

# Transforming disadvantaged places: effective strategies for places and people

Round-up  
Reviewing the evidence

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Approaching poverty and deprivation in the context of place is an increasing focus of regeneration policy. How can integration be strengthened between social and economic interventions for deprived places, and what are the key challenges to more effective delivery?

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## This paper:

- summarises evidence about the underlying forces affecting place-based economic deprivation across Britain, and explores how interventions aimed at both people and places can be strengthened to tackle disadvantage.

## Key points

- Spatial polarisation of wealthy and poor people increased in Britain from 1970 to 2005. Urban clustering of poverty has also increased.
- Overall unemployment decreased between 2000 and 2005 in areas with high claimant and poverty rates, but high levels of worklessness persist in many areas affected by economic decline, often concentrated amongst social housing tenants.
- There is varied evidence on the recovery of areas affected by economic decline in terms of people's access to work, for example in former coalfields. There is no universal model for successful regeneration.
- Attachment to locality based on strong family and social networks in deprived neighbourhoods can limit people's horizons and willingness to consider opportunities elsewhere. However, strong social networks can also foster resilience within deprived neighbourhoods.
- Sustained place management in deprived neighbourhoods can help to stabilise and turn around their prospects. This approach should pay equal attention to issues affecting people as well as place-related disadvantage.
- Fragmented policy and governance arrangements, particularly in relation to social inclusion and economic development, remain key barriers to the delivery of more effective interventions.
- Debates about whether to focus on place or people interventions impose a false divide. The social equity principles of sustainable development require effective, interlinked approaches across social, environmental and economic domains at all spatial tiers of governance.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) has been supporting a wide-ranging research programme into the causes of place-based economic decline and deprivation across Britain and the effectiveness of strategies for tackling the problems of economic exclusion. The research has included exploration of the underlying forces at play at different spatial levels of the region, sub-region, city and local neighbourhood, and the complex ways in which these affect both people and place.

Devolution in the UK is enabling regeneration strategy to be more closely aligned to specific local circumstances, and is continuing to push responsibilities for economic development down to lower spatial tiers of governance (to local authorities and sub-regional or city-region partnerships). This trend has been unfolding alongside the implementation of major programmes of neighbourhood-focused renewal, driven by growing concerns about spatial concentrations of deprivation and social exclusion. These policy initiatives have aimed to tackle the multiple factors that impact negatively on both the neighbourhood as a place and on the personal circumstances of its residents.

But are these approaches effective in enabling greater economic inclusion of those experiencing poverty and disadvantage? The findings from this Britain-wide JRF research programme provide valuable insights into:

- the changing geography of poverty and affluence;
- the effect of fragmented responsibilities across different spatial levels of policy and decision-making and across different sectors on meeting the needs of deprived areas;
- the impact of interventions focused on either people or places, particularly those aimed at tackling worklessness and low skills;
- the complexities of relationships between deprived areas and their wider economies;
- the impact of place on access to opportunity, in light of people's sense of attachment to where they live, their aspirations and mobility.

This paper highlights key policy challenges and considers how to strengthen collaboration between initiatives addressing specific social and economic exclusion problems at the local and neighbourhood level and wider responsibilities for regeneration and economic development.

## Understanding the prospects of places

Tackling poverty and deprivation in the context of place is an increasing focus of regeneration policy. This section explores the research to see whether and why place matters in the way we understand and respond to spatial deprivation, particularly in relation to factors that impede the effectiveness of interventions designed to address economic exclusion.

### Places, people and poverty

To address the problems associated with concentrations of disadvantage, it is necessary to understand the distribution of different income groups and the relationship between poverty and place. But approaches to the measurement of poverty generally only examine levels of poverty and of (relative) inequality, not the spatial relationships between the wealthy and the poor, or their impacts.

Work by Dorling et al (2007) set out to examine these relationships, looking for the first time at both poverty and wealth distributions over time and space across Britain. Their work provides a new picture of income inequalities and their spatial effects. Several of their findings illustrate why the dynamics of place and poverty are important:

- Between 1970 and 2000 there was a substantial increase in the geographical concentration and segregation of poverty and wealth in Britain and since 2000 there seems to have been little progress in reducing this.
- Urban clustering of poverty has increased and levels of inequality are rising; in parts of some cities over half of all households are now breadline poor, while wealthy households have concentrated in the outskirts and surrounds of major cities.
- Average households (neither poor nor wealthy) have been diminishing in number and gradually disappearing from London and the south east.

The period covered by this analysis corresponds with a major restructuring of the British economy, with substantial job losses in manufacturing and coal-mining, and a move towards a dominant service-sector economy. High levels of economic inactivity became entrenched amongst certain groups (especially older men, minority ethnic groups and single parents), and concentrated in particular regions, localities and neighbourhoods.

These local neighbourhoods often centre on housing estates of predominantly social rented tenure – largely

the areas of social housing originally built as council estates. The extent to which poverty is increasing and is concentrated amongst social housing tenants is of considerable concern to current policy, especially in light of the Hills review of the role of social housing (Hills, 2007):

- Nearly half of all social housing is now located in the most deprived fifth of neighbourhoods.
- Poverty rates for people living in social housing remain double those of the population as a whole, reflecting the fact that only one-third of tenants are in full-time work, and fewer than half have any paid work.

Hills concludes that there has been a residualisation of social rented housing over the last 20 years; the poorest groups have become concentrated in this tenure and it is seen as an unattractive housing option.

Government policy is becoming increasingly concerned about the relationship between living in social housing and people's wider life chances. Evidence suggests people in this tenure have experienced comparatively poorer outcomes since the Second World War (Feinstein et al, 2008). Yet social landlords may not be much involved with economic development and tackling worklessness, even though they may, to varying degrees, be involved with place management and wider social inclusion initiatives. One of the difficulties is that housing and employment policies have tended to be organised quite separately, with delivery through separate routes and sectors. This raises questions about whether the necessary connections are being made with social housing, particularly with housing and place management practice when seeking to tackle economic exclusion (an issue explored further in later sections).

