

Working Together to Reduce Poverty and Inequality

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Summing up

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General comments

- Congratulations
 - well prepared by both government and NGOs
 - worked very hard and very productively in short time
 - impressive level of cross departmental participation
 - very rich content
 - an important step forward
- Learning through experience
 - courage of people sharing personal experience
 - care and passion for other people's problems
 - conference a good way for policy makers to learn from experience of those experiencing poverty
 - opportunity for government departments to gain experience
- Reinforced the importance of:
 - Listening
 - being open and non defensive
 - Dialogue
 - complexity of some problems

Poverty in the UK

- Progress over 10 years
 - e.g. improved support for adult disabled to participate - some regeneration projects (Tower Hamlets) - some local strategic partnerships (Reading partnership) – support for children with special needs - improved child care - minimum wage – community training/employment initiatives (Action Community Employment in Northern Ireland) – health visitors (Glasgow) – Community First and Good Way project (Wales)
- Poverty still a harsh reality for too many
 - personal testimonies
 - link to inequality
 - “It isn’t acceptable in the 21st century and in modern day Britain”
- Lack of awareness and understanding
 - effective communication
- Ethnic minorities, refugees and asylum seekers
 - discrimination

Recurring themes: overall approach

- Holistic – comprehensive - joined up approach
 - (supporting families - regenerating communities - tackling crime- education – support in work – benefits and work)
 - both policy development and delivery
- Prevention
 - balance universal and targeted
 - early intervention
- Rights
- Ethnic minorities, refugees and asylum seekers
 - discrimination

Recurring themes: empowerment - partnership - participation

- Empowering people and communities
 - importance of community involvement (e.g. in tackling crime; in community regeneration; evaluate across 4 nations)
- Effective consultation
 - resource it
 - consult with all & don't ignore hard to reach (LGAs)
- Importance of partnership
 - involves trust and information sharing
- Importance of community and voluntary organisations
 - long term sustainable funding for community groups
 - more recognition of value of voluntary work to the individual and the community

Recurring themes: better delivery

- The gap between policy and reality - intention and delivery
 - Benefits and entitlements
- Information gaps
- Respect
 - value people
 - avoid stigmatising (families, children in school)
 - training and retaining staff (police, social services, teachers)
- Flexible and tailored approach
- Choice
- Urban – rural differences
- Learn from good practice

Families

- Prevention and early intervention
 - Don't only focus on families with multiple needs – also those on the margin
 - More proactive social services and better information
 - More family conference centres
- Whole family approach
- Support for men
- Support for refugee and asylum seeker families
- Home - school links
 - engage parents more in education
 - More resources for home link workers
- More support to families when children or adolescents are leaving care
- Need for Social Exclusion Task Force to look at how different communities represented in bottom 2-3%
- Housing critical
 - Reassess how housing benefit administered
 - Regulate private landlords and information to their tenants (also relevant to community regeneration)
 - Mortgage support
 - More social housing and ring fence money from sales
 - Better repairs

Communities

- Mixed communities approach
 - Varied views - Need to guarantee participation - Monitor
- Very varied experiences
- Learn from successful regeneration
 - Well paid quality work but also a comprehensive approach
 - Good Services (transport, education, health, social services)
 - Resources needed to increase quality and availability of housing stock (incl. social housing)
 - Enable people to achieve their aspirations
 - Involve planners so comprehensive approach
 - Regulate landlords: stop exploitation – esp. refugees/asylum seekers
 - Places for communities to get together and kids to hang out
 - Places for pensioners – counter isolation

Crime and policing

- Link with poverty and deprivation
 - Anti-social behaviour is a symptom of poverty
- Prevention and opportunity
 - Danger of tarring young people
 - Support not criminalise young people
 - More youth work and facilities
 - Don't forget the well-behaved poor kids
- More education
 - use people who have had drug or alcohol problems in schools
 - More education and skills development in prisons
- More engagement
 - Adopt a cop
 - Police on the street but trained for “softer” approach
 - Closer social services and police cooperation
- Treat causes not symptoms
 - Activities for children – especially 14-18s – that build self esteem and support parents
 - Whole package of measures – whole community approach
 - Community police and community support officers make a difference (but don't clock off at 5 or 10)

Education and Skills

- “do I have to be bad to get something”
- Ask the mums about primary school and the kids about secondary
- Detention of children whose parents are newcomers, asylum seekers refugees
 - more discretion to schools to support these children
- Additional costs leading to exclusion or self exclusion
 - Education is free but*
 - (e.g. trainers – school trips – uniform – food for home economics)
 - compulsory contingency fund for parents – uniform grants
 - Avoid stigma (e.g. school meals)
- More after-school activities and in holidays
- Poverty awareness training for teachers
- Importance of lifelong learning

Benefits & Work

- Problem of low rates – base support on average earnings
- Importance of voluntary work
 - can be more meaningful than a bad job
 - don't force people into poor jobs
 - Help people into work not harrass them into work
- Incentives to work – make work pay
- Poor delivery
 - processes too slow (seasonal and casual workers), cumbersome and complex
 - one form/single claim system to avoid delays
 - more flexibility
 - more inter-agency cooperation
 - more staff training
 - use community organisations more to support people
- Allow asylum seekers to work
- Specific schemes
 - Disability Living Allowance and how it relates to other benefits
 - Disregard carers allowance as income – “care for the carers”
 - Reduction in child maintenance grants (£1,000-£250)
 - Child benefit rates too low
 - Make lone parent fathers pay
 - Publicise that Child Support Agency payments are not means tested

Support in Work

- Inadequate information about tax credits and copy system
 - continuing fall out from over payments
 - improve and simplify forms
 - give examples people can relate to
 - share training and information across departments
 - involve community groups
 - HMRC come out of offices
 - train disabled staff to support people with disabilities through the system
 - use libraries and job centre plus
 - more continuity of staff and build relationships
 - More information about elements for disabled people working part-time and single people
- Unrealistic tax credit assessments
 - tax credits look at gross and should take into account what people actually have to spend
 - greater flexibility and “tailoring” of system
 - single under-25s with no child can’t access tax credit
 - child care element not taken into account for large families
- Fraud is focussed on too much
- Counter exploitation
 - enforce minimum wage
 - informal work - make employers responsible

Conclusions

- Better communication
- Value of the European dimension
 - Mutual learning (two-way)
 - PROGRESS
 - Model for other countries
 - EAPN
- Repeat the event