

The Network Newsletter: tackling social exclusion in libraries, museums, archives and galleries

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The Network's Website is at www.seapn.org.uk and includes information on courses, good practice, specific socially excluded groups, as well as the newsletter archive.

Reaching out: an action plan on social exclusion

Introduction

As you may have seen, the Cabinet Office has just published their Action Plan¹ for tackling social exclusion. This is a major new document, so here is a 'special issue' of the Newsletter devoted to it.

Action Plan contents

The document has four main sections:

1. Introduction – which includes the Executive Summary
2. "A renewed approach" – which looks at the issue and context, and guiding principles
3. "A lifetime approach" – which looks at early years; childhood and teenage years; and adult years
4. The future – next steps.

There is also a grid of policy actions, and a list of the members of the Social Exclusion Task Force.

Section 1: Introduction

The Introduction briefly sets the scene: within a society that is seeing general economic growth and increasing prosperity,

¹ *Reaching out: an action plan on social exclusion*. Cabinet Office, 2006. Available to download as a pdf (1.22 Mb) from: http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social_exclusion_task_force/documents/reaching_out/reaching_out_full.pdf.

“... the persistent and deep-seated exclusion of a small minority stands out even more starkly.” [para 1.3, p8]

The Action Plan goes on to state:

“Some might ask why this agenda is still important, particularly against a background of general success. The Government’s view is that it is precisely because of those successes that it is vital to do more. No civilised country should ignore the plight of the most excluded in society and no one should be shut off from the opportunities, choices and options in life which most of us take for granted. We know that once people are given the opportunity to excel, they often do ... It is this commitment to opportunity which is the driving force behind the policies set out in this Action Plan.” [para 1.7, p8]

Section 2: A renewed approach – The issue and context

Chapter 2 looks at the changes that have occurred (eg levels of absolute and relative poverty falling), and the drivers for this, which include growth in employment, improvements in educational attainment, and reforms to the tax and benefits system.

However, against this positive backdrop, there are some people who have been left behind:

- “Those on the very lowest incomes have seen the lowest rates of income growth” [para 2.11, p17]
- “Despite improvements in average educational attainment, some groups continue to underachieve. For example, 33.3 per cent of black Caribbean boys achieved five GCSEs at A* to C compared with a national average of 55 per cent.”² [para 2.12, p17]
- “... at any one time as many as 11 per cent of 16–18-year-olds are not in education, employment or training (NEET) ... This figure has remained broadly static for over 10 years.”³ [para 2.12, p17]
- Whilst employment rates are rising, “there are a few exceptions to this general trend” [para 2.13, p17], including people with no qualifications and people with moderate to severe mental illness
- “Longitudinal surveys ... have revealed a small proportion of people who experience particularly deep and persistent problems throughout their lifetimes.” [para 2.16, p17] These problems include “alcohol and drug misuse, educational failure, contact with the police, early sexual activity and/or mental health problems.” [para 2.16, p18]

² Source quoted as: DfES *Statistical release: achievements at GCSE and equivalents for pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2005, for local authorities, by ethnicity.*

³ Source quoted as: DfES *Statistical release: participation in education, training and employment by 16-18-year-olds in England: 2003/2004.*

At the same time, there is an increased “potential to help ... identify warning signs early” [para2.17, p18], leading to intervention at an early age and intervention at the early stages of onset [box 2.2, p19].

The chapter concludes by reiterating the need to reach the most excluded.

Section 2: A renewed approach – Guiding principles

Chapter 3 identifies the guiding principles for the new approach, summarised as:

“There are five guiding principles that will mark our approach to people experiencing, or at risk of, severe social exclusion:

1. **Better identification and early intervention.** We will develop and promote better prediction tools for use on the front line, and will seek to ensure that those identified as being ‘at risk’ are followed up.

2. **Identifying what works.** A code of practice for high-quality evaluation, to approve and rate intervention programmes, will be developed. Highly rated programmes, will be given channels to highlight blockages to delivery. We will also strengthen the capability of commissioners of services and we will explore the role of a Centre for Excellence in Children’s and Family Services, which would identify, evaluate and disseminate what works.

