

**‘SPEAK UP FOR RURAL SCOTLAND’ – CONSULTATION PAPER  
OCTOBER 2010**

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**1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1** The Scottish Government has launched a consultation entitled ‘Speak Up For Rural Scotland’. This consultation paper proposes a series of step changes focusing on rural economies, multipurpose land use, renewable energy, empowered communities, sustaining rural communities, infrastructure and services and working together.
- 1.2** This consultation seeks to inform the Scottish Government of the required policy direction to ensure that rural Scotland contributes to the sustainable economic growth of Scotland.
- 1.3** It should be noted that the proposed step changes cover a broad range of subjects, are ambitious and contain very little detail; however, in principal they are welcome and highlight possible future rural policy directions.
- 1.4** The response outlined below has been collated from officer’s and is to be submitted as such (subject to amendments) to the Scottish Government by the closing date of the 25<sup>th</sup> October 2010.
- 1.5** A separate late response will be submitted from the Council subject to approval from the Council’s Executive on the 04<sup>th</sup> November 2010.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1** That Members give consideration to and agree that the response as laid out in this report forms the Councils response to the “Speak Up for Rural Scotland” consultation paper subject to any additional comments or amendments that the Exexutive wish included.

**3. BACKGROUND**

**3.1** The Scottish Government has launched a consultation entitled 'Speak Up For Rural Scotland'. In 2008, the Scottish Government set up the Rural Development Council to advise ministers on a range of issues relevant to the prosperity of rural Scotland. This consultation paper outlines their views which propose 37 step changes focusing on rural economies, multipurpose land use, renewable energy, empowered communities, sustaining rural communities, infrastructure and services and working together.

**3.2** Detailed below are the individual questions posed within the consultation document and the associated comments for Members consideration.

**3.3** **Does the Rural Development Council's advice set out in the section "Step Changes for Rural Scotland", cover all of the main issues relevant to economic growth in rural Scotland?**

The consultation focuses on rural economies, multipurpose land use, renewable energy, empowered communities, sustaining rural communities, infrastructure and services and working together. However, it is considered that there is a gap in respect of marine assets. The marine environment, including our extensive coast, is a huge influence on the prosperity, or otherwise of rural Scotland; namely in respect of visitors to our seascapes, aquaculture and offshore renewable energy which have inextricable connections to the land.

**3.4** **Which of the Rural Development Council's Step Changes would you rank as the most important and why? Please select no more than ten.**

Step Change 16 (Renewable Energy) ; *For small scale community projects, the consents process should be simplified as far as possible and aligned with planning requirements. Fees and charges should be minimised.* Securing related benefits for communities in respect of renewable energy is a top priority within Argyll and Bute Council's "Economic Development Action Plan" and "Renewable Energy Action Plan". De-regulation and reduced fees is welcome to ensure that communities extract the greatest benefits from the growing low carbon economy.

Step Change 19 (Empowered Communities): *Community*

*Collaboration should be reflected in Single Outcome Agreements and recognised by community planning partnerships and public sector staff.* Argyll and Bute Council's Single Outcome Agreement already reflects strong community collaboration through the Community Planning Partnership which has strong links to Local Area Community Planning Groups. However, Argyll and Bute Council welcomes additional opportunities to further align SOA's with aims and aspirations of communities.

Step Change 21 (Sustaining Rural Communities): *The Rural Homes for Rent Scheme is a good example of what can be achieved and its principles should be taken further, to give greater opportunities for affordable housing to meet local housing need, including community-owned housing schemes.* Argyll and Bute Council welcomes further financial support to the private and third sectors from the Scottish Government towards affordable housing projects, particularly those that would be owned by the community. Two schemes within Argyll and Bute have been approved under this scheme (Ardfern and Ardkinglas), however, these have still to be delivered and we look forward to reviewing the outcome of these proposals.

Step Change 23 (Sustaining Rural Communities): *A national rural Parliament could provide a focus for all these (community/ development trusts) groups and a means of enlivening local democracy.* Argyll and Bute Council strongly agrees that there is a growing role for the third sector to play in respect of generating community activity and income. However, consideration must be given to the capacity and skills within the third sector to deliver what appears to be a growing demand for their services. A national rural Parliament would assist in delivering focus, advice, resources and above all, reinforce the culture change required within both the private and public sector to assist in the development of our third sector.

Step Change 24 (Sustaining Rural Communities): *...we encourage the various arms of the public sector to consider the asset transfer to community bodies where circumstances are appropriate.* Argyll and Bute Council considers asset transfer an important step forward in empowering communities to develop social enterprises in a sustainable manner. However, resources are required to ensure that proposals will enhance (or at a minimum maintain) the existing asset and that the necessary skills and capacities within the community group exist. In council officers experiences, such groups have difficulty developing basic business cases and whilst council officers strive to

assist in developing these, the necessary skills are sometimes found wanting.

Step Change 25 (Infrastructure and Services): *We encourage the Scottish Government to enable the provision of high speed broadband to all in rural Scotland who wish to use it, and to do so significantly ahead of the UK national timeline targets.* Argyll and Bute Council recognises the significant importance of 21<sup>st</sup> century communications technology to maintain competitiveness. With 25 inhabited islands and significant areas of 'remote rural' regions on the mainland, we would welcome any efforts for universal coverage in respect of high speed broadband.

