



A Response to the Consultation on the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill

Scottish Youth Parliament

Background to the Scottish Youth Parliament

Our vision is of a stronger, more inclusive Scotland that empowers young people by truly involving them in the decision-making process.

The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) is democratically elected voice of Scotland's young people. We listen to young people, recognise the issues that are most important to them, and ensure that their voices are heard.

In working towards our aims, we support the following values:

Democracy - All of our plans and activities are youth-led, and we are accountable to young people aged 14-25. Our democratic structure, and the scale of direct participation across Scotland, gives us strength and sets us apart from other organisations.

Inclusion - We are committed to being truly inclusive. The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that all young people have a right to a voice, it doesn't matter who we are or where we come from. We celebrate our diversity.

Political independence - We are independent from political parties. Only by working with all legitimate political parties can we make progress on the policies that are important to young people.

Passion - We believe that drive and energy are key to successful campaigning. We are passionate about the key issues and believe that young people are part of the solution, not the problem.



Executive Summary of Recommendations

- The Scottish Youth Parliament would be supportive of any provisions in the Bill that would facilitate joint working with, or inclusion of, communities that share a common interest as well as those from the same area.
- The Scottish Youth Parliament would be supportive of any provisions within the Bill that would ensure that there is an acceptable minimum standard of accessible user friendly information in relation to what is required to make a participation request.
- The Scottish Youth Parliament would be supportive of provisions that would ensure that the process for assessing participation requests is clear, accessible and robust.
- The Scottish Youth Parliament would be supportive of provisions in the Bill that provide a mechanism for appeal.
- The Scottish Youth Parliament would be supportive of measures in the Bill to ensure that community groups who are seeking to buy abandoned land can demonstrate that they have representative support from the community.
- The Scottish Youth Parliament would be supportive of measures in the Bill that would require community groups to demonstrate that their application has the support of the community and the support is representative.
- The Scottish Youth Parliament would be supportive of provisions in the Bill that would require community groups to demonstrate that their proposals are in the interest of the community.
- The Scottish Youth Parliament would be supportive of provisions in the Bill that would require local authorities to maintain a list of all property held by them to allow community groups to make requests, and this list should be publicly available.



- The Scottish Youth Parliament would be supportive of provisions that would require local authorities to establish Community Planning Partnerships in their areas with representation of young people on them.
- The Scottish Youth Parliament would be supportive of measures that would require public sector authorities to seek participation in community matters, especially with young people.
- The Scottish Youth Parliament would be supportive of provisions in the Bill that ensure that young people are involved in the decision making process for community planning.
- The Scottish Youth Parliament would be supportive of measures in the Bill that would ensure that deprived or disadvantaged groups are provided with adequate information and training so that they can make requests for participation and property.



Methodology

The Scottish Youth Parliament are committed to a completely youth led structure. The responses submitted on behalf of the Scottish Youth Parliament are based on direct consultation with young people, existing SYP policy formulated by the democratically elected Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament and our youth manifesto “Change the Picture” which is based on nearly 43,000 responses to a mass consultation exercise with young people. Therefore, Scottish Youth Parliament responses are based on the genuine views of young people and should be seen as an accurate and fair representation in this regard.¹

This response is based on the findings of a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research in the form of a short online survey and a focus group session undertaken during December and January.²

¹ For more information about the Scottish Youth Parliament, our structures and our policy making procedures, visit www.syp.org.uk

² The online survey was facilitated through survey monkey and contained fifteen questions based on the consultation document. The questions have been adapted slightly to ensure they are conducive for consultation with young people.



Background and Policy Precedent

The Scottish Youth Parliament welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Consultation on the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill. As the democratically elected voice of Scotland's young people, the Scottish Youth Parliament actively pursue opportunities for young people to engage with local, national and international decision-makers and provide young people with platform to avail of those opportunities.

The Scottish Youth Parliament has existing policy that is directly relevant to this response. The following statement was endorsed by 80% of the responses to our "Change the Picture" youth manifesto:³

"All young people should be involved in the services which affect them and should have the opportunity to get involved in local decision making opportunities."

