Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill
Local Government and Regeneration Committee Consultation – Scottish Parliament

A response from Volunteer Scotland

Volunteer Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Parliaments Local Government and Regeneration Committee consultation on the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill.

Summary: Volunteering and Community Empowerment

In our response, we highlight:

- the critical role of volunteers in managing the asset transfer process;
- the critical role of volunteers in empowering communities;
- the realistic role for volunteers to assist in the delivery of asset transfers and participation requests;
- the requirement for public bodies to shift their culture of engagement to ensure a empowered community / communities;
- the requirement for public bodies to recognise the value and worth of engaging volunteers in the early stages design and delivery of participation request regulations;
- the role that positive early engagement can have on communities, public bodies and the long term sustainability of community assets; and
- why a person centred approach to public service through community empowerment is both possible and critical to creating a healthier, wealthier and sustainable Scotland.

Voluntary participation is at the heart of community empowerment. Without volunteers community empowerment will fail. Volunteering is used (alongside other measures) as a proxy to understand the extent to which a community is empowered, and to assess a community’s social, economic and cultural capital. Volunteers set-up, drive, lead and run community organisations and charities, and they also carry out a wide range of governance and service roles. For example:

- Volunteers are community leaders: leadership spans all aspects of our society - campaigning for local older people’s services, campaigning for or against service changes and local planning decisions, vocalising their communities’ experience and needs, and leading on empowerment formally and informally. Volunteer leaders have a special creative...
role in empowering communities; their drive and passion to encourage and inspire others to get involved and challenge accepted norms transforms their communities.

- Volunteers are activists: passionate about their cause, these volunteers make a difference and change society and culture to create a modern Scotland promoting equality, women’s rights, the rights of those with disabilities, fair pay, and supporting community activities defined by the lived experiences of those communities.

- Volunteers are community helpers: often the most hidden and least recognised but who provide substantial daily/weekly help to clean premises, provide meals and offer a listening ear to those in need and vulnerable in our communities. They also offer virtual online support or offer their skills and services such as pro-bono accountancy. They carry out formal volunteering roles such as maintenance, cleaning and technical help to ensure the daily maintenance of assets are accessible to communities at minimum cost.

- Volunteers are governors: we know that Scotland’s 23,000 charities can only function with volunteer board members or Trustees who seek to ensure these bodies are well governed, lawful, responsible and meeting their charitable objectives. Critically it is these volunteers who are culpable for mistakes which may require legal intervention and sanction on both the charity and the individual volunteers.

Our Response

Our submission does not simply represent our organisational position; during the publication and initial consultation period we spoke directly to volunteers actively making a difference in their communities and community organisations, as part of our own consultation process, this included talking to those volunteers formally involved in managing community assets. Our response is therefore based on our own knowledge and expertise, as well as the views and experiences of volunteers and communities of volunteering.

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

The Bill presents a real opportunity for change and to implement significant improvements in terms of how volunteers are engaged and enabled to participate in their communities, and how their contribution is recognised and fully valued. However, it is critical to understand the context in which the Bill will operate: it needs to recognise Scotland’s volunteer deficit where we are seeing a decline in the proportion of people volunteering formally\(^1\) at least once a year from 31% in 2010 to 28% in 2013\(^2\). The figures for those volunteering regularly are even starker – only 18% of adults volunteer at least once a month. While we recognise and celebrate the significant contribution of volunteers and volunteering, this means that 82% of adults are not providing the regular help we would expect to see happening to create empowered communities.

The Bill must grasp the opportunity to reflect the reality of those central to community empowerment - volunteers. The Bill may also create new chances for volunteers to rise to new challenges and

\(^1\) Providing unpaid help to an organisation or group
\(^2\) Scottish Household Survey (2010 to 2013)
avail themselves of new opportunities in taking on community assets, influencing decision making and taking greater ownership of their communities and sphere of influence. It is clear, however, that this Bill could have aspired to go much further by shifting power from public bodies to communities.

