

UK NATIONAL ACTION PLAN - NATIONAL EVENT

17 MARCH 2008 - VOLUNTARY SECTOR RESOURCE CENTRE

HOLLOWAY ROAD

The aim of the seminar was to provide an opportunity for people experiencing poverty, academics and key stakeholders in Government, the European Commission and the voluntary and community sectors to share information and views regarding the National Action Plan on Social Exclusion (NAP).

Stephen Martin, DWP Group Director, welcomed everyone to the meeting, the focus of which would be “delivery through partnership”. He welcomed Michele Calandrino from the EU Commission, who would be presenting an overview of what is happening at European level to tackle poverty and social exclusion. He also welcomed Fran Bennett, UK independent expert on social inclusion (with Prof Jonathan Bradshaw) for the European Commission and Katherine Duffy, chair of the Social Policy Task Force. To help inform the thinking of the workshops, there would be a series of presentations highlighting successful delivery models and approaches.

Chris Burston went on to outline the 2006 NAP and the subsequent partnership working which has taken place with key stakeholders in working towards NAP 2008. This has included the formation of a NAP Stakeholder group with representatives from across local and national government, the voluntary and community sector and the grassroots. A conference of people experiencing poverty (PEP) in June 2007 broke new ground in stakeholder engagement in the UK. Chris outlined the timetable for taking forward work on the NAP as follows:

- Mid April - 1st draft to be submitted to Ministers
- May - Consultation in first draft and preparation of second draft
- June - Final draft ready for publication
- July/August - Ministerial clearance/typesetting
- September - publication and launch event

Michele Calandrino welcomed the opportunity to take part in the NAP event. He explained that the European social inclusion agenda runs in parallel with the broader EU agenda. The internal market requires a high degree of standardisation (for example in health and safety requirements) – in the same way a single European labour market requires a more even playing field for employers and workers so that labour movement between member states is based on economic criteria and not on a search to maximise benefit entitlement. The Commission has just completed a consultation on common principles across the EU in the areas which constitute the “active inclusion” agenda: minimum

income schemes (such as Income Support in the UK), policies which facilitate labour market engagement and Social services.

Michele explained that the UK “at risk of poverty” levels are similar to the average across the EU and that UK targeted policies are contributing to reducing the severity of poverty. He outlined the key aspects of the “Open Method of Co-ordination” by which member states can measure the success of their strategies for tackling poverty and social exclusion and share best practice. They are the commonly agreed indicators; common objectives and policy priorities; National Strategy reports; and the joint report on social protection and social inclusion. He indicated that for the OMC period 2008/2010, the key priorities would be:

- The social impact of migration
- Active Inclusion
- Homelessness and housing exclusion
- Access to quality services
- Intergenerational solidarity, child poverty and demography

Michele also outlined the importance of a vibrant local economy in tackling poverty and exclusion. He welcomed the focus of the day’s discussions on better governance and local delivery which encourages: social and economic regeneration; creation of jobs for the most disadvantaged; employment in deprived and peripheral areas; social services and assistance; and social and economic regeneration.

Fran Bennett presented an overview of progress since the 2006 NAP and outlined some challenges for the future.

- Difficult to evaluate progress on the poverty and inequality until the latest HBAI data becomes available, but was hoped that new policy measures introduced since the 2005/06 data would show a positive impact;
- Although UK employment rates exceed the Lisbon goals, rates did not increase in 2007;
- Health inequalities remain particularly stubborn;
- The issue of immigration is gaining increasing importance; and
- Increases in the price of food and fuel could make the fight to tackle poverty and exclusion more difficult in the future.

Policy developments included: an overall reduction in the number of Public Service Agreements (PSAs), but the welcome addition of a PSA on socially excluded adults; a new focus on youth in the child poverty agenda; the setting up of the new Equality and Human Rights Commission; and an increase in the level of conditionality for the receipt of benefits. It also seemed to be the case that the possibility of tax increases was off the agenda for all the political parties. Other developments included: an increasingly participatory approach through the establishment of a cross-government stakeholder group and the strongly

participatory approach demonstrated through the PEP conference and the Bridging the Policy Gap project.

