The role of local government in redressing neighbourhood disadvantage: A case study from Penrith City Council

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Abstract

The concentration of disadvantage in specific neighbourhoods is a widespread characteristic of many Australian cities. A broad range of policies and programs which utilize integrated forms of governance have been designed and implemented to redress this. Within the state of New South Wales, Australia, local governments have been identified as being amongst the most effective drivers for these integrated governance approaches. Utilizing a case study of the Penrith Neighbourhood Renewal Program, this paper explores recent attempts by Penrith City Council to develop a framework to redress neighbourhood disadvantage, firstly by establishing an integrated governance framework for the program, and secondly by transforming the council's operational structure.

Introduction

Disadvantage concentrated in specific localities has become a widespread characteristic of many modern western cities, including those in Australia. Academics and policy makers alike have sought to understand the multi-dimensional nature of the problems facing the inhabitants of these disadvantaged urban localities. Concurrently, there has been a growing interest in understanding the factors that give rise to these disadvantaged areas, and the extent to which policies and initiatives can help combat the problem (Randolph 2004). This paper begins by outlining the emerging policy and practice context, providing insight into the developing understanding of the multiple underlying physical, economic, cultural and social processes that have triggered the problems facing these urban neighbourhoods (O'Conner & Stimson 1995; Baum 1997; Fagan & Weber 1999; Gleeson 2006). This outline also highlights the emergent understanding that more 'joined-up' approaches are required by all levels

of government, the private sector *and* communities to address the problems of disadvantaged localities.

Within the Australian context, particularly New South Wales (NSW), local governments have been amongst the most effective drivers for joined-up approaches aimed at remedying multi-deprivation faced by some residents. In driving these programs local governments in Australian cities are faced with the task of balancing their traditional roles in service delivery with the provision of a framework for more integrated forms of governance. Drawing on research from a recent evaluation process, the paper provides an insight into the way in which one local council, the City of Penrith, took up this challenge of creating a program – the Penrith Neighbourhood Renewal Program and action planning process – to address neighbourhood disadvantage within its local government area (LGA). The paper uses the Penrith program as a case study. It explores the emergence of the program within the context of Penrith City Council's strategic planning framework, the development of the program's integrated governance framework, and the way in which council's operational structure was transformed to create a supportive environment for the program.

Redressing localized disadvantage: The emerging policy and practice context

Australian cities have undergone significant social, economic and demographic change over the past few decades. In terms of socio-economic advantage and disadvantage these changes, often associated with globalisation and economic and technological restructuring, are not evenly distributed across cities. Recent studies have illustrated the social and spatial polarization in Australian cities and the growth of areas of significant disadvantage (Murphy & Watson 1994; Babcock 1997; Baum et al 1999; Gleeson & Randolph 2001; Gleeson 2006). It is now widely accepted that Australian cities have become more socially and economically polarized at the neighbourhood level as a result of these restructuring processes (Randolph 2003). Whilst the emergence of localized disadvantage in Australian cities is often described as being less intense than in Europe or North America, Gleeson (2006, p. 46) notes that it is moving rapidly towards the situation of "cities in the US, where socio-economic differences are often highly localized, even street by street."

One group of policy responses developed to address localized disadvantage has been neighbourhood renewal programs (NSW Department of Housing 1999; Dodson & Berry 2002; Wood et al 2002; Wood 2002; Randolph 2004; Victoria Department of Human Services 2002). Renewal as a loosely defined concept has taken on currency not only in Australia but internationally (UK Government 2000; Randolph 2004; Katz 2004). In the early 21st century in Australia renewal tends to be described in terms of both 'urban' and 'community' renewal, the former referring to activities such as the physical upgrading of properties and neighbourhoods, the latter

denoting social and economic community development activities (Dodson & Berry 2002; Wood 2002; Wood et al 2002; Randolph 2004).

A traditional assumption of physical planners has been that physical upgrading will eventually promote a 'nice' living environment that fosters 'nice' people, a belief based upon environmental determinism. Physical renewal emerged in planning activity in the decades following the mid 1950s through the mass redevelopment of public housing estates based around modernist inspired, formalist physical solutions to urban decay. More recent physical renewal has embraced 'New Urbanism', an orientation resembling earlier planning approaches that used spatial relations to create a close-knit social community that allows diverse elements to interact, for instance, through a variety of building types, mixed uses, intermingling of housing for different income groups and a strong privileging of the public realm.

Critics have questioned the appropriateness of outcome-oriented physical planning, arguing that whilst physical renewal programs address some of the symptoms of disadvantage, they do not address the underlying causes, such as the social and economic marginalisation of residents in disadvantaged areas. Physical renewal schemes can improve the place, but often at a cost to the community. Consequently, initiatives aimed at improving social and employment aspects of disadvantaged localities have become prominent within renewal programs.

The development of these social and economic initiatives has been supported through an understanding of emerging concepts such as capital and social exclusion and inclusion. The concept of 'capital' in relation to disadvantaged communities has attracted much interest in Australia in recent years (Bourdieu 1985, 1986; Webb et al. 2002). It involves economic, cultural and social components. An individual needs access to economic capital to provide sustenance and self-esteem. S/he also needs cultural (or informational) capital: "instruments of appropriation of valued cultural products, which exist in the embodied, objectified and institutionalised form" (Waquant 1998, p. 26; see also Gibson, 2006; Throsby, 2006). Cultural capital is connected to having 'roots' and the feeling of belonging to a place that is 'home'. Social capital consists of the totality of resources an individual or group has by virtue of being "enmeshed in networks of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition, or through membership in a group" (Waquant 1998). All these forms of capital intertwine with one another.

