Response to the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill

From: Engage Renfrewshire

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

Response: The Bill offers the potential to empower communities, but it will be up to communities themselves to make sure this potential is realised. In the first instance the debate generated by the Bill itself has raised awareness about the potential of community ownership across Scotland. Engage Renfrewshire has worked to raise awareness of its members regarding the possibility of community ownership and has also sought to capture the experience of community groups that have completed community ownership.

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

Response: Public sector organisations have an opportunity to benefit substantially from the Bill. The Bill offers the potential for statutory organisations to release the potential of underused and unused assets. This will enable public sector agencies to divest itself of the management and maintenance of assets for which it has no productive use, which would be a saving to public expenditure. More importantly, assets taken over by the community have the potential to strengthen the capability of the third sector to deliver activities and services either independently or as part of a community planning partnership. By investing in support to help communities take over assets successfully, public sector agencies will see a return over the long term in the strength of local third sector organisations and the appearance and capacity of local areas. These third sector organisations will then be better equipped to deliver policy outcomes shared with the public sector, which may result in longer term savings to the public purse.

Possible disadvantages to the public sector of the Bill may be the costs of dealing with underdeveloped requests to take over community assets, both in terms of financial cost and officer time in negotiating with local communities. Public sector organisations may also have concerns about the costs of failed asset transfers being returned to public sector hands. However, this will be mitigated if public sector organisations have a full and clear understanding of the benefits that each individual asset transfer can deliver in the long term.
3. 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?

Response: Communities across Scotland may have different levels of capability to take advantage of provisions of the Bill. In Renfrewshire, there are successful examples of asset transfers having taken place and other examples where communities have developed the capability over time with support from local agencies.

COSS and DTAS provide invaluable support to communities to build capacity to enable them to take advantage of the provisions of the Bill. Third Sector Interfaces and the officers of statutory sector organisations transferring assets can play a vital role in ensuring that third sector organisations have a full awareness and understanding of the assets available for transfer and the process by which this can be undertaken. Local TSIs and statutory organisations can also work effectively together to ensure that there is an agreed local framework for asset transfer and provision of advice and support that would make the process easier for a third sector organisation.

4. 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?

Response: The specific provisions of the Bill are supported. The Bill provides a positive policy context for third sector organisations to play a leading role in delivering national outcomes through community planning and the transfer of unused or underused assets from the statutory sector to communities throughout Scotland.

5. What are your views on the assessment of equal rights, impacts on island communities and sustainable development as set out in the Policy memorandum?

Response: The assessment of equal rights, impacts on island communities and sustainable development appears to be satisfactory.

6. Any additional comments?

The thrust of the Community Empowerment Bill is to be supported and should now be backed up by positive commitment from statutory sectors and third sector organisations to make this work in practice. Work requires to be undertaken across community planning community planning partnerships to ensure a consistent understanding and approach is shared by all partners.