Much more needs to be done to ensure volunteering continues to develop and thrive; where everyone can volunteer and every community is empowered through sustainable approaches to volunteering. For example:

- Part 3 of the Bill relating to Participation Request only recognises the role of three distinct entities “community controlled body”, ‘community participation body’ and ‘public service authority’. The Bill in no shape or form reflects that at the core of its agenda are individuals building empowerment through their volunteering activity.

- The Bill does not recognise the level of support required to facilitate them or the requirements placed upon those volunteers who will be responsible for the day to day management and decision making relating to the asset, nor its impact on a defined geographic or thematic community. The Bill and its memorandums do not reflect the reality of volunteering landscape across Scotland.

- The formal process for making a request to a public authority the Bill in no way recognises the skills, support and or time commitment required of volunteers.

- While Part 3 Section 17 Participation Requests subsection (c) seeks to gain an insight to the knowledge, expertise and experience of the community participation body in relation to specific outcomes, it does so leaving the public body to define the knowledge, expertise and experience required of the community participation body. It is critical that there is an agreed base for such measurement and that public bodies recognise the full value of the individuals involved, this will require transparency, collaboration and support in the pre-application stage.

Volunteer Scotland would draw to the Committees attention that volunteering rates across Scotland have started to move in a downward trend (as mentioned above), and that the additional burden of asset management on the volunteering landscape leaves existing volunteers burdened with policy makers and public authorities unrealistic expectations of their capabilities and capacity to take on new community commitments. This may have a long term detrimental impact on community experience and diminish the value and worth of volunteers in Scottish society. For a number of years the direction over various administrations has been to invest in Third Sector which is seen in policy terms as the only volunteering related sector. While the sector has seen substantial investment we continue to see falling volunteering rates, for some this is part of a process of the professionalization of the Third Sector and the slow uptake of other community planning partners to fully recognise the value of volunteering to achieve their priority outcomes. It is noted that Third sector income – where the majority of volunteering takes place (81%) – has risen from £2.1 billion in 2001 to £4.5 billion in 2011.\(^3\)

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It is important for the Committee to recognise the diversity of volunteering across Scotland. Volunteering across local authority areas varies greatly and has changed significantly over time in some places. 19 of the 32 LAAs have a fairly stable rate of volunteering between 2007 and 2012. Western Isles has seen the greatest increase in volunteering from 35% in 2007 to 57% in 2012. However, some areas have also experienced a significant decrease - for example, East Dunbartonshire’s volunteering rate has decreased by -21 percentage points from 45% in 2007-08 to 24% in 2012\(^4\) (see Appendix).

- **Recommendation 1**: The Committee and Government must recognise the requirement to focus resources and investment in support for potential and active volunteers and challenge all Community Planning Partners to recognise the value and worth of volunteering to community empowerment and improvement in overall health and well being.

- **Recommendation 2**: The Bill should recognise the value and worth of utilising national standards for community engagement to ensure volunteers play a central role in defining basic criteria for knowledge and expertise standards before assets are transferred. The national community engagement standards are an agreed standard measurement component of each Community Planning Partnership.

- **Recommendation 3**: The Bill should include a formal clause recognising the role of volunteers in empowering communities and society.

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

A unique benefit to the Bill is the challenge it sets for a range of sectors; critically the public sector will need to develop an enhanced understanding of the impact of volunteering in the management of community assets and in delivering of public services. The impact of involving individuals in the design and delivery of services, either by utilising existing volunteers or working in partnership across Community Planning Partnerships to deliver local understanding of a community’s needs, will involve communities volunteering time and commitment to engage in discussion, planning and assisting in the delivery of services.

Both elements of enhanced engagement and participation of the wider community pose benefits and challenges. However, we challenge the concept of disadvantages. Based on our experience a person centred approach to community empowerment can bring a key benefit to public sector organisations - the talent, skills and capacities volunteers and volunteering brings; enabling and enriching the way in which communities will be empowered to take on assets, influence decision and deliver services. This can only serve to increase public confidence in public services designed around the needs of communities.

