



ACOSVO Response to the Smith Commission

31 October 2014

About ACOSVO

ACOSVO is a unique, member-led forum for Scottish third sector Chief Officers and Senior Managers enabling peer support, good practice sharing and leadership development. Our vision and mission are:

- Vision: Excellent third sector leadership in Scotland.
- Mission: Shape the future of Scotland's third sector by providing every leader with opportunities to develop, influence and excel.

Narrative

Having forged strong links with the Scottish Government, the Scotland Office, the Carnegie Trust UK and UK funding organisations in debating opportunities and threats to the new model for Scotland over the last 18 months, ACOSVO is delighted to have the opportunity to engage with the Smith Commission.

Members were invited to contribute through written comment and face-to-face discussion at specific devolution-focused events and discussion periods at core events. As many highlighted they had already contributed to the debate through individual, organisational and other collective responses – such as through SCVO, in terms of which measures should be devolved and why this is appropriate, this response focuses on:

- How the UK must engage and communicate better with Scotland.
- How the third sector must be integral in any way of working.
- Highlighting the importance of investment in cross sector Leadership development as an enabler.

The third sector has a significant role to play in any new model for Scotland, having a reach and understanding that others cannot emulate. Members highlight the following areas as being critical to achieving positive progress:

- Opportunity to discuss, debate and deliver real change must be grasped.
- Scotland Office has bigger role to play bridging Westminster with Scotland.
- Third sector input and involvement in the design and delivery of a new model for Scotland is essential.
- Local approaches to services and accountability are needed if citizens and communities are to be empowered at local level and encouraged to join a process of co-production.
- Improved investment in leaders, emerging leaders and cross sector debate and working must be encouraged if Scotland's full potential is to be harnessed.
- Positive improvements in dialogue and accessibility of Scottish Government achieved since 1999 should be built on and improved further.
- Communication and understanding of the Scottish context across the UK is vital.

Grasping the opportunity

Members do not want the status quo. They highlight this opportunity to build a positive, open, inclusive, ambitious, outward looking Scotland where decision making processes are inclusive and more truly within Scotland - not London led or top down. There is a very strong view that a genuine social partnership model is required with people at its heart – a true citizen/community-led process with democratic forms empowering and engaging communities and citizens directly in the decisions that affect them. There is also considerable concern that the imposed timetable for consultation is too short for meaningful consultation and debate, with the view that measures taken in haste can often have unintended consequences.

Bridging the role between UK Government and Scotland

Members strongly believe that the UK Government must become much better at consulting and understanding Scotland – it must ‘get out and about’ and really engage. To enable such an improved relationship significant cultural change will be required both within Whitehall and Holyrood. Members therefore see an important and much bigger ‘enabling role’ for the Scotland Office, helping to bridge and coordinate with stakeholders to ensure more comprehensive engagement between Westminster and Holyrood.

Third Sector Involvement in new framework

Current government policy, commissioning and monitoring relating to third sector service delivery falls well short of a real understanding of the third sector. The future delivery structure must be co-developed and designed bridging the gap between policy and practice. Within such a model, there is a need for a more coherent, joined-up Civic Scotland within which the third sector should be viewed as a key and equal partner. Third sector knowledge, expertise and understanding must be integral to this new model for Scotland. There is also a strong ground swell that ‘Young People’, many who have biggest societal problems and who voted for the first time, must become more involved – perhaps through the inclusion of some form a Young People’s Commission within any new engagement model.

Local approach to services

Service delivery must not be top down and centralised, but more focussed toward partnerships and local engagement with powers devolved to local level as advocated in the Christie Report:

- Reforms must empower individuals and communities receiving public services by involving them in the design and delivery of the services they use.
- Public service providers must be required to work much more closely in partnership, to integrate service provision and thus improve the outcomes they achieve.
- Expenditure on public services which prevent negative outcomes from arising must be a priority.
- Our whole system of public services – public, third and private sectors – must become more efficient by reducing duplication and sharing services wherever possible.

