

Department for Social Development

People and Place

A Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal

Working Paper 1

Report of the Consultation Process

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Section 1: The method and scope of the consultation

- 1.1 This Working Paper describes the results of the consultation process that followed the publication of the Neighbourhood Renewal Consultation Document published by the Department for Social Development (DSD) in 2002.
- 1.2 The consultation exercise included 7 regional consultation conferences attended by 327 people, of whom 67% (220) were men and 33% (107) were women. The sectoral breakdown showed that 41% (135) were from the community/voluntary sector, 11% (33) from the private sector and 48% (159) from the public sector. In addition, there were 48 written responses to the Department's consultation document.
- 1.3 There was also consultation with the Social Development Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly and a group of academics and practitioners who drew on a range of perspectives and experiences to help develop the strategy.

Section 2: What do we mean by neighbourhood?

- 2.1 A fundamental concern in the consultation process was the need to clarify what we mean by neighbourhood, who defines the appropriate scale and what criteria are used to delineate boundaries. There was a general acceptance of the need to concentrate on smaller spatial units that exhibit intense social, economic and environmental deprivation.
- 2.2 It was generally agreed that there is a need for flexibility when defining ‘neighbourhoods’ and that objective measures are essential but we should not be too prescriptive. The need to think creatively about what is meant by ‘neighbourhood’ was a theme in the discussions, with many suggesting that local people should be involved in defining these areas. Others suggested that the term *neighbourhood* was an evolving concept and incorporated cultural and historical dimensions as well as physical delineation of boundaries.
- 2.3 It was felt that the nature of neighbourhoods differs between settlement types, especially between cities, large towns and smaller areas, and this gave rise to a concern that smaller communities outside Belfast and Derry/Londonderry could be overlooked by the strategy. There was also a feeling that a gap between areas supported by rural policy and the settlements classified as urban could cause a range of intermediary settlement types to miss out. The need for clear urban and rural definitions as well as complementary urban and rural policies was prioritised in the consultation.
- 2.4 It was pointed out that almost every public body has a different definition of neighbourhood and a co-ordinated approach must be adopted if resources are to be concentrated in the most disadvantaged areas.

Section 3: Prioritising areas and regional balance

- 3.1 A second broad set of concerns related to the way that neighbourhoods will be identified and the possibility that this might become an excluding process and create competition between disadvantaged areas.
- 3.2 Most felt that disadvantaged areas, however they are defined, should be the target for extra resources. Some warned of the danger of spreading the resources too thinly and limiting their impact. Consultees highlighted the need to make use of the Noble Index as an objective measure of social need.
- 3.3 Many believed that local people should be involved in defining deprivation. There was some concern that an exclusive reliance on the Noble indicators could result in some areas with severe problems not being identified. There was also concern that it was unclear from the Consultation Document how priority neighbourhoods would be established and by whom. The conclusion was that the Department should be explicit and open about the criteria used to identify target neighbourhoods.
- 3.4 It was agreed that the identification of deprived areas must be handled sensitively. For example, there might be a danger that the 'worst first' definition could create a victim culture and that competition and rivalry could occur between equally disadvantaged areas. Many also felt that there is a stigma attached to the idea of living in a 'deprived' area and it will be important to be sensitive when describing and prioritising neighbourhoods.
- 3.5 In addition, many areas may not fall within the definition of disadvantage but still have disempowered and disenfranchised people within them. It was felt that no area should be excluded on the basis that it had received assistance from programmes and other urban policy initiatives in the past.
- 3.6 Attention was also drawn to the needs of areas in decline as well as those that exhibit the highest deprivation indicators. Over time, the distribution of deprivation might change and areas may move up or down the scale of need. Continuous monitoring and analysis should be employed to ensure that the strategy can adapt and respond to these changes.
- 3.7 There was concern that the focus on urban areas would mean that Belfast and Londonderry would benefit most from the strategy and that estates in District Towns, which tend to be small, could lose out in resource allocation decisions. Some consultees felt that regional sifting would be important before applying more rigid statistical criteria to decide the priority neighbourhoods.
- 3.8 A number of respondents warned against drawing parallels with policy in the rest of the United Kingdom and highlighted the importance of developing a policy that would fit the distinctive Northern Ireland context. The need to look at and learn from examples of regeneration around the world was acknowledged, but it was stressed that we should draw on this experience selectively. Indeed, a number of submissions highlighted the need to reflect on local practice and to build expertise and specialist knowledge within Northern Ireland. Linked to this, it was felt that the development of resources, deeper competencies and professionalism might involve a more innovative approach to learning and developing community capacity. Sharing good

practice within and between neighbourhoods was seen as making an important contribution to the development of locally owned skills.

