Evangelical Alliance Scotland Response to the Local Government and Regeneration Committee Call for Evidence on the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill

The Evangelical Alliance in Scotland is the largest body serving evangelical Christians in Scotland and has a membership including denominations, churches, organisations and individuals. Across the UK, Evangelical Alliance membership includes over 700 organisations, 3500 churches and thousands of individuals. Our members in Scotland include the Baptist Union of Scotland, Vineyard Churches, the Salvation Army, Newfrontiers, Elim Pentecostal Churches, Assemblies of God, The Free Church of Scotland, Brethren, a number of congregations within the Church of Scotland and other independent churches. We have a number of organisations as members in Scotland including Glasgow City Mission, Bethany Christian Trust, Tearfund and Scripture Union Scotland. Within our Scottish membership many of our churches and organisations have considerable experience working with communities all across Scotland.

Introduction

The Evangelical Alliance welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence in relation to the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill. The Bill affords a vital opportunity to recognise that the future of Scotland will to a large extent be shaped by the strength of its civic society and community life. As an organisation with a network in almost every community of Scotland we welcome the fact that the empowerment of communities has now risen up the political agenda. For our members in churches and organisations up and down the country this bill offers the possibility of empowering them as they go about their daily business providing community services and serving their communities for the benefit of all who live there.

The Evangelical Alliance would be very happy to share some of our knowledge and experience in this area in oral evidence if that would be of benefit to the committee. We offer a number of brief comments on each section of the Bill that may also be taken as answer to Question 1.

Specific Comments

There are many provisions we welcome in the bill. There are also a smaller number of areas in which we believe greater emphasis should be given to communities and less emphasis given to the public sector. We will comment on each area in turn:

Part 1 – We welcome the emphasis on national outcomes and community consultation contained within the Bill. It is vital this consultation reaches out to all parts of the community and is not just a tick box exercise. Groups such as churches have many community links and can be a useful partner in ensuring the whole community can access consultations and ensure all views may be heard.
Local Government and Regeneration Committee

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Part 2 – We welcome the increased definition of roles for CPPs but question whether there is enough emphasis on the ‘Community’ emphasis of Community Planning Partnerships. Whilst a more joined up approach among statutory bodies is very welcome it is important that this does not override the views of the community in local decision making.

Part 3 – We strongly welcome the provision to enable local community groups to be involved in improving service outcomes. This potentially opens the door for a vast increase in local community activism and volunteering that would not otherwise be available to the local authority or agency.

Part 4 & 5 – We welcome the focus on Community right to buy Land and Asset transfer. There are many example among our members of churches and organisations that have worked with the community to retain or develop use for disused buildings and other assets. In an era of public service spending restraint this gives the opportunity to leverage outside funding and enable true community development to be realised. We also welcome the specific simplification of right to buy processes and the planned framework to purchase abandoned land recognising the value Community Right to Buy can have in stimulating future social and economic development.

Part 6 – We welcome this provision though we are perhaps not best placed to comment on the detail of it.

Part 7 – We strongly welcome the provision on allotments. Many churches and community groups are increasingly involved in community gardens and we have found that particularly for those in vulnerable or difficult social circumstances having access to an allotment can bring not only a sense of connection with the local community but also means of productive voluntary work. We strongly support ensuring Local Authorities having an effective allotment regime that allows reasonable access for those who wish to have an allotment.

Part 8 – We welcome the principle of this provision reflecting the principle of subsidiarity.

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