

Decades of investment have failed to bring lasting regeneration in many areas of the UK. Joined-up, sustainable strategies are needed, says **Adam Fineberg**

**O**ver the last four years I have developed a project designed to address the need to establish sustainable community strategies: ones which focus the sum total of all of the actions to further local development in a strategic and sustained way.

The 'growth coalitions' project is about creating a vehicle to provide an over-arching, strategic agenda which helps local authorities and other partners work towards a common goal.

Led by the authority but made up of a partnership of public, private, voluntary and community organisations, a growth coalition has many aims. It seeks to tackle disadvantage by growing a successful, sustainable local economy – addressing education, work and the economy, housing and the physical environment, crime and health.

In deprived areas, it looks to re-engage local people and communities with the mainstream economy by tailoring a local response to the situation at hand while critically assessing the legacy of the range of 'special initiatives' in the area.

It can also provide a one-stop shop for local developments, truly engaging the interests of the private sector by identifying and unlocking investment opportunities, improving economic productivity.

Decades of investment in deprived areas have not resulted in sustained regeneration and improvements in the wellbeing of all of the local communities in many localities.

The growth coalitions project has drawn attention to the need to establish sustainable community strategies. The aim is to realise a *modus operandi* under the auspices of existing partners, programmes and funding levels to make things work better, resulting in strengthened, sustainable communities which address all aspects of community wellbeing.

The sustainable community strategy becomes, in effect, the single point of reference for the council and its constituent directorates as well as providing the glue or linkage with external partners and their actions, at the neighbourhood, town, sub-



region, regional and national scales. Effectively, it will pull together the various strategies and commitments of the council and its partners for the short, medium and long terms.

By developing initiatives on the ground, the growth coalitions project has already influenced the development of local area agreements (LAAs) and local public service boards and strengthened the workings of local strategic partnerships (LSPs).

For example, I have been working with the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) in Walsall to develop its regeneration service. The commission for Walsall took on a number of forms, including facilitated workshops with a range of staff at all levels, council members and key partners.

I have also been assisting local authorities in laying out a clear 'journey', mapped out in terms of the leadership, development and implementation of a shared agenda for strategically focused, joined-up regeneration-related activity locally.

Much work is already being undertaken by local authorities in developing, executing or planning for an LAA. Depending on the nature and scale of ambitions locally for a LAA, the most challenging issues may ultimately be matters relating to the aligning and/or pooling of budgets.

Local authorities are considering how they can set about working to a new agenda where the challenges

of local public service agreements and, latterly, LAAs, impact on council activities.

Many authorities are developing a tranche of projects, and programmes are coming on stream through councils and the work of a range of local partnerships. The LSP has a key role to play in this activity and in many cases it is a timely moment to take local authorities and their partners forward together.

Growth coalitions, by creating an overarching strategic focus for projects and programmes in line with corporate priorities, can provide the objective and hence the glue to stick these initiatives together.

Community plans and councils' corporate plans are a good starting point. These high-level plans need to be smart in order that department and service plans, which draw from these, can be set in a meaningful performance management framework. Councils and their partners' staff are the key to progress. They hold the key to unlocking the creative, collective potential of the council as a community leader.

In certain cases, there is need for joint learning and the development of a smart approach to local government. This is an evolutionary process, which requires dedication and resources.

Firstly, a council's executive management team, council members and then those at all

levels in the authority need to come together to undertake a stocktake of where they are. At the same time the council will consider the new agenda and the impacts it will have on work in progress.

In effect, this is an informed self-review process, and generates an understanding of where staff fit together – across 'silos' and also in relation to the community and corporate plans.

It will enable the council to realise where the priorities for action are, internally and externally with its partners. The council can corporately communicate a clearer, smarter role for itself and re-engage on this basis with external partners, particularly fellow members of the LSP.

Through this approach it will be able to focus more on working with partners and developing community leadership locally and become better positioned to lead sustainable regeneration.

**Adam Fineberg** is a policy and regeneration consultant. He has made submissions on the 'growth coalitions' project to the Lyons inquiry into local government and to the government's



consultation on local strategic partnerships. For further information go to [www.growthcoalitions.org.uk](http://www.growthcoalitions.org.uk)