



Briefing paper for APPP members at their 4th meeting on 4.9.14



1. Alliance for Action Purpose

The **SURF led Alliance for Action** is a collaborative activity and shared learning programme supported by the Scottish Government. In the two case study areas of Govan in Glasgow and East Kirkcaldy in Fife SURF is working with relevant local and national partners to:

- Build local capacity, strengthen resilience, increase practical outcomes and improve the wellbeing of local residents;
- Link local knowledge, initiatives and assets with national networks, policies and resources in support of more coordinated and holistic local regeneration activity.
- Draw out transferable learning towards more successful and sustainable policy and practice in community regeneration.

2. The role of the APPP

The **Academic, Policy and Practice Panel** is convened by SURF on a biannual basis. Its main role is to provide a supportive reference point for oversight, advice and guidance with regard to the aims, activities and policy/practice impact of the Alliance for Action initiative.

3. Purpose of this 4th APPP session

- To move beyond previous exploratory and planning APPP discussions into the presentation of some emergent learning points for the APPP members to consider.
- To explore potentially productive links to relevant research, policy and practice.

- Taking the above into account; to advise on the best direction of development of the A for A process from this point.

4. The process so far

'One year on - Progress and Priorities' sessions were held in Govan on 13.03.14 and Kirkcaldy on 20.03.14. These collaborative sessions involved over 80 community project and agency representatives. They established priority themes of Alliance for Action activity in each area. The overlapping spheres of priority focus are as follows:

Govan

- Planning & Infrastructure / Govan Town Centre Development
- Creativity and Community Participation
- Building on Heritage and Assets

(See diagram at Appx 1)

East Kirkcaldy

- Capital Regeneration Investment
- Spaces for Community Activity
- Creative Community Participation via Community Budgeting Health and Wellbeing (addressing inequality and preventative spending)

(See diagram at Appx 2)

Over the last 5 months the main focus of Alliance for Action activity has been on:

- Developing collaboration and investment within and across these complementary priorities.
- Identifying links and hurdles in progressing shared aspirations
- Identifying emergent policy and practice lessons from that process.

5. Some practical progress

5.1 Govan

Amongst other Alliance supported connections and activities within the Govan Alliance for Action initiative, the Govan town centre and waterfront area has emerged as the main focus of practical shared interest. In an extended series of engagements with key players, SURF identified and supported an emergent consensus based on collective appreciation of existing assets and the potential development of these and the physical site to form a vibrant social, economic and cultural hub of connectivity.

The dynamics of the hub would potentially link Govan assets and investments east to west (BBC to Southern General Hospital) as well as north to south at the historic river crossing point. In this way it would serve to connect the shared interests and potential of both Glasgow and Govan.

At a specially convened Govan Alliance gathering on 19.8.14 thirty six representatives of existing and potential Alliance partners jointly explored the scope for realising that potential and the apparent hurdles on the way to achieving it. A report of those points of further consideration and potential action is being produced. Meanwhile, SURF's diplomatic engagement with relevant politicians and resource holders is continuing.

5.2 East Kirkcaldy

After a quicker start, the progress in East Kirkcaldy has been slower over recent months. There are meaningful activities ongoing; not least attempts at supporting the engagement of community interests in the £950K physical regeneration investment in the 'Gateway to Gallatown' development. This substantial SG Capital Regeneration Fund investment is directed at the construction of community facilities (as previously prioritised by community groups) and related landscaping works.

SURF and Fife Council have recently agreed to develop a more formal agreement on respective expectations and responsibilities for building on the Alliance for Action initiative and connections established over the last year.

5.3 Rothesay

In early August, SURF secured the support of the senior management team of Argyll and Bute Council for our work on a feasibility study on the prospects and potential content of an Alliance for Action initiative based on the assets and challenges for the town of Rothesay on the island of Bute. This investigative and diplomatic engagement work is being funded by HIE. A report is now due to be produced by the end of this calendar year.

6. Some lessons from the Alliance process so far

Some positive signals include:

- 6.1 **Proactive partnership** - Willing cross sector participation in the Alliance approach and an apparent increasing level of general consensus on the wisdom and added value of collaboration on shared aims. This seems to have been supported by the increased orthodoxy of partnership processes over recent decades. Practical experience of engagement in statutory CPP processes may also have helped to develop a more realistic view of the effects of differences in power, particularly in decision making authority and access to resources.

Within this welcome spirit of partnership, there have been some encouraging proactive offerings from some agencies. These have been able to practically demonstrate their commitment to collaborative efforts on tackling inequalities and how their particular remit and resources can be engaged in that widely shared aim. Children in Scotland and Creative Scotland have been leading examples so far. It has also been interesting to note that some other organisations might have been expected to be more proactive than they have been.

- 6.2 **Coordination** - The apparent value of a network like SURF taking the initiative and responsibility for supporting a coordinated and focused approach to collaborative place based regeneration. SURF's generally respected 'no axe to grind' profile, together with its diplomatic work and reassurances appears to have encouraged a higher level of participation and investments. The apparent necessity of a SURF type role presents questions on how to measure the degree to which such a n instrumental intervention effects measurable outcomes and how that role might be replicated elsewhere and on a wider basis.
- 6.3 **Enhanced connectivity** - A range of incidental benefits in facilitating organisational and individual introductions which have sparked the discovery of shared interests between previously unfamiliar partners. There has been evidence of some of them going on to collaborate on a bi lateral basis beyond the scope of the intended formal Alliance focus. There have also been some benefits in facilitating diplomatic reengagement of some local

projects and influential personalities on the shared aims of the Alliance focus. Equally, there have been instances of uncovering misunderstandings and failures of representation and sufficient accountability.