- 3.9 It was also felt that we should differentiate between areas and that perhaps some neighbourhoods could be supported with comparatively limited resources, especially where this might arrest their decline or address the early symptoms of economic and physical problems.

Section 4 Delivery structures and governance arrangements

- 4.1 Much of the debate and many of the written submissions focused on the need to identify clear, locally accountable and inclusive structures to both develop and implement neighbourhood renewal programmes.
- 4.2 A frequently made point was that there should be flexibility in the structures for delivering the strategy, since what might work in one neighbourhood might not work in another. In order to implement strategies, local capacities would have to be developed and a lead-in time would need to be planned in order to allow appropriate organisational systems to be established. The use of DSD, EU and district council resources to build community infrastructure in support of Neighbourhood Renewal was regarded as important in helping to integrate policies and programmes.
- 4.3 It was emphasised again that having two separate government departments to look after rural and urban policy might lead to the regeneration needs of some small towns and villages being overlooked. The need for inter-departmental and inter-agency collaboration was stressed.
- 4.4 The need for good communications between government and local communities was also emphasised. It was felt that transparent communication with communities early in the process would be required to establish clear objectives, build trust and develop local skills. Equally important to the success of the strategy would be co-operation between neighbourhoods, especially in sharing ideas, experiences and problem solving approaches.
- 4.5 There was much support for a bottom-up, community-led approach, with planning issues identified at local level, although it was recognised that this would be a time consuming process. The need to work through and not on communities should be prioritised in the delivery of the strategy.
- 4.6 Some consultees with experience of local area or neighbourhood level partnerships identified their variable quality, resources and experiences in urban regeneration. It was felt that if the programme were to be delivered at neighbourhood level, then these structures would need to be formalised, properly resourced and professionalised.
- 4.7 A number of respondents advocated a coordinating role for the emerging Local Strategy Partnerships. However, it was also felt that decision-making and strategy ownership should be as close to the target community as possible. In general there was a desire to see existing structures used efficiently to avoid new structures competing with existing fora and to prevent the creation of a new tier of local bureaucracy that would clutter the existing governance arrangements at a local level.
- 4.8 Capacity building was regarded as essential to empower local people to make decisions about the future of their areas. It was also felt that although capacity building should be a continuous process of learning and reflection, there would be a clear need for intensive work at the start of the process, especially in areas with a weak tradition of local development.

- 4.9 A number of respondents felt that clustering and twinning neighbourhoods to ensure effective and efficient management of change at the appropriate level would be important. However, it was stressed that whatever delivery mechanisms were put in place, decision-making should be as close to the neighbourhood level as possible. LSPs and district councils have a valuable role to play in co-ordinating policy, but it will be vital that groups and interests in the target neighbourhoods do not become marginalised in the evolving decision making arrangements.
- 4.10 The integration of the proposed strategy with related programmes was welcomed. However, it was also felt that the strategy should provide a clear interpretation of the broad themes in the Programme for Government, the Compact between the government and Voluntary Community Sector and the New TSN Action Plans of DSD and related departments. In addition, the Northern Ireland Strategy should have clear linkages with the UK Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy as well as best practice within Ireland and globally.
- 4.11 There was also a call for a strong connection between the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy and the Department for Regional Development's Regional Development Strategy (RDS) for Northern Ireland and the Regional Transportation Strategy. In particular, it was felt that Neighbourhood Renewal should sit within the spatial frame of the RDS and help to animate key development proposals.

Section 5: Timing and assessing programme success

- 5.1 The *Consultation Document* committed the Department to a 7 to 10 year time horizon to allow programmes to achieve the sort of structural adjustments required in the most deprived neighbourhoods. This more patient approach was commended in the consultation process together with the recognition of the need to assess the impact of programmes on community empowerment as well as on traditional activity and output indicators.
- 5.2 Overall, consultees supported the 7-10 year time scale, which was regarded as a reasonable time period to allocate resources and see tangible results from local programmes. However, many consultees also argued that there will be a need for support for the target neighbourhoods to continue beyond the 7-10 years envisaged and some raised the need for exit plans to deal with the end of funding.
- 5.3 It was also felt that the timing of neighbourhood strategies should complement Area (land use) Development Plans, LSP strategies and economic development initiatives led by district councils.
- 5.4 It was widely agreed that monitoring and audit need to be built into the Neighbourhood Renewal process. It was emphasised by many that the process of delivery of the strategy must be looked at as well as the outputs and impacts. It was also agreed both long and short-term objectives and the measures used in evaluation should be agreed at the outset with the local community and that in order for these to be monitored effectively, a comprehensive baseline will have to be established.
- 5.5 It was felt that collecting some of the data, such as information on unemployment, health, crime levels and education attainment, would be straightforward. However, it was also felt that there would be a need to measure variables that are relevant to local people and the Department should aim to capture information on the changes in the quality of life experiences of residents.
- 5.6 It was also suggested that it would be useful to measure the level of community group activity over time. Linked to this, it was suggested that community cohesion should be monitored, possibly by surveys at the beginning, middle and end of the funding period, and measures should be developed to detect changes in community relations and social distance over the life of the programme.
- 5.7 Some respondents felt that DSD had a key role in initiating Neighbourhood Renewal at a local level by:
- brokering agreement on the structure and composition of neighbourhood structures;
 - producing guidance on neighbourhood plans, good practice and ‘twinning’ between the relevant selected areas; and
 - identifying and helping to provide the skills and knowledge needed by all stakeholders and ensure the provision of suitable regeneration training programmes.