However, the concept of capital is only half the story and this is where forms of social, cultural, economic and political exclusion become important. Policy makers have adopted the term 'exclusion' to encapsulate the multi-dimensional nature of the problems facing inhabitants of disadvantaged urban areas. Power and Wilson (2000, p. 1) summarise

social exclusion as "the inability of our society to keep all groups and individuals within reach of what we expect as a society".

The concept of social exclusion is often used uncritically to encompass economic and cultural exclusion. Social exclusion is related to poverty, but makes sense only in the broader perspective of citizenship and integration into the social context. Economic exclusion is traditionally related to concepts such as poverty, underclass and a lack of the economic resources normally secured through decent employment. Cultural exclusion can be defined as a marginalisation from shared symbols, meaning, ritual and discourse. The final aspect of exclusion is political exclusion, which relates to the lack of a stake in power or decision- making. It exists when people are unable to participate in decision-making affecting their lives and community (for instance in the local neighbourhood), beyond simply voting and electing politicians to represent their interests.

The advantage of exclusion as a framework for policy action is that it focuses on the interconnectedness of issues to promote joined-up policies that address the concentration of disadvantage within specific localities, where people can become trapped in a cycle of related problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poverty, poor housing, cultural fragmentation, limited access to participatory mechanisms, bad health and family breakdown. The role localities play in forging patterns of disadvantage is implicitly recognised in the notion of exclusion. The greater the problems of disadvantage within specific localities, the stronger the cumulative impact, leading to the flight of those more able to go, and gradual loss of control resulting from chronic instability and disempowerment. Policy responses framed in terms of exclusion therefore tend to stress the problems of places, rather than just those of individuals and families.

A key consequence of this emerging research and policy development, and the focus of the following case study, is a growing awareness of a need to shift away from sectoral planning and service delivery towards more integrated governance of problems within disadvantaged areas in order to deal more effectively with the diverse aspects of exclusion they display. More integrated approaches are required to go beyond the sectoral solutions imposed by physical renewal and public intervention in the traditional sense (child support, social workers and so forth). In isolation, the 'top-down', expert-driven approach, which forms the foundation of the traditional sectoral solution of welfare governance, reduces residents within disadvantaged areas to client-like and passive receivers of services. To foster self-esteem, an important prerequisite for social inclusion, residents must accept an obligation to take more responsibility and be given opportunities to be involved and empowered.

Reflecting on this new approach a series of policy and program interventions have emerged within Australian cities to develop joined-up or

'whole-of-government' approaches to addressing issues in disadvantaged areas (see for example Wood et al 2002). The case study below provides a detailed insight into one of these emerging programs. In NSW the Department of Housing and local councils have implemented and attempted to drive these more integrated approaches in many locations, moving beyond a whole-of-government to a 'whole-of-community' approach, built upon partnerships between government, the local business sector, and the community in all its forms (Wood et al 2002). However, many of these initiatives face the problem of short-term funding – a barrier to the effective longer-term solutions that are required to address the complex and multifaceted problems faced by residents in disadvantaged localities. While this issue is widely recognised by most project stakeholders, no realistic solution has been developed to move beyond the funding-round approach to more sustainable models. Long-term integrated governance approaches to localized disadvantage also need to be driven by strong and committed organisations. As noted above, in NSW this role has been played by both local and state government agencies, such as the Department of Housing. The success of these organisations is based on their control over physical and social planning within local areas, their awareness of local community needs and strengths, and their ability to integrate these to create responses to local issues.

Several studies have shown how the rigid organisational structures of modern government may impede the innovative program delivery needed in disadvantaged localities. The development of more integrated approaches by local government has led to a cultural change in the way local governments organise the provision of services (Mant 2002). This includes more collaborative approaches to planning which integrate economic, land use and social planning, and embrace a 'bottom-up' approach in which the starting point is to understand the local community rather than imposing the ideals of experts from the top down. The failure of planning during the heyday of massive physical urban renewal programs (carried out without community involvement) substantiates many of the objections made by opponents of the top-down, expert-driven form of planning oriented towards physical outcomes, and supports a move to integrated, inclusive and consultative planning practices.

The Penrith Neighbourhood Renewal Program

The remainder of this paper focuses on a case study of the Penrith Neighbourhood Renewal Program action planning process that the City Council has been using to address growing disadvantage within a handful of neighbourhoods since April 2001 (Penrith City Council 2001). Penrith City is one of 152 local government areas (LGAs) within the state of NSW, and one of 43 LGAs that make up the Sydney metropolitan area. It is located on the western fringes of the metropolitan area, and has been shaped by rapid urban expansion over the last 40 years. Penrith has been

identified as the most important city in the outer western sub-region (NSW Department of Planning 2005).

The case study provides an overview of some key findings from an evaluation of the Neighbourhood Renewal Program during 2004-2006. Following the first four years of operations, the evaluation was used by council to determine the future direction of the program, develop a more effective program framework in consultation with stakeholders, and identify the most appropriate framework for council's own future involvement. The methodology utilised for the evaluation was rigorous and independent. The evaluation focused on collaboration, organisational development and learning, creating opportunities to build organisational capacity, and recommending guidelines for the strategic direction of the program's future. Research involved quantitative data collection and analysis; stakeholder interviews,[1] literature reviews; analysis of the program's objectives; reviews of program documentation; analysis of corporate history and profile; assessment of program management and support; and a series of stakeholder workshops.[2]

The case study discusses first, the development of the program in the early 21st century as part of the council's emerging whole-of-community strategic planning process. Secondly, it explores the emergence of a formal integrated governance framework for the program in 2004, developed through a series of collaborative workshops with program stakeholders and built on the evaluation of the informal arrangements that emerged during the early years of the program's operation. The final section explores the changes instigated by the council to its operational structure (management, departmental and staffing) in order to accommodate the integrated governance framework for the program. A broader cultural shift within the council supported this departure from the traditional rigid organisational structures of local government that were seen to be impeding innovative program delivery, towards cluster formations which allowed the dissolving of boundaries between traditional functional service areas (physical, economic and social planning), and the reconfiguration of the professional-client role. It should be stressed that the case study presented here is unlikely to be comprehensive in its description of the program as it is focused on particular aspects of the program's transformation and development. Neither does the case study explore the program's local level area-based initiatives and, given that the evaluation itself was programmatic rather than project specific, reference to area-based initiatives will only be made where they enhance the understanding of the case study.

