

Annex 2.8

Bridging the Policy Gap

8.1 Bridging the Policy Gap – What was done

1. The *Bridging the Policy Gap* project was developed by a number of key stakeholders from local and central government and from the voluntary sector. Most of these stakeholders have been involved in the implementation of the EU social inclusion process in the UK, and have experience of raising awareness of and promoting engagement in the development of the UK's National Action Plan (NAP) on Social Inclusion 2006-08. Most notably some had been involved in the *Get Heard* project which had attempted to involve those with experience of poverty in the development of the UK NAP Inclusion. The *Get Heard* project had been very successful at engaging a very broad range of people with experience of poverty in a very wide range of issues related to poverty and social exclusion. The *Bridging the Policy Gap* project builds on this success by deepening the dialogue between people with experience of poverty and national and (crucially) local policy makers through the examination of key examples of policies aimed at tackling social exclusion. In doing so, the partners hoped to not only contribute to the development of the next UK NAP on Social Inclusion, but also to develop a model on how to link the local to the national experience more effectively.

2. In order to create a participatory evaluation of the implementation of key aspects of social inclusion policy the BTPG project organised three 'Peer Reviews' events, with preparatory and feedback meetings, during September and October 2007. These two day assessment events each focused on the implementation of particular policies or strategies, in different parts of the UK – one in Wales, England and Scotland. Peer reviews are events often used in the European policy context to better understand how and why particular policies work. The 'peers' who attend these events are composed of a range of people with expertise in the policy area, for example, those in government (local or national) who helped develop the policy, those responsible for its implementation, or academics who have carried out research in the area. The Peer Reviews that were at the heart of the *Bridging the Policy Gap* project included another important 'peer' – the people who had direct experience of the impact the policy, who were the intended beneficiaries. The inclusion of these voices was a crucial element in the project and transformed it from being only about understanding why particular policies are successful, or not, to providing an approach to further developing the participation of those with experience of poverty and social exclusion in the analysis and evaluation of 'what works' – and for whom – and what else should be done.

3. The policies under review were selected by the project Reference Group, which was made up of representatives from the UK Government, devolved Government, local authorities, voluntary organisations and people with direct experience of poverty and social exclusion. The Reference Group set criteria to guide the selection of the policies or strategies to be reviewed. The overarching aim was that for a policy to be considered for review, it had

to fit within one of the four themes of the UK NAP Inclusion: eliminating child poverty, increasing labour market participation, improving access to quality services and tackling discrimination.

If it did then the following additional criteria were considered:

- Has the policy or initiative undergone an evaluation (formal or informal) that has determined it to be 'successful'?
- Where does the policy/initiative fall in the strategic hierarchy of the organisation? Strategic or operational?
- What is the scale or impact of the initiative?
- Does the initiative engage with the devolved government?
- Does the initiative involve other partners or agencies?
- Is there a participatory element already in place for the initiative?
- Innovative/Alternative/Unconventional – is the policy/initiative trying to do something differently?

4. Whilst the Reference Group determined that it would be useful to look at policies that were regarded as 'successful' it was important that in the focus in the Peer Reviews should be on what those with experience of social exclusion considered to be 'success'. Using these criteria as a guide the following policies and strategies were selected for peer review in the following three local authorities:

8.2 City and Council of Swansea

5. The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) launched its Play Policy in 2002. This was part of their overall approach to tackling child poverty, which identified issues around income, participation and services. The City and County of Swansea developed a Play Strategy in 2003 which was developed to ensure people understood the importance of play in society, and in particular, to child development. In this field, Swansea is in advance of most UK local authorities in having a strategy and policy in place.

The principles upon which the policy was based are:

- All children and young people within the Swansea area have the right to high quality, accessible and resourced play opportunities.
- It is essential that children and young people within Swansea are consulted on and involved in all key decisions relating to play.
- Staffed, Open Access Community Based Play should be seen as a key component in developing quality play opportunities locally.

- It is vital that the importance of play is recognised and that all parties take responsibility for advocating this.

6. The Peer review provided an opportunity to assess the implementation of the 'local' play strategy and its impact upon children that were living in poverty or were socially excluded. The Reference Group decided that the Play Strategy was a good candidate for Peer Review as it fitted with both the child poverty and access to quality services areas of the UK NAP. In addition the City and County of Swansea were also conducting a review of the strategy, to which the Peer Review would contribute.

8.3 London Borough of Newham

7. The Newham Peer Review focused on improving employment opportunities for disabled people.

8. In 2006 Newham Council launched its Routes to Employment review to explore how, and with what impact, the Council can improve employment opportunities for disabled people:

- To identify the individual needs of disabled people and to determine their barriers to progression into employment.
- To match and relate identified needs to current provision within Newham.
- To consider options for development/reconfiguration of current services to meet identified needs and gaps.

9. The Routes to Employment review was chosen as the focus of the Newham Peer Review as it provided an opportunity for national as well as local policy and services to be examined. The theme related to two aspects of the UK National Action Plan: increasing labour market participation and tackling discrimination.

