Health and Sport Committee Welfare Reform Evidence Sessions
Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations

The interest of the third sector in Scotland on Welfare Reform has been exemplified by not only the volume of information produced by the sector but the turn-out of some 63 organisations at the recent Welfare Reform round-table held in the Scottish Parliament.

What was evident from this session is that the Health and Sport Committee must approach the evidence sessions with a view to forming the best Welfare system for Scotland. We must determine what Welfare system Scotland requires in the future then deduce from this how to deliver it.

The Committee also has a responsibility to look at the implications Welfare Reform has on the Scottish Government’s budget and if the Government is prepared for the impact these reforms will have on current spending projections.

At present it is clear that the biggest impact will be made through secondary legislation in the regulations that will be brought forward. To date there has been no provision that would allow for these regulations to be approved or adapted to fit the Scottish context.

Key Points

1. UK Welfare reform will have a massive impact on Scottish budgets going forward, the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government need to ensure they fully engage the third sector in assessing the impact of the reforms on devolved services.

2. SCVO would argue that it should be possible for the regulations, that will be part of secondary legislation, to be adapted to take into account the Scottish circumstances.

3. How can we instead, move to a vision of welfare reform that works for Scotland, to ask the questions: ‘what kind of welfare in Scotland do we want to see?’, ‘how do we get there?’ and ‘which powers would we need?’

What are the issues?

The UK Welfare Reform Bill is at serious odds with devolved welfare provision:

• There is a divergence of policies where benefits are reserved to Westminster whilst health and social care policy is devolved to the Scottish Parliament

• The UK Welfare Reform Bill has now taken this divergence to the next level, bringing a punitive approach to welfare which is at odds with the supportive approach that successive Scottish Parliaments have developed for Scotland

• This will result in increasing difficulties for some of our most vulnerable people and communities, for Scotland’s public authorities (who will have to pick up some of the costs being dropped by Westminster), and for Scotland’s third sector organisations (who will end up picking up the pieces)
• There are specific issues such as the impact of housing benefit cap on homelessness, the 20% budget reduction in the change from Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payments, the devolution of council tax benefit with a 10% cut, the closure of the Independent Living Fund to new claimants and sanctions for job-seeking parents which don’t account for the lack of statutory childcare in Scotland

• Taken in totality the UK Welfare Reform proposals left unchecked could blow a hole in the Scottish budget

• One of the biggest concerns is that much of the detail of the proposed legislation has been left for secondary legislation, so the Scottish Parliament cannot even plan for the impact on services in Scotland.

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About SCVO
The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations is the national body representing the interests of the voluntary sector in Scotland. SCVO’s mission is to advance the values and shared interests of the voluntary sector to provide them with information and assistance; to improve their effectiveness and efficiency and to represent their views to Government and other public bodies. SCVO works to support people to take voluntary action to help themselves and others, and to bring about social change.

As the national body for Scotland’s third sector, SCVO has written and made representations to the Health and Sport, Scotland Bill and Equal Opportunities committees. We have outlined the major impact that the UK Welfare Reform Bill will have on the people and communities served by third sector organisations in Scotland.

SCVO fully endorses the briefings provided by the Scottish Campaign on Welfare Reform, of which we are a member, and the briefings provided by SCOWR’s members.

At this stage we would like to offer a strategic response to inform the debate.

Further details about SCVO can be found at www.scvo.org.uk.