SCHW's Response to the Social Renewal Advisory Board's Report "If Not Now, When?"

(Including references to the Scottish Government's response to the Social Renewal Advisory Board's Report - March 2021)

The alliance of community-led health and wellbeing improvement organisations

May 2021

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These are SCHW's responses to the 20 Calls to Action. The responses highlight the critical importance of 'locality', a necessary shift in local democracy and bridging the gap between promises and practice. The challenges in securing progress on the 'Call to Action' are immense. SCHW is ready and willing to engage in serious collaborative working at local and national levels to start bridging the "promise gap' now. The 'Blueprint for a Healthier Scotland' produced by SCHW provides a contribution to the way forward. In order to embed it in communities across Scotland the Blueprint requires the kind of changes highlighted in the report including culture shifts in the decision-making frameworks locally and nationally. When these are coupled with a long-term commitment to a modest re-purposing of existing improvement resources across several Government directorates the impact in communities will be transformational.

MONEY AND WORK

1. Commit to a Minimum Income Guarantee for all as a long-term aim:

Research has demonstrated that Community led health and wellbeing improvement organisations facilitate a wide range of local economic, social, democratic, and ecological development…… local leadership focussing on sustainable development. There is a growing and increasingly wider body of research and interest on the role of a 'community economy'. This has been influenced by recent learning and understanding on the kinds of infrastructure and decision-making frameworks needed to successfully develop the community sector. To achieve its maximum impact 'Minimum Income Guarantee' must be developed within the context of a growing and thriving community economy. SCHW's Blueprint offers the way forward in establishing a thriving community infrastructure across Scotland.

Moving towards a Minimum Income Guarantee will have to be step-by-step process. The Blueprint can contribute to the steps. Community led organisations working in partnership with the Scottish Government can contribute to establishing the community-based readiness required to introduce a Minimum Income Standard. This will be a complex and demanding task and will require effective collaboration with communities to establish the understanding and evidence gathered from lived experiences. Community led organisations are well placed to gather this kind of evidence and locate it in the context of sound knowledge and experience of overall quality of life in disadvantaged communities.

A second less direct but important contribution the Blueprint would make relates to the critical task of reducing failure demand in statutory services.

Health economics are complex. We do know that expenditure on health services takes up the biggest share of National budgets. What happens in health expenditure has a significant impact on the resources available to deliver other priorities such as the Minimum Income Guarantee. The SCHW Blueprint would tackle a major cost to the health service – failure demand. Community led health improvement organisations are in a unique position to work with local communities to ensure local priorities are ones which will make the biggest impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals and their communities. A second advantage community led organisations have is that they have the flexibility and responsiveness to respond to the needs of individuals in a holistic way. This is best evidenced through the social prescribing programmes being delivered by SCHW organisations. Community led approaches to improving health and wellbeing will, as the Blueprint becomes more widely implemented help reduce failure demand on health budgets and free up resources.

2. Develop an approach to anti-poverty work, including personal debt, that is designed around the needs of the individual:

This is at the core of community led approaches to improving quality of life in disadvantaged communities. The Blueprint enables community led organisations to work directly with individuals and communities to improve health and wellbeing. This is the foundation upon which individuals build their engagement with actions/activities/services which will support them to tackle the determinants of poverty and poor quality of life. With increased confidence, a stronger sense of hope for the future and improved wellbeing individuals are in a much stronger position to take on self-management of key aspects of their situation. Local organisations are also well placed to ensure that individuals are supported in accessing high quality money advice and welfare rights. The Scottish Government has quite rightly indicated that these complex issues require strong collaborative partnership working by local authorities, and the public and third sectors. The SCHW Blueprint would support the locally-based frameworks in which such partnerships can become established and develop.

3. Work in partnership to develop a new social contract on Fair Work:

Partnership working is at the heart of social renewal. Partnerships are effective when they are built on strong commitment, openness, mutual respect, trust and a fair balance of power and influence. Many partnerships are not effective and are not resilient because these characteristics are challenging to establish and the leadership and commitment to bring them about is not strong enough. The social contract on Fair Work should be an integral part of strong partnerships committed to establishing a thriving community economy. Community led organisations are in a position to both demonstrate and advocate the adoption of Fair Work principles and practices across the third sector and in partnerships with the private and public sectors. Fair work practices are directly related to the quality of life and wellbeing of individuals.