Challenges for the 2008 NAP included:

- How to achieve adequate income levels and sustainable employment;
- Tackling the gap between the rhetoric and the reality on the child poverty agenda; and
- How to ensure policy follow-through on issues raised at the PEP conference and through the Bridging the Policy Gap project.

And the Government would be tackling all of this in a tighter economic and spending climate and strongly contested political priorities.

Katherine Duffy described her role through the Social Policy Task Force and EAPN as one of amplification of the voices of people experiencing poverty. She believed that a key achievement since 2006 had been the creation of the NAP stakeholder group, which had enhanced the level of dialogue between government and the third sector. Key policy achievements to date included: revised Housing Benefit Regulations (2001 NAP); child poverty (2003 NAP); Debt as a social exclusion issue (2006 NAP); and getting “in-work” poverty onto the NAP agenda. Areas which still needed to be addressed included: poverty proofing, the guarantee of an adequate income and the right to work for asylum seekers. More also needed to be done to engage with pensioners. Katherine also reminded us that 2010 had been designated as the European Year against poverty which presented many opportunities for raising the profile of the NAP and the Social Inclusion agenda.

There then followed two short presentations featuring successful local delivery strategies:

The London Borough of Newham has very high levels of disabled people and amongst this group a lower than average employment rate for disabled people. **Ann Lloyd and Carlen Finn** outlined the Newham strategy which aims to improve employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities by 50% in three years. Newham has taken the approach that creating employment opportunities for this group is a community responsibility and that providers, both national and local must play a role. A key provider, First Line, acts as co-ordinator. They have provided 550 people with employment advice and guidance since starting out in 1999 and over 193 have gone into paid employment.

But First Line cannot work in isolation and many other services need to be in place to ensure a successful work placement. Key workers ensure a linear process from initial discussion to final placement, to avoid being shuttled between different services and the “revolving door” experience of going from course to course, irrespective of relevance. Additionally, some candidates need

help with very basic necessities such as setting up a bank account before they start work and support with domestic issues once they have started work. These services are provided by a range of providers who form the Employment Task Group. The group includes Connexions, schools, employers, day service providers and the Access to Jobs team.

Sally Reynolds of Social Firms UK explained how Social Firms are creating employment opportunities for severely disadvantaged people within a thriving and successful market led business. To be a Social Firm, an organisation should adhere to the values of enterprise, employment and empowerment, whilst creating paid employment for a minimum of one quarter of the workforce who are severely disadvantaged and generating a market-led income of more than 50% of the total turnover. This is a growing sector in the UK with 67 existing and 70 emerging social firms. In 2006, 1652 full time employment posts were created, 52% of which are held by severely disadvantaged (mainly disabled) people. There were an average of 841 trainees benefiting from Social Firm activity each week. In 2007 the number of firms had increased to 151.

Debbie Carter outlined her role as co-ordinator for Working for Families within the Clackmannanshire council area. Working for Families is a Scottish Executive funding stream (£50 million for 2004 - 2008) allocated to a selection of local authorities based mainly on the number of children in households dependent on key workless benefits. The target is to support 15,000 parents from disadvantaged areas and groups entering or moving towards employment by removing childcare barriers.

Clare Cochrane outlined the intentions of "Gender Works", the EU funded trans national project which will be run by Oxfam. The project will work with socially excluded women in the UK, Italy and Austria. It will look at gender issues such as the gender pay gap to show how gender impacts on poverty.

Discussions following on from the presentations considered the local delivery of aspects of the anti poverty agenda, grouped under the headings: what works, what doesn't work and who is best placed to deliver services. A full transcript of the workshop outputs is attached in the Annex to this document. The key issues arising are outlined below.

What works?

Discussions concluded that good partnerships, where there is a clear understanding of roles, work well. Partnerships which include the VCS, education service and Jobcentre Plus tend to deliver successful outcomes. The partnership needs to include the person who is receiving services: a personalised framework is considered essential to a successful outcome, particularly for disabled people. The most successful outcomes occur where all aspects of a

persons situation are considered and dealt with simultaneously. Success is more likely where customers are participating as volunteers, rather than being coerced.

