



Briefing 07/54 October 2007

Principles and Priorities: Programme for Government

To: All Chief Executives, Main Contacts and Email Contacts (Scotland)

CC: All Chief Executives, Main Contacts (England, Northern Ireland and Wales)

Objectives and legislative priorities of the Scottish Government

Key issues

Scottish First Minister reveals his plans for the first year in power. Aim is to deliver on the manifesto commitments of the Scottish government.

11 Bills identifying the way ahead with the new Government.

1. Introduction

Since coming to office over 100 days ago, the First Minister for Scotland Alex Salmond has issued a programme which looks to persuade - rather than one which asserts the domination of one party or coalition or one world view. It sets out the objectives and legislative priorities made by the Scottish Government and aims to look at, and reflect on amongst other things, shared services and objectives. The bills are about delivering on the manifesto and it is hoped that a consensual approach to the proposals will find sufficient opposition support to get through.

The document can be viewed in full at:

www.scotland.gov.uk/news/this-week/speeches/principles-priorities/

This Government adopted an approach to Government based upon three objectives:

- To win and retain the trust of the people requires an administration willing to focus on showing competence and direction in the day to day business of government
- It is believed that the people of Scotland want a Government based on principle but able to move with mainstream opinion to build consensus in the public interest
- Government must always be about vision, restoring belief in the power of democratically elected Government to effect change and to focus on the 'possible' rather than merely accepting the status quo

The report attempts to paint a picture of a better, more dynamic society and offering Scotland a radical and inspirational choice about its future. The purpose behind the changes is geared towards the ambition to create a wealthier and fairer Scotland and that economic growth is its highest priority. The Government hopes that Scotland can achieve a highly developed national status with high growth and vibrant communities. Scotland requires an economy which drives employment, investment, research, development and rewarding success.

The strategy adopted will focus on areas such as lowering business tax and simplifying regulation on boosting skills and on improving the focus and delivery of the enterprise network. It is hoped that these should devolve to local authorities. Perhaps lower tax for small businesses will provide further assistance to a growing Scottish economy. The specific Bills according to the report include:

2. The Bills

- 1) **Abolition of Bridge Tolls Bill**, aims to make good the Government's commitment to remove the tolls on the Forth and Tay Bridges. However, this will result in the loss of many jobs which may have a detrimental effect on the local economy.

- 2) **Creative Scotland Bill**, to establish a new cultural development body, Creative Scotland, by amalgamating the Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Screen. This has the potential to lead to increased linkages with local authority culture service areas.
- 3) **Interest (Scotland) Bill**, to develop fair and consistent rules for the application of interest rates to payments of debt and damages in Scotland.
- 4) **Budget Bill**, to finance the public services Scotland needs. Westminster has indicated that there may be tighter budget controls in the future. The results of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) for authorities will reflect the current positions within authorities.
- 5) **Graduate Endowment (Abolition) Bill**, to abolish the Graduate Endowment Fee, should benefit 50,000 students in Scotland who will no longer be asked to pay back fees.
- 6) **Local Healthcare Bill**, to give greater patient and community involvement in delivery of local health service and introduce direct elections to National Health Service Boards. This has a direct link to service delivery and is of great interest on a community level.
- 7) **Public Health Bill**, designed to comprehensively modernise Scotland's public health legislation. The purpose of the Bill is to redefine and clarify the relationships between Ministers, Health Boards and Local Authorities. It is designed to strengthen all roles and provide a first class service to the public.
- 8) **Patients' Rights Bill**, looking at how to best implement a draft measure which includes the right to an individual waiting time guarantee.
- 9) **Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games Bill**. Undoubtedly the Games represent a massive opportunity for Scotland if successful and may lead to increases in revenues and tourism for the Scottish economy.
- 10) **Judiciary (Scotland) Bill**, to establish a Judicial Appointments Board and help modernize the organisation and leadership of Scotland's judiciary.
- 11) **Rape and Sexual Offences Bill**, to reform the law on rape and sexual offences in light of the Scottish Law Commission's review.

3. Conclusion

APSE believes that the Executive has campaigned in the process to ensure that the overall benefit will be reflected in communities and the people who live there. This

report gives a flavour of a Scotland where community planning is central to local authorities. Therefore putting the role of local government at the heart of activity in this area should not be overlooked by councils.

It is clear from these proposals that the Scottish Government hopes to create a better, more dynamic society and is offering Scotland a say in Scotland's future. Whilst APSE welcomes any change for the better, it is felt that a great deal of caution should be taken as there is no clear and concise view as to whether these proposed changes will benefit Scotland and in particular, for authorities trying to deliver services. Through these Bills the Scottish Government is hoping to transform public health, drive educational attainment and changing the way the environment is viewed, albeit these are long term aims, but APSE will watch this closely to see the effects of the Bills on service delivery.

APSE would welcome any comments on this, which should be sent to ptaggart@apse.org.uk

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