesses and economy suffer as a result.

Rural communities need to be well connected to services through integrated and affordable transport.

Many public transport providers operate on a commercial basis and determine their own timetables and prices. However in rural areas transport operators are often subsidised and the local authority has a say over their timetable. There are an increasing number of community transport operators who fill in the gaps and provide vital services for rural communities.

Depending on whether an operator is commercial or subsidised depends on how rural communities can best influence their decision-making. At the moment it is often not clear to communities how timetabling, pricing and integration decisions are made.

All stakeholders need to agree what services/timetables required. Frequently see empty buses driving round.

It's not just the lack of provision, but that the provision isn't fit for purpose.

Businesses really need affordable transport of goods, to and from, especially islands.

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OBJECTIVE 1: Improved communication between transport operators and with communities regarding transport developments and efforts to integrate timetables, with opportunities for communities to challenge changes to services.

We are seeking:

Commercial transport operators publish details of how they engage with other transport providers and with the communities they serve when designing or amending services.

Local authorities and bus service providers consult with communities when making changes to timetables.

Guidance is published by Scottish Government to encourage stronger engagement between transport operators and Local Transport Authorities and the communities that they serve when changes to services are proposed.

We will:

- Clarify the mechanisms through which Transport Scotland, local transport authorities and transport operators engage and communicate with rural communities. Publish these details to enable communities to influence service provision in their areas by 2016.
- Support and contribute to the implementation of new bus service registration arrangements designed to strengthen engagement between operators, local transport authorities and service users by Jan 2016.

OBJECTIVE 2: Improved support for community transport initiatives.

We are seeking:

The new integrated health and social care partnerships should embed transport in their planning and develop a strategic approach to working with community transport operators in order to provide effective non-emergency transport.

Transport service commissioners should review transport contracting so that the quality of service provided has a higher weighting, include community benefit clauses where appropriate, and make the tender process proportionate for small community transport operators.

The Scottish Government should consider how the Scotland-wide bus concessionary fare scheme can best be amended to ensure users of community transport services can benefit from their entitlement to concessions.

We will:

- Issue a statement of support for the Community Transport Association UK in their pursuance of these objectives by Dec 2015.
- Work with partners to monitor and report to rural communities on how the new health and social care partnerships are addressing issues of access to services by October 2016.



Digital Connectivity

Problem for us uploading secure data files to client, affects #innovation too!

Excellent 4G mobile phone signal and superfast broadband are essential services and yet many people in rural communities do not receive even basic mobile signal or broadband. It is one of the most limiting factors affecting businesses, communities and individuals in rural areas and is a likely cause of the out-migration of working age people and businesses.

Broadband and mobile phone signal provision are essential services which should be available to all.

Access to superfast broadband and 4G mobile phone signal would make it easier for rural businesses to compete more effectively on a national and international scale, providing jobs and ensuring the sustainability of rural communities. As technology develops it can provide people in rural communities with essential and desirable services, improving quality of

life. The importance of being able to connect with friends, family and information cannot be overestimated.

"Lack of good broadband means businesses will not move into the area, and the slow speeds reduce the potential output in one day which is magnified over the course of a year. Need more businesses to produce employment, to have more people to use the local facilities to make the high street thrive."

There are projects underway to improve both broadband and mobile phone signal. Broadband is dealt with by the Scottish Government and mobile phone signal is dealt with by the UK Government.

Broadband

The Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband Programme aims to provide fibre broadband infrastructure to areas where commercial infrastructure providers have chosen not to develop. Combined with current commercial roll-out plans, 95% of premises in Scotland should have access to fibre broadband by the end of 2017 and 85% by the end of 2015.

Community Broadband Scotland has been set-

up to focus on providing broadband solutions in the areas that are least likely to benefit from the Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband rollouts.

People in rural communities are concerned by the pace of the roll-out of broadband, that some households and businesses may not get any improvement and that until BT confirm where they will not be operating communities cannot access alternative solutions.

Mobile signal

The Mobile Infrastructure Project has been allocated £150million by the UK Government to deliver mobile phone signal to rural areas where there is currently no signal. The project is responsible for responsible for "a full-scale roll-out including mobile network planning and design, sourcing and acquiring sites, building the infrastructure (including masts), installing the Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) equipment and operating the sites – after the equipment has been commissioned by the MNOs."

(<http://www.arqiva.com/views/our-views/mip-better-connecting-rural-britain/>)

However people in rural communities are concerned about the slow pace of progress – the project is currently two years behind schedule – and that there are no plans to provide 100% coverage or to improve 4G coverage.

Poor comms from BT hampering progress with community solutions. Don't know if BT will provide and cannot invest.

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OBJECTIVE 1: Mobile phone signal in rural areas is significantly improved over the next 5 years.

We are seeking:

The Mobile Infrastructure Project is reviewed and the effectiveness of this project for rural Scotland is maximised.

We will:

- Gather and collate information and concerns about mobile coverage in rural areas by September 2015.
- Raise concerns about the Mobile Infrastructure Project with the UK Government by October 2015.

OBJECTIVE 2: Broadband of sufficient speeds reaches all rural communities as quickly as possible.

We are seeking:

Greater transparency from BT over the delivery rates of broadband to rural areas and in particular clarity over the areas broadband does not reach. A Universal Service Obligation for broadband which specifies a minimum speed.

We will:

- Seek immediate clarification of the status of different areas of Scotland, to enable communities to work with Community Broadband Scotland to identify a solution for their local area where this is necessary by July 2015.
- Contribute to the Ofcom review of telecommunications and encourage other rural organisations and communities to respond to the public consultation by Oct 2016.

Decent broadband & mobile essential for remote health & social care. All interconnected.

Internet is a crucial part of rural living, must be reliable!!



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