



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Wednesday 19 June 2013

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE
20th Meeting 2013, Session 4

CONVENER

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP)

*Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab)

*Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con)

*John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)

*Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP) (Committee Substitute)

Jackie Brock (Children in Scotland)

Isabel Dunsmuir (DRC Generations)

Bronagh Gallagher (West and Central Area Voluntary Sector Network)

Von Jackson (Coalfield Communities Federation and New Cumnock Liaison Group)

Margaret Logan (Gallatown East Tenants and Residents Association)

Karen McGregor (Kirkcaldy East Regeneration Forum)

George Roberts (Whitfield Development Group)

Judith Robertson (Oxfam Scotland)

Brendan Rooney (Healthy n Happy Community Development Trust)

Robert Young (Community Links South Lanarkshire)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

David Cullum

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Local Government and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday 19 June 2013

[The Deputy Convener *opened the meeting at 10:00*]

Interests

The Deputy Convener (John Wilson): Good morning and welcome to the 20th meeting in 2013 of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee. I ask everyone to ensure that they have switched off mobile phones and other electronic equipment.

We have received apologies from the convener of the committee, Kevin Stewart. I welcome Christian Allard, who is substituting for him as an ordinary member of the committee.

Agenda item 1 is a declaration of interests. In accordance with section 3.5 of volume 3 of the code of conduct for members of the Scottish Parliament, I invite Christian Allard to declare any interests that are relevant to the committee's remit.

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): I have stood down from all the community groups that I was part of before I became an MSP, so I have nothing to declare.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you.

Subordinate Legislation

Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2013 (SSI 2013/154)

Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (Scotland) Regulations 2013 (SSI 2013/155)

Town and Country Planning (Appeals) (Scotland) Regulations 2013 (SSI 2013/156)

Town and Country Planning (Schemes of Delegation and Local Review Procedure) (Scotland) Regulations 2013 (SSI 2013/157)

10:01

The Deputy Convener: Under agenda item 2, we will consider four negative Scottish statutory instruments that relate to planning. Members have a paper from the clerk that sets out the purpose of each of the instruments.

The Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee considered the instruments and had no comments to make on them. As members have no comments, do we agree not to make any recommendations to the Parliament on the instruments?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Regeneration

10:02

The Deputy Convener: Agenda item 3 is an oral evidence session in our on-going inquiry into the delivery of regeneration in Scotland. We will have two panels of witnesses today.

The first session is a round-table discussion with representatives of various community organisations. We have about an hour and 20 minutes for the discussion. For the purposes of the record, it would be helpful if each of our guests stated the community group that they represent.

Robert Young (Community Links South Lanarkshire): I am from Community Links South Lanarkshire.

Brendan Rooney (Healthy n Happy Community Development Trust): Good morning. I am from the Healthy n Happy Community Development Trust, which is also in South Lanarkshire and which covers Cambuslang and Rutherglen.

George Roberts (Whitfield Development Group): I am the chairperson of Whitfield development group in Dundee.

Bronagh Gallagher (West and Central Area Voluntary Sector Network): I am from the West and Central Area Voluntary Sector Network.

Isabel Dunsmuir (DRC Generations): I am from DRC Generations, which is based in Scotstoun in Glasgow.

Margaret Logan (Gallatown East Tenants and Residents Association): I am a member of the Gallatown east tenants and residents association.

Karen McGregor (Kirkcaldy East Regeneration Forum): I am a member of the Kirkcaldy east regeneration forum and chairperson of the tenants group in the area.

Von Jackson (Coalfield Communities Federation and New Cumnock Liaison Group): I am a Coalfield Communities Federation director.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you very much.

It is the convener's privilege to ask the first question. Do the community representatives find the current range of financial and other support that is offered for their work appropriate to the tasks that they face?

Von Jackson: Who is offering the support?

The Deputy Convener: That is what we want to try to find out. When we go out and about and speak to officials, we are told that various agencies and local authorities provide financial and other support to allow communities to fully

engage in the decision-making process and deliver the services that community representatives want to deliver locally. In our inquiry, the committee is trying to find out whether such support is provided and, if not, what type of support would assist community organisations to deliver what they seek to deliver for their local communities.

Bronagh Gallagher: As someone who deals with a network of about 100 organisations in our area, my observation is that organisations are being required to adapt what they do to meet the criteria for the available funding rather than accessing funding for what they evolved to do or would like to do.

Brendan Rooney: My answer to the question would be yes and no. Let me start with the negative and finish with the positive.

As regards income, funding and so on, the answer has to be a fairly categorical no. There is a lack of consistent funding to support community groups and organisations in their core activities, such as for covering their overheads and running costs. The year-to-year element—on occasions, it may be month to month—of hand-to-mouth financial support is not good enough. There needs to be a far more consistent approach over a programme of perhaps three to five years to allow community-led groups to develop capacity and experience. That would allow them to generate probably another £3 or £4 for every £1 that is invested by the public purse. In that sense, unfortunately, the answer would need to be no.

As regards the sharing of skills, knowledge and capacity by public sector agencies, in some of the work that we do locally, there has been very good support. At an appropriate point, I can give examples of where that partnership approach has made a genuine difference to the regeneration of our most disadvantaged communities.

John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw (Lab): I have a follow-up question on what Brendan Rooney said about funding being a difficulty. Is that because the funding has not been for an identified period of one year, two years or three years, or is it because funding has become more difficult due to the financial climate in which everybody now has to operate?

Brendan Rooney: In my experience, it is both. We have been fortunate, but in the current financial climate generating income and funding from a wide range of different sources is a full-time occupation. Communities can be innovative in how they generate income, but they lack the core support to do that properly. For instance, my community organisation receives public sector moneys on an annual basis, but they are a pretty low percentage of our overall income and it is

difficult for us to create other opportunities to generate income.

Let me give a brief example that I hope will be of use. We are physically located right on the border of the Commonwealth games site. At the northern tip, if you go across the River Clyde, you are at the Commonwealth village. At the southern tip are the Cathkin Braes, where the mountain biking track will be located. One of our local volunteers suggested, "Why don't we turn Cambuslang and Rutherglen into a bike town?" That would promote the health and wellbeing of local residents and bring the communities together. From an economic perspective, an annual cycling festival could bring some vibrancy back to the main streets of Rutherglen and Cambuslang and improve business.

That is a fabulous idea and the local paper ran with it, but we have no money to develop it. We organised a food-for-thought event, to which we invited people from the council and the national health service as well as politicians and local people. There was real excitement about the idea, which came from a local resident, but we do not have the money to develop it. That is a day-to-day feature of trying to juggle funding. If we had confirmed income for three to five years, we could absolutely support developments of that nature.

Karen McGregor: There are only five community members on our committee, and our problem is that we do not have any funding, although we hear people saying that funding is available. We have only one chairperson in the forum, and there is no driver. We are the driving force in the community, but nobody is listening to us, yet we are in the top 2 per cent of the Scottish index of multiple deprivation. Unless funding is put into our area, nothing is going to change; we are just getting further and further up the ladder. The inequalities are all there and the research has been done, so why is the funding not coming to us? Why do we have to go to meetings where most committee members do not understand the language that is being used? Most people do not understand what community planning is. We have the ideas; we just want somebody from the community to work alongside an educated community worker. That would work.

What happened was that the money came in for a community worker, but we were not involved in the interview panel, so we got a community worker from the link up programme whom we do not get on with. It does not link up with us, because he has his own agenda with YMCA Scotland. Why is the funding not just coming to us? There must be a way for it to be trickled down to us.

The Deputy Convener: Karen McGregor has raised an interesting point. It is about chasing the money. The original question was about financial

and other support that communities need to develop their ideas and strategies and to organise locally. Do other community reps find it easy to get access to money or are there too many hoops to jump through before you can get it, assuming that you know that the money is there? We have found in our inquiry so far that the range of funding is vast, but people need to know that it is out there before they can apply for it.

Robert Young: A good funding officer can approach groups and help them to apply for those funds. The organisation that I work for was originally set up by local volunteers, so it has always been volunteer led. We have a new project, on which we did research by asking people in the community what they thought they might need after the forthcoming changes to the benefits system. They said that they needed information technology training, so we set up a hub based on what the community said. We showed that project to the council, which thought that it was a good idea to provide extra money on top of what we already had so that the project could be expanded to other areas, but the ultimate aim is to hand it back over to the community.

Another thing that I have often seen with the community groups that I have worked with is that it is difficult to do anything without a good funding officer. A lot of groups do not know how to get a funding officer, whereas organisations that are set up as Brendan Rooney's is have people whom we can approach for funding. The council provides us with a funding officer to help us out, but local groups will be bypassed and, even if they get funding, somebody may be imposed on them. That is a big problem.

People in the community know what is best for them, so why are they not picking the people to work with? In our case, the people who picked the people to work for the organisation were the volunteers who work in that area. They employed the staff, and that seems to be the best model. As Karen McGregor said, it has been a huge problem in her area. If they had been involved in the process of picking the staff who they would be working with, it would have been better.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I have some questions for Karen McGregor. What would you have done if you had had the funding? What has the community officer done, working with the YMCA? Is there any value at all in what has been done?

Karen McGregor: The problem is that we do not have a community hall, so we do not have a base to meet. That is our biggest issue, because we cannot get other agencies to come in. The area got funding through the YMCA, which brought in a link up officer, but that came with issues. The community worker had his own

agenda and he was not linking up. He was linking up with the YMCA, which was also looking for funding for its groups, so it approached the bowling club and hired part of the bowling green. That has caused problems, because the elderly bowlers are now ready to kill the teenagers who are going on the grass with their bikes. It has never been a thought-through process. It is a quick fix, like putting an Elastoplast on, because it makes it look as if something is happening.

10:15

Margaret Mitchell: What did you want to achieve if you had a community hall? Did you just want to run a community hall? What would you like to be done in the hall? What were you trying to do to help regeneration?

Karen McGregor: We would like to have seen more social enterprises. A lot of people in the community are the third generation in families in which no one has ever worked, but people could go out and mow a lawn and we could have a hairdresser's seat and a beautician. We could have facilities that are used to give people in our community skills. Most of the people have low self-esteem. Nobody has ever come to their door and spoken to them or done a community consultation to ask, "What would you like done?" It is all right to send out questionnaires, but does everybody know how to read and write? It is all right if a questionnaire is online, but does everybody have a computer? We live in a different world now. We would like funds for community capacity building to be ring fenced for an area and for the money to stay in that area until something changes.

The rent office will become available, as it will be empty. We have done a feasibility study, but the council told us last week that we must have a business plan. It is assumed that we are all very clever and know how to do a business plan. I do not know how to do a business plan. Who will help us to do it? The YMCA or some other agency might come in and say, "We will help you to do this", but the thing that scares us is whether what it does will be in its interest or in the community's interest.

Margaret Mitchell: Barriers are put in your way. Do other witnesses have similar experiences? Are there similar blockages?

The Deputy Convener: Brendan Rooney had his hand up.

Brendan Rooney: I do not want to speak too often, but I am passionate about the subject.

