



## The Public Service Reform (Scotland) Bill Stage One Debate

Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations Briefing

### Introduction

As the national body for Scotland's voluntary sector, SCVO submitted and presented evidence to the Finance Committee on the draft Public Services Reform bill. We responded to specific provisions in the bill as they related to voluntary organisations, and commented on points of principle.

At this stage we would like to give a strategic response to inform the debate on the principles of the bill. SCVO will be following this in subsequent stages with more detailed responses to the specific provisions.

SCVO believes that for genuine and lasting reform, this Bill should not be rushed.

### What are the issues?

**The draft bill tries to do too much at once:** This bill doesn't take a strategic approach to reforming public services. Rather, it contains a jumble of provisions, resulting in a fragmented bill. For example, the provision to allow indemnity insurance for charity trustees is simply out of place in this bill and would be more effectively discussed as part of a review of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005.

**Service users must be central to planning and delivery:** Giving evidence to the committee, SCVO's convener, Dr Alison Elliot, stressed the importance of the role of the user in public service delivery. She questioned whether reducing the number of public bodies would automatically lead to simplification or personalisation for the service user.

**More trust is needed between service providers and commissioners:** We must improve the relationship between public authorities and voluntary organisations delivering public services, particularly at the local level. Research released this week on Freedom of Information shows that 49% of voluntary organisations fear for their future funding if they question the funder's decision making processes. This lack of trust must be addressed if we are to improve the effectiveness of public services.

**Public spending cuts change the context for the bill:** The PSR Bill is an opportunity for genuine transformation of public services not just reform. Substantial challenges lie ahead in public expenditure. This mandates a new way of thinking about public services that changes the culture, design and delivery. This bill can't just be a stacking or rearranging of quango deckchairs.



## What's the solution?

**Be bolder and go further:** This bill provides an opportunity for a genuine transformation of Scotland's public services. The voluntary sector has a central role to play in this new landscape, working in partnership with the public sector to deliver more effective and efficient services for communities.

The voluntary sector offers alternative ways of delivering public services that are imaginative, rooted in and led by communities and provide added value.

For example:

- **Alternatives to custody** - diverting individuals from Scotland's burgeoning prison population through addiction treatment programmes in communities, sector-led employability programmes, befriending and mutual support groups.
- **Alternative options in health care** – relieving pressures on hospital beds and in-patient facilities by supporting community care, particularly in mental health support in the community, self-help and mutual support groups, and provision of community-led structured activities, sports and healthy lifestyles for young people.
- **Alternative opportunities for tackling poverty and inequality** – Scotland's financial services sector is rooted in the voluntary sector, through the co-operative and mutual movement. Supporting the growth of credit unions, housing associations and co-operatives more generally will play a major part in providing cost-effective solutions to tackling economic inequality and multiple deprivation in Scotland's communities.
- **Alternatives for developing skills and tackling unemployment** – Politicians of all parties are increasingly recognising the added value that the sector represents in the jobs market, providing employment routes through charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprises. Employment initiatives within the voluntary sector offer an alternative skill set to that in the public and private sectors as well as providing direct community benefit.

Such alternatives still need to be recognised by policy-makers then developed, designed, up scaled and replicated in order to provide better services which are more cost-effective and more relevant to the needs of the individual user of public services.

In conclusion, we would be very happy to give further evidence and work with the Finance Committee and others on developing our ideas for public service reform.

## Contact us:

Ruchir Shah, Policy Manager  
**0131 474 6179** or **07790 954 684**  
[ruchir.shah@scvo.org.uk](mailto:ruchir.shah@scvo.org.uk)

Sarah Beattie-Smith, Communications Officer  
**0131 474 8045** or **0779 060 1995**  
[sarah.beattie-smith@scvo.org.uk](mailto:sarah.beattie-smith@scvo.org.uk)