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The Rt. Hon. Suella Braverman KC MP
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27 September 2022

Dear Suella,

Congratulations on your appointment as Home Secretary.

In January 2022 I wrote to Kevin Foster, then Minister for Safe and Legal Migration, to notify the UK Government of Scottish Ministers' intent to develop a pilot proposal to attract and retain migrants in remote areas. This follows the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) stating in 2019 that *"the current migration system is not very effective in dealing with the particular problems remote communities experience. If these problems are to be addressed something more bespoke for these areas is needed"*. The MAC recommended to the UK Government in 2019 that action should be taken to develop and pilot a scheme to attract and retain migrants in rural areas, a recommendation that was accepted by the then Home Secretary.

The Scottish Government offered to work collaboratively with the UK Government and the MAC to develop a rural visa pilot. In 2021 we made a public commitment to develop a practical, deliverable pilot proposal that meets the needs of communities affected by rural depopulation.

We have worked with a wide range of stakeholders, including local authorities and business sector organisations, to jointly develop this proposal. The local authorities and business partners who we have engaged with during the proposal development process have voiced strong support for a bespoke migration approach for Scotland and we have been guided by their input at each stage when designing this proposal. While we have engaged with stakeholders in Scotland's rural communities in designing the proposal, there is undoubtedly commonality between the experiences of rural communities across the UK and so we would hope that the proposal may have wider applicability.

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I believe that this proposal represents a practical solution to facilitate migration to remote and rural areas and in doing so to support communities, their local economies, and the delivery of crucial public services. Today, the Scottish Parliament has given its support to the plans.

The proposal supported by the Scottish Parliament, local authorities and partners is for the establishment of a Scottish Rural Community Immigration Pilot (SRCIP), a community-driven approach to local migration modelled on successful immigration schemes delivered in Canada. It proposes an employment-based scheme, delivered by a wide-ranging partnership between UK and Scottish Government, local authorities, employers, public services and the voluntary sector, who would play an active role in identifying which types of areas and employers would benefit most from the scheme, and would be engaged in delivering an 'integration plan'. It is designed to allow rural and remote communities to attract migrants in line with distinct local needs.

Our ask is that the UK Government works with the Scottish Government and local partners to establish and deliver Scottish Rural Community Immigration Pilots. We would envisage a small number of Pilots which, as recommended by the MAC, would run for several years and be subject to a full evaluation to assess their effectiveness.

Scottish Ministers are taking action to address the challenges of rural depopulation including through the development of an Addressing Depopulation Action Plan, to be published in 2023. However, our rural communities are dealing with a historical legacy of out-migration which has resulted in distinct demographic challenges which can only be addressed by attracting new working age migrants to help to sustain and grow these communities.

We need to be able to attract and retain new people to enable our communities to flourish, and the Scottish Rural Community Immigration Pilot proposal would enable this. If the UK Government is serious about delivering an immigration system which works for the whole of the UK, then it must meet the distinct needs of remote and rural communities in Scotland before more long term damage is done by the inflexibility of the current system to local labour supply, public service provision and future sustainability of our communities.

In addition to the preferred option of the Community Immigration Pilot, the proposal also includes a second, baseline ask around the planned review of the Shortage Occupation List. We will engage in full with the review, once the Migration Advisory Committee issues its call for evidence. However, the Shortage Occupation List also needs to be adjusted to ensure it meets the needs of remote and rural areas in Scotland, for example by establishing a specific Remote and Rural Shortage Occupation List – with a range of relaxations of certain entry criteria, such as salary – to enable employers in select areas to recruit a greater number of workers across a wider spectrum of skills, salaries and occupations.

I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss next steps around the proposal, and have copied this letter to Neil Gray, the Scottish Government's Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development and Alister Jack, the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Yours sincerely,



MAIRI GOUGEON

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