I also represent the Scottish Healthy Living Centre Alliance, which includes 72 community-led organisations throughout Scotland and the islands. We put to the Scottish Government a proposal that

we needed no extra money from the current public sector spend but that 0.5 per cent of the current health spend in Scotland would secure and establish for the next five years the organisations that the alliance represents. There would be no extra spend whatsoever. I have not done the same exercise for all community-led organisations in Scotland rather than just community-led health improvement organisations, but I put it to members that we are not looking at any extra spend. There is no need for any additional money, but we seek a mechanism to bend the spend—sorry, I do not like that term, but I cannot think of another one—to genuinely support community-led organisations.

The Scottish Government's community-led regeneration strategy is fabulous and the policy intent is magic but, unfortunately, the money and resources are not necessarily coming through. If we bend the spend and redistribute current public sector spending towards community-led organisations, I have no doubt that we will see sustained success.

The Deputy Convener: A crucial question is: how would you like local authorities to redirect funding towards community groups? That is, in effect, the major issue. We hear from local authorities and other agencies that a lot of money is available and that they are ploughing it into deprived communities. We have had almost 50 years of Government-influenced spending in certain communities throughout Scotland. How do we get to a situation in which local authorities and others direct the money to where you—community representatives—think it should go?

Karen McGregor mentioned community planning partnerships. They tell us that they direct funding into areas of need. However, Karen indicated that they do not consult you about where the money should go. Is there an issue about the consultation process and how the money is being spent? Would you like it to be spent in different ways?

Von Jackson: I have my doubts about community consultation.

New Cumnock, where I am from, has just got the carbuncle award. Obviously there is a big influx now—whatever New Cumnock wants just now New Cumnock seems to be getting. That does not seem to be a problem—except for the money side of things.

We had two schools in the village, and there was supposed to be a community consultation on which one would be the best one to keep—the traditional school on the main street, or the pre-fabricated, 1970s-style, flat-roofed school that was put up in the middle of the village. New Cumnock is on the main trunk road, so the school in the

middle of the village would have been ideal, because kids would have had a safer environment with a lot more green space round about. However, the council came back and said, "No, the community consultation says we have to keep the one on the main road."

Ten thousand pounds later—all that we have had in the past 10 years is £10,000 towards our new school—it is an absolute nightmare. If you go through the village at 9 o'clock in the morning, there are cars up and down the street, and heavy goods vehicles. Just now, the coal traffic is not going through, which is lucky. Scottish Coal went into liquidation, so we have not got its lorries—you can imagine what it was like when we did. At 3 o'clock, people do not even venture down the main road.

That problem could have been solved if the community consultation had been done right and everybody had been consulted, not just the kids at the school. The issue affects the whole village. They had to move all the kids out of the school and put them into the other one while all the repairs were done, whatever that cost, and then they had to move the kids back down, and all we got were problems. The school has been open for six months and the heating and other stuff have broken down three times. Is that good practice?

The Deputy Convener: I assume that the council carried out community consultation and that the result was that the community said it wanted the school to be where it is currently located. What did you mean when you said that the problem could have been solved if the council had got the community consultation right?

Von Jackson: Everybody in the village should have been consulted, not just the school pupils and their parents. Everybody could have looked at the bigger picture and thought about where it would be beneficial for the community to put the school. Which option would have created a safer, healthier environment? It was not just about what would look best—the school is on the main street, where there were already three derelict buildings, so it would have been another derelict building.

The Deputy Convener: Was it just parents and pupils who were consulted?

Von Jackson: Yes, as far as I know. I have asked people in the community and they did not take part. I did not take part.

The Deputy Convener: So no other community groups were involved in the process.

Von Jackson: That is right, as far as I know.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): This is a heretical question, just to see what folk think—maybe everyone will comment, if the convener allows. Given that many

changes, such as changes to schools, are brought forward by a big institution, such as a council, which does its own plans, would there be more confidence if consultation was led by community groups rather than by the institution making the proposal? I suspect that I know what the answer is, but it would be interesting to hear about it and what the problems might be, if the answer is as I think it will be.

Von Jackson: As I said, there is a community consultation going on in New Cumnock about our goals for 2020. We have had to offer an incentive to people to get the papers back to us—the local hotel owner is offering a night's stay. People are even going door to door to collect the papers.

I did a survey myself a couple of years ago for the liaison group at our fun day. People were just not interested. There was apathy. East Ayrshire Council gets the blame for the be-all and end-all, whether it is the council's problem or not, and people are just not interested in filling in forms. I hope that the incentive of the hotel break will make all the difference this time, but that is yet to be seen.

Isabel Dunsmuir: Our impression over the years has been that there is a lot of apathy in the community, which has arisen since community planning came into existence. Community planners were seen as disengaging communities, destroying a lot of the community groups, getting rid of where community voices were coming from and deciding who should be the voice of communities. That is changing slowly and gradually; a lot of work has been going on over the past two years to change that, but it is a slow process. What can be damaged within a year will need a lot of trust to be built back up and it will be another five years before you get the communities back on board.

Robert Young: We do consultation work in our area and we have a service delivery agreement with South Lanarkshire Council. The work is door to door, as that is the only way to do it. You have to keep going round and round until you get all the answers. Brendan Rooney has done that as well. It is the only way that you get a true picture of an area.

However, I would not say that the situation is totally negative. In areas where we have done consultations, the planning partnership has put in place things that have completely changed those areas. One of the areas that I worked in when I started 10 years ago is completely different now. It has worked, and there are other areas in which you can see huge differences.

I talked earlier about how a small change can completely change things. You can see changes happening already in communities as a result of

the small changes that the Government has introduced with different things in the welfare system. That could be a big problem in the future. Our communities could be damaged again, and all the work that has been done could be damaged badly.

Brendan Rooney: My answer to Stewart Stevenson's question is yes, 100 per cent, without doubt. Community-led groups have become adept at translation. For example, if the council wants to know something, community-led groups can adapt the council's lingo into language that local people can understand. The community-led group can say to the council, the NHS or the statutory agency, "That approach will not work in this area. Here is a better methodology"—such as the door-to-door approach—"Why don't you do it this way?" They have the local knowledge and the local language, so my answer is 100 per cent yes.

Christian Allard: I have a follow-up to Stewart Stevenson's question. Do community groups such as Von Jackson's have any experience of consultation? Have they drafted their own consultations at any point?

Karen McGregor: In 2007, we had a big consultation in the primary school. It was called "Gallatown: a regeneration journey". Everybody had to write something. It was a way for the community to say, "This is what we would like to see in our area in 2017." I do not think that the council reached any of its targets, so it just ripped that up and had a new consultation with exactly the same things that were there in 2007. Nothing had changed. It is only as good as a working document. It was up in the office for months—years—but nobody looked at it, yet we have the same issues. The communities say, "We've heard it all before. You've promised us this and you've promised us that." They are just not interested.

Stuart McMillan (West Scotland) (SNP): Last week, we had representatives of housing associations before us. Some questions were asked of them and a couple of points came out of last week's meeting. Does the panel think that housing associations are active in their areas? Do they, can they or should they play a role?

Isabel Dunsmuir: I am involved with Glasgow Housing Association. It funds our organisation and it is heavily involved in the local community. My background is housing: I was a volunteer member of West Whitlawburn Housing Co-operative and I am partly responsible for the healthy living initiative in Cambuslang and Rutherglen. That was the area where I lived. I would say that housing associations and co-operatives are heavily involved in their communities.

10:30

Brendan Rooney: That is my experience, too. A number of housing associations in Rutherglen, Cambuslang and the broader South Lanarkshire area are actively involved in what is, in most senses, a community-led approach to regeneration. They are rather large complex businesses led by tenants.

George Roberts: They would be delighted but, because of the financial restrictions on housing associations, they do not see the need to go forward at this time.

The Deputy Convener: Does Von Jackson or Karen McGregor want to comment? We have heard from Glasgow and South Lanarkshire, which are areas where housing associations have a large involvement. What is your experience of housing associations in your area?

Von Jackson: We do not have a housing association. They are demolishing houses in our area—every time a house becomes empty, it is demolished.

Karen McGregor: The houses in my area are mostly council, but there is a small pocket of housing association houses, although I could not tell you who they belong to. They are not invited to the table.

The Deputy Convener: They are not directly involved in regeneration issues in the way that the housing associations in South Lanarkshire or south Glasgow are.

Karen McGregor: I do not think that they have ever been asked.

Bronagh Gallagher: My experience is that housing associations generally play a strong role and are very much positioned where people have the most immediate need, which is around their housing, so they are close to the community and they know what is happening on the ground.

Stuart McMillan: Before I pick up on a couple of the witnesses' comments, I will pose a question to Robert Young. In response to a previous question, you touched on Government policy and the role of housing associations. What more can you say about that? I am keen to hear more about the issue.

Robert Young: I work with credit unions. We have worked with the housing associations, including in West Whitlawburn, to progress matters relating to the future universal credit and the changes to housing benefit. The credit unions have been very helpful in progressing that. For example, the credit union and one of the housing associations in East Kilbride have a joint venture to build single-apartment houses to try to solve the

bedroom tax-related problem of single people who have homes with multiple rooms.

I have always found the housing associations that I have worked with, through the credit union and other organisations, to be forward thinking. The West Whitlawburn Housing Co-operative has built many new houses to help that area to regenerate. In South Lanarkshire, the housing associations have been very helpful in that regard.

The clients we deal with from housing associations and elsewhere are in denial about the welfare changes that are taking place. Because they have yet to happen, people do not accept that they will happen. I realise that I have moved away a wee bit from what I mentioned previously, but I have had a positive experience of housing associations' involvement in regeneration.

Stuart McMillan: Housing associations tend to be very much community-led organisations. Government policy, whether from the Scottish or the United Kingdom Government, will affect what they can do. You mentioned the bedroom tax. Will that negatively impact on what housing associations can do for communities? Will that impact on what takes place in communities?

Robert Young: I was speaking to you earlier about this. We already have people coming along who are confused about why they are having to pay the bedroom tax. I cannot speak for housing associations because I do not work in a housing association but, among the group of people that we already work with locally, there is definite confusion about why they are having to pay the bedroom tax and what they can do about it. It is not as if they can move. If they do move, they are being taken out of their community.

The issue that regeneration in future will have a problem with is people being removed from their community to go to one-bedroom accommodation. If somebody is in a two-bedroom flat, and the one-bedroom house that the housing association has available is somewhere else, that is breaking up a community. Regeneration was all about building communities. In the long run, the bedroom tax could have a negative effect on regeneration because we are moving people out of their own area.

To tell you the truth, I do not think that the policy was thought through. It was one of those things thought up on the back of a cigarette packet. I can see that happening in future and housing associations will have to adjust to that.

Stuart McMillan: Last week, the housing associations were asked about their work doing repairs and tidying up areas. They were asked about the perception that some of the work that they undertake was badged or rebadged as regeneration as opposed to general maintenance

or maintenance of areas that they should have been maintaining in the first place. A couple of folk are nodding in agreement.

Isabel Dunsmuir: This is my personal belief. I have been involved from the very start of a housing co-operative, and it is about not just bricks and mortar but the people who live in the houses. It must be community led. If there is a housing association or co-operative in an area, it will be responsible for regeneration. People will go to it—as housing officers, the staff indirectly become social workers. They see people day to day and make referrals to the different organisations out there in the community. They try to bring in those organisations.

