

Third sector visions for a Scotland of the future

A better state: inclusive principles for Scottish welfare

September 2013

This is the first in a series of papers which lay out the third sector's vision and ambitions for the Scotland of the future as we journey towards next year's referendum and beyond. It reflects thinking and ideas from across the sector and is intended as the starting point for ambitious discussions about the future of welfare in Scotland.

Introduction

Scotland is in a privileged position as we debate our future as a nation. We have a unique opportunity to debate the kind of society we want to see, and the ways in which we might achieve this vision. The future of welfare and the possibility that Scotland could do 'welfare' quite differently are key issues in this debate. Everyone is keen to have a say.

The third sector is dealing with the impact of the current reforms pursued by Westminster, compounded by cuts to local services, whilst negative stereotypes continue to be applied to people who are dependent on benefits and social protection.

For these reasons the sector is looking to the future, considering how Scotland might recreate a collective commitment to a refreshed and perhaps radically different welfare system. This paper attempts to bring some of these ideas together at a strategic level. We hope the sector will respond and add practical detail as to how these principles might work in reality for the groups and individuals they support on a daily basis.

The bigger picture

A new economy – less dependency

Examining the future of welfare in Scotland without understanding why people are dependent on a myriad of benefits and allowances is a mistake. Within the third sector, and more widely, there is a growing call for our economy to be reformed to prevent poverty and inequality rather than nourish and encourage it.

The Reid Foundation, SCVOⁱ, Oxfam and others make strong arguments for thinking differently about the economy. There is increasing consensus that our economy works for the few, and not the many – with wealth pretty much going only one way^{ii, iii, iv, v}. Oxfam's "Our economy" project highlights how the current economy "shuts people out"^{vi}.

Changing the nature and mix in our economy is key. High value jobs and better pay, building on the idea of a Living Wage, must play a part in a new approach to welfare in Scotland. This will take time but is necessary if we are to eradicate poverty in Scotland. The Scottish Common Weal provides a framework to begin to make this happen.

Complex lives require better connected policy

"Demographic change is bringing about a fundamental shift in how we all live, work and care... – rising life expectancy, shrinking family networks ... huge progress in women's workforce participation, greater incidence of disability and learning disability and advances ... meaning that far more severely disabled children live into adulthood.

For many families this is bringing a new mix of work, childcare and care for older and disabled loved ones – new challenges which previous generations have simply not faced.^{vii}

In creating a new approach to welfare we must consider what these changes in our society mean. Traditional transitions e.g. from child to adult life, into old age are blurring and family life is increasingly complex. Therefore, having separate, 'compartmentalised' approaches to policy are no longer appropriate or work for us.^{viii}

We need to step back and consider how areas of policy which are not always associated with wellbeing and 'welfare outcomes' play a key role in helping families and communities respond to changing demography and needs. This includes looking at employment, transport, housing and planning policy, and capital investment, through a welfare lens.

The sector welcomes recent moves to consider lessons which can be learned from abroad in relation to welfare policy. Recent examination of welfare policy in Nordic and other countries through the Third Sector Internship programme for SCVO highlights different approaches to traditional 'welfare' policies such as childcare but also pulls examples of different approaches to how and where we live and its impact on wellbeing e.g. refreshing the idea of intergenerational living.^{ix}

Where are we now?

As well as coping with the effects of the current economic model, and responding to changes in family and societal structures, designing a welfare system in Scotland must take account of the damage being done by current policies. Looking specifically at benefits changes, many of these will be poverty inducing, not poverty reducing measures. More widely, there are various accounts of the cumulative impact of welfare and public service cuts:

- Disabled people in Scotland stand to lose at least £1.3 billion over the next 5 years, arising from the cumulative impact of a range of changes, with financial losses from the "Bedroom Tax" sitting at approximately **£52 million** per annum in lost housing benefit^x.
- Funding is being pulled out of the Scottish economy as a result of the current programme of welfare reform – some £1.6 billion a year; equivalent to around £480 a year for every adult of working age.^{xi xii}
- Eligibility thresholds are continually being raised so that people in "significant need of care" get little or no support at all.^{xiii} Cuts across the board as well as specific benefit cuts fall on the most disadvantaged across society.^{xiv}

Considered alongside evidence about the experiences of specific groups in our society such as children^{xv}, lone parents^{xvi} and unpaid carers^{xvii}, we have a situation where many communities and families are already becoming more isolated - family capacity and community connections are gradually being eroded.^{xviii}

This means that the starting point for creating a new approach to welfare in Scotland is materially worse than it might have been. That may make the challenge of creating a more progressive system greater, but not insurmountable.

