SUBMISSION FROM SCOTTISH COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

This paper constitutes the Scottish Community Development Centre's (SCDC) submission to the Local Government and Regeneration Committee's call for evidence on the Spending Review as it relates to local authorities.

SCDC is an independent voluntary organisation, registered charity in Scotland and the recognised lead national agency for community development. We work directly with communities to build skills, organisation, involvement and equalities, with people who work in communities at practitioner level to build their skills base and at a partnership level to support strategic community development approaches.

Through our direct experience working with communities and practitioners we seek to influence policy in favour of community development approaches to achieving positive outcomes for all.

SCDC cannot respond authoritatively on behalf of local authorities and their partners. This response is based on our experience of working in a support role with local authorities and our intelligence on the general impacts on local communities of changes to budget settlements and changes to service delivery.

This submission responds to the seven questions set out in the call for evidence which can be answered through an external perspective.

1. Spending Review - To what extent will the Government’s proposals for public service reform, and specifically its response to the Christie Commission, support local authorities in improving outcomes for people living in Scotland and helping to drive demand out of the system?

Response:
1.1 In the Spending Review the Scottish Government states its commitment to reducing inequalities and to shifting the focus from service delivery to building the capacity of individuals, families and communities. The government’s proposals for reform are built around a ‘decisive shift’ towards prevention, integration and partnership, workforce development, and improving performance.

1.2 The prevention ‘pillar’ is the one which most clearly addresses the issue of demand and we endorse the priority areas identified for Change funding and the components of the Scottish Futures Fund. We believe that those measures should be complemented by initiatives to enhance the supports available at neighbourhood community level and that communities experiencing long term deprivation and those at risk of degeneration and decline should be treated as priority.
1.3 The focus on outcomes as a way of planning and evaluating service delivery challenges public services to revisit and reaffirm their essential purpose and their underpinning values.\(^1\) It is widely acknowledged that, to achieve real progress and lasting and sustainable change, people and communities must be involved in identifying their own desired outcomes and in planning and implementing shared local solutions. Recent evidence suggests that one outcome cannot be addressed in isolation to another\(^2\). Participatory, (i.e. involving communities) outcome-driven thinking and planning\(^3\) is essential to redefining the boundaries of the state and individual and community rights and responsibilities.

1.4 Communities that have been supported to develop their own responses to meet needs and address local concerns are more resilient, more sustainable and can complement the role of public services as well as potentially drive down demand. Evidence suggests that more cohesive and settled communities impact less on public services in so far as residents are typically healthier, better supported, more fully engaged and able to provide mutual care and support\(^4\). Consequently, we need to invest in people’s ability to organise effectively to contribute towards meeting identified community need. **With this in mind we advocate a fifth pillar – that of social and community development – to encourage the building of resilient and sustainable communities supported by an active network of community and voluntary organisations with the capacity to meet the majority of basic needs of people in an accessible and personal way.**

1.5 **A social and community development pillar should encompass:**

- The development of a strategic response to community engagement and the deployment of resource across all outward facing local authority departments for workforce development in this area
- The development of a strategic response to building community infrastructure - skills, organisation, governance, influence and sustainability
- The deployment of skilled community support workers into neighbourhoods currently experiencing social and health inequalities, tasked with developing and supporting the establishment of social networks and bridging communities with public sector agencies
- A programme of support to existing community based organisations to strengthen, extend and measure their impact and to share and extend learning across neighbourhoods
- Workforce development in respect of assets based approaches\(^5\) (moving away from a ‘doing to’ culture and treating people as part of a solution)

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\(^3\) [http://www.planandevaluate.com/leap-approach/](http://www.planandevaluate.com/leap-approach/)

\(^4\) [http://www.scdc.org.uk/media/resources/what-we-do/mtec/Making%20it%20Happen.pdf](http://www.scdc.org.uk/media/resources/what-we-do/mtec/Making%20it%20Happen.pdf)

\(^5\) [http://www.scdc.org.uk/assets-alliance-scotland/](http://www.scdc.org.uk/assets-alliance-scotland/)
2. Spending Review - What do you consider are the main barriers to public service reform in Scotland, especially from the local authority perspective?

