

Scrutiny Review of Regeneration Funding and Neighbourhood Renewal

Report of the Overview and Scrutiny
Management Board Panel

December 2011

Scrutiny Review Group:

Cllr Glyn Whelbourn (Chair)

Cllr Hilda Jack

Cllr Darren Hughes

Cllr Jenny Whysall

Cllr Jacquie Falvey

Cllr Jane Hamilton

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The review was commissioned by RMBC Cabinet following the publication of the latest indices of multiple deprivation, which showed deterioration for a number of areas in Rotherham.

The main aims, as set out in the agreed scoping document, were to:

- Assess the effectiveness of past neighbourhood-based regeneration programmes in Rotherham and identify good practice and key lessons
- See whether learning could be applied to the planning or delivery of existing or future projects to ensure the greatest impact is made
- Analyse, in particular, the various intensive neighbourhood management schemes (i.e. Chesterhill, Local Ambition Programme) and assess the potential for further roll out.

Panel members agreed to focus on four particular areas that had previously been targeted for neighbourhood-based regeneration activity:

- Dinnington (SRB1)
- Ferham (Local Ambition Programme [LAP])
- Canklow (Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder, LAP)
- Chesterhill (intensive neighbourhood management pilot)

Summary of Key Findings

The review highlighted a wide range of issues that were felt to contribute to an area's continued vulnerability or "deprived" status, as well as identifying critical success factors within the various programmes. These included:

Problems / Issues

- Private landlords not letting responsibly - the same tenants "churning" around a small number of properties
- Housing allocations criteria not creating desired mix of residents
- Poor perceptions of deprived areas and stigmatising of residents
- Low aspirations / culture of worklessness
- Duplication and silo working leading to ineffective use of resources
- Short term programmes raise expectations, but then aren't continued or embedded

Successes

- Local coordinators provided visible presence and link between communities and service providers
- Good level of community engagement and involvement
- Regular walkabouts identified environmental issues that could be dealt with quickly
- LAP provided a tailored approach for each area rather than "one size fits all"
- Leadership role of local ward members

Summary of Recommendations

Housing

- Work more proactively with private landlords and review housing allocations policy and practice.

Resource allocation

- Give area assembly teams greater flexibility to target their efforts where they are most need and consider an overall shift to targeted rather than universal services.

Neighbourhood working

- Consider how the role of local coordinator can be created in deprived areas as part of wider local governance arrangements that incorporate a key role for members and senior officers and adapt *community budget* principles as appropriate.

Aspirations

- Ensure a renewed focus on raising aspirations through council commissioning processes, strategy development and effective partnership working to address barriers to employment.

Strategic

- Ensure key council policies and strategies - particularly the economic plan - have an explicit focus on tackling long-term issues in the most deprived communities.

Prevention and early intervention

- Ensure that *prevention and early intervention* principles underpin the approach to targeting resources in deprived areas.

Communities of interest

- Carry out equality analyses and ongoing impact assessments and monitoring to ensure all proposed actions recognise and address the particular issues facing groups with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

2 METHODOLOGY

Following the initial scoping exercise with members in July, extensive desk-based research was carried out throughout August. This looked at evaluation reports from a number of local programmes, as well as an evaluation of the *national strategy for neighbourhood renewal*.

Deprivation data was analysed to show trends over time for the review's focus areas and to compare Rotherham's progress on key economic indicators to other, similar districts.

This research identified a number of key themes that were then explored in more detail in October's review sessions. The sessions took place at Dinnington Resource Centre (6th October) and Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (21st October). Officers, ward members and community representatives were invited to attend and share their experiences of various regeneration schemes.

For further information see appendices:

Appendix A - research summary

Appendix B – themes and questions

Appendix C – Dinnington session notes

Appendix D – OSMB session notes

3 POLICY CONTEXT

National

A recent communities and local government committee report on regeneration strategy, concluded that ministers have no adequate strategy to address the complex problems faced by England's most deprived communities.

The report found the government to be "focusing overwhelmingly upon the achievement of economic growth, giving little emphasis to the specific issues faced by deprived communities and areas of market failure".

The sudden withdrawal of housing market renewal funding was particularly criticised, with the committee pointing out that "the decision to end funding so suddenly has had a profound impact on the lives of people in town and cities throughout the North and Midlands".

