



Centre for Local
Economic Strategies

local work

voice

Evaluation and Local Area Regeneration

Author: Ray Holden, Eton Evaluation, (0151) 249 6342

Editor: Victoria Bradford, Policy Consultant, CLES (0161) 233 1927

Number 77

Introduction and editorial note

This Local Work: Voice is concerned with evaluation and how to improve the way in which findings inform existing activities, future plans, the activities of partner organisations and of course wider policy. As a not for profit think tank and consultancy, CLES is very much concerned with evaluation, improving interventions so that their effect is maximised and they focus on improving the lives of the most deprived and the sharing of best practice as well as ensuring that evaluations inform national policy and strategy with experience gained from activity on the ground. In addition, CLES has considerable experience of providing policy and project evaluations and continually looks to make the connections between activity on the ground and local, national and regional policy.

For CLES there is also the additional interest in this topic as local authorities and their partners begin the move from the Comprehensive Performance Assessment to that of the Comprehensive Area Assessment, which continues to evaluate local public services and how effectively they use taxpayers' money as well as developing a shared view about the challenges facing an area, such as crime, community cohesion, a sustainable environment or public health issues such as obesity, and will also create a more joined up and proportionate approach to public service regulation.

Without wishing to understate the complex issues that face regeneration practitioners, this Local Work is concerned with how lessons can be learnt more effectively and how evaluation can inform regeneration policy. Indeed, it is looking to explore and understand how these complex issues can be better addressed in the future. In doing so, this Local Work focuses on the findings from recent research into evaluations of Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund Programmes (SRBCF), and in particular at:

- The importance of evaluation as a process
- The importance of timing
- The form of evaluation undertaken
- Who undertakes evaluation
- Where and how the evaluation findings are circulated

In order to do this Local Work will first explore why it was felt necessary to undertake this research and the motivation for it, including looking at reoccurring themes within regeneration. It will then move on to:

- Look briefly at evaluation theory;
- Explore the methodology used in the research
- Examine the findings of the research as regards the topics detailed above
- Explore the findings highlighted above through the three case studies; and
- Offer some Policy Recommendations and conclusions.

About the research

The research featured in this Local Work is a summary of that undertaken as part of a dissertation for an MSc at the University of Glasgow. The research was motivated by the opportunity to explore the, seemingly endless, rounds of new initiatives, which in many instances are new names for old ideas. Indeed, the regeneration and policy communities know what the problem is, but the lessons of previous regeneration initiatives are not being transferred to new and emerging programmes. This is highlighted by two key approaches within English regeneration policy, first the Report of the Liverpool Inner Urban Areas Study, 'Change or Decay', published in 1977; and second the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, published in 2001, both of which called for a holistic approach to regeneration, despite being nearly 25 years apart. Indeed, it appears that despite the general acknowledgement of what needs to be done to tackle urban deprivation, lessons are not being learnt from earlier initiatives in order to make future policy interventions more effective.

Reoccurring themes in regeneration policy

The Report of the Liverpool Inner Urban Areas Study, 'Change or Decay', published in 1977, discussed at length the problems faced by the inner city communities of Liverpool and called for a new approach to managing local neighbourhoods – that of 'area management'. It was envisaged that area management would bring together services at a local level to assist with dealing with urban malaise. In 2001, the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal advocated a similar initiative, with the word 'neighbourhood' replacing 'area'.

Also, in 1977 the Government produced its White Paper 'Policy for the Inner Cities' which became enshrined in legislation in the 1978 Inner Urban Areas Act. This Paper called for a total approach to tackling the needs of deprived communities and economies. The 2001 National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal calls this form of policy a 'joined-up' approach. Moreover, many local areas have been the subject of regeneration initiative after regeneration initiative, but deprivation continues to exist and many such areas have actually fallen further behind prosperous neighbourhoods, whilst local deprivation has got worse. It was this frustrating fact that prompted further investigation into evaluation of area based regeneration programmes to test the notion that the regeneration profession is not learning lessons from previous regeneration initiatives and that the evaluation of such local initiatives is not undertaken in a coherent manner.

Evaluation theory

A review of literature pertaining to evaluation revealed that there is growing support for the development of evaluation methodologies that are based upon qualitative assessment frameworks to support traditional forms of quantitative evaluation. Such methods seek to ask not just whether an area regeneration programme achieved its aims, but how it met its targets, under what circumstances, and why the programme was successful in some areas and unsuccessful in other areas and aspects.

