
FINAL REPORT OF THE BTPG PROJECT

From the Local to the National: Bridging the Policy Gap in Social Inclusion

February 2008



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List of Abbreviations		
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions	
LASE	Local Authority Social Exclusion Network	
NAP	National Action Plan	
NGO	Non-Government Organisation	
OMC	Open Method of Co-ordination	
SPTF	Social Policy Task Force	
WFF	Working for Families Fund	

Executive Summary

This report summarises the observations and learnings from Bridging the Policy Gap (BTPG), a 12-month project funded to increase awareness of European action in the field of social inclusion and social protection. The project put participation at the heart of the awareness raising work; achieving increased awareness through actively engaging a cross-section of people and organisations in the development and evaluation of policies designed to tackle poverty and social exclusion at the local level.

The project employed an innovative approach to participation which successfully brought together participants from central, devolved and local governments, academic and voluntary organisations and, critically, community members with personal experience of the policy under review either as service users, or as relatives or carers of those it was trying to help.

BTPG set out to identify how national policies were being implemented at the local level and whether gaps existed between the stated intentions of national policies and the outcomes delivered at the local level. We sought to understand the gaps between the top (policy making) and the bottom (policy implementation) of the policy process but community members made it clear that we also needed to consider ‘bottom-up gaps’, that is needs identified by the community member that are not being addressed by the policy.

Key findings from the project contribute to the improved implementation of policies to combat poverty and social exclusion but also make a specific contribution to the development of participatory methods of evaluating locally implemented policies that fall within the policy priority areas of the United Kingdom National Action Plan on Social Inclusion, 2006 – 2008.

1.1 THE PROCESS

The project adapted the European concept of a ‘Peer Review’ as a basic structure that allowed for thoughtful and reflective discussion amongst participants. Importantly it also introduced the idea of ‘policy peers’, establishing a clear message that the experience and knowledge of all participants was equally valued; regardless of whether it was gained through professional exposure to the policy or through lived experience of the impact of the policy. An additional benefit of the Peer Review format was the flexibility it offered which lent itself to a great deal of participant involvement in determining the structure and content of the event.

Three local authorities participated in BTPG, each looking at a different policy but each relating back to at least one of the four themes of the National Action Plan:

- **Swansea:** Children’s Play Strategy for Swansea
- **Newham:** Access to employment for disabled people
- **Glasgow:** Working for Families Fund



1.2 POLICY OBJECTIVE 1: ELIMINATING CHILD POVERTY

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.

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.

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.

1.3 POLICY OBJECTIVE 2: INCREASING LABOUR MARKET PARTICIPATION

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.

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.



1.4 POLICY OBJECTIVE 3: IMPROVING ACCESS TO QUALITY SERVICES

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.

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.

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.

1.5 POLICY OBJECTIVE 4: TACKLING DISCRIMINATION

Whilst there was much discussion about the attitudes of employers towards the employment of people with disabilities, 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.

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.

1.6 CROSS-CUTTING LESSONS

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.



1.7 GOVERNANCE: LESSONS IN PARTICIPATION IN POLICY MAKING

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.

1.8 CONCLUDING STATEMENT

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.

1.9 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.

Poverty: Linking the Local to the National

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Across the European Union an estimated 68 million people live at risk of poverty and social exclusion.¹ Despite living in some of the richest countries in the world many of the poorest people are not sharing in this rising prosperity. Tackling poverty is a key dimension of the 'Lisbon' agenda of the European Union. The *Bridging the Policy Gap* (BTPG) project is contributing to the learning on policies to combat poverty and social exclusion that is central to the National Action Plans on Social inclusion process. The project's specific contribution is on learning from participatory methods of evaluating locally implemented policies in UK National Action Plan policy priority areas.

Overcoming the deep rooted problems of poverty and social exclusion, even in wealthy countries, has not proved easy. Strategies have been developed, new and innovative policies have been introduced, significant resources have been deployed, yet in most EU member states the problem of poverty and social exclusion are stubbornly persistent. Nevertheless, real progress has been made over the past 10 years. For example, in the UK, child poverty and poverty amongst older people have both declined as a result of concerted government action, at both the local and national level.

However, what has become clear in all member states across the EU is that if strategies, policies and resources are to have a more decisive impact on poverty and if recent progress is to be sustained, then there must be better co-ordination both between member states and within them, more effective sharing and mainstreaming of good practice and more coherent implementation locally.

The EU Social Inclusion strategy, which is outlined in more detail in section 3.1 below, is intended to support the development of more effective social inclusion strategies by improving the co-ordination of activity to tackle poverty and sharing good practice. More needs to be done to link the local level into the EU Social Inclusion process.

Co-ordinating activity to tackle poverty within the UK has become a more complex process over the last 10 years. The creation of devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, all with different degrees of devolved responsibilities in social and health policy, provided both opportunities to better meet local needs, but also added to complexity in implementing national policy priorities. As well, there have also been significant changes in relation to the role and responsibilities of local authorities in addressing poverty and social exclusion. These changes have taken place at the same time as there has been a greater recognition of the role of the voluntary sector in delivering social inclusion. There is potential for developing new and innovative responses to poverty but with greater difference and complexity has also come the increased potential for a gap to emerge between national policy and what is actually being delivered at the local level. Finding ways to close that gap, between intentions and actions, has been central to activity that has taken place during the *Bridging the Policy Gap* project.

The *Bridging the Policy Gap* project has been funded by the European Commission in order to help raise awareness of the EU social inclusion process in the UK. Part of the awareness raising role of the project has been to bring together key stakeholders from UK Government, from devolved administrations, local authorities and the voluntary sector to enhance feedback between the different spheres of government and civil society. The overall aim of BTPG was to learn about how national policies are being implemented locally, what role is played by

1. Poverty and Exclusion Special Report, Eurobarometer 279, September 2007



local conditions and what transferable lessons can be fed back into the UK National Action Plan

A core dimension of the project has been to further enhance governance by involving those who are directly affected by anti-poverty and social inclusion policies in the dialogue of policy development, implementation and evaluation. Taking seriously the aim of involving all actors that is central to EU social inclusion strategy, the project partners have built on their national and local experience of participatory methods to ensure that the voices of those with experience of poverty and social exclusion are heard in assessing the impact of policies and in the development of new responses to the problems of poverty and social exclusion. Indeed, BTPG has been innovative in the UK in linking local experiences in a structured way to the development of national policies in a European framework, with the direct involvement of people experiencing poverty and partners from all levels of government and from the voluntary sector.

