

accumulated outcomes



Messages from Scottish community regeneration



This paper is a collation of some of the most commonly expressed views and opinions of participants in the Open Forum Programme in 2005-08

The objectives of the Open Forum programme are to:

- Create Open Forum events that are accessible, relevant and appropriate so that exchange of knowledge and experience and learning can take place.
- Provide a variety of perspectives on community regeneration matters.
- Produce and disseminate Outcomes Papers from the Forum events to better inform and, hopefully, influence policy and other decision-makers in Scotland.
- Gather relevant information from around Scotland, the rest of the U.K. and elsewhere and make it available to the regeneration sector in Scotland.
- Make information that is topical and relevant to regeneration readily and freely available at SURF networking programme events, through dissemination of reports and summaries to members of SURF networks and other stakeholders, and joint activities with other organisations as well as online.



This paper was written with the aim of disseminating some of the views of people who either work, or are otherwise active, in the community regeneration field.

The material is intended for a general audience of professionals and non-professionals alike and for those from different backgrounds, whether Scottish Government civil servants, local government elected members or officers, community or voluntary representatives, etc.

The views described are entirely those of participants in the Open Forum programme and do not necessarily reflect the views of SURF or the Scottish Government. They are offered as a broad reflection of the Open Forum outcomes rather than as a fully representative analysis or survey.



Some of the expressed views and opinions of participants in the Open Forum Programme:

Partnership Working

- There was a deep and broad consensus among participants that partnership working is key to delivering effective and sustainable regeneration.
- There were, however, marked differences of opinion about how good we are at working together and operating in partnership.
- Participants were very supportive of the view that all stakeholders need to embrace an effective partnership approach and promote the benefits of partnership working.
- The partnership approach was argued to be essential to securing long-term and sustainable value for public investment.
- Some participants felt there had been a period of constant change and a profusion of agencies, organisations and programmes. They cited examples of the difficulties and opportunities this could create. During this period, there had been the changing Community Planning landscape, the new Fairer Scotland Fund and the establishment of Urban Regeneration Companies.
- Participants supported a continued emphasis on 'learning organisations', and there was reference made to the benefits of using the 'Learning in Regeneration Skills Pack' published by the Scottish Government's Scottish Centre for Regeneration.



Area-Based Regeneration versus General Approach

- A few participants argued that there may have been a weakening around the consensus on the need, in regeneration, to concentrate resources on the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods.
- Some participants emphasised the need to guard against the possibility of area regeneration activity that merely displaces the poor and disadvantaged. Others advised that a similar vigilance is needed against unintended or unforeseen exclusion of minorities from the benefits of regeneration projects.

Long Term Value

- Regeneration, for many participants, is essential to securing long-term and sustainable value for public investment. They held that regeneration requires a holistic and multi-stakeholder partnership approach that seeks to combine diverse skills, knowledge and experience to ensure maximum returns and sustainable outcomes, rather than unsustainable quick fixes, from any individual item of public investment.
- For virtually all participants an un-integrated focus on single components of Scottish social, cultural and economic life would almost certainly fail to secure such value.
- Many participants reported that evaluation is being increasingly practised across all regeneration activities. For these participants, the challenge is now to ensure effective evaluation practice and for outcome-based approaches to be used by all Community Planning stakeholders.



Some of the expressed views and opinions of participants in the Open Forum Programme:

Reaching the Unengaged

- On reaching difficult-to-engage groups (such as homeless drug or alcohol abusers) there were many examples of excellent practice and sustainable successes illustrated at Open Forums. For most participants, however, the imperative was to disseminate these examples and encourage others to take up 'what works'.
- Some participants felt that one group of 'unengaged' were senior decision makers who often 'just do not come to the (Community Planning) table'.

Making An Impact

- Many regeneration practitioners at Open Forums reported on their struggles to influence policy makers and other decision makers.
- Many of those participants who believe they may be making an impact at a local level found it extremely difficult to find out whether they are doing so, or to measure this impact.
- There was a widely held view among participants that community and voluntary organisations need to become more skilled and knowledgeable in presenting 'their case'. Campaigning and lobbying is not enough – evidence is essential.



Cross Sector Engagement

- For some participants, a start could be made on building a clearer understanding and acceptance of the respective contributions that each sector can make to regeneration efforts.
- In the view of many Open Forum participants the public sector and the private sector are well experienced and competent in engaging *within* their sectors. They are however, for some of these same participants, less good at engaging *across* the sectors.
- In the view of some private sector participants at Open Forums, the public sector must more clearly articulate what it wants from engagement and speak with a consistent voice. These participants spoke particularly about differences, and at times inconsistencies, between departmental positions within local authorities.

