

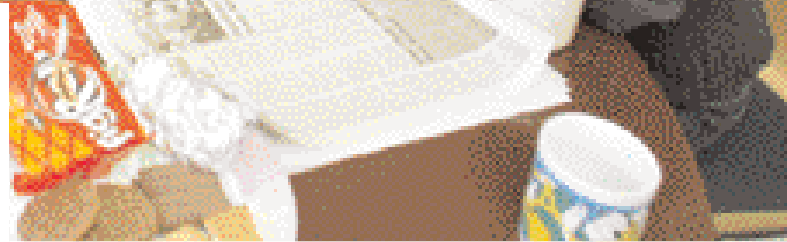
to build a fair
and inclusive
society

 **Combat Poverty
Agency** *working for a
poverty-free Ireland*

SOCIAL INCLUSION UNITS IN LOCAL AUTHORITIES

GOING FORWARD - THE LESSONS LEARNED

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Introduction

The Combat Poverty Agency works to assist in 'strengthening the capacity of local government to tackle poverty as part of the wider process of local government reform'. It supports local authorities to embed the National Anti-Poverty Strategy in local authority actions and policy. As part of this work Combat Poverty commissioned a mid term review of the Local Government Pilot Social Inclusion Units Initiative during 2004. This brief draws on the findings of that review to identify some of the key learning in relation to embedding social inclusion as a core objective and operating principle of local authorities.

Local Authorities and Social Inclusion

The revised National Anti Poverty Strategy (NAPS) *Building an Inclusive Society* states that building an inclusive society is the key priority of the government. Responsibility for implementation of NAPS and the more recent National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAPS/incl) requires actions across a number of different levels: (national, regional and local).

The key objective of the NAPS/incl is:

to build a fair and inclusive society and ensure that people have the resources and opportunities to live a life with dignity and have access to the quality public services that underpin life chances and experiences

Local authorities are specifically named in the context of the implementation of the NAPS. The multi-dimensional nature of poverty and social inclusion requires action across a range of functions and policy areas within local authorities beyond the traditional role of local authorities as providers of social housing. This was the context within which the Pilot Local Authority Social Inclusion Units Initiative in association with the RAPID Strand 1 Programme was launched.

Local Government Pilot Social Inclusion Units

The eight Pilot Social Inclusion Units (SIUs) were established in 2001 for a three year period. They were seen as a mechanism for embedding the National Anti-Poverty Strategy in local authority actions, policies and initiatives and for developing a strong anti-poverty focus within local government practice and policy. The Units are typically responsible for the co-ordination of policy and action and their activities are focused around the achievement of twelve objectives.

The Programme was funded by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Each Unit was given a basic funding allocation of IR£75,000 (€95,250) with additional funding allocated based on the number of RAPID areas and the population base within each local authority area. Units were established in local authorities where there were RAPID Strand 1 Programmes (Cork City Council, Limerick City Council, Dublin City Council, Waterford City Council, Louth Local Authorities, Wicklow County Council, Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown Council and South Dublin County Council).

The Units consist of a Social Inclusion Officer and an Analyst and are generally headed up by the Director of Community and Enterprise. The Pilot Social Inclusion Units Initiative is an important development as it is the first time that dedicated staff and resources have been allocated to the process of embedding social inclusion within local authorities. It is the first time local authorities have been provided with dedicated technical support. The appointment of the post of Analyst also marks the first time that the majority of the local authorities had this kind of research and analytical skills available to them.

The Units have made progress in the process of embedding social inclusion. However, the extent to which this has happened varies. The experiences and learning generated by the Units in their work also has a resonance and a relevance to other local authorities working to progress the social inclusion agenda. This briefing aims to highlight some of the learning generated by the Pilot SIUs for the purposes of sharing this learning with other local interested authorities.

The Three Stages in Embedding Social Inclusion

The challenge is to embed social inclusion as a core objective and operating principle that permeates the way local authorities work. This process of embedding social inclusion within local authorities can be seen as a three stage process¹:

Stage 1. Generating a commitment to social inclusion across the local authority

Stage 2. Broadening and embedding the commitment to social inclusion across the authority, through the development of a clear strategic approach to social inclusion, backed up by monitoring and performance management systems and through a range of initiatives

Stage 3. Embedding social inclusion in local authority policies and strategies so that local authority actions promote social inclusion and generate positive outcomes for those who are excluded.

The learning generated by the Units is examined under these three themes.

¹ Geddes, M & Newman I (2002) *How Local Authorities can Make a Difference: Benchmarking Best Practice*. Local Authorities and Social Exclusion Network. Report 10, Local Government Information Unit, London.

In their work with local authorities in the UK they identified a three stage process for change within local authorities that perhaps provides a useful structure to examine the work and progress of the Units.