2.2 WHAT WE DID

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 2006-08². 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.

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. Section four of this report will draw out the lessons relevant to the participation of people with experience of poverty in policy discussion.



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?**

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:

2.3 CITY AND COUNTY OF SWANSEA

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 development³. 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.**

3. For further information on the Swansea Play Strategy visit: <http://www.swansea.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=1924>

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.

2.4 LONDON BOROUGH OF NEWHAM

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

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.

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.

2.5 GLASGOW CITY COUNCIL

The Peer Review in Glasgow reviewed the Working for Families Fund (WFF)⁴, 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.

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.

4. For more information regarding WFF generally visit: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Social-Inclusion/17414/WFF/Intro> For information regarding WFF in Glasgow go to: http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/cn/Residents/LearningEmployment_Training/Employment_Training/workingforfamiliesfund.htm



Prior to each of the Peer Reviews taking place preparation meetings took place with community members who would be involved in the event as they were a key part of the target group for the policy. These meetings were designed to give participants a better understanding of the context of the project (the EU social inclusion process, the UK NAP, etc) and what the expected outcomes were. In addition, these preparation meetings help to determine the questions that would structure the Peer Review. In this way we ensured that the discussions which took place in the Peer Review were grounded in the experience of those who were the intended beneficiaries of the policy. The role of the preparation meetings is explored in more detail in section four of this report.

A comprehensive report from each of the individual Peer Review meetings has been produced to accompany this synthesis report. These summaries the discussions that took place during the Peer Reviews and contain a number of key recommendations for the local level. All reports are available from the project website at www.povertyalliance.org/btpg.

2.6 STRUCTURE OF REPORT

The aim of this synthesis report is to comprehensively summarise the key outcomes from this project and take forward recommendations for the UK NAP Inclusion 2008-11. In producing the report we have attempted to make it relevant to all those who took part in the Peer Review events. However, there will be accompanying documents – including the individual local Peer Review reports referred to above, plus an evaluation report on the project methodology and transferable lessons and a short publicity document to support the awareness aims of the project, in addition to the website.

The structure of this report is as follows:

Section One The policy context for that the project was operating in with regard to both UK and EU social inclusion policies.

Section Two The main policy lessons arising from the three Peer Reviews, organised according to the four broad policy areas of the UK NAP Inclusion. Inevitably there is some cross over in these areas. The report identifies cross-cutting transferable lessons, those relevant to the broad area of social inclusion policy, as well as those more specific to the particular policy themes.

Section Three This report also identifies policy gaps, especially in those areas where there may need to be better co-ordination between local implementation and national priorities in tackling poverty and social exclusion.

Section Four of the report draws out some of the key lessons with regard to participation and governance. We hope the experience of this project and the ideas in section four will help stimulate new developments around the engagement of those with experience of poverty and social exclusion in the development of policies to combat poverty.

Section Five The final section draws together the main conclusions of the project and the recommendations for future action.

To ensure follow up, a final conference in February 2008 will draw together politicians with representatives from all groups who have been involved throughout the project and a wide range of government officials from all levels of government. The conference will reflect on the learning and on the next steps in the context of the NAP Inclusion 2008-11. The local partners will follow up the specific local recommendations in the individual Peer Review reports. The Social Policy Task Force which launched the idea for the project and which is part of the Reference Group, will be responsible for following up with the UK government the recommendations for the NAP Inclusion 2008-10, including recommendations on engaging with the local level. The evaluation report will be used to develop transferable lessons and enhance tools for the European level on engagement with people with experience of poverty, which will be promoted through the European Anti-Poverty Network and through other avenues.

Policy Lessons: Transferable Lessons and Gaps

3.1 THE POLICY CONTEXT

In 2000, the member states of the EU committed themselves to making a decisive impact on poverty by 2010. The detailed strategy to achieve this goal is for each member state to determine in the light of local challenges and national social and political conventions. However, the member states agreed that there would be a co-ordinated approach to tackling poverty and social exclusion based on common objectives, shared good practice and analysis of the causes of these problems. This ‘open method of co-ordination’ (OMC) focuses on commonly agreed indicators, shared high level objectives and the regular production of National Action Plans (NAPs) setting out each member state’s social inclusion strategy. At the European level, a Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion is produced by the European Commission for the spring European Council (of Ministers) ⁵.

In preparing their NAPs, the member states are encouraged to work in partnership with ‘all relevant actors’ to increase the understanding of the challenges and to better co-ordinate action. In practice, this means engaging with people experiencing poverty, grassroots and national non-government organisations (NGOs), the voluntary, community and private sector and all levels of government to develop the NAP. The effective use of EU level funding and sharing understanding at EU level through peer reviews and seminars also contributes to the NAP. Developing this shared agenda means that the NAP Inclusion at the national level is a continuous process of dialogue and sharing of practice, rather than a series of reports.

Within the UK, the NAP Inclusion has resulted in the development of new participative approaches at the national level to social inclusion. In 2003, the Social Policy Task Force (a group of anti-poverty NGOs which came together to follow up the development of the NAP) ⁶ proposed a working group to consider how the NAP process could best involve grassroots people and organisations. The working group, whose members included representatives of the UK Government alongside people experiencing poverty and anti-poverty organisations and was supported by the UK Government, developed a participation toolkit. This toolkit was used as the basis of the *Get Heard* project ⁷. In 2004, the Social Policy Task Force (SPTF) successfully bid for EU funds to develop and use the *Get Heard* toolkit in a series of workshops intended to allow people experiencing poverty to contribute their views experience and priorities to the next NAP. These workshops were held in 2005 and the outcome strongly influenced the UK’s 2006 NAP.