Trust and Transparency

- Supporting the idea of trust among partners has been treated a bit like a desirable but 'soft' aim.
- 'Trust' is, for almost all participants who expressed an opinion, a critical and concrete driver in the effectiveness of regeneration partnership.
- The issue of trust can be easily extended across social and economic life.



Some of the expressed views and opinions of participants in the Open Forum Programme:

Where are we on Engagement?

- A significant number of community and voluntary sector participants at Open Forums expressed sincere, but controversial, opinions based on their experiences that community organisations are still viewed as troublesome by some official agency players, which can lead to their being sidelined and excluded.
- There were assertions and recognition from many participants from different backgrounds that well-established community level organisations can provide regeneration partnerships with a rich source of 'expert' local knowledge and experience.
- In the experience of some participants, community and voluntary organisations had provided platforms for individual representatives and activists to grow in confidence.
- Community organisations were accused by a few Open Forum participants of unequal representation of their constituent communities – but they and other participants hastened to add that this was against a background of such organisations struggling for their very existence.
- Strong support for 'good old basic community development' with skilled workers attached to community organisations was expressed by many Open Forum participants from the community and voluntary sectors.
- The changing role of elected councillors was for some Open Forum participants a potentially promising area of civic renewal.

Need for Longer Timescales

- Many Open Forum participants asserted that, in area-based regeneration initiatives where local authority departments or Scottish Government Agencies are involved, there is a need for them to commit to a greater local presence over longer-term scales. It was agreed that this would provide valuable support for knowledge creation and sustainable capacity building on the part of local community and voluntary sector organisations.
- Open Forum participants from the community development field felt that *community regeneration* needs to emerge alongside *community development*. Both need resources and perseverance over adequately long timescales.

What about Empowerment?

- Many Open Forum participants from the voluntary and community sectors felt that their experience of interaction with public sector agencies was limited to involvement in consultations and receiving information.
- There was periodic debate among Open Forum participants on whether communities want full empowerment or just better public services. The broad consensus was that it was a matter of assessing with communities which option, or mix of options, their members wanted and had the capacity for.
- The same participants also mostly supported the view that there were persuasive arguments for the need to align 'civic' empowerment in the workplace, whether in the public or private sector.
- Some participants pointed out that significant factors in community regeneration, such as welfare benefits and employment policies, were reserved matters well out-with the direct control or influence of community level stakeholders and the Scottish Parliament.



More on Open Forums

Format

Open Forums have a range of formats, which include presentations given by expert speakers, themed facilitated workshops, plenary debates and question-and-answer sessions with specially invited panellists.

Location

Open Forums are held six times per year at venues across Scotland. In 2005-08, Forum events took place in Aberdeen, Ayrshire, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, Perth and Stirling.

Participants

A distinct aspect of the Open Forum events is that they are free of charge and participants come from a wide and diverse range of backgrounds, interests and experience and in various capacities.

All Open Forums in 2005-08 were attended by representatives from:

- Local Authorities
- Private Companies (including housing developers, architects, law firms, consultancies and banks)
- Third Sector Organisations (including housing associations, charities, community groups, social enterprises and other voluntary sector bodies)

Most Open Forums in 2005-08 were attended by representatives from:

- Academic Institutions (including staff and students)
- Community Planning Partnerships
- Scottish Government (and its agencies and sounding board members)
- Urban Regeneration Companies



More on Open Forums

Some Open Forums in 2005-08 were attended by representatives from:

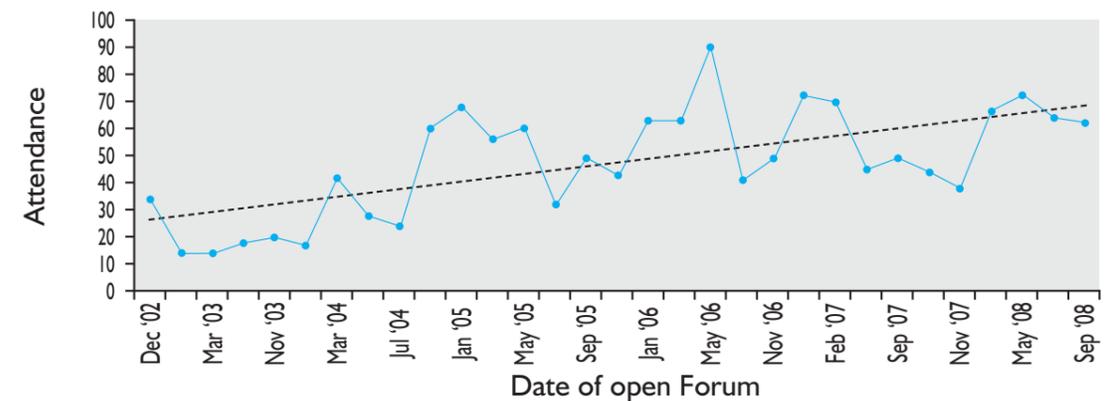
- Community Health & Care Partnerships
- Fire & Rescue Services
- Health Boards
- Non-governmental Funding Bodies (including Big Lottery Fund in Scotland and Social Investment Scotland)
- Other Public Sector Agencies (including Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Regeneration Agencies and Local Enterprise Companies)
- Professional Bodies

