SUBMISSION FROM ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL

Background

1.1 This document has been drafted in response to a request from the Scottish Parliament’s Local Government and Regeneration Committee (21 August 2012) to Councillor James Gifford, Leader of Aberdeenshire Council and the Chief Executive.

1.2 The request takes the form of questions (shown in italics) 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.

What Does Regeneration Mean in Your Area?

2.1 Aberdeenshire Council is currently using the definition from The Scottish Government’s Regeneration Strategy ‘Achieving a Sustainable Future’ was published in November 2011. It 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 are also looking for a simpler, plain-English alternative to which the majority of our residents could relate more easily.

2.2 By definition, regeneration takes many years to effect change so we would not offer any examples of concluded projects. Instead it would be appropriate to note that Aberdeenshire has carried out initiatives in several areas in response to economic shocks, or as a result of the switch of lead role in local regeneration to Local Authorities and in response to Aberdeen City & Shire Structure Plan 2009 which included an emphasis on Regeneration Priority Areas (RPAs). For example:

2.2.1 Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership (1998-2008) was a partnership between Aberdeenshire Council, Scottish Enterprise and Communities Scotland from 1998-2009 and worked with the communities in key Aberdeenshire towns to deliver economic, physical, social and environmental change. It has been acknowledged as an early example of the Whole Town approach and as good practise through engaging with the community to effect change. Results were viewed as positive but limited due to the need to move on to other towns.

2.2.2 Building Buchan New Beginnings (BBNB 2003-2008) developed from Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership (ATP) with the same partners to specifically tackle economic shocks associated with the decline of the fishing industry and its consequential impacts. It focussed on physical and economic interventions with step-change projects in Peterhead, Fraserburgh, Banff/Macduff and Huntly. Current regeneration such as Energetica and the Fraserburgh North
Masterplan can be traced back to this initiative which ended as a result of national funding and organisational changes.

2.2.3 A number of community-based initiatives have also been undertaken including Regeneration Outcome Agreements in Peterhead and Fraserburgh, Transport & Connectivity actions in areas of Kincardine & Mearns and the formation of independent Development Trusts in former ATP towns as continuing partners of the Council.

2.3 From the above, it has been evident that lack of community cohesion has an extremely detrimental impact on the level of success, the duration of an intervention and the resources required whether in financial, leadership or visionary terms. A satisfactory outcome is a community better connected and engaged, with the confidence and leadership to take forward further improvements proactively and with reliance on self-sustaining income rather than grant dependency.

The regeneration strategy, resources and funding

3.1 Aberdeenshire Council is working through COSLA to achieve fairer and improved access to the many funding sources for which it does not currently qualify. The switch of funding from Scottish Enterprise discretionary investment to a per capita distribution through COSLA has not been to Aberdeenshire’s advantage and has resulted in reductions in the scale of interventions in the Council’s neediest areas. An approach which favours decisions on the strengths of a business case rather than historical data would enable Aberdeenshire to compete on a more equal footing. The amount of funding available overall remains very modest and does not match either the level of need or ambition within Aberdeenshire Council.

3.2 In terms of how the strategy is being implemented it is too early to tell. Aberdeenshire agrees with and supports many aspects of the strategy and is keenly waiting to take forward improvements within its 16 towns. The lack of intelligent data and good benchmarking continues to be an inhibition which we hope will be resolved through the Strategy and enable us to continue to develop our own plans in line with best practise.

Regeneration, equalities and preventative spending

4.1 Aberdeenshire Council is committed to improving efficiency through the sharing of services with the public sector, including sharing facilities and spend-to-save initiatives and to make it easy for people to participate in the decision making process through meaningful and well thought out consultation.

4.2 Aberdeenshire Council is also committed to the greater integration of Health, Community and Social Care and to working closely with our partners on the three key pillars: Economic Development, Early Intervention and Demography.
4.3 Regeneration Policy can assist with the delivery of the equalities agenda by helping minorities develop a voice and a capability which reduces vulnerability and empowers individuals, groups and communities to deliver for themselves.

Regeneration and sustainable economic development

5.1 Sustainable economic development is at the heart of the Council’s renewed Economic Development Strategy as well as being one of the three key pillars (along with Early Intervention and Demography).

5.2 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 which will encourage the businesses and entrepreneurs of tomorrow. Current access to funding, private or public, is considerably short of what is required to achieve optimum, sustainable growth. Aberdeenshire is open for business but would wish to do much more.

Community led regeneration and CPPs

6.1 Aberdeenshire Council has an extremely good relationship with its community planning partners and there are many examples of strong partnership working. This is especially true in the areas of Community Wellbeing & Community Safety and in Tackling Poverty and Inequalities. The business community is less engaged with community planning which leaves gaps in the areas of physical and economic regeneration in which they are generally experienced and proficient. This is being considered as part of ongoing work to review the Council’s Regeneration Strategy which should conclude in March 2013.

6.2 The Council has a strong track record in engaging and consulting with our communities. However, feedback and surveys regularly highlight their desire for action not just consultation. Aberdeenshire is also a geographically and demographically diverse region which emphasises the need for localism in that the needs for one area are not necessarily those of another.

6.3 In its regeneration strategy, the Scottish Government states “local partners and communities themselves are best placed to identify local assets and needs”. However, expecting everyone to agree on priorities and direction is unreasonable and may lead to poor compromise and fragmentation. The process requires leadership and facilitation. This includes being open about what can and can’t be done, and framing the engagement so people are aware of the whole picture rather than just their part. This is more likely to lead to a cohesive, achievable strategy.

Regeneration and climate change targets

7.1 This is an area in which Aberdeenshire Council, and the organisations which it supports, have been innovative and achieved some success. The achievements reinforce the message that climate challenge offers great opportunities as well as threats.
7.2 As part of the exit strategy associated with the Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership (see 2.2.1 above) independent Development Trusts were helped to set up in Peterhead, Fraserburgh, Banff/Macduff and Huntly. Core funding was provided for three years on a reducing basis with the Trusts expected to gradually become sustainable through acquiring an asset or carrying out commercial activities. All four Trusts derived financial and organisational benefits from involvement in recycling and renewable energy including:

7.2.1 *Huntly Development Trust* is developing interest in wind and hydro power in conjunction with existing developers through a community benefit share or an additional turbine. They have also partnered with a Registered Social Landlord who, in return for an equity stake in future developments is assisting with core costs and expert advice. They believe this to be a first in Scotland which, if successful, will not only return climate change benefits but will help counter fuel poverty and provide investment for new local housing.

7.2.2 *Peterhead Projects* have developed their 2ReUse recycling business which started in September 2010 and is operated as a social enterprise. In its relatively short life it has successfully diverted over 100 tonnes of materials from landfill and over 10,000 customers have visited the Berryden Road retail facility and supporting services. They were runner-up in the 2011 Alick Buchanan Smith ‘Spirit of Enterprise Award’ Finals and were awarded a Bronze ‘Green Apple Award’ in recognition of their Environmental Endeavours in the Community. They have also achieved ‘Volunteer Friendly Award’ holder and are a registered Accredited Recycling Centre (Revolve Level 1). Another of their activities has been to acquire community woodland for educational, recreational and environmental purposes including the planting of substantial numbers of trees. This has been made possible as part of the regeneration work being carried out.

Aberdeenshire Council
12 October 2012