8.4 Glasgow City Council

10. The Peer Review in Glasgow reviewed the Working for Families Fund (WFF), a Scottish Government initiative designed to tackle poverty by improving employment and employability outcomes for disadvantaged parents. Specifically, the fund aims to break down childcare and other barriers preventing parents from accessing opportunities and progressing towards, into, or within employment, education or training. The aims of this project are closely aligned with the UK Government aim of eradicating child poverty by 2020 and the European Inclusion strategy aim of making a decisive impact on poverty by 2010. WFF has been operating in Glasgow since 2003, with the current round of funding due for completion in March 2008.

11. Again, this policy was considered appropriate for Peer Review as it fitted under both the 'eliminating child poverty' and 'increasing labour market

participation' priorities of the UK NAP Inclusion. There was also a particularly close fit with some of the key goals of the project in terms of linking with the local implementation of policies that were developed at the devolved or UK level.

8.5 Policy Objectives

Policy Objective 1: Eliminating Child Poverty

12. Glasgow's Working for Families Fund aptly demonstrates the potential of employability programs to lift families out of poverty in a sustainable way. It also showed the positive impact that parents returning to education or entering a new career can have on the aspirations and self-confidence of their children. It was undisputable that the success of this programme lay in long-term, individualised support programs that were highly tailored to the needs of the client and their family delivered by a well-informed and highly committed team of workers.

13. Gaps were found with regards to life-long learning, participants were clear that they felt they deserved more than one chance at an education. Many of the parents who participated were keen to return to higher education in an effort to increase future earning potential but were prevented from doing so because of inadequate childcare funding.

14. The Swansea Peer Review highlighted an issue that has, to some extent been overlooked, in the development of child poverty policy. Whilst increasing income should be at the heart of the strategy to tackle child poverty, the Peer Review event in Swansea reminds us that the quality of a child's life is determined by a range of factors. The evidence from the parents in Swansea highlights that child poverty for them was about far more than low income. If child poverty is about more than just low income, then delivering improvements to the lives of poor children will be more than simply the responsibility of the UK Government. The issue of 'play' has highlighted the significant contribution that other parts of government, particularly local government, has to play in improving the well-being of children from low income families.

Policy Objective 2: Increasing Labour Market Participation

15. Many of the issues facing disabled people in Newham were very similar to the issues faced by lone parents in Glasgow. However there were unique issues facing disabled people who were frustrated by inadequate information, society's low aspirations for them and the general ignorance amongst the general public about their lifestyle and capabilities.

16. Excellent government policies were failing to have an impact simply because people did not know about them. Participants were wary of employability services whose purpose was to place them in 'a job' rather than support them towards their own career and the benefits this can bring in terms of self-respect and financial independence. The focus of employability work

and the education system should be on the individual needs, aspirations and abilities of the disabled person. Employability work needs to recognise that these may differ from the needs and aspirations of the parents, carers or support workers that will also be involved in the life of a disabled person.

Policy Objective 3: Improving Access to Quality Services

17. The decision of where to locate a service was viewed as critical to successful service delivery. In all three peer reviews there was a strong sense that services needed to be located near those that they were aimed at. Locally provided services allowed users to feel comfortable with the setting, improved accessibility and improved the ability of the service to respond to the needs of the local community.

18. Government efforts to engage people in decision-making processes must continue and improve. Improved governance in this area requires improved awareness of government policy. Policy making and implementation can be enhanced through engaging those people impacted by a policy but there is a need to reach beyond the typical public sector audience and bring in the key stakeholders from all sectors: community, grassroots, private and voluntary.

19. Shared ownership between the community and the local authority can help improve the delivery of services but can only be achieved as a result of genuine, early and ongoing consultation and community engagement in the decision-making process.

Policy Objective 4: Tackling Discrimination

20. Whilst there was much discussion about the attitudes of employers towards the employment of disabled people, it was clear that these attitudes could not be viewed in isolation from general public. Many participants in the Peer Review in Newham suggested that the biggest barrier of all was the attitudes of the general public, employers and employees.

21. A 'sea change' in attitude was required before disabled people could expect open access to the job market and to career development. Participants believe that Government remains responsible to lead that change.

10.6 Cross-cutting Lessons

22. This section highlights the importance of funding, political support and partnership working to all policies that seek to eradicate poverty and social exclusion in modern day Britain. Consultation was viewed by participants as the backbone of community support. Proper consultation could improve policies and their implementation, ensure resources were allocated efficiently and could ensure popular support (thereby increasing the chance of political support) and ensure the sustainability of the policy.

8.7 Governance: Lessons in Participation in Policy Making

23. BTPG has demonstrated the value of engaging people who are directly affected by policies and enabling them to play a greater role in the evaluation of those policies. It has also developed a tool for enhancing dialogue between local and national government on important aspects of social inclusion policy, ensuring that the local experience can influence national policy. This section sets out what we learnt about this process during BTPG.

