

19 March 2001

## **Response to the “Communities First” proposals from the National Assembly for Wales**

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation is grateful for the opportunity to comment on this important document. The Foundation very much welcomes the fact that, following the earlier consultation last year, the National Assembly for Wales has now developed a draft framework for targeting resources at Wales' most deprived neighbourhoods. In parallel with similar developments in Scotland and England, this is an extremely important step in ensuring that the needs of these communities are tackled consistently over time.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, in successive programmes, has devoted substantial resources to projects concerned with both urban and rural regeneration. Most recently, it supported over 60 projects (with an investment of well over £2m) in its area regeneration programme, summarised in Michael Carley (December 2000) ([Foundations D10](#)). The Foundation's Action in Rural Areas programme is summarised in Mark Shucksmith (2000) ([Foundations 760](#)).

The following comments are based on research in urban and rural regeneration that has been carried out with support from the Foundation.

The Foundation's response will open with a number of general points, to be followed with some more specific comments on the various sections of the consultation document. First, the general points:

- **The need for long-term regeneration strategies** Many of those who have written on regeneration for JRF (Carley, Shucksmith, MacLennan, Duncan and others) have highlighted the need for long-term strategies to cope with urban and rural deprivation, which have both built up over a long timescale. The consultation document suggests that funding is in place for three years and hints that the programme may last longer. While it is appreciated that it may be difficult to make commitments beyond the duration of a single Assembly, urban regeneration commentators are unanimous in asserting that, for regeneration to be successful, long-term commitment is essential.
- **In relation to regeneration, the importance of linking different levels of governance (national, regional, local and neighbourhood)** It is not clear enough, from the “Communities First” consultation document, how the various different levels of governance will be able to inter-relate, in respect of neighbourhood regeneration. This is a crucial aspect which has been very clearly and comprehensively documented by Michael Carley (May 2000 ([Foundations 560](#)) and December 2000 ([Foundations D10](#))). Carley points out that mechanisms have to be found to link national, regional and sub-regional issues (for example: inward investment; transport planning; and

training and employment policies) to regeneration efforts at the local level. Duncan MacLennan, (2000) also points to the importance of linking sub-regional planning to neighbourhood renewal, and in his report *Changing places, engaging people* calls for further research to establish the exact nature of local housing and labour markets which both play such a crucial role in determining choice of where people decide to live.

At the local authority level too, there are important links to be made between specific neighbourhood regeneration projects and the broader strategic planning at the local authority level. As Michael Carley has pointed out (May 2000)([Foundations 560](#)) failure to site neighbourhood renewal within these broader strategies can make it more difficult to: plan neighbourhood renewal in a logical manner; sustain efforts at the neighbourhood level once short-term funding has dried up; and engage the energies of residents and community groups fully over time.

Michael Carley (May 2000)([Foundations 560](#)) in his comprehensive report *Urban regeneration through partnership* makes specific comments in relation to Wales, based on research in the Valleys and Rhondda Cynon Taff. Respondents in this study suggested that there is a missing tier of regional leadership in Wales (that could for example co-ordinate the activities of local authorities in the Valleys). The respondents suggested that the National Assembly for Wales should: either provide the necessary regional co-ordination itself, or delegate responsibility for this to a strategic planning organisation; develop and share good information systems on regional development; assign sufficient human resources to regional planning; and be prepared to mediate on regional decisions (eg an out-of-town shopping centre or greenfield business park location) prior to the planning inquiry stage.

- **Rural regeneration** The consultation does not apparently make a distinction between urban and rural regeneration. However, it is clear that the requirements of regeneration in, say, Cardiff, Newport or Swansea will be very different from that carried out in rural areas. These issues have been captured by Mark Shucksmith (2000)([Foundations 760](#)) who highlighted: the particularly entrenched nature of rural social exclusion; the importance of transport in accessing labour markets; a severe shortage of low-cost housing in many rural areas; and the particularly difficult problems of young people in rural areas. Work by Katy Bennett (2000)([Findings 450](#)), drawing on work in Wales and elsewhere, showed that problems of regeneration in ex-coalfield areas are often similar to those experienced in other rural areas. It would be helpful then if more could be done in the final version of *Communities First* to stress the particular needs of rural regeneration.
- **Community involvement strategies** The implementation of a regeneration strategy such as *Communities First* will involve striking a creative balance between “top down” and “bottom up” activities. Although the consultation document does contain a section on building capacity and participation, we would argue that, here and throughout the

rest of the consultation document, there is not a strong enough emphasis on building and sustaining community involvement. JRF has supported a considerable number of projects which focus attention on this theme, and a number of these are detailed below. However, much of the good practice in this area was summarised in a document by John Low (1999) *Developing effective community involvement strategies* ([Findings 169](#)). This document summarised the five essential stages of community involvement, namely: getting started; involving communities in partnerships; creating strong local organisations with their own assets; developing an infrastructure to build and sustain community organisations; and monitoring progress. The document also recommended that regeneration partnerships should develop, and sign up to, comprehensive Community Involvement Strategies in advance of, and as a condition of receiving, regeneration funding.

