



Action Plan for Scottish Rural Action 2015-16

The Scottish Rural Parliament met in November 2014 and endorsed the following areas of work to be taken forward on behalf of rural communities. Rural communities need to be:

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

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

It is the view of the Scottish Rural Parliament in 2014 that:

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.

We have therefore outlined objectives and actions relating to each of these views.

Objectives & Actions

1. Scotland needs new democratic structures decided, agreed and driven by communities.

	Objective:	The Rural Parliament is seeking:	Scottish Rural Action will:	Delivery partners:
1.1	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.	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Increased understanding and development of participatory democracy as an approach, building on the example and practice of the Scottish Rural Parliament.</p>	<p>Engage with relevant partners, including Scottish Government, to broaden and deepen debate on revitalising local democracy:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	<p>Scottish Government</p> <p>Convention of Scottish Local Authorities</p> <p>Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy</p> <p>Electoral Reform Society</p> <p>Rural communities, including through regional alliances and networks where these exist.</p>

1.2	Concerns about community councils are addressed.	Scottish Government to respond to the concerns of rural communities about community councils.	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.	Rural communities Community councils Scottish Government
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2. Rural communities should be empowered to take action for themselves.

	Objective:	The Rural Parliament is seeking:	Scottish Rural Action will:	Delivery partners:
2.1	Increased awareness and engagement amongst communities with the new opportunities available through the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill and the forthcoming Land Reform Bill.	<p>Relevant organisations to take a coordinated approach to ensuring communities are aware of and have the capacity to access the opportunities available.</p> <p>Rural communities' take-up the opportunities offered and share successes and challenges with each other.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>Feed into the regulations and guidance following the passing of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill between June 2015 and October 2016.</p> <p>Gather and promote case studies of empowered rural communities by Oct 2016.</p> <p>Facilitate inter-community networking and knowledge exchange by Oct 2016.</p>	<p>Rural communities</p> <p>Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations</p> <p>Develop Trust Association Scotland</p> <p>Scottish Government</p> <p>Other stakeholders</p>
2.2	Funding for community projects and initiatives is	A change of policy within the public sector to pay funding for	Advocate on behalf of rural communities by February 2016 for payment in advance of	Rural communities

	available to community organisations in advance of projects making expenditure.	community-led projects in advance of expenditure being made, wherever this is not dictated by EU or other externally controlled rules.	expenditure to be the norm within the public sector.	Local authorities Scottish Government Highlands & Islands Enterprise
		Inclusion of concerns about the payment in arrears of EU grant funds to small projects within the report from the European Rural Parliament.	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.	European Rural Parliament Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations - European Unit European Network of National Civil Society Associations Members in the European Parliament for Scotland
2.3	Communities are funded and supported to develop a vision for their local area.	Best practice guidance, funding and support are available to each community in developing their own vision for the future.	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.	Scottish Community Alliance LEADER Scottish Rural Network Rural communities Other stakeholders.

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

	Objective:	The Rural Parliament is seeking:	Scottish Rural Action will:	Delivery partners:
3.1	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.	Clarity over the efficacy of existing outcome measures and monitoring arrangements for rural areas.	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.	Scottish Government SRUC James Hutton Institute LEADER Other stakeholders.

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

	Objective:	The Rural Parliament is seeking:	Scottish Rural Action will:	Delivery partners:
4.1	Coordinated and accessible enterprise services are available which reflect the needs and the economy of different regions of rural Scotland.	The current economic needs of different regions of Scotland are reviewed, available wider support is mapped across all partners and enterprise support services are amended to reflect these needs.	Work with partners to collate and extend existing research, including case studies, of the different enterprise needs of rural communities. Prepare a case for a review of enterprise services and submit this to Scottish Government by June 2016.	Scottish Government Research partner Federation of Small Businesses Business Gateway Operation Network SRUC James Hutton Institute Crichton Institute Highlands and Islands Enterprise Scottish Enterprise Cairngorms National Park Authority

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

	Objective:	The Rural Parliament is seeking:	Scottish Rural Action will:	Delivery partners:
5.1	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.	<p>Commercial transport operators publish details of how they engage with other transport providers and with the communities they serve when designing or amending services.</p> <p>Local authorities and bus service providers consult with communities when making changes to timetables.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Transport Scotland</p> <p>Local transport authorities</p> <p>Statutory Regional Transport Partnerships</p> <p>Transport operators</p> <p>Rural communities</p>
5.2	Improved support for community transport initiatives.	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.	<p>Issue a statement of support for the Community Transport Association UK in their pursuance of these objectives by Dec 2015.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Community Transport Association Scotland</p> <p>Local Authorities / Convention of Scottish Local Authorities</p> <p>Statutory Regional Transport Partnerships</p>

		<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>		<p>Scottish Government (in. Transport Scotland)</p> <p>NHS Scotland</p>
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6. Broadband and mobile phone signal provision are essential services which should be available to all.

	Objective:	The Rural Parliament is seeking:	Scottish Rural Action will:	Delivery partners:
6.1	Mobile phone signal in rural areas is significantly improved over the next 5 years.	The Mobile Infrastructure Project is reviewed and the effectiveness of this project for rural Scotland is maximised.	Gather and collate information and concerns about mobile coverage in rural areas by Sept 2015. Raise concerns about the MIP with the UK Government by Oct 2015.	UK Government Scottish Government Mobile Operators Association
6.2	Broadband of sufficient speed reaches all rural communities as quickly as possible.	Greater transparency from BT over the delivery dates of broadband to rural areas and in particular clarity over the areas broadband does not reach. There is a Universal Service Obligation in place for broadband which specifies a minimum speed.	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.	BT Ofcom Rural communities Community Broadband Scotland Digital Scotland