In support of this are a range of evaluations that show that involving local stakeholders in the development and implementation of evaluation reports enhances their validity at the local level, and increases their significance as regards wider policy-making, learning and development. In summary, evaluation activities should focus on examining the processes of area regeneration, seeking to establish how regeneration programmes benefit and change local economies and communities. Such methods call for an in depth understanding on the

socio-economic factors that have shaped and continue to influence urban neighbourhoods and localities.

Methodology

Survey findings

As has already been mentioned the research featured in this Local Work used a literature review as a base, and then surveyed a number of local areas regeneration bodies. This survey concentrated on five key questions relating to the nature of evaluation of area based regeneration activity in the North West, namely the importance; timing; and form of evaluation as well as who it is undertaken by and how the findings are reported or disseminated.

Importance of evaluation

With regard to the question of the importance placed upon evaluation, the majority of respondents to the survey undertaken as part of this research placed great importance on evaluation - 97.8% of respondents indicated that they had either undertaken evaluation or planned to do so. This percentage is split into 87.2% who had undertaken evaluation and 10.6% who plan to undertake evaluation before the end of a local SRBCF Programme.

Timing

In terms of when evaluation takes place, none of the respondents said that they undertook ongoing evaluation exercises. All evaluation exercises surveyed were of the stocktaking form of evaluation and were based on quantitative assessment frameworks. Nearly two thirds (65.8%) of respondents undertook evaluation activity at the mid-point and end-points of a programme whilst 12.2% undertook evaluation activity at the mid-point only of a programmes' implementation. The remaining 22% of respondents undertook evaluation at the end-point only of a local SRBCF Programme.

The form of evaluation

All local accountable bodies that had already, or planned to undertake evaluation of their SRBCF Programmes were asked about the form of evaluation. This was asked to determine whether local partnerships were taking account of academic developments and policy advice concerning the increasing benefits of using qualitative techniques to support more traditional quantitative methods. In addition, this line of enquiry was also intended to assess whether or not area regeneration partnerships use local stakeholder groups to help with evaluation activity.

The survey results revealed that 75.6% of local accountable bodies used a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods in their evaluation activity. The remaining 24.4%, whilst using qualitative and quantitative methods, also used participant stakeholder activity to undertake evaluation activity. These results are a positive indication that area-based regeneration partnerships in North West England appreciate the relationship between qualitative methods of evaluation and the production of more robust evaluation reports.

Who

In terms of who undertakes evaluation, a review of the literature on local evaluation points to the fact that evaluations that engage local stakeholders and involve local officers at some stage in the evaluation process will have greater added value. In addition, this line of enquiry looked at whether there were any local examples of the use of research centres and universities in the preparation of local evaluations because this can ensure that there are clear linkages with the academic underpinnings of evaluation and actual practice. Over half, 53.7%, of those respondents who had already undertaken evaluation of their local SRBCF programmes used external consultants to undertake evaluation. Whilst 36.6% of respondents ensured that officers from their local regeneration partnership were involved in the development of their evaluation activities.

Only 9.7% of respondents used local research centres or universities to undertake evaluation activity and just 3% used local stakeholders to lead evaluations.

Disseminating and reporting

The final line of enquiry for this research was concerned with the issue of the reporting of completed evaluation documents and publications. This was of some concern because it is important that the findings of evaluations are made known to the local community and also disseminated to the wider policy and academic community. This element of the survey revealed a number of key issues for consideration. On a positive note, 95% of respondents reported their evaluation to their local SRBCF Programme Management Board and 58.5% reported the findings to the constituent local authority. Around one third, 34%, of respondents reported their findings to the wider Local Strategic Partnership in question. In general terms, the research found that there was a good spread of reporting to local decision making organisations concerned with area regeneration. Also, 58% of local regeneration partnerships forwarded their evaluations to regional organisations such as a Regional Development Agency or Government Office. However, only 3% of local area regeneration partnerships reported their evaluations to the National SRB Evaluation Team and the wider academic and policy community. This equated to one local regeneration partnership.

Case studies

In order to supplement the survey material, the research also carried out three of more detailed case studies, of Halton Borough Council; East Bury; and Stockport. These are explored in more detail in this section.

Halton Borough Council

Halton Borough Council, acting as the Accountable Body for the Halton Strategic Partnership, was successful in securing 3 rounds of SRBCF grant, across the following three programmes, with a combined worth of £38 million:

- (a) SRBCF Round 2 – ‘Runcorn on the Mersey’ 1996 – 2003 £12.7 million.
- (b) SRBCF Round 4 – ‘Realising the Benefits’ 1998 – 2005 £2.4 million.
- (c) SRBCF Round 5 – ‘Focus for Change’ 1999 – 2007 £23 million.

