

The People's Charter Proposals to the Scottish Parliament Petitions Committee 11th December 2012

1. Our proposal that the Scottish Parliament establish a commission to extend employee participation and democracy in the workplace is a recognition that political democracy is limited if it is not accompanied by economic democracy and yet the Scottish Parliament has done nothing to encourage such economic democracy since its establishment 1999 despite a deterioration in the nature of work and working conditions and continued downwards pressure on salaries. This could be considered by the Equal Opportunities Committee.
2. Introducing legislation to implement a Scottish Living Wage throughout all Scotland's public services whether they be they delivered by the public, voluntary or private sector would have a significant impact on in-work poverty. We are conscious that the Scottish Government has introduced this for its employees, and will be uprating it to £7.45 from the start of next financial year. However, the Scottish Government has dropped its commitment to include adherence to the Living Wage in the draft Procurement Bill apparently on the basis of advice from the European Commission despite the fact that the Welsh Assembly have procurement policies with standards on earnings, training, local economic benefit and other matters. We would like this to be considered by the Economy, Energy and Tourism committee.
3. We are deeply concerned about the lack of social housing especially in light of the Housing benefits cuts. We therefore believe that there must be an increase in funding for council house building, especially one and two bedroom properties. More immediately we are concerned at the acute problems which will face under-occupying tenants this April. We would urge that Scottish housing law be amended to substitute debt recovery for eviction in these specific circumstances (we will table a draft amendment). In addition, we urge Parliament to introduce rent regulation to the private sector to stop private landlords profiteering in circumstances where council and housing association tenants will be forced to seek alternative accommodation in conditions of serious housing shortage. We also propose the introduction of a public sector equity release scheme to allow those who wish or need to release equity in their home to do so in a more fair and equitable manner by increasing the social housing stock. Many older home-owners, for example, have an income that is so small that they are entitled to Pension Credit. A public sector equity release scheme would mean a increase in the social housing stock and increased income for those who access the scheme. We would like this to be considered by the Economy, Energy and Tourism committee.
4. Public transport in all its forms is essential to the quality of life for working people in Scotland. We need to give bus, rail and ferry users control over these services which receive considerable public subsidy. To this end we believe there is a need to regulate Scotland's bus services and to explore and exploit every opportunity to bring all Scotland's network rail services back in to public ownership and to protect our ferry services by keeping them under public ownership and control with no hiving off of individual routes beyond the limited provision of The Transport (Scotland) Acts 2001 and 2005. We would like this to be considered by the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee.
5. There has been a systematic reduction to the budgets of local authorities. Many working people, especially in times of austerity, depend very heavily on local authorities for their quality of life including basic services from refuse collection to social care and education. The impact of the cuts to local authorities have not been properly assessed nor has the Scottish Government clearly signalled its opposition to these cuts and indeed has been implicated in making things worse, by reducing funds to local authorities and freezing the council tax. We therefore propose that the Scottish government requires Scottish public sector bodies that set budgets to report on any difference between what is required in terms of identified need against actual budgets set; and to include a clear social impact assessment for all procurement based on equal opportunities, employment and reduction of economic inequality best practice. We would ask that the Local Government and Regeneration Committee consider this.
6. Finally, the financial pressures of the current recession not only on those who are unemployed but many who are in work are becoming intolerable. As a result there has been a rise in so called 'pay day' loans and even less savoury forms of lending. We propose that alternative forms of lending should be developed and that the Scottish government should promote and support credit unions to develop and expand so that they become a primary provider of financial services to the Scottish people and to fund credit unions so that they may reach out to those targeted by high interest lenders to offer them fairer access to loans and financial education in order to prioritise the elimination of loan sharking and personal debt. We would ask that the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee consider this.