Local Government and Regeneration Committee

Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill

Response to call for evidence as part of Stage 1 consideration of the Bill

Introduction

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) commenced on 1 April 2013, and replaced the previous eight Fire and Rescue Services in Scotland. The main purpose of the SFRS, as articulated within the Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2013, is to work in partnership with communities and with others in the public, private and third sectors, on prevention, protection and response, to improve the safety and wellbeing of people throughout Scotland.

The SFRS is supportive of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill and welcomes this opportunity to provide evidence. We believe that the Bill will facilitate the SFRS’ purpose to work in partnership with communities, affording the opportunity for services to be co-produced in a manner that reflects local circumstances, within the context of a national organisation.

The aforementioned Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2013 sets out the overarching strategic direction for the SFRS. It contains 58 priorities for the Service including such areas as working in partnership with local communities, prevention, protection and emergency response. The SFRS has created a Strategic Plan 2013 – 2016, which articulates how the Service plan to deliver against the priorities within the Framework, in a manner that supports the Scottish Government’s National Outcomes.

To support local scrutiny and engagement, the SFRS has appointed a Local Senior Officer (LSO) for each of the 32 local authority areas across Scotland. By working in partnership, LSO’s have developed Local Fire and Rescue Plans for each local authority area. These plans set out the priorities and objectives for the SFRS within the local authority area, the reasons
for their selection, how they will be delivered and measured. The plans also articulate the contribution that the SFRS will make to other relevant local outcomes that have been identified through community planning. These plans are widely consulted upon and must be submitted to the relevant local authority for approval.

To what extent do you consider the Bill will empower communities, please give reasons for your answers?

The SFRS believes that the Bill provides the landscape within which communities can become empowered. This is due to the strengthening of Community Planning Partnerships (CPP’s), placing them on a statutory footing. The SFRS contributes to all CPP’s within Scotland, and welcomes the opportunity to strengthen them that the Bill provides.

In addition to the enhancement of CPP’s, the SFRS also supports the other aspects of the Bill that will empower communities. This is due to the opportunity provided by the Bill for communities to have a greater say in the delivery of public services and local decision making processes. The SFRS is very supportive of a bottom-up approach to empowering communities, through collaboration and co-production, using all the assets within a community, including those from the public, private and third sectors as well as the inherent skills all communities possess. The SFRS considers that the Building Safer Communities Programme will be a vehicle for mobilising communities in this manner.

The SFRS recognises that improving outcomes cannot be done by organisations working in isolation, or indeed without the involvement of communities themselves. This is an approach that the SFRS already takes, for example in relation to our partnership approach to engagement with communities from a prevention perspective. We recognise that we cannot make people safer without working in partnership with others, and have also successfully utilised ‘community calls to action’ to assist safeguard more vulnerable members of society from fire. We therefore welcome the opportunity to strengthen these principles, which the Bill will provide.

What will be the benefits and disadvantages for public sector organisations as a consequence of the provisions in the Bill?

The SFRS believes that the Bill will have a positive impact upon public sector organisations. As an organisation within the public sector we recognise that our purpose, as articulated above from the Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2013, is to improve the safety and wellbeing of people throughout Scotland. We are organised as a Service to fulfil this purpose, and measure our success in terms of improving outcomes for communities.
The SFRS supports the sentiment within the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill Policy Memorandum that communities can achieve significant improvements by doing things for themselves. This is because communities invariably know what would work for them, and will grow in confidence and resilience when their endeavours have positive results. By working with communities, right from the point of design, services can be co-produced, which we believe will have an enhanced impact on outcomes. This is to be welcomed by the SFRS as our purpose is to improve all outcomes for communities, particularly those associated with safety and wellbeing.

Do you consider communities across Scotland have the capabilities to take advantage of the provisions in the Bill? If not, what requires to be done to the Bill, or to assist communities, to ensure this happens?

Many successful initiatives undertaken to date demonstrate the ability of communities to take advantage of the provisions of the Bill. Notwithstanding this, some communities will face greater challenges than others in becoming proactive.

The strengthening of legislation around community planning should be welcomed, as it will further enhance the imperative around CPP’s engaging with communities in identifying and prioritising the local outcomes that should be delivered.

Public services should ensure that their engagement with communities promotes the building of capacity within [community] organisations. This will promote community participation, and should be done in a way to address inequalities. In doing so, those communities that may require additional support to mobilise their own resources should be identified and appropriate support given by all relevant partners in the public, private and third sectors. It is not suggested that the Bill requires to be amended to meet this imperative, but rather practical support should be given locally to develop the necessary skills, confidence and resilience within communities.

Are you content with the specific provisions in the Bill, if not what changes would you like to see, to which part of the Bill and why?

Part 1 – National Outcomes

The SFRS welcomes the enshrining of national outcomes in legislation and looks forward to making a continued contribution across them.

Part 2 – Community Planning
As stated above, the SFRS welcomes the strengthening of community planning via this legislative route. We would also advocate the benefits of engaging the third sector and anchor organisations through this process to strengthen the connection with communities.

Part 3 – Participation Requests
No comment

Part 4 – Community Right to Buy Land
The SFRS welcomes the inclusion of this provision within the Bill, particularly in relation to the positive impact it could have on the vibrancy of communities, and the reduction of fire-related and other antisocial behaviour, which can have significant impacts upon areas.

Part 5 – Asset Transfer Requests
No comment

Part 6 – Common Good Property
No comment

Part 7 – Allotments
The SFRS welcomes the inclusion of this provision within the Bill, particularly in relation to the positive impact it could have on the vibrancy of communities, and the reduction of fire-related and other antisocial behaviour, which can have significant impacts upon areas.

Part 8 – Non-Domestic Rates
No comment

Part 9 – General
No comment

What are your views on the assessment of equal rights, impacts on island communities and sustainable development as set out in the Policy memorandum?
No comment