



**New Commitment to Regeneration –
progress and policy lessons**

***LGAresearch* Report 15
Executive summary**

A copy of the full report can be
purchased
From IDeA Publications Sales, Layden
House,
76-78 Turnmill Street, London, EC1M
5LG.

Tel. 020 7296 6600. Fax. 020 7296 6666.

Please quote LGA code SR019 and send
payment (cheque made payable to
'IDeA')
with order.

Price £20 (including postage), £10 local
authorities and not for profit
organisations

Executive summary

The lessons of New Commitment to Regeneration (NCR) are especially timely and important because NCR anticipated the direction of recent government policy. In particular, it provides a model for Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs).

LSPs were promoted in the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, draft Community Planning Guidance and will feature in the forthcoming Urban and Rural White Papers. They will be cross sectoral, cross agency partnerships committed to improving the quality of life and governance in a locality and will provide a single overarching framework within which other, more specific local partnerships can operate.

There are messages from the NCR experience about the focus of regeneration policy, the choice of area for a strategic partnership, about the operation of a local strategic partnership and its implications for partnership processes, partner organisations and central government.

Introduction

A new and ambitious approach

The Local Government Association (LGA) developed NCR as a more strategic approach to regeneration based upon the experience of the 1980s and 90s. Its distinctive features are that it:

- focuses upon a wider area – city, conurbation or county - than previous area-based regeneration initiatives, involving whole local authorities or multiple local authorities
- encompasses mainstream budgets and programmes as well as special regeneration funding and activities

- involves national government as a partner
- seeks to explore flexibilities in the way that national policies are carried out locally in order to encourage greater creativity, innovation and success.

The NCR approach is ambitious because it:

- requires all partners to work collaboratively with new strategic partners
- embraces all policy areas
- extends to the core business of its partner organisations
- changes the relationship between central government and local players.

NCR pathfinders are very diverse. Located in urban and rural areas, they differ in their socio-economic composition, needs and priorities, past regeneration experience, patterns of local government and traditions of partnership working. This diversity makes it possible to identify factors likely to affect the evolution and effectiveness of LSPs. However, pathfinders also face many similar institutional challenges when trying to equip themselves for effective partnership. Again they provide significant messages for LSPs.

Enthusiasm and realism

The evaluation, though its fieldwork and a survey has found a general enthusiasm for the philosophy and ambitions of NCR and the broader concept of regeneration it embodies. It has brought various benefits:

- raising the profile of regeneration activities

- giving partnership a clearer focus

- fostering a more integrated approach
- providing a catalyst for a joint strategy
- giving a strategic framework for partner organisations' policy planning
- prompting partners to look at outcomes and to look at what they can achieve with their mainstream budgets.

Enthusiasm is combined with realism about the challenges to local players, regional bodies and central government if its ambitions are to be fulfilled.

Policy lessons

The real significance of NCR experience to date is its relevance to the current policy debate. NCR underlines the need for, and feeds into thinking about LSPs and informs thinking about local authorities' new duty to prepare a community strategy. It has important messages about partnership dynamics, functions, boundaries, and resources and about the role of central government.

Re-defining regeneration

Although its lessons so far are mainly process ones, NCR raises substantive issues about regeneration policy. Regeneration has been an evolving concept but, at any given time, tends to have been framed by the goals and activities specified by funding regimes. The following considerations suggest that a strategic approach should be based upon a more expansive definition:

- the need for a longer term approach
- the importance of mainstream services in affecting quality of life and the greater

regeneration potential of harnessing mainstream resources

- that patterns of deprivation vary within and between neighbourhoods and districts
- the interconnections between deprived and other neighbourhoods
- the importance of connecting need and opportunity
- the need for preventative intervention to arrest early symptoms of decline
- the need to intervene at the level of labour and housing markets.

Meeting these requirements entails a shift from seeing regeneration solely as special, targeted, time-limited activities funded by centrally designed grant regimes to understanding it as the rationale for the management of whole areas. In other words, regeneration is not one activity amongst many. Rather it is the glue holding other things together. This may be most evident in areas of widespread deprivation, but it also holds for other urban and rural areas when the goal of regeneration is seen as sustainability, in the widest sense of a better quality of life for everyone, now and in the future. Regeneration has to balance the potentially competing drives of increasing economic competitiveness and promoting social inclusion.

Lessons for LSPs

Selecting the partnership area

The diversity of NCR pathfinders in their area coverage, institutional landscape and fit with other features such as local labour markets underlines that these factors are integral to

the role, purpose and scope of LSPs and community strategies. It is necessary to assess the implications where, for example:

- local authority boundaries do not coincide with those of a natural conurbation or a coherent area for economic development
- there is two tier local government or some other combination of local authorities
- there is a marked lack of co-terminosity amongst the major agencies.

The spatial level at which the partnership operates and the interests of the member organisations at that level will affect their commitment, the range of the partnership agenda and the stakeholder and community involvement that is desirable and feasible. A reasonable fit of boundaries and interests is likely to enable faster progress.

Building partnership

NCR underlines that partnership:

- cannot be rushed: it is necessary to build trust and understanding and develop a culture of participation with which all partners feel comfortable, including the private, voluntary and community sectors
- cannot grow in a vacuum: it must be built by doing and encouraged by evidence of success and benefits to partner organisations
- depends upon certain critical factors such as leadership, an appropriate pace of working and having an executive team.

For *strategic* partnerships, the rewards are less obvious because there is no immediate cash prize. Partners need to be convinced of the benefits of partnership *per se* which

requires identifying its goals and added value.

Partnership structures must be:

- sensitive to the requirements of agencies' statutory or territorial roles
- have feedback and accountability mechanisms so that they are embedded in and can influence the overall operation.

Servicing partnership

Partnerships need an executive team to:

- give the partnership an identity of its own and reduce the risk of it being over-identified with one organisation – usually the local authority
- service the partnership
- maintain an overview and have a monitoring function
- act as a spur to progress
- network and manage opportunities for connection and communication across sectoral, organisational and professional boundaries.

Lessons for partners

The wider the remit of partnership working, the more it entails radical change within partner organisations. Partnership working at this level requires working towards whole systems change to maximise the synergy of integrated strategies and joint working. Mainstreaming partnership means changes in governance structures, internal and external relationships, accompanied by the requisite training and capacity building.

Lessons for government

So far little progress has been made on the goals of NCR that central government should become a partner and enable flexibilities in the way that national policies are enacted locally.

- Too much activity continues to be driven by central funding rather than local needs
- the local operating environment limits the capacity of local players to respond more creatively to local priorities and tailor policy to local circumstances.

For NCR and for LSPs, local players want central government departments both to *act more corporately* and *let go*. 'One size fits all' policies, whether or not they are cross cutting, are inappropriate. Central government can help local strategic partnerships be more effective by:

- giving them greater flexibility in implementing national policies
- reducing the number of special pre-packaged initiatives and enabling local players to tackle similar policy targets using appropriately adjusted mainstream resources
- clarifying the role of government offices for the regions (GOs) and pressing them to be more proactive.

Central government can facilitate local joining up by:

appropriate guidance: for example, guidance about LSPs and community planning partnerships to other organisations expected to participate as well as local authorities