Introduction

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Local Government and Regeneration Committee’s scrutiny of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill.

SDS is Scotland’s skills body, focused on contributing to the delivery of the Scottish Government’s Economic and Skills Strategies. Our services are further shaped in response to the Scottish Government’s Career Information, Advice and Guidance Strategy and the Youth Employment Strategy. We set out our vision, future development and delivery plans in our Corporate Strategy (2012-15) and annual Operating Plan.

SDS’s key aims include the delivery of support to young people and small and medium sized businesses. SDS has a key role in supporting people towards and into employment and to progress within their jobs. SDS is working collaboratively with individuals, employers, training providers and partners throughout Scotland to raise aspirations and create a more skilled workforce and thus contribute to Scottish Government’s overarching purpose of increasing sustainable economic growth with opportunities for all to flourish.

**SDS partnership work and service delivery arrangements at local level**

SDS’s ambitions can only be delivered through collaboration with partners. We continue to work with national and local partners to improve, further integrate and make our services for customers more accessible and deliver them in response to their needs.

The SDS contribution to improved outcomes in Community Planning Partnership (CPP) areas is delivered through a range of resources provided on a national, regional and local level. Although SDS is not currently a member of all CPP Boards we are members of the Employability/skills related sub groups in all 32 areas.

At a local level, we currently work with local authorities and contribute to Single Outcome Agreements enabling us to translate our national offer into a local context. Going forward, we would plan to articulate our contributions to local services through the CPP local improvement plans and Youth Employment Activity Plans.

A key part of our work is the delivery of Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG) services by local staff to meet the specific needs of local areas, enabling SDS to make a significant contribution to key policy drivers such as Opportunities for All as well as wider employment and economic development priorities within each local area. Our work is augmented by offerings such as My World of Work, Scotland’s careers information and advice web service, and Our Skillsforce, our web service for employers, with information on the national and local skills support available to them from the public sector.

We are committed to the principles of shared planning and the move towards shared outcomes; our co-commissioning approach for the Employability Fund with CPP partners in each area is an example of this. Working with CPP partners aims to ensure that our provision fits with the local employability skills pipeline and complements the provision from other CPP partners in local areas in order to help improve outcomes.

**Proposal for SDS to become a formal Community Planning Partner**
Part two of the Bill (Community Planning) proposes that SDS formally becomes a community planning partner for the first time. SDS welcomes this. When CPPs were established, SDS was not in existence, and therefore SDS is not a core member of all CPP Boards. However we would like to highlight that despite not being an official community planning partner in all CPPs over the last five years, SDS has been strongly committed to working with CPPs and individual partners to support the delivery of Single Outcome Agreements and optimise public sector resources to improve outcomes for local people. A move which reflects the importance that SDS places on its continued engagement with CPPs is the recent suggestion posed by our Chair to the CPP Chairs, in the areas where SDS is not currently a board member, that SDS strengthens its strategic engagement on CPP Boards, by having a senior SDS representative sit on each Board.

Although the majority of CPP boards in Scotland have invited SDS to nominate a representative to join their Board, we welcome the proposal for SDS’s inclusion as a statutory member of CPPs as this will provide more scope for SDS to input to local strategic outcomes. The provisions of the Bill would allow SDS the opportunity to work more closely, strategically and consistently with all CPPs across Scotland.

**Suggested points of clarification to the Bill**

**Establishment of Corporate Bodies**

The Bill gives CPPs powers to make an application to become a body corporate by regulations, following an application made by a LA and at least one other community planning partner in the area. As we understand it, a CPP could hold its own budgets and assets and employ its own staff. SDS would therefore welcome clarification as to whether all community planning partners would be obliged to be members of the body corporate if they were not the partner making the application with the LA, and what legal and financial obligations could be placed on community planning partners should they be amongst the members of the CPP body corporate. Any financial implications associated with the establishment of a body corporate do not appear to be taken account of in the Financial Memorandum to the Bill.

**Governance**

SDS welcomes the Bill’s clarification of the definitions of “Community planning”, “community planning partners” and “community planning partnerships”. However the Bill does not clarify how CPPs should be structured and the specific membership of separate governance groups within CPPs by partners.

More specifically, there appears to currently be various approaches to CPP governance arrangements including a two tier model involving e.g. a scrutiny group or “Board” (chaired by the Leader of the Council and including elected council members and the local commanders of fire and police) and a strategic group or “implementation/management” group (chaired by Chief Executives of the LAs).

It is unclear going forward which partners should sit on which group(s) and indeed if it is possible to sit on both, or even another separate management group or sub-group at the same time. It is important that all partners are represented on CPP subgroups, such as an implementation group, as this is where the bulk of activity will take place at a regional and local level. We believe partners should be able to sit on both the strategic and implementation groups. As an example, although SDS is more involved in operational
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activities and local service delivery with CPPs and other relevant partners we believe we can make a valuable contribution to the strategic direction of CPPs. SDS’s unique position as a national agency with a local remit, means that we can help other partners to look at local issues in a national context and provide a strategic perspective on how national activity can have an impact locally. We would welcome clarification of this point either in the Bill or guidance to the Bill.

Local outcomes improvement plan

SDS assumes that the aim of the Bill is to avoid the duplication of effort and resources at local level. While we welcome the proposals for each CPP to prepare a local outcomes improvement plan, as this will be a tangible plan around which to plan local service delivery, we would be grateful for clarification as to whether these plans are expected to replace the existing local Single Outcome Agreements, or if they are expected to continue to be implemented in parallel.

SDS would also value clarification, either in the Bill or in accompanying guidance, as to who will have responsibility for final sign-off of the local outcomes improvement plan and its annual report, and how all CPP partners (and community interest groups) will be invited to comment and agree upon it, in order to ensure all views are taken into account.

Duties on community planning partners

The Bill places responsibilities on community planning partners, including the obligation for each community planning partner to provide the partnership with information about local outcomes in the plan. SDS has existing management information reporting arrangements in place which meet SDS’s individual business needs and our ability to produce reports are constrained by the functionality of the systems we already have in place. We would welcome further clarification as to what our duties, and other partners, will be in terms of the provision of information to the CPP and whether this may have financial implications for SDS. The Financial Memorandum does not appear to take account of any additional costs which may be incurred by community planning partners as a result of having to comply with this duty.

Conclusion

SDS is delighted that the Bill recognises the valuable contribution we can make to community planning by being proposed as a statutory community planning partner; this would allow SDS to formally engage in CPPs and integrated planning work at local level across Scotland for the first time. At the heart of the Bill is the intention for appropriate community bodies to be given the opportunity to, and be encouraged to, participate in community planning by the CPP, and crucially, that CPPs should have to take steps to enable them to participate to the extent they wish to. SDS welcomes this positive, inclusive approach to community engagement, as well as the proposal for a structured approach to the agreement of measurable local outcome plans. We look forward to receiving feedback on the clarification of the points we have raised about the Bill over the course of its scrutiny.