Learning from the Local Government Pilot Social Inclusion Units Initiative

STAGE 1. GENERATING COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL INCLUSION ACROSS THE LOCAL AUTHORITY

Identify Social Inclusion Activities

Local authorities do a lot of work that could be considered as social inclusion work but is not currently identified as such.

Local authorities need to clarify what is meant by the term social inclusion in the context of their work and the work of the different sections of their local authority.

Take Small Steps

Many of the Social Inclusion Units experienced resistance to their work at a variety of levels and for a number of reasons, particularly in the early stages of their establishment. Local authority staff queried the function of the Units and the role of local authorities as social inclusion agents fearing that this role would add to their burden. There was a fear that the Units were going to police the implementation of social inclusion actions. In practice the Units adopted a supportive and facilitative role. A lot of time and energy was spent in the initial stages in building personal relationships and networking with individuals within different sections in the local authority. The Units used small scale projects as a way of introducing social inclusion type activities to local authority staff. This proved to be a successful method for convincing staff that the adoption of socially inclusive approaches would result in better service delivery.





Use small scale projects as a way of introducing social inclusion type activities to local authority staff and as a method for convincing staff that the adoption of socially inclusive approaches will result in better service delivery.

Information Provision/Research/Analysis

The absence of readily accessible and usable information on the levels and extent of social exclusion within local authority areas is a serious issue. A number of very useful reviews and reports that may provide a good model for other local authorities included in this work have been produced by the Social Inclusion Units. These include:

- A Profile of Households Accommodated by Dublin City Council in 2001
- A Social Profile of County Louth
- A Profile of Households Accommodated by Dundalk Town Council
- A Review of the Limerick City Council Rent Schemes
- A Poverty Proofing Review of the Differential Rent Scheme by South Dublin County Council

Undertake analysis of existing schemes and programmes funded by your local authority (using the SIU studies as a framework) to access their inclusiveness.



Social Inclusion Training

A number of the SIUs sourced and provided a range of social inclusion type training for local authority staff. This training was useful in that it raised levels of awareness of what constitutes inclusion and of what practical ways local authority staff can apply a social inclusion focus. For example, Dublin City Council provided racial awareness training while Wicklow County Council provided specific training for its planners and for planners in neighbouring local authorities. Training was also provided by Louth County Council for front-line reception staff who are the often the first point of contact for local authority service users.

Consider providing local authority staff with social inclusion training (using the different types of training provided by the SIUs as a starting point). The provision of specific tailored training for front line local authority staff should be prioritised.

Proofing Local Authority Actions

Many local authorities have become more familiar with the concept of poverty proofing through the requirement to proof the ten year County Development Board Strategy. The Social Inclusion Units have concentrated on proofing within their own local authority. They found that proofing and making local authority actions more socially inclusive was easier in some functional areas than in others. For example, it was generally easier in housing and planning than it was in either roads and transport, or water and sewerage. Progress has been made, however, by many of the Units in different areas and there is now a body of knowledge within the various SIUs that could be shared with others.

Consider establishing a system for proofing local authority actions. This could be linked to the development of a Social Inclusion Audit (See Stage 2).



Developing Poverty Profiles

Some of the Units have begun the process of developing local poverty profiles for neighbourhoods within their local authority areas. An example of this is the County Poverty Profile which was undertaken by the South Dublin County Council Social Inclusion Unit. The absence of readily accessible data, disaggregated at a sufficiently local level, makes this process slow and time consuming.

Local authorities should consider developing detailed poverty profiles for one to two small localised areas.

Raise Awareness of Social Inclusion at Elected Member Level

One of the key issues raised by the work of the pilot SIUs is the need to engage elected members in the process of embedding social inclusion within the organisation. The Units contact with elected members has largely been limited to occasional/one off presentations to the Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs). Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown raised the profile

of social inclusion with their elected members through the production of a statistics pack and others achieved this through occasional presentations to Strategic Policy Committees and through information booklets.

Strengthen the awareness and commitment of elected members to social inclusion type activities by using:

- Short presentations to Strategic Policy Committees on what constitutes social inclusion for local authorities
- Information booklets (The Unit in Limerick produced a booklet on Asylum Seekers and Refugees. Louth Unit produced booklets on 1) what social inclusion means and 2) disability awareness. Dublin City Unit produced a Directory of Services for people with disabilities while the Waterford City Unit compiled a Youth Directory and a Directory of Services for their tenants.)
- Social inclusion awareness training and additional supports for elected members
- A Member's Forum on social inclusion

STAGE 2. BROADEN THE COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL INCLUSION ACROSS THE AUTHORITY THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CLEAR STRATEGIC APPROACH TO SOCIAL INCLUSION, BACKED UP BY MONITORING AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS AND THROUGH A RANGE OF INITIATIVES.

