



# **Getting Social Inclusion into the new Local Authority Corporate Plans (2010-2014)**

**A position paper prepared as part of the Formative Evaluation  
of the Local Government Social Inclusion Units**

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## 1. Introduction

Local authorities have a clear role in relation to promotion of social inclusion through:

1. The provision of services accessible to all and particularly to those who are excluded.
2. The provision of services designed to counter disadvantage e.g., housing and accommodation services.
3. Working with others to tackle exclusion.

Local authorities are required to produce Corporate Plans every five years in accordance with Section 134 of the Local Government Act 2001. Local elections are scheduled to take place in 2009 and as such each local authority will be required to put a new Corporate Plan (1010-2014) in place for the end of 2009.

The structure and content of the current Corporate Plans (2005-2009) was determined by guidelines endorsed by the Minister (Circular LG14/04) and prepared by the Customer Service Group. Among the key recommendations of the guidelines included:

- *The need for the plan to be prepared on an inclusive basis*
- *The need to frame the objectives for the five years within the context of the operating environment and resources available to deliver on the objectives which in turn will influence the extent to which the objectives are achievable.*
- *The need to identify a limited number of strategic objectives to be delivered over the five years, with the objectives to be translated into more detailed supporting strategies and activities to be identified in Annual Operational Plans*
- *The need to prepare an Annual Operational Plan for each year of the Corporate Plans which will spell out in more details the activities to be undertaken by different service areas to deliver on the Corporate Plan objectives*
- *The need to put reporting arrangements in place to ensure that progress on the implementation of the Corporate Plan is monitored on an annual basis*

### **From a social inclusion perspective the Guidelines recommended that**

- *Social inclusion is identified as one of a number of cross cutting themes to be reflected in the Corporate Plan.*
- *A cross-departmental team is involved in the drafting process to ensure that cross-cutting issues such as social inclusion are properly taken account of in the plan.*

It seems likely that these recommendations will be applied and may even be strengthened further in the Guidelines for the new Corporate Planning process to commence in 2009.

## **2. The Treatment of Social Inclusion in the Current Corporate Plans (2005-2009)**

A Combat Poverty (Walsh, 2005) review of the 2005-2009 Corporate Plans and Year 1 Annual Operational Plans Studies found that the current Plans:

- Involved extensive consultations with local authority staff
- Were developed and progressed through the establishment of broad based working groups (with staff from the majority of pilot local authority social inclusion units included as members of these groups)
- Consultation with elected members was more limited and the extent and nature of external consultations varied substantially between local authorities
- Had no common format for the plans making comparison between the plans of different local authorities difficult.
- While the majority were structured around the different local authority functional areas, a much smaller number were structured around a number of key themes/goals/principle activities/the work of the Strategic Policy Committees.
- Had no common approach to the monitoring of the Plans Some local authorities planned to link their reviews of their plan to PMDS and quarterly reviews while others intended to track progress using computer systems and annual reports to elected members

The review found social inclusion/inclusion identified as a cross cutting issue/core value in almost all local authorities Corporate Plans for 2005-2009. In some plans there was a cross over between inclusion and equality/diversity related activity. Some local authorities also included a specific section on social inclusion within the Plan. The local authorities with a Pilot Social Inclusion Unit generally also had a section on the work of the Units, while they and others had sections on the implementation of the RAPID Programmes in their areas.

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS), the more recent Irish National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP/inclusion), the NAPS target groups (and particularly people with disabilities), engagement with the local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network and the Development of a local Anti-Poverty Strategy/Strategies were also variously mentioned by a number of local authorities particularly in the context of the operating environment for the Corporate Plan. Interestingly, few if any of the Corporate Plans provide any detail on how or where the work of the local authority is influenced by NAP/inclusion.

Social inclusion was also found to have been named as a core value, a core objective, an objective, a key principle/a guiding principle, a strategic priority within the different Corporate Plans. It was also the case that the elimination of poverty was frequently linked to equality and to a commitment to the principle of equality. Moving from the rhetoric of social inclusion to the identification and implementation of practical actions to promote and support inclusion was more challenging for many local authorities, in terms of the moving from high level social inclusion objectives to the identification of practical actions for inclusion in the Annual Operational Programmes.