While the *Get Heard* process is recognised as an example of good practice in the field of civic engagement, this engagement was largely between people with experience of poverty and national government. Local government, in particular, was not adequately engaged in the process which, as a result, risked failing to address the local dimension which is crucial to developing effective social inclusion strategies. Accordingly, when a second round of funding became available, the SPTF, supported by DWP put forward a proposal for a process based on the experience of *Get Heard* that included local government. The bid was successful and the *Bridging the Policy Gap* (BTPG) project was launched.

5. For a comprehensive overview of all the key components of the EU social inclusion strategy visit http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsi/poverty_social_exclusion_en.htm

6. This group became known as the Social Policy Task Force (SPTF).

7. See <http://www.ukcap.org/getheard>



The aim of BTPG is to pilot participatory approaches to local policy assessment in the context of the policy priorities outlined in the UK NAP Inclusion. The process of a ‘peer review’ of the chosen local policies builds on the experience of the UK’s Local Authority Social Exclusion (LASE) network, also a partner in BTPG. The LASE network have been involved in cross-national peer reviews of local authority policies to combat poverty and social exclusion. However, the BTPG has used a broader concept of ‘peers’ – including at the core, the target group for the policy and also the differing tiers of government, so that the policy can be assessed from its development to its impact on the beneficiary group. The combination of the wide range of relevant actors and the close focus on a detailed policy area involves intensive work for all involved but it supports very rich learning about the policies assessed.

3.2 UK NAP – KEY POLICY AREAS

The UK’s 2006 NAP is structured around four policy objectives and one overarching theme - governance. The four policy objectives were: eliminating child poverty, increasing labour market participation, improving access to quality services and tackling discrimination. Each of the three Peer Reviews tackled one, or a combination, of these four themes: governance was an issue in all of them. Given that the overarching objective of the NAP is to improve social inclusion, it is not surprising that there are a number of natural crossovers between the four themes. This resulted in some of the same issues being raised at more than one event. For the purpose of clarity this report is organised into sections that relate specifically to one policy objective, followed by a section addressing issues of governance (and, in particular, participation). It is not the intention of the report to prioritise these issues it is only to avoid repetition.

3.3 Policy objective 1: Eliminating Child Poverty

One of the UK Government’s key objectives is to eradicate child poverty by 2020. The midway point for this is to have halved the number of children in relative low income households between 1998-99 and 2010-11. This includes:

Reducing the proportion of children living in workless households by 25% between spring 2005 and spring 2008. The responsibility for delivering this target lies with both the Department for Work and Pensions and Her Majesty’s Treasury.

As a contribution to reducing the proportion of children living in households where no-one is working by 2008 there should be an:

- increase the stock of Ofsted registered childcare by 10%;
- increase the take-up of formal childcare by lower income families by 50%.

The responsibility for delivering this target is shared between HM Treasury, the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the DWP. Whilst these objectives and targets are the responsibility of the UK Government, they are also shared by the Scottish Government and Welsh Assembly Government. During the course of this project Governments in both Scotland and Wales changed, but both have reaffirmed their commitment to the ‘2020’ child poverty target.

The National Action Plan 2006-08 states that these targets will be met through a combination of ensuring financial security (through encouraging parents to enter employment as well as financial support such as tax credits), child support payments, childcare initiatives; supporting



parents and good parenting through initiatives such as Sure Start, and raising standards in education particularly for children most at risk of educational disadvantage.

The lessons and gaps identified during the Glasgow Peer Review are relevant to a range of government policies and initiatives that are aimed at reducing child poverty. This Peer Review looked at the operation of the Working for Families Fund (WFF) in Glasgow. WFF is designed to support disadvantaged parents in deprived areas and groups to progress towards and into employment by removing childcare and other barriers. Parents in three main groups are given targeted employability support:

- **Parents on a low income;**
- **Lone parents; and**
- **Parents with other stresses in the household that make it difficult to sustain employment, including disability, mental health and drug and alcohol problems.**

In addition, the Swansea Peer Review highlighted a number of important issues relevant to the wider issues of the social inclusion of children, an issue closely linked to child poverty. Both of these Reviews will be considered in this section.

3.3.1 Transferable Lessons

The Key Worker Model

One-to-one support is the foundation on which the success of the WFF programme in Glasgow is built. Whilst the model itself has merit, the officers delivering the programme demonstrated their commitment to the model by allowing sufficient funding and resources to implement it fully. This allowed WFF workers the time and flexibility they needed to establish substantive relationships with their clients and understand the complex needs of the individuals with whom they are working.

WFF workers take a client-centred and holistic approach to their work. The focus of the WFF workforce is on the wellbeing of the client and their family rather than simply getting people into jobs. Funding is not target dependent and workers are given the flexibility and time they need to cater to the individual needs of the client.

The commitment demonstrated by the WFF workers was impressive. They were dedicated to helping their clients finding the right job, at the right time and ensuring it was sustainable and beneficial for both the client and their family. An example of this commitment was the willingness of WFF workers to speak to employers about the needs of the WFF client and what the employer could do to improve the sustainability of that job for their client. This type of support was important for the client as it signalled to them that didn't have to tackle any barriers on their own. (See paragraph 79 below for role of key worker in relation to 'increasing labour market participation').

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.



Flexibility

The flexibility of the WFF programme can be seen in terms of who they work with, and the services they provided. On the whole it appears part of the appeal of the programme is that it attempts to respond to the needs of the client, rather than trying to apply a strict set of procedures to any given situation. It achieves this by employing a fairly limited set of rules to what support workers can do to help, as long as it fits with the ethos of the programme which is to help parents manage their care responsibilities and enable them to return to training or employment. This approach allows for most decision-making to be delegated to the operational staff who benefit from the autonomy this provides.

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.