Volunteers told us they were concerned about the suitability of legislation to solve the problems of empowerment – they felt that a change in attitudes and behaviours in the public sector is needed

\(^4\) Note of caution: we need to be careful when interpreting these figures as there’s a degree of fluctuation most likely due to small sample sizes.
more. Similarly some volunteers strongly believed that ‘empowerment’ cannot be bestowed on people in a top down way through legislation.

In addition, these volunteers were clearly of the view that volunteering connects them to a community (of other volunteers) and is in itself empowering; allowing citizens to contribute to their communities and in the design and delivery of services. The key is to allow communities to realise their own ambitions through participation. Through early engagement with volunteers public bodies could ensure a cohesive, locally empowered person centred approach to determining the direction of travel for the Community Empowerment Bill in their communities, and therefore allowing for participation requests to be founded on support prior to submission. This approach offers the potential for volunteers and public bodies to better recognise the requirements and expectations of each other in delivering and designing public services and managing assets.

- **Recommendation 4**: The Committee recognises the value and worth of a person centred approach to community empowerment and supports the early engagement and support of volunteers in asset transfers to better reflect a community focus to asset transfers.

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?**

The success of the Bill, and community empowerment more generally, is built on the assumption that individuals and communities can/will do more on a voluntary basis to empower their community – take on assets, join representative bodies; deliver services and activities locally – but the evidence tells us this is unlikely to happen. The Bill needs to recognise this assumption and the facts of Scotland’s declining volunteer numbers\(^5\). In this context much, more needs to be done to support individuals and communities to participate and tackle inactivity.

It should be noted by the committee that despite increased funding and resources to infrastructure development and the third sector, volunteering participation has not changed. Third sector income – where the majority of volunteering takes place (81%) – has risen from £2.1 billion in 2001 to £4.5 billion in 2011\(^6\), yet volunteering participation is in decline (as above).

In as much that the Bill is seeking to empower communities, we will find that asset transfers will increase pressure and burden on a limited and reducing volunteering pool. These volunteers are already delivering a diverse range of services across divergent policy headings; from criminal justice to older people’s agenda, from early years to health and social care, from transport to community resilience.

Potential volunteers have told us that they are willing to do more for their community if the opportunities are flexible and fit their own interests and commitments. 19% of those not currently

\(^5\) Scottish Household Survey: 2013 Volunteering
volunteering would start or restart volunteering with an organisation or group\(^7\), and people would be more likely to do this if it fitted in with their existing commitments\(^8\). A plurality of approaches to volunteer engagement and involvement is needed.

The Bill should encourage a move beyond traditional service models of volunteering - which are currently dominant and lagging behind social, economic, cultural and technological drivers of change and based on old notions where supply (volunteers) should meet the demand of organisational needs. More consideration needs to be given to the motivations, interests and needs of citizens as volunteers to enable sustainable solutions to community empowerment; a person centred approach.

The gravest consequence of the Bill would be an unrealistic expectation of an individual volunteer’s ability across a range of communities to manage community assets. For example:

**Case study**

In 2011, a swimming pool and leisure centre in a small town in Scotland was transferred to community ownership by the local Council. It was clear that the centre had suffered from under investment for decades, had been closed and had been scheduled for demolition. The community mobilised to oppose this and a campaign group and Committee was formed to oppose and reverse the Council decision, which it did successfully. The facility was sold to the Group for £1. The Group has now formed itself into a social enterprise and has charitable status and it is working to reopen the Centre.

Initially a large numbers of volunteers in the community became involved in the group and campaign but since then more and more responsibility has fallen on a small group of volunteers. The group is now grappling with health and safety issues, environmental issues and the need to attract funding.

Nevertheless progress has been made in refurbishing the Centre. The involvement of volunteers has been crucial to this. A key aim of the Group is: The advancement of citizenship and community development by encouraging and increasing involvement of individuals in community activity through volunteering.