The three programmes awarded to Halton varied in size, scale, purpose and nature. The earliest programme, ‘Runcorn on the Mersey’, was evaluated using the traditional form of stocktaking evaluation with external consultants undertaking a mid and end of scheme evaluation. The mid-term review was produced in 1998 and the end of scheme review in 2003¹. In addition to stocktaking processes, the end of scheme review attempted to inject more qualitative methods into the activity by working with local stakeholders and residents to assess their views on whether Runcorn Town Centre was a better place after six years of the SRBCF investment. This was undertaken by the appointed consultants via a series of focus group meetings at local venues. Whilst the end product of this evaluation did produce a sound ‘stocktaking report’, the report was affected by the lack of baseline evidence contained within the initial bid document, which in reality made it hard to assess positive or negative changes in local conditions as a result of the investment provided by the programme.

In terms of evaluating the smaller SRB 4 programme ‘Realising the Benefits’, a mid-term assessment of this programme was undertaken in 2003. Due to the small size of this programme the review was undertaken by officers of the local SRBCF partnership and focused upon a financial and performance assessment of the programme to ensure that the programme was meeting its agreed targets² This focus was primarily established due to the fact that in its early stages the programme had difficulties in meeting planned targets. This programme was then merged into the larger SRBCF 5 ‘Focus for Change’ programme and its final evaluation will be undertaken concurrently with the SRBCF Round 5 programme.

¹ Halton Borough Council (2003) ‘*Realising the Benefits Single Regeneration Budget Programme Evaluation*’ Halton Borough Council, Widnes and Halton Borough Council (1999) ‘*Runcorn on the Mersey Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund Programme Interim Evaluation*’ Halton Borough Council, Widnes.

² Halton Borough Council (2003) ‘*Runcorn on the Mersey Single Regeneration Budget Programme Final Evaluation*’ Halton Borough Council, Widnes.

Whilst the SRBCF 5 'Focus for Change' Programme was evaluated using a 'stocktaking' process, the evaluation was taken forward in the context of wider corporate evaluation developments with the development of a Corporate Evaluation Strategy for all regeneration programmes in Halton. This strategy supports the development of evaluation methods that, where appropriate, assess the actual difference made by programmes such as SRBCF on the lives and life chances of local residents and communities. The SRBCF 5 'Focus for Change' programme after undertaking its stocktaking evaluation, is now calling for a series of action based research activities to assess the direct impact of the individual projects within the programme³.

The East Bury Initiative

Bury Metropolitan Borough Council, acting on behalf of the Bury Local Strategic Partnership, secured £5.05 million of SRBCF grant under SRBCF Round 5 for the 'East Bury Initiative'. The 'East Bury Initiative' covers an urban area of 31,600 local residents located towards the east of Bury Town Centre. This area has been identified by Bury Metropolitan Borough Council as the area of the borough that has the most significant pockets of deprivation and the highest local priority for area regeneration⁴. In 2006, the 'East Bury Initiative' Regeneration Team appointed the Consultancy Firm EKOS to undertake an end of scheme evaluation. The overall objective of the evaluation was not only to look back and assess the successes of the programme but to also identify areas of good and bad practice to note for future area regeneration programmes, particularly neighbourhood management.

The final report produced by the external consultants for the 'East Bury Initiative' was a mixture of a 'stocktaking' report and one that assessed the quality of partnership processes and activities. In terms of the stocktaking element of the evaluation process, the programme was measured against the original project and programme targets but the consultant reported that due to the fact that there was a lack of true baseline data for the programme area this made reporting actual progress on the ground at a local neighbourhood level, extremely difficult. With regard to the qualitative assessment undertaken within the programme, this included a range of stakeholder and beneficiary interviews across the local neighbourhood and target area. This assessment showed that the programme had some positive local impact but it was hard to actually assess the impact of the programme on some beneficiaries because the activities funded through the programme had ended by the time the evaluation was undertaken. Indeed it has been noted by the consultant who undertook the end of scheme evaluation that further work is needed in the future to assess in greater detail the sustainable benefits of the SBRCF Round 5 'East Bury Initiative'⁵.