The Carnegie UK Trust’s “Enabling state – a discussion paper” also provides clear proposals on ‘localism’ and how to engage people in a new relationship between governments and people through:

- Seeing and engaging people’s lives in the round, not as a series of isolated interactions with parts of their lives.
- Government and public services thinking how they enable people who need help to retain as much control over their lives as possible, moving step by step to a position where their need for assistance has diminished.
- Ensuring public services are sufficiently close to those they engage so they are able to see and understand them.

Members feel that Local Authorities and Community Councils must be used more effectively with this being a significant opportunity to use the Third Sector Interfaces and Community Councils as a basis for examining, improving, providing and communicating services at local level.

There is also a view from our members whose organisations are based away from the Central Belt that the other parts of Scotland must be included and heard more, with communication layered to reach through all and across all of Scotland and society.

The Commission for Local Democracy's vision of 'local matters' also provides a strong foundation, seeking to maximise the benefit of local approaches to services and accountability in a modern Scotland and debating the kind of architecture and governance public services need to deliver in the future:

- Empowering local democracy: doing more locally, doing things differently and making sure local democracy is part of the checks and balances of effective democracy
- Enabling integration not centralisation: bringing power closer to local people, not centralising it - preventing problems, not spending on the results of failure.
- Focusing on outcomes not inputs: flexibility to focus on what makes the biggest difference locally i.e. leading on reducing inequality, improving fairness, supporting vulnerable people, driving social cohesion.
- Providing local choice and accountability: protecting local democratic decision making and making sure that local services and the spending are decided upon locally.

Improved investment in leaders and emerging leaders

ACOSVO and its members have seen how investment in the development of leaders and emerging leaders, both within and cross sector, builds understanding, increases capacity, improves dialogue and drives positive change. There is also significant evidence that regular engagement between Scottish Government leaders and leaders from other sectors, has real added value. Any new model for Scotland must have investment in these areas at its heart if the true aspirations, capabilities and knowledge of all leaders are to be fully embraced. The ACOSVO Leadership Exchange Programme, supported by partners cross sector, is an example of a process where real learning and understanding can be fostered and developed.

Positive improvements and dialogue with Scottish Government built since 1999 must be built upon

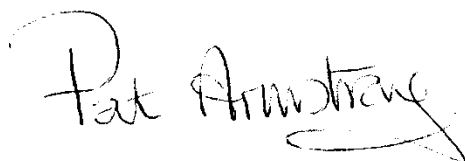
The many positive cultural improvements in devolved processes achieved since 1999, evidenced by accessibility of civil servants, third sector involvement in public sector reform, and policy and sectoral leadership development must be built upon further. Increased consultation and collaboration will enable better understanding and improved collaboration.

Communication and understanding of the Scottish Context

The Referendum debate highlighted that significant portions of the UK and Scotland populations have little idea of the powers that are already devolved. As the new model of working within Scotland evolves, there will be a need to communicate the what, how and who, not just within Scotland but across the UK as a whole, across all levels of society and age groups, to ensure that all understand what is devolved, how this will work and who is responsible for delivery.

Conclusion

This is a great opportunity for Scotland to develop a true social partnership model - with civic society, the third sector and people at its heart, empowering and engaging communities and citizens directly in the decisions that affect them. The third sector must be integral within any new model/process. Crucial to success will be a much deeper engagement and understanding of the Scottish context at Westminster, with the potential for Scotland Office to play a much greater bridging role. Within Scotland, new mechanisms, involving Local Authorities, Third Sector Interfaces and Community Councils, reaching out to local level will be required. The positive relationships and process built between the Scottish Government and third sector, built since 1999, must be developed still further to break down more barriers and increase real understanding. Leadership development within the third sector and cross sector is fundamental to this process. Finally, when the new model for Scotland is agreed, there will be a need to comprehensively communicate what this means not just across Scotland but across the UK as whole.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pat Armstrong". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P' and a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Pat Armstrong
Chief Executive
ACOSVO

Appendix: Members who have submitted written copies of their Smith Commission submissions to ACOSVO.

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In addition to the many members who have made verbal inputs at ACOSVO events over the last month and email comment, the following members have submitted written copies of their Smith Commission submissions to ACOSVO.

Voluntary Health Scotland
Scottish Environment LINK
YouthLink Scotland
Apex Scotland
Link Housing Association
SCVO