



Response To The Scottish Government Consultation

The Role Of A Scottish Futures Trust In Infrastructure Investment In Scotland.

The Wise Group

The Wise Group is one of the Scotland's leading social enterprises and has a central mission to help those outside of, or disadvantaged within, the labour market to change their lives by improving their employability and by contributing to the sustainable regeneration of the communities in which they live.

Since 1983 the Wise Group has provided a range of employment focused services that contribute to the physical regeneration of communities, from the start working with a clear focus on both people and place. From landscaping, fencing, tree planting, environmental improvements and maintenance, building, housing insulation and home safety and security activities; the Wise Group has delivered a range of physical regeneration programmes that have provided much needed real work experience for long term unemployed people.

The Wise Group is not expert in the technical and legal frameworks in which this proposal is based and for that reason has not answered the specific questions detailed in the consultation document. Instead this response highlights some key points that, from the Wise Group's experience both as a deliverer of regeneration activities in Scotland, and as an active player within the welfare to work arena, where services are increasingly delivered by profit making institutions, will hopefully contribute some useful perspectives as this proposal is taken forward.

Key Points

- ▶ Public procurement has immense potential to ensure value for money and legacy from public spend and to increase the sphere of influence of government at a local and national level. There is far greater potential for government to influence the way in which the private, public and third sectors operate by using procurement as a driver of change.
- ▶ The profit-making imperative that drives many of the organisations increasingly being drawn into the public service arena can be at odds with the principles inherent in public service delivery. Our experiences of delivering people-focussed activities through welfare to work contract reinforce this: there is for some organisations a tension between maximising profit and providing services that meet the best interests of the individuals served.

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- ▶ The idea of a body, that whilst able to draw on the opportunities open to the private sector is also not driven to maximise profits for return to shareholders is a welcome one. The consultation document however does not explore options open to it within the sphere of social enterprise, which would allow the creation of a surplus for reinvestment in future activities, without the distribution of profit to shareholders.
- ▶ The creation of an independent body should also allow for a greater focus on the wider added value that the kind of large-scale infrastructure projects planned for within this document can produce. An obligation on the SFT to consider all possibilities for social clause insertions and for the broadest possible definition of best value could have a huge impact, not just for value for money, but in increasing the long term impact of infrastructure investments for local communities. There is no reason why local unemployed people cannot be given training and employment opportunities in the building of a new school, and such opportunities would have complex layers of benefit. Many of these people may themselves be the parents of children attending the schools, thus potentially impacting on child poverty and on their social mobility.
- ▶ Any new body would have to be accountable and what is lacking in this proposal is any explanation of what structures would be put in place to ensure this accountability.

The Wise Group welcomes the tone of and principles behind this proposal and will follow with interest the future development of the Scottish Futures Trust.

Contact

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