Local Government and Regeneration Committee

Regeneration Inquiry

Submission from Aberdeenshire Council

1 Background

1.1 This document has been drafted in response to a request from the Scottish Parliament’s Local Government and Regeneration Committee (January 2013) for evidence related to the remit of the Committee which is:

“To identify and examine best practice and limitations in relation to the delivery of regeneration in Scotland”.

1.2 The request takes the form of an initial question (shown in italics) plus additional questions on the themes of Strategy & Policy and Partnership Working.

1.3 A draft response to this Committee was last prepared in August 2012 on six themes by way of an information-gathering exercise in order to evaluate the current actions of Scotland’s Local Authorities regarding regeneration and the reaction to the Scottish Government’s strategy published in November 2011.

2.0 Q: What does regeneration mean to you?

2.1 A: As previously indicated in August 2012, Aberdeenshire Council is using the definition from The Scottish Government’s Regeneration Strategy ‘Achieving a Sustainable Future’ (2011) which defines regeneration as:

“the holistic process of reversing the economic, physical and social decline of places where market forces alone won’t suffice.”

As part of our work to review our own regeneration strategy we also looked for a simpler, plain-English alternative to which the majority of our residents could relate more easily. The result was:

“Reversing the decline of a place can only happen by everyone working together to tackle the whole problem whether it involves social, economic or building issues”

2.2 Regeneration in Aberdeenshire can encompass a wide range of activities including community, economic and physical (spatial) development. The Council uses the image at Appendix 1 to represent how it views the integrated aspects of regeneration. Activities are funded from a range of sources e.g. Council budgets, partner budgets, third sector sources, specific Scottish Government funding. The main sources remain the former Fairer Scotland funding (c£989,000 p.a.) administered by the Community Planning Partnership and Local Regeneration funds formerly allocated to Scottish
Enterprise (c£432,000 p.a.) administered by the Council. The former pays for social/economic activities and the latter for mainly economic interventions.

2.3 Aberdeenshire Council is currently developing a new regeneration strategy but the current ‘Framework for Regeneration’ (2010) followed the Aberdeen City & Shire Structure Plan 2009 which emphasised Regeneration Priority Areas (RPAs) and recognised the switch of lead role in local regeneration to Local Authorities. The framework set out proposals and divided regeneration funds between three RPAs which roughly equate to the coastal parts of Buchan, Banff & Buchan and a coastal corridor in Kincardine & Mearns from Inverbervie to St Cyrus.

3.0 Strategy and Policy Issues
3.1 Q: How can the linkage between the various strategies and policies related to regeneration be improved?

A: Aberdeenshire Council seeks to do this by recognising and acknowledging the links within its policies and those of its partners. We look to minimise exclusion and develop a collegiate atmosphere between individuals, agencies and community groups in order to achieve collaborative gain.

Strongly held views may lead to differences of opinion between partners but are resolved through respectful discussion.

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

A: They are rarely, if ever, separate entities but the strength of connection may vary from tentative to strong. The integrity of a project should not be compromised by requiring it to be equally strong on all three aspects.

We can offer no examples which are distinctly focussed on one aspect to the exclusion of the others.

3.3 Q: 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?

A: Regeneration is currently following a needs-based approach. It can be argued that an opportunity-based approach would achieve greater impact through a better return on investment leading to more funds being available for re-investment.

For example, Aberdeenshire remains an area of growth and opportunity to the benefit of the whole of Scotland but to maintain or enhance that growth requires investment in infrastructure and capital projects. Current access to funding, private or public, is considerably short of what is required to achieve optimum, sustainable growth because of the needs-based approach and Aberdeenshire’s perceived wealth. One of the most frequent criticisms we
encounter with Fraserburgh, our area of most need, is the perception of poor road and transport connections.

