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## Scottish Leaders Forum

Thank you Jason for that introduction. I'm delighted to be here to address this Scottish Leaders' Forum.

I wanted to meet you at the very start of this Parliament because you are the leaders who are delivering Scotland's public services, and because together we face an unprecedented opportunity and challenge.

I am proud that my party has achieved an unprecedented third term Government here in Scotland. But I am not particularly interested in that as an end in itself. I want to use my position as First Minister to make a difference to people's lives. I'm assuming that applies to every one of you in this room as well, that this is what brought you into public service in the first place and is what motivates you to keep going, especially in tougher times.

Your experience, energy and dedication are vital to our task - which is to ensure that everyone has the opportunity and the support they need to fulfil their potential. We have never needed truly collaborative leadership in our public services more than we do now, working across perceived boundaries with a common purpose.

As a Government, we've talked about this ambition with you for 9 years now, and I know that there are some good examples, in some places, of the work that's needed. But I don't yet believe it's deeply ingrained into the way that all of our public services work. So I want to ask you today to fundamentally re-appraise what we all need to do - as leaders - to see a real shift; to deliver the results we need.

Since 2007 we have been working towards a consistent set of outcomes, with a broad consensus behind the principles underpinning reform set out by the Christie Commission. That approach has delivered successes, and I thank you for all you have done. The opportunity we have is to build on that platform. But it is also true that the challenge has never been greater. We are not seeing anything like an acceptable level of progress in reducing inequalities across our communities.

Demand for public services continues to rise in many areas - we are not yet seeing that decisive shift to prevention that Campbell Christie called for. And public expenditure remains constrained by the austerity agenda.

I wanted to be frank with you about the scale and urgency of this task. The shape and focus of our public services has changed - there have been major shifts in recent years like the integration of health and social care, and college reform. But we need to do a lot more, and quickly.

As the leaders of your organisations, it's what you do that other people model their behaviours on. I passionately believe that change and reform is about how we work together - across the whole system - every bit as much as it is about financial flows or organisational structures. And so we need spaces where we can work out how we need to work differently, together, as leaders. In other words, if we didn't have Scottish Leaders Forum we'd surely have to invent it. And that is why I'm here today.

So, in setting out the challenges ahead for the public sector I will first underscore my government's top priorities to make it absolutely clear where we will direct our greatest efforts and our unshakable attention.

I'll then go on to discuss what our plans mean for our public services - and most importantly for the people they serve and support.

And finally I'll set out our ambition to involve everyone in public services in planning for their delivery.

I'd like to say a few words first about the scope of my programme. Two weeks ago I set out my government's priorities to Parliament. Our plan for Scotland is unashamedly bold and ambitious - but it is also achievable.

In this parliamentary term we will step up our efforts to confront deeply-rooted problems like poverty, inequality and its impact on educational attainment.

Yes, these are tangled and complex issues - and they constantly present new challenges as our society changes.

But those are not reasons to accept what's unacceptable. People living in poverty. Children achieving less in life - just because of where they were born. Women getting lower pay than men for similar work - just because they're women.

These outcomes are not inevitable. That's why I am determined that within the next five years people in Scotland will feel and see a real and marked improvement in their lives.

I don't intend today to cover all the details of my government programme - they are set out fully in our manifesto, and in the speech I gave in Parliament.

There's time for discussion later too when I'm happy to take questions on any aspect of my programme.

But for now I'd like to focus on what I see as my government's core priorities. These are fundamentally:-

To drive economic growth that is strong, sustainable and inclusive;

To continue to reform our public services, and particularly education - which is by far the most important tool we have to improve children's life chances - along with health, social care and social security; and

To devolve more power to our communities and give people greater control over the budgets and form of services they receive.

So, let me add some more detail about these core priorities and consider what our commitments mean for wider public services, and for you as their leaders.

First returning to the economy and specifically the importance of inclusive growth. I want to ask you today to consider the increased importance of this agenda to every single one of you in this room, and to think afresh about the part each of you can play.

