

LOCAL GOVERNMENT SURVEY 2018 – ANALYSIS

This paper presents findings from the Scottish Local Government Leadership Survey 2018 (based on answers to open-ended questions only), delivered by PA Advocacy. All interviews were conducted between 14th March and 4th May 2018 by Robert Cumming, MD, PA Advocacy Ltd. Council leaders were not asked any open-ended questions and are therefore not included in the findings below. The questions asked to CEOs and Heads of Economic Development (HoEDs) were different but common themes can be found below.

- **Voice of the people**

Most CEOs describe the third sector as the voice of local communities. Thirteen out of 18 CEOs refer to ‘community empowerment/community planning/communities’ in their answers reflecting the strong connection made between the third sector and people living locally.

‘They’ve got a different way into communities and a different way into talking to people about how they might get more involved in that.’ (CEO)

A few comments also suggest that third sector organisations can have a strong voice in some areas, holding local government to account:

‘Pretty much any functioning committee has a third sector presence, and if we don’t then we hear all about it.’ (HoED)

- **Delivering services**

Nine out of 18 CEOs link the third sector to the provision of services, mostly in health and social care. However the third sector is not perceived as an economic partner:

‘So if I think about care and what’s happening in that sector, then we have a lot of things happening with the third sector across the health and social care arena, and some of the education and skills stuff, but I would say that less so the third sector in the kind of economic area than others.’ (CEO)

By comparison the role of the third sector in employability services is highlighted by HoEDs (9 out of 24). HoEDs also appear more aware of TSIs (17 out of 24 mention them) than CEOs. Some HoEDs are also planning to further involve third sector organisations due to financial constraints but also because they see the third sector as a partner.

- **Tokenistic approach?**

On the other hand comments suggest that involvement of the third sector in the design of services remains tokenistic in some areas:

'For my services? Very little, probably. Or a minor part. They have some role in that we've got to talk to them about what we're doing and get their views, and we would never do anything that would duplicate what they do or try and...because that would just be silly. But, at the end of the day, I answer to the council.' (HoED)

'They are involved in terms of there's quite a bit of community consultation. [...] There's quite a bit of community engagement. They probably don't feel that they have sufficient involvement in the design of policies and I think that's probably fair.' (HoED)

A couple of HoEDs also note that contact with the third sector has diminished over the past couple of years due to budget cuts which could be a concern for the sector.

- **Who speaks for the third sector?**

When asked about stronger partnership, several HoEDs comment on the diversity of the third sector which makes it difficult for them to identify who speaks on its behalf.

'I suppose I find the third sector a challenge in some ways, in that when you say the third sector you're talking everything from SCVO who are the third sector and represent the third sector, then you've got Barnardo's and the Prince's Trust and these nationalists that are monoliths. And then you've got your wee community group who are trying to get a new swing park. So it's such a range of groups [...].' (HoED)

There is acknowledgement from several CEOs that relations with the third sector could be better and further developed. But some of them also believe that there is an issue of trust between local government and the third sector with the former being perceived as 'bad'.

- **Funding**

Like CEOs, HoEDs emphasise the financial challenges faced by local government as well as by third sector organisations. Interestingly a couple of HoEDs recognise that more could be done to support the third sector.

'If we could be far more understanding of how the third sector...if we weren't so constrained as the public sector that you must do this and you must do it that way and we're all having to do it, you would allow a freedom to actually commission and work with the third sector. That would be far better.' (HoED)

Only one answer refers to EU funding but it is worth pointing out in the light of Brexit. Currently the third sector coordinates services funded by the EU in that area but what will happen to those services after Brexit?

- **How do we develop trust between local government and third sector?**
- **How can we share examples of good practice across sectors?**
- **How do we address the issue of diversity/voice of the third sector?**
- **How do we demonstrate the value of the third sector as an economic partner?**
- **EU funding – what's next?**
- **What is SCVO's role/opportunities? Relations with TSIs?**
- **Link to the discussion on the value/impact of third sector?**