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[1] Quotes from in-depth interviews are coded with the number of the interview completed and one of three generic descriptors – Council (i.e. Council officer, Councillor etc), Community Member (i.e. business representative, resident etc), Strategic Partner (government agency representative etc).
[2] Interviews and workshops involved residents, community members, council officers, councillors, council managers, and strategic partners such as the NSW Department of Housing,

Emergence of a program based on Social Justice: 2001-2004
The origin of the program lay in the last few strategic plans developed by
the council. Strategic planning within Penrith only has a short history. Its
commencement in the early 1990s was driven by two factors. The first was
the redrafting in 1993 of the NSW Local Government Act. The new
legislation introduced greater autonomy for councils with a flexible range
of functions and broader responsibilities outlined in a 'charter'. This charter
called upon councils "to exercise community leadership", a provision
which was clearly seen by Penrith City Council as providing a mandate for
whole-of-community strategic planning. The second factor was a NSW
local government department audit of the council's performance which was
critical of the council's lack of strategic planning (Interview 12: Council).

Over the next decade the council developed a whole-of-community
strategic planning process based on successive strategic plans formulated
every four years by newly elected councillors.[3] In creating the strategic
plans the councillors drew on the research, experience and professional
insights of council officers, together with the insights of the local
communities that they represented. Whilst elements of NSW government
legislation and policies throughout the past few decades have encouraged
local government to engage in strategic planning, there are currently no
formal statutory requirements for councils to prepare this type of broad
strategic plan, either for themselves as an organisation, or for their
communities.[4] Consequently, strategic planning processes developed by
local councils in NSW are discretionary and use widely varying models and
processes.[5]

As part of the development of Penrith's 2000–2004 Strategic Plan, the
councillors identified the increasing disparity between infrastructure and
services available to local communities in the older established suburbs of
the LGA compared to those available in the areas developed since the

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[3] In NSW local councillors are elected for a four year term, consequently Penrith
councillors during their first year of office prepared a strategic plan for the second, third
and fourth year of their term, recognising that the
next newly elected council would need time to create its own strategic plan.

[4] At the time that this paper was being prepared the NSW government was investigating the
possibility of legislating a new strategic planning and reporting regime for councils that has
clear outcomes and accountabilities. The new system proposes a 10 year strategic plan (to be
known as a Community Strategic Plan) to be created by each council that includes social,
environmental, economic and governance outcomes. It will be revised and rolled forward
every 4 years, within 6-18 months after each council election.

[5] For example the Penrith City Council strategic planning process is different from that
used by the Blue Mountains City Council (BMCC) that adjoins it. Whilst Penrith's process
is focused on 4-yearly strategic plans that are formulated by new councillors as
representatives of the community (supported by a strong research/information base),
BMCC's approach is based on 25 year strategic plans, with the most recent plan being
created through an extensive community participatory process. BMCC first adopted a 25
year strategic plan in the 1970s. In 2000/2001 BMCC committed "to develop[ing] a [further]
long-term strategy in consultation with the community and other levels of government … [to
set the] directions for the City over the next 25 years" (BMCC Management Plan
2000/2001).

1980s. Older areas were facing ageing infrastructure, redevelopment pressures, increased strain on existing services and facilities, and changing demographics. Unlike newer development that had benefited from 'Section 94' funding,[6] these areas were dependent on council intervention and resources, and possibly NSW government agencies, for their regeneration. In response, Penrith City Council (2000) identified within its 2000–2004 Strategic Plan the longer-term objective of achieving "equitable provision of services and facilities across the City, with special consideration to disadvantaged areas [within established areas built prior to the 1980s]."

Whilst councillors thus identified the need for long-term objectives within the strategic plan to address emerging disadvantage within established neighbourhoods, it was left to the council officers to devise the program to fulfil that objective. Drawing on discussions with human service agencies that already operated in some of Penrith's most disadvantaged areas, and based on emerging neighbourhood renewal literature, council officers developed an initial framework for the Neighbourhood Renewal Program. This framework centred around the development of location action plans that set out an integrated approach to provision of infrastructure and services by the council, community groups, non-government organisations and NSW government agencies. The action plans were based on the principle that community members themselves, as well as council and other service delivery partners, are essential participants in the process of determining priorities and approaches to the delivery of services, projects and maintenance of infrastructure within disadvantaged established neighbourhoods. This is in line with the council's broader strategic goal of providing more equitable access to economic, cultural and social opportunities for all within the Penrith LGA. The strategic plan set out the longer-term direction of council and the parameters within which council operated. The local action plans that emerged from the program act as localised versions of the strategic plan, functioning as a set of considerations to guide how council works with the community at the local level to develop policy and to deliver vital services that are genuinely responsive to community needs and meet the objectives of more equitable access to opportunities.