5.8 The whole issue of skills and knowledge formed an important element of the consultation submissions. In particular, it was felt that there will be a need to:

- clearly identify the competencies required in neighbourhood regeneration in the community/voluntary, statutory and private sectors. Some research and analysis has already been carried out in this area, but it was emphasised that we need a comprehensive education and training strategy to meet the needs of the emerging policy agenda;
- make use of community development methodologies and approaches in the management and delivery of Neighbourhood Renewal programmes;
- develop statistical and research support that was available to communities as well as government officials;
- there is also a need to build quantitative and qualitative data sets, share best practice and deepen expertise in the field of local planning and regeneration;
- record hard outputs, although it was recognised that there will be a need to record the processes of community development and their impact on local strategy making. Some of the expenditure may be questioned if the strategy is not seen to be having an effect on jobs, the use of land and property and business development; and
- ensure that the implementation of the strategy is not overly rigid and leaves space for innovation and resources to be diverted to new areas and priorities. Whilst the allocation of resources to the poorest areas was generally welcomed, it was also felt that it would be important for the policy to be capable of responding to unanticipated problems and development opportunities.

Section 6: Priority issues in neighbourhoods

- 6.1 As well as examining issues around the development and delivery of the Neighbourhood Renewal, the consultation exercise also explored the content and substantive scope of the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy.
- 6.2 It was acknowledged that the priorities of each community will be different and the Strategy must be flexible enough to reflect this. The first step should therefore be to consider what initiatives, community audits and capacity building exercises have been undertaken in each area. It was constantly emphasised that people must be at the centre of strategy formulation, delivery and evaluation.
- 6.3 It was also felt that priorities will change over time and, therefore, the Strategy will have to be sufficiently flexible to take account of this and the unanticipated problems and emerging policy opportunities that may impact on specific neighbourhood areas.
- 6.4 Some of the priorities identified by consultees highlighted the interrelated nature of problems. They included underage drinking, drugs, literacy problems, unemployment, lack of educational opportunities, the debt and benefits trap, community services like doctors, community centres, children, employability and education, physical infrastructure, vandalism and isolation. Some consultees made the point that priority should be given to the social fabric of communities as well as the physical environment of the target area.
- 6.5 The emergence of policing and social justice as vital issues in neighbourhood planning and community development was highlighted. It was felt that community policing and partnerships with local people will be particularly important. The Government review of the Northern Ireland Criminal Justice System includes a chapter on Community Safety and the Review Group recognises that crime is a significant social issue.
- 6.6 It was suggested that in many cases Neighbourhood Renewal will be a matter of raising awareness and making better use of resources that are already available in neighbourhoods, such as Credit Unions, making use of school buildings outside school hours, and education for life so, that problems passed on from one generation to the next are halted through learning and training.
- 6.7 Some consultees suggested that there may be an apathy among communities that have already been through a number of initiatives resulting in burn out or fatigue. Energy and interest will need to be developed, especially at the start of the planning process.

