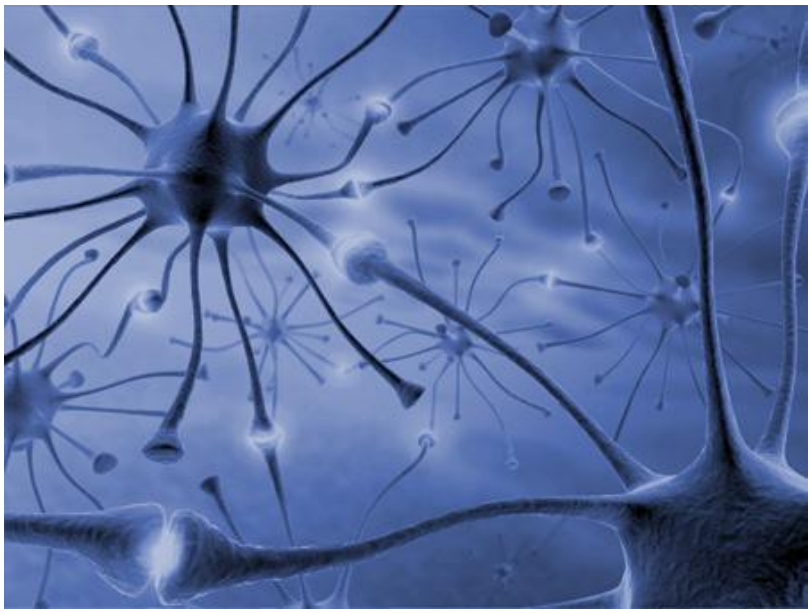
SURF
Scotland's Regeneration Forum

SURF : sharing experience : shaping practice



Lessons for Local Governance and Regeneration

A special SURF conference on Thursday 22 March 2018, 10am-2.30pm
Pearce Institute, Govan

This paper:

- **sets out the purpose and context of the event;**
- **notes relevant learning points from SURF's place focused collaborations under our Alliance for Action programme of work;**
- **summarises key points from our recent consultations with Community, Local Authority, Third Sector and Private sector colleagues and contacts.**

We hope this information will support a lively and constructive cross sector discussion. That will help SURF to make the most informed and influential input to the current Scottish Government and CoSLA Review of Local Governance.

At the same time, we hope this paper and the day's discussions will further enhance mutual understanding and active cooperation across all of the different sectors and partners who are committed to more successful community regeneration in Scotland. That is SURF's main aim.

1 Purpose of the conference

- To draw on the accumulated experience and learning of SURF's regeneration related networks and contacts; especially via its Alliance for Action programme and related partners.
- To help inform and influence the Scottish Government's considerations under the present Local Governance review and any subsequent legislation.

In doing so it will focus on:

- The challenges for community regeneration in disadvantaged places,
- Place focused regeneration policy, practice and resources
- The perspectives of different sectors and players involved
- The influences of wider policy, resources and decision making.
- The scope for enhancing local governance structures and decision making processes, for the shared benefit of increasing efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability in community regeneration.

2 Context

2.1 Shared practice and learning

SURF's longstanding advocacy for, and active support of, community focused regeneration is best evidenced via:

- The annual SURF Awards for Best Practice in Community regeneration and the popular follow through shared learning events.
- SURF's, cross sector Alliance for Action programme. It is supported by the Scottish Government, HIE and relevant Local Authority partners. It connects local regeneration knowledge, priorities and initiatives to wider structures, partners, policies and resources.

Two key learning points arising from these activities are:

- The further potential of local knowledge, assets and activity in identifying and driving well targeted responses to particular community challenges and opportunities
- The shared benefits of making informed connections and investments, based on the intelligent allocation of roles and resources at the appropriate level of capacity and responsibility.

That concern for more informed and productive collaboration, was the central theme of SURF's well received 2016 'Manifesto for Regeneration'. It provided a series of nine practical recommendations. Collectively, these were aimed at constructively linking the benefits and further potential of the Scottish Government's place and community empowerment focus, to its wider priorities for tackling poverty and inequality, improving services and developing a more inclusive economy at both national and local levels.

2.2 A shared opportunity

SURF has therefore warmly welcomed the opportunity to draw on the knowledge, perspectives and practical proposals of its cross sector Alliance for Action partners, to help inform the present Scottish Government's current Review of Local Governance. That process, which is also supported by CoSLA,

appears to offer the prospect of better connecting the complex reality of local places, with wider and highly influential service delivery and decision making structures.