The committee recommended "that the government set out a plan for a "managed wind-down" of the housing market renewal programme in all pathfinder areas. In doing so, it should ensure that sufficient funds are available to eradicate the blight that has been left in many neighbourhoods".

Ultimately, the committee recommended that the government produces "a national regeneration strategy which addresses all these issues and sets out a coherent approach to tackling deprivation and market failure in the country's most disadvantaged areas. This should be the first step towards a more determined focus on the part of government to tackling the deep-seated problems that still blight too many of our communities.

The government's response to the report talked about the housing market renewal programme being halted because it "knocked down neighbourhoods in some of the most deprived areas of the country, and left families trapped in abandoned streets." The government also announced a £30m transition fund

“to help those people living in the worst-affected streets”.

The response went on: "We know that true regeneration can only be achieved by creating the conditions for communities and businesses to thrive in. That's why we have axed the regional development agencies and introduced business-led local enterprise partnerships and low tax, low regulation enterprise zones that are being planted across the country to give businesses the incentives they need to grow their local economy and create thousands of new jobs."

To some extent this approach chimes with findings of the recent evaluation of the Labour government's national strategy for neighbourhood renewal, which identified "economic performance in the wider sub-regional economy" as one of the most powerful factors in determining the likelihood of a neighbourhood improving.

Community budgets

Building on the previous government's Total Place initiative, the Coalition is launching a series of community budget pilots, enabling increased local control over public finances as part of the decentralisation drive.

The overarching aim of community budgets is to enable partners to redesign public services in their areas, agreeing outcomes and allocating resources across different organisations.

The three distinct community budget strands are:

Families with complex problems – Rotherham is a pilot area for this strand, which aims to give local councils and their partners control over spending to tackle social problems around families with complex needs.

Whole place - developing a pooled budget comprising all funding on local public services in an area

Neighbourhood level – this is probably the most relevant strand for the regeneration review. The aim is to give people more power over local services and budgets in a neighbourhood and align these with all the other resources that the local community can bring.

The neighbourhood could be an estate, a few streets, a ward, a collection of wards, or a parish. It must be something residents relate to and identify with.

Government see three potential scenarios in neighbourhood-level community budget areas

- A 'willing coalition' of residents, the council and other public service providers that would like to set up a community budget
- The local community represented by an 'association', 'anchor organisation' or 'neighbourhood council' are keen to draw down powers and responsibilities but are struggling to progress
- Local service providers are keen to devolve more resources, but the community lack the desire, confidence or capacity.

There may be opportunities for Rotherham to apply the community budget concept in tackling neighbourhood deprivation, building on the emerging pilot for *families with complex problems*.

Community First

Complementing community budgets, *Community First* is a new government funding programme, delivered by the Community Development Foundation. It aims to help communities come together to identify their strengths and local priorities in order to plan for their future and become more resilient.

Within Rotherham, a total of £712,000 has been allocated to 11 wards (based on deprivation data) over 4 years, with spending priorities to be determined by local panels supported by the council and key VCS organisations.

The council will have no direct control and limited influence over this funding, but again it could be used to help tackle problems identified by this review.

Local

Rotherham's neighbourhood renewal strategy (2005-10) and working neighbourhoods plan (2008-11), both sought to reduce inequalities in the borough. The neighbourhood renewal strategy (NRS), whilst targeting a number of specific areas identified as the most deprived in the borough, outlined a comprehensive approach linked to the old corporate plan/community strategy themes (Alive, Safe, Learning, Achieving, Proud). The broad aim was to improve the quality of life for people living in Rotherham's most deprived neighbourhoods, enabling everyone to realise their potential and benefit from the regeneration of the borough.

The working neighbourhoods plan, on the other hand, had an exclusively economic focus, aiming to address the gaps and needs around enterprise, employment and economic investment within our most disadvantaged communities.

The economic plan, which runs until 2020, but is due to be refreshed over the next 12 months with input from the new Rotherham Economy Board, has a specific strand on *economic inclusion and increasing participation*. This strand sets out actions needed to close the gap between Rotherham's disadvantaged and better-off communities, raising aspirations and encouraging enterprising behaviour.

The council's corporate plan has a specific priority of *making sure no community is left behind*. This is fundamentally about reducing inequalities and making sure no-one is disadvantaged by where they live.