The seniority of representatives ranged from chief executives, senior partners and national coordinators to project managers and officers. Also in regular attendance were community regeneration managers, independent consultants, housing officers, voluntary community activists, policy officers, lecturers, and chairpersons.

Attendance

Participation at Open Forums has risen progressively over time (see graph below). The average Open Forum attendance over the 2005-08 period was 57 guests.

Open Forum attendance over time



Feedback

After each Open Forum, SURF produces an Outcomes Paper that summarises the key points made during each event. They are subsequently disseminated to key regeneration policy-makers in Scotland. Outcomes Papers are available to download from the 'Knowledge Centre' section of the SURF website (www.scotregen.co.uk).

Evaluation of the Open Forum Programme

If you want to find out more or make a suggestion

Suggestions or comments on topics or themes for the Open Forum events are always welcome. To make suggestions, or for further information, contact:

Government

The Scottish Government has commissioned two independent evaluations of the programme. Both identified further areas of improvement and were broadly favourable:

“Stakeholder interviews and the participants’ survey suggest that the Open Forum Series has had a positive impact in relation to meeting one its key objectives – enhancing regeneration practice in Scotland.”

“Participants’ evaluations of Open Forums show a relatively high level of satisfaction with the quality of Open Forums across key indicators such as speakers, venues, administration, the value of discussion and use of one’s time.”

The above extracts are from the 2008 evaluation of the SURF Open Forum series by Hexagon Research & Consulting

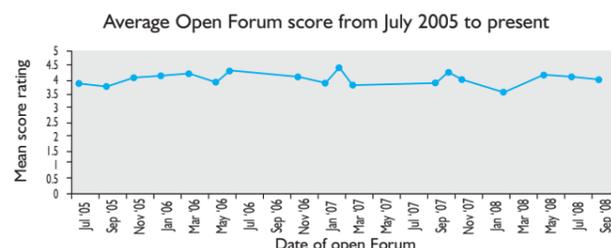
“Almost two-thirds of those who have participated in these events reported that topics have ‘contributed to their knowledge of the regeneration field’.”

“SURF is regarded as part of the network of organisations that can influence the policy development process in Scotland as an established organisation with a good name and reputation for a commitment to high professional standards.”

The above extracts are from the 2005 evaluations of the SURF Open Forum series by Docherty Consulting Ltd

Participants

After each event, SURF ask participants what they think of it by asking them to complete a brief evaluation form. One of the questions we ask is, “overall, how did you rate this seminar as a good use of your time?” In 2005-08, participants on average scored the events as 4.02 out of 5, where 1=very poor and 5=very good (see graph below).



What’s Next

The Scottish Government continues to fund the Open Forum programme from 2008 to 2011.

Future Open Forums will be more closely aligned to selected and relevant National Outcomes within the Scottish Government’s Strategic Objectives.

SURF will also develop a wider range of formats and scales for events in order to demonstrate a stronger influence on Scottish regeneration policy.



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SURF is the independent regeneration network for Scotland.

The SURF network aims to be the primary arena for debate on community regeneration in Scotland. It acts as a channel for information, consultation and policy proposals, based on the knowledge and experience of its membership and wider connections.

SURF network activity includes seminars, conferences, international policy exchanges, annual awards for best practice and the distribution of the quarterly Scotregen journal.

This all provides a truly independent network to explore current practice, experience and knowledge, with which to positively influence the development of successful regeneration policy.

SURF was established in 1992 as a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. It is directed by a board of voluntary directors drawn from across its wide cross-sector membership of over 300 organisations.

SURF members range in size from small community groups to some of Scotland’s largest private companies. Membership organisations also include local authorities, housing associations, health boards, academic institutions, professional bodies, voluntary organisations and charities.

SURF is grateful to the Scottish Government’s Scottish Centre for Regeneration for funding the Open Forum programme.