Response: Note: our response is from the perspective of an independent support agency

2.1 Recent evidence gathered by SCDC as part of a research scope commissioned by NHS NES (not yet public) underlines that public sector partners, despite using outcomes language, in the main remain engaged within an output and target driven culture. The move to greater involvement of local people in the influencing, shaping, complementing and delivery of aspects of public services requires a 'letting go' of professional authority and control. The barriers we have identified are;

- **Resistance to change**: the struggle to stay the same (dynamic conservatism)
- **Risk**: of loss of control of the agenda and/or of political authority and of blame (both externally and by internal management) if anything goes wrong
- **Cost**: lacking the conclusive evidence that working in a different way will really save money
- **Competence and culture**: challenges to professional boundaries and behaviour and the requirement for new competences associated with community and service user involvement
- **Tendencies to 'reinvent the wheel'**: in response to new political imperatives and lack of realistic timescales for positive change to take place.

2.2 It should be noted that we have identified that the barriers associated with 'cost' and 'risk' are mainly located within the middle management tier (in particular those responsible for budget allocation). Our experience is that leaders in local authority demonstrate a vision and value base in respect of building services around people and communities and that staff working at community level are, in general, supportive and enabling in terms of this approach.

2.3 A history of time limited funding to community based and voluntary organisations has inhibited the ability and opportunity for longitudinal research and/or evidence of impact. Time limited funding puts strain on local organisations in terms of their ability to plan for the long term and to maintain settled staffing levels. This presents barriers in terms of the realisation of the full potential of the community and voluntary sector to deliver activities which support and evidence the achievement of positive outcomes.
2.4 In respect of the points above, our view is that public service reform in Scotland needs to be underpinned by;

- The use of the evidence base currently found within ‘grey literature’ and project and programme evaluations (some examples6) on the impacts of a community development approach to public service reform to inform policy and strategy development
- The building on previous investments by Scottish Government to support effective community engagement practice, notably the National Standards for Community Engagement and the VOiCE software7
- A workforce development programme designed to support culture change and competence development in community led approaches

3. Local authority budgets - Given the real-terms reduction in local authority budgets and the rising demand for the services they provide, is there a need for local authorities to reconsider their priorities? If so, are there any services that should be protected?

Response
3.1 Given that the economic downturn is already having the most detrimental effect on the already disadvantaged, and that this is compounded by the effect of reductions in public service budgets, the first priority must be for government and local government to protect the weakest and most vulnerable, and maintain services to the section of the population that is the most dependant on them.

3.2 The second priority must be to seek to develop and deliver services in a way that offers a route out of poverty for as many people as possible – the principle at the heart of the Change fund and the Scottish Futures Fund. These funds should as far as possible be applied to programmes that directly engage with the population groups in question for their design and delivery.

3.3 Community Learning and Development Managers Scotland (CLDMS) produced a report in September 20118 based on an online survey of its members which outlines how the provision of CLD services may be changing in 2011/12 in the light of pressures both for spending reductions and to contribute to achieving national priorities. It focuses on changes in budgets and staffing, where services are located and what priorities have been set for them. The report evidences that the community capacity building element of Community Learning and Development has been worst affected.

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7 http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/regeneration/engage
8 http://www.cldms.org.uk/resource-library/papers-and-statements Community Learning and Development: Changes and Pressures
3.4 Our recommendation is that economic evidence that shows added value as well as savings should be compiled and that services concerned with supporting resilience and capacity building within local communities, particularly in areas of disadvantage, should be protected and expanded where appropriate.

4. Local authority budgets - What potential does a move towards outcome budgeting offer as a means of adapting to the funding gap created by the reduction in local authority budgets and the demand for services? Would such a move help the development of Community Planning?