That is something that I see in the local area, working with GHA. I am linked in with GHA because of the funding of my post. GHA tries to do the best for its tenants. No one wants to see anybody being made homeless. A housing association wants to do its best to sustain a community, as well as sustain a tenancy. It is all about the individuals, although sometimes it comes down to, "Where do we go from here?", and a housing association has no alternative but to evict. It is more than just bricks and mortar and maintenance. GHA and other housing associations are key players in whatever is going on to sustain communities.

Bronagh Gallagher: My general comment on that is that housing associations are extremely important, but we need to avoid the danger that all the attention is focused on the housing association in an area as the sole community anchor organisation. If other organisations are in the area, the culture should encourage them to collaborate and work together, rather than preferring one over the other, particularly when it comes to funding or resources.

George Roberts: I wonder why so many one-bedroom houses were demolished. They turn around and announce the bedroom tax, and that people have to move to one-bedroom accommodation, and there is nothing there. It defeats the purpose.

Brendan Rooney: My experience of local housing associations—Rutherglen and Cambuslang, West Whitlawburn and a few others—is that they separate the core services of maintenance and so on from their wider regeneration work. There is quite a clear distinction and positive action.

Linking back to your previous question, I wonder about the impact of welfare reform and other pressures. I know that there is potentially a pension crisis looming. Might that lead to the blurring of core maintenance work and regeneration? I wonder whether the housing

associations now have to go through a period of focusing on consolidation and survival rather than on regeneration and wider services. That would be my fear.

Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): We have just spoken about housing associations as one of the mainstream services; I want to open that up. What other experience of mainstream services do you have within the community? We have had the example of housing; other examples could be education, social work, the police or other mainstream services in your community. What is the relationship with those services?

Karen McGregor: We do not have many outside agencies coming in, because we do not have a base or a place to meet. It is difficult for anybody to come in. What we need is what there is in another part of Kirkcaldy: the Cottage Family Centre was purpose built so that people could get access to the NHS and to needles, for instance. It has a nursery and there are schemes for fathers and gardeners. A lot of things go on there.

Regeneration is very good at painting walls and fixing gardens, but it does not fix what goes on behind closed doors. Families have broken down and there is anti-social behaviour; children are being brought up thinking that going round the park on a moped is fine, because that is what their dad used to do. In reality, of course, that is not fine. We are trying to get agencies to come in and try to change that behaviour: for example, to say, "Look, if you want to go about on a motorbike, why do you not learn how to fix a motorbike?" We tried to get an activity to do with bikes up and running with the YMCA, but it has not been very successful. The boys go there, but they do not know what to expect. They thought that they were going to get a certificate, or that perhaps they could get into college. There seem to be too many barriers. We come up with ideas such as the bike idea, but it was not thought through to the end. No action plan was put in; for example, it was not written down, "This is what happens at the beginning. We will get so many kids from the area; we will give them skills or City and Guilds training, and maybe two or three of them will go on to college."

To be fair, the only way out of poverty is through education and work. We think that we know the answers, but nobody seems to be listening.

Brendan Rooney: I want to give a good example, if I can. The Burnhill area in Rutherglen has been described as the land that time forgot. Statistically, in terms of data zones, it is the second most deprived area in South Lanarkshire. Both community and voluntary agencies should hang their heads in shame, as they left that area in a very poor state indeed.

We were invited, along with the NHS, the local authority, police and fire services and others, in effect to sit down and say, "What can we do in this area?" We advocated very strongly that we should ask that of the people who lived there, and that is what we did. We constructed a consultation exercise in which we asked the local services—the NHS, the local authority and the police and fire services—what information they needed. We had to fight fairly hard. We had to say, "Well, if that's what you need, that's great, but it cannot be the only information that you get." We tried to put in a community perspective.

We asked people whether they had been involved in any voluntary or community activity in their area. Only 30 per cent of that community had ever been involved in such activity, which I thought was quite tragic. We then asked them whether they would be interested in becoming involved, and 60 per cent said yes. We thought that that was the single most important piece of information on which to build, and we have built on it.

The experience of working with the council, the police and other statutory agencies was very positive. There is a residents action group and there have been community lunches and community clean-up days. The council officer has been the gatekeeper of access to council services to which we never would have had access. The most difficult experience is getting to the right person: once you get to them, they are always very helpful. The community officer played that facilitator role, so there is a parent cafe, an employment group and two youth groups, one for eight to 12-year-olds and one for 12 to 18-year-olds. No such activity had existed in the area for an awfully long time. To give credit to the statutory agencies, they have been fully supportive of the process.

From our perspective as a community-led organisation—we are led by 10 local residents—the trick is being able to understand the languages: we understand the policy language, the interagency language and what local people are saying. However, we need to invest further in facilitating the coming together of the different perspectives.

10:45

Bronagh Gallagher: What I have witnessed is mainstream agencies losing the ability to be responsive at a local level because their work plans and priorities tend to be centrally driven, whether at local authority level or Scottish Government level. Community groups need to be able to say to health staff, "We need the tooth fairy," or whatever, but they have to fight very hard to get staff to come in and deliver services. Mainstream agencies need to find the

ability to respond to what is coming up on the ground and what folk are saying in an area, rather than taking an approach that is based on top-down priorities.

John Pentland: Brendan Rooney gave a very good example of how CPPs can deliver, which is tremendous. However, I am sitting beside Karen McGregor, who has not even got on to the first rung of the ladder to getting things delivered in her community. Obviously, there is a problem somewhere between what has been achieved in Burnhill and what Karen faces in her area. What is the problem? How is it that Karen is unable to achieve on behalf of her community the same ambitions that Brendan Rooney has achieved for his? Is it a leadership thing? Does it come down to resources? Is it about communication? I need to find out what the answer is, because what we have heard is not dissimilar to previous evidence that we have heard on the issue. How can one part of the country be successful while another part of the country cannot even get started?

George Roberts: Our area is quite fortunate, because we are getting a new, custom-built life centre, if you want to call it that, so that all the agencies—social work, the NHS and the council—will be in the one building. Instead of people having to ask where to find the different agencies, they will find everything in one building. We have been very successful in getting the new building and we hope that it will open at the end of this year. The facilities will be on tap for everyone in the community.

The Deputy Convener: Who is going to own, manage and operate the new life centre?

George Roberts: It is a council-operated centre, but a management group will run it.

The Deputy Convener: As part of our inquiry into regeneration, community asset transfers have come into the debate. I am interested in what you said about a life centre being established in Whitfield. I just wanted to clarify who would own the building, given what I know happens in other communities. I have to declare an interest, because the community that I live in is currently looking at a life centre for the village, but the community wants to own and control the centre and run it for the benefit of the community. The aspiration of some communities seems to be that they are quite happy for the council to retain ownership of buildings and to manage them but to delegate some responsibility to local management committees to operate the buildings.

George Roberts: The council will own the centre, but community representatives will be on the management committee.

The Deputy Convener: Brendan, you wanted to respond to John Pentland's question.

Brendan Rooney: Thank you, convener. I think that the answer is a very complex one and I am not sure that I have the full picture on it. From my experience, it appears to me to be largely a cultural issue. That leads me to probably one of the most important points that I have raised, which is that community planning partnerships seem to have a fundamental lack of trust in community groups and organisations having the skills, commitment and capacity to manage resources and make effective decisions. The good experience that I cited took a lot of brokering, discussion and reassurance from us. Over the past 10 years, we have, thankfully, managed to develop a reputation as an organisation that can take on resource, spend it wisely and make a difference to people's lives. Ultimately, that is what regeneration is all about. It is a complex situation, but there is a cultural issue in the fundamental lack of trust among community planning partners generally throughout Scotland.

The Deputy Convener: I am going to ask Margaret to speak on this issue. We have heard from Karen McGregor about the apparent lack of resources going into your area.

Margaret Mitchell: Every community has a school. To what extent is that used as an asset in the community for out-of-hours activity? Is there even spare capacity within the school for meetings and things like that? If we could get the experiences of those around the table, that would be pretty good.

The Deputy Convener: Margaret Logan?

Margaret Mitchell: You have not said anything yet, Margaret. You have been sitting there nice and quietly.

Margaret Logan: You are all talking about what communities have done, and that is what we are trying to do. Not all communities have disabled young adults—some of you around the table might have, but none of you has touched on that. You are all talking about what you want. Do not get me wrong—we are battling to get what you have got. We would love to get what you have got, but there are not just normal people in the communities. Karen McGregor will know that I have a 20-year-old in the house who looks normal but who has a lot of problems. My issue at the minute is with Fife Council, which has said that he is not getting back into college because of a lack of funding or a lack of this or that. The council has not come to me to say, "This is here," or, "That is here." It is me, myself and I. If I had a community hall like you guys have, I would be able to take him there and say, "Right, help me. I'm here. I'm stuck."

Margaret Mitchell: Could you use your local school out of hours to run a club, whether for disabled people or for other skills to be learned?

Margaret Logan: We could, but we would have to pay and we have not got the funding to back us.

Margaret Mitchell: Does that mean that none of your schools is being used in that way just now?

Margaret Logan: They probably are, but for school-age people, not for young adults.

Margaret Mitchell: Not for the community at large.

Margaret Logan: Not even for 15 and 16-year-olds who are out and about. As Karen McGregor says, they are out on their motorbikes and we have got to sit and listen to them. There are bound to be better things out there for them, which they could achieve if we had what you have got.

To get funding, we set up a group of ladies and called ourselves the fat club. Fife Council was mortified and said, "You can't call yourselves that."

Margaret Mitchell: Was it not politically correct?

Margaret Logan: You should have heard what we were going to call ourselves, but we decided on the fat club. Not one of us is skin and bone. We were a group of women—about seven or eight of us—who met every Tuesday for two hours, and that was our time. It was brilliant. We then got a loan of bikes from Fife Council, which was brilliant. I had not been on a bike for 30-odd years, but it was fun. It made us have a laugh and go out into the community. It brought us eight ladies together and, when we talked to other people, they said, "Oh, we'd love to do that." We had to go to Kirkcaldy KANES—the Kirkcaldy area neighbourhood engagement scheme—to get funding for us eight ladies from Kirkcaldy to get bikes.

Margaret Mitchell: It sounds as though, sometimes, you do not know the right person to go to. Can I ask Karen McGregor about the schools issue?

Margaret Logan: Can I just finish? Sorry.

Karen McGregor and I got asked to go to a cycling and walking conference at Our Dynamic Earth. It was only my second conference and I just thought that I would not be able to do it, but, after we got there, went on stage and told them what we had, we were offered two lots of funding for bikes. Fife Council was mortified because we were approached and one of the funders was only a stone's throw away from our doors.

Karen McGregor: It was in the YM.

Margaret Logan: It was. Fife Council did not come to us to tell us that it had a pot of money and could get us four bikes to start with and we could build on that. It does not seem to like coming to

meetings, because we get a lot done—at least, we try to.

On schools, it takes a lot for people to come out. Childcare is an issue as well, because there are too many young children having children.

Margaret Mitchell: Schools are an asset, although it does not sound as though they are. Is it your experience too, Karen, that schools are not really used out of hours?

Karen McGregor: The school is too expensive to use. The high school has a community facility for five-a-side football, for instance, but local people do not use it; people who come from outside use it.

We got the use of the gym hall on the sly. That is how we started the fat ladies club, but we did not have to pay for that. However, somebody else has taken over and has discovered that we are using the gym hall. They asked why we are there but not paying. The hall was there, so why not use it?

