Reply from James Henderson, social researcher (15.03.13)

I’m a social researcher, and PhD research student at Heriot Watt University considering the ‘community anchor model’

Themes of interest: Set out below are themes on which the Committee is seeking your views. This is intended to be an open information gathering exercise. The questions set out below are intended to be a guide only. Please feel free to give us your views on any of these themes.

Strategy and Policy Issues

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

The breadth of potentially relevant policy and of potentially relevant strategy is likely so wide that your Inquiry may likely need to focus on one or more particular ‘approaches’, central strategies perhaps, in order to meaningfully discuss integration of policy, practice and strategy. I’m undertaking research in relation to the ‘community anchor model’, and which can be seen to have a significant fit with the concept of ‘community-led regeneration’ and indeed ‘community anchor’ themes that contribute to the Scottish Government’s Achieving a Sustainable Future (ASF) regeneration policy (2012). Although there are a wide-range of other themes within the policy document, my own experience has been that the community anchor model is a valuable central strategy in its own right, and worthy of consideration in greater depth.

I’ve answered questions 1-10 using the community anchor model as generally understood within a developing community sector theory & practice in relation to anchors over the last decade (see for instance Thake, 2001, 2006; Pearce, 2003; Scottish Community Alliance, 2008; Weaver, 2009; Sampson & Weaver, 2010); and by drawing from my own field work with three community anchors in Scotland – one urban, one rural, one remote (island). There are a wide range of anchor organisations working in Scotland, community housing associations and development trusts for instance, and demonstrating ‘good practice’ which the Inquiry could learn from; and can be contacted via Scottish Community Alliance, Development Trust Association Scotland and/or Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Association, for example.
There is more that can be said here about how the community anchor model relates to the range of policy and strategy within ASF, but this begins to become clearer through the answers that follow.

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.

Within the community anchor model, the role of the anchor organisation is both multi-purpose and facilitative. A community anchor, and the wider local community sector that it seeks to support, will be concerned to work together across the range of challenges that a community itself defines and faces – across the built and natural environments, community-building (social) and community economic development – in order to generate an integrated and community-led regeneration action plan. As noted in 1) there are many examples of community anchors in action across these three strands of regeneration, which the Committee could visit to find out more; depending on the particular balance of emphases it wishes to consider, for example an anchor that has pursued a multi-purpose approach but with a current emphasis on housing …

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?

The scale of poverty, and more generally inequality, within Scotland is overwhelming and is concentrated spatially in places large and small, but also relevant to all communities even the apparently affluent. There are likely no ‘magic bullets’ and no ‘quick fixes’ through regeneration to tackling such socio-economic disadvantage, and the role of community anchors will therefore be over the longer-term to support a developing ‘community-control’ (community-led) through work within a community on practical projects – whether physical, social or economic – whilst also continuing to recognise the scale of the problems faced and the investment needed to make change, and to continue to make this ‘visible’ and ‘heard’.

Crucial then is the long-term financially-sustainability of individual community anchors and wider community sector organisations; without this there are no obvious candidates to sustain a longer-term vision for a community and more generally society. Community housing associations and development trusts have found/ are achieving such financial sustainability through a focus on developing an income-generating asset base whether as housing and property and/or through community-renewables (onshore wind and hydro). Such community asset/enterprise-based work can also be integrated with social, physical and economic regeneration objectives as established through a community-led plan. Where this financial sustainability is
achieved then the necessary longer-term role of community anchors and the community sector can then be sustained.

The committed and long-term work of Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE) in supporting community organisations is one example, and could surely be extended across Scotland; likewise the approach of both central and local state in transferring housing stock to community housing associations particularly in Glasgow since the 1970s has paid significant dividends.

**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?**

A well-organised, financially-sustainable community anchor organisation working with a local community sector, and within a particular local community of place, but recognising the local communities of interest – ethnicity, gender, class, disability and age for instance – that intersect with it to form a ‘community matrix’, will be well-placed to facilitate such access across all sections of a community.

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**

As indicated in 3. above the aim within the community anchor model is to establish a financially-sustainable organisation, with sufficient income-generating capacity to meet its core costs. This may take a ten year period, although much depends on income-generating opportunities available to the organisation and on the concerns and aspirations of the local community. It will likely require stock transfer/patient capital as relevant to establishing a suitable community-owned asset base and/or enterprise, as well funding/endowment needed to support development staff until sufficient income-generating capacity is established.

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

The community anchor model seeks to answer that through its combination of income-generating activity to meet core costs with local community-control - and more generally depth of ‘community-connectedness’; such that the organisation is both financially-sustainable and actively, genuinely rooted in that community and its people. Larger public, private and third sector organisations can support regeneration in many ways, but long-term community-led regeneration will need community anchors and local community sector grounded within informal and grassroots community activity and networks.
Practical Issues

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

Existing community anchors will be best placed to lead on a ‘community-led’, community anchor approach; so draw on experienced community anchor organisations – staff, committee members, activists-volunteers – and use existing community sector networks and representative bodies. They will also be able to point others from public, private and third sectors that they have found useful too – social enterprise development agencies, community finance development initiatives and other relevant forms of finance, HIE, legal advisors, etc.

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

Where representative community anchors and associated community sector structures (community councils, forums for instance) are already established within a CPP area, then the CPP can valuably draw on their knowledge, experience and abilities in order to establish neighbourhoods plans or similar; which can then support development of relevant CPP plans and policy.

CPPs can also draw on the ability of the community anchor and community sector to work effectively within their community to deliver relevant services. However, contracts relating to such services should not be consider a way of supporting a community anchor’s core costs – these need to be met through income-generation in order to sustain the independence of the anchor organisation and so its ability to effectively play a long-term role within and on behalf of a community. Neither should such contracting be used to cut wages and pension contributions for staff providing such services; this would be self-defeating in terms of the longer-term credibility of the community sector to represent the community interests, in particular of those on low-incomes.

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.

See 8) and 1) above.

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?
Be very clear about the theory and related practice being used to inform the direction of any regeneration strategy. Time and energy put into clarifying this thinking will then pay-off in terms of developing realistic and concrete outputs, outcomes and impacts – and ways to illustrate and measure the contribution of various ‘interventions’ will then likewise clarify over time. Choosing broad outcomes that don’t match the necessary scale of investment aren’t going to be illuminating. In this light, what can be learnt from research/evaluation of investment in community anchors would depend on such clarity of thought and realism re. potential outcomes; talk of ‘tackling poverty’ for instance would need to be matched by necessary scale of investment. Given the long-term approach of the community anchor model, a longitudinal and comparative approach to research would likely be very relevant too.