The issue of separate delivery arrangements is a critical one. The ways in which responsibilities for social inclusion, regeneration and economic development are organised at different spatial levels, as well as by different agencies, are explored in a number of the JRF studies. They provide useful insights into the problems this causes for delivering effective regeneration interventions.

### Fragmented responsibilities

Within current governance arrangements, responsibility for regeneration schemes and economic development programmes tends to be at wider regional or sub-regional levels. This contrasts with arrangements for initiatives focused on people and social outcomes, which are largely organised and/or delivered at more local levels, and increasingly at the very local level of the ward, neighbourhood or housing estate. Effective

co-ordination between different spatial levels (national, regional, sub-regional local and neighbourhood) is generally extremely limited.

North et al (2007) explore this problem in some detail, studying six areas with different governance arrangements in Scotland, Wales, London and three English regions. Their work looks at the extent to which the trend in devolving powers and responsibilities for tackling employment and economic concerns is affecting the prospects of deprived neighbourhoods. They conclude that the trend is not yet helping much, largely because economic development practitioners are not natural partners with those working on social inclusion, and vice versa. The institutional arrangements exacerbate this pattern with the economic development and social inclusion agendas split between, and ingrained within, different policy agendas and government departments. For example, they find that:

- Within England there have been poor links between the regional economic development agenda (now the responsibility of the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform) and the neighbourhood renewal and social inclusion agendas (under the Department for Communities and Local Government).
- In Scotland and Wales, the institutions responsible for economic development mostly pre-date devolution (e.g. Scottish Enterprise), whereas those responsible for the social inclusion agenda are newer (e.g. Communities Scotland<sup>1</sup>). A particular concern in Scotland has been the low priority Scottish Enterprise has given to the Executive's goal of 'closing the opportunity gap' compared to its emphasis on improving national economic performance.
- It remains to be seen whether the Welsh Assembly Government's decision in 2004 to wind up a number of economic development 'quangos', including the Welsh Development Agency, and transfer their functions to its own departments will achieve closer integration in delivering policies to tackle disadvantage.

No doubt many of these observations from the North et al (2007) study are now superseded by more recent changes proposed by governments in England, Wales and Scotland, perhaps making their relevance to current practice even more important. The study provides some useful examples from across Britain where agencies have been mobilised to co-operate locally. These seem to rely on the quality and commitment of strongly-motivated staff teams able to work in a client-centred way, but with strong connections to the wider labour market and across the different agendas of the agencies involved.

North et al (2007) conclude that the place-based nature of interventions is important in diverse ways, whether in terms of delivering personalised employment support to residents of deprived areas, linking deprived areas into wider labour markets, or generally strengthening localities to make them desirable places in which to live and work.

The overarching conclusion here is that stronger integration is needed across the different spatial governance arrangements, and between people-based (social) and place-based (physical and economic) interventions. Yet whether one or the other approach is the more effective is an almost constant debate within regeneration.

## People- or place-based interventions

Policies and strategies to tackle income-related poverty are largely coordinated as national programmes, through benefits and tax credits or other fiscal measures. They are focused on people and usually delivered directly to individuals. Employment programmes are also predominantly person-based, rather than place-based, assisting people with the transition into work regardless of the particularities of place which may affect their ability and willingness to seek employment.

However, more recently there has been a growing focus on spatial concentrations of worklessness (people not actively seeking work, on incapacity benefit for example), rather than the previously dominant focus on tackling individual unemployment. This has led to a number of area-based initiatives seeking to take more account of local circumstances (e.g. the Working Neighbourhoods Pilots introduced in 2004, discussed further below), though few have explicitly sought to exploit the logical synergies between people and place.

Given the recent introduction of the Working Neighbourhoods Fund in deprived local authority areas across England, which is explicitly focused on tackling spatial concentrations of worklessness, it is perhaps becoming even more important to understand the impact that the relationship between people and place has on the effectiveness of interventions.

Evidence from the JRF research suggests that poverty and disadvantage are mediated by place, and that places are affected by the poverty or otherwise of their inhabitants. It would logically follow that policies which dissociate people from places and the impacts of place may be less effective.

Yet it is difficult to ascertain the relative effectiveness of person-based and place-based programmes. Griggs et al (2008) set out to explore this difficult terrain. They

examined evaluations of different place and person-based programmes, focusing largely on impacts on employment and education outcomes, but found comparison between the two approaches extremely difficult because:

- Comparatively few have been assessed against a counterfactual (a baseline from which to measure what would have happened without the programme or policy).
- The programmes have different, often multiple, objectives with correspondingly diverse measures of outcomes.
- Evaluations tend to be carried out over very short time periods, sometimes too short for interventions to have proved their impact.
- Few have clearly stated ‘theories of change’ as the basis for how interventions are expected to work and the outcomes they are designed to achieve.

Work by Griggs et al (2008) looked at one of these schemes in more detail. The Working Neighbourhoods Pilots, established in England in 2004, was one of the few programmes designed against a clear ‘theory of change’. This posited that a ‘culture of worklessness’ had developed in certain areas which could be addressed through intensive, focused interventions to help people move into and retain jobs that were available in or near the locality. The Working Neighbourhoods Pilots were targeted at particular areas, usually with staff working in and from various local, accessible and non-statutory premises, and with considerable flexibility for staff to construct appropriate support packages for their clients.

Staff skills and commitment to working in this way were found to be important in achieving positive outcomes. There needed to be a degree of devolved responsibility for decision-making to ensure flexible, client-centred approaches. However, place-based employment programmes have usually involved voluntary self-referral. It is possible, therefore, that schemes tapped into a pool of people keen to return to work who had not previously been encouraged to do so. Given that programmes like the Working Neighbourhoods Pilots were not run for very long, it is difficult to judge whether those that did show positive outcomes would have continued to do so (see DWP (2007) for the final evaluation of the pilots).