A teacher at the primary school is keen for the school to be used, but she has an issue with who will open up and close the building. The local office is not used at night, although it has a meeting room that could be used at night and outwith hours. It is open only three days a week now. The issue is who will carry and have access to the keys? Can somebody in the community be trusted? People who live in a disadvantaged community are all seen as bad: we might rob the place. There is an issue of trust.

There are places that can be used in the short term but, for something to change in our area, we need to bring in every service to change the way that people think and bring up their kids. We know that some people will not change—they just do not want to—but unless the services are brought in nothing will change and we will stay in the top 2 per cent of the SIMD.

People in our area just think that they live in a bad area. They do not know that they are actually living in poverty and that there is a great big, huge world outside the wee area that they never leave because they do not have the money, whether to go abroad and see different ways of life or even to come across to Edinburgh to go to the zoo with their kids.

Margaret Mitchell: It sounds very limited. What are the other witnesses' experiences?

Von Jackson: Our school is definitely a community asset. I was invited along to the open day, and it is absolutely brilliant. However, no community group could afford to use it. I brought that up at a planning meeting. I said, "You give the community groups money for their lets and different things, so why not just give them it for

free? Saves you a lot of paperwork and us a lot of hassle,” but no—that just does not work. It keeps somebody in a job if they have to do the hall lets and stuff like that. Ours is a state-of-the-art school. It is beautiful.

Our Age Concern group—another hat that I wear—is not even using our community centre this year. We would love to go to the school and hold our social evening there at the end of the year, but we cannot afford it. We will have to hold our social evening at the working men’s club because the community centre is that run down. It is one of the buildings that is up for asset transfer.

It is not viable for us to use the school. I wish we could, but there is no way we could afford to.

Margaret Mitchell: That seems pretty shortsighted. What is the experience in South Lanarkshire?

Robert Young: The convener asked about a hall. We use the local hall, which is owned by the council but run by a local committee. It has its own gardening facility with vegetables and flowers that are given out to the community. The committee has its own groups, which use the hall at a much-reduced rate. It has us in there now at a cost, but we help it with IT training by running a night class for it, so it is a quid pro quo.

At the moment, our problem—which is becoming bigger—is that many councils are switching to trusts. Because the trusts have to account for the cost of buildings, they have to charge for their use. Under committees led by the community, groups can be charged, but it is up to the committee how much they are charged. That is a better way to do it.

11:00

Anne McTaggart talked about how much influence we have. Our organisation is community led. All the board members are people from the community. They all sit on committees that are run by the council, so they have their say. I know that that seems completely different to some of the people at the table; I wish that they would visit our organisation and Brendan Rooney’s organisation to see what they can achieve. For all that we criticise what goes on, the council has been a huge help with organisations in South Lanarkshire. I think that it helps that people from the community are on the board.

If all community resources such as leisure centres had a committee that was run by the community, those committees would be able to take into account the fact that something would benefit the community and those costs could be drastically reduced, instead of having a blanket charge of £10 an hour. However, the fact that a lot

of councils are switching to trusts could be a big problem, because the trusts are separate from the councils.

Brendan Rooney: I would like to make two points. I reassure Margaret Logan that many of the 130 volunteers who are actively involved with us have disabilities and that our volunteers are of all ages. I completely understand her point. She is not alone there.

I would like to answer the question about schools as a resident and a volunteer in Cambuslang and Rutherglen—I have not sought the views of my organisation on the issue, so I do not feel that I could represent it properly. My response is pretty categorical: I accepted the need to build new schools, but I had difficulty with the use of community land to build them on. Those who are responsible for making the decision not to make those new community schools that have been built on community land accessible to community groups at an affordable rate, or free of charge, should be ashamed of themselves.

If any members are interested in seeing it, I have a photo on my mobile phone that was taken the first Saturday after the Olympics, in the midst of the euphoria over how good the games had been. I walked out of my back door and looked at the playing fields, where there are a number of football pitches, tennis courts and other facilities, and not a single child or adult was utilising them. Why? Because they could not afford to do so.

I was delighted when my oldest son phoned me to say, “Dad, the janny’s thrown me off the pitches, but I’m no going.” I asked what had happened. He told me that the janny had said that he needed to pay, but he had told the janny that it was community land, so he was not going to pay. I said, “Good on you, son.” I asked what the janny was doing. My son said, “He’s getting the polis.” I said, “Okay. Wait till the polis come and when they arrive say, ‘Thanks very much. I’ll just go now.’” The point is that, for local groups and local people, community schools in our area are not affordable or accessible, and that is not good enough.

Margaret Mitchell: Is that because of the letting policy?

Brendan Rooney: Absolutely. It is to do with how the letting policy deals with opening hours.

The Deputy Convener: I seek clarification. Is the issue the management of the school rather than the letting policy? Is the school in question a private finance initiative/public-private partnership school?

Brendan Rooney: Yes, it is. The issue is actually to do with the opening hours—the times that the school facilities are open. We were sold that it would be a community school by night and

at the weekend, but it is not open at the weekend. The letting charges are an issue, too.

Margaret Mitchell: Could you seek recourse by going back to the planning conditions?

Brendan Rooney: I suspect so, but I have no real confidence that that would make any difference.

George Roberts: The new school that has been opened in Whitfield—Ballumbie primary school—is not, to our good fortune, a PPP school, and the community is going to be allowed to use the school gym and assembly hall as a community facility; it will also have rooms in the new life services centre. The scheme has other primary schools and a secondary school, and one of the headmasters has said that he would be delighted for the community to use the school's facilities because after 4 o'clock and at the weekend everything is closed up. Again, however, it all comes down to finance. Who is going to open up and close the school? Who will be responsible for maintenance? The headmaster himself has said that it is ridiculous that councils do not let communities use facilities that are just standing there vacant.

Isabel Dunsmuir: I have three after-school projects that run between 3 o'clock and 5 o'clock, and I get the facilities for free until 5 o'clock. After that, I have to pay for the janitor or whoever it is who closes the hall. It is the same with every primary or secondary school in Glasgow: after 5 o'clock and at the weekend, the facilities are not free. A lot goes on in the schools, but they are just too expensive.

Bronagh Gallagher: There has also been a shift with a lot of out-of-school care providers being advised that they need to vacate premises in primary schools because of letting policies and plans for the future use of school property.

Christian Allard: I have listened to people saying that they are not allowed to use the community's assets or that they have to vacate premises by a certain time, and Karen McGregor said that there was nowhere for the whole community to meet. Would having your own key to a particular building make a difference? Have any of you heard of asset transfer? Have you tried to own or at least lease some of these assets for your community, which means that you would have a key to get into and out of the building whenever you wanted? Instead of going to see your local council or any other agencies, you could tell them to come to your place and see you. Do you have any experience of that, and do you think that that might be the way to go in future?

Von Jackson: Since last January I have had the railway station at New Cumnock—which is owned not by the council but by Network Rail and

ScotRail—and have not had to pay a penny for anything. People are bending over backwards to help; in fact, I have recently secured funding from the ScotRail stations community regeneration fund and the Railway Heritage Trust to turn the station into a cafe and youth hub. The area has been crying out for a place for 14 to 17-year-olds who are looking for somewhere safe to go that is not going to cost their families any money. There are lots of groups, clubs and different things going on in New Cumnock, but they all cost money. In any case, when young people turn 14 or 15, they do not want to wear a scout uniform, go to the Boys' Brigade or do that kind of regimented stuff. They just want a safe place where they can do their own thing.

I picked up on this when I was a judge with SURF—Scotland's independent regeneration network—and visited different projects that worked with youths. I saw that they were getting youths in from the very beginning, saying to them, "We've got this room for you. What would you like to be in it? How do you want it to be designed?" and letting them have some ownership of it. I have always worked with youths and when I took the idea back to my own community the young people said, "That'll be great. That'll be brilliant." Now that we have set up and got the funding for the project, all the outside agencies are coming to see me. For example, we had a youth meeting in the building that involved local councillors—two members of the council's hierarchy came along, which was really brilliant—and people from youth leisure facilities and what used to be called community action but is now vibrant communities, and we discussed what we could do for youths and what else was happening.

All of that is absolutely brilliant, but as I have said, the building is owned by ScotRail not the council. I do not know whether that makes a difference. As I said, quite a few buildings in New Cumnock are up for asset transfer, but they are all big buildings for a small community group to take on and it would take quite a bit to make them sustainable. That is what puts off a lot of wee community groups—especially just now, when funding is getting cut.

I was at a Big Lottery funding event yesterday and the criteria are moving even within that funding. The Big Lottery is not just looking for a long-term lease; it is looking for you to own the building, which can be quite scary for a community group to take on. At the end of the day, buildings are moving from the local authority to the community group. If it does not go right, the community group gets the blame for the building sitting there empty or for things not working out. It is a big responsibility for the community to take on some of the asset transfers that are going on in different communities.

Brendan Rooney: I apologise for speaking too often, convener. Asset transfer is definitely part of the way forward. It goes back to Karen McGregor's point, and Von Jackson just touched on it as well. Community planning partnerships and national agencies could help community groups by equipping, training, upskilling and supporting them. Karen talked about a business plan, for instance. A business plan does not have to be that difficult; it can be relatively simple. Community planning partnerships could support community groups to develop the skills and the knowledge and generate the money and so on to take on that asset transfer. That is where support could be offered.

Karen McGregor: It is about equality as well. Certain parts of Kirkcaldy have three community centres; we have absolutely none. We get overlooked. The people in the area that has three community centres all vote and they will go and annoy their councillor. The people in our community do not annoy their councillor—they probably do not even know what a councillor's role is, because nobody has ever explained it to them, but that should not make a difference. It is about equality. Whatever one area gets should be fed into another area. We should not have to go and say, "Look, how do we get a key to get a community hall?" and then bring agencies in, because it seems that once you have a property or a building, the agencies come.

I have had people phoning me—I am not even a paid worker for the Gallatown, although you would think that I was. I get more stressed from being a volunteer in the community than I do in my real job at night. I work 12 nights on and two nights off. I only get four days off a month on rubbish wages working for the council. If I need to come to a meeting at night time, I have to take unpaid leave or a holiday. I am not prepared to do all of that.

Most of the others work in Asda on minimum wage, while the shareholders take all the profit—we are just living on the scraps. People are not motivated enough to do a business plan and to attend boring meetings that are constituted and where you need a chair, a secretary and a treasurer—people are not interested in that. People are only interested in having a cup of tea and a biscuit and saying, "It'd be good if we had a community centre—old Mrs Broon doon the road's never seen naebody for months." Mrs Broon will probably be dead by the time something comes along—there is nothing for the elderly.

There are wee drops of agencies coming in, but it is not enough. There is a youth club for 45 minutes a week, but in another area of Kirkcaldy, they have a youth club every night. It is about people saying, "You know what? That's not fair." It

is about equality. What is good for one area should be good for another area.

Bronagh Gallagher: Just to pick up on a couple of points, asset transfer is a great idea in principle, but in practice there needs to be massive capacity building and the asset should not just be handed over after a year. It is about working with people to build capacity and recognising that it needs to be sustainable, so funding support is not just withdrawn as soon as you get to a certain point—core funding and grant funding might be needed for many years. Also, the state of some of the facilities that people might inherit means that they will need to be invested in as well. It is a great idea in theory, but a lot needs to go around it so that people are not just set up to fail.