The need to engage with the community cannot be overstated and capacity building, where skills and expertise are lacking, is essential. It is important that decision making is local and that there is consultation with those who will be affected by initiatives, but often a push from central government is needed. The recognition of informal skills also helps to build confidence both for deliverers and service users (you don't need a degree to teach a skill). An effective dialogue between the community and public services ensures that services are appropriate and essential. Dissemination and shared learning is also important.

Jobcentre Plus was considered a good example of how shifting public attitude towards a service has led to it being viewed in a more positive light. Well trained personal advisers have also contributed to this. "Wheels to work", a scooter rental/purchase scheme to enable access to the workplace is a good example of a local initiative working successfully in Islington and Merseyside. Outreach programmes in rural areas and Link Age plus, the one-stop approach to services for older people were also cited as examples of good practice. The Social Exclusion Task Force participatory approach to tackling the problems of the most excluded adults was also welcomed.

The NAP user engagement model was cited as an example of working with service users, and Bridging the Policy Gap a good working model of better engagement with local government.

What doesn't work?

Partnerships which are not based on expertise or rigour or where it is not clear what the respective roles are tend not to be successful. Partnership at central government level is viewed as generally not working well, although it is hoped that the increase in cross-cutting Public Service Agreements may help to stimulate a more joined up approach. Delivery will not work where there is a lack of public sector engagement with providers.

Programmes based on incentivising delivery by numbers rather than dealing with real human beings are considered to be less likely to be successful. There is insufficient gender, equal opportunity and poverty proofing of government strategies and policies

Work is not always the best form of welfare where the work is so low paid that people are better off out of work. Long term planning is essential and funding needs to be sustained to ensure that projects continue to deliver and to be around for customers in the long term. Work placements should only be offered where there is a certainty of their becoming available. Withdrawal can lead to

great disappointment and confusion. There is often a lack of good and flexible child care, which is essential to parental involvement in the labour market.

A poor public transport infrastructure can make it difficult to access work and public services and to participate fully in society. It is also important to ensure that information is widely available on the concessions that are available to ensure take-up.

Increasing conditionality for work search activity to lone parents with children of seven years and over is considered to be a policy approach that will not work and is an example of a central government policy which is at odds with local delivery in the case of the Scottish Government's "Working for Families".

Who should be delivering services?

It was suggested that there needs to be a mapping exercise at government level to decide this. Central and local government policies often conflict, for example in the case of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and education: DCSF wants more GRT children to go to and stay in school, but local planning departments want to get rid of them. There should be more meaningful involvement of service users in delivery (for example in Jobcentre Plus and the Health Service) and in the commissioning and procurement of services.

The Government needs to own the national picture but solutions should be delivered by local experts and it is important that funding is available for this at street level, particularly in the most deprived areas. Central government departments should share intelligence and data in a more constructive way and more pressure should be brought to bear on Departments which are not delivering.

Social Firms are providing employment for people with disabilities, even in areas of high unemployment, and other types of social enterprise are also opening up opportunities within such communities. Local authorities can be partnership builders as well as employers and can act as a catalyst in encouraging local accountability. The media has a role to play in changing public attitudes in a positive rather than a negative way. Volunteering in an appropriate role can be a route to employment, building confidence and removing barriers.

Minister for Employment and Welfare Reform, Stephen Timms closed the conference. He welcomed the evidence of successful local initiatives that had been highlighted throughout the conference. Local implementation of policies will be key the success if the Government's plans for welfare reform. Whilst the UK has a great deal to be proud of in its strategy for welfare reform, there is still much which needs to be improved. Success would be seen as:

- the achievement of the 80% employment rate and the associated reduction in the number of families dependent on benefit;
- the eradication of child poverty by 2020 and having halved it by 2010; and
- a renewed consensus over the rights and responsibilities of the welfare contract.