Stockport Regeneration Programme

Brinnington is located within the area of Stockport which is a Metropolitan District of the Greater Manchester Sub-region. In 1998 the Brinnington Regeneration Partnership received £3.2 million under SRBCF Round 4 for the 'Brinnington Regeneration Scheme' (Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, 2002). In 2002 a mid-term evaluation took place of the 'Brinnington Regeneration Scheme' that was led and managed by the local community partnership organisation known as Brinnington Community First (formally BC2000). An Evaluation Steering Group was established that contained a range of partners from the local strategic partnership that were able to assist and guide the research and evaluation process. This Steering Group was guided in its evaluation work by guidance issued both from central government and organisations such as the New Economics Foundation who provide advice on programme evaluation. In terms of undertaking local evaluation activity, local projects were reviewed as set against their initial targets and the Steering Group undertook some local survey work with local volunteers carrying out survey work amongst the local population. The evaluation that took place at this point included a range of quantitative and qualitative processes together with participative stakeholder activities to gauge local opinion on the

³ Halton Borough Council (2003) 'Runcorn on the Mersey Single Regeneration Budget Programme Final Evaluation' Halton Borough Council, Widnes.

⁴ Bury Metropolitan Borough Council (2006) 'The East Bury Initiative Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund Programme Final Evaluation' Bury Metropolitan Borough Council, Bury.

⁵ Bury Metropolitan Borough Council (2006) 'The East Bury Initiative Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund Programme Final Evaluation' Bury Metropolitan Borough Council, Bury.

overall effect of the programme at that stage in its lifetime. This was useful in being able to gauge the success of the programme to date as perceived by local communities, as opposed to what was initially stated in a bid document. However, the quantitative work undertaken within this evaluation process was hampered by the lack of baseline data for some areas of the programme, making it difficult to measure the actual changes being made by the programme⁶.

In the final concluding remarks of the evaluation reference is made, as with the 'East Bury Initiative', to the recognition that the impacts of the local regeneration programme will continue long after the programme formally ends and that the ongoing evaluation process needs to reflect this particular issue. In addition to this, the evaluation report itself is a fairly honest document in the sense that whilst it does point out the successes of the programme, it also at the same time points out areas of the programme that have not been as successful and require amendment in the later stages of the programme in order to increase their overall effect and impact (Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, 2002).

These case studies revealed a number of additional points of interest.

1. The first issue to note is that the case studies supported the notion that 'stocktaking' evaluations have their limitations when it comes to assessing the impact of a programme upon the beneficiaries of a regeneration programme. Such evaluation, particularly when undertaken at the end of a programme, cannot easily measure changes and improvements over time because it is undertaken as a 'snapshot'. The result of this is that a report will be produced that will have limited use to the wider policy learning process for a local regeneration partnership and indeed wider national policy developments and national evaluations.
2. The second point to note is that the evaluation of an area based regeneration programme has to be considered and planned for at the start of the programme and that this process needs to ensure that there are measurable targets in place to assess the direct impact of the programme on how it has changed its baseline position. If such targets are not in place then this directly limits any attempts by evaluators to measure the local progress that has been made and can make any form of stocktaking evaluation particularly ineffective. This appears to be a consistent and reoccurring feature that is hampering evaluation practices.
3. The third point to note is the issue of evaluation over the lifetime of a programme and after a programme formally ends. The case studies highlighted that unless you assess the impact being made on local beneficiaries within the lifetime of a programme then valuable data and intelligence will be lost. In addition to this, if evaluation activity is to be of any real worth in measuring the long-term impact of a programme then measures need to be put in place to assess the effects of a programme after it has formally ended. Such measures call for a range of qualitative indicators and techniques to be used, and whilst costly in terms of human and financial resources, they will add great value to the learning and development process.
4. The fourth point is that there needs to be flexibility within a programme to respond to evaluation findings. The evaluation undertaken at Stockport for example has shown that a review at the mid-point of the local programme has enabled it to re-focus areas of the programme where projects have been under-performing.
5. The fifth and final point of interest from the case studies is concerned with the direct involvement of local stakeholders in the preparation of an evaluation strategy and report. This can lead to the production of a robust evaluation report that will be able to inform future local neighbourhood renewal policy.

⁶ Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council (2002) '*Brinnington Community Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund Programme Final Evaluation*' Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, Stockport.

Flowing from this review of area based regeneration programmes in North West England, and in particular the case studies, are many positive examples of regeneration partnerships that undertake informative and well-structured evaluations of area based regeneration programmes. However, the research flags up that there are a number of specific issues that need to be addressed to ensure improvements in future area based regeneration programmes, these are explored in the form of the policy recommendations set out below.

Policy Recommendations

1. Promote the positive benefits of evaluation activity

There is clearly a range of positive benefits to the policy development process that evaluation can bring. In order to promote these benefits it is suggested organisations such as the United Kingdom Evaluation Society are supported in their attempts to promote the positive benefits of effective evaluation techniques.