John Pentland: We have heard some good examples of CPPs—Brendan Rooney highlighted one—but we also heard about areas where people do not believe that the CPP is working. What is the rest of the panel's experience of CPPs? How realistic are their plans? I follow you on Twitter, Karen, and one of your comments was:

"Community empowerment only occurs when local people lead the process of taking power and control over resources."

Do the other people on the panel agree with that?

Karen McGregor: Was that me? That was awfully intelligent. [*Laughter.*]

John Pentland: Perhaps I could ask Robert Young to start while the other members of the panel are given time to think.

11:15

Robert Young: Brendan Rooney and I are both from South Lanarkshire, so we have similar CPP experience. Our experience has not always been positive, but it is certainly more positive than Karen McGregor's.

Only if your organisation is community led, as our organisation was and still is, will people listen to you. If your organisation is community led, the CPP will at least listen to you and allow you to sit on committees and get your point across. We have had a lot positive experiences, although we can see that some things could be done better.

John Pentland: Do you think that CPPs are working, or is there still room for improvement?

Robert Young: Sometimes you might feel that the CPP is just a rubber-stamp—as Brendan Rooney said earlier, issues are brought up and then they are done with—but what comes out of the CPP can be of benefit. In South Lanarkshire, we now have a team that deals just with tackling poverty, and board members from our organisation sit on it. That was a good idea that

seems to work reasonably well. These things feed down into the community. That is the way to make it work, I feel.

John Pentland: If you could do anything to improve CPPs and make them work a bit better, what would that be?

Robert Young: There needs to be more community involvement. If there is no community involvement in the area, the process does not work. In areas where it works, there always seems to be community involvement, so that seems to be the way to make it work. The community must have some investment in the process or it will not work. As Karen McGregor said, the CPP will say, "This is what you need", but the community might then find out that what has been provided is not what it needs. That happens because the community has not been involved.

John Pentland: Do you still believe that the community—

The Deputy Convener: Let us go round some of the other witnesses.

John Pentland: Sorry. Once I ask Robert Young this question, I hope that each individual on the panel will answer.

The Deputy Convener: I would prefer that you directed questions to the whole group of witnesses rather than singled out an individual witness. This is a panel round-table discussion. Brendan Rooney has already indicated that he wants to answer one of the three questions that you have asked Robert Young.

Brendan Rooney: I have already given a good example and there will be other good examples from around the country, but there are also examples where the CPP does not work, as Robert Young has alluded to.

I urge members of the Scottish Parliament to rename the process. As I pointed out over breakfast, "community planning" does not involve the community. There is an urgent need for agencies to plan together, which is what community planning is. There is no community involvement in community planning at the moment, so I urge members to acknowledge that by changing the name. We need to look to incorporate community involvement in the planning process, but communities are currently not involved.

George Roberts: Sometimes the CPP seems to be just a talking shop. The real issues are put at the bottom of the agenda, whereas they should be at the top of the agenda. The relevant and most important points are dealt with when the meeting is coming to a close, as if to say, "Let's get this over and done with." Those points are never taken on board, whereas if you had more community

personnel—rather than agency personnel—you might get some progress.

Bronagh Gallagher: My experience is that the process is definitely getting better, but it is very top-down. I can think of few examples of issues that have come up from the community and ultimately been addressed by the CPP.

There needs to be recognition of how big the shift in culture needs to be in community planning to get over the idea that there are professionals and there are communities. We should all be working together to consider what the issues are. My message to the Government would probably be that we need to recognise that that culture change needs to be supported with resources. There is a training and capacity issue around that for everyone involved so that we can move forward together.

Isabel Dunsmuir: If you are going to make any change in community planning, you should make the community the lead agency, not the councillors and the local authority. Further, it is important to drive things. At the moment, people are reacting to what is going on instead of being proactive. That needs to change.

Margaret Logan: I agree with Isabel Dunsmuir. The community needs to lead things. Do not take this the wrong way, but all the councillors are pen-pushers. They are up above us. They pay attention to what they want, not what the community wants. If they stepped down to our level, they would realise what we want.

Karen McGregor: I want to go to an area that has been in the top 5 per cent of the SIMD and has managed to get out, so that I can see how it did it. We should go to different agencies—like Brendan Rooney's or Robert Young's—and see what they have done. Unless we see places that have made progress, we will still be stuck at the starting point with nobody really listening to us.

Von Jackson: I agree with Isabel Dunsmuir. The process must be community led. The community has to have a bigger say than the agencies. There should be more people from communities sitting around the table than from outside agencies.

Isabel Dunsmuir: If some of the head guys who sit up above us came and worked at the coalface in the communities for a month they would understand what people are dealing with on a day-to-day basis.

The Deputy Convener: I thank the witnesses for the way in which they have responded to the questions today. That information will inform the committee's future deliberations. The *Official Report* of this meeting should be available early

next week. We will ensure that the clerks circulate copies of it.

Other issues will, no doubt, arise during our future discussions. Feel free to drop us a line or phone the clerks if you hear something in the future evidence sessions that you would like to comment on.

I suspend the meeting for 10 minutes.

11:22

Meeting suspended.

11:32

On resuming—

The Deputy Convener: We continue with agenda item 3, on the delivery of regeneration in Scotland. I welcome our second panel of witnesses, which consists of Jackie Brock, chief executive of Children in Scotland; and Judith Robertson, head of Oxfam Scotland. I invite the witnesses to make a brief opening statement, if they wish.

Jackie Brock (Children in Scotland): Thank you, convener. I have had the benefit of hearing the previous evidence session, which was very useful. I will tie in some opening comments to my written submission and to comments that were made earlier.

I will explain why we asked the committee to consider schools as the hub for community regeneration. First, you heard it expressed eloquently in the earlier evidence session that schools should be considered as a community asset, not a cash cow. They do not just function for their pupils but are community assets: the buildings and the resources within them—teachers, IT sessions and so on—and the surrounding land.

We heard one of the earlier speakers say that they get to use the school on the sly. Many parent-run out-of-school clubs use school facilities outside school hours, often without permission but with the benign oversight of the school leadership. They would not be able to use the resources otherwise, because of the expense. Again, the committee heard that eloquently described earlier.

Secondly, the question is what function and purpose our schools have. Clearly, the learning of pupils is at the heart of that purpose. However, schools also provide a powerful function for tackling seriously the attainment gap for the children in our most deprived communities, addressing the issue of childcare in order to get more women and men into the workforce, and increasing the skills base of all our local communities. Schools cannot do all that on their

own; they need to have resources, people and access to funding provision, and to be able to offer a broader service to not just our pupils but the wider community.

Thirdly, schools have the advantage of being seen as a universal service provider that will not necessarily stigmatise. Equally, most parents and school communities are passionate about what they can do to support their school, and they can be a driver for engagement. The interest that parents have in schools and their children's futures is an ideal way in to addressing some of the apathy questions that were raised earlier.

I feel passionately about this issue. I am sure that we will hear of some great examples from Judith Robertson, but the question is: how do we move from fantastic projects in schools, which many of you will be aware of, to regeneration opportunities for children and their wider communities? We must look at the sustainability of projects. The convener touched on the issue earlier when he said that a range of funding is available, but how on earth do we access that? We think that there is a role for providing a better opportunity for schools and the school communities to access the range of funding that is already in place.

Equally, we think that there is a considerable role for community planning partnerships. I think that all committee members have heard most CPPs say that they already give out lots of funding and resources for various priorities. However, the point is that the activities are not aligned. I think that the school community and its population provide an ideal focus for aligning a huge raft of regeneration activities that are being developed. They could be much more effective and sustainable if the school was one of the bases and hubs for regeneration in the community.

Judith Robertson (Oxfam Scotland): From our perspective, the fundamental purpose of regeneration is to tackle poverty. For us, therefore, over the 30 or 40 years in which regeneration has been a buzz word or catchword and a way of Government functioning, it has clearly not been a hugely successful process.

We continue to have a large section of our population and a lot of children living in poverty. We are very good at naming where they are and we know how to track how that poverty manifests, but we are clearly not very good at turning the situation around and transforming communities so that all individuals have the opportunity and capacity to access employment and decent community resources and services—that is a real gap.

In the most recent past, the community planning partnerships were legislated to be the principal

vehicle through which regeneration is delivered. The committee heard in the earlier evidence session—I know that you also heard about this directly from some of the projects that we work with in Govan—about some of the significant and major gaps for community organisations that try to relate to the CPP, influence it or, indeed, have any impact on it at all. Some of the earlier discussion drew out reasons for that.

From our perspective, it seems that we are expecting community organisations to tackle problems that as professionals we often fail to tackle, and to engage in community planning processes when they have no individual resources to do that. Community organisations often have very few staff and work with volunteers, who often do not have much time, as the committee heard from the woman from Kirkcaldy. In my experience, that is a very common instance. We expect some of the most vulnerable people in our communities to take care of some of the most vulnerable people, which is not okay.

The committee will have seen our written submission, so I am sure that members will pull out some of its points in the course of questioning. We have offered a raft of options and different ways of working that could transform some of the dynamics. Making that transformation is not without its challenges, and I will highlight two.

One is a culture within local government that the Christie commission clearly identified, although it perhaps did not characterise it in the way that we do. What we get from back from the organisations that we work with is that it is not a partnership—it is a war. People see local authority structures as being in opposition to the community and do not see them as an ally in trying to bring about change. That is a huge problem: the culture in those structures of dismissing community members and not seeing them as sources of expertise, who should be brought to the table on equal terms, is disabling and militates against transformative change.

The other challenge is to do with the resources that are available to communities to engage in the processes. We seem to expect some of the poorest communities somehow—magically—to have resources that will enable them to play a meaningful role in community planning partnerships. That is bonkers. Such an expectation is naive and unrealistic—things have not worked like that and will not do so.

I have been part of the reference group for the proposed community empowerment and renewal bill, and there has been a lot of discussion about supporting some of the poorest communities to engage more meaningfully in community planning. However, the notion that additional focus and resources should be directed into poor areas to

support organisations to engage meaningfully does not seem to be on the agenda. It is on our agenda. We have tried to promote a recognition that we will have to do something different in poor communities, because what we have done previously has not worked.

I could say loads more, but I will stop for the moment.

The Deputy Convener: Given what you said, is the key issue with regard to regeneration the need to focus on tackling communities who are in poverty? You talked about community planning partnerships. In some areas, work has been going on for 20, 30, 40 or more years. Are we focusing in on poverty in the context of the regeneration agenda?

Judith Robertson: I think that such a focus is there in some of the writing and the rhetoric. There might be intention in that regard, but it is not delivering in practice. Why not? We must ask what we are doing wrong. There are lots of aspects to that, which are not all in the gift of community planning partnerships—it is naive to think that they are. There is a bigger picture, too.

Answers to the why-not question lie in all the comments that you heard from the previous panel and that I am sure that you hear when you are out on visits. Who are we are talking to? Who are we are asking? Who we are choosing to engage with? How are we doing that? Are we engaging in a way that generates trust, ownership and a desire to contribute ideas, enthusiasm, time and energy?

