

Local Government and Housing Committee Review of Community Regeneration

Review of Capacity Development and Training

Emerging Issues

Background

In August 2001 the Local Government and Housing Committee commenced a review of community regeneration in Wales. The review adopted the following terms of reference. To identify:

the policies and programmes aimed at community regeneration which have been adopted by the National Assembly and its sponsored bodies with a view to making recommendations for streamlining the existing programmes and improving the arrangements for delivery;

the financing for those policies and programmes;

the role of partnership in developing community regeneration;

what further issues the committee should address on other aspects of the community regeneration agenda, taking into account of the work that has been undertaken for the Communities First programme

The Review was published in September 2002 (Welsh Assembly Government 2002) and made 18 recommendations for consideration by the Welsh Assembly Government. The recommendations were focused on the key themes of:

Funding

Capacity development

Shortage of community regeneration staff

Relationships with statutory sector partners

Resourcing community engagement by the statutory sector

Advancing the Communities First approach

The role of the Welsh Assembly Government

A number of these themes had been dominant throughout the review process and had been raised by a wide range of organisations and individuals in the evidence sessions and programme of visits that the Local Government and Housing Committee had engaged in. These key issues included capacity development and training of community regeneration volunteers and workers. The Committee resolved to extend the Review process to gather more opinion and evidence in these key fields and initiated a programme of evidence sessions and visits to community organisations throughout Wales. To date that process has identified a number of emerging issues and possible responses to them by the Welsh Assembly Government. This emerging issues paper presents these and a range of options for consideration by the Committee. In doing so inevitably there is a degree of overlap with the findings and recommendations of the first stage of the Review. Key issues such as funding and resources are topics which will arise in consideration of any aspect of community regeneration. For clarity and focus these general concerns are not repeated here unless specifically relevant to the topics of capacity development and training and the reader is directed to the publication of findings of the first stage of the Review.

Emerging Issues: Capacity development

The term capacity development has developed a common currency in recent years against a backdrop of increasingly community-centred policy programmes. Although there is no precision of meaning, its general usage signifies the promotion of skills and abilities in community members to enable their active participation in the community regeneration process. Such activity may be as volunteers providing services and facilities to the community and may extend to membership of management boards and multi-agency partnerships working alongside professionally trained staff of local authorities and other statutory bodies. In a typical 'grass roots' community organisation members will collectively need a range of skills and knowledge which might include, facilities management, employment law and equal opportunities, child protection legislation, charitable status management as well as the organisational skills associated with the delivery of a range of local services.

It is this model of community engagement that is increasingly replacing more institutionally and centrally focused approaches to policy and service delivery. This is particularly true in relation to policies to tackle social deprivation and social exclusion. The value of involving community members in both identifying the nature of the problems faced and the solutions to be adopted has become widely accepted and a community regeneration approach characterises housing, health, education, regeneration and environmental policy. An increasingly comprehensive range of social policies has developed expectations of community participation and the creation of specific community delivery mechanisms. At the heart of this model is the

regeneration partnership, which conventionally brings together a multi-agency grouping to provide 'joined-up solutions' for common social problems. Community involvement in such approaches is a core value and a central expectation. This is true of a wide range of policies in Wales including Surestart, People in Communities, Sustainable Communities and Healthy Living Centres. However, Communities First more than any other policy has raised a clear expectation of high levels of community involvement. In the early stages of this emerging policy approach little thought or attention was given to the achievement of high levels of community participation or the skills which community members would require to enable this to happen. There was an assumption that communities possessed 'hidden' skills and talents that would emerge given the correct facilitative policies and organisational structure.

More recently, there has been a more sophisticated understanding of these issues and an expectation that community capacity is something which will require clear resourcing and time to develop. There is also recognition that different communities will have different levels of capacity and that development needs will be different and varied. The Communities First framework recognises this by requiring each partnership to develop a Capacity Development Plan (CDP) alongside its Community Action Plan. The CDP will identify specific and local needs and ensure that measures are taken to provide learning and development opportunities for local residents.