Section 7: Equality and Neighbourhood Renewal

- 7.1 There is a statutory duty on the Department to comply with the provisions of the equality agenda during the development of the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy. However, this agenda also provides an opportunity for the strategy to address the legacy of segregation, territoriality and contested places in some of our most deprived neighbourhoods.
- 7.2 Consultees emphasised the need to consult on all of the equality areas. Moreover, it was felt that section 75 groups should be monitored and the effects of the strategy audited against their needs and priorities. However, it was also felt that the equality agenda cannot be imposed on communities, but should evolve naturally through local planning processes.
- 7.3 It was felt that the consultation process itself needs to be as inclusive as possible, involving all types of people and all ages.
- 7.4 Different views were expressed on what the key equality issues were and the needs of travellers, enclave communities and homeless people were among the diverse issues mentioned. It was also noted that disabled people experience distinctive challenges in remote housing estates with few resources and weak transportation linkages. High rates of unemployment and benefit dependency and poor skills and qualifications further deepen the exclusion experienced by disabled people in the poorest areas.
- 7.5 Some of the suggestions for operational ways in which the equality agenda could be reinforced included:
- Transparent selection processes in the identification of target areas;
 - Equal access to resources within the target areas identified;
 - Specifically targeting minority and section 75 groups within local plans; and
 - Closely monitoring the effects of initiatives on section 75 categories over the life of the programme.
- 7.6 A number of consultees highlighted the need for the resulting strategy to explicitly address the legacy of the conflict and to contribute positively to Northern Ireland's transition to some form of political normality. In particular, the strategy should engage the problems created by segregation, territoriality and interfaces. It was suggested that the Department could fulfil its 'Good Relations' duty under section 75.2 of the Northern Ireland Act 1999 by developing positive approaches to cross-community contact especially around areas of mutual concern to both communities in some of the poorest neighbourhoods.
- 7.7 It was pointed out that there may a need to support single identity groups in certain neighbourhoods as well as promoting good community relations between neighbourhoods.

Section 8: Understanding Neighbourhood Decline

- 8.1 During the consultation process, particular attention was focused on the process of neighbourhood decline and the need to use resources under the strategy to address the underlying processes that cause spatial disadvantage. Some positive ideas for initiatives and the use of funding were also identified during the consultation.
- 8.2 The link between housing allocation and transfers and the most disadvantaged areas was identified by a number of the respondents. Demographic ‘churning’, with high turnover rates concentrated in deprived housing estates exacerbated efforts to maintain community solidarity, activity and a positive image for the area and created housing management problems. The need to make deprived neighbourhoods more popular and viable residential choices was regarded as a priority if the conditions for long-term stability are to be created.
- 8.3 It was also felt that initiatives such as *housing plus* should be developed especially as housing associations have primary responsibility for providing social housing. Housing plus involves linking association activity to related services such as developing low cost accommodation for embryonic enterprises and offering residents relevant and accessible routes into the field of information and communications technology. A number of consultees felt it was important that social housing should be seen as part of the solution and not defined as a problem.
- 8.4 The physical decline of areas, the collapse of local property economies and the importance of land and building infrastructure to the recovery of the most disadvantaged areas were also highlighted. In terms of urban renewal it was acknowledged that there are few departments, other than DSD, who invest directly in physical development and that these resources are essential to sustained community renewal. It was also pointed out that community based environmental initiatives are good examples of projects that can satisfy a range of training, employment and youth-work objectives and it was felt that physical projects are one area where communities can work collaboratively.
- 8.5 There was some criticism of an apparent lack of engagement with the private sector in the consultation document. Deprived neighbourhoods experience a range of problems that make it difficult for businesses to plan and work effectively and efficiently and as a result, they suffer from under-investment. It was pointed out that the private sector have developed a number of programmes that bring business skills to the economic and social regeneration of communities. These relate to improving employability, business innovation and skills in the digital economy.
- 8.6 A key link was made between the processes of neighbourhood decline and exclusion from the labour market. Basic literacy and numeracy skills were considered vital, but so too were initiatives that promoted skills in growth sectors of the economy. It was also felt that Departments such as the Department for Employment and Learning should ‘bend’ their resources to co-ordinate with neighbourhood strategies in order to achieve a broad based but integrated approach.
- 8.7 It was also pointed out that ‘transportation poverty’ accentuates the exclusion that many people experience in remote housing estates. This has a disproportionate effect on those on low incomes, the car-less, those seeking work, women, families and young people and older people. It was felt that the strategy should attempt to respond in an innovative way to the problems of

remote housing estates. It was suggested that properly integrated public transportation would reduce the marginalisation experienced in the most deprived communities and that this would require a strategic policy shift away from what were felt to be the car-based transport policies of the past. It was suggested that options for cycling and safe pedestrian movement should also be encouraged. It was also argued that controlling parking and traffic with initiatives such as Home Zones, safe routes to school and traffic calming, would add to the safety, environmental quality and amenity of residents, especially in inner city areas. The connection with the equality agenda was also highlighted.

Section 9: Next steps

This document has attempted to synthesise a wide range of detailed, high quality and diverse comment on the Neighbourhood Renewal Consultation Document. Submissions from the regional seminars, written reports and the Assembly Committee have provided a critique of the proposed approach and detailed, well-grounded arguments about how the Strategy should be translated into reality. These have been built into the final Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal which provides the broad framework for the implementation of the neighbourhood renewal approach in Belfast, Londonderry and Regional Cities and Towns. The framework will be refined as DSD takes forward the process of engagement on implementation issues such as the definition of Neighbourhood Renewal Area boundaries and delivery of the approach within each area.