The building blocks of a Scottish welfare state

The recent report from the Expert Working Group on Welfare highlighted the potential need for a transition period in the event of a 'yes' vote in next year's referendum^{xix}. Many of us would want to see that transition period lasting for the shortest time possible but it would allow us to create flexibilities in the current system which would act as an important stepping stone in the journey towards a new and more progressive welfare state.

That assumes we know the destination at the end of this journey - the outcomes that we want to seek for our country and the part that a welfare state plays in achieving these.

The Scottish Government has begun to outline some of its own views on this. In "Your Scotland, Your Voice"^{xx}, it lays out a number of elements which illustrate how a welfare state might look, feel and operate. But we need more, and the starting point for a new welfare settlement for Scotland must be a positive vision for the kind of society we want to see, as argued for by the Centre for Welfare Reform^{xxi}, and by third sector organisations as part of evidence gathering for the first Expert Working Group on Welfare^{xxii}. Welfare reform should be people-centred; it should be about creating a system that enables people to live independently and live the fullest lives possible.

What kind of society do we want?

The Scottish Government Paper, "Scotland's Future" lays out a clear statement of intent designed to shape a written constitution, the potential rights and responsibilities of citizens, the state and others and, subsequently, to guide future policy and legislation:

"Everyone in Scotland should be entitled to equality of opportunity and to live free of discrimination and prejudice. Everyone should be entitled to public services and to a standard of living that, as a minimum, secures dignity and self-respect and provides the opportunity for them to realise their full potential both as individuals and as members of wider society."^{xxiii}

This statement could apply to a vision for welfare in Scotland. At its heart, this statement seeks to uphold key human rights as well as sending out a clear message that achieving people's welfare is much wider than cash benefits. It becomes focussed on how communities and public services can work together collectively to achieve wider positive outcomes – equality, dignity, self-respect, achieving our full potential – all underpinned by ensuring a decent standard of living.

It is also broad enough to cover a move to more inclusive policies, and those which might tackle rather than contribute to increased inequality and poverty - for example, more universal services, the idea of a minimum income guarantee or a 'Citizens' income, as well as introducing outcomes which have a broader sense of equality and wellbeing – not just those which focus solely on economic growth and financial equality. In that sense, it is a vision we can work towards regardless of the result of the referendum.

Seven principles for a fair society

A complementary but more detailed vision for the kind of society we might want to see is provided by The Campaign for a Fair Society.

The campaign brings together a wide range of third sector organisations and seeks to promote alternative approaches to policy. It argues that support for people to live well and

independently is fundamental – yet, we are in a position where public services can actually contribute to people being dependent. It advances a set of positive principles for policy making which seek to shift the power and control back to families and their communities:

Family – giving families support so that they are able to look after each other.

Citizenship – we are all of equal value and we each have unique and positive contributions to make.

Community – we support and root services in local communities.

Connection - we all have chances to make friends and build relationships.

Capacity – we help each other to be the best we can be.

Equality – we all share the same basic rights and entitlements

Control - we have the help we need to be in control of our own life, and support to live that life.^{xxiv}

The simplicity of these seven principles is their key strength - we can all relate to them. In many ways, they reflect and further develop the vision outlined above for a fairer and more equal Scotland.

The vision for a more equal society, a vision for a different economic approach and the principles outlined above provide a basis for the kind of society many in the third sector would like Scotland to become. Underpinning this must be a core set of principles which drive our approach to welfare, social protection and assistance in Scotland.

Positive principles

The visions outlined above were widely reflected in the evidence given to the Expert Group on Welfare. Many responses elaborated by outlining key principles on which a Scottish welfare system might be built. More widely, such principles consistently emerge when the third sector critiques public policy^{xxv}.

Many of these principles mirror how the third sector operates – our focus on people, their assets and abilities and the need to strengthen and support individual, family and community capacity. Here we bring some of these ideas together for consideration and discussion in relation to the debate about future welfare policy in Scotland.

Collectivism

The starting point for developing a Scottish Welfare State must be a set of founding principles which put people at the heart and which lay out what we expect from each other and from the state. Citizens Advice Scotland calls for a social security system which is “grounded in a clear and fair social contract of rights and responsibilities for both Scottish citizens and the government”^{xxvi}.

The Common Weal^{xxvii} promotes the idea of Folkshemmet - the people’s state. The idea of welfare provision arising from a contract between all key groups in society can help us move away from the concept of deserving versus undeserving - we all have a collective

responsibility and share collective risks. This is clearly something we seem to have lost in Britain – let’s consider the stereotypes of claimants which are put into the public domain and which pit one group against the other.