The Committee wished to endorse this more sophisticated understanding of the capacity development issues and recognise the burden that is being placed on communities and their members by a range of legislative and policy changes in recent years. The expectations placed on community members are high and further heightened by the fact that the communities involved are often the least resourced and least prepared for such activities. This is not to deny the wealth of talent and skill the Committee has encountered in its visits to community organisations, but does recognise the low levels of qualification and training that exists and the difficulties of involving more than the few dedicated and active citizens which can always be found, even in the most deprived community. In considering these issues the following central themes are evident,

Resourcing Community capacity development

In the submissions to this second stage of the Review organisations have repeated some of the earlier concerns about funding and resources identified in the initial review. However, they have done so in relation to the need to adequately fund and resource in other ways the community capacity development process. For some of the organisations providing evidence such a funding regime should begin with providing funds to allow communities to conduct skills audits and identify training and development needs. There is a pre-existing pool of skills in all communities and it is an important part of the regeneration process that this is recognised and

the actual mix of skills charted and recorded. There is potential for extreme variations in skills levels. In visiting a forestry project in Snowdonia the Committee met community members who in their professional lives were foresters, farmers and academics and had major capacity to develop a working proposal for a forestry based tourism development.. In other communities where community regeneration activities are long standing there may be a well-developed volunteer base and a culture of community learning. In other communities characterised by long term unemployment and high levels of disaffection in young people, there may be a lack of basic skills such as literacy and numeracy. There may be a general lack of confidence to participate experienced by community members and there may be a reluctance to believe that participation can produce any benefits in the light of long histories of neglect of the community by the full range of statutory providers.

Recommendation 1

That the Communities First Capacity Development Plans are developed from a full training needs analysis in the community and are fully funded to provide a long-term development process that will involve subsequent age cohorts.

Other views emerging in the review process stressed the patterns of support required in the capacity development process in order to enable all sections of the community to participate. This requires the adoption of flexible models of learning delivery to maximise the ability of community members to take up development opportunities. Learning opportunities should be presented in community settings, at varied times and in different formats. This required training providers to be less rule bound and more open to community needs. An example of this was referred to as the 'bums on seats problem' whereby courses are often cancelled when attendance falls below a threshold number of attendees. Those remaining lose they learning opportunity, have their confidence challenged and may conclude that learning is simply not worth the effort. This problem illustrates the need for reform from the point of delivery through to the funding of HE and FE organisations that enforce these models of practise.

Recommendation 2

That the funding of community learning is flexible and responsible to community need and able to support the learning ambitions of relatively small learning groups.

Respondents with experience in providing community based learning stressed the need for 'informal' learning opportunities that provide minimal thresholds to participants. There was a stress on learning as fun, described by one organisation as 'learning by stealth'. Community members with unpleasant memories of school and formal learning are more attracted to learning events and activities rather than formally enrolled courses. This form of 'learning

through doing' has a long history in community development. It provides soft entry points to skills development, easy progression stages and a ladder of opportunity which can take the individual to the level they choose. That may simply be the development of a particular skill to enhance their community role (e.g. committee skills) or may ultimately be the securing of a qualification to enable full-time employment (e.g. in youth work). There is ample experience of such patterns of learning in Wales and many examples of good practice with excellent outcomes.

Recommendation 3

That current best practice in capacity development is shared through the activities of key agencies such as the Communities First Support Network and that experience of 'what works' is disseminated to the Communities First Co-ordinators.

Recommendation 4

That the key principles of flexibility, community delivery, and gradual progression are promoted in any guidance issued for capacity development.

There was also concern amongst the organisations consulted that learning at community level should be physically and materially supported by a range of mechanisms to promote participation. In practical terms this will include the provision of crèche facilities for learners with children, support for carers of adults, transport within the community to learning centres, assistance with the purchase of learning materials and equipment and the adequate resourcing of tutors and regeneration workers to enable adequate time to be spent on the capacity development process. There was a concern that capacity development is often seen as an extra activity which is not part of the core function of the regeneration team and respondents wished to argue that it is recognised and funded to be one of the central objectives in the community regeneration process.

Recommendation 5

That capacity development activities are fully resourced and funded to include a full range of support mechanisms rather than funding merely of the activity itself.

Accreditation of capacity development

Many organisations were concerned that capacity development activities are properly accredited and that learners achieve recognition for their learning. This issue will be more fully addressed in the section of training for regeneration but also needs to be considered in the context of even quite low levels of learning activity experienced by community members. Several respondents who argued for accreditation of even minor community learning, identified

the link between reward for learning and the desire to continue. It was seen as essential to encouraging further activity on the part of the individual but also to providing a credit accumulation that could lead to higher qualifications and employment opportunities for individuals. Models of accreditation were presented, for example by the Open College Network, but were not generally available to all communities in Wales.

Recommendation 6

That the Welsh Assembly Government conducts a consultation with relevant parties to include ELWa to explore the accreditation of community learning and assess the issues in the development of a national accreditation scheme.

