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Citizen Participation and Public Petitions
Committee
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19th December 2023

Dear Jackson,

Thank you for your correspondence dated 26th October 2023. I would like to thank the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions committee for inviting Scottish Government to provide evidence at the pre-budget scrutiny session on 4th October 2023.

As I stated during my appearance, Scottish Government continues to recognise the value of having a team with central responsibility to provide the coordination and oversight of participatory engagements across the organisation. We know that forming such a team with the skills, expertise and capacity to ensure standards are met, and staff are supported to deliver participatory approaches would be a key step in addressing the recommendations made by the Institutionalising Participatory and Deliberative Democracy (IPDD) working group which Scottish Government has agreed to.

Officials have been progressing work internally to identify the skills and resources required to establish how a central team could be organised in order to provide effective support. However, following the Chancellor of the Exchequer's autumn statement on 22nd November, you will be aware that Scottish Government faces the most challenging fiscal landscape since devolution. This means we are having to make difficult choices. I anticipate that by February next year I will be in a position to provide the Committee with further information on how the IPDD recommendations will be taken forward.

Scottish Government has been clear that we are committed to improving the accessibility of the budget. As I outlined to the Committee, the 'public information and engagement' budget that you refer to is for communications for paid-for-media marketing only, and does not relate to public participation work. It should also be noted that this is not a single, discrete budget line within Scottish Government; it is a cumulation of funds identified by individual policy areas where paid-for-media marketing is indicated as essential to achieve specific policy outcomes. Monies for paid-for-media marketing are funded by policy area programme budgets, and are set out and reported together to enable Ministers to monitor spend. As such, there is no central communications programme budget within the Scottish Government that can be accessed to support broader communications work.

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The current budget for public participation is difficult to estimate as funding is dispersed across policy teams. Officials are working on improved co-ordination, as recommended by the IPDD working group, which will provide a clearer representation of costs associated with participation and engagement. Whilst it is likely that aspects of the budget for public participation work can have greater impact if dispersed across government, the remit of a central team for participation will involve improving the quality, proportionality and reporting of participation-related spend.

I note the Committee's advocacy to establish a strategy that outlines the connection between participation, marketing and communications, as well as the wider aims of improving democratic improvement and education, and the resourcing of these. Scottish Government welcomes this and would relate it to the IPDD working group's recommendation to develop a National Participation Strategy. Such a strategy would strengthen the links within government, but crucially this would not be for government alone. We recognise the need to build participation skills and capabilities across the public sector and civil society, and that this is required to realise our ambitions for participatory and deliberative democracy in Scotland. It is envisaged that this would be a task for a participation team to explore when resources allow as this will require time and collaboration. As part of this exercise Scottish Government would seek input from a wide range of perspectives, and of course, the views of your committee.

Kind regards,



GEORGE ADAM

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