Voluntary

New WFF clients may feel unable to return to work or training immediately, but the fact that clients self-referred meant they were open to considering possibilities, and therefore also open to the idea of moving towards that goal. It was felt that this aspect of WFF, that clients of the initiative were not 'compelled' by anyone to take part, was an important aspect of its success.

Given the success of WFF Glasgow it would not be unreasonable for policy makers to consider making the service compulsory for some groups (e.g. lone parents). Some participants worried that this could endanger the success of the service for a number of reasons. Compulsion raised questions of whether clients would be as committed to successful outcomes. Staff of WFF felt that because clients were not compelled to be there and knew that they would not be 'pushed' into any job, then successful outcomes were more likely. They questioned whether compulsory programmes would have the same impact. It is also important to note that the non-compulsory aspect of WFF did not mean that it was only working with those 'close to the labour market' - in many cases the opposite was true. However, it was also clear that WFF did work with other organisations to ensure that it was connected to those 'further from the labour market', for example the Full Employment Areas Initiative.⁸ There was also concern about whether the service could be scaled up successfully in a short timeframe; finding and training the right staff was critical to providing a good service and this could take time.

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.

8. The Full Employment Area Initiative undertakes 'door knocking' in local communities to help people engage with the labour market and training. For more information visit: http://www.ceis.org.uk/employability/full_employment_area.html



3.3.2 The Gaps

Parents under the age of 19

There was concern amongst Glasgow Peer Review participants that some vulnerable young parents aged under 19 were not receiving the support they needed. Access to benefits, training opportunities and tax credits do differ between young people aged less than 16 and for those aged between 16 and 18 but participants felt that both groups are poorly served by the current system. The issue that proves most frustrating for WFF workers on the ‘Young Parent Project’ which provides services for parents aged 16 - 25 was the lack of childcare available to this group. Many of the training courses available to the 16 – 18 group have no childcare funding attached to them. Not only is funding childcare an issue, even finding a childcare place for a child aged under three years in Glasgow was referred to as ‘impossible’ by one of the WFF childcare mentors. Some had found placements for this age group, but within private nurseries which were prohibitively expensive for WFF clients, some charging as much as £35 per day.

The participants who had been working in childcare for more than 10 years said that this issue has been around since they began working but nothing has been done to tackle it. One participant felt that these parents were just ‘hitting a brick wall everywhere they turned’; they were young woman who wanted to do something with their lives but were confronted with nothing but barriers. When discussing the issues that this group faces, one participant observed:

... it’s a raft of policy gaps – not just about the Scottish Government, but it’s also a Department for Work and Pensions gap. They haven’t pulled together and recognised all the issues that young parents face.

WFF Worker

Where a child under 16 years old has a child of their own, she remains the responsibility of the school that she attends. The school is legally required to continue her education and help her find a local childcare placement. The experiences offered at the Peer Review were that very few schools in Glasgow were aware of either their responsibility towards that student, or the support available to the school to help her maintain her studies. There are a few schools in Glasgow that have allowed WFF key workers into the school to help both the student and the school through the process with the key objective to help that student stay in school and avoid her dropping out of the system altogether. Given the difficulty associated with parents returning to education later in life (see paragraph entitled ‘Enabling Life-long Learning’), this work could be critical to helping a young mother avoid a life of poverty.

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.

More than Low Income

To tackle the issue of child poverty most effectively, policy makers and lobby groups must think much more broadly than simply issues of household income. Access to services such as decent play provision can have a major impact on the physical and mental health of children. However, it should be remembered that people on low incomes are more likely to rely on publicly provided ‘free’, or low cost, play services. In order to help tackle the experience of child poverty it is therefore all the more important to ensure that these services are accessible.

Enabling Life-Long Learning

One of the few criticisms of the WFF programme was the tendency for clients to move into what are historically undervalued professions such as customer service and childcare. Participants were keen to see more individuals moving into further education courses. Further education was seen as an important step towards improving an individual’s future earning potential and therefore enabling them to obtain a greater degree of financial independence and security for their family.

However, it was acknowledged by all participants as a very difficult option to undertake without substantial support from family and social networks to cope with childcare issues. There is limited funding and places available for adults wishing to undertake degree level courses. In Scotland, there is a childcare grant of £1155 available for eligible lone parents (who are also entitled to lone parents grant of £1,240) but this amount is the same whether you have one child or three and is irrespective of their age, it also forces a student to go into debt as it is only available if you have taken out the student loan.⁹ There were vast differences in how much a childcare grant would cover as there was no consistency between educational institutes in terms of what childcare was available or how much was charged.

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.

9. It is important to note that different systems of childcare support for students exist in Scotland and in England and Wales. For specific information and advice about Scotland visit www.student-support-saas.gov.uk, for England and Wales go to: www.direct-gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/index-htm



3.4 POLICY OBJECTIVE 2: INCREASING LABOUR MARKET PARTICIPATION

This policy objective is part of the wider objective of full employment in every region. As part of this the UK Government has set the following targets for the DWP:

- Demonstrate progress on increasing the employment rate, (shared target with Her Majesty's Treasury);
- Increase the employment rates of disadvantaged groups (lone parents, ethnic minorities, people aged 50 and over, those with the lowest qualifications and those living in the local authority wards with the poorest initial labour market position); and
- Significantly reduce the difference between the employment rates of the disadvantaged groups and the overall rate.

In addition to these targets the NAP Social Inclusion mentions other key targets are to reduce the number of people claiming incapacity benefits by a million in a decade, helping 300,000 lone parents into work, and increasing the number of older workers by one million. The NAP sets out that it will achieve these targets through a combination of policy measures (including New Deals and extending Pathways to Work beyond its pilot phase), tackling skill shortages, easing the transition to work through tax credits and trialling a range of post-employment interventions. Finally the NAP states that there will be proposed new measures to help a range of groups including: ill or disabled people, older workers, those living in deprived areas, those suffering rural exclusion.

The peer review in Newham considered 'Access to Employment for Disabled People'. This covered a number of services offered by government and non-government organisations and asked participants whether the services in Newham are helping disabled people to return to work.