During its early years neighbourhoods were selected for the program for a variety of reasons, ranging from political through to identification of disadvantage from a series of wellbeing indicators, such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Socio-Economic Index for Areas (ABS 2001). In 2001 initiatives were commenced with the development of neighbourhood action plans for Cranebrook and Werrington/Cambridge Park. A further initiative in North St Marys was added in 2002. In 2002/2003 the council identified

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[6] Within NSW public infrastructure has traditionally been provided through a mix of funding sources including Commonwealth, State and local government budget allocations, plus developer charges and user pays fees. Section 94 of the *NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* enables local councils and some other government authorities to levy contributions for public amenities and services required as a consequence of new development.

the need to accelerate the program's funding by increasing property tax ('rates') by 4.8% per annum for 10 years. During the early years of the program there was a shift from an initial focus on the repair and maintenance of physical infrastructure to working with communities to resolve issues of social, economic, political and cultural exclusion. This shift was viewed by many of the program's stakeholders during the later evaluation process as a positive move towards a more holistic approach to the strengthening of disadvantaged communities through addressing both physical and social aspects.

In 2005 the council renewed its commitment through the inclusion of a long-term objective within the 2005–2009 Strategic Plan that identified the need to continue the implementation of a program of "renewal for selected [established] neighbourhoods that contributes to a sense of community identity and cohesiveness" (Penrith City Council 2005, p. 7). This is one of a group of objectives aimed at achieving the council's vision of social justice through seeking "to secure social wellbeing by being alert when designing its programs to issues of *social justice* and by championing the city's case to others" (Penrith City Council 2005, p. 6, emphasis added).

Underlying this vision for the city is the concept of a 'just city' (Harvey 1973; Harvey 1992). The actors for 'just city' endeavours have sometimes been radical urban social movements for whom a 'just city' results from mobilizing the public rather than prescribing a methodology to those in office. During the heyday of mass urban renewal and the cruelties of mass clearance carried out as part of those renewal programs, the mobilisation of social movements in opposition to top-down, expert-driven planning, and the business and political interests which constituted its power base, engendered a review of the approaches being taken. The lessons learned have influenced a generation of planners and councillors who support programs that aim to empower those who have previously been excluded from power, through promoting an active citizenry, strengthening community wellbeing and reducing the causes of disadvantage and exclusion. This approach takes an explicitly normative position concerning the distribution of social benefits, where social justice is about access to the same rights and services for all citizens. Reflecting this philosophy, the Neighbourhood Renewal Program can be seen as a policy framework and action planning process through which Penrith City Council strives to build a just and inclusive city.

Identification of a program framework: 2004-2005
As part of the evaluation of the program in 2004 the council brought together a wide range of stakeholders, including various government agencies, non-government organisations, community representatives and organisations from the program's existing place-based initiatives, and local business enterprises, through workshops and working groups to develop a future program framework.

During its first few years the program had developed an important, although informal, framework for addressing the needs of residents in the selected established neighbourhoods. However, by 2004 there was growing apprehension about the program's apparent lack of an overall 'documented' framework and understanding of its sustainability, and about how council understood its position within the overall planning processes for the LGA. The lack of a strong program identity among stakeholders propagated a perception of the program as disconnected activities/area based initiatives occurring across different parts of the Penrith LGA. This perception led to differing expectations and understandings of priorities, financial and resourcing constraints. To identify a formal framework for the program, the evaluation sought to build on two distinct sources: leading practice principles for addressing multi-deprivation within disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and stakeholders' perceptions of the existing program and its future. The intent behind determining those perceptions was to unpack the assumed, although undocumented, knowledge held by the project's stakeholders about the program's framework.

As the program existed in 2004, stakeholders noted that it already reflected some of what recent research exploring place-based initiatives recommended might be implemented within the NSW context if place-based disadvantage was to be effectively tackled (Randolph 2004, p. 8). This included: the need for greater local coordination and integration of place-focused initiatives; a move towards a more coherent spatial targeting framework for the diverse patchwork of agencies and programs addressing localised disadvantage within the Penrith LGA; the identification of a local council role to coordinate delivery of local renewal programs; and, the integration of land use and social planning (Randolph 2004, pp. 8-11).

The program was particularly valued by stakeholders for its ability to provide an environment which enhanced communication/information sharing and partnership formation between communities, agencies and the council, leading to more effective responses to community needs and continuity and coordination of delivery at the local level. Council was seen as providing a supportive context for the development of synergies and integration of the diverse patchwork of programs and agencies within particular place-based projects such as Cranebrook, Werrington/Cambridge Park and North St Marys. The program was also valued for its ability to develop integrated land use and social planning responses to issues and concerns 'on the ground' (for example mentoring programs, public domain maintenance teams, establishment and support for Neighbourhood Advisory Boards). The following brief examples of the neighbourhood renewal action planning processes at North St Marys and Cranebrook provide a clear insight into the way in which the program, as reported by its stakeholders during the evaluation, provided a crucial mechanism for dealing with the multifaceted issues of neighbourhood disadvantage on the ground.

North St Marys

The North St Marys neighbourhood renewal action planning process commenced with two workshops in 2002 that were attended by over 30 participating agencies, including government agencies, community organisations and local services, the two local schools, and North St Marys Neighbourhood Centre Incorporated. The second workshop 'signed off' to a North St Marys neighbourhood renewal action plan with priority actions identified across a range of themes – community development and social services; access to education, training and employment; community safety; service coordination and physical infrastructure. As the project stakeholders explained during the evaluation, the collaborative forum created by the North St Marys workshops provided an environment that allowed a broad range of previously disparate service providers and local community groups, many of whom were already working within the North St Marys area, to come together and explore the way in which synergies could be created between the services and support being provided to the community, and how more effective and holistic outcomes could be developed for the communities through these synergies.