A strong and growing economy underpins all of our plans. Quite simply, without a strong economy we cannot finance stronger public services. And, with our new fiscal framework, for the first time, the strength of economic growth in Scotland will have a direct impact on our spending power. So, in whatever we do, the likely impact on economic growth should be a prime concern.

I invite all of you to reflect on the role you can play in boosting inclusive growth: through your programmes; through your expenditure; and as employers. We spend over £30 billion a year on public services and the public sector employs more than a fifth of the labour force in Scotland. That is enormous leverage to embed positive policies in order to drive economic expansion. These should include policies to drive gender balance at all levels, create opportunities for young people starting their careers, and also to reduce our use of carbon.

And there's no contradiction here with our goal to make the economy fairer and more inclusive. It's crucial that all employers treat employees fairly. Paying the living wage, equal pay for equal work, and training and developing their staff for the future is not only fair - it makes good economic sense.

I also invite you to look afresh at what it means to be a leader of change and reform. We have set out a clear commitment to continue to transform and reform public services. We must lead further innovation if we are to achieve the radically better results for people that we want. The cost of not doing so - the human cost above all - is just too great.

So I'm talking about transformative reform, not incremental reform. And as far as possible I want this to be reform which you design and deliver jointly with other organisations and the people using your services, and lead through to delivery. We will travel further faster if we do so together. And given the large measure of agreement on what we want to achieve - agreement across civic society, and even across political parties - I very much hope that we can recognise each other's place at the table and then work together.

Some of the changes to our public services relate to new tools and opportunities. We now have new tax powers - and we're getting important new responsibilities for social security.

We plan to create a Scottish social security agency - which will be a new part of our public services landscape. This means we can take a new approach to social security. Instead of stigmatising people who receive sickness and disability benefits, we will value their potential and help them contribute to society.

But most of the changes are in the territory of already devolved areas. We have just achieved a significant milestone in the reform of health and social care. On the 1st April, the new Health and Social Care Partnerships became fully operational across Scotland - the result of years of partnership work to integrate these services. This is a good example of how we can work across systems - public sector and third sector - to create a better way of doing things.

Our health and care services must evolve if we are to maintain a continually improving world-leading service. The breadth of primary and social care, the mix of general and specialist treatment, and the services we prioritise - like cancer and mental health care - must evolve to keep pace with and better target people's needs.

And, as the way in which we deliver health and social care changes, the structures of our NHS, and its relationship with local government, must reflect those changes. Structures can't act as a barrier to planning or delivering local services effectively.

We plan to build on our integrated approach and review the number, structure and regulation of our health boards - and their relationship to local councils. We have 22 health boards and 31 new local integration bodies to deliver health and social care. We must consider the working of these services as a whole.

Within our public services, education is my government's top priority. I have said that raising standards for all and closing the attainment gap between richer and poorer pupils will be the defining mission of my government. We plan to direct significant investment at raising attainment and closing the gap. Again, I don't think there are many in this room or elsewhere who would disagree with that ambition. The only question is how best to achieve it.

We have made a start, and our approach to education also illustrates how we plan to ensure decision-making over policy and budgets is made at the most appropriate level.

For instance, we will introduce a National Improvement Framework that will mean for the first time we'll be able to accurately measure the attainment gap across Scotland, and set precise and transparent targets for closing it.

We established the Attainment Scotland Fund in the previous parliament. Now we will increase that Fund to £750 million over the next 5 years - targeting resources at the children, schools and communities which most need them, to help us close the gap.

As part of the fund, we will allocate £100 million a year directly to schools, giving head-teachers the freedom and the support to enable them to decide how they can best spend these resources. Each head-teacher will be able to direct funds so that pupils are able to take the fullest advantage of new opportunities. For instance, they might fund partnerships with the third sector or health service, or out-of-school activities, or additional teachers or classroom assistants.

We want to build on the rights that will be given to communities by the Community Empowerment Act.

But to close that attainment gap I know we need more. It will require strong leadership throughout the system, taking decisions ultimately at the level of individual children to give them the support we need.

We will continue to work positively and collaboratively with local government to review their roles and responsibilities and get more powers into the hands of communities.

