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Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth
Scottish Government
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22 July 2010

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Dear Cabinet Secretary

Sustainable Development Commission in Scotland

We are disappointed that the UK Government has decided to close the Sustainable Development Commission in London and aware that this is likely to have implications for the future of SDC Scotland. Independent advice, support and scrutiny of government efforts towards delivering sustainable development is critical and SDC Scotland plays a valuable role in supporting and critiquing Scottish Government progress.

Whilst we acknowledge the extreme pressures on public spending and the imperative for the Scottish Government to cut expenditure, integration of sustainability across all policy areas is vitally important. The Scottish Government's cross cutting strategic objective approach supports such integration and in a period of tight finances, this becomes even more paramount if we are to support policy and spend decisions that deliver on multiple priorities rather than undermine each other.

We would draw attention to the independent scrutiny and assessment of Scottish Government progress as a particularly important part of SDC Scotland's role and one that we believe must be retained in Scotland. Such a role could perhaps be undertaken either by a smaller SDC Scotland team or through merging this with Audit Scotland. Were Audit Scotland to take on this aspect, their remit and that of the Audit Committee would need to be extended and strengthened beyond a financial remit to one of addressing all the aspects of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental. In the absence of a direct Scottish equivalent of the Environmental Audit Committee, which has apparently been tasked to take on the scrutiny role of the SDC in England, this would be a valuable refinement of the Scottish audit structures.

In addition, we recognise that greater scope exists to support existing mechanisms to champion and support sustainable development in Scotland further. In particular we note the role of the Government High Level Group on Sustainable Scotland and the inclusion of external representatives on this group as a way of supporting this endeavour. However we do not believe that these existing mechanisms can provide the necessary independent advice and scrutiny role.

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We would urge the Government to work closely with SDC Scotland in determining how these important functions can be maintained in Scotland and of course ensuring that any changes are well planned and managed so as to support important ongoing work.

We would of course be delighted to discuss this matter further with you or your officials in ensuring that the important functions of SDC in Scotland can be retained.

Yours sincerely

Deborah Long
Chair