Local Government and Regeneration Committee

Submission Name: Scottish Youth Parliament
Submission Number: 117

Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill

Written evidence for the Local Government and Regeneration Committee

Scottish Youth Parliament
September 2014

Introduction and background to the Scottish Youth Parliament

The Scottish Youth Parliament is the democratically elected voice of Scotland’s young people. Our vision is of a stronger, more inclusive Scotland that empowers young people by truly involving them in the decision-making process. In working towards our aims, we support the following values:

- **Democracy** - All of our plans and activities are youth-led, and we are accountable to young people aged 14-25. Our democratic structure, and the scale of direct participation across Scotland, gives us strength and sets us apart from other organisations.

- **Inclusion** - We are committed to being truly inclusive. The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that all young people have a right to a voice, it doesn’t matter who we are or where we come from; we celebrate our diversity.

- **Political independence** - We are independent from political parties. Only by working with all legitimate political parties can we make progress on the policies that are important to young people.

- **Passion** - We believe that drive and energy are key to successful campaigning. We are passionate about the key issues and believe that young people are part of the solution, not the problem.
The Scottish Youth Parliament welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Local Government and Regeneration Committee’s Call for Written Evidence for the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill.

As an organisation, we exist to provide a platform for young people to discuss the issues of importance to them, and affect the change in society they wish to see. We believe that young people are active, engaged and passionate citizens who are keen to engage positively in their local communities. As such, we welcome that the Scottish Government has brought this legislation to the Scottish Parliament with the view to strengthening community engagement in local decision making.

However, in recognising the opportunity that this legislation presents to improve the ability of young people to engage in local decision making, we believe that the legislation could be strengthened in a number of crucial areas, specifically with reference to Parts 2 and 3.

**The Context to our response**

Our submission is based on the policies selected and passed by our democratically elected Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs) at our tri-annual National Sittings, where MSYPs meet in plenary to debate policy issues of importance to their constituents. Our contribution is further grounded in the policy statements contained in our youth manifesto “Change the Picture”, which received almost 43,000 consultation responses. Therefore, our remarks are shaped by the genuine views of young people.

In addition, we carried out a piece of small scale primary research to ascertain the views of young people to inform our response to the initial public consultation. This response will also form the basis of our evidence.

The Scottish Youth Parliament holds the following pieces of policy that directly impact upon this legislation:

> All young people should be involved in the services which affect them and should have the opportunity to get involved in local decision making opportunities.

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1 You can see the list of SYP Policy, including our youth manifesto here: [http://www.syp.org.uk/policy-W21page-340-](http://www.syp.org.uk/policy-W21page-340-)
In addition, the following Members’ Motion was passed by the Membership of the Scottish Youth Parliament:

*The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that young people must be given the opportunity to contribute to civic life if Scotland is to achieve its potential. A strong commitment from Government must be given to achieve genuinely effective youth participation.*

Through our engagement work locally, and the experiences shared by our Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament, we know that there the level of engagement with young people in local decision making is extremely variable.

There are a number of fantastic examples of how local authorities, and their decision bodies, engage with young people through youth representative bodies. Conversely, we are also aware that the quality of genuine engagement with young people is of a very low standard in other areas.

We believe this legislation represents an opportunity to improve the quality of engagement with young in community decision making, but crucially, in a more systematic and consistent manner.

**Recommendation:** We believe that the Committee should consider how wider principles or minimum standards for representative community engagement could be included on the face of the Bill, or through provision for additional statutory regulation or order making powers. Public bodies should have to provide evidence as to how they have met these standards.

**Part 2: Community Planning**

Part 2 provides a statutory basis for Community Planning Partnerships and imposes duties on them to secure the participation of local community bodies. However, we believe that the provisions could be strengthened to ensure that efforts must be made to ensure such participation is representative. In addition, we believe that the provisions pertaining to the Local Outcomes Improvements Plans could be strengthened and be made more representative.

Presently, Section 5(3/4) places requirements on Community Planning Partnership to “consult” with appropriate community bodies. Similar to other organisations, we believe in the principles of co-design. Such plans should be established by the community together, rather than a simple obligation to consult. In our experience working with young people, we have found that where the principle of co-design is implemented, improved policy outcomes ensue.
In addition, we believe that this Section could be strengthened to ensure Community Planning Partnerships are representative in their consultation, with a particular emphasis on young people who often face additional barriers to engagement.

**Recommendation:** Specifically, in relation to Section 4(5), we believe that this should be considerably strengthened by outlining a requirement to ensure that efforts to secure participation are representative, including age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, socio-economic background etc.

**Recommendation:** Specifically, in relation Section 5(3/4), we believe that a duty to consult should be strengthened to a duty to collaboratively produce Local Outcome Improvement Plans, ensuring that any community bodies involved are representative of the whole community.

### Part 3: Participation Requests

Part 3 provides additional mechanisms for communities to be more proactively involved in decisions as to how public services are planned and delivered. While we welcome these provisions, the young people we consulted with made a number of recommendations for improvement.

In relation to Section 17, the young people felt that there needed to be a duty on public service authorities to make available information about participation requests, notably, how they can be made, and what opportunities exist that could entail a participation request. It was felt that this was very important in order to ensure accessibility to organisations that work with, or are run by, young people.

In addition, the young people consulted also felt that there public authorities should be required to make information available about the process in which participation requests are considered, and decisions are taken. Specifically, as part of Section 19, there should be a duty on public service authorities to make information available detailing the process for deciding whether participation requests should be accepted.

Furthermore, similar to other organisations, we believe that where a participation request has been declined, there should be an appropriate appeals procedure in line with the basic principles of due process and transparency. The young people we consulted with felt that this procedure should be independent.
**Recommendation:** As part of Section 17, there should be a duty on public service authorities to make information widely available about participation requests, how they can be made, and the opportunities where a participation request may be applicable.

**Recommendation:** As part of Section 19, there should be a duty on public service authorities to make information widely available about the process used to assess participation requests.

**Recommendation:** As part of Section 19, there should be additional provisions detailing an appeal mechanism.

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**Contacts**

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