If we are not engaging in such a way, we will not get engagement from community organisations. Why should they engage? Most have their own agendas and things that they are trying to achieve. That is positive, and some of what they do is fantastic. However, when they are asked to get involved in processes, as often happens, they do not see those processes deliver for them or for anyone, so the enthusiasm wanes and people withdraw and become very cynical.

It is a difficult process to manage—it is not perfect. At a time when resources are being extracted quite harshly from vulnerable community organisations, it becomes almost impossible for such organisations to contribute. For me, that is a real issue. It is not that there is no focus on poverty; it is just that we have not yet grasped what it will take to make the focus real and meaningful.

Jackie Brock: If we are to agree that one of the outcomes of the regeneration strategy is to lift the vast majority of children out of poverty, we will need to look at schools, which have a key role.

The story of Scotland's schools is that there are a small number of schools in pockets of severe

deprivation. All of the solutions for that, which Judith Robertson mentioned, need to be addressed. One of our big assets in Scotland is our comprehensive schooling system. Scotland's school population tends to reflect our society—on average, 80 per cent of people are doing pretty well and 20 per cent of children are in deprivation and on free school meals.

11:45

We also need a national strategy that is specific to schools and their communities. If we are going to have the national objective of lifting all children out of poverty, we need to look at the issues for schools that serve deprived populations, although I would argue that it must not be exclusive to those schools. We have to tackle poverty and the issues faced by pretty much every school in Scotland.

Stuart McMillan: I have a question for Judith Robertson, because of a few things in the Oxfam submission.

I grew up in Port Glasgow, which is not a wealthy area by any manner of means. I grew up at a time of tremendous social and cultural change as well as changes in employment and unemployment. In my household, my father was unemployed for more than three years at one point. There was not a tremendous amount of money, certainly within my household.

I recognised a lot of what you said in your submission, although I have a question about your suggestion on page 5 that

“Funding, and related delivery mechanisms, should be ‘pro-poor’”.

In one way, I can accept that. However, if that were to be the case all the time, would you be pitting communities against each other in a race to the bottom to claim who is the poorest so that they can get additional resources put into their area?

Judith Robertson: That is a fair comment. From our perspective, it is not that everything has to be focused in those areas. We need to recognise that people who are living in poverty are no longer just people who are not working. Sixty per cent of people who are living in poverty are working, which creates a whole other set of challenges. People are trying to generate income and are spending time generating income. The woman from Kirkcaldy talked about that. Working in Asda on minimum wages—that is a poverty lifestyle.

We have to do something about that. One solution, which the Scottish Government is very positive about, is a living wage. That increases people's incomes, which are absolutely fundamental. The Government could make paying

the living wage a prerequisite of receiving its contracts. Those are important initiatives.

If we do not do things differently, nothing will change—and we have to do things in such a way that we take people with us and engage them, so that they are able to say, “I recognise that if I invest in this process it will deliver something for me and my family.” That is not a selfish process; it is about making change happen. It could be the development of a school, the opening of a school or making a community centre available. It could be transferring assets, which I have some real concerns about.

All of those initiatives are not wrong, but we also need to acknowledge that people are increasingly struggling to survive. How many people are now having to use food banks? If you are in that position, your capacity to engage in wider strategic processes on the development of your community is very low.

Further, the stigma that goes along with poverty also comes from public sector bodies. They emanate that stigma. When people engage with local government officials, Jobcentre Plus officials or whomever, those people treat them additionally badly because they are poor and because of the stigma that is attached to poverty. It is another disincentive to engagement. There are some real challenges in turning around those dynamics.

We produced a report with the Govanhill Law Centre on the experience of the Roma community with the Jobcentre Plus office in Govanhill. It was absolutely shocking. We found desperate institutionalised racism within that space. The staff lied to, abused and bullied the Roma people, who are some of the most disadvantaged people in Europe. The staff are public sector workers. That behaviour is unusually extreme but, if you listen to the people with whom we work on a day-to-day basis, you hear that the type of behaviour itself is not unusual.

When we say “pro-poor”, it is important to unpack what that really means. We need to think about how we change the approach and make the services in our communities support the people who need them.

Jackie Brock: I have nothing to add to that.

Stuart McMillan: I agree with practically everything that you have said; I just suggest that the terminology is rather unfortunate.

Judith Robertson: I am happy to do something about that. Of course, one of the reasons why the term creeps into our language here is that it is used internationally as well.

Stewart Stevenson: Earlier, Judith Robertson said that we expect the most vulnerable people to look after the most vulnerable people. As I heard

it, that was stated as a problem. However, I wonder whether having responsibility for fellow vulnerable people is an opportunity for vulnerable people to have a role and a meaning in life, as a first step to positive engagement with the community in which they live.

Judith Robertson *indicated agreement.*

Stewart Stevenson: I see that you are nodding your head. I am glad that I mentioned that.

The question, therefore, has to be: what support do the people in vulnerable communities who have the willingness and potential to support the people in the immediate area need that might make a difference and enable them to take the very small first steps and move to a position in which they can start to take bigger steps?

Judith Robertson: I could not agree more with your first point. I think that some of the committee members went to GalGael in Govan. That project supports the most vulnerable people and takes them on a journey. Some of the people who have gone part of the way on that journey are helping other people who have just started the journey. That is a really supportive dynamic.

GalGael staggers from funding crisis to funding crisis. Most of its senior management—which is really only one person—spend all their time looking for the next client or the next source of income. That is madness. Again, we are talking about organisations that are meeting genuine need in some of the poorest communities but have no sustained funding and cannot think in terms of a 10-year lifespan in which they can plan and develop projects, build people's skills and capacities, and see the fulfilment of some of the worthwhile and dynamic work that they are doing, as well as spreading out the impact of that more widely in the community. They have the potential to have a lot of community impact, but we have taken the money away from them.

That is such a disservice, and it is happening not only in GalGael but across Scotland. We are taking money out of all sorts of places—we are taking money out of the public sector across the piece. That is a problem: we are giving massive redundancy packages to some public sector employees that are costing us hundreds of millions of pounds at the same time that we are taking out resources from the poorest communities.

I know that it is not the best thing to do to marry up X against Y—I understand that the dynamics are difficult—but to be honest, until we do that, I do not know how we will turn around the problems that GalGael and others are having and which mean that, instead of delivering consistent services, they are moving from one funding gap to the other.

Stewart Stevenson: I want to raise an issue on which I am sure other members will want to ask questions, too.

The panel has referred to resources purely in monetary terms. I recognise and accept the point that was made, but I am also interested in resources as non-financial help. For example, many large corporates want, as part of their corporate social responsibility, to engage their staff in social good activities. To what extent does that work? To what extent can we make that work harder for us? That is a particularly important consideration in times when the financial resources are less readily available—assuming that they were ever readily available.

Is there a role for the corporates? What can we do? More to the point, and to look at the matter more narrowly, what should the committee say to Parliament and Government on the subject to make a difference, rather than just produce a worthy report that is interesting but without influence?

Jackie Brock: Thank you for the opportunity to answer a question that gets to the hub of the issue.

I will wind back to your previous question and put it into the school context. What can schools in the most disadvantaged communities do to support each other? That is the key to the sustainability issue.

We must move away from nice projects that are occasionally parachuted into a school to help particular children and to give them a lovely experience but which then bow out due to lack of funding. It is just not possible for Scotland to solve, at the very least, its attainment gap without a sustained approach. I suspect that we will not see the return of big, old centrally funded programmes, such as new community schools, so we must look at how we can use the community resources together with better aligned existing funds.

Is there the potential for local communities to tap into their own resources, such as time? More importantly, can we enable them to tap into corporate social responsibility resources? For example, in our work with one school, Asda is there to provide some money. The school does not want more money; it wants fruit and healthier food. That would help because the school has a 53 per cent free school meal catchment. A more appropriate use of existing funding is needed.

We also need to think about how we, community development trusts and others can help community groups tap into funding from the Big Lottery Fund, the Robertson Trust and local funds, and how we can link to other funded projects.

A specific action that your committee could take is to call for an examination of the big funding programmes and the extent to which they align around systems change, if you like, rather than lovely projects that help people for a time. Important and good as those projects are, how are they helping fundamental long-term change or ambitious goals such as closing the attainment gap or improving employability? There is a huge amount that they could do. Crucially, there is a lot that organisations—organisations such as Children in Scotland and Oxfam are already doing this—can do to enable and empower parental and school community groups to tap into that funding.

Stewart Stevenson: I have a tiny question, the answer to which I think will be yes or no. You said that fruit from Asda would be useful. Would it be particularly useful for companies such as Asda to focus on things that are of huge value to the community but of almost no cost to them? I suspect that much of the fruit that they could provide would be perfectly usable, but it would not have another day's shelf life. Is that a fair comment?

Jackie Brock: It is.

12:00

Judith Robertson: I would like corporate social responsibility to be extended so that corporations pay their taxes and the Government revenue can be used to support poor communities directly. Sadly, that is currently not within the Scottish Parliament's gift. I say that that is sad because, if that were the case, I would have more opportunity to influence the Scottish Parliament.

Members might say that the procurement bill that is being developed is not within the committee's competence, but it provides huge potential for us to make demands of the private sector. We could say that, unless they pay the living wage, deliver according to environmental impact considerations and are transparent about their holding in communities of land banks that are completely unused—such community assets might not be seen as community assets, as they are owned by Tesco or others—they will not receive access to the contract or other corporate subsidies that are within the gift of Governments. That might not be seen as a regeneration process, but that approach has potential if we are talking about the impact of those organisations in local areas, improving that impact and maximising its benefit.

You raised a volunteering issue. We work with a number of large corporations on some of that. The programme is okay; there are some good examples. It provides short-term support and inputs sometimes very well, but it will not offer the

transformative change that is needed if we are to provide sustained outcomes for people.

The Deputy Convener: For the record, the committee will comment on the procurement bill at some stage.

Judith Robertson: That is good.

The Deputy Convener: We will take your points on board.

Judith Robertson: We should have a submission on the procurement bill that we can provide, if you like.

Anne McTaggart: I will bear down on the decision-making process and the involvement of communities. This question has in the main been answered, but how might we improve that?

Jackie Brock: A number of levels are involved. Earlier, members heard a really good example from New Cumnock that involved a school building and its location. The law is such that the council was clearly just carrying out its statutory duties. There is a requirement to consult the parents of children who attend or are likely to attend a school, but that is completely at odds with our proposal, which I am sure many members agree with, that a school is a community asset. Some specifics on the statutory duties that relate to new schools and the rebuilding of schools would be helpful.

On consultation and on helping and working together with communities to understand the role and potential of schools, we need to ensure that parents and the wider community understand that we need to move from seeing schools as providers of learning, reading skills and subjects to seeing their exciting potential for offering children and the wider community a whole lot more. There are many good practice examples of that. Parents and the wider community could really help schools.

Starting small was talked about this morning. We could say to parents and others, "Let's talk together about how, as a school community, we can provide Saturday morning master-classes in subjects to help your children to achieve their grades. We can do that only with your help. How could we do that? We could get some money and so on. Working with you as a community group, we might well be able to get money from the Big Lottery Fund, but we need your involvement."

We can begin to help parents understand that the provision of learning opportunities is not just down to the school because, if they rely just on the school, the opportunities in our most deprived communities will not be sufficient. If we give parents and the wider school community that line of sight, we can show them that ambitious proposals are possible with their help and

involvement and that we can support them in their involvement, if they work with us.