Institutional Capacity

A recurrent theme in the second stage of the review was the issue of the capacity of statutory and voluntary organisations to work in community sensitive ways. Organisations felt that many staff in statutory and voluntary organisations were having their role redefined by the community regeneration agenda but were not being provided with the skills and capacities to work with the community. It was not sufficient simple to re-title a post and was unfair to the individual who was expected to immediately acquire community-working skills. The end result it was claimed was often poor relations between the community and other partners in the regeneration process. It was felt that training opportunities should be created for those who were in positions affected by community regeneration policies such as Communities First. This was also extended to the need for local authority elected members to be provided with training on patterns of community working and governance. It was felt that the changes in the role of local members was not fully understood by many of them and that there were example of members experiencing difficulty in accepting a more active role for community members and organisations. This was felt to be critical to the success of local regeneration initiatives and the opposition of a locally elected member could be a significant barrier to regeneration.

Some respondents felt there that was good opportunity to increase understanding between community members, elected members and full-time staff of agencies by having joint training activities. The learning needs of community members and agency staff were not seen as fundamentally different and the advantages of learning together could be considerable. This was felt to be true particularly for local authority employees where there was no background of community working. Many such staff were being appointed to newly created community regeneration posts or having their work redirected by community initiatives. Some authorities had responded to the situation with training opportunities for staff other had not.

Recommendation 7

That the Welsh Assembly Government engage in discussions with the WLGA to promote

dissemination of good practice and develop guidance for local authorities in the development of the community-working capacity of their staff and elected members.

These issues were not limited to the statutory sector and several organisations in the review have reported issues with umbrella voluntary sector organisation and county level voluntary associations.

Recommendation 8

That the Welsh Assembly Government liaise with the WCVA to ensure uniformity of practice and sharing of good practice especially where voluntary sector organisations were providing management services such as payroll functions to community organisations.

An all Wales response or strategy for capacity development

A majority of organisations making representations to the review believe that the issue of capacity development is so fundamental as to require an all Wales response to promote parity and uniformity of provision through Wales. Responses varied from identifying the need for an all-Wales strategy to the creation of an all-Wales agency. Few organisations expressed this as more than a requirement and they did not specify the form that an all-Wales measure might take. The Committee is also of the opinion that the issue of capacity development should not be determined by post-code variations and that all communities in the regeneration process should have similar expectations on the availability of funding and support. It was clear that currently there is enormous variation. It is too early in this debate to distinguish what options might be available but it is important that the debate should be developed to explore how this identified need might be best met.

Recommendation 9

That the Welsh Assembly Government initiated a consultation with the full range of relevant parties to include community organisations, about how a national framework of capacity development might be achieved

emerging issues: training of community regeneration workers

This issue is not unconnected to the previous discussion and there was a strong belief that local community members should be employed as community workers in their own locality. Consequently, the capacity delivery mechanisms identified above should have the capability of

taking a completely unskilled and unqualified community member to the level of a professionally qualified community regeneration worker. This underlines the earlier point about the need for ladders of opportunity which can carry individuals from the acquisition of basic skills to the acquisition of professional qualifications. In this context there was also support for bursaries which could support community members through the lengthy process of acquiring qualifications which could lead to their employment. This is currently being investigated by the Welsh Assembly Government.

Recommendation 10

That the Welsh Assembly Government progresses its intention to create a bursary programme for community members engaging in training for community regeneration. A scheme should ideally be in existence for the commencement of academic year 2003-4.

In addition to this general concern to see community members gaining employment in the regeneration of their own communities there were also a number of key themes related to the training and development of a sufficient pool of trained and qualified community regeneration workers in Wales.

Shortage of qualified staff

A large number of organisations reported difficulties in recruiting appropriately qualified and experienced staff to regeneration posts. This problem has worsened significantly since the appointment process to the Communities First programme has begun. Competition for staff in this field from within Wales is considerable with a wide range of development organisations expanding as well as the creation of local authority teams to meet the demands of Communities First. Each Communities First locality is appointing Co-ordinators and development workers. Community organisations report difficulties in matching the salaries and longer-term contracts offered by local authority departments. Developments in regeneration policy in England such as New Deal for Communities also ensured that there were shortages of qualified staff throughout the UK. Evidence from the Consortium of Community Regeneration Training identified the following key issues

The report identifies the shortage of qualified and trained community development workers

The shortage also extends to people able to teach community regeneration

There is a lack of bi-lingual trainers and training materials

Staff on short term contracts can't access longer term training courses

Smaller organisations cannot release staff for training

There is no accumulating pool of qualified and trained workers

Collectively, these issues present a major barrier to the regeneration process as adequate and competent staffing levels are a pre-requisite of successful community interventions. Quick fix solutions are not evident but there are short and medium term interventions which can ease the situation. The following recommendations recognise that the Welsh Assembly Government has begun discussions of these issues with relevant providers and agencies.