In addition, the Membership of the Scottish Youth Parliament passed and has subsequently extended the following Members Motion:

"The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that young people must be given the opportunity to contribute to civic life if Scotland is to achieve its potential. A strong commitment from Government must be given to achieve genuinely effective youth participation."

The Scottish Youth Parliament also submitted a response to the previous Community Empowerment and Renewal (Scotland) Bill which contains many similar themes to the provisions of this Bill.⁴

³ The consultation exercise for "Change the Picture" received nearly 43,000 responses and can be accessed here:

<http://www.syp.org.uk/img/Youth%20Manifesto/Scottish%20Youth%20Parliament%20Youth%20Manifesto-%20Change%20the%20Picture.pdf>

⁴ Scottish Youth Parliament (2012), Consultation Response: Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill, http://www.syp.org.uk/img/consultations/Community%20Empowerment%20and%20Renewal%20Bill_SYP%20Response.pdf



The Scottish Youth Parliament believe that this strong policy precedent based on the views of young people, not to mention the significant and increasing amount of young people who are choosing to participate in decision-making platforms through the Scottish Youth Parliament, local youth forums and youth services locally and nationally, represents a compelling priority and mandate for action by Government, local authorities and communities themselves to ensure that young people are actively encouraged and supported to participate as equal partners in the decision-making process.

This sentiment is the central focus of this response. In addition, this response does not directly address every provision contained within the consultation document; rather it focuses on the specific elements of direct importance for young people.



Scottish Youth Parliament Response: Research Findings

This section provides the research findings from the online survey and focus group session. Respondents were asked to choose the extent to which they agree with each of the following statements ranging from: Completely Disagree; Disagree a little; Neither agree nor disagree; Agree a little; and, Completely agree.

Q1. Community groups should include communities that share a common interest as well as communities from the same area.

An overwhelming number of young people said that they either Agree a little (25%) or Completely Agree (63.6%).

This sentiment was reflected in the focus group section. Notable comments from the young people involved included:

“If there are large groups in a region, then they should be able to work together, and mechanism should exist that promote and enable them to work together.”

“You cannot force communities to work together; however, where there is common ground, this should happen naturally.”

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| Recommendation: The Scottish Youth Parliament would be supportive of any provisions in the Bill that would facilitate joint working with, or inclusion of, communities that share a common interest as well as those from the same area. |
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Q2. Community groups, particularly those with young people, should be informed about what is needed to make a participation request.

An overwhelming number of young people said that they either Agree a little (27.3%) or Completely Agree (70.5%).

Again, this sentiment was echoed by the focus group. Notable comments include:



“There needs to be accessible, user friendly information available about what exactly is required here, and that should be the case across the Board.”

“Often, the information available from local authorities about these types of issues is very patchy. There needs to be acceptable minimum standards.”

Recommendation: The Scottish Youth Parliament would be supportive of any provisions within the Bill that would ensure that there is an acceptable minimum standard of accessible user friendly information in relation to what is required to make a participation request.

Q3. Criteria for a public service authority to agree or to refuse a participation request should be clear and simple to understand.

There were no young people who said they disagreed with this statement. Conversely, a significant number of young people said that they either Agree a little (29.5%) or Completely Agree (79.5%).

Notable comments from the focus group include:

“This process must be transparent. The criteria must be readily available and understood.”

“Training should be provided so people understand the process.”

“Where applications have been refused, there should be an appeals process.”

Recommendation: The Scottish Youth Parliament would be supportive of provisions that would ensure that the process for assessing participation requests is clear, accessible and robust.



Q4. Community Groups should have the right to appeal refusals to participation requests.

A significant number of young people indicated that they either Agree a little (29.5%) or Completely agree (63.6%).

Notable comments from the focus group included:

“There must an appeal process. People have a fundamental right to appeal decisions made that affect their lives.”

“Clear and accessible criteria and guidance would keep the number of appeals low.”

Recommendation: The Scottish Youth Parliament would be supportive of provisions in the Bill that provide a mechanism for appeal.

Q5. Community groups, particularly those that work with young people, should have the power to buy abandoned land in certain circumstances.

An over-whelming number of young people said that they either Agree a little (34.1%) or Completely agree (56.8%).

