COSLA response to Local Government and Regeneration Committee’s call for evidence on the delivery of regeneration in Scotland

1. COSLA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Local Government and Regeneration Committee’s call for written evidence on its inquiry on the delivery of regeneration in Scotland. COSLA previously responded to the Committee’s call for evidence on regeneration in relation to the scrutiny of the Scottish Government Draft Budget 2013-14, and we are keen to utilise this opportunity to further expand on issues relating to the wider delivery of regeneration in Scotland.

2. Regeneration policy and funding remains of crucial importance to local government in Scotland, due to the continuing economic challenges and reductions in public spending, regeneration more than ever needs to be effective and responsive to the needs of local communities and continue to improve outcomes whether these are economic, social, or environmental. Local government has consistently argued that delivering better outcomes for Scotland’s communities requires public agencies to be empowered to work together. That case is particularly compelling given that a holistic approach to regeneration encompassing economic, social, and environmental aspects can also link and contribute to other policy areas such as sustainability, community safety, the equalities agenda, and the recommendations of the Christie Commission, particularly in relation to early intervention and prevention. It is this holistic and partnership approach to regeneration that has the potential to significantly improve the lives and outcomes of communities across Scotland.

Strategy and Policy Issues

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

Can physical, social and economic regeneration really be separate entities? The Committee would find it useful to hear about projects distinctly focused on one or more aspects, and the direct and indirect outcomes of such activity.

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?

3. Adopting a holistic approach to regeneration provides the best opportunity to link regeneration to other strategies and policies and the holistic nature of regeneration is also emphasised within the Regeneration Strategy itself. There are a variety of other strategies and policies which have linkages to regeneration. For instance the Agenda for Cities, NPF3, Infrastructure Investment Plan, Enterprise Areas,
Community Planning, and the Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill among others have links to regeneration.

4. When the Regeneration Strategy was published in December 2011 there were a number of policy announcements and strategies made public at this time, including the Agenda for Cities and Enterprise Areas. In discussion around these documents and strategies COSLA emphasised and continues to emphasise to Scottish Government the need for strategies to relate to one another and not to pose a conflict. However, due to the Regeneration Strategy, Agenda for Cities and Enterprise Areas being published or announced in quick succession, the opportunities for linkages being made must come in terms of their implementation, as opposed to explicit detailed reference within the text of the documents themselves to ensure strategies and policies are complimentary rather than conflicting.

5. COSLA believes a holistic approach to regeneration is vital and therefore physical, economic and social issues should be considered in the round rather than as separate entities due to the inter-relation of these three aspects. For instance a regeneration intervention which creates economic or employment opportunities, and provides community and environmental benefits could target those susceptible to poverty or unemployment, therefore preventing the need for costly reactionary measures at a later date. Therefore an economic intervention, will also improve social outcomes for a community.

6. Furthermore the environmental aspect of regeneration should not be overlooked, as physical or economic improvements can also contribute to the sustainability agenda. For instance changes to infrastructure/open spaces, the creation of employment opportunities in the waste or renewables sectors, or improving community safety thereby leading to greater use of sustainable modes of transport, can all help contribute to the sustainability and low carbon agenda. As such these examples demonstrate the inter-linkages between the physical, social, and economic aspects of regeneration.

7. For these reasons it is important that approaches to regeneration are considered within the wider context of public service reform in Scotland, which has a step change in Community Planning at its heart, where partners come together to consider and evaluate priorities for their community, and agree how to address these jointly. The recent Review of Community Planning and Single Outcome Agreements is an important step in this process, but although the building blocks are being put in place, the challenge is to ensure this is reflected in how regeneration is taken forward in Scotland.

8. Another important dimension is understanding the resources available for regeneration activities. COSLA is currently in on-going dialogue with Scottish Government in relation to various streams of funding referred to in the Scottish Government’s Regeneration Strategy, in order that regeneration funding has the biggest impact possible on local areas and local communities. COSLA have also previously requested that Scottish Government undertake a mapping exercise of regeneration funding streams in order that all those involved are clear on the funds available, who can access them, and the opportunities for match funding. Such an exercise would highlight possible alternative means of funding if an initial bid is unsuccessful. COSLA would reiterate the need for a mapping of the entire
regeneration funding landscape to be undertaken at this time, not just solely in terms of funding for the community sector.

9. COSLA and Scottish Government are helping to ensure regeneration funding has the biggest impact possible on local areas and local communities through joint work to establish the Regeneration Capital Grant Fund. This £25m per annum bid fund will focus on delivering large scale regeneration projects which have the potential to demonstrate wider impact as well as delivering strong physical, social, and economic regeneration outcomes, and potentially leverage other funding and investment. This fund will for the first time be open to all 32 local authorities, URCs and other regeneration Special Purpose Vehicles, as opposed to previous regeneration funding streams which were targeted at specific geographic areas, or particular types of project/remediation work in order that the Regeneration Capital Grant Fund can effect large scale transformative change in local areas and communities.

10. COSLA and Scottish Government will also be reviewing the Vacant and Derelict Land Fund (VDLF) during 2013 to consider its current application and whether any change is needed. The review may consider which areas should receive funding in the future, and what activities should be funded to provide more flexibility to local authorities to respond to issues with vacant and derelict land and property.

**Partnership Working**

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?

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.

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

11. As referred to above COSLA has requested Scottish Government undertake a mapping exercise of all regeneration funding streams, this would help improve transparency in terms of the funds available and eligibility criteria, therefore allowing all sections of the community to clearly view regeneration funding which is open to them to access. Doing so would recognise that if community planning approaches are to work effectively at local level, there needs to be a consistent understanding of the wider policy and financial environment in which regeneration activities take place.