4. Focus Fair Work actions on those most affected by the pandemic:

SCHW organisations have been directly engaged in responding to the many challenges presented by the pandemic. They have demonstrated responsiveness, resilience, creativity, determination, compassion and robustness in their fantastic range of responses. They have

also highlighted the importance of good communications, strong partnerships, minimising bureaucratic barriers to action and mobilising citizens to a common cause. In all their lived experiences during the pandemic the principles and practice of Fair work have been evident in the actions of community organisations in supporting those most affected by the pandemic in relation to difficult work and family circumstances. Community organisations have a proud record of supporting elderly citizens and providing opportunities for improving the wellbeing and learning of young people. This support has been necessarily more intensive during the pandemic. Community organisations will continue to put people at the centre of the design and delivery of employability services whether it is providing local volunteering opportunities, social enterprises, sessional work, locally based training and developing new skills and qualifications to enter or return to the workplace.

5. Extend free early learning, childcare, and social care so all parents and carers can access the childcare they need, when they need it:

Early learning, high quality childcare and social care all make huge contributions to wellbeing and quality of life of families, individual parents, and extended family members. They provide opportunities to offer families a route out of poverty. SCHW organisations deliver a wide range of services, activities and programmes for young children and their families. These activities complement the provision available locally through public and private nurseries. In many cases the services are made available in locations and at times in response to the needs and preferences expressed by local parents of young children. The services are also designed to reach young parents and their children who may not feel comfortable accessing more formally provided services. The services provided by community organisations may also engage young parents in other forms of support provided by the organisation. In particular activities which address mental health issues and aspect of loneliness and isolation. As in many community led approaches to improving health and wellbeing they are designed and delivered to be holistic.

PEOPLE, RIGHTS AND ADVANCING EQUALITY

6. Incorporate the right to an adequate and accessible home in Scots Law:

Community led health and wellbeing improvement organisations know their communities, not just their current situation but their history, their past positive and negative influences. Their tragedies and successes. The story of houses and homes threads through most quality of life narratives. It is a basic theme whether to do with availability, affordability, adequacy, heating, location, overcrowding neighbours, environment. They all at some point can have a massive impact on health and wellbeing and in particular mental health. The holistic approaches used by community organisations to respond to cries for help and the 'help me' visits to primary care teams identify many of the pressures related to housing and homes. Community organisations are in a strong position to advocate on behalf of individuals, support individuals in their approaches to statutory services, help develop confidence and resilience and critically stay in touch as individuals tackle and cope with difficult situations. On a broader front, anchor organisations can work with local decision-makers to highlight the connections between housing and health and support housing options that are driven by local need and place-based approaches. We welcome the call to treat the right to an adequate

home and preventing homelessness to be made national public health priorities and integrated with other government strategies.

7. Make sure there are enough homes that are safe, warm, accessible, affordable, and in places people want to live:

This Call to Action links closely with community empowerment. Access to good, affordable housing is central to quality of life. For many individuals the factors which determine the ease of access go far beyond supply, quality and location. They include very personal issues including family, confidence, hope, work, finance, motivation, resilience and physical and mental health. In other words, factors which have a massive impact on health and quality of life. Community led organisations are in the position to work with individuals in a holistic way and work through the mix of factors, personal and more generic which will have an influence on their success in accessing good quality housing. We welcome the Scottish Government's responses that highlight the Place Based Investment Programme which is planned to support community led regeneration, community wealth building and 20 minute neighbourhoods together with supporting vital housing development in rural communities. These ambitions will be most effective when carried out in partnership with communities, not at a macro level but working closely with neighbourhoods in which specific histories and needs influence the shape of local developments…communities are empowered. Investment in SCHW's Blueprint would ensure there is an infrastructure which would enable this approach to be delivered effectively and efficiently. SCHW will work in partnership with the Scottish Government to ensure the processes and local decision-making related to providing ready access to good housing is based on equality, fairness, and social justice.

