This paper is in two parts – the first offers evidence of good practice in the delivery of regeneration in Scotland by the Link group of registered social landlords (housing associations) and social enterprises ('Link'). The second makes some observations on areas where things haven't gone so well.

**Link Group Ltd.** is the parent company in the group and was established in 1962 as Link Housing Association Ltd. It currently owns and/or provides services to more than 10,000 social tenants and other customers in 24 Scottish local authority areas. Its annual turnover is £32m.

**Evidence of Link's Regeneration-Related Activity**

Although founded to 'fill the gap' between the owner-occupied and local authority sectors by providing affordable, good quality homes to rent, Link has always recognised the additional health and economic well-being needs of local communities and the individuals who populate them. Link's responses to such needs (in chronological order) are summarised as follows:

- Provision of a GP surgery and a general store in two of our first developments in Edinburgh in 1966.
- Sub-division of large town houses in Edinburgh to provide small flats for older people close to all amenities (1960s).
- Development of 15 Co-ownership estates which offered individuals the benefits of ownership while the properties remained in community ownership (1970s).
- Taking local approaches to community regeneration which led to the formation of successful, independent, community-controlled housing associations – Port of Leith, Kingdom and Hjaltland (1970s).
- Sustaining housing associations with a particular community of interest, either through the provision of management and development services or through merger (1970s to date).
- Development of ‘cluster flat’ shared and supported accommodation for young people and those with ‘special needs’ in Glasgow and Edinburgh (1980s). (This was part-funded by our reserves and surpluses and we have continued to be able to do this subsequently.)
- Establishment of leasing and management arrangements with voluntary sector specialist organisations in the provision of support for people with mental health issues and learning difficulties (1980s).
- Completion of our first sheltered housing development (1980). We now have twelve.
- Working in partnership with several local authorities and local communities in the rehabilitation of ‘Housing Action Areas’ (1980s)
- Introducing Shared Ownership as a new form of tenure to provide a route to affordable home ownership (1982). More than 300 developed to date.
- Appointment of our first ‘Special Needs Officer’ in 1985 to develop ‘Care in the Community’. LinkLiving (our care and support subsidiary) now employs 120 members.
of staff to provide a range of person-centred services to over 450 service users. In 2012/13 in Edinburgh our service supported 128 young people, 79 of whom accessed education, training and employment opportunities and 112 had maximised their income as a result. Initially funded wholly from Link’s own free reserves, LinkLiving’s support services are now mainly funded by local authorities through contract payments. Nevertheless, these do not always cover full costs……

- Establishment of a subsidiary, Link Homes Ltd. in 1985 to build good quality, affordable homes for owner-occupation (400 to date) and for market rent (140) to complement wider local regeneration activity and to relieve the pressure on local authority housing waiting lists by giving them ‘first option’ on allocations. Surpluses generated have been re-invested in Link’s homelessness-alleviation projects.

- Creating a joint venture company (Inverlink) with Tulloch Homes to deliver general and special needs projects and community facilities for Link and others, including a new citadel for the Salvation Army (1995).

- Boosting the relatively deprived Linktown area of Kirkcaldy in 1996 by the rehabilitation of the West Bridge Mill into a ‘Foyer’ to provide accommodation for 44 young people, a café, conference centre, training/employability facilities and 14 affordable units for local businesses. All have been full ever since. In 2012/13, 86 young people received accommodation/support.

- Partnering with the Royal Bank of Scotland to offer a Mortgage to Rent service to avoid homelessness among owner-occupiers and to help sustain communities. (This activity was expanded by a Scottish Government-sponsored scheme in 2003).

- Forming the community-controlled Kintry Housing Partnership (with three other RSLs) in Craigmillar, Edinburgh to build or improve 650 homes using ‘New Housing Partnerships’ funding, vital to the regeneration of the whole area (1999).

