

BRIEFING PAPER

Creating a Fairer Scotland: What Matters to You

Summary of the Discussions so far

Since the launch of Fairer Scotland in June 2015, over 7,000 individuals and organisations have taken part in Fairer Scotland public events and locally organised discussions. Even more have engaged online, with the number of visitors to social media platforms edging towards 17,500.

The Scottish Government held over around 200 events, including a series of in-depth discussions, in eight locations across the country, discussing some of the emerging themes. People were asked to identify the issues that matter most to them, as well as suggesting what could be done to make Scotland fairer. The Scottish Government received a broad range of opinion from individuals, organisations and groups of people who came together to take part in Fairer Scotland discussions.

Each piece of communication was categorised into a broad range of topics, from taxation to transport, equalities to education, and housing to health. In summarising the wealth of information received, five core themes were identified that best reflect views received. These are:

- Work and living standards.
- Homes and communities.
- Early years, education and health.
- Community participation and public services.
- Respect and dignity.

This brief report presents a snapshot of what the Scottish Government have heard so far.

Work and Living Standards

- A **decent standard of living** is a key theme to emerge from the discussion. For many, that means having a job that pays a fair wage and treats people fairly.
- **Access to jobs and support to find employment** was discussed at length, with recognition that those seeking work should receive more individually tailored support to ensure they find work that they want, and are able, to do.
- **Employment opportunities** should be provided for specific groups. This could include mentoring schemes for young people, as well as extending the age threshold of the Modern Apprenticeship (MA) scheme to better accommodate disabled people.
- The idea of everyone having an **adequate level of income** was raised, with a number of ways suggested as to how to do this. More people being paid the Living Wage, as well as increases to both the living and minimum wages were suggested.
- **Improvements in working conditions** were discussed, in particular greater flexibility in employment. For example, employers should give more consideration to individual employee circumstances. Equal pay was also discussed, both between women and men, and between people of different ages who do the same job. People want to see an end to zero hours contracts to provide more work and wage security.
- **Tackling poverty** is another key issue, with a general feeling that society should be doing everything it can to end poverty in all its forms e.g. child poverty, food poverty, and fuel poverty. This is recognised as being key to creating a fairer Scotland.
- The **'poverty premium'** is discussed, whereby those living in poverty are further disadvantaged through, for example, increased utility costs and lack of access to affordable credit. Legislation to prevent high interest lenders from operating is one suggested solution. Another is that energy costs should be made the same regardless of how fuel is paid for.

Homes and Communities

- **Affordability and access** are key issues. There is a need for smaller, more affordable housing that will allow those on lower incomes to buy. Rent levels, mainly in the private rented sector, are too high and further controls should be put in place. For example, through the introduction of a rent cap.
- **More private housing, to both buy and rent, as well as more local authority housing**, is necessary. More **housing in rural areas** is also important.
- **Homelessness** was discussed, with calls for more to be done to address this issue. Better engagement with homeless people is one way to do this.
- **Housing allocation processes** are important to many, with a common suggestion being to pay more attention to individual needs in this process, especially for vulnerable groups of people. This was a particular issue raised in relation to the migrant and refugee community.
- With regards to **housing support for disabled people**, suggestions were made around improving support for young disabled people moving out of the parental home. Making sure that all housing is accessible for disabled people is key.
- Ideas on how **improve the standard of housing** include tougher penalties for landlords providing sub-standard housing; tougher regulations for house builders; and upgrading/modernising of existing housing stock. All housing must be more **energy efficient**.
- An **increase in communal spaces/facilities** would mean local communities can come together. This includes both indoor and outdoor spaces. There have also been calls to increase the level of community activities for people to access, in particular young people, especially in rural areas.
- Requests were made for **more community policing** and greater visibility of local police in the community.

Early Years and Education

- **Childcare** is a key issue and is considered important in terms of parents accessing work. **Flexibility and choice** are equally as important as availability of childcare, particularly for parents who work outside of nursery.
- There were several comments about **providing childcare during school holidays**, which can prove difficult and potentially expensive for parents, especially those without extended families who are reliant on private childcare during these times.
- **Support for parents** is necessary, particularly more supportive information for parents, equal rights for fathers, better paternity and maternity leave arrangements and additional support for adoptive parents.
- For **parents of disabled children or children with additional support needs**, the key points are that services remain in place for the long term, and that there is more support for disabled children or children with additional support needs in school. This could include more carers in special schools and better training for school staff.
- **Children looked after by the care system** need adequate support when they leave.
- There were a range of views as to how **education** should be delivered. There is some focus given to starting school later, with reference to the Scandinavian countries, as well as class sizes and teacher/ pupil ratios.
- A key issue in relation to the **school curriculum** is that there should be more variety of subjects taught, such as health, voting/getting involved in politics, how to start a business and life skills such as budgeting, preparing a meal, etc.
- **Vocational learning** should have parity with academic learning, with greater value placed on vocational study. Apprenticeships and trade schools are ways to encourage young people to follow vocational career pathways.
- **Pupils and students with disabilities** need greater levels of support, for example by providing access to transport. Additional support for disabled people moving from education to employment is also important.