12. During oral evidence provided to the committee during its scrutiny of the draft budget 2013-14 in terms of regeneration, the Minister recognised that the multiplicity of funding streams may impact on the ability of groups to access funding and assured the Committee that the Scottish Government was engaging on this issue. COSLA would be keen to see a mapping of the entire regeneration
funding landscape undertaken, as opposed to just focusing on the funding available to community groups, although while important this does not represent the totality of the funding landscape for regeneration.

13. In terms of sustainability of projects and funding one off challenge or bid funds, lasting for one financial year only are not strategic and are resource intensive for those bidding for funds. It is hoped the Regeneration Capital Grant Fund which although it is a bid fund, will represent a move away from this type of limited intervention, to a pipeline approach for regeneration funding, whereby long term strategic and transformational change can take place. This fund widens out access to regeneration funding as it will be open to all 32 councils, URCs and special purpose vehicles as opposed to previous regeneration funding which was targeted as specific areas or geographies, thereby preventing certain localities from being able to access funding. The Regeneration Capital Grant Fund will also ensure strong regeneration outcomes (physical, economic, and social) need to be demonstrated for bids to be successful.

Practical Issues

What actions could the Scottish Government’s forthcoming community capacity building programme include to best support communities to ‘do regeneration’ themselves?

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

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.

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?

14. CPPs play a vital role in planning and resourcing strategic priorities facing their communities. That includes promoting an outcomes and partnership focused approach to regeneration, and acting as a mechanism for the co-ordination of EU funds to local communities. CPPs do not deliver services themselves, but they are the mechanism where all relevant parties can jointly focus on the needs of local communities, agree priorities, and allocate resources.

15. It is important that CPPs are empowered to focus on these activities, including a statutory requirement being placed across all relevant agencies, and not simply local government. CPPs also need to be able to rely on effective relationships and participation across a range of local partners. Although there is some excellent work going on, this is not always clearly linked to overall community planning priorities, and there is a need to ensure that all partners understand their role and remits in relation to regeneration.
The CPP approach seeks to empower community planning partnerships to focus on the issues that matter most to communities. However, transfer of power should not necessarily stop with the organisations that make up those partnerships. It is widely accepted in local government that 'doing' services 'to' people is ineffective, costly, and jeopardises the trust of communities. That is why community engagement and empowerment is at the heart of the community planning process, including a major role for communities in setting and developing the priorities in SOAs. Over time that also means a dialogue about responsibilities and building capacity within communities to take ownership of outcomes. Councils and their partners are constantly exploring how to evolve that process, including creating community capacity and encouraging communities to take responsibility and control of assets. Aberdeenshire Council, for example, has developed a robust Community Asset Transfer Policy which enables the transfer of assets and services to community and voluntary organisations where they can utilise or deliver these more effectively or efficiently, or where these are no longer a core council function.

Councils are already working hard with communities to create new, innovative and more responsive forms of local delivery, including coproducing services and transferring assets where appropriate. Much good practice already exists, but we believe that this needs to be shared more widely. The Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill may have a role in helping make progress by providing tools and removing barriers to local action being taken at a local level; COSLA is broadly supportive of measures in the proposed Bill including the proposal of a duty being placed on community planning partnerships over engagement, however we are not convinced that bringing forward detailed statutory requirements provides an effective route to empowerment.

Another important aspect of regeneration work with local communities is carried out via Urban Regeneration Companies (URCs), with community representatives being involved at board level on URCs to ensure community benefit is delivered and the community can contribute to projects. Furthermore specific projects undertaken by URCs highlight the degree of community involvement and community benefit resulting from the work of URCs.

For instance Irvine Bay Urban Regeneration Company plays a crucial role in economic development in North Ayrshire. Its projects have included: refurbishment of the old station building in Saltcoats, a makeover of Beach Park in Irvine which involved local young people and provided them with employment experience; and the re-development and restoration of Trinity Church in Irvine, again involving local young people. These examples highlight the involvement of local communities and specifically in this case young people in regeneration activity in their local area. Likewise Clyde Gateway URC has a strong ethos of community involvement and community benefit in their projects. For instance via the creation of jobs and training places, including permanent positions for local residents at the Commonwealth Sports Arena/Sir Chris Hoy Velodrome, work with local schools to support pupils through transition and exam preparation and employability support, to the fact responses to consultations led to specific projects being undertaken by this URC, and that all projects themselves contain community benefit clauses.

In terms of the capturing and measuring of regeneration outcomes, this can be a challenging task due to the holistic nature of regeneration, and the range of social,
economic and physical infrastructure issues that it is aiming to address. It is vital that the focus is on outcomes, rather than outputs, as a focus on outputs would not offer a full picture of changes and activity in an area. Clearly reporting mechanisms are necessary in order to monitor the use of regeneration funding and investment, however existing or current means of monitoring or collecting information should be utilised where possible, with the revised evidence based approach to SOAs as one option which may be of use. However, it must also be ensured that focus is not simply on one sector or stakeholder such as local authorities, where the activity of other stakeholders is not monitored or measured. It is also important to recognise that improving outcomes is a medium to long term project requiring combined commitment and resources of all relevant partners. Rather than being constrained to short term targets and activities, the focus must be on the CPPs longer term impact, and on showing what is being done to secure improved outcomes on a continual basis.

Conclusion

21. As stated above local government in Scotland remains acutely aware of the importance of regeneration policy and funding particularly at this time of continuing economic challenges, and that regeneration policy and funding must be responsive to the needs of local communities and improve outcomes. In doing so it is vital that a holistic approach to regeneration is adopted, and that it is undertaken in partnership with others via CPP mechanisms, and that the funding landscape for regeneration is transparent and accessible for all those involved.