## Introduction

This note is intended to inform the LG&R Committee's consideration of its legacy work, and focuses on two of the main topics considered by the Committee during Session 4, namely Community Empowerment and the Delivery of Regeneration. The note also remarks upon the emergence of mixed and diverse communities in Scotland.   This written evidence is, for the most part, based on research conducted within the GoWell Programme, which is funded by a number of partners, including The Scottish Government: see www.gowellonline.com. GoWell is a long-term study of the effect of policy interventions in fifteen deprived communities in Glasgow. The views expressed here are those of the author, and not of the GoWell Partnership, nor of its Steering Group.

Community Engagement and Empowerment

What is Community Empowerment?

Community empowerment is often stated as central to regeneration policy and practice, but what this means is rarely explained. We have developed a model of community empowerment as shown in the Figure below. This describes community empowerment as a set of circumstances and processes which have three key elements and three kinds of outcomes.

A Model of Community Empowerment
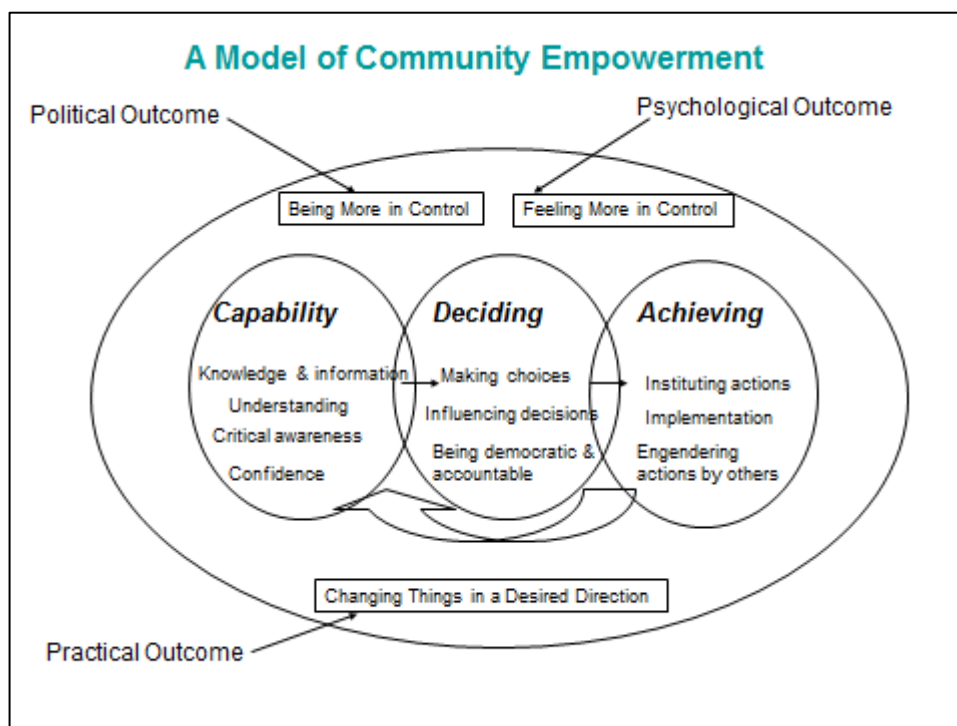
Thus, an empowered community is one which combines the following: having the ability to identify its own needs and the *capability* to raise questions and issues with others (e.g. service providers and

planners of services) at propitious times, in suitable arenas; having opportunities to make choices about the community's future, or to influence *decisions* being made by others that affect the community; having the ability, through its own organisations or through its relationships with other organisations, to stimulate and monitor *actions* in pursuit of the decisions that were made or influenced by the community.

Approaches to community empowerment most often focus on aspects of the decision-making process (such as consultation exercises) but less often address the other two elements: assessing and developing the capacity of the community; and, ensuring that implementation follows and is in accord with the consultation and decision-making process.

A commitment towards and pursuit of community empowerment should result in one or more of three outcomes: perceived influence and control on the part of individuals and the community as a whole; a shift in power and control towards the community, identifiable in decision-making and monitoring processes; and practical changes which meet the community's needs and aspirations more fully and more quickly. These outcomes from community empowerment are rarely assessed in policy and practice, particularly at a local level where they matter the most, although perceived influence over local decisions does feature in the Scottish Government's Regeeneration Outcomes Framework.

Why is Empowerment Important?

Greater community empowerment should mean that more neighbourhoods and communities are able to meet the needs of the people who live in them, making them more sustainable in two senses: communities that are less dependent on additional services and support; communities that are more desirable and in-demand as places to live. But individual and collective senses of empowerment are also important as contributors to health and wellbeing, and for other desired outcomes from regeneration.