We need to rebuild a shared commitment to a welfare state recognising that at some point, no matter who we are, we will need an intervention or support to help us to continue to live in our communities and with our families. We must see welfare as being much wider than cash benefits and resurrect the idea of cradle to grave insurance - not just the basic safety net which increasingly marks the current UK approach.

Human rights

Many third sector organisations call for human rights principles to underpin key policy developments – most recently in the debate surrounding the integration of health and social care in Scotland^{xxviii}. We *must* ensure that our own approaches in Scotland protect and enhance key rights – rather than threatening them^{xxix}.

The Scottish Campaign on Welfare Reform (SCOWR) and others argue for a rights based approach to be the cornerstone of a new approach to welfare.^{xxx} A human rights approach emphasises rights to participate in society, to have choice, the right to live independently and so on. We need to see social and welfare services as the means by which people are supported to achieve these rights.

Caring is a normal part of life. Most people in Scotland will take on a caring role at some point in their lives. Carers Scotland supports an approach which is firmly grounded in the principles of rights, dignity and respect, and which provides a minimum income for carers and truly recognises and values their vital contribution to society. With these values at its heart, Scotland can better support carers to care, but also to have the same opportunities as other citizens.

Fiona Collie, Carers Scotland

Carers Scotland^{xxxvi}, the Trussell Trust^{xxxvii} and others illustrate how policies such as the so called bedroom tax have led to selective fulfilment of human rights with, for example, families having to choose between eating and paying rent. Examples of where the current system fails can also be seen in the day to day lives of unpaid carers – hence the move recently to create a charter of rights for this significant group in society.^{xxxviii} In addition, One Parent Families Scotland has highlighted how the rights of lone parents and children are being disregarded by the current welfare system. A key example is the imposition of financial sanctions, an increasingly concerning issue for the third sector.

The use of sanctions on lone parents is worrying especially where they are unable to comply with jobseeker requirements through no fault of their own e.g. as a result of poor access to transport or exorbitant childcare cost. One Parent Families Scotland points out that this “... *leaves them without sufficient resources to meet their needs, and undermines their own and their children’s rights to participate, contribute and thrive equally within society. There is an urgent need to replace the current punitive approach with a new approach which puts parents’ and children’s needs at the heart.*”^{xxxix}

These examples highlight how an erosion of even the most basic rights leads to a reduction in family and individual capacity to cope with illness, disability, financial shocks and so on.^{xxxv} The current human rights deficit and power imbalances in Scotland,

highlighted by Chetty and others^{xxxvi} makes the embedding of key rights at the heart of a welfare state a necessary starting point.

It is therefore important that before we look at policies and services within a Scottish approach to welfare, we must start with a vision for society as discussed above, supported by a constitutional framework which lays out clear rights and accountability.

There is, then, an opportunity for the production of the Scottish National Action Plan for Human Rights to provide a direction of travel both for a written constitution and a welfare state within an independent Scotland. Even in the event of a 'no' vote and given the challenges outlined above, the third sector must fight to maintain momentum to build in rights based approaches to devolved welfare policies and services – now and in future.

Done together, not 'done to'

The third sector believes strongly in co-production - that the people who benefit from welfare systems and support should be central in designing a future welfare state or the further devolution of powers to Scotland^{xxxvii}. So a key principle in a redrawn welfare state could be the extension of personalisation, where people have a much greater say in how they are treated, and they have a direct stake in how they achieve their goals and aspirations – economic, social or personal.

However, recent work by the Scottish Human Rights Commission and others demonstrates that we have some way to go if people are to be at the heart of policy development and service planning and delivery:

“..more could be done to involve people in decision-making processes and directly involve them in the design and implementation of human rights based policies, plans, laws and services...meaningful community engagement, to provide the most vulnerable members of society with the opportunity to shape policies that affect them”^{xxxviii}

We have a very real opportunity to use the process of creating a new welfare settlement to bring alive the much lauded concepts of co-production and personalisation. Giving people a stake in creating their future means there is a greater chance of them buying into it.

Choice

A challenge emerging from current reforms to the benefits system and devolved policy developments in Scotland is the *limitation* of choice, relating to how and where people live, where and if they work, and so on.