A Cross-Departmental Social Inclusion Steering Committee

Local authorities have, in the past, tended to operate in a vertical fashion. These old and often hierarchical ways of working are one of the biggest challenges for the social inclusion agenda and the work of the Units. The establishment of cross departmental social inclusion steering committees by the majority of the Units has been seen as an important mechanism for progressing the social inclusion agenda. These generally involve a range of individuals from different levels across the organisation. (This has also occurred in a number of local authorities that do not have a dedicated SIU.) These committees can take responsibility for the development of the social inclusion strategy for the whole organisation. The

success of these structures depends on the commitment and priority given to supporting these structures by senior management, in terms of the appointment of the correct combination of individuals from a range of levels across the local authority. A committee was established in South Dublin County Council in April 2003 and has met every month since.

Establish a Cross-Departmental Social Inclusion Steering Committee to embed the social inclusion agenda across the local authority and as a vehicle for progressing the development of a whole organisation social inclusion strategy.





An Audit of Social Inclusion Activities and Development of a Social Inclusion Action Plan

Many of the Units are in the process of undertaking an audit of social inclusion activities. This has been found to be important in terms of identifying the nature and extent of social inclusion activities currently being undertaken in the various different sections within a local authority. Participation in the audit has also served to make local authority staff more aware of the social inclusion dimensions of their work and the work of their particular section.

The Units are using the findings of these Audits to develop a social inclusion action plan for their local authority. Responsibility for implementing the actions rests with the relevant individual sections of the local authorities. Embedding social inclusion requires a 'whole organisation type approach', with every department and section taking on responsibility for embedding social inclusion within their actions, activities and processes.

The Unit in Cork City completed an internal social inclusion audit and from this developed a social inclusion action plan which provides a mechanism for ensuring the integration of social inclusion

actions across the local authority. Audits of social inclusion activities were also carried out in Louth, Limerick and Dublin City. Critical to the potential success of this approach is that responsibility for the implementation of the actions rests with the relevant section within the local authority and not the SIU.

Local authorities should consider undertaking an Audit of Social Inclusion and the development of a Social Inclusion Strategy. The Social Inclusion strategy should:

- **Be area-based and issue/service based**
- **Contain details of all of the different strategies used to embed social inclusion**
- **Provide a structure within which it is possible to monitor progress, identify challenges and evaluate outcomes**
- **Include clear objectives, action areas, priority outcomes and annual action plan targets for each section within the authority**