Interestingly the review found that where the Corporate Plans were structured around thematic rather than functional areas social inclusion objectives and actions were more evenly spread and visible across the variety of local authority functions. Social inclusion objectives and actions were also found to be particularly visible in the eight local authorities that had social inclusion units.

This study also perhaps not surprisingly found that certain functional areas, such as Housing, Community and Enterprise, and Libraries had a very visible social inclusion focus to their work. There was however a number of examples of where functional areas with less obvious social inclusion focus had include social inclusion strategies and actions. There were examples in some Plans of accessibility being addressed in the strategies of IT, Parks and Recreation and a small number of Roads Departments, while a small number of Human Resource Departments looked at the issue of inclusion in relation to staff and staff recruitment.

The study concluded that there were at least four levels of embedding of social inclusion in local authorities Corporate Plans as follows:

1. Very limited mention of social inclusion
2. Social Inclusion identified as a core objective/value (with visible evidence of positive social inclusion action in the more obvious areas of Housing, Community and Enterprise (RAPID etc.)
3. Social inclusion identified as a core objective/value and translated into objectives in a range of key areas (these are generally the most obvious areas of Housing/RAPID libraries and where they exist, sections on social inclusion).
4. Social inclusion as a core objective, translated into objectives across the majority of areas of the Plan (Six out of seven local authorities identified in this category had a Pilot Social Inclusion Unit).

### **3. Getting Social Inclusion into the new 2010-2014 Corporate Plans**

It is interesting that local authorities that had pilot social inclusion Units were generally found to have been more successful at getting social inclusion identified as a core Plan objective and translated into objectives across the majority of areas of the Plan.

Studying the work of the Social Inclusion Units that were engaged in the last round of corporate planning and reviewing the plans of the current Units who have identified (in the context of their 2009 work programmes) how they plan to feed into the development of the new plans has enabled the identification of a number of key issues for embedding social inclusion across the new Corporate Plans as follows:

#### **The Planning and Plan Development Process**

- The need for the establishment of broad based Corporate Plan working group. Staff from the social inclusion units where they exist should be included as members of these groups. In local authorities where there is no social inclusion unit, a staff member (with a good knowledge of social inclusion issues) should be given the responsibility for the social inclusion brief on the working group.
- Members of the Corporate Plan working group need to receive some social inclusion training. The purpose of this training would be to increase their levels of understanding of social inclusion in terms of what it is that constitutes inclusion and exclusion and what actions can be taken in a local authority context to promote it particularly in areas/sections that would not traditionally be associated with tackling poverty.
- A senior staff member needs to be identified in each Directorate as the Social Inclusion Contact Person. Where necessary they should receive social inclusion training. The task of this individual would be to facilitate others with their directorate to consider how the impact of their work could be enhanced to promote greater levels social inclusion. This person could assist in ensuring that the social inclusion impact of their Directorate is both visible and actionable within the Corporate Plan. In local authorities where Social Inclusion Units exist this individual could work closely with the SIU as part of this process

#### **The Format and Content of the Plan**

- Corporate Plans could be structured around both functional and a number of cross cutting thematic areas thus ensuring that social inclusion objectives and actions are visible across the variety of local authority functional areas.
- Where data exists on the nature and extent of social exclusion within local authority areas this should be provided to and used by the Corporate Plan working group to identify and explain why particular geographical areas or indeed target groups are

being targeted for support by a local authority. For example electoral area<sup>1</sup> census data can show up pockets of disadvantage within what might be considered relatively affluent or middle class areas. The inputting of this type of information into the corporate planning process could in turn result in the increased targeting of local authority supports and services within particular areas.