Evidence suggests that locally tailored interventions with individually tailored support, sustained over time, are important factors in success, as long as there are strong connections with the wider labour market. The next section considers issues of connectivity, both the extent to which job opportunities are physically

accessible to those in deprived areas and the way people’s attitudes and aspirations are affected by their attachment to place, which may influence how they access jobs.

## Connecting people to jobs

Economic development strategies predominantly focus on economic restructuring and job creation, especially through inward investment. But job creation alone fails to address the economic fortunes of people in deprived neighbourhoods. The trickle-down theories of the 1980s are long discredited by the persistent, growing inequalities within urban areas experiencing substantial economic success; London being a case in point, as noted by Dorling (2007).

Issues of connectivity between jobs and those without work are therefore of significance in much of the research, raising the following issues of particular relevance:

- connectivity and commuting opportunities between deprived areas and wider jobs markets within cities and across city-regions; and
- people’s individual attitudes and motivations to travel to access opportunity.

### Connectivity across city-regions

Those with poor skills have fewer opportunities and face more constraints in the labour market – both in terms of skills and geography – than their more highly skilled peers. The quantity and quality of local jobs is therefore particularly important for this group (Green and Owen, 2006). However, there remain fundamental issues of mismatch between labour demand and potential supply, especially in many former industrial areas and seaside towns (Gore et al, 2007). In areas of decline, job opportunities are fewer. With recent policy debates focused on economic relationships between cities and their wider surrounding sub-regions, it is pertinent to consider how far people in more deprived areas are now accessing jobs further afield.

The relationship between cities and the regeneration of former industrial areas was the focus for Gore et al (2007), studying labour market changes within three former coalfield areas: South Yorkshire in England, Lothian in Scotland and the Central Valleys in Wales. They noted how the fortunes of different coalfields and their labour markets differed in relation to their economic and geographical context and transport links:

- The South Yorkshire coalfield was a large, relatively self-contained economic zone, whose economic fortunes since the decline of the mining industry have largely been determined by what has



happened within its own boundaries. Job creation has been strong in recent years, and there is no evidence of any overall increase in commuting to neighbouring areas. Links with Sheffield exist, but are not driving the overall pattern of change in the coalfield labour market. Established urban centres such as Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham also act as economic hubs, as do newer employment zones such as the Dearne Valley. The coalfield here has been making progress in adapting to change.

- The Central Valleys coalfield, although also a substantial economic zone in its own right, has seen relatively weak new job creation. Cardiff's exceptionally strong employment growth in recent years has brought a rise in commuters from the coalfield. But while the Central Valleys have increasing connections with their neighbouring city, the proportion of working-age residents travelling to jobs in Cardiff remains relatively small at just under 10 per cent. The growth in commuting is a symptom of economic weakness in the Central Valleys themselves.
- The links between the Lothian coalfield and Edinburgh were the strongest and continuing to grow. Its small population and fairly close proximity to the Scottish capital mean the coalfield is less an economic zone in its own right and more a part of the city's interdependent hinterland. Commuting into Edinburgh is a dominant feature of the Lothian coalfield, and this has been rising over time. Its population has also been rising, mainly through overspill from Edinburgh.

These findings illustrate the critical impact of place and geographical relationships in determining the contribution of cities to providing labour market solutions for nearby towns and their wider areas. Gore et al (2007) conclude that there is no universal model for cities' role as key drivers in the economies of former industrial and coalmining areas, and indeed that geographical variations in labour demand remain critical to the prospects of areas of economic decline. This makes it ever more important to develop robust local understanding of how wider spatial relationships operate within regional economies when designing regeneration strategies, and to match them with appropriate transport strategies.

Lucas et al (2008) looked further at the importance of transport in terms of wider social inclusion, by reviewing the introduction of new public transport initiatives in four deprived areas. The conclusions from their research highlight the importance of transport within cities and across wider city areas as a key barrier to people entering work, with information about transport options being almost equally important. However, many studies (for example Green and White, 2007) draw attention to

the poor quality and pay levels of jobs available to low-skilled entrants, which may mean that these jobs offer insufficient incentives for wider commuting or prospects of improved incomes from entering the labour market.

Another pertinent finding from the Gore et al (2007) analysis was the importance of unemployed people's own attitudes about seeking work outside of their home areas in terms of their willingness and ability to travel to access opportunity. This problem can apply just as much within cities themselves as wider city-regions. It is in this context that people's sense of attachment to a place becomes important.

### **Place attachment**

The critical question here is whether strong place attachment is a help or a hindrance in tackling the problems of economic exclusion within deprived areas. The research shows that strong place attachment can operate in different ways:

- It can act as a constraint by limiting people's own ambitions for themselves, largely because of restricted social networks which may mean less contact with broader opportunities.
- Conversely, strong attachment relating to strong social networks can help people to get into work (for example, with families providing help with childcare to enable single parents to access work), as well as supporting wider resilience in deprived neighbourhoods.

Work by Green and White (2007) focused on three deprived neighbourhoods in England to explore the extent to which social networks and place attachment shape young people's attitudes towards education, training and work opportunities. Their conclusions raise similar issues to those already explored in this paper with regard to the complexity of economic relationships between deprived neighbourhoods and wider economies, especially the ease of commuting. They also conclude that there are often negative effects from strong place attachment in restricting outlooks, cutting young people off from interest in the full range of opportunities available. Others have also concluded that social networks, if restricted to local areas, play an important role in shaping attitudes to potential work locations (Gore, 2007).

These findings highlight the importance and complexity of place attachment issues, and how necessary it is to understand how they play out differently in different local areas when designing economic interventions.

The research also provides some clear conclusions about the factors that help or hinder strong place attachment. People tend to form a stronger bond to a place if it meets their needs, both physical

and psychological, and matches their goals and lifestyle. Different perceptions about the identities of neighbourhoods, and how they are formed, are therefore of interest.