8. Ensure everyone can access nutritious, culturally appropriate, and affordable food:

During the pandemic SCHW organisations are delivering critical support to communities, families, and individuals for whom food poverty is only too prevalent. The ongoing growth in the use of foodbanks has been well documented. Many commentators, politicians and decision makers have argued that that there must be an investment in the successful partnerships approaches of the pandemic. This investment should be long-term. The Government acknowledges that it is important to work alongside community led organisations to engage older and disabled people among others, including individuals who have become isolated during the pandemic and those who can often miss out on 'standard' approaches that "overlook problems with access, transport, or support needed". We welcome this acknowledgement and argue it is now time to move away from many of these ineffective 'standard' approaches and invest in community led approaches which operate at the heart of neighbourhoods and communities. Investment in SCHW's Blueprint is needed now help generate the conditions in which strong long-term partnerships in communities can help eliminate food insecurity and the need for foodbanks.

9. Set a target to end digital exclusion in the next parliamentary term:

In the 21st century. digital exclusion should not be at the current levels. We welcome the Connecting Scotland partnership and the critical role played by local community and voluntary organisations. This should be sustained and expanded. The key to its success in

reducing digital exclusion is that digital public services are accessible to all affordable if not free and simple to use. Individual SCHW organisations are playing a big role in tackling digital exclusion and are constantly seeking funding to support their efforts at community and neighbourhood levels. To ensure many individuals become included tailored approaches need to be developed. This is essential if, as the call to action argues, we are to meet the needs of those farthest removed including some minority, ethnic older and disabled people who experience a wide range of barriers to accessing and using new technology. Community led organisations are picking up this challenge. They need more investment to ensure that the ongoing IT support for our most disadvantaged communities and individuals can be sustained. This is not a short-term project with a quick one-size-fits-all solution and needs a lasting consensus, commitment and investment across the political spectrum – a SMART national priority.

10. Adopt the principles of Universal Basic Services:

What should now happen in relation to such a basic and far-reaching agenda which includes discrimination against women, elimination of racial discrimination, the rights of the child, the rights of persons with disabilities and the covenant on economic, social, and cultural rights. Whatever progress is made, and it should be a lot, it will happen only if there is strong commitment to engage the power of communities This requires building up power and momentum in communities to increase community capacity. This will help ensure these basic universal rights are embedded in all local and national decision-making processes and strategies and legislators are held accountable for failures to do so. New infrastructures and collaborative partnerships at local level will be required. The SCHW in partnership with the Scottish Government can help make this happen across Scotland.

11. Incorporate key international human rights instruments into Scots Law so as to deliver real change:

The Scottish Government has given a commitment to introducing wide ranging human rights which they argue will "empower people, enabling them to claim and enforce a wider range of their human rights domestically, including in court". This is to be welcomed. It does require much preparation particularly within public services. This will include changes to the processes to ensure services are inclusive and the reduction of barriers to accessing services faced by women, refugees, older and disabled people and others. This is not about the future, this is about now, if not now, when? Many individuals will not be able to access their rights without support, encouragement, confidence and hope. These are characteristic which are most effectively achieved through the work done in communities and neighbourhoods by well embedded, trusted and respected anchor organisations. This is where the "now" opportunity lies and SCHW's Blueprint will help with this.

12. Take action to realise the human rights of disabled people:

The need for this action is long overdue in all aspects of social, political, and economic life. Why has it not happened much more quickly. The answer lies in the fact that action does relate to the need to transform practice in the design delivery and resourcing of public services and in the formulation of public policy and finance decisions. Without major change

in the culture (i.e., the attitudes, values, and beliefs) which persists in public services coupled with new facilitating infrastructures it will continue to be an uphill struggle. We actually, 10 years on, do need to implement the recommendations of the Christie commission…if not now, when? Many individuals will not be able to access their rights without support, encouragement, confidence and hope. These are characteristic which are most effectively achieved through the work done in communities and neighbourhoods by well embedded, trusted and respected anchor organisations. This is where the "now" opportunity lies and SCHW's Blueprint will help with this.