- Appointing Link’s first Welfare Rights Officer in 1999 using its own free reserves. Development of this aspect of our portfolio has attracted support funding from national and local governments and has included the Older Persons’ Advice Service (which from 2005 until 2013 secured welfare benefit income of £14m for 5500 people) and our Welfare Rights and Money Advice services (which this year alone have respectively gained tenants £1.3m and have dealt with debts amounting to £764k). These advice teams now comprise 18 members of staff.

- Constructing and refurbishing 92 homes in the Dawson Initiative (Falkirk) to generate a new local estate-based information and resource centre including an internet café. Nine apprenticeships provided by the building contractor and sponsorship by Link of a local person to study for a university-accredited degree in Community Education and Development. Falkirk Council won the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland Regeneration Award in 2012 for this initiative (2000- 2010)

- Supporting self-builders to complete 6 new homes for themselves in Ballingry, Fife (2000)

- Following merger with the (failing) Gap HA in 2000, developing factoring services, provision of which is crucial to the success of most if not all regeneration activities.

- Re-developing and regenerating a substantial area of Petersburn, Airdrie to provide 250 new ‘secured by design’ homes for rent and sale and to support the local community to establish a Development Trust to raise funding (£1m) to create toddler and teenager play areas and a football pitch and to host an IT learning centre using computer equipment and training donated by Link. (2002 – 2005). We used the unique
size and timescale of that project to ensure (among other things) Intermediate Labour Market ‘hits’ and training and employment for local people with the main contractor.

- Developing community health facilities in Kirkshaws, Coatbridge - a new, purpose-built dental surgery and extension of the local Neighbourhood Centre to provide a healthy-eating project (2005).

- Participating from day one in the Homestake/LiFT/ New Supply Shared Equity initiative to help potential owners onto the ownership ladder and delivery agent for more than 2000 new owners throughout central and southern Scotland (2005 to date).

- Participating in the major regeneration of Oatlands, Glasgow not only by the provision of 50 new social rented homes among the 1250 planned but also by the provision of factoring services and assistance with the establishment of the Oatlands Development Trust and its aim to bring the derelict St. Margaret’s Church back into community use (2006 to date).

- Expanding SmartLiving, our volunteer peer education project to tackle homelessness and worklessness among young people in Falkirk and Fife (2008). (This service received People and Communities Fund (£168k), Falkirk Council and Young Start support to secure its future at least until 2015. In 2012/13 alone it engaged with 83 young people who volunteered 1677 hours and advised some 3000 young people).

- Working with Action for Children Scotland to roll out a nationwide Youthbuild programme, particularly in Inverclyde and Craigmillar (2009-2012).

- Establishing Volunteer Befriending services called RealLiving, helping people with mental health issues to gain confidence to build social networks in their local communities. Currently 20 and 16 volunteers befriend 25 and 15 older people in Fife and Midlothian respectively.

- Committing to Tenancy Sustainment, Affordable Warmth and Financial Inclusion Strategies in 2010, outcomes of which have included a 27% reduction in repossessions, respectively 50% and 70% reductions in heating costs as a result of retrofitting a biomass-fired district heating system in Bridge of Allan and a combined heat and power unit in West Bridge Mill, Kirkcaldy.

- Taking over the management of 1600 privately-owned properties in the City of Edinburgh Council’s Private Sector Leasing scheme (2010). These properties are rented by the Council which leases them to people on their waiting list. This has been instrumental in the Council achieving its 2012 Homelessness target.

- Carrying out three social impact assessments - on our Older Persons Advice service, our Accommodation with Support service in Kirkcaldy and our delivery of the West Lothian Care and Repair service, evidencing a Social Return on Investment (SROI) of £27, £3.69 and £15 respectively for every £1 invested in them (2010 to date).

- In the interests of younger tenants’ health, sponsoring football teams in six of the more deprived areas in which we work (2010/11).

- Helping to deliver East Renfrewshire and Renfrewshire Councils’ Town Centre Regeneration Strategies in Barrhead and Paisley respectively (2010-13).

