

Briefing from SCVO's Rural Team on the rural dimension of the Big Lottery Fund's Big Thinking consultation

Big Thinking Consultation

The Big Lottery Fund (BIG) distributes 50% of lottery funding and provides support in the broad areas of education, health, environment and community. It also provides a small number of international grants. BIG is consulting on the development of its strategic funding policies for 2009 –

2015. In Scotland BIG, wishes to continue and refine Investing in Communities. The Growing Community Assets (GCA) strand of Investing in Communities funded voluntary organisations wishing to obtain and develop assets. However, SCVO believes that it failed to provide adequate support for village halls and community facilities.



How can you respond?

The Big thinking consultation is an online only survey. Go to www.bigthinking.org.uk

Once in the consultation survey pages at <http://www.big-thinking.org.uk/consultationsurvey.aspx> you'll see the survey questions on the left. Unfortunately you can't see the Scotland questions until you have answered the UK ones. You'll probably want to see them all before you formulate your thoughts and get it down on paper.

Therefore it's probably best to download and print the guidelines and outlines of the questions at <http://www.big-thinking.org.uk/consultationsurvey.aspx> first.

See <http://www.big-thinking.org.uk/content/Big%20thinking%20-%20final%20guide.pdf>

The questionnaire starts with 10 'Big Questions' at UK level. Then you can go on supplementary questions for Scotland. The questions are quite focussed and don't allow much opportunity for addressing specific issues with Investing in Communities funding. Comments on the failure of Investing in Communities – Growing Community Assets to deliver for village halls are probably best addressed in question 3 of the Scotland questions.

Scotland questions

Question 3 – Does Investing in Communities need to be improved or revised to help communities and voluntary organisations deal with current or future changes? If so, how?

Background

Village halls summit 2008

The Village Halls Summit 2008 was a conference for village halls, organised by SCVO. It was an opportunity to hear from funders, politicians and civil servants who provide support for community buildings, and to put questions to them in the panel session. Alison Magee from the Big Lottery took part in the panel debate. She urged village halls to respond to consultation and agreed that it was important for funders to work more closely together.

At the summit delegates called for:

- recognition that halls need to generate income but that it needs to be balanced against social needs and values
- current lottery funding streams to be reviewed in light of the needs of hall committees
- simplified and unified grant application forms. There could be a common form from several funders for halls that are more coordinated in terms of timings of deadlines and spend

Christine Scullion from the Robertson Trust also made the point that many communities do not want an all-singing, all-dancing hall just a small hall that can act as a social gathering place.



Village halls research

Community facilities in rural Scotland: A study of their use, provision and condition. Scottish Government Social Research 2008.

This research was based on a postal survey of 322 halls and a number of case studies.

Key points arising from the research underpin the collective feelings expressed at the Village Halls Summit 2008 that the Growing Community Assets strand of Investing in Communities was failing rural communities in their aspirations to maintain and develop vital facilities.

The research highlights concerns about the age and condition of rural community facilities. It showed two thirds of rural community facilities are over 50 years and are in need of improvements to be fit for purpose. Repairs are needed to address poor physical fabric and high running costs associated with the energy forms used and poor energy efficiency.

A major concern highlighted in the report is the policy of Investing in Communities not to fund general purpose meeting places or sporting provision but to focus on funding proposals that mix economic and social purposes. This is seen by BIG to be a more sustainable approach for communities. However, the research challenges the view. Findings suggest the principal purpose of rural community facilities was for providing a venue for activities generated by the local community rather than as a locus for services. Delivery of public services was fairly uncommon (84% delivered none) and only small proportion of halls could be described as multi-service outlets (MSO's). Despite this, and the age and condition of the buildings, nearly 90% of facilities surveyed covered their running costs, including minor repairs, from rental income.

One of the case study halls had had an outline application to Investing in Communities declined on the grounds that they were only seeking money for a general purpose meeting place and they should consider other uses for the building such as an internet café. This model was seen to be at variance with what the local community believed to be sustainable and functional. Rather than seek a larger multi-roomed building which served a multitude of purposes, this community group believed that a smaller building in keeping with traditional models was best suited to their community needs.