8.8 Concluding Statement

24. Over a 12 month period around 300 people engaged with Bridging the Policy Gap in an effort to improve local services and contribute to the development of policies tackling poverty and social exclusion across the United Kingdom. The project has produced a number of lessons for policy at both the local and national level. Perhaps the most important findings have been that communities have a strong desire to be involved in government policy processes, they have innate understandings of the issues confronting them, and they believe that the government cannot solve these issues without them.

8.9 Summary of Key Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The key worker model enables one-to-one support to help individuals return to training or the labour market. The long term, holistic approach of the WFF model in Glasgow should be considered as a template for employability programs across the UK.

Recommendation 2

The flexibility of the WFF model allows workers to tailor their support and services to the individual, considering their needs and the needs of their families. The WFF culture encourages this individualised approach and the funding arrangements allow it. This approach should be integrated into more employability programs across the UK

Recommendation 3

Whilst conditionality and compulsion within the welfare system is increasing it is important for government policy makers to be aware that the voluntary nature of WFF encouraged individuals to engage with the programme. Individuals were more comfortable engaging with WFF because they knew they wouldn't be coerced or 'pushed' into an inappropriate job and that they could set their own pace.

Recommendation 4

There is an urgent need to address issues confronting parents under the age of 19. The needs of this group are not being addressed in a holistic manner,

the consequence of which is many young mothers falling into poverty because they feel unable to return to education, training or employment following the birth of their child. Central, devolved and local governments need to work together to improve the opportunities and outcomes of this group.

Recommendation 5

If education is to be a genuinely life-long opportunity then childcare funding for people with children undertaking education must be well-resourced and available to all. National and local government must work with educational institutions to reduce the complexity of funding support for childcare.

Recommendation 6

Both local and national policies designed to help people back into sustainable employment should have clear strategies to engage employers. These strategies should include information and awareness raising elements to ensure that employers can access the support and advice they need.

Recommendation 7

All public sector organisations should be accredited by the Two Ticks Scheme. Consideration should also be given to requiring public sector contractors to be registered under the Two Ticks Scheme. This could become a standard requirement in public sector procurement contracts

Recommendation 8

Participants felt the education system does not adequately prepare disabled people for a career. It was felt that the education system as a whole should play a stronger role in increasing the options of young disabled people, and there should be a more explicit focus on career opportunities for all pupils.

Recommendation 9

A long-term view is required when helping hard-to-reach individuals back to the job market. Short-term targets are understandable in a privatised welfare market but may fail to lift someone out of poverty or may simply begin a cycle of short term employment followed by a return to welfare. The focus of employability services should be: firstly to find suitable jobs and rewarding careers for clients, and secondly to provide ongoing support to the individual to ensure the position is sustainable.

Recommendation 10

Low aspiration is a major barrier preventing disabled people from considering having a career. Aspiration of individual disabled people is an issue but there is also a need to address levels of aspiration amongst those who care and provide services for disabled people: parents, carers, teachers, health services and employers, as well as service providers such as Jobcentre Plus.

Recommendation 11

A good communication plan should be an integral part of any new initiative or policy, whether it is being delivered by local government, the voluntary sector or a private sector provider. However, when such developments are targeting

disabled people, particular care must be given to communication and how it will reach its target audience.

Recommendation 12

Funding to support disabled people to undertake longer courses of study should form part of any government initiative designed to enable disabled people return to work.

Recommendation 13

The location of services should be carefully considered. In all three peer reviews there was a strong sense that services needed to be located near those that they are aimed at. Locally provided services or services based in existing community facilities allowed users to feel comfortable with the setting, improved accessibility (in all locations, but particularly important when the service is aimed at disabled people who struggle to use public transport) and improved responsiveness to the needs of the local community.

Recommendation 14

Awareness of strategy documents amongst relevant actors in the public, private and voluntary sectors should be a priority of those interested in improving public services. Consultation can be used to improve public awareness and encourage 'shared ownership' of strategies.

Recommendation 15

An inclusive strategy requires minority needs to be explicitly recognised. In Swansea this required that play activities and facilities for children with a range of abilities ought to be visible in the development of the strategy so that they can be – and seen to be – openly debated and included.

Recommendation 16

Consideration should be given to the creation of more dedicated 'Two Tick' Officers within Job Centre Plus. The posts could be within regional offices or alternatively centrally located with the objective of targeting head offices of larger employers across the UK.

Recommendation 17

A 'sea change' in attitude was required before disabled people could expect open access to the job market and to career development. Participants believe that Government remains responsible to lead that change.

Recommendation 18

In preparing for the next NAP Inclusion (post 2008) the UK Government should support the implementation of a number of Peer Reviews on key policies to combat poverty and social exclusion. These Peer Reviews should be seen as an additional tool to supplement more traditional forms of evidence gathering and evaluation. Crucially, these Peer Reviews must ensure the active engagement of people with experience of poverty from the outset.