One of the key outcomes of this synergistic process which stakeholders identified, and which would not have occurred otherwise, was the joint realisation that a new neighbourhood centre for North St Marys would be a fundamental step in enabling enhanced local service provision in the area, including outreach services from St Marys Community Health Centre, the NSW Department of Housing and other key support service agencies. The centre was identified as a key initiative within the Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plan. Funding for the centre was provided by several of the organisations that had committed to the plan, with the council providing over $800,000, the NSW Department of Housing and NSW Premier's Department committing $350,000, and St Marys Leagues Club and other registered clubs contributing over $100,000. The creation of the centre enabled much needed programs and services to be delivered to the North St Marys community including youth activities, a women's multicultural group, antenatal clinic, family counselling, and other recreation activities for local residents. The development of the centre, which opened in August 2005, also enabled the neighbourhood renewal initiative at St Marys to secure Strengthening Communities funding from the NSW Government for family fun days, kids craft activities, parenting information sessions, young parents support network, and dads and kids activities in the local park.

Cranebrook

Whilst the council had taken a leading role in creating the workshop forums to facilitate the neighbourhood renewal action planning process at North St Marys, the implementation of an action planning process at Cranebrook built on a Neighbourhood Advisory Board (NAB) which had already been established by the NSW Department of Housing to coordinate delivery of services and programs within that locality. The action plan developed for Cranebrook through the NAB included a wide variety of activities that were

aimed at providing a more cohesive approach to a range of social, economic and infrastructure issues that were seen to be contributing to deprivation within the suburb. Examples of the programs initiated through the plan include: the establishment of a Metropolitan Technology Centre to provide residents with e-commerce training and development; achieving the reinstatement of evening public bus services through the Cranebrook Housing Estate, as well as working with the bus service (Westbus), the Transport Workers Union and the NSW Department of Housing on a memorandum of understanding to establish an agreed process for managing bus safety incidents in the suburb; establishing a local youth service network to support coordination and partnerships on service delivery to young people aged 9-11 years of age; and the formation of a working group within the Cranebrook NAB that coordinated the development of the Cranebrook Town Centre Strategic Plan as well as a landscape masterplan, to address issues of ageing infrastructure in the town centre precinct and enhance community safety.

Whilst key building blocks put in place over the first four years of the Neighbourhood Renewal Program were believed by many stakeholders to be alleviating disadvantage within particular neighbourhoods, the evaluation also identified a series of key concerns that impacted on the program's effectiveness. These included the need for a 'life cycle' approach for the long-term interventions required to address multiple deprivation within disadvantaged localities. Current research suggests that addressing multiple deprivation requires interventions of 15-20 years. Such a life cycle approach has an internal logic incorporating clearly identified aims, objectives, priority needs and issues which are then translated into activities, outputs, impacts and outcomes. It also allows incremental change over time and has well articulated and agreed exit strategies triggered by an evaluation framework that can be used to measure progress against original aims, and to adjust those aims in line with changes in resources as well as the community's changing needs.

Given previous political intervention into management of the Neighbourhood Renewal Program, stakeholders also identified the need for clear selection criteria to identify place-based initiatives for inclusion in the program based on social, economic and cultural indicators (the ABS Social and Economic Index for Areas and other wellbeing indices), as well as other local sources of information (crime and personal safety reporting, council and non-government organisations data etc). Stakeholders also identified the need for the indicator data to be tested for validity through consultation with the residents of identified localities.

Based on a review of leading practice principles and stakeholders' perceptions of the existing program, the evaluation then identified a series of 'building blocks' to guide the development of the program's future framework. In brief they include the need for (Prior 2006):

- A conceptual framework and program logic
- Clear selection criteria for disadvantaged neighbourhoods
- The program to be expressed in an evaluation framework
- A shift from a needs-based (deficit) approach to a strengths-based approach to community development (see below)
- Appropriate community involvement and ownership
- Appropriate partnerships to be established
- Council to be the program's driver
- The support of long-term intervention
- Acknowledgement of finite resources
- An operational structure to support the program with integrated land use and social planning mechanisms.

In developing the program's framework, stakeholders stressed the importance of utilising a 'bottom up' approach to attain a truly integrated governance framework for each place-based intervention. This was to enable collaboration with, and empowerment of, the local community, and to be grounded and informed by community involvement during all phases of planning, design, implementation and review. It was agreed that disadvantage within specific geographical locations was most effectively addressed by involving the local community from the outset and building on their existing strengths. Thus one of the main aims in developing this underpinning for the program was a shift away from a needs-based (deficit) approach to a strengths-based approach, building on existing social, cultural and economic capital within a neighbourhood.

Using the above building blocks stakeholders identified a framework for the program structured around a hierarchy of outcomes approach and involving three steps in a causal chain leading from immediate to intermediate and ultimate outcomes (see Figure 1 below). Key outputs and resources required to achieve the identified program outcomes were also identified. The hierarchy starts with 'needs' at the base, continues up to 'outputs/resources' (developed in response to 'needs'), building up to 'immediate outcomes' and 'intermediate outcomes', and finally to 'ultimate outcomes.' (see Figure 1) The priority need identified was the strengthening of "established neighbourhoods within the Penrith LGA that face significant disadvantage/inequity compared to other parts of the Penrith LGA" (Prior 2006, p. 2). The key outputs and resources identified included:

> Delivery plans being established for each … place-based initiative
> which indicated methods of implementation, review, evaluation, and
> planned exit strategy and the establishment of a partnership structure
> including community, agencies etc to adequately resource each
> initiative. (Prior 2006, p. 35)

Building on the priority needs and resources, the hierarchy of program outcomes identified by stakeholders started with the establishment of positive partnership structures for each place-based initiative to support a

bottom-up approach; through to strengthened communities within the target locality; and with the ultimate goal of developing structurally enduring community processes and mechanisms within the locality that can be supplemented by the council's broader suite of planning programs, and do not require ongoing high-level resourcing through the program.

