SOCIAL RENEWAL ADVISORY BOARD: CALL FOR IDEAS		
Deadline: 23rd October		
Email/Queries: socialrenewal@gov.scot		
ORGANISATION:	**Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland (CNS), University of Glasgow**	
BRIEF SUMMARY OF ORGANISATION:	*CNS works with children, young people and families in six areas which have high levels of disadvantage and poverty, four urban, one rural and one small town community across Glasgow, West Dunbartonshire and South Lanarkshire.*	
DEMOGRAPHIC SUPPORTED:	*Children and young people and their families living in areas with high levels of disadvantage and poverty*	
IDEA THEME:	Place and public services	

YOUR IDEA: What needs to change to build a Fairer Scotland, learning from the response to the COVID pandemic?

Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland's (CNS) suggestion is to **build on and further enhance the local capacity and capability that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic to support communities, particularly in areas where there are high levels of disadvantage**. Below we suggest **three actions** that should be taken to support this idea. These are drawn from the programme of research undertaken by CNS during the pandemic exploring the impact of COVID-19 on families with children, and how local services and community organisations responded to the rapidly changing context in both urban and rural settings. The full set of COVID-19 research publications, briefings and insight papers can be found on the CNS website here.

1. **Strategic emergency response planning** – ensuring the wider third sector are fully engaged and involved in emergency response planning as standard practice

The crucial role played by the third sector in the emergency response at a local level emerged as a strong feature throughout the CNS research. Trusting relationships between frontline third sector workers and individuals and families were critical in identifying issues and providing rapid and adaptable support in high-poverty neighbourhoods. When lockdown was announced, statutory services suspended or reduced a majority of their services and third sector organisations adopted the role of 'first responders' or 'primary engagers' within communities. Following an initial focus on emergency food provision to families, over time support was expanded to address other practical needs such as fuel poverty, digital access and emotional support. There are examples of local authorities streamlining funding and decision-making processes so that supported organisations could quickly repurpose grants to meet urgent needs.

The smaller local organisations who work at the front line played a hugely significant role in helping to ensure that families in need of support were not missed. The relationships with the community and local intelligence found in small, third sector organisations are valuable and important in ensuring the right support gets to the right families, particularly in high poverty areas. These smaller organisations however faced significant challenges during the pandemic, including loss of staff, precarity of funding and conditions attached to the funding which did not always allow flexibility in how monies could be used to support local need.

The third sector organisations interviewed for the CNS research were quick and agile in their response to the pandemic, but concerns were raised that the value of this role may not be fully acknowledged and recognised by public sector services. The lockdown exposed the reliance of the UK and Scottish Governments on the third sector and community organisations to provide emergency food provision and support for the most vulnerable families. Therefore, the development of a shared mechanism for strategic emergency planning between the public and third sector would better support and strengthen collaborative working for the future.

2. **Locality planning** – maintaining the ownership and grassroots engagement in local coordinating groups, organisations and hubs

The crisis has been a catalyst for new forms of social connection and activism. Volunteering has flourished, local communities have self-organised and third sector groups have mobilised their staff in an effort to help people through these unprecedented times.

Community councils and other groups supporting the local response, showed signs of greater social solidarity and community cohesion. A local authority worker in the CNS research reflected on the changing local attitudes to poverty and disadvantage: *"we've seen that change a little bit, because it's now become everybody's issue"*.

The pandemic and lockdown resulted in a significant increase in volunteering and community mobilisation. Service providers interviewed for this research were keen to sustain this momentum by encouraging more local self-help and community-focused approaches. The wider evidence supports the need for a move from deficit-based to asset-based approaches to collective resilience (Seamen et al., 2014)[1]. In the context of COVID-19 recovery, Harkins (2020)[2] recommends that communities, vulnerable populations and groups are engaged in the design and implementation of community recovery initiatives. Therefore, to sustain the momentum that emerged in communities during the pandemic, collaborative structures are required that actively promote equality in voices and perspectives and maintain a focus on local needs and concerns.

3. **Facilitation** – supporting key local officers from public sector and / or third sector interface organisations to facilitate a place-based response to recovery coordination and continue to link smaller organisations into local governance systems

The evidence gathered by CNS during the pandemic includes examples that saw the development of new coordination and collaboration mechanisms. Forums and networks that may have previously had members from public sector and representatives from larger third sector organisations expanded their membership to include smaller organisations and community groups.

Relationships between public / third sector interface officers and local community groups and volunteers quickly developed in order to meet the immediate needs of communities. Local officers from community planning and / or third sector interface organisations played a key role in facilitating these relationships which supported a targeted, place-based response to the pandemic. This allowed for the development of different support models according to the needs in communities. Participants in the research described how working together in new ways had led to changes in officers' perceptions about what could be achieved by working in partnership with communities and the need to guard against reverting to pre-pandemic ways of working.

Leadership that supports those undertaking this facilitation and coordination role is required so that there is a mechanism to build on the engagement and energy of communities and local groups that emerged during the pandemic.

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[1] Seaman, P., McNeice, V., Yates, G. & McLean J. (2014) *Resilience for public health*. Glasgow: Glasgow Centre for Population Health.

[2] Harkins, C. (2020). *Supporting community recovery and resilience in response to the COVID-19 pandemic– a rapid review of evidence.* Glasgow: Glasgow Centre for Population Health.