

Our Ref: MW/KM

Dr Kevin Pelan  
Committee For Social Development  
Room 144 Parliament Buildings  
Belfast  
BT4 3XX

Dear Kevin,

**Re: Regeneration Bill**

I refer to the above and am pleased to offer some comments and observations as a contribution to the current consultation on the Regeneration Bill as presented to the Assembly by the Minister and currently being considered by the Committee.

As you are aware, Supporting Communities NI (SCNI) is an independent charitable organisation which champions community participation by developing groups, supporting active citizenship and building cohesive communities. At the same time, and in partnership with the NI Housing Executive, SCNI supports and facilitates the Housing Community Network which was formed in response to the need for housing and related policies to be developed with and on behalf of local communities. SCNI works with the Housing Executive, Housing Associations and other organizations in housing and related matters and including urban and rural regeneration processes and activities.

Indeed, in Northern Ireland SCNI has unique and unparalleled experience in working with all communities on regeneration programmes and projects and this stretches back over several decades.

SCNI has a proven track record of promoting and supporting community involvement in housing and regeneration and is pleased to continue to support engagement between the committee and local communities through the Housing Community Network. In recent years SCNI staff have been working with and supporting community organisations develop and engage in regeneration programmes, eg Neighbourhood Renewal, Areas at Risk, Small Pockets of Deprivation. We have also and for many years been working with a range of partners on estates undertaking various regeneration activities and schemes.

The views and observations contained in this response are informed by this experience; the views are further supported by a number of research and information exercises undertaken in recent years with members of the Housing Community Network discussing the role and future of tenant and resident participation in regeneration work.

The Bill is largely administrative in purpose and we are certain that the Committee has received useful technical guidance on its content; nevertheless SCNI would offer several observations which might be of interest to the Committee in their deliberation.

We welcome the Minister's decision to remove the housing elements from the Bill as previously proposed in order to advance the proposed legislation and also the delay in the transfer of responsibilities until 2016. This is particularly welcomed as the new Councils will benefit from the opportunity to properly establish regeneration programmes and activities within their own areas, to develop new relationships with communities and partners and to develop the relevant appropriate expertise.

In large part the Bill provides for the transfer of existing powers to local authorities in respect to regeneration. We note that there appears to be little change in terms of what these powers entail, merely their location. This being the case, many of the mechanisms in the Bill relates to the transfer of these powers and responsibility for policy development and programme delivery will lie subsequently with local Councils.

We note that the Minister has offered some reassurance to the Assembly that it is not his intention to give Councils additional powers without providing some resource allocation to support these added responsibilities. We welcome this but we would suspect that the Committee would like some clarity as to exactly how much support will be given to Councils and if this support will include additional technical support and expertise in regeneration.

A further consideration is worth noting; the status of existing and ongoing regeneration programmes and activities could be described as fragile. The uncertainty which has surrounded the immediate and long term future of regeneration policy has had a negative impact on the confidence and energy of regeneration processes; this has been unhelpful. Whilst we hope that the transfer of responsibilities will provide renewed impetus and encouragement to regeneration processes we would urge the Committee to ensure that the Department provides guidance and support to Councils to safeguard existing processes and ensure that progress gained to date is not lost.

SCNI wishes the Committee well in its consideration of the Bill and would be happy to provide further observation and insight if required. Please do not hesitate to contact me should that be the case.

Yours sincerely,  
For Supporting Communities NI



Murray Watt  
(Policy and Information Officer)