The stated purpose of the SG review:

"We believe that communities – large and small - can thrive when they have greater control over the decisions which matter to them most. The Local Governance Review is a big opportunity to consider how the power that government currently holds could be used differently in local areas. This means local people increasingly deciding for themselves how best to reduce inequalities in their area, and how best to promote a local economy which has opportunities for all. We want to hear ambitious ideas from communities the length and breadth of Scotland about how a new approach to local decision-making could be made to work for them". *Alasdair McKinlay, Scottish Government*

To help us all make the most of the extensive knowledge and experience of SURF's diverse networks, we have also undertaken additional and separate consultations on how local governance could be improved from the perspective of community, third sector, local authority and private sector partners.

3 Perspectives and proposals

3.1 SURF'S Alliance for Action learning

Firstly, here is a summary of some relevant lessons from our Alliance for Action collaborations in Govan, East Kirkcaldy, Rothesay and Dunoon.

- **Productive Partnerships** – Collaboration adds value to any governance process. The Alliance for Action approach of identifying, facilitating and developing links between partners within and out with communities, improves access to, and the targeting of, investment and delivery opportunities.
- **Adding value** – The promotion of collaborative working by a respected, objective 'outsider', like SURF, increases the identification and achievement of shared benefits. It does so by encouraging the collective efforts of local players, informing policy makers and by helping to ensure that funder's processes and investments can engage more effectively with the varied realities of the local regeneration context, in a 'safe' coordinated collaboration.
- **Creative approaches –** There is increasingly wide appreciation of 'creativity' as an inclusive and effective medium for initiating, enhancing and extending community engagement and capacity building; in contrast to conventional consultative and 'representation' processes.
- **Preventative Investment –** Leading local projects and third sector agencies are frequently lauded for producing substantial preventative spend benefits for wider society. However, even those which are cited as national exemplars often struggle from year to year to sustain their core programmes. Grossly disproportionate amounts of time and energy are wasted by creative leaders chasing short term 'survival funds'. This damages the concept of community led regeneration, as well as the capacity of key individuals and 'anchor' organisations.

- **Community realities** – Place based regeneration initiatives are likely to fail when the community is not adequately engaged. A persistent challenge is in identifying what or who the relevant 'community' is. Well intended policies, professional advocates and consultants tend to underestimate the natural volatility, variable capacity and historic grievances within any community. It is essential to account for the reality that the day to day challenges facing residents in poorer communities increase internal tensions and decrease capacity for external engagement.
- **External realities** – Issues of governance cannot be realistically addressed in isolation from the external forces which can destabilise and rupture best laid plans. The most substantial local regeneration efforts are inevitably in thrall to powerful external degenerative forces over which they have little or no control.
- **Regeneration realities** – Actors operating at the local level can do little to influence the impact of high-level 'hard to reach' political and private sector investment decisions. It is important to openly acknowledge that these have a much more profound effect on the lives and opportunities of local people and businesses than even the most substantial attempts at local collaborations on regeneration strategies and investments.
- **Fixing a false narrative** – Despite genuine efforts to understand the community consequences of policy and funding decisions, the personal and professional remoteness of decision-makers and processes tends to obscure their role and rationale from those most affected by their decisions. That gap in culture and operating context can generate undeliverable expectations at both ends of the process. Over time, a generally false public narrative of 'failure' in local regeneration efforts has tended to obscure significant successes and drain the mutual confidence required for substantial and sustained investments.

Secondly, what follows is a list of summarised points, gleaned from a series of sector specific consultations that SURF has carried out over recent weeks. N.B. As is always the case in inclusive consultations, there are elements of contradiction and repetition in the lists below. SURF is grateful for all of the individually contributed views. They are all useful in informing awareness of different perspectives and the collective debate but it should not be assumed that SURF or its members agree with all of them.

3.2 Community perspectives

- **Funding-** There's a general view that while those who promote community engagement and empowerment talk a good game, these processes are rarely adequately funded.
- **Participatory budgeting** – The value and further potential of these initiatives is recognised but, unless sufficient time and money is invested in the delivery system, as well as in the end product, their impact will be limited.
- **Exploit existing potential** - People in communities should be trained/upskilled to deliver local engagement programmes. Professionals from outside who are paid to support communities are, in effect, taking already limited resources out of the communities.
- **Copy what already works** - Lots of other places and countries have methods of enhanced local governance which work better than UK.

- **Transparency** – Too many important decisions for communities are still taken behind closed doors. Decisions, and the processes which inform them, should be explained in plain non patronising language and be made widely available.
- **More decentralisation and localisation** - Power over management of budgets and resources should be devolved to the lowest possible level. This could involve support for frequent referenda, with simple online systems so that everyone is encouraged to participate.
- **Social engineering** - Stop making things worse by 'offloading' the most damaged and vulnerable people into areas already struggling with poverty. Policies and strategies should be aimed at preventing the concentration of disadvantage in communities.
- **End monopolies** -Legislation should prevent monopoly control or ownership of property or land in concentrated areas. There should be a limit on the percentage of homes owned by one agency, whether they are housing associations or private landlords. Remind government and politicians that they are there to serve
- **Those in positions of influence should be reminded that:**
    - Politicians are there to serve the public
    - The people of Scotland are sovereign
    - We are guardians and stewards of our land – not owners
    - They should not assume that 'power' is theirs to give
    - Scottish Government and Westminster should start the review of governance by rethinking their own existing internal hierarchical power structures.