Response
4.1 Community Planning is the overarching vehicle for partnership working at a local level. To date, the current model of community planning has not, in any significant way, been built on pooled budgets.

4.2 Using publicly available data, public service and third sector organisation managers alike will recognise that certain areas make disproportionate demands on their services. These are normally small pockets of severe deprivation and social dysfunction, often found within larger areas defined as priorities in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. Such areas can readily be identified by service managers, and they can also be delineated as likely to fall within the ‘worst’ 2% of enumeration districts, or by geographic techniques of mapping service demand.

4.3 Community planning partners should be able to make a reasonably accurate calculation or estimate of the amount of staff time and other resources devoted to responding to the demands of these pockets of deprivation. Aggregating these costs – particularly if off-site costs such as hospital time, court time and indeed prison time were included – would undoubtedly demonstrate that a substantial amount of public and voluntary sector funds were being spent in the area, yet the value of this spend in terms of beneficial outcomes for the residents involved and the wider community might well be difficult to establish.

4.4 Better value for spend might be achieved if a proportion of the costs were diverted to a dedicated programme of community development and support in these areas. Such a programme would take a neighbourhood-wide view of the social, emotional and wellbeing needs of the residents and consist of a programme of support and community building focused on the aspects of life where the greatest support is required, and where the benefits are most clearly recognised. This resonates with the evidence sited earlier in this paper that one positive outcome is unlikely to be achieved in isolation from another. Funding for such a programme would be based on all the spending agencies agreeing to calculate their spend in the pocket as outlined above, and contribute a percentage of this spend either in cash terms, or in the deployment of dedicated staff time. Such a commitment would require to be made for five years or more.
4.5 The devolvement of outcome budget decision making to a neighbourhood level can lead to positive impacts, supporting the move to the involvement of communities as equal stakeholders. Evidence to support this can be found in the outcomes of the Participatory Budgeting within the contact of anti-social behaviour pilots9.

4.6 Our view is that, for maximum impact, a move to outcome budgeting must involve communities as equal and key stakeholders.

5. Local authority budget - What potential benefits can be derived from changes to procurement practices and the use of community benefit clauses?

Response:
5.1 Current procurement processes are lengthy, complicated and time consuming and, in some instances, cost inefficient for both the procurers and those tendering. As a social enterprise, SCDC tenders on a regular basis and we have had experience of some local authorities asking us to competitively tender for contracts worth under £3000. The cost of administering the process for amounts such as this will cost more than the value of the work.

5.2 The benefits of opening up procurement to local community based organisations are potentially high;
- Resource is ploughed directly into local neighbourhoods
- Local jobs are created for local people
- Services are delivered by organisations that are governed by local people who understand the needs and issues of the wider community

5.3 For such changes to local procurement to allow greater delivery by local community based organisations and for that delivery to be successful we believe that communities should be involved at the prior stage of co-design of project development. Community engagement and procurement must be seen as separate but related initiatives. Agencies which commission public services from third sector organisations (and private sector organisations) should retain responsibility for ensuring standards are met involving service users and communities in assessment processes.

5.4 In areas of entrenched health and social inequalities, it should be recognised that there may not be immediate capacity for communities to enter into so-design or co-delivery arrangements and that specialised community capacity building support is required to bring allow those communities to benefit from local commissioning (see 1.5).

5.5 We believe that the use of community benefit clauses are useful revenue sources which should be used to support community activity. Our view is that it is imperative that communities themselves are involved in decisions on how that resourcing should be best applied and then given the authority to manage funding locally.

6. Wider socio-economic impact of declining budgets - Do you consider that there will be any social-economic consequences in Scotland as a result of the rising funding gap in local government?

Response:
6.1 Without radical public service reform, the potential implications for a funding gap in local government are reduced social mobility, increased inequalities, increased number of people living in poverty, social disturbance and overall demise in the quality of life and increased demand on public services.

18 October 2011