

Draft response to the Local Governance Review from the Dumfries and Galloway Community Planning Partnership

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The Local Governance Review provides an opportunity to tackle issues which can improve outcomes for our communities. We support subsidiarity, making decisions at the most local level appropriate and support a rationalisation of partnerships and individual bodies rather than creating any new bodies or legislating for change. Partners here have evidenced good practice in relation to these issues in their arrangements.

We support the adoption of the European Charter of Self Government, currently the subject of a Private Member's Bill in the Scottish Parliament and in addition would recommend that the Local Governance Review addresses the following key issues:

(1) Budget Horizons: Dumfries and Galloway has well established public services that are coterminous which provides significant benefit with regards to planning. However, to effectively deliver these plans there requires to be fully aligned budget planning for the medium term (confirmed budgets over 3 years) and long term (indicative budget over 5 years). In addition, the finance periods should begin and end at the same time to allow the public and partners to better understand and co-ordinate activity.

(2) National work delivered locally: Greater recognition is required by national organisations about the implications for local delivery of national strategy commitments; and that community empowerment means that delivery can be by both public services and local communities/communities of interest. There are opportunities for national public bodies to relocate jobs to help stimulate economic growth in different parts of a country.

Dumfries and Galloway is a low wage economy: a significant number of jobs have been lost as a result of the centralisation of public sector services. It is important to recognise that the location of public sector jobs within the region can provide a catalyst for the area.

Public sector relocation can stimulate the local economy in two main ways; the first, direct impact is the move of the jobs themselves and the wages they pay; the second is the 'multiplier effect' that these jobs can have, boosting demand for local goods and services and attracting jobs in related industries; enhancing the intellectual capacity of the area; and improving the attractiveness of the area to businesses

(3) Enhancing engagement and empowerment: Communities know their areas and their needs very well. The correct form of engagement and empowerment at local level can improve decision-making within public services but there needs to be a reduction in bureaucracy involved. The role and function of Community Councils is a fundamental aspect of this.

(4) Informed, Evidence-Based Policy Decision-Making: Evidence gained through engagement at all levels needs to influence policy decisions. There requires to be investment in the design of an aligned and clearer framework so that public bodies can demonstrate consistently how they have arrived at their decisions; and also to support new approaches to public decision-making e.g. Participatory Budgeting

(5) Local Accountability: Enhanced local accountability for the Police and Fire and Rescue Service within Dumfries and Galloway - these services are coterminous and

this structure benefits people within this region. The targets and actions should be tailored to, and address, local evidenced needs and, importantly, should be scrutinised locally with the ability to influence future planning and delivery. Police and Fire and Rescue Services should control local budgets and direct staff working within the region to best effect.

(6) Delivering 'their' Public Service: Public bodies understand that they are civic leaders and custodians of public services which are delivered on behalf of, and with, their residents. Innovative ways of involving residents and service users in the development and delivery of services needs to be researched and supported so there is a genuine partnership culture and approach to service delivery.

(7) Challenges: The Dumfries and Galloway Community Planning Partnership has identified a number of challenges during the development of the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan that may require new approaches, collaborations and arrangements to be effective. The key areas are:

Connectivity: This is a significant issue across a rural area and covers broadband and transport links (rail and road networks) along with flexibility in public transport arrangements. How we plan and implement these issues may need to change as the issues facing urban Transport Partnerships are quite different from rural ones.

Housing: The access to affordable and accessible housing, addressing homelessness and providing the opportunity for people to access support and advice through a more streamlined process.

Health and Wellbeing: This impacts on services provided by many community planning partners. There are challenges with supporting mental health issues for all ages. Prevention is key to reduce demand on our services from poor health. New arrangements for Public Health at local (CPP) level must be integrated into existing forums and approaches rather than the creation of additional governance bodies.

Learning and Employment: Education goes beyond the established school system, extending to people accessing learning opportunities throughout the life cycle and any collaboration arrangements must allow for links with appropriate other locations. Building the economy of the region is a challenge with an ageing demographic. The availability of appropriate employment opportunities for young people along with a skills mismatch between employment opportunities and the qualifications our people possess. Attracting working age people to work and live in the region remains a significant challenge, especially with the provision of key services our communities require, such as doctors and teachers. The new City-Region and Borderlands Growth Deal arrangements must respond to the identified needs of the area and provide flexibility to respond to local needs.