In the section below we look at the transferable lessons and gaps observed by Newham participants that should be taken into consideration by the government which has clearly stated its commitment to improving the employment chances of people with disabilities. The experience of the Glasgow Peer Review is also relevant to this policy objective, and we will also draw out the lessons and gaps from that event where relevant.

3.4.1 Transferable Lessons

Employer engagement

It was clear from the service providers that attended the Newham peer review that employers had a critical part to play in increasing numbers of disabled people in work. It was also clear that there was a great deal of misunderstanding and ignorance amongst employers about employing disabled people. However, there were many anecdotes told about employers that are successfully employing and retaining disabled people and benefiting enormously from the commitment and talent of these employees. A number of different service providers in Newham, particularly representatives from Job Centre Plus, spoke of the importance of developing relationships with key individuals in local businesses. This was important in ensuring that they were aware of the support that they would receive as employers if they were to take on someone with a disability. Such relationships were also important to ensure that vulnerable disabled people were not exploited by some employers (for example, through poor training programmes or 'volunteer' positions).

Employer engagement was therefore essential to making back-to-work programmes effective. In Glasgow, it was apparent that many of the key workers were willing to intervene with employers to ensure that their client was being placed in an appropriate job. It was clear that this engagement was time-consuming and resource intensive. It was also clear that the engagement of decent employers was essential if back-to-work programmes were to have the intended impact on poverty and social exclusion.

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.

First Line is a Newham Council run 'supported employment agency' for people with learning disabilities. *First Line* provides a range of services for users including vocational guidance, careers counselling, interview support and direct support on the job. The project also gives ongoing advice to employers in connection with individual employees and on employing people with learning disabilities. It has developed into a model of best practice providing individualised support to enable people with learning disabilities to access and retain paid employment. Training and work preparation courses run regularly and there are specific courses also targeted at school pupils and college students. In 2007-8 *First Line* are delivering a joint project between national DWP and the Department of Health Valuing People Support Team and London Borough of Newham to test where the application of known best practice can increase the numbers of people with a learning disability gaining employment.

Whilst *First Line* is clearly an exemplar project it is limited in the number of people it can help because it operates on a restricted budget. It chooses not to advertise its service for fear of being inundated with people that it will not have the resources to help. Given this situation, it is of little surprise that participants in the Newham Peer Review also had concerns about the information that was available about services (see Recommendation 11). Greater levels of funding needs to be available for local authorities and other organisations to provide services such as *First Line* that provide a holistic approach to help people sustain employment.

However, it is also necessary that where projects and initiatives are operating on limited funding that they seek to work in partnership with others to ensure that they are targeting those who are most disadvantaged.

Best practice in local organisations

‘Newham People First’¹⁰ and ‘Action and Rights of Disabled People in Newham’¹¹ were both excellent examples of organisations being run by disabled people and entirely staffed by disabled people. Not only were the services provided by these organisations greatly appreciated by disabled people in Newham, they also provided much needed role models for the local population which suffers from very low levels of aspiration for the disabled members of the community.

Role of Local Authority – driving service improvements

There were key areas and initiatives where the London Borough of Newham was taking the lead in helping disabled people find work. Firstly, in addition to being a two-tick accredited authority, Newham is testing a ‘job carving’ scheme. This involves identifying tasks that could be performed by a person with learning disabilities and rolling the requirements of several departments into one position. Additionally the work the Authority is doing to bring together service providers and enable partnership working is also to be commended.

Key Workers

As was noted in paragraph 57 above, key workers in Glasgow were crucial in helping parents return to the labour market, and thereby help to reduce their children’s chances of growing up in poverty. Other examples of ‘key worker’ type approaches were also in evidence during the Peer Review in Newham. Both service users and service providers spoke of the importance of the relationship between clients and a variety of ‘key workers’, whether these were social workers, community workers or others. It was seen that in supporting people to move into the labour market, particularly people with multiple and complex needs, the consistent presence of a knowledgeable and supportive worker was important.

Long term approach to support

In Glasgow, clients of WFF relied on their support workers well beyond the start date of their new job. WFF understand that moving into work is a big step for many people which can result in a raft of new issues arising. Debt repayment requirements, housing issues and childcare arrangements can all change once a job starts and all of these issues can impact an individual’s ability to sustain employment. It was clear from the discussions that the WFF staff did not see their role as coming to an end when someone moved into a job or training. This was important for the clients who were more comfortable moving into employment if they knew they could call on their WFF support if a crisis arose and didn’t feel that they had to face all their issues on their own.

10. Newham People First is a Self Advocacy ‘Speaking Up’ project run by people with learning difficulties and campaigning for equal rights for people with learning difficulties. They also provide information training and advice and try to improve services in Newham by helping people to speak up at meetings.

11. Action and Rights of Disabled People in Newham is a user led group run, managed and controlled by disabled people. It provides information on a range of disability issues as well as signposting to other agencies when appropriate.



3.4.2 The Gaps

Availability of Quality, Appropriate Employment

One of the key factors that limited the ability of people to return to work was the lack of quality employment opportunities. This was equally the case for people in Glasgow and in Newham. Whilst lone parents faced barriers such as lack of affordable childcare or transport, or may have lacked confidence or skills to return to the labour market, there was little doubt that the type of jobs which were available were often not of high enough quality. This was often a problem of the low level of pay that was on offer for some jobs, but the problem of inflexible types of employment was also an issue. Even jobs which appeared flexible, for example part-time work, were often flexible in a way that suited the needs of the employer rather than the job applicant.

Whilst it was clear that a great deal of good, and successful, work was being carried out to help people find the right jobs at the right time there remained a lack of appropriate employment opportunities for many people.