3.3 Local Authority perspectives

- **Community Empowerment**
    - The Community Empowerment Act is a potentially powerful tool. However, wealthier communities can be more demanding and they tend to suck up most resources.
    - It is not about whether, but about how, to move the discussion on towards greater community empowerment.
    - For some, there seems to be almost an unquestionable belief that communities will inevitably know best. In certain areas of concern, that may well be true but not always across the board.
    - We have to carefully think about what we mean by 'community'. Sometimes when we (Local Authorities) speak with community councils and local development trusts, we then get challenged by others that they do not represent 'the community'.
    - There is a general lack of trust around nowadays and this needs to be challenged. Social media is a useful tool but in a widespread climate of mistrust, it is too easily used to undermine any organization, collective body, politicians or anyone else who takes responsibility.
    - The Business Rates Incentivisation Scheme could be used more effectively at a National Level to help support community empowerment strategies, with longer term benefits across the board.

- Third sector social enterprises have a role to play in community empowerment; much like an extension to the previous Wider Role programme in mentoring and supporting communities.
- Local Authorities are often keen to identify and bring leading community activists on board; this is a natural route for democratic political development but that can also sometimes result in them becoming less effective, when they are seen by some as 'part of the establishment'.

- **Local Government Structures and Decentralisation**
  - Local Authorities already have the power to devolve a lot of decisions but resources are needed to support the shift from the more centralised aspects of authorities.
  - Just like other groups and individuals with their own particular reasons and interests, occasionally some local Councillors can try to stop things from happening within communities; sometimes by using the media to undermine the role of their own local authority.
  - We all benefit from more effective and efficient services when the local authority is in tune with the service users. The use of local information from communities is a significant resource and more could be made of it.
  - There are cases of local authorities just looking to tick a box, to say they have engaged with the community by using methods such as Customer Engagement. In other cases, there just aren't sufficient skills, time or financial resources to genuinely co-produce.
  - LAs and CPPs across the board need to be more innovative in community engagement and empowerment approaches but they are often too busy firefighting and providing vital statutory services to do that well.
  - We are not great at sorting out at what level we want to do things. Are there not things we could do better at a regional level?
  - Most authorities are politically clear about the localism agenda but unclear on which decisions at which local level – what is the scale?
  - Local Authority officers who are instructed to work with communities are not always adequately trained. Most have little knowledge of the processes and how to adequately "gear up" communities for successful and sustainable Community Asset Transfers. Meanwhile, Estates teams handling the CAT process have little knowledge of the mechanics of community engagement. For them, it is merely a property transaction.

- **Capacity Building**
  - The most vulnerable communities are challenged, not by lack of aspiration or opportunity, but by lack of support, skills, and confidence to successfully assess and navigate the opportunities that policy and legislation frameworks create.
  - The Scottish Government should provide training to poorer community organisations, so that it isn't just the job of already stretched community development staff in local authorities.
  - Communities are not in the business of rationalising services. While, the community should be at the heart of decision making; generally, they are often interested in doing specific things but less so in the wider service management and delivery agenda.

- Some communities will want to run services but others won't. Twenty years ago, most communities would have been in a better place to respond.
- We need to look at leadership skills and sustainability. This needs to do this before getting into bigger discussions. Where is the Scottish Government role in this? They should be getting specialist support in for communities who want to do more. We will all see the real possibilities once that support infrastructure is in place.
- Presently most disadvantaged communities are limited in their ability to respond. In many cases, there is a desire to get involved where they can but more leadership is needed. Even the better resourced ones are not always willing/able to tackle the more difficult and important challenges.
- Support to enable communities to take up opportunities is patchy across Scotland. There is real merit in looking at new ways of shared delivery community support across the public, private and third sector.
- Overall, there is patchy support/lack of understanding at LA level, lack of awareness, knowledge and signposting to the excellent but busy landscape of National Support, e.g. DTAS, etc.

- **Budget Restrictions**
  - Budget restrictions and single year budgets are causing real tensions within and between local authority departments. The community empowerment push is a positive opportunity but under present restrictions, the response from local authorities is all about money and austerity. That has a profound influence on what is actually happening in localities.
  - The practicality of LA's delivering improved outcomes in current circumstances is a big ask. They are up for being involved but the realities of the challenge has to be taken into account by the present review process.
  - We need to ensure there are effective innovative developments in how we effectively support community empowerment against a back drop ongoing service reductions and efficiency savings, combined with asset rationalisation; which often involves the removal of localised support services.