Robertson et al (2008) explore this, seeking to understand more about how neighbourhood identity is formed and changes through time. They conclude that neighbourhood identity is established very early, as places are constructed (and sometimes even beforehand), and is very resilient to change. In the three neighbourhoods examined in Stirling, a hierarchy of status had been maintained over more than 70 years. Critical to each neighbourhood's identity was its social class and status, alongside the better understood considerations of housing type, style and tenure. Yet it is notable that of the three neighbourhoods Robertson examined, the most 'aspirational' one had the least obvious sense of community.

When considering whether people feel strongly attached to their neighbourhood, the research concludes that an individual's place attachment tends to be highest in areas with strong social networks or cohesion, but undermined in places perceived as unsafe, with high crime and insecurity (Livingston et al, 2008). There is a strong correlation here with perceptions about neighbourhood security as an important risk factor for neighbourhood decline. Work by Innes and Jones (2006) looking at 'resilience', the ways in which neighbourhoods can withstand or tackle the threats posed by high crime and antisocial behaviour, found that a neighbourhood's resilience reflects the extent to which communities are able to exercise informal social controls or come together to tackle common problems like drug dealing. It is people's social networks, more than any physical characteristics of a place, that appear to be most critical in creating a sense of attachment to place.

Population turnover also affects place attachment. High levels of residential turnover are perceived as destabilising, undermining attachment to place and contributing to neighbourhood decline and social exclusion.

Yet Bailey and Livingston (2007), from their analysis of flows of population in England and Scotland, concluded that deprived areas were not inherently unstable places. Neighbourhood demographics, particularly age, were found to have a greater influence on population turnover than levels of deprivation, with younger age groups being more mobile.

More recent analysis of population turnover in deprived neighbourhoods (CLG, 2008) gives weight to this conclusion. This finds that mobility is predominantly linked to 'life stage', with over a third of out-movers from the neighbourhoods (between 2002 and 2004)

aged 25-34, and nearly half of these living in owner occupation when interviewed in 2004. This group – particularly families – is an important one to retain within communities, which otherwise run the risk of being skewed between the young and the old.

There is a widely-held view that targeting employment-related interventions on individuals within deprived neighbourhoods only results in people moving out when their individual prospects improve, leading to even greater polarisation. Much of this evidence is anecdotal and the analysis of Bailey and Livingston (2007) finds little to support the contention that 'those who get on, get out'.

The balance of views supports the importance of tackling the general 'place' problems of deprived neighbourhoods (particularly crime and safety, housing quality and choice, schools and community facilities) to strengthen place attachment. Tunstall and Coulter's (2006) longitudinal study of 20 housing estates in England over 25 years indicates that physical improvements and stronger, more effective place management approaches can help stabilise and sometimes turn around unpopular areas, especially when carried out with positive resident involvement.

## Implications for tackling economic exclusion in deprived areas

As the research demonstrates, there are a number of ways in which 'place', and the relationships between poverty, people and place, can influence the effectiveness of strategies for tackling economic exclusion. Within current policy agendas, tackling persistent concentrations of workless households provides the strongest rationale for integrating economic and social interventions, an increasing concern for policy-makers.

## Developing integrated approaches

This section explores aspects of existing policy in England, Scotland and Wales to identify the challenges presented for developing more integrated approaches to tackling disadvantage. To what extent are policy initiatives being designed to encompass both social and economic interventions to address the problems of deprived areas?

It is perhaps the local area level – especially neighbourhoods and estates – that currently offers the best opportunities to explore closer synergies between economic development approaches and social inclusion (and between people- and place-focused interventions).

## Neighbourhood interventions

The most interesting aspect of the recent policy emphasis on tackling the problems of multiply-deprived areas is the integrated approach that has been adopted, aiming to address both people and place transformation through programmes like the New Deal for Communities (NDC) partnerships in England and the Communities First programme in Wales.

These approaches by the different national governments of the UK share a number of common characteristics, including:

- their aim to empower residents as active partners in programmes;
- partnership structures between public, private and voluntary sectors and residents;
- spatial targeting of initiatives on the most deprived places (using multiple indices of deprivation);
- holistic, integrated interventions aiming to tackle the complex array of social, environmental and economic problems in deprived areas;
- a desire to 'bend' the mainstream spend of frontline service providers, to achieve service provision more closely aligned to resident-defined needs and priority issues of concern;
- long-term funding allocations.

Recent research highlights learning from these programmes, as summarised here.

## Community empowerment

- The Communities First programme is founded on the principles of community empowerment and a great deal of support has been given to community capacity building and creating opportunities for participation. Central government took a 'non-prescriptive' approach to enable spend priorities to be determined locally.
- However, whilst recent JRF research (Adamson et al, 2008) indicates that good progress has been made in involving local residents and providing positive consultation opportunities, resident participation alone is not enough. Their ability to influence the decisions of service providers is an essential part of the empowerment process, and there is little evidence of this happening to date.
- The ability of Communities First partnerships to influence mainstream providers depends on wider governance relationships and connections with decision-making at the local authority level. Adamson et al (2008) describe this as involving a 'capillary approach': a model of local influence which builds from the level of neighbourhoods, through ward-based co-ordination mechanisms up to local authority-wide partnerships. Interestingly, in England the indications are that NDC schemes are improving their partnership with other agencies, including Local Strategic Partnerships, and aligning future programmes (beyond NDC grant) with emerging priorities in Local Area Agreements (CLG, 2008b).

## Place or people?

- The neighbourhood-focused programmes offer an opportunity to explore further the debate

### New Deal for Communities (England)

The NDC programme was launched in 1998. The overarching aim is to 'narrow the gap' between deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country by focusing on holistic programmes of renewal for the most deprived neighbourhoods, designed and delivered through multi-agency partnerships of public, private, voluntary and community sectors. The NDC operates in 39 neighbourhoods, with the benefit of 10-year, £50 million (approx) budgets, with strong involvement by local residents.

### Communities First (Wales)

The Communities First programme was a flagship scheme for the new Welsh Assembly, launched in 2001 after extensive consultation. It established 132

spatially targeted community regeneration partnerships at electoral division (ward) level or sub-ward level and covered the 100 most deprived areas identified in the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation. The programme also included 10 additional schemes focused on thematic needs groups (e.g. disability, victims of domestic violence and minority ethnic groups).

Substantial changes are now being made to the programme under a new title of Communities Next. These aim to provide partnerships with greater central direction on priorities, along with robust consideration of whether all should continue (particularly the thematic schemes). There is also a stronger focus on outcomes, including increased economic inclusion.



raised previously about place- or people-focused interventions and the way they interact and impact.

- The most recent synthesis of evidence compiled on the NDC programme in England (CLG, 2008b) indicates that it continues to be easier to affect improved 'place' outcomes than to achieve demonstrable 'people' outcomes (see also Tunstall and Coulter 2006). The reasons for this are complex and relate to:
  - difficulties of measurement, because people-based outcomes (such as those for worklessness, education and health) tend to benefit fewer people and are harder to evidence; and
  - the extent to which place-based interventions have taken priority in the earlier years of the programmes and have dominated spend profiles (there is now evidence emerging of a statistical relationship between spend on people-based interventions on the one hand and positive change to people-based outcomes on the other).

#### **Holistic interventions**

- There is substantial evidence emerging from the NDC in England of inter-related benefits; that intervention on one issue improves other outcomes. Statistically strong and positive relationships have been identified in the following domains:
  - as housing and the physical environment improves, crime rates reduce;
  - in areas where people feel more of a part of their community there are better educational attainment outcomes;
  - as the worklessness rate of an area decreases, health outcomes improve.

#### **Neighbourhood stability**

- Despite the NDC programme's proven impact on improving place outcomes (and generally encouraging more positive attitudes to the area and the local environment) there has been no parallel reduction in the proportion of those who want to move away (CLG, 2008b).
- The reasons behind people's wish to move are complex and often as much to do with unsuitability of accommodation as with area dissatisfaction. Previous research on mixed communities suggested that key factors motivating families to leave new inner urban mixed communities related to the size of homes and quality of schools (Lupton, 2005). More generally, mobility is considered to relate to a complex range of factors including lifestyle and

status aspirations as well as financial constraints (Hickman 2006).

- For those in social rented housing which, as we have explored, often forms the core of deprived neighbourhoods, overcrowding is a particular issue affecting people's desire to move. Social tenants enjoy less space per person than other tenures, less than they did a decade ago, and are more likely to be dissatisfied than others if they are living with little space. One in seven social tenants say they are dissatisfied with their local areas and with their accommodation, with dissatisfaction with accommodation being particularly high for those aged under 45 (Hills, 2007). This is the very group found to be the key out-movers in NDC areas (CLG, 2008b), although younger households are generally the most mobile age group (Bailey and Livingston, 2007).

The strong view emerging from neighbourhood renewal programmes operating in Britain is that such interventions have not done enough to turn around the disadvantages deprived areas suffer in terms of weak economies, high levels of worklessness, low skills levels and insufficient enterprise (see, for example, HM Treasury, 2007).

#### **A focus on worklessness**

In England, the introduction of the new Working Neighbourhoods Fund (replacing the previous Neighbourhood Renewal Fund) represents the latest attempt to tackle persistently high levels of worklessness in particular areas and signals the centrality of tackling this issue within the Government's current regeneration policy (HM Treasury, 2007). Interestingly, within the Chancellor's 2007 Pre-Budget Report and Comprehensive Spending Review it is only the Department for Work and Pensions' Public Service Agreement target (PSA8) to 'maximise employment opportunity to all' that retains the 'narrowing the gap' requirement for ward-based spatial levels which was the focus of the now abandoned floor targets that operated in England as part of previous policy on neighbourhood renewal.

Similarly, in Scotland the Fairer Scotland Fund is a new ring-fenced fund from the Scottish Government through which resources are made available to each local authority area to enable Community Planning Partnerships to tackle area-based and individual poverty and to help more people access and sustain employment opportunities. The Fund aims to promote:

- focused action on improving employability as a key means of tackling poverty;
- investment to address the causes of poverty, not its symptoms;

- early interventions for vulnerable individuals, families and disadvantaged communities;
- promotion of joint working between local partners.

The focus of these new funds is one of a number of more positive signs of new opportunities for joining-up and integrating the delivery of support for workless householders with tackling the effects of concentrated area deprivation that so often impede progress.

However 'work first' approaches to tackling multiple deprivation often play down the fact that entry-level jobs can offer few prospects for developing skills and moving out of poverty (North, 2007). Dorling (2007) notes that lack of paid employment may be becoming less useful as an indicator of poverty because of the low-wage service economy jobs now dominant in some communities, and the effects of the substantial rise in home ownership as a determinant of wealth. Concerns about 'in-work' poverty are highly relevant given the proportion of poor households which have someone in work.

## Mixed communities

Housing markets and the 'sorting' effects they produce are a critical factor in determining social polarisation and the concentration of lower-income, disadvantaged households into social rented or other low-value housing, in predominantly single-tenure estates. The policy response throughout the UK has emphasised creating more mixed-income and mixed-tenure communities both as part of new housing developments and as part of estate renewal approaches. The aim in new development is to provide a range of affordable housing (a range of options that has substantially increased over recent years), including social rented tenure, and to distribute social housing within schemes rather than concentrate it in specific blocks or areas. Some schemes also aim to be 'tenure-blind' in their design and appearance.

There has been some success in that mixed communities have not been characterised by the problems often linked with exclusively low-income areas and have generally met the expectations of developers, residents and housing managers and become pleasant places to live, learn and work (Holmes, 2006). Mixed-tenure and mixed-income were also seen as "non-issues" to residents; they saw their neighbours as "ordinary people". However, recent research into residents' views within high-density affordable schemes has found a prevalence of more negative views. Bretherton and Pleace (2008) found that the presence of social rented tenants within such schemes has impacted on views about the desirability of the area amongst home owners.

Some of the research also raises doubts about the prospects for mixed communities and their wider impact in alleviating poverty. Cheshire (2007) points out that many of the poorest neighbourhoods have been among the most deprived since the end of the nineteenth century and argues that neighbourhood factors such as good schools, low crime rates and high quality amenities are effectively capitalised in house prices and rents. He argues that:

**The poor do not choose to live in areas with higher crime and worse pollution: they cannot afford not to. The problem is poverty not where people live. (Cheshire, 2007)**

He suggests that area-based programmes to create more mixed communities are little more than elaborate ways of rearranging the deckchairs in the absence of thoroughgoing redistribution of income and wealth.

Robertson et al (2008) offer a more tempered view. Their work highlights the importance of the aspirations set for an area, in light of the endurance of neighbourhood identity over time. This includes the need to properly consider how layout and design can help foster a sense of place and the social interactions that promote feelings of community. They suggest more thought needs to go into parks, play areas, open spaces and the wider environment including the shops and social facilities that provide a forum for social contact in localities, echoing previous work highlighting the social value of public spaces (Worpole and Knox, 2007).

Clearly the impact of 'mixed communities' policies remains a contested area, and there is limited knowledge on the extent to which mixed communities can be engineered and sustained. Robertson et al (2008) note that abandoning the concept of mixed communities to return to the development of more segregated areas is no solution. Perhaps our approach to the complex interplay between place and attachment needs to be based more firmly on understanding local communities and housing markets and their respective dynamics rather than pursuing policies on a one-size-fits-all basis.

If place matters to the design and delivery of regeneration and new development, then spatial strategies need to respond uniquely to the characteristics of local areas. A critical tool for doing this is the planning system.

## Spatial planning

In 2004 the planning system in England was substantially reformed to embed a spatial planning approach, the Welsh Assembly adopted its Spatial Plan

for Wales and the Scottish Parliament approved its first National Planning Framework for Scotland.

Spatial planning is designed to bring together policies for the development and use of land with other policies and programmes which influence the nature of places and how they function. The approach is founded on the principles of sustainable development and the need to develop appropriate and distinctive approaches in different regions and local areas.

Spatial planning is arguably a more powerful tool for the integration of people and place than was the case with the previous land use planning system, and yet its potential impact on integrating physical, social and economic strategies (people and place) is perhaps insufficiently explored and only slowly being grasped.

Many of those involved at the local area level, within the Local Strategic Partnerships in England for example, do not collaborate effectively with the planning system (CLG, 2007a). This means that important connections between regeneration strategies, including housing growth, and tackling social and economic exclusion are being missed. Similar concerns apply in Scotland where community planning approaches have not necessarily involved effective partnership with statutory planning processes. In Wales there is no regional planning tier and it remains unclear how the Wales Spatial Plan will influence planning activity on the ground.

Yet both local government and the planning system are equally tasked to deliver sustainable development outcomes, recognising that sustainable development is just as concerned with social equity and the quality and accessibility of public services as it is with physical infrastructural changes or wider environmental issues. Whilst the dominant focus of regeneration is the economy and jobs (and the associated requirement for skills development), places cannot recover without improving the prospects of their disadvantaged populations.

The three elements of sustainable development (social, economic and environmental) are together pivotal to recovery, as is recognised by the more recent proposals in England to merge the previously separate Regional Economic Strategies and Regional Spatial Strategies (a responsibility now tasked to the Regional Development Agencies in England). The intention here is to ensure clarity in bringing forward plans that affect both housing and labour markets together, and that can provide an effective basis for planning appropriate transport infrastructure.

Spatial planning principles can also underpin approaches to planning agreements, especially to achieve links between major investment and associated new job opportunities with the people living in deprived

areas (see Macfarlane and Cook (2002)), although North et al (2007), in their case study analysis, raise some of the problems experienced in enforcing such agreements with developers.

Approaches like these clearly require robust integration between strategies and players at different spatial levels. So what about partnership working at lower spatial levels, sub-regionally and in local areas? What can the maturing local authority-led partnerships in England, Scotland and Wales tell us about the prospects for more spatially integrated strategies?

## Developing partnership approaches

The direction of travel underpinning recent developments in local government reform (which by and large post-date most of the JRF research) is common across all three administrations. Local government is tasked to lead integrated partnership approaches, through:

- Community Planning Partnerships in Scotland (with delivery through Single Outcome Agreements);
- Local Strategic Partnerships in England (with delivery through Local Area Agreements);
- Local Service Boards in Wales (with delivery through Local Delivery Agreements).

Whilst these bodies differ in the details of their configuration and delivery responsibilities, they are all based on:

- the agreement of shared local priorities for delivery, choosing from an agreed set of indicators and outcomes as determined by their respective government administrations;
- a loosening of control from central government administrations, a step back from micro-management to empower local government and partners to lead and act locally;
- a reduction in the number of separate funding streams and ring-fenced grants from central administrations to local government and its partners;
- a consequent pooling of budgets and resources and encouragement of shared, cross-sector approaches to key issues;
- changes to the performance management arrangements for local government and local service providers – taking a unified approach across local areas.

The most important change that all this embeds within local partnership working is that the focus is on agencies working together in areas to achieve both social and economic outcomes, integrating approaches for both place and people.

In England there are also proposals to introduce Multi Area Agreements at the wider spatial scale of sub-regional (or city-regional) partnerships for coordinating strategies related to economic growth (transport, housing, worklessness and skills). Whether such agreements can capture the benefits claimed for the French 'Contrats de Ville' approach – assessed by Urbed's recent review of urban regeneration schemes in three different European cities (Cadell et al, 2008) as being a positive driver of progress – is as yet unknown. They may be hampered by their shorter (three-year) time span compared to their French counterparts (up to seven years, see box for explanation).

The agreements being introduced in the various parts of the UK may also be hampered by the weaker powers available to local government here. Urbed's work (Cadell et al, 2008) concluded that successful urban regeneration seems to involve:

- a powerful local authority in charge of the regeneration scheme (and its resources), using it not just to revive a run-down area but also to change the whole image of the place and transform its strategic economic position;
- coordinated, long-term strategies, reflecting a strong vision and including a focus on addressing the needs of deprived areas;
- local authorities benefiting directly from local taxation, providing a powerful incentive for successful city economies.

The most recent consultation on implementing the Review of Sub-National Economic Development and Regeneration (HM Treasury, 2007) looks at the potential impact of further devolution of economic development powers and resources from the Regional Development Agencies to local government in England, supported by the proposed new duty on local government for carrying out detailed local economic assessments. Similar developments are taking place in Scotland with proposals to devolve responsibilities and resources from the economic development agency Scottish Enterprise to local councils (although these negotiations are proving somewhat protracted).

Welcome though these developments are in the context of Urbed's findings – and other findings from the JRF research – it remains to be seen how further devolution of powers and responsibilities for regeneration and economic development to local authorities will develop

## Contrats de Ville

Contrats de Ville in France provide a form of contractual agreement between central and local government (i.e. between the funding and the delivery of outcomes). In return for a guaranteed package of funding from several government sources, local authorities are able to lead delivery of agreed plans for their towns.

The first generation of Contrats de Ville aimed at incorporating specific help for disadvantaged neighbourhoods into a broader, city-wide approach to urban development. They were re-launched in 1998 and 2000 to include other national objectives on social inclusion, inter-communal co-operation, sustainable development and housing.

as these changes begin to be negotiated. Capacity will need to be developed to respond to this challenge, especially within smaller authorities.

The final section of this report gives an overview of the key messages emerging from the research about how to strengthen the effectiveness of policy, strategy and delivery to address the problems of deprived areas.

## Lessons for policy and practice

The research commissioned through the JRF has explored the wide-ranging issues of understanding place and poverty, the complexities of local economies and spatial economic relationships, and the equally complex issues of how place impacts on people and their aspirations.

This section briefly summarises the main messages drawn from the research to in light of policy and practice opportunities for regenerating deprived places, recognising that there have been a number of important policy developments across the administrations of England, Wales and Scotland since the majority of the research was undertaken.

## Place matters

The increasing social polarisation between wealthy and poor people, and its spatial impacts (Dorling, 2007) form the overall context for analysing why place matters to economic development and social inclusion.

Communities and Local Government in England has recently published two papers, both of interest here because they each explore critical questions about why

place matters economically and why it is important to understand regeneration from a spatial perspective.

- The first paper (CLG, 2007b) reflects on the fact that there is no single 'area effect'; places affect people, and people affect places, in many different ways. Area effects can work at different timescales, levels of geography and to a different degree for various outcomes like employment, education, crime or health.
- The second economic paper (CLG, 2008a) turns to the difficult terrain of identifying which interventions are needed at which spatial levels, including both decision-making and delivery responsibilities. Local problems, such as concentrations of workless households, may have their cause at a wider spatial level and be linked to complex economic relationships across wider sub-regions or city-regions relating to transport availability and commuting patterns as well as labour markets. It concludes that the design and implementation of economic development strategies must take place at all spatial levels as no geographical area, let alone any institutional arrangements, can fully capture the complexity of economic patterns.

This conclusion reflects much of the JRF research. A more integrated approach to tackling disadvantage, connected across the different spatial levels of governance, and between the different agencies involved in people- and place-focused actions, seems to be essential for greater success in improving the prospects of deprived places and the people living in them. As North et al (2007) conclude, the problems of deprived localities are very different and complex when explored spatially. The labour market challenges posed by a highly stable, largely homogeneous white population that has experienced intergenerational unemployment in a former coalfield area are quite different from those of an ethnically diverse, younger and more transient population living in an inner-city area.

The research findings support the direction of recent developments in regeneration policy across the administrations of England, Wales and Scotland which, despite differences of detail, share some clear aims:

- empowering local authorities to take a greater role in promoting economic development and regeneration, and strengthening local government's capacity for strong leadership – within its own boundaries and across neighbouring authorities in functional economic areas – on issues such as transport, skills and infrastructure planning;
- accelerating efforts to address economic exclusion, especially within the most deprived neighbourhoods;

- enabling more coherence and integration between people and place strategies through the coordination of multi-agency partnership working, focused on tackling shared local priorities.

JRF research does, however, urge caution in the emphasis being placed on work as a route out of poverty. The quality of jobs, and whether in economic terms they offer realistic incentives for people to return to work, remain fundamental challenges even if transport connections and other measures to connect disadvantaged areas to jobs are addressed.

The extent to which local government really understands its 'places' and their wider economic relationships will be a key challenge for devolved powers and responsibilities to work to best effect. Knowledge-building, effective data gathering and interpretation are likely to become more important skill domains within local government as a result, and possibly particularly challenging for smaller local authorities.

Of equal concern is the extent to which local government can effectively lead more collaborative and cross-cutting approaches, both internally and working with its partners, recognising the links between health and employment for example, and in developing closer cooperation with private sector partners in designing and delivering appropriate interventions in economically deprived areas. Substantial challenges remain in the way agencies are working together and perceive their roles, yet the research presents powerful arguments for more holistic approaches between social inclusion and economic interventions.

