

CSPP Forum Discusses the Contribution of Towns to a Fairer Scotland

CSPP (22/10/2015) – A discussion forum on how Scotland’s towns can contribute to social justice and wellbeing has produced a range of positive ideas.

The forum, held in Falkirk on Monday 19th October, examined how towns could contribute to a fairer Scotland in the context of the Scottish Government’s [National Conversation](#) on the issue.

Hosted by the Centre for Scottish Public Policy (CSPP) and supported by Scotland’s Towns Partnership (STP) and the Voluntary Action Fund (VAF), the discussion forum brought together individuals representing local authorities, public sector and cultural institutions, community development trusts, business improvement districts, community councils, and others.

By acting as a space for the exchange of diverse experiences – from the Western Isles to West Lothian – the discussion focused on gathering insight and expertise in the identification of key factors and considerations for the alignment of town development with social justice goals.

Opening the session, CSPP Chair, Professor Richard Kerley explained, “This initiative is to talk about a fairer Scotland – sometimes we talk about inequality and social justice – set against the backdrop of a sustainable and thriving Scotland”. He placed these issues in the context of town and community development, as well as posing the question of the extent to which differing social and economic goals were complementary or involved trade-offs.

Those attending the forum began by citing successful examples of how community-led town development had managed to reduce deprivation, such as Ainess in Ross and Cromarty.

Several common themes then emerged in the discussion, including the importance of development being community-led in order to lead to successful outcomes. Many felt that investment made without sufficient consultation and community engagement was less likely to be sustainable and produce the desired results.

Connected to this, several of those present voiced the view that every town and area in Scotland is different, and that there can be no “one size fits all” approach to town development – reinforcing the case for local groups to take the lead in identifying priorities for town improvement.

It was argued that mechanisms or institutions for community participation must have “teeth”; as in order for people to become engaged, they need to feel that the decisions they make have real meaning. Training and capacity building of community members who wish to play a leading role in local development and planning was also seen as desirable to encourage participation.

Discussion also focused on the role of the young and the need to harness the next generation’s optimism and energy into the development of their towns and communities. It was suggested that initiatives in the cultural sector, and training and capacity building, could contribute to this process.

Many other issues were also discussed by the forum, including: governance structures at the local, national and UK levels; the relative importance of economic development to encouraging engagement and tackling deprivation; the need to make the planning process more

accessible; and the need to understand the Scottish / UK experience in comparison with other European countries.

Participants also discussed new and proposed legislation relevant to these issues, such as the Community Empowerment Act and the Land Reform Bill.

Those present were also reminded that they could use the [Understanding Scottish Places](#) tool to better understand and compare Scotland's towns.

Next Steps

STP has appointed the CSPP to host the "National Think Tank on Towns", to work with STP and others to develop wider understanding on the impact of town development and town centre regeneration on equality and fairness.

As part of this, the findings from the discussion forum will feed into a major piece of work being undertaken by the CSPP and its partners on how towns can contribute to the development of a fairer Scotland.

Early findings from this work will premiere at a future-towns session at [STP's national conference for Scotland's towns](#) on 18th November in Falkirk.

ENDS

Website link and photos:

http://www.cspp.org.uk/cspp_forum_discusses_the_contribution_of_towns_to_a_fairer_scotland