Targeting and coordinating resources to the most deprived areas

This was a recent report to Cabinet that covered similar ground to this review and suggested a four phase approach to tackling deprivation

Integrated Strategic Needs Assessment (ISNA)

The ISNA aims to identify key themes from local intelligence documents that will help partners to better target resources in the most deprived communities.

The themes that have emerged are: housing, lifestyles (health and disabilities), jobs and worklessness, aspirations and pride in communities.

There will be a report to SLT and then members in November and December setting out findings and recommendations.

4 KEY FINDINGS

Problems / Issues

- *Private landlords not letting responsibly - the same tenants “churning” around a small number of properties*

This was highlighted as a problem in evidence from all of the case study areas. At the Dinnington session, witnesses talked about pockets of deprivation concentrated in a small number of streets. The areas tended to be characterised by a high proportion of private rented accommodation, with tenants “churning” around the same small number of properties/streets. The effectiveness of Dinnington landlords’ group, which aims to tackle the issue of problem tenants, is limited by poor attendance.

- *Housing allocations criteria not creating desired mix of residents*

An attempt had been made in Canklow to use housing allocations criteria to create a good mix of families, (e.g. a minimum number of people in employment, ensuring no history of anti-social behaviour etc.), but evidence suggested that more “problem” families had moved in.

Demolitions in Chesterhill were also largely a result of a failing allocations policy, which had created a concentration of problem tenants and a high level of churn (some properties being let seven times a year).

- *Poor perceptions of deprived areas and stigmatising of residents*

This was a strong theme in Canklow in particular and had been picked up in the Local Ambition Programme evaluation. The panel heard an example of a comprehensive school teacher referring to a child pejoratively as a “Canklownian”. There were concerns about how we might be able to address these ingrained issues.

- *Low aspirations / culture of worklessness*

Again, this was a recurring theme. There was an example, again from Canklow, of a pupil asking a teacher: “Why do you work?!” It was pointed out that the Jobcentre Plus outreach/drop in sessions in the LAP areas had been successful, but were not continued when LAP ended. This leaves a question of how people in deprived areas are going to be supported to access jobs and employment support.

- *Duplication and silo working leading to ineffective use of resources*

This was identified as a frequent problem and it was felt – in all the Local Ambition Programme (LAP) areas - that the coordinator played a key role in addressing this. Area Assemblies recognised the need to focus on particular areas, but lack of resources is an issue.

- *Short term programmes raise expectations, but then aren't continued or embedded*

There were examples of this from all of the case study areas. Not surprisingly, the fairly recent premature ending of LAP (due to government cuts) was highlighted. Another example was the Jobcentre Plus outreach/drop-in sessions in the Local Ambition areas, which were very popular, but haven't been continued.

In Dinnington, there were examples of interventions that hadn't been sustained or appeared to be piecemeal. This included housing enforcement resources that had helped to ensure 200 properties were brought up to a decent standard. This had now changed from a proactive to a reactive service.

Successes

- *Local coordinators provided visible presence and link between communities and service providers*

This was emphasised as being crucial by everyone who'd been involved in LAP, including ward members from East Herringthorpe. In both Ferham and East Herringthorpe, reinstatement of a local coordinator was identified as the top priority should any additional funding become available.

- *Good level of community engagement and involvement*

Community engagement had been central to the Canklow regeneration programme. Canklow Community Partnership had played an active role in the initial planning phase, for instance by sitting on recruitment panels to select consultants. Throughout the programme, officers had talked directly to households and businesses affected by demolitions and development, and had involved the local school and resident groups.

In Ferham, LAP had helped agencies develop links with community groups, particularly Ferham Community Group, the local TARA.

- *Regular walkabouts identified environmental issues that could be dealt with quickly*

The ability to deliver “quick wins” in response to residents' concerns was important. Regular walkabouts in Ferham, which have continued – though with reduced frequency – since the demise of LAP, led to visual improvements to the area with litter, fly-tipping and bins on streets reduced.

- *LAP provided a tailored approach for each area rather than “one size fits all”*

The importance of tailoring services to the needs of a particular area was another lesson from LAP. Panel members heard that, in East Herringthorpe, the youth service were a key partner, as there were issues around youth engagement, whereas in Ferham the police and SNT were more prominent, and in Canklow the local school was crucial.

