Dear Cabinet Secretary,

I’m writing to you regarding the operation of the Northern Ireland (NI) Protocol and the perpetrations being made by local authorities to mitigate the impact of additional checks on goods between Scotland and Northern Ireland which will come into force later this year. The Committee notes that recent announcement by the Scottish Government, that a ‘Special Development Order’ has been laid in the Scottish Parliament, to provide for the creation of a ‘Border Control Post’ at Cairnryan.¹

At our meeting on 18 February 2021, the Committee heard evidence from Mark Thomson, Resilience Manager at Dumfries and Galloway Council. In respect to the NI Protocol, the Committee inquired about the additional checks on certain goods which will come into force in April and July of this year and the accompanying infrastructure and expertise required to undertake these checks at the port of Cairnryan.

Mr Thomson explained in evidence that the designation process for an inland border control post was underway and there would be a need to establish a new port health authority team. Mr Thomson noted that—

“However, we do not yet have port health authority status and, given how close we are to 1 April, that is a significant challenge not only for creating the framework for that but for the recruitment process. That is hugely challenging.”²

The Committee understands that DEFRA made funding available for port health authorities in England and Wales but Dumfries and Galloway Council are still awaiting confirmation regarding what funding support the council will receive to help it establish a new port health authority team. Mr Thomson suggested that Dumfries and Galloway

² CTEEA Committee, Official Report, 18 February 2021, Col. 29-30.
council would be looking to secure funding from the Scottish Government to the local authority of this new designation could be in the region of £2m to £2.5 in order to meet the costs of this new designation for the local authority.

Given the specialised nature of the roles required to staff a new port health authority team and the timeframes and infrastructure required to support additional checks at the port of Cairnryan, the Committee would appreciate further details of the support being provided to ensure that the port of Cairnryan can function effectively and when the relevant facilities are expected to be fully operational. The Committee would also welcome your view on the funding likely to be required by Dumfries and Galloway council in this regard and when a final decision on this issue can be expected.

The Committee would appreciate a response by 10 March 2021 if possible.

Yours sincerely,

Joan McAlpine MSP
Convener, Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee