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CLES Bulletin is a topical summary of articles which have appeared in the professional press. Its aim is to provide a pithy précis of a subject area, drawing out the specific and common issues raised in the individual articles.

CLES Bulletin No. 18
December 2003

Single Regeneration Budget

Introduction

As the year draws to a close, it seems fitting for the final Bulletin of 2003 to discuss the many regeneration projects around the country now facing the end of the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB). There will be no more national rounds of the SRB and Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) will now meet their commitments to SRB rounds 1-6 from Single Programme (Single Pot) resources, which began in April 2002.

The SRB began in 1994 and brought together a number of programmes from several Government departments with the aim of simplifying and streamlining the assistance available for regeneration. SRB partnerships were expected to involve a diverse range of local organisations in the management of their scheme, including local businesses, the voluntary sector and the local community.

The SRB was administered at regional level by the Regional Development Agencies and, in London, by the London Development Agency.¹

The press has recently looked at the impact that the SRB has had, as well as what the end of SRB funding means for many local communities.

*Regeneration and Renewal*² discusses the sustainability of SRB projects after the funding runs out. It highlights one SRB project in particular in Huyton, Merseyside, which has been praised as a model of good practice after achieving a number of notable successes including growth in local employment and a significant reduction in crime. It seems the greatest achievement, however, is that its structure and emphasis on community involvement and capacity building, led to the creation of a network of community groups, which have had great success in addressing social problems.

In particular, *Regeneration and Renewal* highlights the SRB's concentration on building sustainable, self-financing projects which have adopted quite a sophisticated approach to ensuring sustainability, often by tapering funding contributions, sign-posting alternative sources of funding, and trying to develop local capacity to manage projects from internal sources.

Regeneration and Renewal goes on to discuss the problems associated with the end of the SRB. There are concerns that many projects will come to an end being unable to find follow-up funding. It suggests one solution to the problems associated with the end of SRB funding is to 'mainstream' successful programmes, incorporating them into council services. It shows how this has worked to an extent in Huyton, where a regeneration team running initiatives in schools has been brought into the council's education department.

*New Start*³ focuses on the Urban Forum report, *Out of the SRB into the pot*, which raises concerns that when the SRB finishes, community-based projects will find it harder to access funds for certain types of work. The report argues that the RDAs will not give community-based organisations adequate support because of their strict economic remit, and there are fears that money will be diverted to other priorities. The report claims that the problem is exacerbated because community organisations are rarely able to engage with funding strategies at a regional level, which could mean the end of some projects when the SRB finishes.

Interestingly, it draws attention to capacity building and community involvement as the type of activity most challenging to resource. This was highlighted as a key factor in the success of the Huyton SRB in *Regeneration and Renewal*, and worryingly, *New Start* suggests that current

¹ ODPM (2001) *The Single Regeneration Budget: Overview*
www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_urbanpolicy/documents/page/odpm_urbpol_608001.hcsp

² Ross, Matt *A singular legacy* *Regeneration & Renewal* 2 May 2003 pp.22-23

³ Burrows, Gideon *Pot luck* *New Start* 24 Oct 2003 pp.12-13

Government policy of community involvement and empowerment could be completely undermined by the lack of resources to support this work.

New Start highlights a number of schemes, which will be affected after the end of the SRB, and looks to the RDAs to see to what extent they are taking responsibility for this. In particular, it shows a significant part of Yorkshire Forward's continuing expenditure is firmly rooted in economic regeneration at the community level. Also the East of England Development Agency has drawn up a programme that will gradually replace SRB as it winds down and will be looking to their partnerships to see how they are working with community groups to see what the best and most effective way forward is.

*Urban Studies*⁴ reports on research that assessed the achievements of the SRB, focusing on the three key areas of relevance to the attainment of local area regeneration:

- targeting social deprivation;
- bringing about effective partnership working;
- 'bending' the activities of mainstream service providers.

A central objective of the SRB has been to target regeneration funding into areas that are experiencing social deprivation and yet at the same time encourage innovative responses to regeneration problems. Overall evidence, as highlighted in this article, indicates that despite the competitive nature of the allocation procedure adopted under the SRB, overall allocation of funds were highly targeted on relative need as far as this could be assessed given the measurement problems involved.

It suggests that the approach of the SRB meant that regeneration funding was able to be committed to tackle emerging problems of deprivation and regeneration in small pockets contained in some of the 240 English districts that had hitherto not been able to access such funds. It concluded that the SRB approach was able to provide a flexible response to tackling local area regeneration whilst, in general terms, not neglecting areas of greatest need.

Urban Studies goes on to assess the contribution the SRB has made to the process of partnership working, an important issue because the nature of regeneration problems is so diverse and complex it requires the bringing together of all the relevant partners who have a stake in improving the general well-being of the area concerned.

The research revealed that after a slow start there have been real improvements in the nature of partnership working in England and the delivery of regeneration has improved, as a consequence. It found that the ability of the partnership to attain its objectives was due mainly to how it managed and organised itself. The research clearly found that in areas where partnership structures are weak, it would take successive rounds of regeneration funding over a sustained period to build capacity.

Finally, the article looks at sensitising and bending the activities of the mainstream. The findings suggest that there has been modest and variable success in improving mainstream delivery into deprived neighbourhoods. However, the clear message is that if Area Based Initiatives, such as the SRB, are to assist in bending mainstream funds into deprived areas then the traditional providers of mainstream funding at the local level need the budgetary discretion and flexibility to be able to respond. It argues that there needs to be a co-ordinated refocusing of mainstream expenditure into problem areas.

Conclusion

The SRB has clearly had a positive effect on many communities and generally on regeneration in England. Not all projects will survive without SRB funding and they need strategies to ensure their sustainability, as well as backing from the Regional Development Agencies who have a responsibility to support local regeneration after the SRB runs out.

Mainstreaming appears to be the key to the sustainability of many of the projects, that is, integrating projects into mainstream services and bending mainstream funds to serve deprived areas. However, there are still a number of barriers to achieving this, and it will be interesting to see if the lessons emerging from the end of the SRB will push the mainstreaming agenda forward.

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⁴ Rhodes, John et al *New developments in area-based initiative England: The experience of the Single Regeneration Budget* Urban Studies 40 (8) Jul 2003 pp.1399-1426