Health

- On health, **nutrition and access to healthy food** is a key focus, with an emphasis on child nutrition through healthier school meals and availability of fresh fruit in school. Educating parents on nutrition and providing warnings on unhealthy foods such as sweets and fizzy drinks are also important.
- The **cost of healthy food** was raised, noting that it is too high and that unhealthy food is cheaper. Some ideas to reduce these costs include offering tax relief on healthy foods, through VAT, or local suppliers, through business rates relief.
- **Mental health** is a key issue. There is a real desire to see mental health services at the same level as physical health services, both in terms of access and quality. There should also be more child and adolescent mental health services.
- **Reductions in waiting times** to access health services is important, particularly in relation to mental health services and especially for people in crisis situations.
- Suggestions were made that **GP appointments** are difficult to get and often too short. This is a particular concern of those whose first language is not English.
- The NHS could be further improved by greater levels of **integration between different health departments**. This would enable more efficient sharing of patient information and allow those with multiple or complex issues to access integrated care at one location.
- The **NHS should continue to remain free at the point of access** and that further investment should be provided to ensure it receives the level of funding it requires.
- **Carers** are one of the key groups discussed, with support for carers emerging as a key theme. There is acknowledgement of the role that carers play, as well as calls for greater provision of sufficient respite for carers. **Carers' allowance** should be raised to reflect the economic value they contribute to the Scottish economy.

Community Participation and Public Services

- There is a need for more **opportunities for local people be involved** and play a part in decisions that affect them and their community. There is also a focus on more decisions being taken locally and at a community level. Better use could be made of community councils, including reforming them in order to make them more representative of local communities and give them more authority.
- **Support for community groups and organisations** to allow participation at a grass roots level is vital. Access to information is also critical to community engagement, as is the provision of feedback to generate trust and maintain community involvement.
- The **role of public services** is another standout issue, the key point being that services should fit the needs of people. Users should be listened to and involved when services are being designed.
- This is particularly the case with regards to issues raised on **transport**. Suggestions on how transport services could be improved include improved routes and greater reliability of services and greater integration of transport services for rural communities, such as bus and ferry services.
- **Access to public services** is important. On one hand, there are many comments suggesting that quality public services should be available to everyone regardless of where they live. On the other is the view that the availability of services should be based on where they are needed most. Access should reflect this.
- Access to services is a particular issue in relation to **rural communities**. More resources are needed to improve access, such as improving broadband to provide more access to online services. Faster broadband speeds and better mobile coverage in general is a key issue around digital services.
- **More local services**, such as local clubs and activities, and greater ease of access to key services such as health and education are vital. Translation services for non-English speakers in health centres and schools is an example.

Respect and Dignity

- **Ending discrimination** of any kind and ensuring **equality of opportunity** for all are vital.
- The **negative media portrayal of certain sections of society** and how this reinforces the stigma that exists around these groups and communities. More funding for local media to promote positive community stories is suggested to combat this, as is a greater community voice more generally in the national media.
- **The way that people are treated by public services** is a key point. This is particularly the case with regards to social security and the welfare system. These should be fairer, more helpful, provide security and treat everyone with respect. As part of this, suggestions were made that sanctions should be removed.
- On specific **welfare benefits**, restoring lifetime awards for people with permanent or deteriorating conditions is a key suggestion. As well as this, fit for work assessments should take greater account of mental health status and GPs' recommendations to provide a rounded assessment.
- A more personal, empathetic and compassionate service, offering tailored **support for jobseekers** is called for. Having a designated adviser is one way in which this could be achieved. Claimants should be made fully aware of the benefits they are entitled to and assistance should be offered to complete necessary forms.
- Creating a **more welcoming and less intimidating job centre environment**, through the removal of security guards from the premises; provision of more privacy for job seekers and creation of a more child-friendly space would be welcomed.
- As part of the Fairer Scotland process, extra effort was made to speak to **minority groups and equality groups**. There are a number of specific views offered by these communities of people around the broad theme of respect and dignity.

- There is a real need for **further inclusion of disabled** people across all areas of society, particularly with regards to finding employment and in skills attainment across education.
- **Greater representation of minority ethnic communities** in senior positions and in key decision making roles is also suggested.
- **Greater representation of women** across society is important. There should be a 50/50 gender split in company boardrooms and senior positions. Reducing the gender pay gap is also a key issue.
- The **migrant and refugee population** in Scotland should be allowed to contribute to society while they are awaiting the outcome of citizenship applications, through work, volunteering and/or education. One idea suggested is for a system that recognises the existing qualifications of migrants and allows them to access appropriate employment. There are also calls for a reduction in the wait for citizenship applications to be processed.
- There are requests for more **English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses**, along with greater provision of translation services in key public services such as schools and health environments.
- **Promotion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning and Intersex (LGBTQI) issues** across society is important in order to generate greater awareness, with transgender issues a particular focus. One suggestion is to highlight LGBTQI issues in schools to combat bullying and discrimination at an early age.
- More needs to be done to integrate and include **traveller communities** in local areas, for example through representation on community councils.
- Providing adequate support for the **reintegration of offenders** into society is a key issue through, for example, suitable housing, tailored employment support and benefits in place on release.
- **Care for older people** needs a flexible approach. The issue of loneliness is an important one, as is the need to address social isolation of elderly people. Intergenerational activities is a good way of reducing isolation for older people.



The Scottish Government plan to publish a social justice action plan later in 2016. For further information about the Fairer Scotland process, visit: www.fairer.scot.

The Scottish Government are committed to ensuring as many people as possible access this report. If you have ideas on how we can make this report more accessible to you, such as providing versions in a different format or language, please contact the Scottish Government via Karen Armstrong on 0300 244 1165 or by emailing karen.armstrong@gov.scot.

Comments and questions around the analysis of responses received to the Fairer Scotland discussion can be made to Paul Sloan on 0141 244 5400 or by emailing paul.sloan@gov.scot.