Although the focus group agreed with statement in principle, they added a number of caveats. These comments included:

“There is a need to avoid any indirect loopholes. Although community groups should be able to buy abandoned land it needs to be for public use and public benefit.”

“There is a need for transparency.”

Recommendation: The Scottish Youth Parliament would be supportive of measures in the Bill to ensure that community groups who are seeking to buy abandoned land can demonstrate that they have representative support from the community.



Q6. When acquiring land or property, it is important that a community group demonstrates that its application has the support of the community it represents, including young people.

A substantial majority of young people said that they either Agree a little (20.5%) or Completely agree (77.3%).

Similar comments to the previous question were made by young people in the focus group:

“There needs to be transparency and clear intentions to benefit the community.”

“Community groups should be accountable and explain their intentions in the same way as a Council would be expected to.”

“Community groups need to be able to demonstrate that they have the support of the community, and that this support is representative.”

Recommendation: The Scottish Youth Parliament would be supportive of measures in the Bill that would require community groups to demonstrate that their application has the support of the community and the support is representative.

Q7. When acquiring land or property, it is important that a community group demonstrate that its proposal is in the public interest, including in the interest of young people.

An overwhelming number of the young people who responded indicated that they Agree a little (13.6%) or Completely agree (84.1%).

The focus group echoed their responses to the previous question indicating a need to ensure that community groups ensure that their proposals have the support of all groups in the community, including young people.



Recommendation: The Scottish Youth Parliament would be supportive of provisions in the Bill that would require community groups to demonstrate that their proposals are in the interest of the community.

Q8. Local authorities should maintain a list of all property held by them to allow community groups to make requests.

A significant majority of the young people who responded stated that they either Agree a little (15.9%) or Completely agree (72.7%).

The focus group were unanimous in their agreement of this statement.

Recommendations: The Scottish Youth Parliament would be supportive of provisions in the Bill that would require local authorities to maintain a list of all property held by them to allow community groups to make requests, and this list should be publicly available.

Q9. A Community Planning Partnership (CPP) should be established in each local authority, as this supports community engagement.

A substantial majority of the young people who responded stated that they either Agree a little (34.1%) or Completely agree (50%).

Notable comments from the focus group include:

“Young people should be represented on community planning partnerships.”

“Community Planning Partnerships should actively seek the views young people when engaging with local communities.”

Recommendation: The Scottish Youth Parliament would be supportive of provisions that would require local authorities to establish Community Planning Partnerships in their areas with representation of young people on them.



Q10. Public sector authorities should have to seek participation in community matters, especially with young people.

The majority of young people who responded said that they either Agree a little (31.8%) or Completely agree (52.3%).

The focus group was unanimous in their agreement of this statement. The group agreed that the Government should consider inclusion targets in terms of ensuring a diverse range of participation.

Recommendation: The Scottish Youth Parliament would be supportive of measures that would require public sector authorities to seek participation in community matters, especially with young people.

Q11. Young People should be key partners in community planning.

The majority of young people who responded indicated that they either Agree a little (27.3%) or Completely agree (65.9%).

The focus group were in unanimous agreement.

Recommendation: The Scottish Youth Parliament would be supportive of provisions in the Bill that ensure that young people are involved in the decision making process for community planning.

Q12. The Scottish Government has a duty to provide allotments to groups who request them.

Whilst the majority of young people who responded indicated that they either Agree a little (20.5%) or Completely agree (43.2%), a sizeable number of respondents indicated that they Neither agree nor disagree (20.5%).

The focus group indicated broad support for this statement.

Q13. Special efforts should be made to ensure that deprived or disadvantaged groups, including organisations that work with young people, are educated and empowered to make requests for participation and property.



Q14. Deprived or disadvantaged communities and groups of young people need training and support to empower them to equally participate in these processes.

The majority of respondents indicated that they Agree a little or Completely Agree with both these statements (18.2%, 77.3%; 34.1%, 63.6%).

The focus group were in unanimous agreement of both statements.

Recommendation: The Scottish Youth Parliament would be supportive of measures in the Bill that would ensure that deprived or disadvantaged groups are provided with adequate information and training so that they can make requests for participation and property.

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