4 Partnership Working

4.1 Q: 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: Under Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership, our previous community regeneration initiative, we identified that every community has champions who are willing to come forward and work on behalf of others. We also established that three things were needed to make their work sustainable:

(a) A co-ordinator or administrator to undertake routine tasks and build professional contacts.
(b) Meaningful decisions to be made by the group so that they were able to make a difference.
(c) Some discretionary funding so that the group feels empowered.

These three elements, when connected to the existing network, are normally sufficient for sustainability. We have established this through the formation of Development Trusts and Town Partnerships in our key towns.

4.2 Q: 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.

A: In Aberdeenshire we have focussed initially on start-up AND running costs with the proviso that groups use the breathing space that these funds provide to obtain a sustainable source of income such as an asset, a community energy scheme or a social enterprise. This was introduced in 4 major towns and has been successful in three. The fourth faltered due to reputational issues.

As a result we now have three Development Trusts, independent of the Council, but working with us on key regeneration issues.

4.3 Q: How can it be ensured that regeneration projects are sustainable in the long term?

A: As indicated above, we established Development Trusts who have reduced their grant dependency and are now in a position to cover their own running costs through the operation of an asset, such as a caravan park, developing a community energy scheme or developing a property or social enterprise. However, the greatest threat to sustainability may not be financial. Previous initiatives have shown that progress is often impeded by local or personal disagreements or by those in the position of gate-keeper leading to a lack of cohesion. Effort is needed to develop plans which are inclusive and offer a compelling vision, strong enough to overcome these obstacles.
5 Practical Issues

5.1 Q: What actions could the Scottish Government’s forthcoming community capacity building programme include to best support communities to “do regeneration” themselves?

A: This question has been addressed at 4.1-4.3 but there will be communities which are not yet ready to assume those responsibilities. Aberdeenshire Council uses interventions from a number of services to bring them to the position of ‘investment-ready. The services include Community Learning & Development, Community Economic Development, Rural Partnerships as well as the involvement of Community Planning Partners and other anchor organisations such as Registered Social Landlords.

5.2 Q: What role should CPPs play in supporting the community in regenerating their communities?

A: The most important role that CPPs can play is to ensure that they are a platform for co-operative working and collaborative gain and by ensuring that discussion is translated into action.

5.3 Q: 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.

A: The answers at Section 4 provide some good examples within Aberdeenshire but we also have strengths within our Rural Partnership network and within Community Learning and Development as well as the local work undertaken under the current ‘Framework for Regeneration in Aberdeenshire’. The latter programme in Kincardine & Mearns established a number of community initiatives from transport to employability and heritage. It did so with modest funding and by encouraging the smallest communities raise funds which could then be matched by grants. This has made a significant difference in a number of cases who are now minded to continue with further improvements.

5.4 Q: 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?

A: This is an area we are currently examining. We have previously used Social Accounting to capture the non-financial value being created and we are also trying to capture some of the performance indicators established by the Audit Commission in 2005 for Economic Regeneration. Positive attitudes and strong cohesion are difficult to measure but are key indicators of successful regeneration but there is inevitably a delay between an intervention and a measureable improvement.

Report prepared by Bill Clark, Strategic Regeneration Executive, Aberdeenshire Council
28 February 2013
What Regeneration Means in Aberdeenshire

Economic Regeneration
- Diversification
- Remedial Assistance
- PACE
- Inward Investment
- Town centre improvements
- Business Initiatives
- SME engagement
- Local Initiatives
- Business Associations

Social Regeneration
- Capacity Building
- Community Learning & Development
- Community Planning
- Regeneration Outcome Agreements
- Deprivation and Poverty
- Health Inequalities
- Employability

Physical Regeneration
- Employment land
- Planning & Development
- Brownfield Regeneration
- Retail & Town Centre Development
- Change of Use
- Housing Regeneration
- Community Facilities
- Public Realm & Public Art

Cross-Cutting Areas
- Art & Culture
- Housing
- Health
- Employability
- Community Economic Development
- Community Safety
- Skills & Education
- Design
- Leisure
- Environment