3. **Multi-agency working.** We will strengthen the role of Local Area Agreements, publish information about the cross-agency costs of social exclusion, and explore how to extend information sharing between agencies in relation to the most excluded groups.

4. **Personalisation, rights and responsibilities.** We will build on existing pilots and explore budget-holding lead practitioners and brokers, extending tariffs for delivery of particular outcomes, and will encourage practitioners to agree explicit ‘compacts’ with at-risk families and individuals.

5. **Supporting achievement and managing underperformance.** We will work across government to ensure that the next generation of Public Service Agreements adequately address the needs of the most excluded and invite radical proposals from innovative local areas. We will explore in the Local Government White Paper how to strengthen performance management, with a clear ladder of intervention around underachieving provision, while giving effective service providers more room to innovate.” [p21]

This chapter leads to most of the Action points, which are pulled together here:

ACTION 1: The Government will explore the potential of the new research by the Institute of Education to build an identification tool for practitioners.

ACTION 2: By April 2007, the Government will begin trials of a new evidence-based assessment tool for use by community midwives and health visitors to improve targeting and support. These will be evaluated as part of the health-led parenting support demonstration projects.

ACTION 3: The Government will explore how to ensure that those identified as being at risk are followed up, including at later critical life stages.

ACTION 4: The Social Exclusion Task Force and the Government Social Research Unit will work with key stakeholders across Whitehall and beyond to develop and promote a code of practice and common rating of high quality evaluations of programmes.

In addition, the Government will explore how to simplify the existing infrastructure in relation to spreading best practice. In particular we will consider the case for a Centre of Excellence for Children's and Family Services, building on or situated within existing organisations.

ACTION 5: The Government will ensure that approved and rated programmes, be they by third sector or innovative public or private sector providers offering services to other areas, have clear channels to highlight blockages to best-practice delivery. For example, failures could be drawn to the attention of Local Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Audit Commission.

ACTION 6: The Government will continue to strengthen and support the capability of commissioners of services. We are examining how commissioning can be strengthened in central and local government and will publish proposals in due course.

ACTION 7: The Government will strengthen the role of Local Area Agreements in the forthcoming Local Government White Paper, with the Social Exclusion Task Force working closely with DCLG and other departments to ensure that these changes will help drive forward improved multi-agency working around the most socially excluded.

ACTION 8: The Government will promote increased transparency of the downstream costs associated with social exclusion. Wherever possible, this will be done by publishing simple, area-based information about per capita spending on key costs. This information can then be used by local service providers to strike innovative deals for better, and more cost-effective, service provision.

ACTION 9: The Government will explore how to extend data sharing in relation to the most excluded or at-risk groups, including any additional powers that may be necessary.

ACTION 10: Using the lessons from the pilots on budget-holding lead professionals, we will explore whether, and how, to extend the funds held by lead professionals. In particular we will consider how portions of budgets used for mainstream services could be applied to lead professionals' budgets.

ACTION 11: The Government will explore extending tariffs, paid to service providers and reflecting social costs, for delivering particular outcomes in relation to those with multiple problems and at risk of a lifetime of exclusion.

ACTION 12: The Government will continue to actively encourage a rights and responsibilities approach to service delivery, encouraging service providers, individual brokers and lead practitioners to agree clear and explicit divisions of responsibility with clients.

ACTION 13: The Task Force will work closely with the Treasury and other government departments to ensure that the next generation of Public Service Agreements address the unique challenges of the most socially excluded.

ACTION 14: The Government will explore how to strengthen our performance management regime, with a clear ladder of intervention for the most excluded around underperforming provision, while leaving good local statutory services alone. The forthcoming Local Government White Paper will consider how the local government performance framework might evolve to continue to drive genuine service improvements, and how to deal with cases of underperformance.

ACTION 15: The Task Force will explore alternative composite measures of social exclusion that can be used by the Government to monitor progress and to focus targeted intervention and support.

