

Neighbourhood Renewal Evaluation - Lessons Learnt and Recommendations

Key Learning	Rationale	Recommendation(s)	Departmental response
The need for robust baseline data	The new local councils will need robust and reliable statistics relating to the new council areas to allow them to make funding decisions based on identified need. Guidance provided by the Department of the Environment ² (DOE) notes that a rigorous analysis of existing conditions in the new council areas is required. It is also important that this data is kept as up to date as possible.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Those designing future programmes to tackle deprivation should work with NISRA statisticians in the first instance to understand what data is/will be available to them and how to use it effectively to monitor and evaluate their programmes. In addition to the use of available statistical data, a robust analysis of local conditions will require independent baseline surveys of the local population and other key stakeholder groups. 	<p>Already in place</p> <p>Short term - Limited information available May not be required or cost effective given lifespan of the Strategy</p> <p>Long term – included in new policy</p>
The need for evidence based programmes/projects	The Councils will need to identify/consider evidence based interventions that are effective in addressing need.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The efficacy of future programmes/projects should be researched and clearly evidenced i.e. future interventions should be based on a clear understanding of what works/what doesn't work within a comparable context. 	<p>Should be developed:</p> <p>for assistance of New Councils</p> <p>short term - to inform any new project delivery</p> <p>Long term – to inform any new policy</p>

<p>The need for effective monitoring and evaluation processes</p>	<p>The assessment of impact of NR has been impeded by the absence of a robust monitoring and evaluation system.</p>	<p>4. DoE should consider developing a common set of indicators for Community Planning across all of the new councils. This has been done in Scotland (co-ordinated through Audit Scotland).</p> <p>5. SMART impact targets, which are consistent with regional level indicators, should be developed and built into any future programmes to tackle spatial deprivation. These targets should form the core of the monitoring system and it should be a requirement for all funded organisations to measure against these targets and report back on an on-going basis. Progress against targets should be reviewed periodically and action taken where targets are not being met.</p>	<p>For DOE Common set in place for NR in line with Community Planning Outcomes</p> <p>Short term - review to ensure relevance and inform new EAs and CFF's</p> <p>Long term – need to be considered in light of any new scheme would need to be linked to Community Planning</p> <p>Short term - Monitoring and evaluation processes for projects should be reviewed and strengthened as appropriate</p> <p>Long term – develop stronger monitoring and evaluation process that address value for money and ineffective delivery</p>
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<p>Ensuring on-going and effective engagement of local communities is essential</p>	<p>Effective community engagement is essential to determining community needs and achieving local buy-in to future initiatives.</p> <p>With the transfer of responsibility for community planning to the new local government structures, the new Councils may require existing networks and partnerships to be streamlined.</p> <p>Surveys of NRAs conducted by NIHE demonstrated very low levels of awareness of the strategy by local people.</p>	<p>6. Local Government should engage with current NR Partnerships and other stakeholders to determine the structures required to continue to drive improvements in areas of social and economic need.</p> <p>7. Communication and marketing strategies should be developed to enhance community awareness/buy-in of future funding programmes.</p>	<p>For Councils only</p> <p>Long term - New Policy</p>
<p>Provision of sufficient lead-in times</p>	<p>Feedback has identified that new structures require a long lead-in time to bed-in and to work effectively.</p>	<p>8. If new structures or partnerships are created in the future, sufficient time should be allocated to allow the new structures to bed-in, develop accurate baselines/needs analyses and to allow the development of meaningful working relationships. N.B. in DSDs experience, up to 3 years is required to establish any new programme that involves creating new structures or partnerships.</p>	<p>For Councils</p> <p>Long term – New Policy</p>

