Open Government Scotland Network Meeting – 2nd September

Lauriston Halls, Edinburgh

Notes from the meeting

The meeting opened with 3 brief updates to set the context of the discussions

1. Intro to Open Government and the UK Civil Society Network – Tim Hughes (Co-ordinator, UK Open Government Civil Society Network), for more info http://www.opengovernment.org.uk/

2. Intro to the Pioneer Programme – Lucy McTernan and Ruchir Shah (SCVO) spoke about the work they are leading on at the moment as part of the Open Government Pioneer programme – for more info https://opengovpioneers.miraheze.org/wiki/Main_Page

3. Update on the Open Government Plans in Scotland – Doreen Grove (Scottish Government) updated the group regarding progress and timelines for the Scottish Open Govt Action Plan.

    - The requirement in being one of the OGP sub-national pioneers is publish the Action Plan in time for the OGP global summit of governments and civil society partners in Paris in December.
    - There are already a number of commitments being worked on for this – draft commitments – http://forum.opengovernment.org.uk/conversations/450
    - Realistically therefore for the commitments to be approved by Government anything included in this initial plan will need to be developed, finalised and agreed by the end of October.
    - However the short term focus on finalising the plan should not constrain the wider aspirations of the Open Govt movement in Scotland as there is still much that should and can be done outside this initial plan.

The second part of the meeting opened the discussion up to look at what the priorities of Civil Society groups are for future Open Govt initiatives. In this discussion we were looking for both specific, implementable ideas as well as thematic priorities. The outcomes of these discussions are noted below, grouped under 3 key principles of open government – Transparency, Accountability and Participation.

Transparency

- Needs to be more than just putting out datasets. Availability is one thing but accessible and usable is more important.
    - How do citizens get it? Role for the media in this
    - Need for more active sharing - along with actively explaining facts and figures
    - What about those not digitally engaged?
    - Giving people info they need – in a way they want it and can understand
    - People need to understand the significance of data – e.g. was that the most effective use of resources to achieve best possible outcomes?
- App-based info – a public information app development centre?

- There should be a commitment to using open source public sector IT platforms
- Need a better informed citizenship generally regarding issues that concern them eg. What is the most effective resource deployment?
  - But could information overload result in declining engagement?
- Not just Govt that produces useful information. We need to make more of citizens collected data
  - Science world does this already, why not world of politics?
  - Citizen led social audits
- Resources needed as making things transparent and accessible costs – staff time, systems development and legal resources for example
- Beneficiary audit - of decisions made by government / public policy

Accountability

- Citizen's assembly / chamber – with right of investigation and right to advise and censure
- Need to link the National Performance framework to Open Government commitments
  - National Performance Framework to be mapped to the SDGs
  - Need to demonstrate that things have been done differently / new / additionally as a result of the SDG goals. Not just rebranding, repackaged. Otherwise credibility gap.
- Single Outcome Agreements between local Govt and central Govt - what are / were the sanctions if target are not met?
- Incentive – needs to be made clearer why should people want to be involved.
- Review targets and outcomes for health and social care - the targets are old fashioned and input based, need to be reshaped to improve accountability.
- Many processes for holding services etc. to account are complicated and seemed designed to prevent people using them – a need for clear, easy to understand, easily accessible, affordable and consistent systems across all levels/kinds of statutory bodies
- Single point of contact for public service complaints
  - Would be able to model feedback for proper response to complaints and an effective reporting process
  - But evidence suggests that this can lead to too institutionalised responses.
- Top down willingness is required for mechanisms for accountability to really be open and actually deliver de facto accountability, rather than just going through the motions.
- If Govt decides to invest in a particular mechanism they will often get defensive of it eg. Named persons scheme. This can make it very difficult for funded organisations to actively criticise or question.

Participation

- Actually deliver on the 1% participatory budgeting target

- Need inclusive mechanisms for involvement – and people need to know why they might want to get involved

    o Participation initiatives need to focus on issues that people actually care about

- Government consultations need to be fit for purpose

    o Standard 3 month government consultations are not participative and serve a narrow purpose

    o Timescales need to reflect the complexity and size of issues being raised.

    o Institute a practice of open neutral government consultations – i.e. not done or analysed by the people responsible for the policy

- Involve people in decision making processed at all levels (Scot Govt. local Authorities, health boards, IJBs) but also involve statutory organisations and local groups

    o Simply publishing a consultation on an issue is not an involving or meaningful way of co-producing

    o Do it in a way which is accessible, meaningful and important to all people e.g. consider the needs of people with cognitive impairments

    o Ask people what matters to them and how they want to be involved – then keep them involved throughout the process, including reviewing the decisions

- Implement the 'Participation Request' system introduced in the Community Empowerment Act – and monitor to ensure it is meaningfully used and responded to.

