

## Target croft housing support to those who need it – the young

**A** SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER of young crofters and aspiring crofters gathered in Assynt in March, along with some crofting 'elders' and policy-makers.

We, the older-yins, were enormously impressed with the young folks' clear vision and perceptions of how things could be improved for crofting to thrive. One of the main themes that emerged was access to homes, in response to the increasing difficulty young people have of ever getting into the over-priced housing market or to build a house, and the decreasing support offered by Scottish Government. Meanwhile, a consultation on a government review of the Croft House Grant Scheme (CHGS) drew to a close at the end of March.

Whilst the young crofters gave good account of themselves, our government's vision, as reflected in the consultation, was disappointingly lacklustre. The impression given was that, in response to widespread calls for action on this issue, minimal changes to the under-resourced, under-performing and under-subscribed scheme were proposed and put out to 'consultation'.

As revealed by the recent *Economic State of Crofting* report, the crofting areas face a demographic crisis (settled young folk are a rare breed) and it is clear that only a far more radical approach to housing support is needed, rather than this 'tinkering with the bodywork when the engine has fallen out'.

The scheme has not been reviewed for decades so even the welcome increases proposed now come nowhere near to what is needed. The very modest uplift, with conditions attached such as the inexplicable stipulation that a first-time-buyer must finance three bedrooms or more, will, we fear, continue to exclude those in most need of assistance by being in effect means-tested in reverse. Only those with a stash can afford to take advantage of the grant.

It is not unreasonable to question whether those who can finance a £200,000 project are actually in need of public aid at all. If we are to achieve a realistic level of assistance for those who really need it – the young – capped support for first-time buyers could be the way to do it.

Based on actual building costs, it is estimated that it would require an assistance package of at least £75,000 to restore the value of the scheme to its historic level. But it doesn't have to

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Young and less young at Glencanisp

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## Squabbling in the Commission

**T**HE INTERNAL STRIFE on the board of the commission is of great concern to the SCF.

The fact that it has been made public by a commissioner is disappointing. Whatever the issues, it has been handled badly. Forcing the resignation of the convener, leaving the board without a rudder, has caused not a little anxiety in crofting communities.

The SCF got on well with the ex-convener and with the new, enlightened way in which the Crofting Commission functions. The SCF has, for the first time in decades, had a good working relationship with the commission under the stewardship of the current board and executive.

How did it come to this very public squabble

that brought the commission into such a poor light? There are naturally tensions within boards; that is the nature of the diverse group an effective board needs. But surely there is a procedure to resolve dispute? If the commissioners were unable to resolve this themselves, is there not a process for mediation in place? The fact that this has been aired in the media is highly unsatisfactory and unbecoming.

The Crofting Commission has a big enough job on its hands dealing with its legacy. Rather than washing its dirty laundry in public its commissioners should resolve their differences and get on with the work they had made such a promising start to.