At lower spatial levels it is arguable that personal characteristics are more important than place for skills and employment outcomes. But, as much of the research has highlighted, when concentrated in particular neighbourhoods, deprivation may be reinforced through neighbourhood effects, and by family and social networks. There is a need for strategies to recognise and address the impact of low aspirations and limited geographical horizons, especially amongst young people (Green and White, 2007).

There are therefore two developing aspects of policy and practice of interest here:

- approaches to personalised services, especially for those most at risk of social exclusion;
- broadening approaches to local place management to include strategies for tackling worklessness.

### *Personalising services*

The recent direction of social inclusion policy is towards a focus on coordinated interventions with individuals



most at risk, particularly for families because of the UK government emphasis on tackling child poverty. There is a growing emphasis on the personalised delivery of services, recognising that people have complex individual and family needs which require tailored and integrated support from a range of public service providers (e.g. housing, physical and mental health, addiction, skills, employment and debt).

It is consistently argued that whilst many of these deprived families and individuals live outside of neighbourhoods defined as concentrations of deprivation, there are strong incentives for service delivery partners to co-operate (including co-location) at neighbourhood levels as an effective method of targeting impact. Much greater use could be made of those involved in managing local places, for example through housing management functions within predominantly social housing areas, and with other locally-based provision such as health services, Surestart and schools.

### **Place management**

With the end of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund in England, it can be argued that much of the neighbourhood management agenda it supported has, in effect, been mainstreamed within wider local government reform (although it is too early to judge whether this will in fact occur and that Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and local authorities will choose to utilise their resources in this way).

Local government is being urged towards greater leadership at ward or other sub-area levels in their communities, strengthening community empowerment and pulling together service delivery to tackle the problems that residents face. Area or ward committees are rapidly increasing in number across England and there is a strong push to join-up service delivery and accountability between local government, the police and the health services in particular. Publication of the proposed Empowerment White Paper for England, expected in summer 2008, will provide further evidence of the government's intentions in this area of local government and public service reform.

Place management invariably tends to focus on the cleaner, safer and greener issues. Whilst this is helpful in fostering resilience and stimulating recovery at the neighbourhood level (Hastings et al, 2005), local government needs to widen its co-ordination focus to include public services beyond its immediate delivery responsibility. Agencies not normally involved in place-focused initiatives, such as local colleges and Jobcentre Plus for example, need to be brought into the mix of locally-tailored services to tackle persistent concentrations of worklessness.<sup>2</sup>

There is also a potentially greater role for social landlords to support labour market participation among their tenants through, for example, the direct provision of training and employment opportunities and support to help tenants secure and sustain employment (DWP, 2008).

Good understanding of place, including the relationship between housing and labour markets, and focused inter-agency management approaches at the micro-spatial scale may help local government cooperate more effectively with its partners (including the third sector) to tackle the multiple factors involved in economic exclusion. However, this probably requires improved integration with fiscal approaches, particularly welfare policies.

### **Welfare to Work**

The Scottish Government has recently published a discussion paper on future directions for its economic strategy in tackling poverty, inequality and deprivation, and notes that the positive impact of aspects of tax and benefit arrangements (particularly the tax credit system) and the minimum wage have had the greatest impact on poverty in Scotland to date. Whilst devolved policies have been designed to help more people into work (particularly lone parents), tackling poor health and improving skills and qualifications have also played an important supporting role. It is recognised that both devolved and reserved policies will need to work together more effectively to make further progress (Scottish Government, 2008).

The UK-wide approaches of Jobcentre Plus and Welfare to Work policies have only recently begun to be delivered in more flexible ways, seeking to organise delivery in response to the different problems of specific localities. The most recent of these is the introduction of City Strategy pathfinders (15 pathfinders across England, Scotland and Wales) which aim to test whether local stakeholders can deliver more by combining and aligning their efforts behind shared priorities, alongside more freedom to innovate and tailor services in response to local needs.

The involvement of Jobcentre Plus is therefore very important to local strategies, and to the effective delivery of services in deprived areas. However, because of the different way the service is governed (for example, the Department for Work and Pensions has not until recently been integrated within the English Regional Government Office co-ordination system), difficulties may remain in organising this aspect of collaboration at local authority level.

There are also still critical problems with benefit traps. Further reforms, such as extended entitlement to

Housing Benefit for people returning to work in areas of very high housing costs (in London for example), could offer substantial opportunities for increasing engagement in return to work programmes (DWP, 2008).

## Conclusion

The final conclusion from the JRF and other research reviewed here returns to the perennial debate within regeneration circles about whether to focus on the place or the people, and whether social inclusion interventions are relevant in designing employment, skills and education strategies. The research indicates that this is clearly a false divide. Both are required, working in synergy, through coordinated spatial plans that respond to local needs and opportunities and that cut across departmental boundaries and tiers of decision-making.

Long-term change requires strong and effective leadership across different spatial governance arrangements and across policy silos. These approaches are fundamental to the principles of sustainable development. Part of the joining-up process needs to enable the planning system itself to be more fully integrated as a corporate resource, for all partners, in both understanding places better – particularly the key drivers of physical and environmental change – and ensuring that the three interlinked requirements of sustainable development (social, economic and environmental) are coordinated together to best effect across all the different spatial tiers.

Sustainable development, with all its ramifications for social equity, requires policy and practice to integrate far more dynamically than fragmented governance has allowed to date. It is therefore hoped that this research review has offered some timely messages about how best to take this agenda forward.

Recent policy has been formulated in response to a lengthy and positive period of economic growth. If we do move into a period of economic slowdown, these developments need to embed and deliver quickly and robustly if local areas are to develop appropriate responses for their places and people.

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## Notes

1 Communities Scotland was abolished on 1 April 2008. On that date, most of its non-regulatory functions were transferred to the Scottish Government's Housing and Regeneration directorate.

2 For further information about the key messages from JRF research into local initiatives for workless people see the summary report by Pamela Meadows published by JRF on 27 June 2008 – *Local initiatives to help workless people find and keep paid work*.