### **Clear Recognition of the Role and Importance of the Plan as a tool to promote social inclusion**

- The Corporate Plans needs to recognised by local authorities and others as a tool to support the implementation and roll out of NAP/inclusion at a local level and as such be linked with the key themes and actions and life cycle approach used in NAP/inclusion.

### **Turning the Corporate Plan into Action**

- Clearer and more direct linkages need to be made between the content of the Corporate Plan and the various operational plans that cascade from it. The Combat Poverty 2005 Review of the last round of Corporate Plans and Year 1 Annual Operational Plans found very limited connection between the two. A number of local authorities have since been working to address this gap and in some cases have introduced a standard organisation wide format to be used for all Operational Plans. Other initiatives introduced to make clearer linkages between the plans have included the allocation of responsibility for this to a senior staff member. Social inclusion unit staff need to become involved in monitoring the various Operational Plans in terms of the treatment of social inclusion and the extent to which the social inclusion objectives detailed in the Corporate Plan are 1) translated into actions 2) implemented within the Operational Plans.
- Poverty Impact Assessments<sup>2</sup> undertaken prior to the finalisation and implementation of a selection of Operational Plans would add value. In local authorities where Social Inclusion Units exist this work could be undertaken by the different relevant Directorates with the input of the SIU. In order to support and facilitate a better understanding of social inclusion is embedded across all sections of the organisation it would be useful for the Units or staff member responsible for social inclusion to support the implementation of at least one poverty impact assessment within each local authority each section.
- The development and use of appropriate social inclusion indicators (both general and local authority specific in nature) similar to the existing Service Indicators in the Corporate Planning processes would strengthen the cross cutting nature of social inclusion and the role of the Units. An example of a corporate level social inclusion

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<sup>1</sup> Electoral Areas (EA's) are the smallest area for which data is available, they generally consist of about 350 households.

<sup>2</sup> National Poverty Impact Assessment Guidelines are available and have been adapted for local use. These are available from Combat Poverty and the Officer for Social Inclusion. They can be located as section 7 of the Combat Poverty Guide to developing a Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy and at [http://www.socialinclusion.ie/documents/PIAGuidelineswithnewEU-SILCfigures\\_000.pdf](http://www.socialinclusion.ie/documents/PIAGuidelineswithnewEU-SILCfigures_000.pdf) respectively

type indicator would be the percentage of total local authority staff attending poverty/equality/diversity training, while an example of a specific section's social inclusion indicator would be the percentage of the total City/County Councils Non National Roads budget spent on works addressing the needs of Vulnerable Road users<sup>3</sup> (e.g. tactile paving, dished kerbs, etc.). Examples of other section specific social inclusion type indicators can be found in the 2005 study commissioned by Combat Poverty on 'The Development of Local Social Inclusion Indicators for Local Authorities'.

- Social inclusion needs to be more clearly linked into the PMDS process. It is important therefore that the Sponsor, the individual nominated within the local authority to oversee the implementation of PMDS has a clear understanding of the role of their local authority in the promotion of social inclusion. Other actions that would clearly link social inclusion to the PMDS would involve the inclusion of a specific objective relating to the implementation of the organisation wide social inclusion strategy in the Performance Related Award Scheme for senior staff. Each team within the PMDS process could also be required to identify at least one team specific social inclusion focused Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for use in the PMDS process. This would provide a very practical way of ensuring that social inclusion is the responsibility of all sections of the local authority. The Social Inclusion Units where they exist could assist the various teams identify their key social inclusion indicator and could also provide the social inclusion awareness training required for the Sponsor and others.

### **Monitoring the Plan**

- The Corporate Plans are reviewed on an annual basis and new Operational Plans are produced annually. A clear structure needs to be put in place (with the involvement of the Social Inclusion Units where they exist in a local authority) to ensure that the social inclusion elements of the Corporate Plan and associated Operational Plans are regularly monitored. To facilitate this process responsibility for the task could be given to a designated staff member, who in turn would link regularly with the Corporate Planning group.

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<sup>3</sup> Vulnerable Road Users would include: disabled people: older people, children, mothers with small children, etc.