- **Developing an accessible knowledge base and linked training activities** In our reading of the consultation document, the issue how to disseminate good practice in regeneration, and how to ensure an adequate supply of effective trainers for those engaged in regeneration, has been underplayed. Paul Henderson (1998) in his report *Training and education in urban regeneration* has developed a useful model for delivering training to urban regeneration partnerships, based on the needs of those engaged in such partnerships. The report thoughtfully summarises a wide variety of models for training including: group work; courses; action-based learning; community mentoring; placements; secondments; exchange visits; and networking. Beyond this, we would suggest that the *Communities First* strategy should attempt to define the specific training roles expected of consultants, intermediary agencies, colleges, and universities. It will also be important to develop some mechanism to co-ordinate of all these efforts.

There now follows some comments on the main body of the text.

## **Chapter two - the *Communities First* model**

In section 2.1, it would be helpful if the bullet points which, at the start of this section, outline the *Communities First* approach, could be related to the broader themes within the *Better Wales* document. In relation to paragraph 2.12, where you talk about the importance of *building capacity*, a forthcoming JRF report will highlight the work of Groundwork, and include reference to the good work they have done in Wales, particularly in Merthyr Tydfil. The report will show that community development work in deprived communities needs to be long-term and is often best carried out by arms-length (eg non-statutory) agencies.

In relation to paragraph 2.13, which talks about the need to co-ordinate different initiatives and funding regimes, a forthcoming report for JRF by Professor Alan MacGregor will show that this is by no means a straight forward task. In particular, the report will show that expecting

players at the neighbourhood level to achieve this co-ordination is not practicable. Although it is possible for energetic neighbourhood players to achieve some improvements, more comprehensive integrations can only be achieved with the full co-operation of the national agencies which are responsible for funding the various initiatives.

### **Chapter 3 - Selecting the communities**

We welcome the recognition that the consultation document gives to the issue of communities of interest and it seems clear, from the paragraph devoted to this subject, that the needs of a variety of communities of interest are to be taken seriously. Although we have not done extensive work in this area, Sue Brownill's report *Rich Mix* ([Findings 0108](#)) brought together research on the need to include race and gender as major strategic elements within regeneration policy and practice. JRF research does not offer any practical solutions that would enable the National Assembly to take these concerns further.

Beyond this, a few comments on this chapter:

- it is difficult to guess from this chapter *the annual number of initiatives* that would be supported under the *Communities First* programme.
- The proposals to target individual communities, which will presumably be “pepper potted” around the country, run the risk of discouraging local authorities from adopting a strategic approach to neighbourhood regeneration in their localities. Research in JRF's Area Regeneration programme (eg Michael Carley, May 2000) ([Foundations 560](#)) shows that best results are achieved when local authorities have developed long-term strategies for tackling deprivation in *all* their deprived communities (as opposed to “flagship projects” only available in a few selected neighbourhoods).

### **Chapter 4 - Funding**

The draft budgets for the *Communities First* programme seem fairly modest (£81m over 3 years), notwithstanding the intention to gear in funding from other sources.

It is not clear from the consultation document how these funds can be accessed. Will neighbourhoods be selected by the National Assembly on the basis of relevant statistics? Or will local authorities be expected to prepare bids for these funds?

In relation to the first consultation point at the end of this chapter, JRF research has shown that participants in analagous Single Regeneration Budget programmes in England feel that: first, the regional and local bureaucracy associated with drawing down of SRB funds is unnecessarily frustrating and complex; and second, that, where community groups are able to

access regeneration funding, it is particularly important that in doing so they are subjected to a minimum of complicated bureaucracy and delay. We would hope that *Communities First* could avoid these pitfalls in designing a new programme.

## **Chapter 5 - Establishing and supporting partnerships**

In relation to the consultation points at the end of this chapter, the best writing for JRF's Area Regeneration programme on this subject has been done by Michael Carley (May 2000) ([Foundations 560](#)).