Tender process for Government Contracts

A local example of the Government procurement process was the recently let 'Pathways to Work' contract for the City and East London area, which will be delivered in Newham from December, 2007 by 'Work Directions' who won the bid to deliver the service to the East London area. The peer review occurred prior to the implementation of the new service although Work Directions did give a presentation on the first day of the Peer Review. Some participants were critical of the tender process, as the sheer size of the contract meant that small organisations felt unable to bid for the work. There was no local consultation, and no requirement on the bidder to work with existing local service providers, some of whom are getting excellent results and virtually all of whom are struggling for funding. The questions raised in the Newham Peer Review reflect wider concerns with some of the delivery mechanisms for the UK Government's on-going programme of welfare reform, in particular the greater involvement of the private and voluntary sector. We will return to some of these wider concerns in the conclusions and recommendations.

People are hopeful that the Pathways to Work project will benefit the disabled people in Newham, but if it is to make an impact it will need to work alongside existing service providers and consult regularly with service users. They will also need to show clearly that they are interested in placing people in 'the right job' not just 'any job'. The representative from Work Directions was enthusiastic about working with existing local agencies and was clear that finding sustainable jobs for people would be a key factor in measuring their success.

Accessibility

Accessibility goes well beyond the issue of physical access. Accessibility considerations should begin with the job application process and continue after the disabled person is settled in to their new job. Participants suggested that employers could think more creatively about how disabled people can best participate in the job application process. For some disabled people this may mean using different kinds of application processes. One practice that has worked well is the employment of 'working interviews'¹² or the use of advocates within the interview situation. The overall aim of changes to the application process is to provide a level playing field for disabled applicants.

12. A working interview is a short placement of a week or so within the company that allows a person to demonstrate their skills and be assessed against the selection criteria by the employer. It may also be extended to allow a potential worker to pick up the necessary skills prior to assessment.



The 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games

Many of the public sector bodies in Newham have been Two-Tick accredited. Notably missing from the scheme are both the Olympic Delivery Authority and The London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games. These organisations are responsible for delivering the Paralympics, for which Newham is the host Borough. This seems like a significant missed opportunity for the disabled population in the Borough, many of whom would relish the opportunity to work towards the staging of the Paralympics.

The wider issue here concerns the use of schemes such as Two Ticks to help overcome disadvantage and reduce discrimination against disabled people. There is potential for the use of such approaches to be integrated into public sector procurement contracts, making it a condition for those contracting to carry out public services to at least be registered under the Two Ticks Scheme. Such an approach would have the potential to encourage all organisations that were accessing public funds to address issues of disability within their organisation.

Recommendation 7

There are many ways for public sector organisations to be innovative in this field but at the very least public sector organisations should be required to 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.

Low Aspirations

Low aspiration is a major barrier preventing disabled people from undertaking careers. Aspiration of individual disabled people is an issue but there is also a need to address levels of aspiration of 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.

Service users felt that the focus on short-term targets, such as the 12 week marker used to define a 'sustainable' job by the statutory bodies (and others) can result in disabled people being forced into a job that may not be suitable for them. Such short term approaches do not seem to be compatible with attempts to help people into sustained employment and out of poverty and insecurity. Short term jobs and placements may embed the low aspirations that many disabled participants felt that others had for them.

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.

Information gap

Too often good policies and projects were not achieving their full potential because of a lack of accessible information and awareness amongst disabled people. Examples of this included 'Access to Work' and Benefit Protection schemes which are both aimed at easing the transition back to work for disabled people.

There were a number of suggestions for improving how information is conveyed but there were two points that were strongly supported by all participants. Firstly, accessibility remains paramount. Service users still have difficulty obtaining information in a suitable format. It is particularly unusual to see information available in 'easy read' format. Frustration was expressed at being told to find information on the internet. Whilst people accept that the internet can be useful for some people, it fails to recognise that many people cannot afford access to the internet and for many disabled people, computers remain inaccessible.

The second was that people wanted one place they could go to get all the information they needed about living with a disability. They felt that there should be one agency responsible for communicating with disabled people. Participants wanted a one stop shop and 'one button to push' on the internet that would provide them with everything they needed.

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.

Career Development

Disability is no basis for denying someone a rewarding career. The focus of policy in this area should be to support people into jobs that they enjoy and enable them to progress. This means valuing all jobs that disabled people want and are able to do, but also ensuring that they are able to reach their full potential in whatever employment they choose. Essentially, the ambitions society has for a disabled person entering the labour market should be no different to that which it has for any other person. As is increasingly being recognised in Government employment programmes, the focus of employability work should be on the needs, aspirations and abilities of the disabled person.

Service users see the short-term targets of service providers and believe that this creates a short-term focus amongst service providers who concentrate on getting disabled people into jobs rather than careers. It cannot be in the interest of the service provider to suggest a degree course if they only receive their funding from the government when a client reaches 12 weeks in employment.

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.



3.5 POLICY OBJECTIVE 3: IMPROVING ACCESS TO QUALITY SERVICES

According to the NAP Inclusion 2006-08 public services ‘can play an important part in tackling social exclusion, as well as providing a higher quality of life for all.’ The NAP also notes that people from disadvantaged groups are more likely to be receiving poorer public services. Over the last 10 years the UK Government has worked with partners at devolved and local level to introduce a wide ranging programme of public service reforms aimed at not only improving the efficiency, value for money and quality of public services, but also to improve the fairness of provision.

Given the wide range of services delivered by the public sector (and, increasingly, ‘public’ services provided by the private and voluntary sectors) there is a need to identify areas where improving accessibility and quality of public services can have a stronger impact on the lives of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion. The NAP Social Inclusion focuses on a number of key areas, including:

- Improving participation and attainment amongst young people and adults in further and higher education;
- Tackling health inequalities and empowering users of social care;
- Reducing re-offending;
- Providing improved access to decent and affordable housing;
- Improving access to transport for all, particularly for people rural communities;
- Addressing the problems of fuel poverty, through improved efficiency and central heating schemes;
- Addressing the problems of over-indebtedness and financial exclusion.

These are just some of the areas highlighted in the NAP Social Inclusion where work is taking place. The devolved administrations and local authorities also have a range of priorities where they are attempting to improve access to services for the most disadvantaged.

The Swansea Peer Review related most directly to questions of access to quality services, although all three reviews did address issues of accessible provision of services, particularly in relation to access for people from disadvantaged groups.