13. Build inclusive communication into all national and local government funding requirements:

Any decision-maker, manager, politician engaged in bringing about change at any level will have been frustrated at some point by apparent "breakdowns in communications". Failure demand in local services frequently results from poor communications and understanding. Poor communication, inappropriate communication, inaccessible language, poor understanding etc, etc at all levels are prime causes of social, economic and political exclusion. We need to take very seriously the embedding of a culture across all sectors in which open, honest, transparent communications and processes are valued not feared. The report quite rightly points out that "we have seen the importance of clear and accessible communication during the pandemic". Community led organisations have communication as one of their greatest strengths. Communication with individuals of all ages and families; communication across neighbourhoods; communication with local decision-makers and public service partners; communication with individuals and groups who do feel excluded and for whom public services are not a first port of call when in difficulty; communication with individuals who as a result of the pandemic have retreated and now suffer the impact of isolation and loneliness. 'Inclusive communication' needs to be more fully understood and practiced not just in 'funding requirements' but across the whole gambit of public service activity. Local organisations are in a great place to work with public services through new infrastructures which support real, mutually respectful, constructive partnership working. Investment in the SCHW Blueprint can make a major contribution to establishing the conditions on which to build and sustain embedded, inclusive communication across communities

14. Strengthen approaches to prevent and address hate crime and public sexual harassment:

 We would welcome a commitment from the Government to strengthening approaches to address and prevent hate crime and public sexual harassment which "harms individuals and damages families and communities". A key development is improving the communication and reporting of hate crimes. Community and voluntary organisations, embedded in their communities can deliver a significant capacity to support individuals and families to overcome barriers and navigate the channels to successfully report hate crimes and sexual harassment. This local support will increase an individual's confidence that their reporting is being treated seriously and followed-up.

15. Apply the rights and entitlements in this report to all migrants:

A strength of community led organisations in the third sector is their understanding, knowledge, and interaction with both the current issues and past histories of their communities. This includes the ongoing narrative round demographic changes including the arrival and experiences of refugees and asylum seekers. These individuals settle in a community as citizens. All the entitlements and rights should apply to them. However, they do not. Community organisations strive to engage with new citizens from all backgrounds. The situation of refugees and asylum seekers is often precarious. However, community led organisations are frequently in a position to provide direct flexible, practical, holistic support, and signpost individuals to other sources of financial and wider support. The SCHW Blueprint can help support, particularly at the community and neighbourhood levels, the successful implementation of the "The New Scots: Refugee Integration Strategy".

COMMUNITIES AND COLLECTIVE ENDEAVOUR

16. Further shift the balance of power so individuals and communities have more control over decisions that affect their lives:

There is a real problem with language here. The phrases 'shifting the balance of power' and 'communities have more control' require greater explanation and understanding than 'sounds like a positive thing to do'. If there is no consensus on what these phrases mean it is unlikely that there will be a great commitment and capacity nationally or locally to ensure they happen. These are challenges which need bold leadership to move forward and secure 'collective endeavour'. Community led organisations use community development approaches to establish new partnerships with public services. These collaborative partnerships can work closely with communities to identify and tackle improvements in health, wellbeing and quality of life. Whether a balance of power takes place will depend on the nature and practice of the new partnerships. Whether communities have more control than in previous times will depend on the lived experience of those involved in the partnerships. The effectiveness of the partnerships to find solutions to long-standing problems will be critical to shaping community perceptions of power and control.

17. Improve service delivery and design by empowering frontline teams and the people and communities they serve:

The 2011 report of the *Christie Commission* recommended:

- Maximising scarce resources by utilising all available alternatives from public, private and third sectors, individuals, groups and communities;

- Working closely with individuals and communities to understand their needs, maximise talents and resources, support self-reliance, and build resilience;

- Prioritising preventative measures to reduce demand and lessen inequalities.

What Works Scotland has found that this is still "very much an area of developing and evolving policy and practice" and proposed that,

- Co-production can lay the groundwork for prevention;

- The community sector can act as a long-term voice for sustaining a focus on preventing inequalities;

- Good community anchors are well placed as leaders in work that aims to mitigate the worst excesses of inequality. They can help to develop sustainable initiatives that boost the local economy, tackle poverty and reduce harm.

