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Dear Convener,

I am writing to update the Committee on the publication of the Scottish Government's first Population Strategy: **A Scotland for the Future: The Opportunities and Challenges of Scotland's Changing Population** which was published today.

<https://www.gov.scot/isbn/9781800045224>

This publication is the result of a major piece of work from the Scottish Government's Ministerial Population Taskforce and delivers our Programme for Government commitment to publish a population strategy in 2021.

The paper recognises Scotland is facing demographic challenges to achieve a sustainable population for our future and accepts this is a **national challenge** which the Scottish Government cannot deliver alone. We need the support of Scottish Parliament and our local government and national agency partners to deliver transformational change.

To that end, the paper underlines Scotland's 'population story' up until now, and why demography is vital to sustaining our economy, public services, and communities. It then frames the cross-cutting demographic challenges Scotland faces - from falling fertility rates, to population ageing, to the future of immigration, to ensuring a more spatially balanced population across our regions.

The aim of the population programme is to make Scotland's communities attractive places to live, work, bring up families and move to; so that Scotland's population profile provides a platform for sustainable and inclusive economic growth and wellbeing.

To support the deliverability of this aim, the paper structures context and actions around four strategic building blocks. These 'building blocks' are:

- **A Family Friendly Nation** – Scotland is the best place to raise a family.

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- **A Healthy Living Society** – Our population is healthy, active and able to live longer, healthier lives.
- **An Attractive and Welcoming Country** - Scotland is able to make its voice heard internationally and attract the people with the skills to make a positive contribution to our economy, communities and public services
- **A More Balanced Population** - Ensuring our population is more balanced and distributed across Scotland so all our communities can flourish.

It is clear our vision for our population must be a bold and stretching one. One that not only pulls together existing Scottish Government work, but also challenges Government to do more. Both in terms of addressing Scotland's long-term population change, but also in responding to the urgent population needs of many communities today. Likewise, it must also be a vision that embraces the diversity of Scotland, acknowledging that one size will not fit all and that our communities feel our demographic challenges differently.

I am clear that this Strategy, while an excellent start, represents only the beginning of a conversation about population sustainability as a national challenge for Scotland. As a first step, it identifies 36 individual actions, ranging from building more affordable homes and considering the Scottish Government's workforce dispersal, to a series of broader programme-level next steps for further strategic engagement, consultation, and intervention-focused evidence gathering.

So far, I have been greatly encouraged by the energy and collaborative spirit from national government, local government, and wider partners behind this paper, And I was particularly pleased to see a draft version of our Population Strategy unanimously endorsed by COSLA leaders in January. This is very much the spirit that we wish to continue to build upon as the Scottish Government seeks to scale up this work.

As the Programme builds, I am keen to further our constructive engagement on population change issues on a cross-party basis - not just at local government level, but also in the Scottish Parliament. As a start, I would welcome the opportunity for the Committee to discuss the Strategy in greater detail. . Given the limited time window, I suggest that the discussion be scheduled in the next parliamentary term.

During that discussion, it would be helpful to not only discuss the actions detailed in the strategy but I would also welcome the opportunity to consider how the Scottish Government could work with Committee members to engage and develop the aims of the Population Programme in a cross-party environment.

I look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Yours Sincerely

**Fiona Hyslop**

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