- **Power and Misdirection**
  - More affluent communities know how to navigate the intricacies of Community Asset Transfer etc. Vulnerable communities have the same aspirations; perhaps with stronger community spirit but they find it much harder to navigate the system, or to get a seat at the table of locality plans etc. So, we may inadvertently be creating greater inequalities.
  - This is ultimately about power – who should be the arbiter of the final decision?
  - We all try to find where the power dynamics are soft enough to deal with.
  - We seem to have largely missed the opportunity to build greater community engagement when the resources to support it were more available. It is not ideal to be now asking for community help to decide what has to be cut.
  - Just as can be the case in all sectors, we should also be aware that powers given to individual communities will not always be well used in the wider interest. There is no guarantee that a specific group will represent the views of the full community. There is

inevitably some risk of additional resentment, mistrust and divisions within and between communities.

3.4 Third Sector perspectives

- **Local Involvement, disempowerment and support –** There is a democratic deficit that can make people feel disempowered, councils are too large for people to feel that they can relate local issues and challenges to them, there is a case to be made for a more local layer of representation.

  Large or small, rural and urban community development trusts can help support their local neighbourhoods by working in partnership with local authorities. Their sustainability could be strengthened by working in stronger partnerships and with more financial and infrastructure support.

- **Budgets -** Taxation and budgets feel quite far removed from the local level. Most of the Scotland Government's resources come via the UK treasury, most of local authorities' funds come from the Scottish Government and not locally raised taxes. There should be more direct control and accountability.

- **Community Engagement -** Third sector organisations begin with community engagement to build momentum, consensus and vision. This is usually the point that the local authority get involved. There is a tendency for them to treat third sector organisations in a similar way to private developers I.E. they want to know how the business plan stacks up etc. when what is really needed, is to work in partnership on a viable delivery plan.

  CPP's could hold more regular outreach community engagement sessions where local people could feed in their views.

- **Political Relationships -** Local councillors can play a very positive role when political differences are pushed aside and relationships with the local authority are strong. Conversely, local politics and political differences can sometimes have a destructive impact on efforts to support greater community cohesion in already 'fragile' communities.

- **Land -** The focus has to be on motivating people to fully participate at the front end of planning, at the place plan and local development plan stage.

- **Relationships and Conflict -** There will always be conflict in small organisations but getting people to meet and talk about their visions, their hopes, promotes better practice in working together.

- **Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) –** For local people and groups, how and where to best engage with local community planning processes is a big challenge. Perhaps TSI's could play a stronger coordinating role in this respect. A document with a visual guide to the different structures would be useful.

- **Community Accountability -** There are some tools that can help get more local involvement and accountability. In physical development, the Place Standard, can help identify the big issues for a community; as could the idea of Community Place Plans in the draft Planning Bill offer opportunities, provided local communities are given sufficient resource and support.

3.5 Private Sector perspectives

- Local governance has to be inclusive, in that it involves public sector, businesses, cultural players and community based groups. It should be democratic and representative; and not driven by the bigger players, or those with a vested interest in a certain issue and outcomes.

- Community input is normally welcomed throughout the project, provided it is given in a manageable structured manner. Glasgow City Councils TRA's utilise a quarterly strategy group meeting with membership from elected councillors, community council, housing associations, local community groups and the private sector development partners. This, works well under a straightforward code of conduct, with transparency and within the development agreement framework.
- We should avoid going as far as individual "citizen governance" or petitioning if projects are to be delivered with the required momentum.
- A recurring issue for private developers and community groups is that planning contributions, ENV2 and the like, which are imposed on developers are not ring fenced and are not necessarily allocated for expenditure in the area of the development. Better local governance could include participatory budgeting to enable community participation in how and where the amounts raised are spent.
- There are many competing interests in any community and whilst what is good for the community is generally good for private developers, a formed community view should be communicated, co-ordinated and agreed by a strategy group or similar body.
- Better local governance should focus on facilitating good regeneration and avoid competitive tendering focused on land receipt and other financial metrics, over quality and sustainability.

Conference Programme

10.00 am	Gathering with coffee and pastries
10.30am	Welcome and purpose - **Kate Wimpress**, SURF Chair
10.45am	A review of Local Governance - What and Why? - **Alasdair McKinlay,** Scottish Gov.
11am	Learning by listening and doing - key messages – **Andy Milne & Elaine Cooper**, SURF
11.30am	**Table based discussions** - to identify practical present proposals and the scope for useful legislation in the longer term
12.30pm	Proposals, Reactions and **Panel Discussion**
1.15pm	Summary and what next - **Andy Milne,** SURF
1.30pm	Thanks and invitation to stay for more discussion over lunch – **Kate Wimpress**, SURF
1.45pm	Lunch and continued networking.