3.5.1 Transferable Lessons

Location of services

Quality public services must be accessible to the people they aim to assist. For this reason the decision about where to locate services is a critical one that can greatly impact the success or failure of the service. The issue was important to Peer Review participants and was discussed at all three peer reviews. The general consensus was that people benefit from services being delivered locally. They benefit in terms of accessibility (important for disabled people, families and areas where public transport is poor) and they can benefit in terms of greater tailoring to the needs of the local population. In Swansea, the participants did not expect the local authority to be able to meet the play needs of 100% of children, 100% of the time; different children require different play services. However, they felt that through local consultation at a neighbourhood level the council would be better placed to meet the play needs of most children, most of the time.

Local provision was viewed as key to successful play provision for a number of reasons. Keeping play local meant there was no transport cost associated with play, it was readily accessible and children could play with their neighbours and school friends. Local play also had wider benefits for the whole community. It was seen as a useful tool for getting families to engage with each other. It wasn't just the opportunity to 'play' together that built up social networks, the process of applying for funding, creating and maintaining play spaces was viewed as an opportunity for the community to come together and get to know each other and the local children. Not only did this build a sense of community but it also had the benefit of creating ownership and pride in the play facilities.

Another example of the importance of location can be found in Glasgow where many participants felt the location of WFF services contributed to the success of the programme. Instead of resources being spent setting up an entirely new and separate entity, WFF was based in existing organisations already located in the community (such as Local Development Companies, voluntary organisations and regeneration agencies). This enabled quick integration of services with both the community and existing service providers. The local approach was also appreciated by clients because they were located relatively close to where clients live which increased accessibility, especially for parents for whom travel can sometimes be difficult. It was also beneficial to distinguish them from existing employability services, which can have negative connotations for clients.

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.

Post code lotteries prevent access to services for those in need

An issue often raised in relation to the accessibility of services is the notion of a ‘post-code lottery’. This means that whether a person has access to a service depends on where they live rather than their need. However, WFF in Glasgow is a city-wide programme designed to help people on the basis of their individual circumstances rather than their residential address. This was a decision taken in the establishment phase of the project which differentiated WFF Glasgow from many other services aimed at alleviating poverty and social exclusion which often focus exclusively on areas that are the most deprived 15% of data zones. Whilst accepting that there are concentrations of poverty in Glasgow (and other urban areas) it was felt that the approach taken by WFF in Glasgow was an important recognition that not all poor people live in poor areas. It should be noted that WFF is a Scotland wide initiative and in some Local Authority areas it will be geographically targeted.

Whilst targeting of deprivation on a geographical basis may be a useful tool for policy makers, using this information to determine service delivery will result in some people missing out on services that they need. Access to quality services should be based on individual need rather than residential address.

Shared Ownership achieved through engagement and participation

The origins of the development of the Play Strategy in Swansea meant that there had been a high degree of shared ownership of the strategy from the outset. Government, non-government and community organisations joined together in the early stages of the strategy writing process to form ‘The Play Partnership’, a collaboration of organisations that share the belief that through play children develop physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially. The Play Partnership was initially established to create the strategy but continues to actively oversee the delivery of the strategy and ensures objectives and action points are being met. The Play Partnership is responsible for allocating funding (provided by the council) for local projects that adhere to the objectives of the play strategy and regularly invites user feedback and consultation as part of this process. Swansea seems fortunate to have a strong network of community groups active in the promotion and provision of play, but equally importantly a Local Authority willing to engage and enter into shared ownership of the agenda with the community. This has many obvious benefits but it becomes more beneficial to a service that the Local Authority is not statutorily required to provide.

There is a clear desire among people involved in the Play Partnership that the Strategy be an accessible and active document. The document is available at schools and libraries throughout Swansea and in developing the new Strategy, the review team had visited local schools to consult with children of all ages and their parents.

In response to a query about where the Strategy sits in relation to Swansea’s anti-poverty and social exclusion work the Play Officer from the local authority, Stephen Cable explained that there was a need to fight for play; its importance and the need for it to be accessible for everyone. Stephen pointed out that the Play agenda is for people not of voting age; this puts it at a political disadvantage when campaigning for improved play opportunities. It does play an important part across the whole of the authority and they try to engage with the Anti-poverty and social inclusion teams where possible.



3.5.2 The Gaps

Awareness beyond the public sector

Every year the public sector produces a great number of strategy documents that set out how public services should be delivered. Few of these strategies will ever reach beyond a very narrow public sector audience. Awareness within the relevant public sector organisations is critical as demonstrated in Swansea where the Play Strategy has raised the profile of play across the local authority. However, it does seem that the ‘further’ agencies and organisations are from the Local Authority the less likely they are to be aware of the existences of relevant strategies.

It could be argued that as long as services are improving and people are benefiting as a result of the strategy, there is no reason why they should be familiar with the document. This was certainly the case amongst Swansea schoolchildren with regards to the play strategy. The peer review visited Cwm Primary where it was clear the children were unaware of the strategy document but had been consulted on their school’s play facilities and were clearly enjoying the results of that consultation.

Likewise there was a common attitude expressed by community groups in Swansea who delivered localised play services that they ‘were doing it anyway’ and the strategy did not inform their decisions. Whilst this approach did not seem to be damaging the quality of services available from these organisations, it does seem likely that there will be inefficiencies and missed opportunities if relevant local actors are not aware of its existence. Not only could local organisations benefit from the strategy as they may be able to lever in additional resources from public sector or charitable sources but the strategy owners should be using the local knowledge of service providers and their users to ensure strategies remain relevant, active and continue to encourage improvements to public services.

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.

Socially Inclusive Services require minority needs to be explicit

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.



