

SUBMISSION FROM SCOTTISH COUNCIL FOR VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

Introduction

SCVO welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Welfare Reform Committee on the general principles of the Welfare Reform (Further Provision) (Scotland) Bill.

SCVO recognises the need for the Bill following the outcome of the legislative consent motion voted on in parliament in December 2011; it also acknowledges the timeframes in which the Committee and parliament must work to ensure that there is no disruption to individuals when the introduction of new benefits comes into place in April 2013.

SCVO has given evidence to the Health and Sport Committee and the Welfare Reform Committee previously on Welfare Reform and should the committee wish to discuss the issues in this evidence we would be very happy to attend an oral evidence session.

Key Points

- The proposed Bill in question is an enabling Bill. It is essential that the Bill is passed in the correct timeframe to ensure that there is no delay in the introduction of the new benefit system in Scotland after April 2013.
- SCVO recognises that the main aim is to maintain the legislative basis that underpins devolved, passports benefits in Scotland.
- It is also acknowledged that the Bill, itself, does not make any changes to legislation and this will be done through the regulations to be introduced later this year.

Specific Questions

1. 1. Are you generally in favour of the Bill and its provisions?

SCVO recognises the need for the Bill following the outcome of the legislative consent motion voted on in parliament December 2011. The Bill as enabling legislation is vital to ensure there is no disruption to the introduction of the new benefit system to Scotland in April 2013.

SCVO also acknowledges that the importance of the regulations to be passed later this year is more significant in nature and would require greater scrutiny and consultation. We encouraged the committee previously to engage with the third sector as widely as possible and would echo this at this time. The third sector are widely involved in Welfare and should be utilised by the committee to the benefit of the Scottish people.

2. What are your views on this principle?

SCVO would agree with the general principle proposed.

3. What are your views on the proposed powers in relation to UC?

4. Do you have any other comments on the introduction of UC?

5. What are your views on the proposed powers in relation to PIP?

SCVO would support the proposed powers in relation to UC and PIP and would highlight them as essential to the process.

7. What are your views on the proposed subordinate legislation powers in the Bill?

SCVO would agree with the powers and believe them to be correct.

8. Do you have any other comments on regulations that would follow this Bill on “passported” benefits and eligibility for them?

SCVO believe that the regulations pertaining to “passported” benefits represent a great opportunity for the Scottish Government to mitigate the impact of the Welfare reforms to the people of Scotland.

Passporting benefits can be used to soften the blow that the UK welfare reforms are predicted to make. It is vital that the Scottish Government and parliament look at ways of using passporting to support those most in need and most at risk from these reforms.

The Committee should also seek to engage as widely as possible on any future regulations and utilise the expertise of the third sector to ensure that the broadest analysis of the regulations is undertaken. Scotland’s third sector has been widely engaged in the welfare reform process and has experience of working in welfare in Scotland and this should not be ignored or by-passed as it is a great resource for the committee in its work.

10. Are you satisfied in the assessments that have taken place in regard to these matters and in the conclusions reached by the Scottish Government?

SCVO are aware that many details regarding universal credit and PIP are still unclear due to the delay in the introduction of the regulations from the UK Government.

Until this happens it is largely unclear what the true impact of these reforms will mean.

The Scottish Government will be required to undertake a detailed assessment of all secondary legislation and future regulations to ensure that the impact of reforms have as small an impact on the people of Scotland.