Many disadvantaged communities, and the people who live therein, are aware that they are perceived negatively and stigmatised by others, and they can be fatalistic or pessimistic about the chances of things changing for the better for them. It is worth remembering that currently, around a quarter of people who live in the most deprived areas in Scotland feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area, though a third would like more involvement in those decisions.

GoWell findings illustrate how a sense of empowerment, delivered through different routes, is important for mental health and wellbeing. In our surveys we ask respondents about three different kinds of community empowerment: *influence* over local decisions; the community being *proactive* to improve things for itself; and *service provider responsiveness* to the views of local people. We found each of these forms of empowerment to be strongly associated with higher mental wellbeing among respondents, with influence over decisions slightly more so than the other two. Feeling empowered in these ways is associated with an increased likelihood that someone would have high mental wellbeing by one-and-a-half to two times, compared with those who did not feel empowered. These findings highlight the importance for people's wellbeing of having access to planning and

regeneration decision-making processes; of having capacity within the community to do things for themselves, when people wish to; and having a good relationship with service providers on an ongoing basis. In particular, GoWell findings highlight the important role of housing services, residents' sense of whether their neighbourhood is improving, and the reputation of their areas:

- **Housing services** are an important source of empowerment for tenants, often in the social sector, and a support for wellbeing. For many people in disadvantaged areas, their relationship with their landlord is crucial for their residential quality of life, and a key means by which they can gauge their status as citizens, since the interaction with their landlord can offer dignity and respect, which they may not derive much from elsewhere, for example if they are not working. We found that respondents who felt that they were kept well informed by their landlord, that residents' views were taken into account by the landlord, and they were provided with good quality housing services, were approximately twice as likely to have high mental wellbeing as those who did not feel empowered in these ways. In other analysis, we have also found that this 'housing empowerment' doubled or tripled the odds that someone would feel very safe at home and in the neighbourhood over time, additional and important wellbeing outcomes, and ones that also protect against loneliness.

- A **positive neighbourhood trajectory** is also important for residents of disadvantaged areas, thus emphasising the importance both of regeneration efforts and of ensuring that residents are kept informed and aware of progress. In our study, those respondents who thought that their neighbourhood had got better to live in over the past two years were twice as likely to have high mental wellbeing as those who thought the area had got worse. We found instances where communication with residents was not always very regular.

- We have investigated the effects of both **internal and external area reputation**, and found the former to be the more important for mental wellbeing. Those people who thought that their neighbours in the area thought highly of the place were five times more likely to have high mental wellbeing than those who thought the opposite. This shows how important the collective view, and public discourse in an area is for wellbeing: it matters how people view and talk about the place they live in, with others who live there. Creating a positive 'vibe' and dialogue in an area may therefore be important, such as through community identity and heritage projects. This internal community dialogue may be as important as the dialogue with service providers and others promoted via community engagement.

Processes of Community Engagement and Empowerment

We have studied community engagement and community empowerment in a number of contexts including the transfer of social housing to community ownership, and the planning of major area regeneration projects. Some of our key findings include the following:

- Having a sufficient level of good quality housing and public services freed up the time and energy of community groups to address other more developmental issues for the future, as they were not having to firefight over the basics.

- Knowledge and experience gained over time and through relations with other communities fed into a stronger sense of direction and aspiration within community groups. Communities afforded the time and support to develop their own capacity make more informed and more realistic choices than otherwise.

- Community organisations with skilled staff, adequate and flexible resources, and working relations with outside bodies offered communities greater means and opportunities to tackle the issues they faced. Often these are social housing providers.

- Groups purportedly representing the community in processes of engagement can sometimes be weak in democratic terms, for example with regards to who they represent and do not represent from the community, and in terms of their means of collecting views and feeding back to the community.

- Community engagement processes which are under the control of the service provider are open to manipulation and the use of weak methodologies in order to produce results supportive of the desired position of the provider. Absence of clarity about the parameters and limitations of the engagement process can be a source of lack of empowerment.

- Failure to explain institutional and delivery arrangements to communities is disempowering. Despite a community engagement process, communities may lack knowledge of decision-making responsibilities and be unaware of who is deciding things after the engagement process has come to an end. Subsequently, communities can also lack understanding of who is responsible for the implementation or delivery of what has been agreed, nor of how to raise questions about progress and changes.

- A professed adherence to the national standards of community engagement can sometimes co-exist with processes that are not empowering for communities.