By starting small on specifics, through which parents can really see the stake that they can have for their children's improvement, we can begin to get them to see that, without their involvement, their children will not get the full range of resources that they deserve, whereas with their involvement, there are some big opportunities. If we can do that in a number of schools and start to raise understanding and awareness among other parent communities, that will begin to influence local authorities and CPPs on the wider benefits. They could begin to look at childcare and think, "Actually, this has an impact on how we can get more parents involved. This helps us to look at our employment rate, which is horrific. We can use resources of an evening."

Somehow, we have to begin to form a coalition around that. Our schools are fantastic assets that we can use, but we cannot do that in a sustained way without getting a sense of ownership in the community.

Anne McTaggart: Do you see schools as being the main driver of that?

The Deputy Convener: Before Jackie Brock answers, I will pose a question about the community school concept, which has been around for more than 20 years. I worked with the concept when I worked in Castlemilk. The issue is that school estates have moved on in those 20 years and we now have PFI/PPP schools.

This morning, we heard from witnesses about an issue that relates to the affordability and accessibility of schools. Brendan Rooney from Rutherglen and Cambuslang gave an example of his child being chased off what is probably a 3G pitch at a school, although it was not being used by anyone else. Surely the use of such facilities when they are not in local authority ownership is an issue for many local authorities and community groups. Many schools have been transferred to management companies that operate, manage and set the charges for out-of-school use. How do we get round that issue without bankrupting community groups that would like to use those facilities?

Jackie Brock: We have inherited a significant burden. It is an unacceptable burden, when we consider the short-term decisions that are made and the constraints on our communities' health and wellbeing. There is a myriad of things that they cannot use, such as playing fields. That is a disgrace.

I would like to be more satisfied about the financial burden and the grants that go into a range of health and wellbeing activities for children and adults. If we agree that the bottom line is that

we have to pay the bills—through PFI—and we do not have recourse to planning conditions, would a more accessible approach be to look at how we support the funding to the private contractors, instead of looking at project-based funding? Can we look at how we use such universal assets better and fund the provision of and access to those facilities, so that we enable young boys—such as the one whom we heard about today—to get out and kick about a football, rather than have a specific project that allows a child to come for football training once a week? We do not have the balance right in how our existing funding is aligned with some of the short-term solutions that we seek.

Anne McTaggart had a follow-up question, but I did not catch it.

Anne McTaggart: Do you see the school, the education department or the education service as having the lead role?

Jackie Brock: That relates to the convener's point. The PPP burden is a huge constraint. The school has to be the hub.

Members will all know the importance of school leadership and culture if we are to make any of this a success. I am sure that many members will know schools in their constituencies that can be characterised as fortress schools, although they are open and are no doubt doing their job pretty well. Other schools are characterised by their openness and sense of community. That is possible only because of the school's leadership and culture. The education authority can be and mostly is a benign influence, but I do not think that any of what I—and, to an extent, Judith Robertson—have said can be done without absolute ownership and willingness at school level.

Another example comes from the out-of-school clubs that were mentioned, which are allowed to operate below the radar. The head and the leadership look the other way, which includes not seeking payment. That is perhaps nonsense, but we have to look to our leadership to take such a benign approach. In all honesty, the leadership of some schools is not ready to do that. Our expectations of all schools need to change.

Judith Robertson: I see a slightly wider issue. Participation has no impact unless it comes with power. If all that we are doing is consulting—I am not suggesting that Jackie Brock is talking about that—that is really good. On one level, the committee is consulting me. That is good and I am taking advantage of the opportunity, but I have no power over what the committee puts in its report or over what it advocates to ministers. That is fine, because I know that that is the deal; I have elected

you. However, the dynamic in communities is a little bit more fudged.

If we are to engage people, that will involve a transfer of power, which can be done in all sorts of ways. One way that we advocate in our submission is participatory budgeting, which is well used in Brazil, although clearly not to the extent that people got to say whether they wanted to host the world cup. In many cities and at high levels, chunks of the budget are allocated to participatory budgeting. There is a large community engagement process and the community says, "This is how we want the money to be spent." How the money is spent is determined not by a finance committee, the Parliament or a local authority committee but by the people.

A small-scale example is a process that we supported in Govanhill whereby a bunch of community organisations, which were part of an organised network, were allocated £200,000. That sum is not massive, but neither is it insignificant. The organisations decided collectively and collaboratively how they would allocate the money. There was not a bun fight; instead, they decided on the priority issues that needed resources and, having looked at all the options, they decided how the money should be spent. Not everybody involved got access to the money.

If we want to engage people, they need to see that there will be a benefit—that is not a selfish thing. I presume that parents engage in schools because they think that the provision for their children will improve. It is the same for any other process. We need to make the process meaningful and we need to think about what power we can transfer to people and how easy we can make it for such a transfer of power to happen.

John Pentland: You might have heard us discuss in the previous evidence session how good or bad CPPs are. You probably heard that there are examples of good practice but that some voluntary groups have not even heard that CPPs exist. Do you have an opinion on how CPPs could improve their performance on regeneration?

12:15

Judith Robertson: That is not our specialism. Audit Scotland has done a fairly thorough report and made some quite good recommendations. Participation is a juggling act. Some CPPs do not have the word "community" in their name, and they become planning partnerships for public sector delivery. We are honest about that; that is what they achieve, and there are other complementary processes to engage the community, which we resource.

We can go to where some of the poorest people live and knock on doors to say, "How are you doing? What's happening? What do you think?" We did that with the humankind index. Most of that work was done not through door knocking but in small groups or in places in communities where people go, where we placed street stalls to ask people, "What does it take to live well in your community?" Funnily enough, everyone had lots of views, and it was interesting that dog shit did not come into the frame at all, although now it is a popular issue, and I understand why. If the issue is so popular, I wonder why do we not just clear up the dog shit; that would be a good thing to do.

We have to go and talk to people, we have to resource that and we have to do that in such a way that people are prepared to engage with us, so we have to go to where they are. We cannot expect people to come to us.

When the committee went to Govan, that was great. I know that lots of people do that all the time, and that is positive. Bringing people from communities into the Parliament is obviously good, but it is much better to go to where they are to get engagement, and that is resource intensive. It is clear from the Audit Scotland report that community planning partnerships are not predominantly doing that, so practice has to change.

We have to focus our attention on who we want to engage in the process. That has to be underpinned by a gender analysis, because women and men say different things about their lives, for good reasons. That is an important part of the process. I could say loads more about that.

Jackie Brock: In Children in Scotland's experience, just a handful of headteachers or other school leaders understand the role of CPPs and their contribution to single outcome agreements and know how to influence discussions on CPP investment decisions. I suspect that the vast majority of the school community has even less understanding.

I suppose that the upside of that is that it is a great opportunity for CPPs to describe the line of sight between what a school community is saying, influencing and wants to change and how that links in with the CPP's investment decisions and outcomes. Those opportunities are certainly not being exploited and there is considerable scope, to put it mildly, to raise the profile of the benefits. We have heard about the inspiring examples in South Lanarkshire, which are exciting, but I am not sure about the extent to which that has reached school communities.

Judith Robertson: SOAs provide an opportunity for genuine participation and for asking what a local authority's objectives should be, but

they are not used in that way. Education has to be an important part of that, as do housing and other services. Those are the building blocks, but communities are absolutely not being engaged in the conversation. Clearly, if there are only four or five heads across Scotland—

Jackie Brock: The figure is closer to 10.

Judith Robertson: Maybe 10 are—

The Deputy Convener: Out of a school estate of how many? It is okay to cite a small number such as 10, but how many public sector schools are there in Scotland?

Jackie Brock: There are just under 400 secondaries and, I think, just under 3,000 primaries. I am talking only about the heads whom I have spoken to.

Judith Robertson: Have you done a survey?

Jackie Brock: I have not done a survey.

The Deputy Convener: That is now in the *Official Report*. People will read what was said about 10 out of possibly almost 4,000 teachers. People will question the committee on that as well.

Judith Robertson: They will. That was unsubstantiated input on my part.

Margaret Mitchell: The key issue in ensuring that resources are directed where they should be is how we measure the outcomes and performance of an agency, how a school might be used and how a regeneration project has performed. How do we measure that so that we can offer proof of where the money should be invested to address the needs?

Judith Robertson: I go back to the notion of participation. If we want outcomes for people, we need to engage them in deciding what those outcomes should be and they need to be able to say, "Here's where I am." I am not just saying that; we do that around the world. We say, "How is it?" and, in effect, establish a baseline.

We have lots of baseline data available to us. We find out what we want to improve and, in whatever timescale seems appropriate—a year, two years or three years—we go back and ask whether it has improved and whether there has been a change. We must ask people about that.

Audit Scotland does a great job, but I do not know whether it goes into communities and asks the intended beneficiaries how something has been for them. From my perspective, that is a really important check on the outcomes. We need to ask people whether the work has made a difference, but they must be involved in setting those outcomes in the first place, which is quite challenging.

Margaret Mitchell: Would that be enough data to enable you to access more funding or to continue as you are?

Judith Robertson: No—clearly not. However, huge numbers of data sets are available to us that others use. For example, Education Scotland does rigorous inspection that goes beyond the impact in schools and looks at the wider impacts in the community. I imagine that it is undertaking a range of evaluative processes that use Scottish Government-collected information—Scottish societal surveys and the major data sets that are available—and that it is drilling down a bit to see what is happening on the ground in people's communities and in their houses.

Are people feeling the difference? That could tell some rich stories. There will be good and bad in that, but both of those have to be acknowledged. Why is something good for one person but not for another? Is that about poverty and lack of income? Is it about not being able to access things, or is it about something else? People will not necessarily know all that, but they have a lot to tell and I do not think that we draw on that resource much.

Margaret Mitchell: I agree totally. Of course, we need statistics, but what makes them come alive is the story behind them. That is often what grabs people's attention.

Jackie Brock: On accountability and performance, the national priorities, the single outcome agreement and how they translate at CPP level provide a sufficient umbrella, by and large. It would be helpful to think through the participation issues that Judith Robertson mentioned, but that umbrella at the national and CPP levels is good for making progress.

How does that translate to a school? I have been thinking a lot about how we will support schools to access funding, and I am concerned that we should not constrain the school community, in its broadest sense, from prescribing what it wants. Often, there is no linear relationship. For example, the school community might think that it needs an additional classroom assistant to support literacy in a primary school. That would undoubtedly have an impact on the literacy of many children in that school, but a sustained approach to supporting parents in the school community to support their children's literacy is likely to have a far greater impact.

We need to develop parents' confidence and support for their children's wider education, which will secure children's long-term literacy and all the fruits that being literate brings in educational opportunities. I would hate us to say, "Right, we need that school to improve its literacy," when a community has identified that it needs support to enable parents to better understand how to

support children's learning. That approach might not seem very direct, but it is clear from consideration of the evidence and what will sustain improved attainment that it is important for the community to buy in and to be willing to provide support by using its power—for example, by developing applications for funding.

Providing sustainability and improving parents' long-term capacity will be a more effective means of achieving the right outcome. That requires that bit more thought. We are reasonably content with the national picture, but we need to look at the ways in which we allow flexibility at a very local school and community level. That must be one of the solutions.