- *Leadership role of local ward members*

The experience of Chesterhill, the original intensive neighbourhood management pilot, was that it was critical to have a strong democratic lead and visible involvement of ward members. All of the case study areas touched on the issue of having effective local governance arrangements.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the extensive research carried out as part of this review and – in particular – the findings of the two review sessions, the panel would make the following recommendations:

1. More proactive work needed with private sector landlords to foment a more responsible approach to letting – to be picked up via the *scrutiny review of private landlords*.
2. Review the council’s approach to housing allocations to ensure existing policy and practice are helping to create sustainable communities – this to be referred to the *Improving Places* commission.
3. Investigate how existing area-based staff, across partner agencies, can take on the role of dedicated “coordinator” for specific areas, working with communities and partner agencies to ensure joined-up, responsive service delivery
4. Ensure reviews of neighbourhood management / area assemblies address the issue of how area-based teams can more effectively target their efforts and resources where they are most needed.
5. Consider whether the council and – where appropriate – partner agencies should move to an explicitly targeted, rather than universal, approach to service delivery, concentrating resources where they are most needed and withdrawing services from relatively affluent areas.
6. Ensure that the approach to supporting deprived areas is based as far as possible on the principles of prevention and early intervention so that resources target those areas that are at risk of becoming severely deprived, as well as those that are already suffering severe deprivation.
7. Investigate whether: a) existing funds can be redirected AND/OR b) additional external funds can be secured to provide short-term support that will help prevent areas that are vulnerable to becoming severely deprived from reaching “tipping point”.
8. A range of measures are recommended to address the issue of low aspirations:

- 8.1. Investigate whether the Inspire-Aspire toolkit can be used to evaluate the impact of commissioning activity on the aspirations of families
- 8.2. In conjunction with Jobcentre Plus (JC+) and drawing on any evaluation of the impact of outreach sessions held in the LAP areas, look at how the council, JC+ and other partners can work together to help people in deprived areas overcome barriers to employment
- 8.3. Refer this issue to the *Improving Places* commission as part of their examination of the Rotherham Economy Board and economic plan.
9. In the absence of a focused neighbourhood renewal strategy or working neighbourhoods plan, consider whether the economic plan – as part of its refresh – should have an increased focus on addressing relevant issues in the borough’s most deprived communities.
10. Reflecting the council’s corporate priority of “making sure no community is left behind”, ensure specific actions are planned within key council policies/strategies to reduce area-based inequalities. This should ensure a long-term focus - within the most deprived communities - on underlying issues such as poor health, employment and skills.
11. Making links with the council’s community budget pilot for families with complex needs, and with reference to the government’s community budgets prospectus and local integrated services initiative, prepare a report on the feasibility and possible benefits of establishing community budgets for specific Rotherham neighbourhoods. This should consider the need for effective local governance arrangements that enable genuine community involvement and partnership working.
12. Consider the benefits of identifying “champions” at member and senior officer level who can advocate for deprived areas and help to ensure that obstacles to effective, locally-led service delivery are swiftly overcome.
13. The focus of this review and many of the related initiatives highlighted in this report is on place-based deprivation. It is important to ensure that the particular issues faced by communities of interest within targeted geographical areas are also addressed, to ensure that all diverse groups benefit from the outcomes of interventions. Consideration needs to be given to groups with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. These include older people and young people, disabled people, women, men, different ethnic groups, faith groups and lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender people. Otherwise, there is a danger of “double disadvantage” with certain groups disadvantaged by where they live and facing further barriers if services or interventions are not inclusive of their particular needs and requirements.

We would recommend that all actions arising from this review and any related initiatives to improve conditions in Rotherham’s most deprived neighbourhoods are subject to equality analysis and ongoing impact assessments and monitoring. This is to ensure that actions are inclusive of all groups with protected characteristics. Specific approaches to engage diverse communities will also be required.

6 THANKS

The review group would like to thank the witnesses for their time, co-operation and willingness to engage in this process. Their contributions are gratefully acknowledged.

7 CONTACT

For further information about this report please contact:

Michael Holmes, Policy Officer

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

Email: michael.holmes@rotherham.gov.uk

Tel: (01709) 254417