The following goal for the program emerged from an understanding of the identified framework:

> A program of renewal that targets particular established neighbourhoods, develops positive partnerships, and builds on existing community strengths to redress disadvantage leading to a more sustainable [Penrith] LGA. (Prior 2006, p. 19)

A further step in the development of a formal program logic and framework involved incorporation of the hierarchy of outcomes approach into an evaluation framework (Prior 2006). The stakeholders had identified the lack of an official evaluation program or data collection measures for the existing program, the only existing review process being qualitative reporting prepared by steering groups set up for each of the place-based initiatives. Stakeholders saw formal evaluation as essential given the need to establish mechanisms that could measure the program's progress, to adjust the program's focus as communities changed, and to secure ongoing funding.

It was agreed that evaluation should commence from the outset of program activities and should be locally relevant, objective and independent, be adequately resourced, have clearly articulated and measurable objectives and recognisable spatial scales, have good baseline data, measure both short and long-term outcomes, and be able to take into account external influences as well as the impact of particular local initiatives. Given the complex nature of the program and its diverse objectives, both qualitative and quantitative approaches to evaluation were seen to be necessary. Whilst it was agreed that the evaluation model would rely in part on quantitative performance indicators measured against benchmarks established by baseline surveys and administrative data provided by both the council and other agency partners, this approach needed to be augmented by qualitative techniques to obtain more fine-grained data on the program's progress and processes, and to identify winners and losers.

This need for a mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches reflects the complexity of the task of assessing renewal outcomes at a hierarchy of levels to capture evidence of shifts not reducible to simple performance measures. Stakeholders also identified a need for the evaluation framework to focus on how and why programs worked in addition to measuring outcomes. It was the view that a focus solely on outcomes may reveal little about how the policy or program actually delivered the outcome, how well it delivered, or who actually benefited. Based on this mixed evaluation methodology the stakeholders formulated a draft program evaluation

framework. It was agreed that this draft framework would be further developed through its application to individual renewal projects within the Penrith LGA, but also to provide a basis for comparative evaluation across several place-based projects.

A supportive operational structure: 2006 - present
In establishing a supportive environment for the program, the development of the formal program framework identified in the previous section of this paper only represented half the equation for council. The second half was to ensure that the program framework could be supported within the council's operational structure, given that the council was to function as the program's driver or steward.

Lack of a supportive operational environment was identified as a key stumbling block within the early years of the program. The rigid organisational structures of council were seen to be impeding the innovative program delivery required to address disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The program had been the responsibility of one of council's functional areas: City Operations. The fulfilment of program goals was the responsibility of the director of City Operations in the first instance, and the day-to-day operation of the program was the responsibility of a series of council officers who were responsible for a variety of other tasks. Two key factors impeded the program's success: there was no direct allocation of officers who could pay adequate attention to the program, and it was placed within one functional area of council while related functions such as social planning were in another, thus limiting its ability to provide joined-up solutions.

Beyond the need for better resourcing for the program (made possible through the provision of a dedicated coordinator, consultation expert and enterprise worker) it was clear that the creation of a supportive operational environment required the dissolving of boundaries between functional service areas within the council's existing operational structure. The division of services into separate departments reinforced professional boundaries and impeded the implementation of joined-up solutions to delivering services to specific localities, which was the core task of the program.

At the time council turned its attention to creating a more supportive operational environment for the program, it was undergoing an internal reorganisation of its entire operational structure that was being driven by a range of issues. Firstly, by the emerging need within a variety of council's programs, not just the neighbourhood renewal program, for localised responses that required more joined-up solutions from within the council (e.g. integration of land use, economic and social planning). Secondly, by legislative changes, policies and directives of the NSW state government that enabled and called for local governments to transform their operational structures from traditional sectoral models to more integrated frameworks

(see for example Mant 2002; NSW Department of Local Government 2005). Council's solution for the transformation of its internal operational structure was through the formation of clusters[7], made up of place management teams composed of a range of council officers and managers from diverse areas of council in order to provide joined-up solutions to particular areas within the city (see Figure 1). The Neighbourhood Renewal Program was to be linked to the Established Areas cluster team focused on solutions to the management of older developed areas of the city (see Figure 1 below).

In determining the placement of the program within the council's proposed new operational framework, extensive discussions were generated within council regarding linkages between the particular focus of the program on disadvantage and broader issues affecting the established areas within the LGA. Whilst it was generally accepted that the intense level of coordination and focus that the program brought to severely disadvantaged neighbourhoods was not required in all of the established areas in the LGA, it was also agreed that there was a need to develop a related action planning process with a less intense focus than that of the program for other established neighbourhoods that did not need the same high level of intensive intervention. It was considered that many of the public domain, infrastructure maintenance and community development issues identified in established areas could be addressed through the development of this new Established Neighbourhoods Program action planning process. The Neighbourhood Renewal Program process would complement this broader program by bringing an additional level of more intensive coordination, including social and economic/employment development programs, to selected established areas which were identified as having the greatest need for such services (for details on this relationship see Figure 1 next page). Many of the principles adopted within the policy framework for the Neighbourhood Renewal Program action planning process, such as community engagement, were seen as transferable to the new Established Areas Program.