Margaret Mitchell: I understand and agree with what you are saying, but I wonder where the mechanism lies. Where is the opportunity not just to support teachers but to educate parents, which is a sensible approach? Would it be through the parent-teacher association or by convening a special meeting? How do we get education authorities to say that this is not just about having another teacher, to look beyond that to the community and parents and to ask how they engage with those people and use their facilities to do that?

Jackie Brock: We have given that an awful lot of thought. To a degree, the relationship that involves the school, the education authority, local councillors and the PTA turns on the extent to which they are willing to let go and back off slightly to enable the broader community to identify additional support for a school. That is undoubtedly tricky, but it is the precondition for success.

The same is true for all the universal services that the committee is looking at. To be honest, one of the crude methods that we are considering concerns the extent to which communities can—via Children in Scotland, if people trust us, or other intermediaries like us—use the carrot of bringing in additional funding outwith the CPP pot to help to build confidence. That approach will not always succeed but, if the wider school community's capacity is to be nurtured and developed, building up trusted relationships between the education authority, political representatives and the school is almost a prerequisite.

We are looking at different scenarios in schools. Some involve charismatic heads who have a track record in supporting parents and the community, so we are using those examples to identify local factors for and indicators of success. Some schools cannot get any parents through their doors, while others are saying that they cannot keep parents out, so we are looking at what those schools are doing. Parents and the wider school community want to get in, as the committee has

heard today. We can do an awful lot more on that, but it will be a challenge for many schools.

Margaret Mitchell: Another possible opportunity may come from the proposed community empowerment and renewal bill, which is focusing on community projects and communities having more of a say. We have looked at that in other areas. Perhaps a person could be identified in the council who can listen to the communities' ideas, and act as a signpost to direct communities to the person to whom they can put the idea.

The parents could decide, "We can attract more funding", so it would become more of a community empowerment thing. Would that be the way to do it, rather than going through the normal channels such as the PTA or the director of education, which are all complicated routes that would not make it easy?

Jackie Brock: It would be a good idea to begin to kick off that approach and develop a culture. The deputy convener talked about the new community schools programme. Where is the legacy of that? Where are the big central funding and the big champions within areas? In the case of new community schools, there is a great handful, but we did not invest in the long-term systems change that we need.

12:30

We have heard about Education Scotland and the expectations that we should have for the regulatory and inspection regime to consider what gives some teeth to community involvement and participation. Will the community empowerment and renewal bill do that? Will it have the sustained approach that is needed at a local level and move it on from local champions to community empowerment being the way that we do business?

It sounds like a good start, but I would be worried about what we will build in to ensure that community empowerment will now be the way that we work and deliver so that we see the legacy of that work over the next 10 or 20 years. It must be about culture and leadership, not just about money. That is one of the lessons from the new community schools programme.

Judith Robertson: We have advocated for named individuals in local authorities to whom communities could relate. That proposal is important. We had a conversation about the possibility that the local authority would then say, "It's your job to do it," so community engagement would then get sidelined, but the position could be made senior. Indeed, there could be a director of community participation or community engagement. That might be quite interesting.

We have also advocated for a poverty commissioner who would have a remit to monitor, assess and address public sector practice. Within their remit, there would have to be outcomes that were oriented around reducing poverty and ensuring engagement.

A key plank of that poverty commissioner's role would be to audit how engagement happens, how meaningful it is and what has changed as a result of it. The commissioner would also be available to communities for them to say that they had participated, nobody had said anything to them since they did that, they had received no feedback from the process and that that had not been helpful to them. The commissioner would then be able to go in, have a look and see that.

That proposal is focused not only on poverty reduction but on some of the processes that are more likely to enable poverty reduction. That would be another strand of the effective audit and assessment of what goes on.

Margaret Mitchell: I can see where you are coming from with the proposal for a poverty commissioner, but we still have the problem of trying to engage local authorities. Your first idea of having someone sufficiently senior within local authorities to engage with the rest of the council or other bodies would probably be more effective.

Judith Robertson: As you were talking, I just had the idea that the poverty commissioner could host forums for directors of community engagement throughout Scotland. It would be interesting to have 32 such individuals coming in and saying how it is going and what is happening over different strands.

The Deputy Convener: It is good that the committee can facilitate that thought process, Judith.

Christian Allard: I have a question for Judith Robertson, although Jackie Brock could perhaps comment on it.

I agree with most of the 16 pages of the Oxfam Scotland submission. It is a good submission. I do not know whether Judith Robertson was present for the earlier parts of the meeting this morning.

Judith Robertson: Some of it.

Christian Allard: You will have seen that some of the biggest barriers are culture and how agencies engage with communities. Brendan Rooney from Rutherglen and Cambuslang made a point that language is important. The language of poverty always strikes me as not being inspiring. I was surprised that you used the title "poverty commissioner". Will you explain why you took that decision?

Judith Robertson: We used the name to make the point. I agree with you and take the point about the language and the stigma. It is a challenge. It is along the same lines as our comments about needing to be pro-poor.

I would not necessarily recommend that the post ultimately be called the poverty commissioner, because stigma is attached to that. However, we put the proposal in the submission with that title to make the point that the job would be to ask how Government policy impacts on poverty, whether it makes a difference and whether it actually causes poverty. Whether or not that is the commissioner's title is something with which I have no problem. What the commissioner did would be really important.

The stigma is real and is functioning well and we want to break it down, but, although there are challenges, there is a need for such a post. Operating as we do currently, we have failed to make the necessary change. From our perspective, putting someone in a post whose remit is to interrogate policy and look at its impacts on poor women, men and children would be helpful. How are we to do that? Without dedicated resources, it will not happen.

Jackie Brock: Children in Scotland does not have a position on whether there should be a poverty commissioner, but having articulate spokespeople who are focused on action would certainly be welcome. I am sure that everyone is weary of the ritual hand-wringing over the increase in the child poverty figures. There has been no change in the educational outcomes of looked-after children or in the number of qualifications that poorer children achieve. Our educational attainment gap is internationally recognised as the highest in Europe, but successive Administrations in Scotland have not achieved any progress on that. Therefore, yes, we need to highlight the issue and raise concerns about what on earth we are to do about it. I think that the committee can helpfully highlight that what we have learned over the past 10 or 20 years is that we cannot achieve those changes without involving our school communities.

One small point is the language used with parents when they attend school meetings about their children's learning. For many parents, some of the language used seems to come from another world when they try to relate their child's ability and development to what they are hearing from teachers. Schools have a huge role in educating parents about learning, but parents can also help schools to understand what is relevant to their child's learning. Empowering parents to open up that quite closed shop of education could help them to realise that many of the opportunities given to our children in schools are not good enough, but they must also recognise that they

have a role in helping to turn that round. Senior folk and others could then help to enable that community to begin to make the specific changes to children's learning and educational entitlement that would, I hope, put an end to some of the hand-wringing and begin to tackle the disgrace that we see at the moment in our society as far as children are concerned.

The Deputy Convener: The next question will be from Stuart McMillan.

Stuart McMillan: I have a few questions on different areas—

The Deputy Convener: Time is tight, but I will allow two brief questions, as long as the responses are brief as well.

Stuart McMillan: The poverty commissioner question has already been dealt with, so let me ask about welfare reform. We heard this morning how welfare reform affects regeneration. What are your views on how the welfare reform agenda will affect communities and what is needed for regeneration?

Jackie Brock: Children in Scotland is seriously worried about the current and forthcoming impact of welfare reform. As Judith Robertson pointed out, welfare reform affects not just those who are not in work but the vast majority of working parents who are poor. We see no signs that CPPs are beginning to align their resources in any meaningful way with the need to protect our most vulnerable children, which should surely be a core objective. We are all well informed about the changes that are due to happen, so we should be making educated guesses about their impact on our children to ensure that the resource changes. We would all want more money, but we need to consider how the resources that we have will be aligned to protect those who are now, and will be further, under attack. As we discussed, we need to maximise our resources to ensure that things such as out-of-school clubs and Saturday clubs are developed and maintained. We should not give in on that. We need to look at improved use of those resources.

Judith Robertson: I think that the impact of welfare reform will be devastating. We are talking about taking hundreds of millions of pounds away from the poorest households in Scotland. That will have a devastating impact, not only on those households, but on the communities in which those people shop and do other things. There will be a lack of ability to engage in basic services, a lack of entertainment for children and so on. There is no limit to that impact.

We are seeing a huge increase in people who require help from food banks to manage their situation. I know from anecdote—we do not have the data for this, although we have asked the UK

Government to start collecting it—that most of the people who require that provision do so because of the sanctions that welfare processes are putting on them. People are having their benefits withdrawn for, in the long term, up to three years, or they may have six months or two weeks with no money.

As MSPs, you must be hearing stories and feeling the impact of that in your constituencies. It will only get worse, not better. There is urgency around some of the other processes that we have been talking about. The impact of welfare reform is devastating, not just for children but for whole families. It is very, very poor.

Stuart McMillan: I have one final question.

In terms of the regeneration strategy and what actually takes place, there will be no one-size-fits-all solution across the country. There are areas with huge industrial legacies, such as Ravenscraig in John Pentland's area, Inverclyde, Dumbarton and Glasgow, as compared with smaller, more rural communities. What are the main steps that should be taken to formulate strategies that will be useful for the whole country and which will take account of different sizes of place and community and, in particular, of such industrial legacies?

Jackie Brock: I have been thinking about that. When I first had sight of the regeneration strategy, I was shocked to see no mention of schools, colleges and so on. Then I thought that that was fine, since it allows a lot more flexibility to reflect the situation along the lines that Stuart McMillan referred to. I think that that is the intention. However, my worry—Margaret Mitchell mentioned this—is how we ensure that we see action at community level.

We have heard suggestions this morning. We need to ask what requirements there will be for CPPs to describe the amount of participation and engagement that is taking place—whether that is at school level, which I would love to see, or however else it can be described. We should ask the crucial question about what the impact has been. We need to ask what has changed for those communities, in both the short term and the long term—given that we recognise that there are long-term systemic issues—and what steps are being taken to achieve those national outcomes, specifically at local level. I do not want an overly bureaucratic system, but I think that the emphasis has to be on the impact that action has had, as opposed to the amount of talking that is being facilitated.

Judith Robertson: It is hard to pin down one thing, but I would focus on job creation in communities, based around a strategy that the community helps to determine. We need to ask people what they want to happen in their

community. Poor communities are quite degraded: there is lots of stuff that can be done to improve them.

Instead of large-scale infrastructure projects, I would like to see community-led infrastructure projects that prioritise job creation, meaningful activity, paying a living wage and bringing employment and regeneration in its real sense back into communities at that level. Doing that may require direct Government money, but there seems to be money for large-scale infrastructure projects. We can do large-scale work in different ways: we can have a large-scale, Scotland-wide strategy to do community-led regeneration that creates jobs. I think that there could be real potential there.

The Deputy Convener: I thank Jackie Brock and Judith Robertson for their contribution to today's evidence session. It has certainly raised other questions, which I would have liked to investigate even more if time permitted. Given the time that we have had, I thank you for coming. As I said to the previous panel, the *Official Report* will be available early next week. You are welcome to get back to the committee clerks with any comments that you would like to add to your responses to our questions. I will be in touch with the witnesses about some of the issues that were raised in today's evidence session.

12:45

Meeting continued in private until 13:12.

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