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

In our view, a cross-party long-term industrial policy, implemented in partnership with those working towards Scotland’s social, economic and physical regeneration will lead to a fairer more sustainable future for Scotland.

In a healthy commercial and industrial environment, communities become more viable, social networks are strengthened and the physical urban and rural landscape benefits.

Resilience and regeneration are at the heart of Work Place Chaplaincy Scotland (WPCS) which aims to improve the working lives and working environment of Scotland. We help people help people in a local setting, encouraging mutual respect and trust, allowing people to feel good about who they are and what they stand for, in effect, to be proud to be Scottish.

As a professional organisation dedicated to 'oiling the cogs' in more than 700 business outlets in shopping malls, transport hubs and local authorities across the country, Work Place Chaplaincy Scotland sees, at close hand, the often devastating effects - on individuals, their families, employers and employees - of centralised cost-cutting decisions taken by accountants far removed from the people who depend on them for their livelihoods.

It need not be so. We know from our research and that of CBI Scotland and the STUC that absenteeism falls and productivity rises by the same ratio when Work Place Chaplains are involved in an organisation. The benefits of such a unique resource, to businesses and the wider community of Scotland as a whole, is being increasingly widely recognised and could be a very positive driver of change in Scotland’s future. The basis of this positive influence is in people feeling that someone is listening, thereby building inclusiveness and resilience on an individual and corporate basis.

WPCS works daily with people who are feeling acutely the pain of our current economic situation and who regularly use our chaplains as a sounding board for their questions and frustrations. The following comes not from WPCS but from the workers, managers, business leaders and entrepreneurs we support across Scotland:

- “We need a dramatic cut in Business Rates. This is vital to help regenerate high streets and the wider economy. The resultant increase in custom and visitors will also improve opportunities for transport providers.
- “Funding for such a rates reduction could be found by cutting the number of quangos in Scotland. The real effectiveness of ‘Enterprise’ and ‘Business Gateway’ bodies must be questioned. Give us real help to keep our businesses alive and growing.
• “More funding for SMEs, perhaps through structured encouragement of peer to peer lending?

• “While VAT is not devolved, Government may consider lobbying for it to be devolved - then scrapping it altogether. It is regarded by SMEs as a barrier to growth.

• “With such concessions more independent shops will be encouraged into our declining high streets. The resultant ‘feel-good’ spin off from increased job opportunities and an increasingly vibrant economy will result in more dynamic communities and improved mental – and potentially, physical - wellbeing for the population.

• “Demand for housing in regenerated areas will also increase, creating knock-on effects for infrastructure. Public and private investment in our transport, sewerage systems and housing must keep pace, again generating jobs.”

WPCS already works across the public and private sectors supporting and encouraging employers and employees to work together to build a better and stronger Scotland for all. Many of the above suggestions would support this.

Everyone works better when they know they are valued, respected and are listened to, when necessary, in confidence, without being judged and without compromising their position at work or within their family. The chaplain is available to all, of all denominations and none, from the managing director to the new-start apprentice.

Chaplaincy is not about religion or denomination, but addresses the growing understanding within a predominantly secular society that all life has a moral and spiritual dimension, however that is expressed. As a modern, professional organisation, WPCS seeks to identify with the workforce we serve, listening, caring, challenging, in confidence – because people matter.

A chaplain has a part to play in the life of the whole community – at times of crisis and of celebration. Time and again in our daily work we encounter individuals coping with unbelievable amounts of stress, perhaps juggling bereavement or crushing debts with the demands of job and family while unsure if their job will still be there in the morning. It is a privilege to be asked to share their burden and to help them turn their lives around and see them begin to function competently at work again, and to contribute more fully to society as a whole.

WPCS encourages us to get in touch with the spiritual dimension of life, challenging us to consider:

• “What kind of world do I want to be part of, what part do I play in that, what do I believe about myself, those around me, my country, my world, the future?”

We call on the Government to listen closely to those who make our country what it is: innovators, entrepreneurs and academics, from commerce, industry, the arts, science and the faith communities – and to act on their recommendations.

Scotland needs to recognise the immense asset it has in its people. WPCS is already helping empower many of those people to play a fuller part in the unique community that is our country. We welcome the opportunity to enter the regeneration Scotland debate.
Rev Iain McFadzean
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