

T: 0300 244 4000  
E: [scottish.ministers@gov.scot](mailto:scottish.ministers@gov.scot)

Claire Baker MSP  
Convener  
Economy and Fair Work Committee

[economyandfairwork.committee@parliament.scot](mailto:economyandfairwork.committee@parliament.scot)

24 October 2024

Dear Claire,

I am writing in response to your letter dated 27 June 2024 to the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy & Gaelic, Ms Kate Forbes MSP, in your capacity as convener of the Economy and Fair Work Committee. Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding.

You requested updates on several issues in your letter, and I have included information on these areas below.

#### Compulsory Purchase Reform

I can confirm that Scottish Government will publish a public consultation on proposed compulsory purchase reforms in 2025; this commitment was contained in the Programme for Government 2024-25. Additional information on the background to, the objectives of and timescales for the reform programme can be viewed [online](#). This page also includes some information about the advisory group and the building blocks the programme is being structured around.

#### Town Centres

As noted in your letter, the first meeting of the national Town Centre Forum took place in February 2023. The Group, which is jointly chaired by COSLA and the Scottish Government (currently Councillor Gail Macgregor, Spokesperson for Economy & Environment and myself), has met on three occasions since then (September 2023, April 2024 and most recently in early October 2024).

To date, the Group has had a strong focus on examining the opportunities and challenges of town centre living as a key policy aspiration that supports key principles of inclusion, wellbeing, and sustainability. The Group has been working to identify opportunities for supporting the agenda, and a key output has been the delivery of a series of five 'Town Centre Living Roadshows' that were managed by Scotland's Town's Partnership (STP) and delivered in collaboration with Scottish Futures Trust, Architecture & Design Scotland and Scottish Land Commission.

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The roadshows took place earlier in the year to provide a platform for sharing exemplars and live case studies across Scotland as a means to explore new opportunities to expedite the local living agenda in towns and town centres. In total, 27 case studies were discussed and over 200 practitioners from local authorities, community organisations, improvement districts and housing associations attended.

Key learning from the roadshows was considered by the Town Centre Forum members at the April 2024 meeting. This led to a short life working group being established to gather intelligence of different funding and investment models that could support the delivery of town centre living and other types of infrastructure projects that would support a sustainable future for towns. That work has now concluded and the findings were reported to the Forum at the recent meeting on 8 October. Further work will now be progressed that will help create the conditions to support town centre living projects, with a focus on developing the partnerships and collaboration required to secure and sustain long term investment in what are often complex and expensive projects.

The aforementioned work on town centre living also provides a key mechanism that supports the ongoing delivery of the wide range of commitments included in the Town Centre Action Plan. We continue to implement the Town Centre First Principle and to work closely with partners including COSLA and Scotland's Towns Partnership (STP) to support continued progress. A number of key actions have already been delivered, including the publication of National Planning Framework 4 (February 2023) and 'Local Living and 20-minute neighbourhood' guidance (May 2024). Good progress also continues to be made against other actions, including continued work led by Scotland's Town's Partnership on the 'Scotland Loves Local' initiative, and in supporting local businesses and economies through Business Improvement Districts, both of which are crucial in our efforts to support town centre living and our ambitions for place based regeneration. As you will be aware, many of the actions included in the Plan require ongoing work and cut across various parts of Scottish Government, and as such we continue to keep these under review as the policy context in Scotland and the wider UK evolves.

I am also keen to engage with my counterparts in the UK Government to seek clarity on the funding commitments that had been made (by the previous administration) to Scottish towns through the Levelling-Up programme, and to explore ways in which we may be able to align work and resources to support our shared ambitions around towns and place-based regeneration.

#### Retail Industry Leaders Group (ILG)

The Committee's final request from your letter was to obtain details of the most recent Retail Industry Leadership Group (ILG) meeting and an update on the progress of the Group's efforts around Fair Work. I can confirm that ILG members continue to be committed to productive engagement around Fair Work and this is a key topic for the Group's future discussions. I can also advise that the ILG held its last meeting on Tuesday 11 June 2024. The key discussion points were the Retail Skills Audit and Action Plan, the New Deal for Business Regulatory Review Group and, lastly, sectoral hot topics such as retail crime and future industry priorities. The Group also came together on Thursday 29 August 2024, for one-off annual review meeting. The minutes for both meetings will be published in due course and can be found along with all notes of meeting via this link - [Retail Industry Leadership Group - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/retail-industry-leadership-group).

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## Business Digital Capability

Following on from the update in November 2023 I can confirm that the support delivered through the four named schemes related to 'DigitalBoost' are still paused.

However, there is still a vast support for businesses that are delivered through Scotland's Enterprise Agencies and wider public sector which are designed to help businesses grow. The letter you refer to in November 2023 listed a number of these interventions which have been created to ensure business resilience and growth and are delivering huge benefits. The Techscaler programme alone highlighted through their annual report that in the first year alone 517 companies were supported and £52m of capital was raised.

In addition to this, and specifically to the point of digital, we published a progress report on Scotland's Digital Strategy - A Changing Nation report – in May, which outlines progress against a range of commitments aimed at ensuring Scotland can fully embrace the transformative power of technology.

Through our recently published Programme for Government and the new deal for business, I am confident that the Scottish Government is listening and working with businesses to support them effectively through a range of different programmes.

I hope that these updates are helpful to you and your fellow Committee members.

Yours sincerely,



**TOM ARTHUR**

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St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG  
[www.gov.scot](http://www.gov.scot)

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