Suggestions for the Future

- There is very little evidence from GoWell or elsewhere that community engagement processes, or indeed adherence to the national standards, result in enhanced empowerment for communities, in any of the three senses we described above. The ***Effectiveness of Community Engagement*** is something the Committee could seek to have investigated in the future through case-study research. The aim would be to learn in what contexts and circumstances - within the community and beyond the community in respect of external institutions who must accommodate local community engagement processes and outcomes

- community empowerment is or is not boosted through community engagement. This goes beyond, but can also inform, the revisions to the National Standards for Community Engagement currently under way.

- Communities going through major change, or facing major proposals for change or development, should have the right to be afforded independent advice and support in community engagement processes. This support should include preparation and capacity building activity, but also extend to ongoing support and advice throughout the process. The Committee might consider the terms for offering such support as well as how such a **Community Right to Support** could be funded independently of any of the local actors involved in instituting change within communities.

- Even where regeneration is not housing-led, or has moved beyond that phase, it is worth **recognising and encouraging the social housing sector's potential contribution** to individual wellbeing (through service provision) and to community capacity and empowerment (through organisational resources, connections and influence).

The Delivery and Monitoring of Regeneration

A number of things have become apparent to us over the years we have studied the delivery of housing-led area regeneration in Glasgow. First, the regeneration process has been slow in many areas, with plans being adjusted at various times to fit with emerging funding opportunities, or to accommodate shifting levels of private sector interest or of public funding. This produces great uncertainty for communities. A large degree of dependence on the private sector for the delivery of elements of regeneration has not served regeneration goals well. What began as 10-15 year regeneration projects have now become 20-25 year projects, and that is often only a 'guesstimate'. The reality, for example, is that many young people will have lived their entire childhoods and early adult years in locations where the environment and amenities are depleted. The contrast between many parts of the city subject to regeneration and that part of the East End of the city which hosted the Commonwealth Games is striking. In the latter case, a greater volume of change was delivered in a shorter time period due to the imperative of being ready for the Games in 2014. One of our major observations about regeneration is the reluctance or inability on the part of those delivering regeneration to commit to a deadline for its completion, or for the achievement of milestones towards a project's end-point.

A number of things are required for future regeneration:

(i) **Targets** – introduce requirements that regeneration projects or programmes have a target completion date. Communities are often rightly sceptical that proposed projects will be finished in a reasonable timescale;

(ii)   **Accountablity -** political commitment to, and oversight of, the completion of regeneration projects is required. Sometimes projects are effectively abandoned or indefinitely delayed or postponed without the community being informed, or those with political control noticing;

(iii)   **Measurement -** regeneration outcomes frameworks, at national and local level, should include measures of delivery-progress. This would help provide a record of progress on delivery and inform those inside and outside regeneration programmes about progress against the original milestones.;

(iv)   **Funding** – inevitably the funding of regeneration needs to be sufficiently long-term to enable firmer commitments about completion to be made.

(v)   **Partnership -** regeneration is often delivered by a partnership of local actors, but it is important that these *consistently* involve important actors such as health, education and social work. Partnership combinations can vary and sometimes miss these important actors.

Improvements in the combined economic, physical and social environments in an area are often required for its successful functioning and sustainability in the future, and for the achievement of many of the health and wellbeing goals sought through regeneration. Nevertheless, regeneration plans still tend to focus predominantly on physical elements. Moreover, physical improvements and change continue to outpace economic and social change. Social planning for and with communities that are struggling or have acute needs is necessary but often absent, and requires different skills and inputs than physical planning. Social regeneration programmes required to deliver on such plans also need leadership and supporting partnerships.

There can also be a disconnect between local partners and strategic actors whose decisions and strategies can either have implications for local areas subject to regeneration, or can aid or inhibit local regeneration plans. In a city like Glasgow, where a large proportion of the city's communities are considered deprived, the equity issues involved can mean that areas of regeneration do not receive priority attention or involvement from strategic actors (such as national agencies), which then limits local regeneration efforts. For regeneration to be successful, areas selected for regeneration (if selected by a democratic body such as the local authority) need to become a priority for all relevant local and national actors, but this does not automatically follow.

Suggestions for Further Learning in the Future

- Regeneration is currently approached in a variety of ways, for example through city-level partnerships, by Urban Regeneration Companies, by local authorities, by housing associations etc. There could be benefit in ***reviewing the governance and delivery of regeneration*** in order to find out which models are more or less successful in producing positive change for communities; for addressing the range of physical, economic and social issues within communities; and for empowering communities in the process of change. The ability of regeneration to address issues involving the private sector (for example in housing, transport, retail and leisure) is something of particular concern and interest here.