We will also increase participatory budgeting across local authorities to at least 1% of all council spending.

That could see more than £150 million allocated to communities to invest as they see fit.

Local control is the guiding principle here because Scotland's communities - in our cities and countryside - are different and have different needs. One size does not fit all.

Finally I would like to turn to how we will decide the best way to deliver our commitments and how we can work on this together.

Consultation and engagement is ingrained in our plans - whether these are on education, the development of a social security agency or local government reform.

I'm serious about hearing all views. For example, we've convened a summit on school reform and raising attainment. We've invited a broad range of stakeholders and experts. But we've also invited opposition leaders and their education spokespeople.

Our children's future is too important. Let us not be caught up by how things have always been done. We must be willing to follow the evidence about what works. We have committed to publishing a draft delivery plan before the summer. That plan will be bold and ambitious. It will seek ideas, challenge the status quo and raise questions for all of us on the future of education, and how we achieve the best outcomes for Scotland's children.

The Summit will be one opportunity to contribute – there will be many others – we want to work with you to deliver the changes that we need if every child is to realize their potential.

The levers to improve the quality of our children's education or health or prosperity do not sit neatly in any ministerial department or public organisation. We need a joined up approach across all our public services.

At its heart, successful joint working relies on a willingness not just to make what we already do a little bit better – good as that may be – but to think even more widely about what would make life better for the people we work for.

We have to think together and creatively about what we are doing and how we are using our assets and resources.

For instance, we need to make best use of the opportunities the digital revolution gives us, and this government's commitment to 100% superfast broadband coverage, to both improve public services and to make them more cost effective.

As part of that, we must also recognise the broader role public services have as part of the communities in which they are located. Our Social Impact Pledge asks public bodies to commit to do three new things that benefit their community - like sharing their organisation's expertise or facilities with local groups.

I look forward to seeing your pledges in the coming months as we fully realise the assets of the public sector.

And when we discuss collaboration, let me give you an example of the kind of improvements we can bring to public services through just small and simple steps.

Rob was in his kitchen in Hawick when he had a cardiac arrest. His son phoned 999 and was guided by the call handler to start CPR. Just four minutes later the emergency services arrived. They continued CPR and used a life-saving defibrillator three times.

What's different about this story is that first emergency responders on the scene were fire-fighters, who'd been trained specially in life support as part of a trial between the Scottish Fire and Rescue service and the Scottish Ambulance Service. Under their agreement, if there is a cardiac arrest emergency, and the fire-fighters are nearer than the paramedics, they would respond.

Thankfully Rob is fine. The paramedics arrived shortly afterwards and took him to hospital. Over the last six months there have been more than 70 such joint call-outs in the seven parts of Scotland where the trial is running - and it's being extended to two more areas. This initiative is being driven by Scotland's Out-of-Hospital Cardiac Arrest Strategy launched in March last year.

Our public services, working across institutional borders, to help people.

I have set out my priorities.

No-one should be in any doubt that this Government has a clear mandate for its programme. I am not standing here, or anywhere else, with a view to re-negotiating these priorities. However, what I am very interested in talking to you about today, is what we can do together to design the delivery.

This is the time for Scotland's public service leaders to show what can be achieved like never before. None of us can do this alone. We can only make a difference by working together, and by working in new ways.

I invite you to join us in working out how we achieve our shared ambitions – as a group collectively and as individual leaders of your organisations. To build on the relationships across sectors that the Scottish Leaders' Forum has built previously, and to go beyond that by turning our shared ambitions into action.

I ask you to take risks where you need to and to break down barriers to change where you can. If there are things that government can do to make that easier, please tell us. Work with the usual and the not-so-usual suspects - and talk with the people you serve. If they are willing and able, consider handing over influence and decisions about the running of some services to them.

I've said before that my interest is not where ideas come from, but that they work. I know you will have great ideas for collaboration.

You should also know that where you show leadership and find ways to deliver services in a better way, we will back you. And where that means bringing to life truly collaborative leadership to improve outcomes for people, we will do everything we can to support you.

We all want to make life better for the people we work for. That is what matters.

Thank you.