Justice Committee

Community Justice (Scotland) Bill

Written submission from Voluntary Action Scotland

Voluntary Action Scotland is the national network organisation that champions, connects and develops Scotland's Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs) to support the third sector locally. One of the roles of TSIs locally is 'building the third sector's relationship with community planning'. It is around the theme of Community Planning Partnerships and their relationship with Community Justice Partners that we have greatest interest in the Community Justice (Scotland) Bill.

We welcome the steps taken in the Bill to create a more local model of community justice. It is our belief that where decisions are made at a local level with the involvement of communities and the third sector they are more likely to meet the needs of that particular community. This is a key tenet in the public service reform agenda and must be supported.

We have had sight of the response to the call for evidence from the Community Justice Voluntary Sector Forum and support a number of points they have raised. There are a small number of points we wish to reiterate below:

- A number of proposed Community Justice Partners are not currently Community Planning Partners. We therefore would seek clarification in the Bill or guidance around how local community justice partnerships would link with existing community planning structures.

- The Bill would benefit from clarity around how third sector support organisations, third sector providers and people using services will be engaged in the new model. The third sector can play a positive role in community justice related outcomes and therefore need to be fully engaged in the development and delivery of community justice outcomes. Currently it is unclear how the proposed structures will support better engagement and who third sector providers and others should be engaging with in relation to community justice strategic planning.

- A collaborative and engaging approach must be adopted. We would encourage duties on statutory partners to actively engage with individuals and families affected by the community justice system and third sector staff supporting them. This would help bring the proposed legislation into line with legislation in other policy areas

- One key route for the Third Sector into Community Planning is via TSIs. TSIs advocate for the third sector at Community Planning and give a voice to the sector. If there are to be significant links between community planning and community justice structures locally, whereby the outcomes set by community planning partners incorporate those set by community justice partners, there must be consideration given to any potential increase in workload for TSIs in helping set and deliver these outcomes. The relative resources available to

community planning partners to allow them to participate in the process are vastly variable. If these new models are to be adopted and successful then organisations such as TSIs must be supported to be involved and help to give a voice to the wider third sector.

- The third sector can play a vital role in the strategic commissioning process, providing valuable evidence about local needs, availability of existing provision and what works in relation to supporting people with convictions, their families and victims and witnesses of crime. In order for the new structures to be a success they must make best use of the assets available within the third sector, in order to improve outcomes for individuals, families and communities. As with other areas of public service reform, this must go beyond merely the way public bodies work together and must consider the potential role of the third sector and the voices of communities.

Whilst we have not covered all elements asked for in the call for evidence we have highlighted our main concerns and would like to reiterate support for the response from the Criminal Justice Voluntary Sector Forum.

Niall Sommerville
Communications and Policy Officer
Voluntary Action Scotland
17 August 2015