7. Some challenging messages

7.1 *Investments and degenerative factors*

Most of the local regeneration efforts captured and nurtured within the Alliance framework are focused on mitigation and the more efficient engagement of limited and threatened resources.

Govan has many successful third sector organisations which have been developed locally in an effort to address some elements of disadvantage. They offer support in building the self-respect, dignity and confidence of individuals. Their work in providing training and skills which may increase employability and general wellbeing demonstrably reduce demands on the NHS and other public agencies. There are evident practical 'preventative spend', enterprise and capacity building benefits for wider society.

Despite the practical outcomes evidence and the high level of rhetoric in support of the strategic importance this type of local repose, the reality is even the most respected and capable organisations – those frequently cited as examples of successful community regeneration support – are struggling to secure sufficient resources to pay their current costs in order to survive.

Present statutory funding processes and criteria tend to set up organisations to compete with each other rather than cooperate. The same processes produce a focus on short-term outputs rather than sustainable outcomes. This situation is reflected in both SURF's filmed interviews with project representatives and the SG Regeneration Resources research carried out as part of the Alliance for Action baseline information gathering.

Perhaps even more importantly, it is evident that high level political and private sector investment decisions have a much more profound effect on the lives and opportunities of local people and businesses than even the most substantial attempts at local collaboration on regeneration. There is considerable scope for further work in exploring the prospects for better engagement, or at least fuller appreciation, of these dominant dynamics.

7.2 *Some issues of turf, status and trust*

There have been instances of professional status anxiety hampering the ability of Alliance partners to act sufficiently quickly and collectively on agreed collaborative efforts. Conversely, success in enterprising, collaborative activity appears to be significantly based on individual relationships, attitudes and dedicated commitment.

The previous longstanding lack of attention and under investment in community development seems to be being replaced by well-intentioned but often naïve assumptions about the nature of community groups. This is likely to result in potentially damaging implications for 'asset transfer' in terms of community access and accountability.

With respect to the above noted points on the impacts of wider forces and the desire to identify alternative avenues of approach; there seems to be a real danger of damaging an otherwise valuable element of local regeneration strategies by the over-selling and under-resourcing of isolated examples of excellence in community based regeneration. A key problem appears to be a

lack of reference to underlying economic inequalities in considering the strategic and practical prospects for more 'community led' regeneration.

An illustrative example from the East Kirkcaldy Alliance activity:

As has already been noted the "Gateway to Gallatown" project has been awarded £950,000 from the Scottish Government/COSLA Regeneration Capital Grant Fund as part of the first round of investments. The Gateway project includes plans to renovate and extend three existing community buildings – a small community centre, a bowling club and an under-used council office.

The community itself identified the need for an appropriate place to gather and develop creatively as a key capacity shortfall. Although the preference would have been for one new building, the planned developments will provide exactly the kind of resource identified as fundamental to community regeneration success in the draft community empowerment bill and to some extent the Land Review group recommendations.

The details of the way in which this funding will be used are still being discussed but the initial response from sections of the community has been one of mistrust. For example, one part of the Council's plan is to upgrade and refurbish the Overton Community Centre allowing it to expand and improving access. The small group of local residents which has successfully maintained the Overton Centre for several years are concerned that what the Council really plans is a 'takeover bid'. They expect their management committee to be disbanded and replaced with either some kind of official body or someone they fear would be "in the Council's pocket". They anticipate that new hire charges for the refurbished hall will price the community out and that existing social groups will no longer be able to afford to use the building. Rumours spread quickly and instead of the community coming together to discuss the possible benefits the funding will bring, there is already resentment and fear about an imagined future.

Our evidence indicates that the Council is going to some lengths to engage the community in consultation. The broad outline of development had been agreed before the funding was awarded, but the detail is still up for discussion. The recurring issues highlighted in this particular example is that of how we define community engagement. Who is 'the community' Under the present systems of representation and investment in community activity, can it be realistically known who or what is truly representative of that community and their views?

As well as consultation on the Gateway development, Fife Council has also committed to using Participatory Budgeting (PB) to allocate funds awarded by Creative Scotland and matched by Fife Cultural Trust and Fife Council. The same issue of ensuring that engagement is with those who represent the community is making the process difficult and time-consuming. SURF was responsible for husbanding the original deal and we are keenly aware of the frustration caused by the time it has taken to expedite the process. Community Empowerment is not about handing over funds to self-identified community representatives; it requires time and additional resources. Dr. Oliver Escobar - the founder of the Citizen Participation Network – told last month's annual SURF conference that effective citizen engagement requires a period of training in the challenges of responsibility and accountability. Fife Council has used additional money to begin the PB process in recognition of the benefits which accrue when local people are empowered to make decisions about their community.

These experiences seem to reflect many of the findings in the report by COSLA's Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy, which suggests a link between "the absence of true local democracy and the prevalence of inequalities".

8. Conclusion

The above paper requires further development informed by discussion with the APPP and more practical application of 'Alliance for Action' plans and delivery. An interesting challenge is how the learning from that work can be most effectively engaged with some of the current relevant and exciting re thinking of regeneration policy and practice in Scotland.

End of report

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