Step Change 29 (Infrastructure and Services): *Contracts for public transport should include a condition that requires providers to coordinate the timings of all their services with those of private and community providers.* Argyll and Bute Council would agree that integration of public transport services should be encouraged and where possible this could be conditioned in contracts however, there are a number of constraints which make this difficult in Argyll and Bute. There is a lack of capacity on the rail network and in particular platform space at Glasgow Central Station which makes it difficult to integrate rail services with bus / ferry timetables. Buses are also governed by the Traffic Commissioner and financial penalties can be imposed on operators for failures to run registered local transport services on time, therefore operators cannot wait if train / ferry services are delayed. Such issues would require to be considered if integration of services was to be conditioned in future public transport contracts.

Step Change 30 (Infrastructure and Services): *Communities should talk to each other about their needs and look for joint solutions – the Community Transport Association is a good source of information.* Argyll and Bute Council agrees that the Community Transport Association is a good source of information and that communities should look for joint solutions. Community transport schemes which were historically funded by the Scottish Government are now the responsibility of Local Authorities and the money for this is not ring fenced. Argyll and Bute Council currently fund a number of community transport schemes annually however, given impending budget cuts funding for these services could be reduced.

Step Change 31 (Infrastructure and Services): *We want to see maximum use being made of available vehicles.* Argyll and Bute Council would agree with this step change and

along with the two regional transport partnerships (Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, HITRANS) have had some success working with community partners. We are aware of potential Scottish Government funding through Community Planning Partnerships for electric vehicles and are liaising with a number of organisations regarding a potential funding bid.

**3.5** Step Change 32 (Infrastructure and Services): *The Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) scheme should be rolled out to as many ferry routes as possible with priority given to the most remote routes.* High ferry fares have been seen by many as a barrier to economic growth in our communities and RET could benefit ferry users by providing not only cheaper transport costs but also local economies in improving business competitiveness, attracting more visitors etc thus creating increased job opportunities and arresting population decline. If RET is introduced and the number of visitors to islands is significantly increased then consideration should be given to linking elements of the fare to the island to contribute to a fund to improve the island's infrastructure e.g. road network. Some of the islands infrastructure may not be able to cope with significant influx of visitors. The existing RET pilot has already highlighted that waste management has been a problem with limited infrastructure on islands for adequate disposal.

**3.6** **Do you have any further Step Changes that you would like to propose? If you do, what are they?**

The benefits that could be accrued from marine renewables for island/ coastal/ rural communities (financial, employment/ skills, procurement/ supply chain, infrastructure, transport) need to be optimised and harnessed at the local authority level.

**3.7** In respect of Sustaining Rural Communities, Argyll and Bute Council would welcome any efforts to simplify mechanisms towards joint procurement i.e. energy suppliers, with third sector organisations and local authorities which would assist the sustainability of local communities.

**Do you have any suggestions on how the Step Changes could be implemented?**

The suggested national rural Parliament, facilitated by the Scottish Government would be in principle a sound forum

for further debate around the step changes. It may be possible for the remit of the Scottish Rural Network to be expanded to allow for this. It is important that decisions relating to rural Scotland are made in forums where the practical realities and issues of rural Scotland are closely understood.

**Having read “Speak Up for Rural Scotland”, what more do you feel you could do in your local area to support the local economy and/ or your community?**

Argyll and Bute Council are already striving to support the local economy and communities through a number of initiatives/ programmes such as;

3.8

- CHORD, an ambitious £30m waterfront regeneration programme focusing on our 5 main towns,
- Business Gateway; seeking to work with over 1,000 new and existing businesses to help them start, grow and survive
- Delivering secretariat support to the Argyll and the Islands LEADER Local Action Group
- Assisting communities in the Town Centre Regeneration Fund
- Continued representation on the Regional Proposal Assessment Committee (RPAC) in respect of the Scottish Rural Development Programme
- Strong partnership working with the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, HIE, the Scottish Association for Marine Science and many other public, private and third sector organisations

Nonetheless, Argyll and Bute Council would welcome advice from either the Scottish Rural Development Council or the Scottish Government on how best to continue supporting the local economy/ communities and a national ‘rural plan’ through either a national rural Parliament or the Scottish Rural Networks may be the way forward.

**Please provide any other comments that you would like to make about any aspect of “Speak Up for Rural Scotland”.**

None

**4. CONCLUSION**

- 4.1 The Council officers welcomes this consultation paper as part of the wider debate about the policy direction of rural Scotland, particularly in respect of its contribution to

Scotland's sustainable economic growth. However, the proposed step changes cover a broad range of subjects, are ambitious and contain very little detail. However, in principal they are welcome and highlight possible future rural policy directions and importantly a potential new forum for debate.

## 5. IMPLICATIONS

<b>Policy:</b>	Responding to the "Speak Up for Rural Scotland" assists the Council in delivering our commitment to securing our key objectives in the Corporate Plan and the local outcomes within the Single Outcome Agreement relating to Vibrant Communities, Outstanding Environment and Forward Looking.
<b>Financial:</b>	There are no resource implications linked to this paper; however there are potential resource issues which may be incurred in respect of some of the proposed step changes. However, due to the broad and far reaching nature of this consultation, it is considered highly likely that details of any step changes taken forward will come back for further consultation.
<b>Personnel:</b>	None
<b>Equal Opportunity:</b>	None

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### LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS:

"Speak Up for Rural Scotland" August 2010 available at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/07/22091602/0>

Copy also available in the Members Lounge