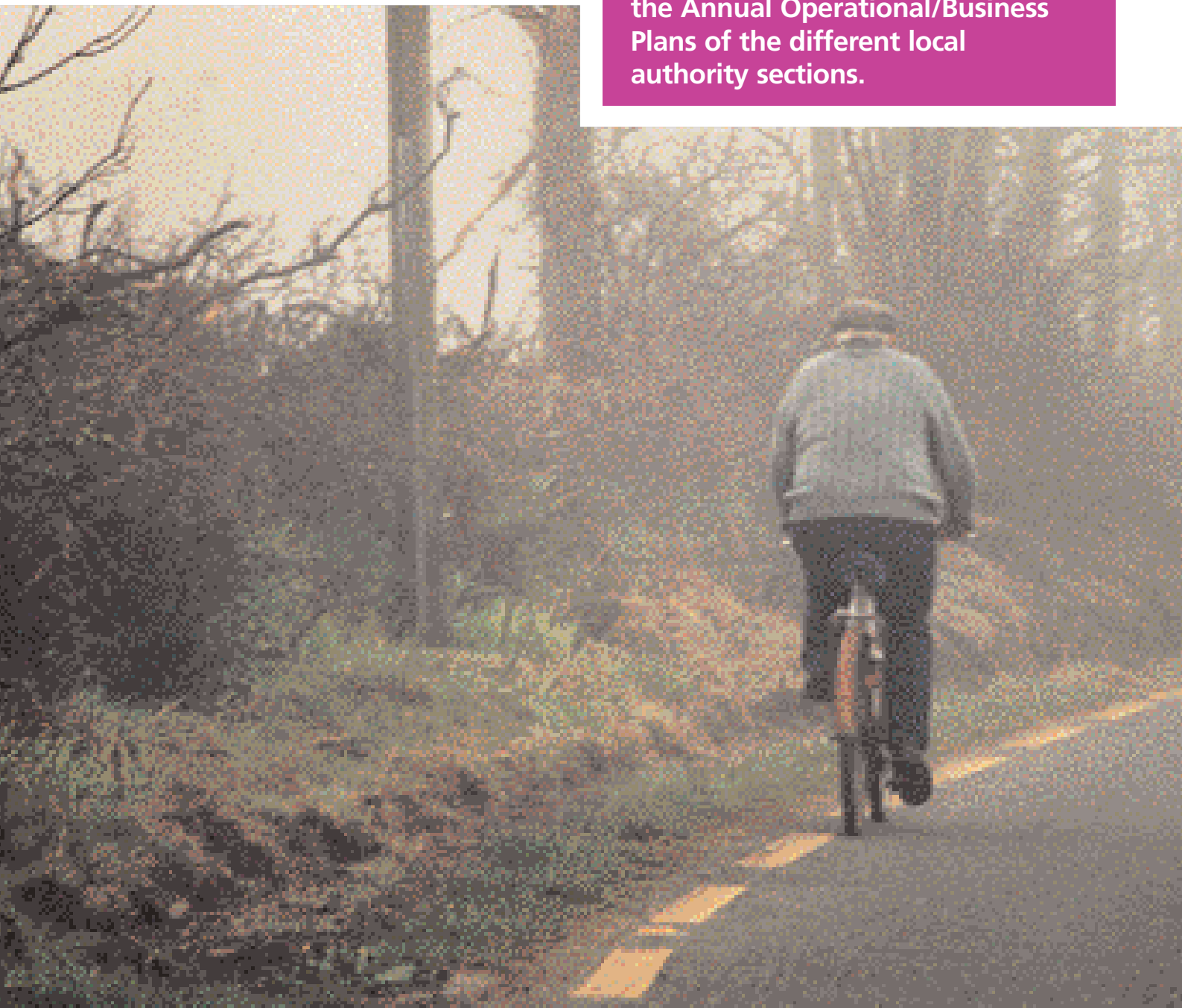
The Annual Operational/Business Plans

Some of the Units are feeding social inclusion objectives, activities and processes into the development of the Annual Operational/Business plans for different sections within their local authorities.

The absence in some local authorities of a clear, structured and systematic process for the development of Annual Operational/Business Plan makes feeding social inclusion actions into these plans more complex. Some Units have been successful in working with the various sections and Directors of Services on their Annual Operational/Business Plans. Successful initiatives include the following:

- In Wicklow the Unit was involved in the preparation of a new chapter on community for inclusion in the County Development Plan, as well as poverty proofing the entire Plan.
- In Waterford the Unit has worked to support the integration of positive social inclusion actions within a number of internal committees which focus on a number of local authority housing estates.
- In South Dublin County the Unit worked closely with the Planning Department to ensure that social inclusion is threaded through the County Development Plan 2004-2010.

Seek to feed social inclusion actions into the development of the Annual Operational/Business Plans of the different local authority sections.



STAGE 3. LOCAL AUTHORITY POLICIES, STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS PROMOTE SOCIAL INCLUSION AND GENERATE POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR THOSE WHO ARE EXCLUDED.

The Corporate Plans

At a strategic level the Units have all recognised the need to get social inclusion written into their Corporate Plans and many have sought to become actively involved on the smaller working groups responsible for the development of the new Plan. The integration of social inclusion across the Corporate Plan is a key method of ensuring that social inclusion considerations will be mainstreamed into local authority corporate policies. The Cork Unit, for example, integrated their Social Inclusion Audit and Action Plan within the Corporate Plan and in South Dublin County Council the Unit was a member of the team who developed the new Corporate Plan 2004-2009.

Seek to get social inclusion written into the Corporate Plans as a cross cutting objective (linked to NAPS) and as an activity across all the various sections of the local authority

Monitoring Progress/Changes/Enhanced Services

The Units have identified a need for the development of formal social inclusion success criteria/key indicators for local authorities with a distinction made between activity and outcomes. These indicators should be linked to the general Performance Management and Development Systems and Service Indicators being developed by individual local authorities. These indicators also need to be linked to the National Anti-Poverty Strategy targets and objectives. Examples of where connections between the NAPS targets and local targets could be made include good estate management (with tenant involvement), enhanced neighbourhood amenities, more playgrounds, etc.

Local Authorities seek to track and monitor their progress in relation to social inclusion using a number of key social inclusion indicators.

The Role of Senior Management

The experience of the Pilot Social Inclusion Units has been that the commitment of senior management is critical to ensuring that social inclusion is embedded within local authorities. Making social inclusion a mandatory activity within the Performance Management Bonus System for County Managers and Directors of Services would strengthen the local authority social inclusion agenda.

Recognise the critical role Directors of Service in particular, can play in raising social inclusion as a regular agenda item at senior management team meetings. Find mechanisms to reward Senior Management who undertake positive action/s to progress and champion the social inclusion agenda within their local authority.



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