**Recommendation 5:** The Committee recognises the governance implications of asset transfer; as they may have implications for the managing organisation and its volunteers. The Bill should therefore include provision for investment to support volunteers through the pre-application and post application processes. For example, a public body providing long term support to volunteers through a change-management process to ensure sustainability and longevity for transferred assets.

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?

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\(^7\) Volunteering in Scotland (Omnibus survey) [http://www.volunteerscotland.net/policy-and-research/research/volunteering-in-scotland/](http://www.volunteerscotland.net/policy-and-research/research/volunteering-in-scotland/)

\(^8\) Scottish Household Survey (2012)
Measuring the success of the Bill and the extent to which communities are empowered is crucial. However, the current Bill is institution centric and public sector lead and requires to recognise that only a person centred approach to community empowerment will ensure change in attitudes across public bodies and enhance the public services they and others provide (including the private and third sector). Critically the Bill should consider an effective measurement tool to influence public sector change in enabling community empowerment.

Consideration should be therefore given to the inclusion within Scotland Performs National Performance Framework of an indicator for volunteering, ensuring that all public service partners recognise and engage in volunteering development. This challenge would be best met via Community Planning where the national performance framework is already leading to substantial changes in local working practices and promoting collaboration. Such an approach would improve overall CPP recognition of volunteering enabling volunteering involving organisations across sectors to better plan and develop opportunities based on potential volunteer’s requirements.

Building upon this proposal would improve Community Planning Partnerships understanding of the role of volunteering. In their recent criticism of past and emerging regeneration policy, the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research highlighted the recent statement of Audit Scotland:

“Audit Scotland has undertaken a couple of major reviews of the workings of CPP’s and both were highly critical of the relative absence of strategic capacity and tangible evidence of joint working arrangements”

While volunteering is reflected in the majority of Community Planning Partnerships Single Outcome Agreements the absence of strategic capacity and evidence of joint approaches to volunteering reduces community empowerment opportunities. Volunteering is not reflected in the majority of SOA’s. It is hard to evidence the connection between community empowerment and volunteering through the strategic document for localism in Scotland’s local authorities.

Much is made of the asset transfer disposal by non-governmental departments and that these should be passed to volunteer governed organisations. While Volunteer Scotland agrees that a range of assets may be best serviced by volunteering governed organisations it is critical in light of public service reform that any such adjustments to asset management are based on best value and effective management linked to outcomes for the wider community, and based on sustainability not merely a movement of financial responsibility and fundamentally risk to individual volunteers.

**Recommendation 6:** We would therefore seek the committees support to develop a National Performance Framework Indicator that will measure volunteering in the broadest sense across a wide range of public bodies – that is, taking account of the full value of volunteering activity in Scotland from the very formal to informal to which all public bodies should measure themselves.

**Recommendation 7:** Part 3 must better reflect the community in the design of transfer processes.

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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?**

We would at this stage reiterate that voluntary participation is at the heart of community empowerment, and volunteering is used (alongside other measures) as a proxy to understand the extent to which a community is empowered, and to assess a communities and social, economic and cultural capital. The evidence suggests that the people who volunteer do not reflect the diversity of Scotland. The Scottish Household Survey (2012) suggests there are certain groups of people who are less likely to volunteer, specifically:

**Group dimensions**
- Men
- People with disabilities
- People from low income households
- Unemployed people are significantly less likely to volunteer than those who are self employed, employed full or part time or retired
- People with no formal qualifications are less likely to volunteer than those with qualifications.
- People with no families or caring responsibilities

**Place dimensions**
- People living in urban areas (particularly large urban areas) 26%, compared to 45% of those living in remote rural areas
- People living in the most deprived areas, 19% compared to 31% of those living in the rest of Scotland

In addition, a Scottish Government analytical report ‘Exploring Dimensions of Social Capital’ supports the above points, also finding that social capital – using multiple proxy measures - varies significantly across individuals and groups and communities of place. Based on this evidence, we would argue that some individuals, groups and communities do not have equal access to the provisions in this Bill.

The Bill must ensure that volunteering and community empowerment is supported, developed and targeted to enable all groups to participate. It is crucial that a positive, bottom up approach is adopted where the existing skills, capacities, talents and assets are recognised and built upon by individuals and communities themselves.

