COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT (SCOTLAND) BILL

Background to The Coalfields Regeneration Trust

The Coalfields Regeneration Trust (CRT) is dedicated to improving the quality of life for people in Britain’s former coalfield communities.

Established in 1999, our mission is to lead the way in coalfields regeneration and restore healthy, prosperous and sustainable communities.

We work with people at a grassroots level in order to build confidence and encourage them to take their communities forward. Since 1999 CRT we have supported just over 1000 projects promoting and supporting regeneration activities in the coalfields across Scotland. We have supported a wide range of initiatives that provide added value to the community planning process whilst making significant progress towards our Objectives.

We deliver programmes and services that:

- support people into work
- improve skills and help people gain qualifications
- create pathways into volunteering
- improve health
- develop sustainable solutions for community facilities
- engage young people in positive activities
- grow new businesses and social enterprises
- provide community development support

We work in the heart and soul of coalfield communities, investing resources, expertise and knowledge to ensure local people are able to fulfill their potential. Coalfield communities had a strong history of unity and we have galvanized local people enabling them to participate in building a new positive sense of community.

In response to the invitation to give evidence to the Scottish Parliaments Local Government and Regeneration Committee’s call for written evidence on the above Bill.

Specifically the call for evidence focuses on the following questions.

1. To what extent do you consider the Bill will empower communities, please give reasons for your answer?
2. What will be the benefits and disadvantages for public sector organisations as a consequence of the provisions in the Bill?

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?

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?

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?

CRT RESPONSES

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

CRT has nearly 15 years experience of supporting community action in the coalfield areas across Scotland. A key area of our work involves focusing more explicitly on building capacity in our most fragile coalfield communities, and where we and others have found it difficult to invest in the past.

CRT welcomes the Bill and agrees that it will help to empower communities across Scotland, because

- It sets out a plan for empowering people of Scotland to get involved and make important decisions about their communities
- It is about helping residents play an active role in regenerating their communities, the people living in the communities know what’s best for their area
- It also encourages public service providers play a more active role in listening to communities and encouraging them to take part in partnership working arrangements

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

The Bill suggests that public service providers should talk more to communities, help them have their say about services, and be listened to.

Many residents think ‘it’s the councils responsibility’ to develop communities and provide services, more needs to be done to promote to residents that its okay for them to take ideas forward and let them know who can help them do this.

Local Authority Officers don’t always live in the areas where they work, yet it’s often the same officers who make decisions about a particular community, for example Community Planning Agencies. We anticipate that the Bill will ensure greater interaction with communities should work towards ensuring a local issues and concerns are taken into account when decisions are being made.
The Bill works towards making sure the right people will be heard and have a greater input, its local people from the communities who know what the issues and concerns are for their communities, ‘coming from the horses mouth’ so to speak would result in more sustainable communities – getting it right

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?

It is clear that the affluent communities are more successful in being heard. CRT has found that our most disadvantaged communities struggle to deliver regeneration activities as people don’t know how to go about regenerating their communities and they have low confidence levels, skills and knowledge to take forward their ideas. This could be improved by financial investment and services to encourage and support residents to become involved in their communities at a local level.

A combination of partnership working, development support with funding is a potent mix for village and neighbourhood level organisations, which will help, bring about neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion.

‘They don’t know what they don’t know’

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?

More needs to be done to help communities:
- Know who is there to help them become involved
- Easily find out what assets, land etc is available to them
- How they can go about acquiring assets and develop their communities

We hope you will find the comments useful

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