Strategy and Policy Issues

1. **How can the linkage between the various strategies and policies related to regeneration be improved?**

   Regeneration is multifaceted and therefore it is inevitable that there will be a suite of strategies and policies involved, and will include a wide range of organisations at a national, regional and local level. ‘The National Regeneration Strategy: Achieving a Sustainable Future’ is a welcome attempt to pull the various threads together in a comprehensive fashion but in many respects simply demonstrates the diversity of action necessary and the range of organisations involved. There is a need therefore to find and achieve a focus for activity which local government with its lead agency status for community planning, is best placed to provide. Crucially this also requires partner alignment of effort and resource to achieve success.

2. **Can physical, social and economic regeneration really be separate entities?**

   The Committee would find it useful to hear about projects distinctly focussed on one or more aspects, and the direct and indirect outcomes of such activity.

   For regeneration to be complete and successful, action is needed and outcomes achieved across the range of physical, social and economic dimensions of a community. Whether it is necessary or possible to achieve all in a co-ordinated or integrated manner is more difficult to determine, and often particular action can be initiated by events, needs or opportunities arising.

   A current example is the Nigg Energy Park in Easter Ross which includes within its immediate travel to work area, communities identified by the SIMD as the most deprived in Highland. The Council as part of a multi-agency support package to the regeneration of the yard is investing £653k Vacant and Derelict Land Fund grant to bring 2.38 hectares of land back to a developable state to dramatically improve the appearance of the Energy Park and provide confidence to potential inward investors. Over the two year redevelopment programme, £10m will be invested to regenerate the facility into a multi user port facility. Integral to this investment the Nigg Skills Academy has been established and aims to provide both MAs and general training for some 3,000 people by 2015 for a range of jobs, including engineers, operators, riggers, technicians and for general and project management.

   The indirect economic and social impacts of such an investment across the Easter Ross and wider Highland communities is significant. The regeneration task facing the public and private sector was at the outset a physical one but from it, the opportunity for economic regeneration arose and has been tackled/achieved.
regeneration in the identified disadvantaged communities will not be achieved via the Nigg Energy Park regeneration alone but it can be a significant, positive and contributory factor.

3. **Are we achieving the best value from investment in this area? If not, how could funding achieve the maximum impact? Could the funding available be used in different ways to support regeneration?**

There is no doubt that regeneration investment in its various forms over the years has contributed positively and significantly to the wellbeing of Highland communities. However, a significant challenge remains as Highland continues to experience both rural and urban based disadvantage.

Best value typically is achieved when the funding available is provided over the longer term and/or when time is afforded to correctly plan for the regeneration activity required. This allows for other opportunities and activities to be developed and integrated.

The Town Centre Regeneration Fund is a good example of a funding stream that was welcome but was a one-off fix and the time limited nature of the grant meant that many towns were not in a position to take advantage of the Fund. It meant that “off the shelf” capital projects where progressed and wider regeneration needs and opportunities could not be considered and/or funded.

**Partnership Working**

4. **What delivery mechanisms, co-ordination of, and information on the funding that supports regeneration are required, to facilitate access by all sections of the community?**

Different communities need different levels of support. Communities vary in their capacity to participate and indeed over time this can change as key individuals move on and are replaced. The support structures in place must recognise this, be responsive and appropriate to the particular regeneration challenge faced/community project involved. It must be acknowledged that a small scale community based project or event has its place in regeneration alongside larger asset-based community led regeneration projects.

On one hand it may be appropriate and necessary for a community to secure specialist advice and become formally incorporated immediately but on the other, a community may need only advice and support to enable it to become better organised to identify their needs, to articulate them and to lobby for improved services. They may in time progress then to deliver at their own hand.

This suggests therefore that the support needed must first and foremost be generic and available to all with specialist advice available to be pulled down as required. This in turn will determine what delivery mechanism, information etc. is required.
A challenge often presented is that community led regeneration naturally becomes focused on or is driven by a particular need/opportunity. Other equally important needs may not be recognised by the community. Typically the solution proposed is a community wide survey and needs analysis followed by a local development plan. This can usefully widen thinking and approach but at the same time, can adversely dilute the original purpose and desire locally for involvement. As is further developed in response to Question 8 below, this calls for a partnership between the public sector and the community and a recognition and acknowledgement that each has a particular role to play and any local community development plans prepared, or approach adopted, is one that is shared between the community and the public sector.

5. **Should funding be focussed on start up or running costs? What is the correct balance between revenue and capital funding? Please indicate reasons for your views.**

This question is very open and exceptionally difficult to answer given the diversity of activity that could be included here.