In looking at community care in particular, the Health and Social Care Alliance's "The Twelve Propositions" paper highlights through a case study that such services are not about helping people just to exist – they "should exist to allow people to live".^{xxxix} Carer and disability organisations increasingly demonstrate the opposite is often the case due to the impact of local cuts to services and the subsequent reduction in choice and ability to live independently.^{xl}

Work by Charles Leadbetter, commissioned in Scotland, vividly illustrates what this feels like for people in receipt of services:

“Our workshops and interviews with service users...uncovered a feeling among many that the service they receive is driven not by what people need but by what the system can deliver. Many of the clients feel as if the professionals are in charge and they have no choice...”^{xli}

A strong human rights perspective may help in this regard, where the focus on people’s choices about their lives sits at the centre of policy and planning.

Enhancing dignity, ensuring respect

The Scottish Campaign on Welfare Reform^{xlii}, Citizens Advice Scotland^{xliii}, The Poverty Truth Commission^{xliv} and others argue that dignity and respect should be underpinning principles in a Scottish approach to welfare.

The picture emerging from key features of the current benefits system and the “human rights deficit” mentioned above is one where policies and services have a focus on risk and cost, rather than being asset and people driven. Systems and policies can converge on people’s lives in ways which achieve the opposite of dignity and which can reduce self-respect and respect for each other. The very language of “skivers” as opposed to “strivers” epitomises this.

The lack of recognition of people’s humanity and their treatment within the current system is a consistent message coming from community activists, from third sector organisations and from people within the benefit system^{xlv}. We need to turn this on its head.

One Parent Families Scotland supports an approach to welfare based on principles including ensuring minimum income standards, focusing on dignity and respect and the importance of the rights based approach. A system based on these values would support and empower lone parents and their children to be confident, healthy, successful and prosper from life’s opportunities.

Satwat Rehman, One Parent Families Scotland

Ensuring a minimum standard of living

Third sector coalitions and organisations argue strongly for a right to a minimum standard of living. The SCOWR manifesto calls for benefits rates to be set at a level where “no one is left in poverty and all have sufficient income to lead a dignified life”.^{xlvi} The Centre for Welfare Reform argues for “Fair Income Security”, where the country determines a level of income which no family should be without, and an adequate benefit level is based on this benchmark.

Whilst there is still a safety net element, in principle, in our current benefits system, the third sector can provide significant evidence to show that this isn’t sufficient to fulfil the most basic rights – to food, shelter, travel etc.^{xlvii} It is worth noting that all of us will provide or need care at some point in our lives. Yet we consistently fail to provide adequate financial support for unpaid carers despite the economic and social value of what they do.^{xlviii}

Even within devolved services, we can fail to provide a basic safety net for those who are vulnerable or who are finding it difficult to get by as this case study demonstrates:

“One man Bethany was able to help through the Homemaker project told us how he struggled to hold things together. Lacking the basic household equipment to wash his children’s school uniforms, a single father of two – embarrassed and ashamed – kept his children off school. This happened simply because he didn’t have a washing machine to provide clean clothes for his children. This cannot continue in the Scotland we all want to see”^{xlix}.

Inclusion Scotland argues that a basic safety net should not be the primary purpose of welfare but that *“the over-riding principle should be that it supports all of Scotland’s people, including disabled people, to reach their full potential and play a full, active and equal role in Scottish community and economic life”^l.*

This also means we must value outcomes other than paid employment ^{li} as for some, this will never be an option. That doesn’t mean these people have nothing to offer – nor does it mean that they are “skiving”. We contribute to society in a range of ways including raising children, providing unpaid care, volunteering, activism and so on. By ensuring that people have a minimum income which supports quality of life, combined with support to manage their circumstances, people within even the most complex needs can have the same opportunities to thrive and achieve their full potential.

There is much talk of people being expected to make a contribution to society in the current welfare reform rhetoric. Many of the disabled people Capability Scotland works with will never contribute conventionally via taxes, by volunteering, raising families or acting as carers. A welfare state must be about a society supporting all of its members, particularly the most vulnerable, and about appreciating everyone’s value.

Richard Hamer, Capability Scotland

Costs and affordability

We have heard a lot of discussion recently about the costs of welfare and the need to cut spending in this area.

We need to consider the medium to longer term costs to our society and to the economy of welfare cuts combined with cuts to local services – from the perspective of unpaid carers, this means carers having to give up employment, leading to reduced tax revenues and spending in the local economy^{lii}. Short term cuts may make initial savings but we need to see a longer game - a more holistic approach which recognises the interaction between our approaches to policy making in Scotland, and our changing society.

For many groups, this round of cuts has been devastating with long term social and economic impact. Investment in social protection and assistance is needed in order to save money:

“...investment is needed urgently to help mitigate the poverty impacts of the welfare cuts on individuals. But equally, investment will also reduce the wider costs and social impact of increased poverty, which will include poorer health and greater health inequalities, increased family breakdown and crime. The costs of poverty will increase demands and

financial pressures on local authorities, the NHS and the third sector and will also have a negative impact on the private sector^{liii}.

