Cross Party Group on Volunteering and the Voluntary Sector
Note of meeting on 2nd October 2012
The Scottish Parliament, Committee Room 4

Attendees

Margaret McDougall MSP Convenor
Mary Fee MSP
Margaret McCulloch MSP

Julie Braun	Action on Hearing Loss
Paul Drury	Bethany Christian Trust
John Lee (John Secretariat/Note of meeting)	VDS
David McColgan (Joint Secretariat)	SCVO
Morven McLean	Macmillan Cancer
Andy Milne	CEO SURF
Lynn Kalman	Stroke Association
Alasdair McKinley	Scottish Government
Beverly Oakman	CAS
Pat Scrutton	National Forum for Older People
Andrew Simm	Samaritans
Felix Spittal	SCVO
Emma Whitelock	LEAD Scotland
Annette Wilson	Waverley Care
Kyle Thornton	Vice Chair of Scottish Youth Parliament

Apologies
Annabelle Ewing MSP Deputy Convenor
Derek McKay MSP, Minister for Local Government and Planning

Nan Frame, The Safety Zone
Ian McCall, Paths for All
Liz McEntee, GCVS
Louise McGinty, Quarriers
Claire Walsh, Action on Children

Welcome
The Convenor welcomed both her fellow MSPs and colleagues from the voluntary sector to the meeting and advised that the topic under discussion was the important consultation from the Scottish Government on the proposed Community Empowerment and Renewal bill (CERB); an issue that she had recently spoken about during a debate in the chamber.

The Convenor noted the apology from Derek MacKay MSP, Minister for Local Government and Planning and then introduced the two guest speakers: Alasdair McKinley, CERB Team Leader from the Scottish Government and Andy Milne, CEO of the Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum. Alasdair had been invited to make a presentation on the Scottish Government's vision for the Bill and its impact on communities; Andy had been invited to outline a cross-sectoral perspective on the implication of the proposed legislation.

Key Speakers

<u>Alasdair McKinley, The Scottish Government</u>

Alasdair re-iterated the Minister's apologies but reassured the meeting that Mr MacKay would welcome an opportunity to engage with the CPG in the future. The origins of the Bill lay in a manifesto commitment and it was designed to:

1. Help communities take on unused or underused assets;
2. Maximise the use of vacant buildings;
3. Unlock community enterprise;
4. Link strongly to the Christie commission's recommendations regarding strengthening participation in the planning and delivery of services.

The Bill is exploring a wide range of issues; over four hundred responses have been received from a wide range of sources. Responses are being collated and analysed externally to ensure objectivity. A Bill Reference Group will consider the key issues raised and a draft Bill will be consulted on in the summer of 2013.

Alasdair emphasized that the Minister is very willing to listen to this wide range of views and that the draft might look noticeably different from the proposals in the original consultation. Alasdair and his team are working closely across directorates to ensure a joined up approach and will connect with the current review of Community Planning. The Minister is strongly of the view that, for any Bill to succeed, public authorities had to work with people rather than do things to them or for them.

<u>Andy Milne, SURF</u>

Andy explained that essentially SURF is a membership organisation, independent of government, focusing on regeneration-based policy and practice.

Generally, SURF welcomes the consultation on the Bill and is impressed by the Scottish Government's willingness to bring forward legislation in these important areas. However, the proposal contained both challenges and opportunities.

There is a real opportunity to look a new and innovative ways of encouraging participation: participation is in itself an important factor in successful regeneration and the wider benefits of participation, in health and wellbeing are being increasingly recognised (e.g. in Oxfam's Humankind Index).

The proposals, however, are heavily weighted towards Community Planning Partnerships as vehicles for increasing empowerment and improving participation – these are not the main purposes of CPPs nor are they particularly successful in these areas. Additionally, simply building the capacity of communities to engage effectively with the various structures of CPPs is not necessarily 'community empowerment'.

Communities already possess a wealth of (often hidden) assets and there is a task to (re) discover these and bring them to the fore – where the community came from and where it might go.

In the wider context economic factors continue to dominate regeneration policy. However, regeneration should not bee seen simply as being about jobs and economic growth. There are very vibrant, non-economic resources in our communities which have yet to be fully realised.

Questions, Answers and Comments

Emma Whitelock noted that capacity building is an important underlying issue in the CERB and that Community Learning and Development is one of the key vehicles for building capacity. However, disabled people continue to be under represented within CLD. **Alasdair McKinley** agreed with the general point and emphasized that underlying the Bill there was a determination not to increase inequality – the Bill should focus on how disabled people and other groups can be included and empowered. It is likely that there will be accompanying legislation to establish CLD on a statutory basis. **Andy Milne** added that one of the difficulties with CLD was that it is often based on the assumption that communities need to be educated and are lacking in capacity. Communities in fact contain extensive banks of knowledge and experience and the Bill should seek to bring this to the fore.

Kyle Thornton noted that many young people are excluded from formal mechanisms of consultation, engagement and influence and suggested that there should be a statutory obligation on the Scottish Government and other key bodies to consult/engage with the Scottish Youth Parliament. **Alasdair McKinley** replied that legislation was only one part of any solution to issues about engagement and consultation. **Andy Milne** added that legislation might have a part to play but that the real challenge was to create the right kind of spaces where young people could articulate what they want and engage in a way best suited to them.

The Convenor highlighted that defining community was problematic and suggested that the proposal should be based on a strong message of cultural change in the public sector: the public sector currently does not work in a way that empowers communities or in a way which genuinely unlocks community assets. **Andy Milne** replied that national government should not define community – communities are messy and untidy and are best placed to define themselves.

David McColgan pointed out that the current procurement regime directs significant resources to the public and private sectors and effectively locks out much of the voluntary sector. Additionally the Bill should seek to bring people closer to decision making processes and involve them in service design and delivery. **Alasdair McKinley** opined that there was a complex relationship between participation and decision making that the Bill may not be able to solve. **Andy Milne** highlight a reluctance within urban Scotland - and this was not the situation in rural and island communities - to critically examine the role of local authorities and how they can more effectively release some of their power to communities. Too much politics make it difficult to have a constructive debate about empowerment. Pwer can be shared – it is not a zero sum game.

John Lee mentioned that levels of volunteering have essentially flatlined at around 30% of the population for a decade – could we really expect the CERB to deliver a step change in participation and engagement. **Alasdair McKinely** advised that the Scottish Government was willing to look at new ways of encouraging volunteering and participation and would seek to work with agencies such as VDS to do this. **Andy Milne** suggested that the lines between volunteering and other forms of participation were blurred – this is being exacerbated by young people having to take part in volunteering.

The Convenor brought the discussion to a close.

Round Table

Morven McLean highlighted the significant resources being directed to developing volunteering by McMillan Cancer support and the success this is having in engaging volunteers. It is clear that volunteers bring high levels of passion and commitment to the organisation.

Close and Next Meeting

The Convenor brought the meeting to a close, thanked the speakers and members for their attendance and contribution. The next meeting is at 6pm on 6 November 2012 in the Scottish Parliament.