Panel 2 SLAED Response

1. During the inquiry the Committee has received evidence that community groups access to resources, both physical and financial, is overly bureaucratic and rarely available for a sufficient period of time to make a good start, much less complete their work. Do you consider this view broadly correct and if so how should it be remedied?

The availability of funds to provide support to community groups is largely determined by:

- the capacity of the various funding bodies, such as Councils, having the resources available to commit to this activity, and
- the process for determination of grant etc. awards – which has to ensure accurate targeting of resources, ensure best value and accountability in the use of these funds.

Increasingly community planning partnerships (CPPs) have adopted responsibility for the promotion of community engagement programmes and the channelling of resources to support this work. This makes sense as community groups can be faced with a myriad of potential connections with the work of community planning partners in their area and must themselves prioritise the actions they wish to pursue. It also permits the partnerships to focus their connections with communities in areas or on topics where they can achieve most success. Community engagement is at the heart of community planning and CPPs prioritise their efforts in this field accordingly.

In regard to the resource capacity available to support this work, inevitably there is significant pressure across the public sector and community engagement programmes compete with many other priorities for support. It can be difficult to maintain sufficient long-term commitment to such activities as a result. This is often a consequence of uncertainty that Councils have had over the commitment of resources in this field and inevitably there are instances where community projects could only be funded for short periods. It is important to recognise the value of sustaining community involvement at the outset of a regeneration programme and to build in capacity to support this work throughout the period of its work. There has been increasing recognition of the need for more sustained, long-term funding to be made available, rather than the fragmented approaches that have taken place in the past and the move towards CPPs has assisted this approach.

The targeting and use of funds has also been subject to constraint and the issue of eligibility to access funds is a perennial issue for regeneration. The targeting of funds towards, for example, the SIMD or regeneration areas, to CPP priority areas (for EU funds) led in the past to a complex environment of eligible areas and funding streams which led to a concentration of resources being made available in some communities and dearth of provision in others. The disbursement of grants has inevitably involved formal procedures for the targeting and subsequent access to funds and it is no surprise that some community groups express frustration with this approach. However CPPs and officers within regeneration areas have been able to support community groups to access these funds and to help knit together often complex packages of support that sustain an organisation.

In terms of a remedy, it makes sense:

- that arrangements for community engagement underpin the programme from the outset (engagement may involve a range of different activities involving different interest groups across a community),
- to ensure that resource availability can be sustained throughout the period of a regeneration project,
- that effort does not fragment into competing priorities,
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- is aligned well with the community plan,
- to demonstrate clearly the outcomes that community engagement can achieve.

2. How do Local Authorities use EU funding to support regeneration activity?

Local authorities have been central to the success of the various structural fund programmes that have operated across Scotland and have used these funds effectively to support regeneration activity. The use of EU funds is targeted and adds to the complement of funds directed towards regeneration from local authority, other Government, private and other sources. Regeneration officers across local authorities have adopted creative means of channelling these funds to secure maximum benefit for their communities and there are many examples across the country where successful use of EU funds can be witnessed.

There has been increased concern in recent years over the increased rigidity in the access to EU funds and a fragmenting of effort that has arisen as a result. EU funds added to the complexity of the funding environment and a fragmenting of effort that resulted. It is hoped that the new EU programmes currently in preparation will be able to adopt a more strategic, longer term and more flexible approach, aligning themselves more fully with the mainstream resources available from Government. The arrangements for the targeting and access to these funds has not yet been finalised and will be an important consideration in the direction of future regeneration activity.

3. A breakdown of the expenditure on economic development activity across all 32 local authorities (SLAED).

SLAED does not have a current breakdown of expenditure of its activities that presents its activity across all local authorities. This information is presently being gathered for the annual report, which will be available in November this year. The estimate for total expenditure in 2012/13 was £210 million across Scotland.

4. Information on local authority projects influenced by community engagement, as well information on how many of the 150 people attending the Falkirk Council engagement event referred to were actual community representatives/local people.

There are many ways in which local authority projects have been influenced by community engagement activities. In relation to the examples given at the meeting for the Falkirk Council area a set of documents is attached and a report which gives an overview and examples of the engagement activities that have taken place and the eventual content of the projects that have been put in place.

Further details on the Council’s economic regeneration activities can be found at:

http://www.myfuturesinfalkirk.co.uk/

And the work on town centre regeneration is featured at:

http://www.myfuturesinfalkirk.co.uk/towns/towns.aspx

In relation to the event mentioned at the Committee for Falkirk town centre, a note of the event is attached and a list of the people attending whose names were captured at registration. It should be noted that many more people attended than actually signed in. While most people attending were acknowledged to be local traders (and had been encouraged by the local Business Improvement District team to attend), there was a strong contingent of local residents who also attended. Many of these residents also attended related events that were held for the Falkirk Townscape Heritage Initiative, details of which are also attached.
At the meeting, the community engagement activities of the Helix Project were also highlighted. This work has been integral to this innovative regeneration project and fuller details of this are available on the project website:

http://www.thehelix.co.uk/