Section 3: A lifetime approach – Early Years

Again, this chapter summarises the advances that have already taken place (eg establishment of Sure Start; new duties in the Childcare Act 2006), and outline the continuing challenges which include:

- "... the intended universal nature of [support to families with children] is incomplete. In some areas, the families with the greatest need do not always benefit as much as they should from the support available. The 'inverse care law' suggests that those with the greatest need or at greatest risk are sometimes the least likely to receive the services they need. Indeed, there are some children's and family services where redressing the inverse care law has proven difficult." [para 4.11, p49]
- "Public services struggle to support very high-need families because such families are typically harder to reach and harder to engage. More advantaged families are often the most likely to ask for help, while those with more complex problems may not know that help is available

or may even actively decline it. If their needs are not met then the services cannot be regarded as genuinely universal.” [para4.12, p49]

To overcome these barriers, the Action Plan recommends intensive early, health-led support for families most at risk, eg building on the Nurse-Family Partnership model, where there is “a structured programme of home visits by trained nurses during pregnancy and the first two years (targeted at disadvantaged families).” [box 4.1, p52]

The challenges will also be met by:

- Further training for health visitors and midwives
- Developing the National Academy for Parenting Professionals
- Increasing joint working between PCTs and local authorities
- Earlier intervention and greater emphasis on prevention.

Section 3: A lifetime approach – Childhood and Teenage Years

Improvements have included driving up educational attainment; joining up children’s services; increased child protection.

In addition, the Government has begun to put together a series of programmes to tackle childhood problems at their root, with a new focus on parenting; projects to address anti-social behaviour and offending; and the extension of measures to try to reach “the small minority of parents who refuse offers of support” [para 5.13, p62].

The Action Plan identifies the key challenges and underlying barriers to delivering services for vulnerable and disadvantaged children:

- Intervening too late
- Variable and ineffective practice
- The need for greater multi-agency working
- More personalisation of provision
- The need for improvements to performance management.

It identifies that these challenges will be met as follows:

- Children in care: “The Government will publish a Green Paper on children in care in October 2006, which will set out proposals to narrow the gap between the outcomes of children in care and other children, and will include proposals on individual budget holding for children in care” [Action 18, p65]. This Green Paper “will offer a robust analysis as to why the outcomes for children in care remain poor and propose actions to improve these outcomes, covering:
 - early intervention;
 - placement quality;
 - getting the best from school;
 - positive activities and other services outside school; and

- support while making the transition to adulthood.” [para 5.22, p65]
- Teenage pregnancy: there will be an updated Teenage Pregnancy Strategy which will focus particularly on:
 - “disengagement from/dislike of school among those most at risk;
 - low attendance/attainment at school;
 - lack of aspiration among young people in the most disadvantaged communities;
 - poor knowledge and skills among young people in relation to sex, relationships and sexual health risks, in particular on developing the confidence to resist pressure to engage in
 - early sexual activity;
 - poor and inconsistent contraceptive use among sexually active young people; and
 - lack of support for parents and professionals on how best to discuss relationships, sex, and sexual health issues with young people.” [para 5.27, p66]
- Children and young people with mental health problems: the Government intends “to test different interventions for tackling mental health problems in childhood ...” [Action 20, p67]
- Families: “By summer 2007 the Government will review and consult on how well services aimed at at-risk children and adults are working together on the ground. We will identify any further actions or powers that are needed to deliver a coherent whole-family approach for those most in need of help, challenge and support.” [Action 21, p67]

Section 3: A lifetime approach – Adult Years

Chapter 6 looks at the needs of adults “at risk of, or experiencing, chronic exclusion.” [p71]

Following the same format as previous chapters, this one starts by examining what has already been achieved, including greater support for people with complex needs and getting them back into the mainstream; greater multi-agency working.

The Action Plan identifies some specific continuing challenges, including:

“Despite this progress, there is still a group of people with complex needs who are not benefiting from services because their lives and engagement with services are too chaotic. These adults continue to face poor outcomes in the form of offending, long-term mental and physical health problems, poor family relationships, continuing substance misuse, worklessness and deprivation.” [para 6.4, p74]

The Plan further describes their problems as:

“These high-need individuals may lack basic skills, have mental health problems, be misusing substances and be at risk of debt and homelessness. Yet they are often also unable or unwilling to navigate their way through public services to get the support they need. Their contact with services is instead frequently driven by problematic behaviour resulting from their chaotic lives – such as anti-social behaviour, criminality and poor parenting – and management revolves around sanctions such as prison, loss of tenancy and possible removal of children.” [para 6.5, p74]

To meet these challenges, the focus will need to be particularly on identifying these “high-need, chaotic adults” [p76]; identifying what works; and then looking, as before, at multi-agency working, personalisation and performance management. In addition, the Plan identifies the need for greater employment opportunities for adults with severe mental health problems.

