Local Government and Regeneration Committee

Submission Name: Edinburgh compact partnership and Edinburgh’s third sector strategy group

Submission Number: 64

Dear clerk to the local government and regeneration committee,

Please find attached evidence to your committee on the community empowerment bill from the Edinburgh compact partnership and Edinburgh’s third sector strategy group – on behalf of the city’s third sector.

In answer to the specific questions you have asked in your call for evidence,

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?

1: As it stands, the bill will further empower Scotland’s strongest communities – those with the greatest power, influence, and voice. Considerable work would need to be undertaken to redress existing imbalances in power. Our evidence suggests better engagement with the third sector and with third sector interfaces.

2: Significant impacts on public sector agencies could flow from this bill. In our opinion, these are likely to be differently perceived by different people, agencies and sectors. Embarking on a process of culture change such as this bill could well engender will very likely have a range of different impacts, and much will depend not only on the legislation but also on how it is interpreted and applied.

3: Some communities already have the capabilities to take advantage of the provisions in this bill, but too many – in our opinion – do not. Greater coproduction and a concerted effort to tackle social inequalities could go a long way to ensuring that more people and communities are better able to benefit from this bill.

4: As per written evidence, and previous submissions linked from the attached document.

5: Please see comments within our written evidence.

I am happy to take any questions you might have about our input.

End
EDINBURGH’S Third Sector Strategy Group (TSSG) has responded previously to calls for submissions in the journey towards this Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill. First in September 2012, then again in January 2014. It might be helpful if this submission is read together with those documents.

First, it is important to establish that both the Compact Partnership and the TSSG clearly welcome the Scottish Government’s intention to enable the development of empowered communities.

Stripped down to the bare essentials, there are two core themes to our input: Coproduction and Equality.

By our definition, Coproduction presumes equal and respectful relationships characterised by trust and predicated on shared purpose. This joint purpose may be to make budget or policy decisions, or to plan, deliver and assess human services. We support the Community Empowerment Bill, and the Government’s intent, to the extent that it enables and encourages coproductive behaviours and relationships.

Similarly, we are wholly supportive of the Community Empowerment Bill, and the intention behind it, if (and Only if) the Bill acts to reduce social inequalities rather than exacerbate them. A Bill drafted in ‘general’ terms, without recognising that different people and different communities bring with them unequal abilities to engage and to shape change, will only perpetuate existing inequalities in wealth, power, and voice.

In addition to these two general points, as well as the points made in our previous submissions, we hope the committee will be receptive to the following key messages.
Role of the Third Sector
Within a vibrant and engaged Scottish social context the Third Sector plays a key role. Edinburgh has arguably been somewhat ‘ahead of the curve,’ with a Compact Partnership (bringing a range of Third Sector and Public Sector partners together) installed 10 years ago.

Increasingly the Third Sector delivers services under contract to local government and/or the NHS, and can – in that regard – be seen as a delivery agent acting on behalf of ‘the state.’

Simultaneously, however, and often particularly because the Third Sector delivers services to those people and communities furthest beyond the reach of public services, the Third Sector is also an effective conduit from the public sector to disadvantaged communities in greatest need. While they may not have been set up expressly for that purpose, many voluntary organisations find themselves acting to articulate the voices of people most distant from mainstream services. These are often the voices which are the most difficult for the public sector to reach and to hear.

For these reasons, the Third Sector occupies a unique role within Scottish society today – both reaching out to and speaking out for the least powerful communities. The very communities, in fact, most in need of empowerment.

Given this unique position that Scotland’s Third Sector occupies, it should be enabled to positively and creatively impact on various elements of the Community Empowerment Bill including: setting, reviewing and revising National Outcomes; engaging and supporting engagement with Community Planning; developing, engaging with, and enabling voice in setting, reviewing and reporting on Outcome Improvement Processes; and more supporting and enabling Community Participation and Community Right to Buy. A stronger duty placed on Community Planning Partnerships to engage with the Third Sector, and with Third Sector Interfaces, would be welcome.

Within the Third Sector, Scotland’s 32 Third Sector Interfaces play a unique, pivotal role in (among other things) enabling participation in and participating in Community Planning. Over and above support for Scotland’s Third Sector in general, the Community Empowerment Bill should include a particular role for local Third Sector Interfaces. Interfaces engage with Community Planning Partnerships, enable Third Sector engagement more widely, and – where appropriate – themselves represent the interests of the Third Sector. This role requires effective support, and explicit recognition (we would suggest) outlined within the guidance accompanying the Community Empowerment Bill.

Edinburgh’s Third Sector wishes to add its voice to those proposing that (for the first time ever) the guidance accompanying this legislation be coproduced - with legislators, Third Sector Interfaces, and the broader Third Sector engaging with each other in equal, respectful, trusting and purposeful ways.
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Specific Suggestions

In line with the themes of Coproduction and Equality outlined above, our specific suggestions are these:

1. Coproduce the Guidance which will accompany the Bill. We would be pleased to help support this process.

2. Add ‘the reduction of social inequalities,’ ‘social equality,’ ‘a flattening of Scotland’s social inequality gradient,’ or similar to the list at 19 (3) (c)

3. Add explanatory notes in the Guidance which explicitly draw out how the reduction of social inequalities and the removal of poverty from Scotland lie behind all of the terms within 19 (3) (c)

4. Strengthen the imperative on Community Planning Partners (and Partnerships) to engage effectively with all Communities who wish to, actively redressing existing imbalances in power, influence and voice.

For further information, or to discuss anything within this submission, please contact:

Useful links:
Edinburgh Compact Partnership: www.EdinburghCompact.org


EVOC (Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations’ Council) www.EVOC.org.uk

Previous submission from Edinburgh’s Third Sector September 2012:

Previous submission from Edinburgh’s Third Sector January 2014:

CoProduction, what’s the fuss all about, then?