

Stewart Maxwell, MSP

Representing you in the West of Scotland

Time for Independence? National Conversation Underway

We in the Scottish Government believe that sovereignty in our country lies with its people. As a sovereign people, the people of Scotland - and we alone - have the right to decide how we are governed. That is why our manifesto for the Scottish Parliamentary elections promised to give the people of Scotland an opportunity to consider the concept of Scottish Independence.

It was clear in May that people wanted a change in the way we in Scotland are governed, by using existing powers better, increasing the powers of a devolved Scottish Parliament or by becoming Independent and running all our affairs.

I believe that Independence would be the best option for our country. Others support the alternative of increased devolution, greater responsibility for taxes and

spending, or federalism. But whatever the differences between the political parties, there is clear agreement that the constitutional position of Scotland must move forward.

There have also been recent, historic constitutional developments in Northern Ireland and Wales, with new parties coming to government and new responsibilities being devolved. Along with my colleagues and our First Minister, Alex Salmond MSP, I will put the case for Independence, its benefits and opportunities. However, we also recognise there is a range of other views throughout our country, and represented in the Parliament.

I am delighted by the First Minister's proposal that we have a national conversation on our future to allow the people of Scotland to debate, reflect and

then decide on the type of government which best equips us for the future. The paper,

Choosing Scotland's Future, is intended as the starting point and inspiration for that conversation. It explores areas in which Scotland could take on further responsibilities - such as employment, our national finances, or legislation on public safety such as firearms - as well as the concept of Independence, and wider constitutional developments in Britain.

It is now ten years since the referendum to establish the Scottish Parliament. We have seen its potential to respond to the wishes and needs of the people of this country. But we have also seen the limitations of its current responsibilities. I agree that it is now time for

us, the people of Scotland, to consider and choose our own future in the modern world.

You can find out more about Choosing Scotland's Future and the National Conversation by logging onto www.anationalconversation.com to have your say you can take part on the blog on that site, email joinin@anationalconversation.com or write to A National Conversation, Constitution Unit, G-A North, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ.

This National Conversation is not just for politicians but for everyone. Please take this opportunity to get involved and let your views be known.



Scotland Win the World Cup

Stewart Maxwell MSP, Minister for Sport, congratulated the Scotland team on their magnificent achievement on winning the Homeless World Cup with a 9-3 victory over Poland. The event, which was first held in 2003, brings together teams from around the globe. About 500 players from 48 countries took part this year.

The event aims to help people recover from homelessness by promoting self-confidence, comradeship and self worth. Stewart said it was "fantastic" to see Scotland crowned as world champions. "It is a great achievement for Scotland to have won the Homeless World Cup and I congratulate the team on their victory," he said.

"The Homeless World Cup is an excellent event both in sporting terms and in terms of generating self-confidence, a feeling of belonging and enhanced self-esteem among homeless young people. It has helped many of those involved, both on and off the park, to turn their lives around. They are a great example of how anything is possible with determination and the support of those around you.

Maxwell Sponsors REHIS Exhibition at the Scottish Parliament

Stewart was delighted to get the opportunity to sponsor an exhibition by The Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland (REHIS) in the Scottish Parliament from the 10th to 13th September. Stewart said.

"I greatly admire the work done by REHIS and as an Honorary Vice President of REHIS was delighted to sponsor this event. I know from speaking to the REHIS President, Bernard Forteath and the other exhibitors present over the 3 days that they found it very worthwhile. It gave REHIS the opportunity to spread their message to MSPs and members of staff and for them to find out more about environmental health and the work of the Institute. I'm sure that many of my colleagues are much more knowledgeable of the job that REHIS do than they were before the exhibition.

"One of the interesting things about this exhibition was the chance it gave REHIS to highlight the wide range of issues they are involved in. From supervising Smoking Enforcement Officers to sustainable development within the wider context of the Health and Environment Framework; supporting local authorities engaged in tackling antisocial noise and other aspects of antisocial behaviour in Scottish communities and their work on Energy from waste. REHIS have an extremely important role to play in the environmental health of Scotland.

"Along with REHIS information booklets and leaflets, a number of briefing notes on current environmental health issues were on display.



Pictured at the Exhibition - Stewart Maxwell MSP with Bernard Forteath, REHIS President.

The Scottish Government

One of the early actions we have taken on gaining office is to change the administration's name from the Scottish Executive to Scottish Government.

This is a very important statement about our intentions to move Scotland forward and to stand up for Scotland's interest.

We were elected to represent the people of Scotland as its government. An Executive sounds like a civil service committee. We are the Government of Scotland and it is right and fitting that we now call ourselves one.

Housing Supply Task Force Launched

Communities and Sport Minister Stewart Maxwell outlined his vision for housing as Communities Minister at the Chartered Institute of Housing Scotland's conference on the future of social housing. During this keynote address Stewart laid out the number of steps the government intended to take to confront the housing problems Scotland faces. This included creating a Housing Supply Task Force, chaired by the Minister, to tackle the obstacles, such as land supply and planning issues, which have been hampering the delivery of more homes.

The Housing Supply Task Force has met twice and its member-

ship is drawn from local authorities, house-builders, the housing association movement, and housing interest groups - people in a position to bring about real change. The Task Force will challenge the different sectors to find ways to supply more homes more quickly, while ensuring high environmental standards.

Higher demand for housing is not being matched by adequate supply. Average house prices rose by 72 per cent between 2002 and 2006, but only 2 per cent more homes were built in 2006 than in 2002.

Mr Maxwell said, "The Scottish government wants to see an

increase in the number of homes that are being built across all sectors.

"This will be a major challenge, not just for the government but for local authorities, housing providers and the construction industry. "I want this Task Force to shake up the current systems. Its focus will be on driving action where change is needed, rather than producing reports.

"The group is small but contains the main power brokers; representatives of organisations that I believe will help resolve the problems that get in the way of adequate housing delivery in Scotland."