

Holyrood – Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill



A proposed bill to give more power to Scotland's communities could see the biggest transfer of power since devolution.

The proposed Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill would give more power to Scotland's communities.

The exploratory consultation on the Bill, which was today debated at the Scottish Parliament, is currently seeking views on a range of ideas which could see more power in the hands of communities:

- Urban right to buy – extending the right that currently exists for rural communities to buy land to urban communities.
- Right to take over unused or underused public sector land and buildings – either the right to request a transfer, or possibly a presumptive right to take over a public sector asset when it can be shown it is unused or underused and the asset owner was not able to show plans for future use.
- Right to use and access unused land – where it can be shown that land, in public or private sector ownership, is unused or underused and the asset owner is not able to show plans for future use. This could include a “community right to grow”, giving communities a right to access unused land and plant flowers, crops or trees.
- Community compulsory purchase – communities often identify areas of land or a building in their area that are unused and causing problems and could be brought back into use. Currently local authorities have powers to compulsorily purchase property if it is in the public

interest to do so; communities could be given similar powers.

- Participatory budgeting – giving communities more direct control over how public sector money is spent in local areas.
- Overarching duty to engage – to replace individual duties to engage with communities placed on different public sector bodies with one overarching duty.

Local MSP Malcolm Chisholm took the opportunity during the debate to mention both The Edinburgh Reporter as examples of news outlets reporting on hyperlocal news, but there is also an Edinburgh example of a good community project.

The Broomhouse Health Strategy Group is a community led health project that was set up in 1993 by a group of local residents who wanted to enable the local residents of Broomhouse, Sighthill and Parkhead in SW Edinburgh to have easy access to affordable fresh fruit and vegetables. It has remained a small local charity, run by 29 local volunteers, and 3 part time workers.

They aim to improve health and wellbeing for these low income neighbourhoods by providing a variety of local food & health activities, including their volunteer run fruit and vegetable co-op shop, a free home delivery service or bag carrying service for people with mobility issues. They run regular cookery classes to improve confidence in cooking healthily and on a budget. Other services include health drop-ins, exercise classes and Open Days.

They have just finished the Broomhouse Market & Mural Project to redecorate the whole of Broomhouse Market shopping area. Local youngsters were involved in design workshops and local and business volunteers helped undertake the practical work – over 50 volunteers took part, contributing over 200 volunteer days to help with the colourful transformation.

Local Government Minister Derek Mackay said:

“The Community Empowerment and Renewal bill is potentially the

biggest transfer of power since devolution, transferring power from central and local Government to Scotland's communities.

"We believe that the people of Scotland are best placed to take decisions about their future – both at a national and a local level.

"Scotland's people are its greatest asset and are a rich source of creativity and talent. The Scottish Government wants to see all Scots having a greater say in shaping and deciding their own futures.

"This exploratory consultation sets out a range of ideas to support Scotland's communities to take independent action to achieve their goals and aspirations and to have their voices heard in the decisions that affect them.

"Travelling across Scotland I have seen at first hand the strong foundation of active communities we already have, and I want this proposed legislation to build on this.

"The ideas in this consultation are designed to strengthen community participation, unlock enterprising community development and renew our communities.

"These ideas were developed following discussions with the wider public, private, third and community sectors.

"We want to explore these ideas and see how we can remove bureaucratic barriers and develop a meaningful and effective legislative framework to support community activity.

"We are determined that we develop effective legislation that will make a difference in practice.

"Working with our partners in Local Government, we will listen carefully to people's views and ideas to help meet our shared goal of empowering more of Scotland's communities. The views we hear will help determine what we take forward in our draft Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill."

The consultation on this bill remains open on the Scottish Government website until 26 September.