In relation to the first consultation point, Michael Carley writes (page viii) "top-down and bottom-up integration is necessary to enhance regeneration at all levels - meaning positive linkage between neighbourhood, city, sub-regional partnerships. This gives a chain of sustainable development *only as strong as its weakest link*. Political and funding structures should assist the establishment of partnerships at levels where they are needed but don't yet exist - some neighbouring partnerships in adjacent local authorities, city-wide partnerships, which ought to exist in almost every city in town, and sub-and regional partnerships, the former around logical urban sub-regions or travel-to-work areas".

In the same report, (Summary of key findings at the front of the report), Michael Carley summarises the key lessons of partnership, making points about: leadership; visioning and consensus building; translation of vision into workable objectives; building community into partnerships; drawing business into partnership; inclusiveness vs efficiency on nurturing partnerships; human resources; and the culture of partnership. We feel that these points would form an excellent basis for the minimum standards for representation on partnerships that the consultation document is looking for.

## **Chapter 6 - Building capacity and participation**

In relation to paragraph 6.2, the excellent work of Henderson (1998) in summarising issues for training and regeneration has much to offer on the subject of training and capacity-building.

In relation to the consultation points at the end of this chapter:

- The best ideas on your first point have been captured by Pete Duncan (2000) in an excellent report *Neighbourhood regeneration: resourcing community involvement* ([Findings 320](#)). This report is full of sound ideas about capacity building work for communities that enables them to participate fully in regeneration activities. Key ideas include: strategically targeting regions where community involvement is at a low level; introducing effective sanctions for regeneration partnerships which fail to involve communities adequately; providing flexible funding which makes it easier for

partnerships to take on priorities identified by communities themselves; streamlining the administrative processes whereby communities can access funds; creating a strong client culture amongst a range of agencies engaged in partnership; establishing champions for community involvement at local, regional and national levels; taking steps which allow community organisations to own their own assets (thereby becoming more sustainable); and taking steps to fund a comprehensive network of experienced locally-based intermediaries for the purposes of training and capacity building.

- In relation to your second and third consultation points, the best summary of JRF experience is by John Low (2000) ([Foundations 169](#)) in the brief document *Developing effective community Involvement Strategies*. This outlines a number of key stages which we think you would find useful; making administrative resources available for community groups; arranging training for community activists);
- In relation to your fourth consultation point, Danny Burns (2000) has developed a set of Audit Tools for community participation. These provide the means for a suitably experienced officer to visit partnerships and assess progress on community involvement and capacity building. The process allows the officer both to acknowledge progress, and to criticise weak points: progress on the weaknesses would be expected by the time of the next visit. JRF is currently funding a project to test these audit tools in three English regions, in collaboration with the Regional Development Agencies in question. We would be pleased to brief assembly officials on progress, if you would find this useful.
- Finally, an idea which spans your consultation points in this chapter: JRF has recently produced a report by Tim Dwelly (2001) entitled [Creative regeneration](#) this looks at the contribution of community arts to regeneration. The report is entirely based on community arts projects in Wales. Community arts have often proved to be an excellent way of raising confidence, building capacity in individuals and community groups, and allowing neighbourhoods - including deprived ones - to view themselves in an entirely fresh and energising light. It has been shown that people involved in community arts activities often branch out into other local regeneration activities.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### **Bennett, Katy (2000)**

*Coalfields regeneration: dealing with the consequences of industrial decline*

JRF/Policy Press ([Findings 450](#))

### **Brownill, Sue et al (1998)**

*Rich mix: inclusive strategies for urban regeneration*

JRF/Policy Press ([Findings O108](#))

**Burns, Danny et al (2000)**

*Auditing Community Participation:an assessment handbook*

JRF/Policy Press

**Carley, Michael (December 2000)**

*Regeneration in the 21st century:policies into practice*

JRF/Policy Press ([Foundations D10](#))

**Carley, Michael et al (May 2000)**

*Urban regeneration through partnership: a study in 9 urban regions in England, Wales and Scotland*

JRF/Policy Press ([Foundations 560](#))

**Duncan, Pete et al (2000)**

*Neighbourhood regeneration:resourcing community involvement*

JRF/Policy Press ([Findings 320](#)) JRF

**Dwelly, Tim (2001)**

*Creative regeneration: lessons from 10 community arts projects*

JRF

**Henderson, Paul et al (1998)**

*Training and education in urban regeneration: a framework for participants*

JRF/Policy Press

**Low, John (1999)**

*Developing effective Community Involvement Strategies*

JRF ([Foundations 169](#))

**Maclennan, Duncan (2000)**

*Changing places, engaging people*

JRF/York Publishing Services

**Shucksmith, Mark (2000)**

*Exclusive countryside? Social inclusion and regeneration in rural Britain*

JRF ([Foundations 760](#))