

A Public Social Partnership Project by:



The National Third Sector GIRFEC Project response to Scottish Government consultation on the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 – Community Planning

The National Third Sector GIRFEC Project is a partnership between a core group of organisations. They include Barnardo's Scotland, Voluntary Action Scotland and the Improvement Service. Over the past three years the project has worked in 10 Community Planning Partnerships. The project works to develop and strengthen the role of local Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs) across Scotland, and the third sector more widely, in the planning and co-ordination of children's services across Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs). The core work of the project team involves supporting CPP's to evaluate their current Children's Services Partnership.

This response is based on our work with a wide range of third and public sector partners as well as a specific consultation event with a number of TSIs and third sector organisations. It offers views from a third sector and children's services perspective.

We have provided some general comments, responded to Question 1 of the specific questions, and highlighted some other issues we feel need to be taken into account in relation to the guidance.

General Comments

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the guidance and draft regulation on the Community Planning element of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.

We welcome the fact that community planning has a clear statutory purpose that is focused on improving outcomes. We particularly welcome the fact that there is a focus on reducing inequalities, early intervention and prevention. Such approaches are in line with the provisions in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 in relation to Children's Services Planning. It is however worth noting that the definition of the third sector in the Children and Young People's Act is broader than that contained in the Empowerment Act.

In the context of children's services planning third sector organisations who provide services and who are representative organisations **must** be consulted on the plans. There is no requirement to do this in relation to Local Outcome Improvement Plans and Locality Plans although the duty to involve 'community controlled bodies' is stronger. We fully support the intention to ensure that decisions about local communities are taken by local communities and this aspect of the guidance will help. However we would like to see the guidance make it clear that CPPs should look to fully involve third sector organisations who can contribute to improving outcomes for local communities.

Q1 *The guidance identifies a series of principles for effective community planning. Do you agree with them? Should there be any others?*

We welcome the fact that the guidance gives direction on shared leadership and who this applies to. It is also welcome that the role of non-statutory community planning partners are recognised as having a role in shared leadership and that this includes Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs). Third Sector Interfaces have a crucial role in representing the views of the third sector within Community Planning Partnerships. We also note that the guidance states that CPPs should engage with bodies which are non-statutory partners who may not previously have been closely involved in community planning.

In our work in in CPPs across Scotland we have found very different approaches to involving the third sector and community bodies in planning. It is our experience that where there is an infrastructure in place for non-statutory bodies to be consulted on and involved in planning there is more meaningful engagement and effective partnership working. However we also found that not all areas have this participative infrastructure and where this was lacking it was very challenging for local groups to be involved.

Where an area has invested in a more effective and inclusive third sector infrastructure and participation mechanism, there has been deeper and wider involvement for the sector. Where third sector organisations feel well represented, they believe it has led to a better understanding among community planning partners of the value that the third sector bring to the process.

The capacity of smaller third sector organisations to be involved is also an issue in many areas. Many organisations are funded to deliver specific services to local communities and not to be involved in planning. Any new requirements to be involved in planning can place pressure on organisations who are already working in extremely challenging budgetary conditions. Organisations broadly welcomed the opportunity for greater participation but felt it was essential future commissioning and funding reflected the inclusion of this activity within contractual and grant agreements. **It would be useful if the guidance gave examples of situations where the community planning partnership's have contributed funds, staff and other resources to support greater engagement.**

There could also be a role here for the TSI in supporting the capacity of community bodies to be involved in wider CPP activity, although for some TSIs, without additional resources this may prove to be challenging. Our experience is that TSIs will tend to focus on one or two areas of service delivery. The focus on children's services is patchy and inconsistent across the 32 local authority areas.

In addition, we would highlight the need to **ensure as wide a range of community bodies as possible are aware of the opportunity to be involved in planning.** This should include groups with protected characteristics, such as young people's groups, and other communities of interest within geographic communities. Many young people's groups may have very different ways of receiving and disseminating information from public bodies compared to other community organisations, so specific promotional materials should be produced aimed at engaging such groups. **Any information that is used to promote involvement in community planning with communities should also be available in accessible formats.**

Other comments

Community participation and co-production

We welcome the fact that the guidance is directing community planning partners to demonstrate a clear commitment to securing effective participation with community bodies throughout the community planning. We also support the fact that community bodies – as defined in the Act – should be central to the planning of services in local areas. **We do however believe that the guidance needs to be more explicit on the key role of third sector organisations in planning and delivering services in communities.** At present the guidance states:

“The CPP should also engage with third sector organisations, where doing so can support effective participation from community groups that can contribute to community planning. Third Sector Interfaces should support effective community planning by building links between third sector bodies and the CPP”.

Whilst we would not disagree with either of these approaches we believe that there should be **a further element which states that the CPP should engage with those third sector organisations who are based in the community and work to improve outcomes for members of that community.** We accept that the legislation has a tight definition of what constitutes a ‘community controlled body’. However, it should be recognised that there are many third sector organisations who may not fit this definition but have been working in local communities for many years and are very much part of the community. This should be reflected in the guidance.

We agree that the CPP and its partners, including the third sector, and community bodies themselves should view capacity building as a shared responsibility. It should however be recognised, as pointed out above, that the majority of community and third sector organisations are not funded for capacity building. As such there will need to be more of a partnership approach with public sector organisations to create an enabling and inclusive culture for the diverse range of local organisations to be involved.

Focus on prevention

Many of the services provided by third sector organisations both local and national could be considered as services aimed at preventing problems escalating by intervening early. As such we welcome the fact that the CPP and partners will be required to plan prevention and early intervention approaches as core activities. Third sector organisations are well placed to work with CPPs to ensure that their services are designed in a way that meet the specific needs of the local community.

However, it should be recognised that many third sector organisations currently funded to deliver early intervention services are dealing with an increasing demand for their services as well as an increase in the complexity of the issues they are dealing with.

In our work in local communities there was a concern that early intervention and preventative work will contract if not given priority in the allocation of resources.

There is also a danger that resources available to support partnership working are insufficient to support meaningful involvement of the third sector and ensure that partnerships operate effectively.

Overall the Project found a great deal of willingness to make partnerships work in order that services for children and young people are well planned and effective. In addition, there were many examples of good practice across Scotland. However the progress in improving partnership working is fragile and much more support is needed for the third sector if engagement is to develop and be sustainable.

We welcome the emphasis placed on prevention and early intervention and but feel that this will be challenging to achieve in the current environment. **The guidance should have more emphasis on the role that the third sector and community organisations can play in achieving this.**

For more information or clarification of any of the points in this response contact Maureen McAteer, Project Director, National Third Sector GIRFEC Project Maureen.mcateer@barnardos.org.uk