It is clear however, that start-up costs are definitely one of the biggest barriers to community led regeneration projects being initiated let alone completed. There is a need to make funding easier for such communities to access and a need to accept higher levels of risk associated with it. For example, the Council used LEADER funding to run a scheme whereby communities could access small scale seed-corn funding to enable project ideas to be developed with the aspiration that this then would give them the information required and confidence to proceed with applications for LEADER and other funding to deliver the project. Due to the changed guidance received from Scottish Government, this scheme was closed down due to the disproportionate audit requirements. This type of funding is very important to develop project ideas and test their viability.

6. **How can it be ensured that regeneration projects are sustainable in the long term?**

Again this is a very open question and a challenging one to answer as each regeneration project involved needs to be considered on its merits.

The obvious response to this question suggests that a robust business plan or equivalent needs to be in place at the outset of the project with ongoing revenue costs accounted and provided for. It also argues that capital funding providers must recognise and allocate resource to ensure that the project sponsors plan and address this aspect of their project.

The question asked is based on the premise that all regeneration projects need to be sustainable in the long term. Arguably, whilst projects can be closed down the key issue is the sustainability of outcomes. Outcomes such as higher levels of employment should be the focus of regeneration activity rather than the sustainability of projects themselves.
Practical Issues

7. **What actions could the Scottish Governments forthcoming community capacity building programme include to best support communities to ‘do regeneration’ themselves?**

The public sector should not expect that communities will do regeneration but rather should create the conditions and provide the support that enables them to become active participants if they wish.

The example given below regarding a new school, is one whereby the conditions for community involvement can be created. Allied to it, there is a need to ensure the community has the right advice and support to realise this opportunity. As detailed in question 4, there is a need to ensure all have access to the appropriate support needed for the project involved – be that generic or specialist.

8. **What role should CPPs play in supporting the community in regenerating their communities?**

In its strategy the Scottish Government state that the involvement of local people in public sector-led activity is not community led regeneration and that community-led regeneration is about local people identifying for themselves, deciding what to do and been responsible for the actions that make the difference. The Highland experience suggests there is a middle line here and that successful community-led regeneration is not so much about who leads it, but rather the manner in which it is approached. For example, a new school is being built. The Council is keen to incorporate new community facilities into the school as they recognise the need in the community but the Council is not in a position to fund. The community is happy to organise themselves to achieve this and they help design and find the funding to fit out and a partnership arrangement is put in place for ongoing management/maintenance. Is this public sector-led, community led – or just good collaborative community development?

The role required from the CPP is to recognise that the community is not just a stakeholder in regeneration but also has the potential to be part of or indeed at times, lead the solution. This should be embedded in thinking and reflected in the approach adopted across regeneration activity.

9. **How can CPPs best empower local communities to deliver regeneration? Please provide any examples of best practice or limitations experienced that you think the Committee would find useful in its scrutiny.**

The Highland LEADER Programme – a Highland CPP initiative, is a £16.5m programme aimed at promoting economic and community development within rural areas. It is a bottom up method of delivering support for rural development aimed primarily at small and medium sized community driven projects that are pilot and innovative in nature. The twin aims of the Programme are: Revitalising Communities, and Progressive Rural Economies.
The Highland CPP recognised that if it was to empower its communities, it needed to bring the programme as close as it could to its communities, so that they prepared their own development plans and made decisions on the projects seeking funding. Therefore 11 Local Area Partnerships (LAPs) were established (many already in existence) and after local plans were prepared and approved, a budget was devolved and with support from the LEADER team, each of the LAPs made decisions on individual applications received for grant. In keeping with LEADER principles, voluntary and private sector partners made up 50% of the voting membership.

This approach has proved exceptionally successful and has either reinvigorated and refreshed existing activity or has acted as a catalyst for new community based activity. The challenge now faced is to assist these local area partnerships to review activity and outcomes and to plan for the new LEADER Programme/community based funding.

10. **How can the outcomes of regeneration truly be captured and measured? What are the barriers to capturing outcomes and how should the success of regeneration investment be determined?**

As regeneration activity is very wide ranging and involves the actions of many, there is no easy or straightforward answer to this question.

What will help is an earlier consideration and statement of the outputs to be achieved and how they may contribute towards a particular and relevant regeneration outcome. Arguably, too often project sponsors think only of the project inputs and activity to be undertaken and only measure and report on this.

Therefore a more consistent, shared and understandable approach across partners and communities to this challenge will over time allow for a more consistent measurement of regeneration activity and investment.

The Highlands, and indeed Scotland as a whole, has a long tradition of economic regeneration activity. This forms the basis for expertise in evaluation which could be used for knowledge creation through our universities.