- The *Thriving Places* initiative in Glasgow is important, and a potential source of learning for authorities and communities elsewhere. At face value, it may be capable of combining community capacity building with holistic approaches to addressing the social, economic and environmental needs of disadvantaged communities. However, the emphasis on an asset-based approach and the co-production of solutions could mean that the most disadvantaged communities continue to lag behind in having their needs met. The Committee may benefit from **keeping a watching brief on Thriving Places** and seek independent assessment of whether the initiative is able to engage a wide range of service partners, who are then willing and able to be flexible in the approaches they take in the target communities, with the result that needs are met, inequalities narrowed, and communities enabled to become more empowered and sustainable.

- The recently introduced *Place Standard* is a tool intended to improve the quality of places and help tackle inequalities. There are big questions as to whether it can do these things, since it is discretionary (no-one has to use it in any particular circumstances) and it lacks any benchmarks or minimum standards. Nonetheless, the tool has potential if it is widely used by communities, alone or with other actors, and recognised as having legitimacy by service providers and planners. But it also has scope to widen rather than narrow inequalities if more advantaged communities are able to make better use of it than others. The Committee could seek to **investigate the use and consequences of the Place Standard**: how and where it is used, and with what effects upon decisions and priorities for actions and services. The Committee could also consider whether benchmarks could be derived from the ratings given by different communities when using the tool; these would enable more meaningful assessments of progress over time in improving the quality of places.

Mixed and Diverse Communities

We, and others, have noticed two key ways in which communities have changed over the past decade, sometimes in tandem, and with implications for regeneration objectives in areas of disadvantage and change.

Regeneration over the years has tried to change the housing tenure structure of communities, as a means of balancing the social composition of areas, for example so that younger people who want to buy houses can remain and not have to move elsewhere, or so that the level of worklessness is lowered in order that more local services and amenities can be supported by those with money to spend locally. Tenure change as policy for disadvantaged areas included the Right to Buy for council tenants from the early 1980s onwards, followed by the introduction of tenure diversification so that social housing came under the ownership of different landlords rather than just the local authority within any community. Latterly, tenure mixing was also introduced through the introduction of owner occupied housing into erstwhile council estates, and its inclusion in regeneration plans for areas subject to redevelopment.

These tenure change policies have been enacted over the past 20-30 years, but we have little evidence of their impacts across Scotland. In our own work, we have produced some evidence that tenure mixing is associated with better school performance, and some better individual health outcomes (e.g. in relation to smoking and alcohol-related problems), but this evidence is far from conclusive. There is also a big question about how spatially integrated the different housing tenures need to be to generate the social interaction benefits often sought; as against whether spatially segmented tenures are more desirable and easier to manage.

Over the past decade the housing tenure picture in lower income communities has been rendered more complicated by the growth of the private rented sector, which has for example doubled in size in Glasgow since the turn of the millennium; more owners are letting rather than selling their properties, and more young people are opting for private renting. For some communities, the initial promise of mixed tenure policies has resulted in greater instability and insecurity associated with an expanding private rented sector.

The other way in which communities in Scotland have been changing in recent years is in their ethnic diversity. This is true in many towns and cities across the country; in Glasgow, the ethnic minority population has doubled over the past fifteen years, and there are a dozen neighbourhoods across the city that now have 12% or more ethnic minority residents, including nine neighbourhoods where ethnic minority residents make up a quarter to a half of the population. We have found that the social integration of migrants has been improving over time; although living in deprived areas has it disadvantages, migrants have developed supportive networks that have enabled them to enhance their quality of life. We have also shown that education, English language skills and employment all contribute to better social integration. In health terms, we have found that migrants have better health than locals upon arrival, but for many social and economic migrants their health deteriorates over time in the UK, although again, the position was better among asylum seekers and refugees living in deprived areas.

Suggestions for the Future:

- The Committee could find out more about the extent and configuration of community mix across Scotland in housing tenure, income and employment terms, and identify communities which had changed in this regard. ***Establishing the effects of community mix*** upon education, health and employment outcomes within communities is key to understanding what progress communities have made in the past couple of decades, but also what the direction of travel should be in the future. At present, 'mixed communities' is a conventional wisdom which is poorly understood, but trusted to bring benefits we can't be sure about. Whether the growing private rented sector presents particular challenges for communities and what supportive or regulatory changes can be made to address these, is something of particular importance and urgency.

- Scotland has a reputation for welcoming diversity and seeking to make the most of it. Our research suggests that migrants can be a healthy and positive presence within communities,

but this is not the case for all migrant groups, nor for all communities; migrants present service pressures as well as social opportunities. ***Identifying how well communities and services are adapting to growing diversity***, so as to enable ethnic minorities and migrants to flourish and contribute to local communities and society is an important issue for Scotland's successful development in the future. The need for regulatory change or service adaptations to better accommodate migrants of different types (by status, migration route, country of origin, cultural or religious background etc.) could also be considered.

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