

Clerk to the Local Government and Regeneration Committee  
Committee Office  
Room T3.40  
Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

21 March 2014

Dear Sir/Madam,

### **Local Government and Regeneration Committee - Inquiry into the Flexibility and Autonomy of Local Government**

The Carnegie UK Trust is pleased to respond to this inquiry. We are not responding in detail to each of the questions set out in the consultation. Instead, our response focuses on the question: *'Does any action require to be taken to improve the level of public engagement and interaction with local government, if so please suggest what action might be beneficial?'*

#### **The changing relationship between the public and the state**

In 2012, only one-fifth (21 %) of adults in Scotland agreed that they can influence decisions affecting their local area and around a third (33 %) said they would like to be more involved in the decisions their council makes<sup>1</sup>. We believe that this low level of public engagement in local politics is at least partly related to the nature of the relationship that citizens and communities have with government. Since the 1940s our models of public service delivery have relied largely on decisions about priorities and implementation being taken through a predominantly 'top down' system, with citizens having an opportunity to voice their approval or disapproval of these decisions at election time.

However, it is our view that this situation is changing and new opportunities are opening up. Through our [Enabling State](#) project led by Sir John Elvidge we have tracked what we believe is a paradigm shift taking place in Scotland and in other parts of the UK. We can see a clear move away from top down models to new models of public services where communities and individuals can play a more active role.

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Carnegie United Kingdom Trust. Incorporated by Royal Charter 1917. Scottish Charity No: SC 012799 operating in the UK and Ireland.

Through our work we have identified 7 common policy shifts<sup>ii</sup> occurring in Scotland and in other parts of the UK that appear to us to be collectively creating a more 'Enabling State' .

Key innovations and policy in Scotland include:

- **The introduction of the National Performance Framework (NPF) and Scotland Performs in 2007** marked a move away from more traditional approaches to public sector performance management, which were primarily based on process and input, to a greater focus on outcomes. The concurrent abolition of government departments meant that central government in Scotland was united in the pursuit of this shared set of national outcomes. The NPF has been recognised as best practice internationally – for example by Professor Joseph Stiglitz speaking at the OECD World Forum in India in 2012 – and has attracted cross-party support.
- **A new more flexible relationship between national and local government founded on Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs)** has helped to establish a more collective public sector approach and provided local government with the flexibility to make local decisions that contribute to national wellbeing.
- **The public service reform agenda informed by the Christie Commission report** has helped to build aspirations around a public sector more orientated toward prevention, joined up services, a stronger focus on outcomes and community empowerment.
- **The proposed Community Empowerment Bill** includes proposals to enshrine the NPF in legislation, to strengthen community planning and to help communities take on ownership of local assets and to participate in service delivery.

#### **Action to improve public engagement and interaction with government**

Our research on wellbeing approaches to policy making and on the 'Enabling State' suggests that there is now opportunity to strengthen these changes. In particular there are opportunities to strengthen the outcomes-based approach at the local level and to devolve greater powers to the 'hyperlocal' level giving individuals and communities a more active role in the planning, delivery and governance of public services.

To this end, we think public engagement with local government could be improved in the following ways:

- **Ensuring that SOAs are used more effectively to inform public policy making at the local level.** We think that there are opportunities to better use SOAs to identify gaps in policymaking and to contribute to public service reform priorities such as preventive policy making and joined up working.

- **Giving communities more opportunities to participate in the community planning process and to influence and debate local outcomes** . The development of SOAs offers the perfect opportunity to engage local people in a debate about what matters most to them and to identify what social, economic and environmental outcomes should be pursued locally to improve collective wellbeing.
- **More opportunities for participatory democracy**. This includes participatory budgeting and more ‘community-led’ community planning.
- **A greater emphasis on transformational co-production**. By this we mean the direct involvement of users in the production of their own services. This goes beyond user consultation. It taps into users’ own strengths and experiences and puts service redesign, delivery and development in the control of service users.
- **More opportunities for community-led organisations to take part in the local social economy**. This includes providing communities with more opportunities to take taking on ownership of local land and assets. As well as opportunities for communities to play a more active role in the delivery of public services. The Community Empowerment Bill proposes a range of new community rights that will help encourage this process.
- **Supporting all citizens to engage with local authorities digitally**. Communication between governments and citizens will increasingly take place digitally. However, approximately a fifth of households are currently unable to access the internet due to barriers relating to cost, confidence, motivation and skills. Local government has a vital role to play in tackling digital exclusion to help more people get online. This will not only support new forms of communication between government and citizens but will enable those who are currently offline to benefit from the significant social and economic advantages that connectivity can offer.

### **Challenges in implementing these actions**

The move toward a more ‘Enabling State’ and our recommendations above are not however without risk. The most significant risk is that they exacerbate inequality. The most marginalized individuals and communities - who potentially have the most to gain from changes in the relationship between state and citizen - may be unable to capitalize on these opportunities in the same way that more affluent groups can.

In opening up opportunities for communities to play a more active role in local government specific attention must be paid to engaging groups that do not typically participate in public consultation exercises. In addition disadvantaged communities must be proactively supported to access financial resources, skills, knowledge, training and social capital.

We hope that you find these comments helpful. If you would like to discuss our response, or would like to find out more about our work please contact my colleague Jenny Brochie, Policy Officer at [jenny@carnegieuk.org](mailto:jenny@carnegieuk.org) or telephone 01383 721 445.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martyn Evans". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Martyn Evans, Chief Executive

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<sup>i</sup> The Scottish Government, *Scotland's People Annual Report: Results from 2012 Scottish Household Survey* <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/08/6973/0>

<sup>ii</sup> Wallace J, *The Rise of the Enabling State*, Dunfermline: Carnegie UK Trust 2013  
<http://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/2013/the-rise-of-the-enabling-state>