Section 4: The future – Next steps

This section lists the key next steps [Table 7.1, pp84-85]:

Publication	Lead dept	Timing
Teenage Pregnancy Strategy. This will have a particular focus on areas with high rates and on tackling the underlying causes of teenage pregnancy.	DfES	Sept 2006
National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. This Plan is submitted to the EU Commission every three years and sets out how each EU member state is making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty.	DWP	Sept 2006
Opportunity for All. This is the Government’s annual report measuring success in tackling poverty and social exclusion.	DWP	Oct 2006
Children in Care Green Paper. This will explore how we can further improve outcomes for this high-risk group, including proposals on individual budget-holding arrangements.	DfES	Oct 2006
Local Government White Paper. This will aim to give local areas the powers they need to create cohesive, thriving, sustainable communities. Empowering local communities and ensuring powers are devolved to the right level are central to the Government’s wider aim of democratic renewal.	DCLG	Autumn 2006

Leitch Review. This will set out progress and further measures to address the poor lifetime prospects of those with few qualifications and skills.	HMT (independent review)	End 2006
Comprehensive Spending Review. This is a long-term and fundamental review of government expenditure and will cover departmental allocations for the next three years. It will also include detailed reviews on specific cross-cutting issues. Relevant reviews include a children and young people's policy review looking at how services for children and young people and their families can build on the three principles identified in <i>Support for parents, the best start for children</i> – rights and responsibilities, progressive universalism and prevention; and also a review on mental health and employment outcomes.	HMT	Summer 2007
10-year Strategic Review of Social Exclusion. This will analyse the long-term drivers of social exclusion and identify future trends and the action needed to respond to them.	SETF ⁴	Summer 2007
Social Exclusion Action Plan Progress Report. This will set out further details and early results from the pilots and demonstration projects; the conclusions of stakeholder discussions; and policy changes and investments.	SETF	Summer 2007

Annex A: Grid of policy actions

This Annex draws together all the Action points from the document.

Annex B: Social Exclusion Task Force

The final section lists the members of the SETF.

Comments

1. This renewal of focus on tackling social exclusion is very welcome, as, increasingly, some people have been wondering whether exclusion had become 'passé'
2. It is also welcome to see the efforts being made to ensure that even the hardest-to-reach people and communities are accessing services

⁴ Social Exclusion Task Force.

3. However, by focusing on the particular people/communities noted above, there is also a danger that others may now be overlooked – there needs to be continuing support and efforts to reach other socially excluded communities
4. I do not agree with the premise that economic exclusion, unemployment, skills etc are the main reasons for social exclusion. As The Network has argued from the start, there can also be people who are in work, have a reasonable level of skills, and therefore who could be overlooked – but who are still facing social exclusion, for example many BME people, LGBTs, disabled people.
5. This Action Plan is about the broad, Government-wide approaches, but it still does not have any mention at all of the cultural sector, and it is noticeable that DCMS has not been given any tasks to do.
6. However, the SETF have also invited comments on the Action Plan:

“... we would welcome your comments on the principles and actions within the Plan. We would particularly welcome comments from people working on the ground delivering services, and want to hear about innovative examples we can use in taking forward this important work. We also reiterate our invitation in Chapter 3 for local areas to come forward with innovative and radical proposals for provision around those most at risk.” [para 7.8, p86]

I do hope that museums, archives and libraries will respond to this – and I am hoping to produce a response from The Network, so, if anyone would like to add to that, please let me know. If you do want to respond to the SETF, details are:

- by email: setaskforce@cabinetoffice.x.gsi.gov.uk
- by post:

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