He reviewed progress made since the Government came into office:

- 29.7 million in work, that's 3 million more than in 1997, and more than ever before in our history.
- 1 million more lone parents in work, a third of a million more than in 1997
- 600,000 less children at risk of poverty and the expectation of a million more children lifted out of poverty as a result of policies announced in the budget. This includes increases to Child Benefit, the Child Tax Credit and a new disregard to Housing and Council Tax benefit.
- A million less people are reliant on out of work benefits.

He also outlined the five key principles of welfare reform and gave examples of what the Government is doing:

A stronger framework of rights and responsibilities: From October Incapacity Benefit will be replaced, for new customers with the Employment and Support Allowance and a revised Work Capability Assessment, placing the emphasis on what a person with physical or mental health problems can do rather than what they cannot. Lone Parents with older children, who can work will have more support to look actively for work through Jobseekers Allowance.

A personalised and responsive approach, reforming employment and skills support to meet the needs of individuals better: From April 2009, a more flexible approach to job search will include a removal of the current age distinctions which currently apply in the New Deal and a gradual increase in the degree of support offered by Jobcentre Plus during the first 12 months of a claim. Over a billion pounds has been invested in Pathways to Work which will offer dedicated support to incapacity benefit customers.

Not just jobs, but jobs that offer opportunities for progression: Greater integration of the skills and employment systems will include: screening all new customers for basic numeracy, literacy and language needs; a mandatory skills health check for those in receipt of jobseekers allowance at the six month point; and the offer of a skills health check to lone parents on Income Support two years before that are due to lose their eligibility. Job Centre Plus will work closely

with the new *Adult Advancement and Careers Service* to give benefit customers ready access to skills advice and provision.

The public, private and third sectors will work together: The approach will be to personalise services, with providers focussing on the person in front of them and being paid by results. Providers will not be told what to do, but only held accountable for what they achieve and for success in getting people into lasting jobs. Jobcentre Plus will be at the heart of the system and good providers will have an incentive to deliver, with longer contracts and a growing market.

Targeting areas of high worklessness: Local partnerships are vital to tackling persistent concentrations of labour market disadvantage, which can be very localised, often within major cities and urban areas. The solution lies in using the expertise of local people and this approach is being used in the City Strategy Pathfinders which are working to increase employment and reduce social exclusion in some of the most disadvantaged communities.

Discussion Group 1

What works:

- Partnership working
- Targeting
- Sustained funding
- Personalised frameworks
- Creative working
- Variety
- Addressing multiple disadvantage
- Exploiting new PSA framework
- Recognising informal skills
- Engaging the community
- Capacity building the community
- Changing attitudes of public services (eg) ?Job Centre Plus
- Advice and Support at places of natural resource (eg migrants resource centre)
- Dialogue between community and public services
- Effective training for advisers
- Monitoring after placement
- Enjoyment not coercion

What doesn't work

- Partnership not based on expertise and rigour
- Partnership as the repression of mutual loathing
- Partnership where people don't acknowledge why they are there
- Different sectors set in their ways
- Partnership at Government level (between Departments)
- Community without skills to be empowered
- Incentives rather than dealing with human beings
- Too much emphasis on formal qualifications
- Unfulfilled expectations - eg where placement is withdrawn
- "Better off" out of work
- Fear and confusion over work placements
- Poor public transport infrastructure
- Lack of knowledge of transport concessions
- Inflexible childcare
- Work is not the only way out of poverty (low pay)
- Inflexible work preventing training
- Inadequate income
- One size does not fit all

- Conditionality is not the answer
- Lack of public sector engagement with providers
- Lack of long-term planning (10 years plus)
- Narrow geographical approach does not pick up diverse communities
- Barriers to employment (eg poor housing)
- System incentivises family breakdown

Who should deliver?