- Follow through on processes – Fairer Scotland and Healthier Scotland conversations – what happens next?

- The integration of Health and Social Care presents a key opportunity for improvements in participation and collaboration

    o Are there opportunities to coproduce new / revised health and social care targets?

- The new powers for Scot. Govt. re welfare and employability could be good areas to focus on. Given that it is a fresh start there is opportunity to get the tone and systems right from the start.

- Build community level discussion infrastructures e.g. TINGS

- All decisions made using 'mini-publics' and participatory budgeting

- A governance project – to innovate on how institutions are governed

- Resources needed to cover the costs of better engagement – costs to organisations, individuals, Scot. Govt and collaborative partners

- Democracy Academy – a collaborative centre for the study of good practice and innovation

- Education for participation form the early years upwards

    o Continually involve children and young people in matters that concern them thus building up an expectation and experience of participating

- - Realise the goals of the Curriculum for excellence – engaged citizens and effective communicators
- International collaboration – have a north/south OGP partnership with Malawi that creates space for honest, open, 'warts and all' public dialogue in both countries about OGP. A 2 way sharing as partners (not preaching) to strengthen governance in both countries.
- Citizen Assembly (2nd chamber)
- Fix local democracy
- Increase not just the awareness of the SDG's but also public engagement and buy in. have a website 'Globalgoals.scot' through which the public can share examples of what they and their communities ae doing for SDG – in a visual compelling and engaging way
  - Use this to get a sense of the SDGs as something not just government but the people of Scotland are engaged in and responsible for.

Our Network

In the 3rd part of the meeting we looked at the role, purpose and operations of the Open Govt. Network in Scotland. This was an initial exploratory conversation and will need to be pursued with the wider membership.

Currently the Scottish network is very open and quite loosely defined – essentially anyone who joins the forum http://forum.opengovernment.org.uk/groups/opengovscot

However as it grows and becomes more active the lessons learnt from other parts of UK suggest there will be a need to formalise the network to enable it to effectively co-ordinate action etc.

What should the role of the Network be?
- Are we co-producing with Scottish Govt. or are we a lobby group?
  - Tim explained that in the UK network it is a combination of both – Crowdsourcing ideas, then lobbying, then sit down and work out shared opportunities, co-production – so ideally both
- A collective voice – or does this weaken / limit the pressure power of individual groups?
- An engine for new ideas
- A mechanism to directly engage with Govt.
- A focus point to expand involvement, initiate outreach and increase engagement
- A mechanism for mobilising civil society organisations
- A way of monitoring Govt. progress, and pushing for action as required

  - ✓ While people were generally keen to keep the role of the network quite open and evolving it was recognised that establishing some draft terms of reference for further discussion would help us move forward.

Membership

At present there are no criteria for membership, other than to show an interest. In Scotland membership therefor is open to those from civil society organisations, interested individuals and people from government.

- Should the network be civil society only?

Currently the UK and NI networks are just civil society and provide a space for members to talk, debate etc. away from government
- While the value of this was recognised the general sense from the room was that at present we want to keep the membership open to both and work in partnership.

- Individual or group members – i.e. are members 'representing' or signed up in an individual capacity?
Currently the UK and NI networks all members are members individually (i.e. not signing their organisation up to anything) but then when there are statements made on behalf of the networks members mobilise their groups / organisations to sign up to the specific statement. Would that work here?
  - While the sense from the room was that we did not yet want to establish limiting criteria for membership some guidelines about what membership entailed would be useful

Steering Group

- Is there a need for a formal steering group?
  - An open steering group which played a more active role in proposing ideas would be valuable - but not an executive group making decisions on behalf of the network
  - The network as a whole could then establish business committees or standing groups to do specific tasks.

Action:

- Establish some proposals to address the governance points raised and circulate to the membership for discussion on the forum
  - SCVO and Involve can support getting this moving