Volunteer Scotland is disappointed that the assessment approach is procedural. It is critical that the Committee and Parliament recognise the overall inequality of volunteering and the possible impact of the Bill across Scotland. The evidence demonstrates that the people who volunteer do not reflect the diversity of Scotland, and members of committee and Parliament should be mindful that not everyone in Scotland has equal access to volunteering thus limiting community empowerment.

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10 Scottish Household Survey (2012)
Consideration should be given to ensuring:

- Identification of effective deliver agents to enable community asset transfers (identifying those best placed to manage assets e.g. volunteer skills, individual understanding of responsibilities in asset management)
- A clear public outcome focus on asset transfers (reflecting local community need and volunteer ability to manage community assets)
- Leadership responsibility (recognition of the existing skills improvements in volunteering management skills base)
- Accountability (openness & transparency, improvements in standards and or their enforcement)
- Changes in working practices (organisational change & development and cultural shifts in relationships with volunteers)
- Innovation in volunteering development (identifying requirements of potential volunteers to meet their needs)

**Recommendation 8:** That the Bill should recognise the inequality of volunteering and the challenges to be faced by individual volunteers in promoting and enabling community empowerment in those areas with low volunteering rates.

**Conclusion**

Volunteering empowers individuals and creates a strong sense of community – volunteers already feel empowered by contributing to their communities across Scotland. Volunteers significantly contribute to our nation’s success as a wealthier and fairer, healthier, safer and stronger, smarter and greener place to live, but this is not well recognised. Nevertheless, the Committee must recognise that only 18% of the adults volunteer regularly (at least once a month), meaning 82% of adults are not providing the regular help we would expect to see happening to create empowered communities. There is a need to improve volunteering rates which is central to realising the success community empowerment as laid out in the spirit of the Bill.

In light of our response, we would advise the committee to consider the following recommendations:

**Recommendation 1:** The Committee and Government must recognise the requirement to focus resources and investment in support for potential and active volunteers and challenge all Community Planning Partners to recognise the value and worth of volunteering to community empowerment and improvement in overall health and well being.

**Recommendation 2:** The Bill should recognise the value and worth of utilising national standards for community engagement to ensure volunteers play a central role in defining basic criteria for knowledge and expertise standards before assets are transferred. The national community engagement standards are an agreed standard measurement component of each Community Planning Partnership.

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Recommendation 7: Part 3 must better reflect the community in the design of transfer processes.

Recommendation 8: That the Bill should recognise the inequality of volunteering and the challenges to be faced by individual volunteers in promoting and enabling community empowerment in those areas with low volunteering rates.

For further information,

Volunteer Scotland is a registered Scottish Charity No SC013740

About Volunteer Scotland:

As the national body for volunteering we:

- Provide the most comprehensive online source of volunteer opportunities in Scotland, which is free to the public: www.volunteerscotland.org.uk
- Support tools to help volunteers get the most from their volunteering experiences.
- Build the skills, knowledge and aptitudes of staff that engage with volunteers.
- Work with organisations to connect better with volunteers; we do that by exploring where there’s a need for volunteers; we listen to people to understand how they want to make a difference; we make it easier for them to volunteer and we help volunteers and organisations make a difference and evaluate the benefits.
- Have an information service for volunteers, organisations, Government, and others. This provides insights into what volunteers are saying and experiencing, who volunteers in Scotland and demonstrates the difference this is making to our common good.
- Work with Change agencies in Government and funding bodies such as the Big Lottery, Third Sector Interfaces and Volunteer Centres - there’s a consensus about the value of volunteering and new opportunities such as the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games offering real potential for growth and development.
- Are members of a European network (CEV - link) and have a track record of European projects and relationship building.
Appendix: Volunteering Rates in Scotland’s local authorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal Volunteering Rates in Local Authority Areas in Scotland</th>
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<th>09-10</th>
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Source: SHS (2007-08, 2009-10, 2012)