Ten years have passed and in many reviews over that period there is a strong sense that the Christie recommendations and subsequent proposals to implement them have, at best, seen only limited progress within the pre-existing structures and processes. Why? Bold steps are needed to invest in new community-based structures and processes in which decisions and actions can be taken quickly and flexibly. Frameworks and new infrastructures that are focussed on working to find holistic solutions to problems identified by communities and by neighbourhoods. Structures and processes designed to improve the quality of life of individuals and families. These new infrastructures and processes must emerge from identifying and breaking down barriers to change and improvement which challenge "the way we've always done it". Barriers such as static, restrictive cultures, silo mentalities, defensive behaviours, poor management and leadership and inability to share power and influence especially with communities. Christie advocated 'maximising scarce resources by using alternatives". Communities are a source of amazing resources of energy, experience, expertise and capacity. They are not being empowered to work in true collaborative partnerships with public services and other locally based organisations to tackle issues and generate solutions to locally identified issues. Many of these issues are highlighted in the Advisory Board report. So where are the bold moves to come from? There is no clear answer to this. However, SCHW has proposed investment in a 'Blueprint for a Heathier Scotland' which would be a transformational change in the relationship between the Scottish Government, local communities and the third sector...... a bold step!

18. Build on new ways of working based on what has worked well during the pandemic, and develop new arrangements for local governance:

It is good to see the acknowledgement of the great work carried out by third sector organisations and the local partnerships which were formed during the pandemic. They made all the difference to countless individuals, families and communities. The report captures some of the key lessons from the ongoing work during the pandemic. We very much welcome these;

- changes embedded for the long term
- shift towards long-term systems of risk and reward to bring about a secure and sustainable third sector
- greater collaboration on the key issues of health and health inequalities
- create the conditions which enable communities to design and own their responses to locally identified challenges
- do not expect a one-size-fits-all approach across Scotland
- diversity of local arrangements will be a strength to build on
- the importance of community, neighbourhood and local places
- more autonomy and choice locally

- local control over decisions which impact on local people
- decision making as close to communities as possible
- more say in how public money is spent
- value the contributions of volunteers
- more flexibility and freedom to prevent and solve problems locally
- build trust in communities

We also welcome the Scottish Government's acknowledgement of "a clear appetite for change to how power is shared in Scotland". Support for a collaborative approach involving the Scottish Government, local government and the community sector can create a "platform for a transformation of local democracy through a combination of community, functional and fiscal empowerment across a wide range of public services". The 'Blueprint for a Healthier Scotland', produced by SCHW offers a real community embedded base upon which to build this ambitious shift in our understanding and experience of local democracy. Without such a base in communities across Scotland the gap between promise and practice will continue to grow and the spectre of the Christie Commission will continue to haunt us for another decade.

19. Focus everyone and all activities on building more resilient, fairer, healthier, and stronger communities and places:

Agreed, if not now, when?

CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN PROMISE AND PRACTICE

20. Co-design how we assess progress towards renewal, incorporating deeper engagement with those people and communities who have first-hand experience of poverty, inequality, and restricted life chances:

This is a real challenge for the Advisory Board and the Scottish Government. The third sector has experienced a roller coaster of positive rhetoric in national reports and strategies, task force reports, learned papers which promised much. This rhetoric was frequently set in lived experience and a reality in which challenges developed into epidemics (e.g., obesity, poverty, substance misuse, self-harming and suicide, isolation and loneliness, poor physical fitness, prescription drug addiction, mental health problems. Increasing inequalities and a growing gap in the quality of life between advantaged and disadvantaged communities)

The Scottish Government response to the report frequently quotes the large sums of money being directed toward many of the calls for action. This is good but not good enough. Few of the funds appear to have a long-term focus. Few of the funds are investments in new, permanent infrastructures that will ensure lasting change happens. Few of the funds seem to be directed at securing the major shifts and changes in culture highlighted in the Government's responses to the report. Few of the funds, if any, are directed at ensuring the long-term existence and sustainability of a thriving third sector which will play a central and permanent role in tackling the many challenges highlighted in the report. Responses to the Social Renewal Advisory Board's report need to include a strong, clear message that the bold, transformational changes needed at local and national levels should happen now. It will need

to be a truly collaborative effort by all of us to secure a future that ensures a high quality of life for each and every one of Scotland's people. Let's get started!

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