<p>The need for effective resourcing of and political neutrality within future delivery models</p>	<p>Feedback from Partnership members highlighted that one of the positive factors of the NR structure was the lack of political influence in funding decisions.</p> <p>Our analysis highlights that one of the key factors influencing the effectiveness of NR Partnerships was their ability to access necessary skills and experience (either within the partnership or, from external bodies).</p>	<p>9. Those designing future programmes to tackle deprivation should consider the provision of mechanisms /processes to ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The provision of an independent (i.e. politically neutral) honest broker function. This resource should ensure that selected programmes/projects and priorities are chosen only on the basis of evidenced based need and the potential to achieve maximum impact; and b) Regular review of the skills and experience available to Partnerships/the decision making body and augmentation of these skills when required. 	<p>Short term - Continue to review Action Plans and evidence base and strengthen if and were appropriate</p> <p>Long term – New scheme</p> <p>Long term –if using Partnership model need to consider governance arrangements etc.</p>
<p>The need for longer term funding cycles.</p>	<p>Feedback highlights that although NR was strategic by design, funding uncertainties and the need to bid annually or biannually for funding undermined a strategic approach to tackling deprivation.</p>	<p>10. Those designing future programmes to tackle deprivation should consider mechanisms to secure funding for key strategic priorities over the medium to long term.</p>	<p>For Councils</p> <p>Long term – Restricted by CSR periods - would need strong monitoring in place to support long term funding – need mechanisms to deal with ineffective delivery</p>

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<p>The need for flexibility in targeting areas for support.</p>	<p>Whilst it is recognised that there are very clear, statistical reasons for how the NRA boundaries were established, during the implementation of the strategy it became apparent that some of these boundaries did not work in practice. Some areas were too small to be effective and were amalgamated with neighbouring areas and others were not reflective of natural neighbourhoods or communities.</p> <p>Evaluations of the Welsh and English programmes also noted that these fixed boundaries impaired delivery in some circumstances.</p>	<p>11. Any organisation proposing an area based intervention should ensure that:</p> <p>a) any boundaries that are applied make sense to the local area;</p> <p>b) the size of areas targeted for support are large enough for meaningful interventions to be delivered and impacts measured. N.B. stakeholder feedback and previous research highlights that the NR areas were too small to be effective. Our research suggests that any future programme aiming to tackle spatial deprivation should focus on populations in the region of at least 10,000 in order to be more effective;</p> <p>c) Any future programme should provide the flexibility to include other areas and/or the inclusion of themes/specific groups where it would result in a more effective targeting of need.</p>	<p>Short term - There was never an intention to exclude people from the areas surrounding the Neighbourhood Renewal boundaries and it should be practice across all of the Neighbourhood Renewal areas to not restrict funding to projects that only exist for the benefit of the geographical area the Partnership represents.</p> <p>When reviewing EA's check beneficiaries % and consider introducing beneficiaries rule into CFF's</p> <p>Long term – Policy change</p> <p>Long term - Policy change.</p> <p>Long term - Policy change</p>

<p>The need for increased focus on self-sustaining projects</p>	<p>Community based projects and services in NRAs remain highly dependent on grant funding. The ability of communities to develop self-sustaining projects requires further attention.</p>	<p>12. Future funding allocations should be linked to the provision of robust evidence of a projects capacity to be self-sustaining.</p> <p>13. On-going project monitoring should determine the extent to which self- sustainability is being achieved and the need for any correction action.</p> <p>14. Consideration should be given to the provision of support to groups to develop sustainability strategies.</p>	<p>Short term - consider in current scheme to commence working with organisations on awareness, support etc</p> <p>Long term – included in new policy</p>
<p>Statutory Representation on Partnerships</p>	<p>All Partnerships noted a lack of buy-in from one or more statutory agency which limited the extent to which they could implement activities against their action plans and develop a fully integrated approach.</p>	<p>15. Whilst it is noted that it will be a mandatory requirement for all statutory bodies to be represented in Community Planning, in order for it to be most effective, statutory representatives should be senior enough to engage and contribute meaningfully to the discussion within the Partnership.</p>	<p>Short term - Work within current Community Planning structures - emphasis importance of statutory representation.</p>

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<p>Approaches to future funding</p>	<p>The transfer of additional powers (including community planning) to the new Councils³ provides Councils with an opportunity to re-assess the best approach to funding community based initiatives.</p> <p>Furthermore, our research has identified that areas with a well-developed community infrastructure sometimes delivered a less diverse range of projects. The funding to an area is finite, and where a high proportion is used to fund worker posts, less is available to invest other interventions.</p>	<p>16. Local Councils should also assess the overall pros and cons of continuing to fund posts compared to those associated with an output based Service Level Agreement model.</p> <p>17. Local Councils should consider the balance of funding between revenue and capital and which type of funding best suits the needs of the area.</p>	<p>For Councils</p> <p>Long term – consideration for new policy</p>