

PE1587/B

Scottish Government Letter of 19 January 2016

Assistant Clerk
Public Petitions Clerks
Room T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP
19 January 2016

Ms Sigrid Robinson

Scottish Government response to Petition PE1587 seeking the reinstatement of the Scottish Civic Forum

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this petition. As part of our drive for open, accessible government and empowerment, the Scottish Government is committed to finding ways of working with people to ensure they understand the workings of government, are involved and able to influence the decisions that matter to them.

We are listening to and working with a wide range of partners to make sure that people have opportunities to participate and help shape and influence our society. This includes working with the wider public sector and communities to identify the best ways to achieve this. In doing so, we remain committed to the principles on which the Scottish Parliament was founded - including the need to ensure that Scotland's devolved institutions are accessible, open and responsive and promote a participative approach to democracy.

Over the last year, we have held conversation with thousands of people across the country on how Scotland can be Healthier and Fairer, continued with a series of travelling Cabinets to provide ways for people across Scotland to raise issues directly with Ministers at public meetings, instigated a new approach to engage with rural communities by working with partners on the creation of our Scottish Rural Parliament which we expect will deliver real-life improvements for those living in rural Scotland and have invested and innovated in the use of digital tools and approaches to help citizens debate and work together with us on key issues affecting them. We have also continued to have strong connections to the Older Peoples Assembly and Scottish Youth Parliament and our investment in people and communities for example through our Equality funding help ensure those who currently experience exclusion and disadvantage are able to engage fully in these processes.

The opportunities for individuals and civil society to contribute to the workings of government have changed very considerably since 2005. Particular over the last year, when the Government has brought forward a clear strategy on Community Empowerment, increased public participation in a variety of ways and is currently developing an Open Government Partnership Action Plan, explicitly in partnerships with civil society. One aim of which is to develop a shared agenda around ensuring people can understand and influence the decisions that affect them and know how to hold government accountable.

While a reinstated Scottish Civic Forum is not currently under current consideration, if a proposal for a forum with a clear public purpose and sustainable governance is proposed with the broad support of civil society the government would join the discussion or listen to a proposal.

Happy to discuss further, either with the committee or with the petitioner if it is helpful.

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