- All relevant partners - for example all the partners in the delivery of PSAs.
- Local providers need adequate funding
- Solutions should be delivered by local experts but Prime Contracting is marginalizing voluntary and community sector providers.
- Policy investment in neglected areas to promote local initiatives
- Pressure on Government Departments that don't deliver
- Media to be pressurised to change public attitudes
- Need to join up Government Departmental intelligence
- Government needs to own national picture
- How to make business case when benefit is elsewhere eg upstream?
- Focus on living wage eg Olympics

Child Poverty - Issues for NAP

- Complexity of childcare
- Government policy does not recognise the different position of the four nations.
- Lack of consistency across four nations
- Need for flexible employment - including care in home
- Limits of part-time employment
- Conflicting government objectives for example work v good parenting
- Women need a proper wage
- Parents sustaining work need payment subsidy for part time work
- Appreciation of parental absence from work to deal with child sickness
- "Wrap around" care must be paid for
- Importance of training for employment skills
- London's high cost of living
- Government's don't learn enough from successful projects (and keep funding more pilot projects)
- Work doesn't necessarily lead out of poverty - so parents must decide for the best (best interests of child might require parent at home for example neglected children into care)
- Piloting free school meals across the board
- Need for holistic approach

- Lack of synchronised school holidays puts pressure on parents and families
- Payment for family member in care roles for example grandparents/domestic labour
- Tightly knit families and financial help to allow parent(s) to go out to work
- Need to think more critically about “presumption of abuse” .
- Clients are parents first
- Domestic violence is not an outcome of poverty alone

Discussion Group 2

What is working?

Newham project:

- Importance of partnership with VCS, education services and Jobcentre Plus.
- Most decisions made locally but push from central government eg: Supporting People. Dissemination and shared learning is important
- Core funding for project from social services - issue re: whether they should find jobs
- Funding Issues

Rural Issues:

- Outreach in rural areas involving distances of 20 -30 miles
- Mini Sure Start in rural areas
- “Wheels to work” within 6 months you pay back the scooter - addresses transport issues
- Signposting with for example surgeries
- LinkAge Plus - one stop shop similar concept to Surestart but for older people

Children’s play strategy - Swansea

- Consulting with parents. What did they need? Strategy from Welsh Assembly - not much funding centrally.
- Focus on children with disability
- Question whether the local authority are talking about the “good work” they are doing.
- Social Exclusion Task Force - 400 socially excluded adults.

Not working?

- Lots of new priority policy areas - eg reducing lone parent conditionality to 7 years old.
- Lack of good practice examples

- In Denmark, “work as a route out of poverty” is guaranteed - but not in the UK.
- Conditionality can create divisions with local delivery, for example lone parent conditionality and work of “Working for families” .
- Education - Issue of white working class boys performance at school
- Breaking down the barriers, for example meeting people in the community such as going shopping with them as an opportunity to talk.
- Job retention: Reducing “revolving door” - making sure they are better off.
- Tackling cultural change - myth of people unable to get up for work?
- “Working for Families” has identified a problem with parents moving into low paid jobs especially in the child care sector. Level of pay is important.
- How far can welfare to work depend on the third sector.
- Evidence from SPAN three year project shows real problems with regard to retention.
- Need to look at adequacy of income in and out of work. There is a danger of only concentrating on work as a route out of poverty.
- There is an assumption that increasing conditionality reduces poverty, but it is questionable whether it is a positive thing incentivising work. It is often seen as a punishment.
- There is a risk of increasing pressure and stress on people experiencing poverty.

Discussion Group 3

Lone Parents into work (cuts across all four NAP objectives)

- Why does the NAP focus on Lone Parents? It is a group that has not been targeted positively.
- Statistical evidence shows that lone parent families are more likely to experience poverty.
- Lone parents feel like “scroungers” if they are not working, unlike non working mothers with partners.
- Does a child have a right to be cared for by one of its parents.
- A lot of lone parents end up working in the child care “industry” .
- Working lone parents feel guilty
- Working for Families is “tremendous” and should be rolled out across the UK.
- WFF sitter service allows children to be cared for at home whilst the parents are working.
- It is questionable whether work is a route out of poverty for lone parents. Work often low paid and cost of childcare prohibitive.
- Tax credits subsidise employers who pay low wages, for example service staff on the National Minimum Wage.