The Christie Commission picked up this theme, arguing that the scale of challenges we face in Scotland “..demand careful financial management and continuous improvements in service productivity, **but it would be wrong to let the financial situation dominate our thinking.**^{liv}”

These points encourage us to look at the ‘cost and affordability’ argument in a different light. The current and planned welfare reforms alongside austerity cuts are creating an ‘industry’ around mitigation and crisis management as families reach breaking point. Recent analysis by the Child Poverty Action Group^{lv} shows how resources (financial and otherwise) are being diverted by local authorities and the third sector to deal with this situation.^{lvi}

As SCVO’s recent work to map the impact of welfare reform on the third sector shows, we are increasingly focussing on dealing with damage to families and communities after that damage is done. So we cannot afford NOT to do things differently.

What happens next?

For many in the third sector, there is significant momentum to take forward a different vision and approach to welfare in Scotland regardless of the result of next year’s referendum.

Beverage argued that a “*revolutionary moment in the world's history is a time for revolutions, not for patching.*^{lvii}” We live in difficult times, and for some, the debate about Scotland’s future provides an opportunity for radical change. Others are more circumspect and see a longer game. This applies to the debate about the future of welfare in Scotland.

The Centre for Welfare Reform picked this up in its response to the first phase of work carried out by the Expert Group on Welfare:

“Change is difficult and there are certainly many issues to resolve. Perhaps, as Beverage feared, “patching” is all we will be able to manage. Yet, even if the political leaders of a modern Scotland can only manage to patch the welfare state, we are surely right to try to define the principles that shape that patching.^{lviii}”

There may be scope to negotiate changes to the current system which better meet the principles outlined above. There may be scope to do much, much more and the opportunity to create a more progressive and inclusive social protection system for Scotland. Either way, these principles provide a starting point. Either way, Scotland has a unique opportunity at hand to do things differently.

If Scotland says no to independence, we need to keep these principles alive. What opportunities do we have for constructive ‘patching’ and joined up policies which enhance wellbeing, independent living and the realisation of key human rights?

The third sector is ambitious for the people of Scotland and wants to contribute to shaping a new vision for welfare in Scotland. We have the drive and enthusiasm to make things better. As Lead Scotland’s response to a recent consultation says:

“Lead Scotland would like to see the government adopt a more ambitious set of principles for guiding welfare reform and pass-ported benefits....Lead would like to see a greater emphasis on increasing participation in society, growing rates to reduce poverty and safeguarding human rights. Even if these principles are set out as long term aims that are constrained by an immediate lack of resources, they should still underpin the ethos and design of the welfare system...^{lix}”

We offer this paper out to the third sector and more widely to both the ‘yes’ and ‘no’ campaigns; to politicians from all parts of the political spectrum and to all of us who are part of the benefits system and the wider welfare state. We want to hear from you – do these ideas and principles work? How might they look in reality for disabled people, for unpaid carers, for others? What needs to change to ensure that a new approach to social security and welfare empowers and enables?

Get in touch with us and tell us what you think – we want your views.

Contact:

John Downie
Director of Public Policy
john.downie@scvo.org.uk

Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations,
Mansfield Traquair Centre,
15 Mansfield Place, Edinburgh EH3 6BB

Tel: 0141 559 5036
Web: www.scvo.org.uk

About us

The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) is the national body representing the third sector. There are over 45,000 voluntary organisations in Scotland involving around 138,000 paid staff and approximately 1.2 million volunteers. The sector manages an income of £4.5 billion.

SCVO works in partnership with the third sector in Scotland to advance our shared values and interests. We have 1,400 members who range from individuals and grassroots groups, to Scotland-wide organisations and intermediary bodies.

As the only inclusive representative umbrella organisation for the sector SCVO:

- has the largest Scotland-wide membership from the sector – our 1,400 members include charities, community groups, social enterprises and voluntary organisations of all shapes and sizes
- our governance and membership structures are democratic and accountable - with an elected board and policy committee from the sector, we are managed by the sector, for the sector
- brings together organisations and networks connecting across the whole of Scotland

SCVO works to support people to take voluntary action to help themselves and others, and to bring about social change. Our policy is determined by a policy committee elected by our members.¹

Further details about SCVO can be found at www.scvo.org.uk.

¹ SCVO's Policy Committee has 24 members elected by SCVO's member organisations who then co-opt up to eight more members primarily to reflect fields of interest which are not otherwise represented. It also includes two ex officio members, the SCVO Convener and Vice Convener.

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