The report points out that, "MSO buildings represent larger capital investments and generally require (and generate) greater revenues. They generate larger surpluses, but perhaps are no more sustainable than single purpose buildings because their need for reinvestment is greater."

One hall manager said, "We need recognition of the needs of small communities where nothing else exists and less talk of social enterprise which would be a non-starter here."

Rural community facility managers called for a model of funding for community facilities that recognises the particular circumstances of rural areas; the capacity for communities with differing social, demographic and geographical circumstances to be self-reliant and self-generating; and the need for a funding regime that recognises the diverse needs of communities, and, therefore, the type of buildings which are appropriate for them.

The report suggests a more basic approach to capital funding aimed at making halls more comfortable to be in and address the downward spiral that occurs if the basics are not considered first. Investment in basic energy conservation measures and more efficient heating systems could address some of these problems.

The research found that nearly 20% of halls are not owned by the local community but are managed by them. Many of these arrangements have been in place for a number of years and have been successful partnerships between local authorities, estates and other. Investing in Communities – Growing Community Assets have been reluctant to fund communities with such arrangements to their disadvantage.



Scotland Rural Development Programme

The Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) is a £1.6 billion programme of economic, environmental and social measures designed to develop rural Scotland until 2013. Funding for communities is available in two measures, Rural Development Contracts – Rural Priorities and LEADER.

Rural Priorities is a competitive fund to deliver targeted environmental, social and economic benefits. The Community Services and Facilities option will fund projects that add to or improve community facilities in rural areas. It includes building renovation and new build, internet café facilities, sports equipment and facilities, catering accommodation, feasibility studies and project management. It will fund up to 50% of costs at present.

LEADER is a bottom-up method of delivering support for rural development through implementing a local rural development strategy. Support is aimed primarily at small-scale, community driven projects that are pilot and innovative in nature. Most LEADER programmes can support community facility projects but there is limited scope to support large capital proposals.

Communities wishing to access fund through these programmes will look to Investing in Communities for match funding. Investing in Communities should complement SRDP funding to allow communities to meet both funder's requirements and complete funding packages by providing a unified approach to funding. This could include requiring similar evidence of need and timings of deadlines and spend.

SCVO's response to Scotland question 3

The output from the Village Halls Summit 2008 and results of the 2008 research highlight a number of points. It provides evidence that rural community facilities that act as general purpose meeting places have been operating for a long time, most over 50 years and still manage to meet their running costs in a sustainable way. They do, however, require an injection of capital to bring the older buildings up to standard and make them warm and comfortable places. But the model of multi-service outlet and social enterprise is rejected by the communities.

SCVO believes that Investing in Communities needs to better reflect the needs of rural communities and enable them to provide community facilities that best fit their own needs and aspirations. Investing in Communities need to be revised to:

- Fund general purpose meeting places, without the need to provide multi service outlets.
- Address the need to for capital improvement and repair of rural community facilities, particularly focussing on energy conservation and efficiency.
- Recognise that a significant proportion of community facilities are managed for their communities through leasing arrangements and that they should not be disadvantaged in access to Investing in Communities funding.
- Recognise the requirements and criteria of other funders of community facilities including the Scotland Rural development Programme and work towards simplified and unified grant applications. There could be a common form from several funders for community facilities and more coordination in terms of timings of deadlines and spend.

Links

Village Halls Summit 2008

<http://www.villagehalls.org.uk/Images/Publications/Village%20Halls%20Summit%202008%20Report.pdf>

Community facilities in rural Scotland: A study of their use, provision and condition

<http://www.villagehalls.org.uk/Images/Publications/Community%20facilities%20in%20rural%20scotland%20-%20full%20report.pdf>

Scotland Rural Development Programme – Rural Priorities

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Rural/SRDP/RuralPriorities>

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