- Launching ‘Green Action’ with the Waterways Trust Scotland, centred on the Forth and Clyde Canal near Falkirk – a volunteer programme offering training, employability skills and personal social development to young people (2011).
- Establishing an Employability Strategy in 2012, committing to include Community Benefit Clauses in all our development contracts and providing Community Jobs Fund, School, Student and Modern Apprenticeships work placements – 30, 8, 7 and 3 respectively during 2012/13. We adopted Construction Skills’ Client-based approach to ensure delivery of added benefits to local communities, becoming the first RSL in Scotland to be accredited as a National Skills Academy for Construction. Given Link’s capacity to develop further in a range of regeneration areas during 2013/14 we expect to ensure our contractors deliver 30 apprenticeships and work placements.

- Redeploying 4 members of staff at the closure of the aforementioned Older Persons Advice Service to fill new Tenant Inclusion Officer posts which will be needed to offer the additional support required by tenants to address the effects of Welfare Reform (2013).

- Committing to pay at least the Scottish Living Wage to all staff (2013).

- Securing £23k to establish an IT training suite in Link’s new office and social enterprise hub in Dalmuir providing a resource for local groups and organisations which wish to increase their digital capabilities (2013)

- Levering £80m of private funding and re-investing significant free reserves of our own over a quarter of a century into the redevelopment, regeneration and improvement in health, wellbeing and economic advantage of a wide range of communities and individuals.

Some Downsides and Other Observations….

- The Thatcher government gave the right to buy to co-owners in 1980 and this, combined with extraordinary interest rate levels, signed Co-ownership’s death warrant. With current low interest rates and recognition of the advantages of community ownership (e.g. in the proposed Community Empowerment Bill) perhaps it is time to re-introduce this.

- The relaxation of restrictions on Credit Unions (CU) last year should have realised some new funding opportunities (especially important given the difficulties obtaining money from ‘traditional’ sources). Sadly, this has not happened. This is disappointing given the potential for social enterprise to support social enterprise (like in Australia, for example). Link is currently working with four local authorities to examine scope for replicating successful CU models to make lending more affordable to tenants/community groups. But beware Social Impact Bonds as the answer – unless it’s something like the Ypeople (Perth) variant.

- Although effective factoring is key to holistic regeneration, sadly it rarely happens. Owner occupiers frequently fail to meet their obligations which makes the provision of the service unsustainable. In Forgewood, Motherwell this has resulted in Link progressively withdrawing from providing factoring.

- We haven’t (yet?) got support from the Scottish Government to introduce ‘Homecare’ an equity release scheme for older people. We had the necessary support from Dunfermline Building Society but then…….

- Scottish Government allocated ‘wider role’ funding to help regeneration and other initiatives by housing associations but this ceased in 2012. The People and Communities Fund has replaced it but it is relatively small, is restrictive and is available to a wider range of claimants. Link and others used such funding to incubate social enterprises until they could become financially independent – but the funding can no longer be put to such (good) use.
- There is an emerging apparent difference of attitude towards such wider role activity between the Scottish Government and the Scottish Housing Regulator. The former encourages us to re-invest our free reserves into imaginative projects but the latter frowns upon the additional risk this entails.

- There is a fundamental conflict between the long term aspirations and needs of RSLs and the communities they serve and the short-term decision making which appears to be a consequence of our political systems.

- There is insufficient recognition of regeneration in Single Outcome Agreements and in our experience there is a range of effectiveness demonstrated by Community Planning Partnerships. Communities themselves are not equal partners in CPPs which tend to be extensions of the statutory bodies and are therefore effectively Service Planning agencies. The proposed Community Empowerment Bill may be able to address such concerns.

- Effective and efficient local authority procurement is simply not working. There is a fixation with price, budget holders sit in silos, there is insufficient notice being taken of the benefits of social impact measurement and a lack of strong leadership. Commissioners and council leaders who should have the vision are dictated to by the procurement officers. That's the wrong way round. Bring on the Procurement Reform Bill!

Thank you

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