- Lone Parents and the disabled are a focus for the Government because of demographics and the 80% employment target.
- There are other benefits to working, for example social interaction and gaining skills and experience.
- If parents working, the family may be better off financially, but they do less together, for example play which is essential to a child's development.
- Low paid jobs are not leading to careers
- Working means loss of all benefits - and leads to big bills for example rent and council tax.
- People in low paid jobs cannot afford to rent property in the private sector.
- We need to develop European targets, for example on children's well being, to mitigate the potential negative effect of member states policies.
- If lone parents cannot make a choice about working or caring for their children, it is questionable whether the benefits system is a safety net.

Disability

Pathways

- DWP commissioning strategy for IB changes not helping the hardest to reach. More effort is being put into those easiest to help.
- There is a broad range of disabilities and no money/thought has been given to specific groups.
- Accessibility to be considered
- Transparency around service provision and decision making is often not good, for example with the Newham project.

ESA for new claimants

- In areas of deprivation and high unemployment, how can people come off benefits and in to work when the jobs are not there. There is a role for Social Firms here in creating jobs and social enterprise should be encouraged.
- Think of people not just in silos. There needs to be a transition period.
- The Community Allowance being proposed by CREATE could help to build local communities.
- The role of voluntary work needs to be supported.
- A small number of local providers is easier for administrative purposes, but can result in a lack of local trust.
- The practical implications of the policies are that there could be new companies in setting up in an area, leading to community regeneration.

Discussion Group 4

Who should be driving the agenda? There does not appear to be a top down approach

Working

- Older people's services - for example in Blackpool and Cheshire, but need more funding and mainstreaming.
- The NAP user engagement model, Get Heard, the Social Policy Task Force etc are good examples of working with service users.
- LA involvement is critical. Bridging the policy Gap is a good working model.

Not working

- The Children's agenda needs to be strengthened with work done by other partners.
- Ethnic Minorities - services should not be delivered in isolation - need to be more joined up and targeted.
- There needs to be meaningful involvement of service users in delivery, for example in Jobcentre Plus and the Health Service.
- The cost of engagement is very high for the voluntary sector and goes virtually unrecognised, as opposed to the recognition given to paid consultants.
- There is more joined up working at central government level.
- Gypsy and Traveller issues - NAP initiatives should be new - not old or existing policies.
- There needs to be more proofing of gender, equal opportunities and poverty at National Government level.
- There needs to be a mapping exercise of policies to facilitate better joined up thinking at policy level. For example, the DCSF wants to get more gypsy children into schools, but often the local authority planning department wants to get rid of them.
- There needs to be more user involvement in the commissioning and procurement of services - particularly women's groups.
- Refugees need to have access to quality services such as education, benefits and children's services and specialist organisations are better placed to respond to their needs.
- There is a lack of affordable childcare for all age groups and for sufficient numbers of hours, and especially during the school holidays. There are problems when the child is sick unless the employer is very flexible.

- There needs to be more quality advice given to parents who have been unemployed long term who may have low levels of confidence and ongoing caring responsibilities for children or elderly relatives.
- The quality of advice given by Jobcentre Plus advisers is variable and inconsistent.

Problems for local delivery partners:

- The emphasis is profit driven because they are output/target driven.
- Payment in arrears based on outcomes results on serious cash flow problems for small organisations and can lead to them entering into debt and foreclosure.
- Voluntary organisations need to keep unit costs down and to do this they have to reduce employment costs. This results in them employing less well qualified staff or reducing staff terms and conditions of employment.
- The voluntary sector in delivering public services may be in danger of losing its independent critical voice.
- DWP needs to make links with the office of the third sector.
- There is no anti-poverty strategy in Northern Ireland and the NI Assembly won't support the only anti poverty organisation that exists.
- Structures encourage competitiveness between organisations, rather than partnership.
- There needs to be an acknowledgement that targeting the hard to reach costs more. Specialist services need to be engaged that have more expertise than generic organisations.