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[7] The cluster concept explicitly focuses on combining a diverse set of skills to address specific needs and therefore takes into account all those actors that have a role in addressing complex goals (e.g. maintaining and developing established areas). As the cluster concept captures all forms of knowledge sharing, it goes beyond and provides an alternative to a traditional sectoral approach. Cluster governance formations are noted for their ability to bring together groups with both complementary and dissimilar skills; to use those diverse skills to address shared needs and constraints; and to allow problems to be resolved through synergies and new combinations of resources.
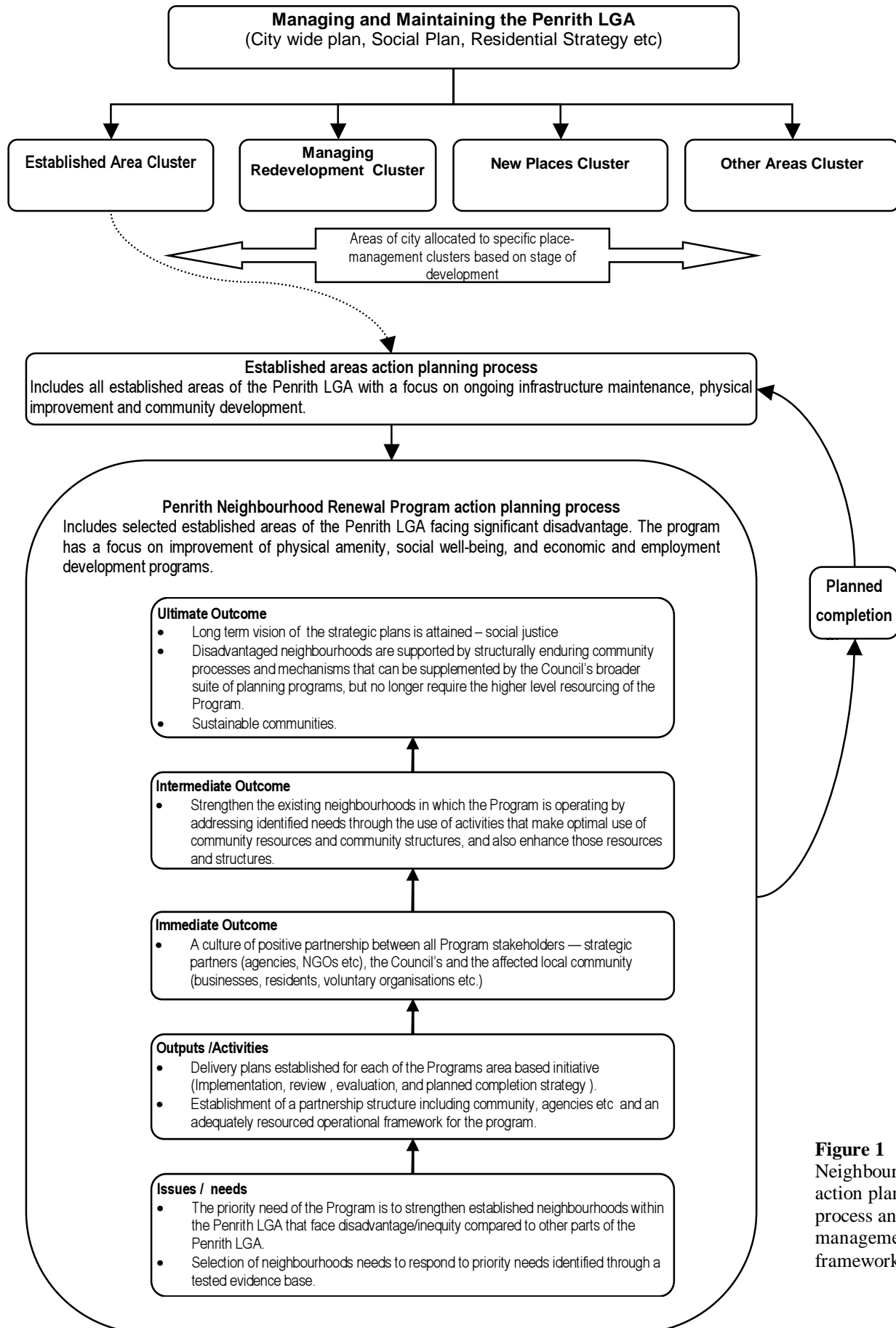
Managing and Maintaining the Penrith LGA
(City wide plan, Social Plan, Residential Strategy etc)

| Established Area Cluster | Managing Redevelopment Cluster | New Places Cluster | Other Areas Cluster |

Areas of city allocated to specific place-management clusters based on stage of development

Established areas action planning process
Includes all established areas of the Penrith LGA with a focus on ongoing infrastructure maintenance, physical improvement and community development.

Penrith Neighbourhood Renewal Program action planning process
Includes selected established areas of the Penrith LGA facing significant disadvantage. The program has a focus on improvement of physical amenity, social well-being, and economic and employment development programs.

Ultimate Outcome
- Long term vision of the strategic plans is attained – social justice
- Disadvantaged neighbourhoods are supported by structurally enduring community processes and mechanisms that can be supplemented by the Council's broader suite of planning programs, but no longer require the higher level resourcing of the Program.
- Sustainable communities.

Intermediate Outcome
- Strengthen the existing neighbourhoods in which the Program is operating by addressing identified needs through the use of activities that make optimal use of community resources and community structures, and also enhance those resources and structures.

Immediate Outcome
- A culture of positive partnership between all Program stakeholders — strategic partners (agencies, NGOs etc), the Council's and the affected local community (businesses, residents, voluntary organisations etc.)

Outputs /Activities
- Delivery plans established for each of the Programs area based initiative (Implementation, review , evaluation, and planned completion strategy).
- Establishment of a partnership structure including community, agencies etc and an adequately resourced operational framework for the program.