2. Ensure a greater link between national and local evaluations

All new area regeneration programmes (such as the Local Enterprise Growth Initiative), should from their outset, ensure that there is a clear relationship between the originator of the programme at a National Level and the Partnerships set up locally to deliver targeted action in order to ensure that local evaluations are fed into particular National Evaluation Frameworks. Each local area regeneration partnership should have a dedicated contact point within the National Level Programme Team to ensure that this linkage takes place.

3. Develop evaluation strategies that assess ongoing performance and processes

All new area regeneration programmes should embrace evaluation techniques that assess ongoing performance over time as opposed to stocktaking approaches in order to assess the impact of the programme and its processes. This form of evaluation will be able to provide high quality information to the local partnership and policy community on 'what works' within a particular area regeneration programme. Whilst stocktaking evaluation does provide useful information, its value is greatly enhanced if it is combined with an ongoing process of evaluation.

4. Ensure that evaluation is planned for at the start of a programme

In order to ensure that evaluation activities are effective, it is recommended that the process of evaluation is planned for from the start and that baselines are established at the outset. These can then be measured at various stages of the programme. It is essential to establish a baseline to ensure that the effectiveness of area based regeneration programmes can be judged by measuring the impact the programme has had on particular socio-economic challenges - those it was established to tackle.

5. Ensure that local stakeholders are involved within the evaluation of local area regeneration programmes

There is a growing body of academic opinion that suggests that involving local stakeholders in evaluation activity will greatly add to the overall validity and legitimacy of the evaluation process and final report. Within this context therefore it is recommended that future area regeneration programmes should seek to engage with local stakeholders in the preparation of the evaluation activity in question. This will help with ensuring that the actual legitimacy of the programme will be increased within the local community and neighbourhood.

6. Ensure that the evaluation of area regeneration programmes contains methods based upon qualitative and participative assessments

Future evaluations of area regeneration programmes should include a range of qualitative and participative methods to support more traditional approaches based upon qualitative assessments. This proposed approach to future evaluation activity will ensure that the evaluation report will provide information on a range of indicators that can assess both the performance of the programme and the effectiveness of processes. Participative evaluation work with local stakeholders should also be encouraged to assess the views of local residents who reside in the regeneration area in question.

7. Ensure that the beneficiaries of area regeneration programmes are consulted within ongoing evaluation activities

Future evaluations of area regeneration programmes should involve direct interaction with the target communities and beneficiaries of such programmes. This is required in order to ensure that area regeneration initiatives are having a positive effect upon their target audience. Such consultation should also not be left to the end of a programme and should be undertaken throughout the lifetime of an area regeneration programme.

8. Ensure that adequate resources are provided for evaluation activities of area regeneration programmes

The research concluded with a range of policy recommendations that will obviously require a level of resource allocated to evaluation activity that is not generally allocated at present within area regeneration programmes. Within this context therefore it is recommended that both National Commissioning Bodies and Local Delivery Partnerships allocate resources (human and financial) to the effective evaluation of area regeneration programmes.

Conclusion

This Local Work has highlighted some of the findings of recent research exploring evaluation activity in the North West and has looked at how it can better contribute to improving interventions and the wider policy development process. The research has made a number of linkages between the 'theory' of evaluation and its actual 'practice' and a number of recommendations have been made that will hopefully, over time, make a contribution to the development of more effective local evaluation strategies for area regeneration programmes.

For CLES, with 20 years of regeneration activity behind us, and in particular the end of Area Based Initiatives and forthcoming roll-out of the Comprehensive Area Assessment, it is crucial that lessons are learnt and that evaluation contributes to the policy development process to ensure that approaches to tackling poverty, social exclusion and supporting economic development, for example, address real need and are structured in ways appropriate to the particular area or community. Moreover, effective evaluations allow interventions to remain flexible as challenges and circumstances adapt so should solutions. The research has revealed the importance of feeding into the wider policy and academic circles in order to ensure that the national approaches reflect the lessons learnt on the ground.

Local Work is one of a series of regular policy reports produced by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES). CLES is a not-for-profit think doing organisation, consultancy and network of subscribing organisations specialising in regeneration, economic development and local governance. CLES also publishes Bulletin, Rapid Research and bespoke Briefings on a range of issues. The views and opinions expressed in Local Work are not necessarily those of CLES.

Centre for Local Economic Strategies & CLES Consulting

Express Networks • 1 George Leigh Street • Manchester M4 5DL • tel 0161 236 7036 • fax 0161 236 1891 • info@cles.org.uk • www.cles.org.uk