Recommendation 11

That key providers are identified in each region in Wales who are able to design and deliver short courses in essential aspects of community regeneration.

Recommendation 12

That key providers are identified in each region who are able to design and deliver longer term courses leading to appropriate nationally recognised qualifications.

Recommendation 13

That providers and institutions are encouraged and resourced to collaborate in the design and delivery of training at all levels

Recommendation 14

That funding be made available to promote the development of ICT and internet based learning in community regeneration

Collectively, these measures should build a training infrastructure which will begin to address the shortage of experienced staff in both the short and medium term. However, the development of provision of training is not sufficient in itself if there are additional barriers to staff attending or being released for study. Staffing levels and staff development policies need to be in place to permit attendance of key staff on training activities whether short day based training or longer term commitments to course leading to professional qualification.

Recommendation 15

That local authorities, development agencies and Communities First partnerships are encouraged and funded to make their staff available for the full range of training and educational opportunities which exist or may be developed

Availability of training

Evidence from the Consortium for Community Regeneration Training pointed to a varied availability of training provision in Wales. With concentrations of courses in the South East and along the A55, the hinterland is not well provided for. Additionally access to community based provision is limited with community delivery only offered by a small number of institutions. There is little distance learning provision and no internet courses available. Shortage of bi-lingual materials and trainers amplifies availability problems especially in parts of rural Welsh speaking Wales. Again these issues are difficult to address in the short-term although some of the measures identified in Recommendations 11-15 will in large part address these problems of the distribution of learning opportunities.

Accreditation of training

As discussed in the context of capacity development there is a strong pattern of ad hoc, bespoke training offered by a bewildering array of providers. Such providers are evident in the FE, HE and private sectors and many community organisations are themselves training providers. The complexity of this pattern of delivery militates against the development of uniform accreditation processes and there is a strong sense of a lack of portability of existing accreditation which does not have a uniform recognition amongst prospective employers. Much of current training is not accredited in any sense.

Respondents to the review regard this situation as unacceptable and many broadly support the identification of a core curriculum and the setting up of national training standards. The Welsh Assembly Government is currently consulting key agencies such as Community Development Cymru who are engaged in working towards such standards and a conference in March 2003 convened by CDC will address this and related issues. In the presentation to the Bangor meeting of the Committee Review one respondent urged consideration of a 'national community development organisation' which would have in its remit the development of a national training scheme and management of this and related activities. Many respondents identified the need to 'professionalise' community regeneration work and develop recognised qualifications and training standards which employer could rely on and employees aim for in the development of their career. many felt that we are on the threshold of the emergence of a 'new profession' but that rapid action was need to co-ordinate and regulate its development, both to protect communities and those who wish to work in them.

Quality control

Related to the previous section is the issue of the quality of training. Currently, there are no effective quality control mechanisms and any agency or private sector company can offer training in this field without any prior experience. Colleges of FE and HE have their own internal quality control mechanisms but, as opportunities in this field expand, there is a danger

that inexperienced staff will be asked to develop courses to meet potential demand. Again consideration of a national community development organisation could help meet those concerns. However, amongst Committee members and other respondents there was some concern about the creation of yet another national organisations with responsibility in the field of community regeneration. Whilst they agreed that the body would build learning networks, provide a central steer for future policy and aid in the dissemination of best practice they were concerned about the addition of an additional agency to an already crowded field. However, they were sympathetic to the development of a National Forum which would create a network of community regeneration organisations and help 'professionalise' community regeneration and raise the status of the service.

Recommendation 16

That the Welsh Assembly Government considers and consults with appropriate agencies about the establishment of a community regeneration forum with membership open to all agencies and individuals engaged in community regeneration and related activities in Wales.

Conclusion

These emerging issues will form the basis of the final stages of the extended review and the recommendations are presented for consideration by the LGH Committee. As in the first phase of the review the quality of evidence and expertise encountered through the activities of the Committee establishes a confidence that these are the key issues in capacity development of community members and training of community regeneration workers. Addressing these problems and finding solutions will improve organisational performance and ultimately make the regeneration process more efficient and effective.