Issues / needs
- The priority need of the Program is to strengthen established neighbourhoods within the Penrith LGA that face disadvantage/inequity compared to other parts of the Penrith LGA.
- Selection of neighbourhoods needs to respond to priority needs identified through a tested evidence base.

Planned completion

Figure 1
Neighbourhood action planning process and place management framework

The Established Areas cluster team was established in late 2006. It comprised a core group of council representatives: the Community Development Manager, the proposed Neighbourhood Renewal Coordinator, the city's Asset Manager, the Local Economic Development Program Manager, the Local Planning Manager, the Corporate Development Manager and the Director of City Planning. It was agreed that other managers with important service and local infrastructure maintenance and development responsibilities pertaining to the city's established areas could be called on as required to participate in the team's planning activities. The structure of the cluster team was seen as providing a flexible yet formal operational platform that had several key advantages over the council's previous sectoral service structure, such as:

- a "greater opportunity for innovation" (Interview 12: Council) through knowledge sharing and interactive learning processes that were able to draw on a diverse set of skills;
- the opportunity to create joined-up solutions by overcoming the "hesitancy to cooperate that was entrenched in the council's previous operational structures" (Interview 10: Council); and,
- the opportunity to develop "efficiency and productivity" (Interview 8: Council) through the sharing of common technology, skills, and information.

Conclusion

This paper has investigated the emergence of policies and programs that have been developed to redress concentration of disadvantage in specific neighbourhoods of Australian cities. In particular it has explored the role that local government has played in the development of these initiatives. The paper began by providing an overview of the emerging policy and practice context that has been marked by a growing realisation of the complexity and diversity of factors that need to be addressed simultaneously to break the cycle of deprivation within disadvantaged neighbourhoods, the diversity of players that need to work together with these affected communities to address those factors, and recognition of the time that it takes to redress the disadvantage within such localities.

Within this rapidly developing policy and practice context local governments have been identified as potential drivers for renewal initiatives because of their control over physical and social planning at the local level, their awareness of local community needs and strengths, and their ability to integrate these to create responses to local issues. Through a case study the paper has showed how one local council, the City of Penrith, has taken up this challenge of creating, driving and developing an ambitious and innovative program – the Penrith Neighbourhood Renewal Program – to redress the multiple deprivation

faced by communities in certain disadvantaged neighbourhoods within its LGA. Drawing on the findings of an evaluation of the program that took place during 2004-2006, the case study provided insight into three key aspects of the program's history which have resulted in the program as it operates today: the emergence of the program as a key strategic focus for the council; the development of the program's integrated governance framework; and the creation of a supportive operational environment for the program within the council's organisation structure. In conclusion we reflect on these three key shifts and the challenges and barriers that were overcome.

The first part of the case study explored the way in which the program emerged as a result of a new local government Act and charter that challenged the council to think in new ways. This legislation along with other forces provided an impetus for the emergence of whole-of-community strategic planning processes within the council in the early 1990s, which in turn created a foundation for the development of longer-term strategies that were needed to redress multiple deprivation faced by populations within disadvantaged established neighbourhoods. Also, the council was able to commit to long-term funding for the Neighbourhood Renewal Program through a special 10-year rates levy.

The second part of the case study showed how stakeholders developed a clear program framework to overcome a range of internal barriers and constraints within the program that hampered its success. Concerns revolved around differing expectations and understandings of priorities, and the ability to carry through on commitments in the longer-term due to resourcing, funding and time limitations. A key factor in the development of a clearer framework for the program involved systematic identification of the program's logic. Whilst each area-based initiative was unique, stakeholders identified an overall logic that could be applied across the board. This was structured around a hierarchy of outcomes which began with the development of positive partnerships and community based planning, then built on community strengths through community development activities supported by physical improvements, with the ultimate aim of breaking the cycle of deprivation faced by communities within disadvantaged established neighbourhoods and creating what can notionally be called sustainable communities. This logic provided the foundation on which to build other elements of the new program framework such as clear selection criteria for target neighbourhoods, community based action planning and engagement, and an evaluation framework. The development of this structure has:

> ... enabled better communication/information sharing and partnership
> formations between communities, agencies and Penrith City Council

leading to more effective responsiveness, continuity and coordination at the level of local delivery. (Interview 5: Strategic Partner).

Whilst the first two parts of the case study examined how the program overcame structural and internal barriers, the final part explored the way in which it overcame bureaucratic barriers. It showed how the council's operational structure was transformed to create a supportive environment for the program by dismantling the silos and territoriality resulting from a long cultural history of sectoral service provision, and by introducing an operational framework based on clusters that accommodate the more flexible and integrated approaches to service delivery required within disadvantaged localities.

Although one size certainly does not fit all, the program developed by Penrith City Council in collaboration with its strategic partners and local communities offers a successful model that other councils might draw on as they develop their own approaches to addressing disadvantage. As one strategic partner noted:

> Council deserves recognition for this program. Council has created a program that has enabled not only council but its strategic partners to provide services in a more effective, productive, and innovative way to communities that really need help. The new program is clearly a success in my eyes (Interview 6: Strategic Partner).

However, in seeking to adapt and apply the Penrith model others should note carefully the following comment made by one council officer associated with the Neighbourhood Renewal Program throughout the last decade:

> The development of integrated programs like the Penrith Neighbourhood Renewal Program require a collaborative process and a willingness to change. The program that we have today was only made possible through dialogue, which takes time, and our willingness to accept and adjust to the domino effect of change that impacted right the way down into the way in which council operates (Interview 5: Strategic partner).

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