3.6 POLICY OBJECTIVE 4: TACKLING DISCRIMINATION

Legislation designed to tackle discrimination against women and people from ethnic minority groups has been in force for more than 30 years but it is clear that they are still likely to experience discrimination in many areas of their lives. Legislation has also been introduced to tackle other areas of discrimination, such as that relating to disability, age and sexuality. Groups that are at risk of discrimination are also often more likely to be at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The recent Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion 2007¹³ report noted that the rate of income poverty for people aged 25 and over was 30%, double that of someone without a disability. The risk of poverty amongst some ethnic minority groups is also higher. The report by Lisa Harker into found that ‘rates of poverty amongst Black African, Pakistani and Bangladeshi children are now more than double the rate among white children.’¹⁴

The UK NAP Inclusion focuses on action to tackle these two areas of discrimination, amongst disabled people and against people from ethnic minority groups.

Discrimination towards disabled people was a big issue for participants who attended the Newham Peer Review. Many of whom were either physically or learning disabled.

3.6.1 Transferable Lessons

Dedicated officer promoting the Two Ticks Scheme

The Two Ticks Scheme is a national accreditation programme that employers can gain to demonstrate their commitment to employing disabled people. The programme is administered by Jobcentre Plus and the application process requires the business to prove that their processes and workplaces cater to the needs of disabled employees. This includes a commitment from employers to interview all disabled applicants who meet minimum criteria for vacancies, to have in place mechanisms to ensure that disabled employees can develop and use their abilities.

City and East London is the only DWP area to have a dedicated (albeit part time) scheme resource. Other areas rely on the member of staff who initially receives an enquiry to join the scheme to then follow it through and work with the company to comply with and introduce the scheme.

Having this dedicated resource has a number of benefits including the ability to investigate cases of alleged non-compliance, particularly concerning applicants who have met the minimum criteria not being granted the ‘guaranteed interview’. If the complaint is received promptly, there may be an opportunity to work with the company to enable the guaranteed interview within the recruitment window. Participants felt very strongly that enforcement was a key aspect of any legislation and there were some people who felt the two-ticks symbol would benefit from more robust monitoring.

13. Palmer, G, T. MacInnes, P. Kenway (2007) Monitory Poverty and Social Exclusion 2007, Joseph Rowntree Foundation/ New Policy Institute, www.poverty.org.uk

14. Harker, L. (2006) Delivering on Child Poverty: What would it take? Command Paper 6951 www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/dwp/2006/harker/



The dedicated resource can also improve the take up of the scheme by helping translate initial enquiries into accreditations by helping businesses through the process. Crucially, in an evidence-based policy environment, it also allows for the active, ongoing monitoring of the scheme in line with other DWP funded programmes, and ensures that there is effective follow up.

Recommendation 16

Consideration should be given to the creation of more dedicated 'Two Ticks' 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.

Quotas

Many participants did feel that employers of a certain size should be statutorily required to ensure that a certain percentage of their workforce has a disability. But this was viewed as undesirable by many of the service providers present. They preferred to work with employers who understood the value of employing disabled people and were committed to integrating disabled people in to their workforce. For employment to be sustainable for anyone, the working environment has to be rewarding and enjoyable, and the setting of quotas may not help disabled people into the kinds of employment situations that they need or want.

It was recognised that there had been progress in introducing legislation to help disabled people into work and tackle discrimination more generally. However, amongst some of the disabled people taking part in the Peer Review in Newham there was a clear desire for legislation to be used more effectively and to help create a culture where discrimination is not tolerated. For some people, a statutory requirement for larger employers to report levels of employment of disabled people, along with targets which would represent a fair outcome of successful disability employment schemes was an essential part of the strategy for tackling discrimination against disabled people.¹⁵

Legislation

New legislation to tackle discrimination will not have the full desired impact unless employers are both aware of it and know there will be consequences if they choose to ignore it. Disabled people felt that there was not enough enforcement of current legislation designed to protect the rights of disabled people, they wanted a telephone number that they could call to complain about non-compliance and they wanted to see the complaint result in some action. The new Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)¹⁶ was launched a few days after the Newham Peer Review took place. The EHRC will have the role of ensuring that employers are both aware of their statutory responsibilities and that people facing any (or multiple) forms of discrimination will be able to have one place to take their complaints.

15. Many organisations set their own (voluntary) targets for the recruitment of disabled people. The DWP has its own scheme, the outcomes of which are monitored in its Annual Progress report. This can be found at: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/aboutus/equalityschemes/progress/pdfs/espr-2007-full.pdf>

16. The EHRC can be accessed at www.equalityhumanrights.com, by telephone on 08457 622 633, or text phone: 08457 622 644

3.6.2 The Gaps

Public Attitudes

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

Negative media coverage of people suffering mental ill-health reinforces prejudiced public attitudes. One negative headline can ruin any small progress from legislation and government policy overnight. Some participants in Newham felt that Disability Awareness Training has a role to play in breaking down barriers but it will only make an impact if senior and middle managers undertake the training and if the training involved 'direct encounters' with disabled people. Such training would also have to be reviewed regularly.

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.

3.7 CROSS CUTTING ISSUES

As has been demonstrated in the preceding sections of this report, there were many common experiences uncovered in the three Peer Reviews. In this section we consider some of the broader questions that the reviews have encountered, issues which are likely to affect the success or failure of a range of anti-poverty policies and initiatives.

3.7.1 Funding Issues

Funding to execute policy properly will always be an issue where there is fierce competition for public funds. Good funding can result in good implementation but it is not a guarantee that a policy will achieve the desired outcomes. Indeed, some of the most effective programmes have used existing funding more effectively to result in savings in expenditure. Additionally, the potential value of a scheme inevitably needs to be taken into account when allocating funding.

Participants understood that the funds available to their Local Authority were limited and there would always be difficult decisions to make about how to allocate this money locally. However, some participants' spoke of their frustration when decisions were made that did not benefit some disadvantaged groups. An example from Swansea is the recently refurbished fixed play area in Brynmill Park. The play area is compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act, advice about which was provided by the supplier of the fixed play equipment. But, according to one participant, there was no consultation with disabled children or their carers before the park was constructed. The end result is a playground that meets the 'minimum standard' of the DDA, but, from the end users point of view is not accessible for disabled children. The participant viewed this as a lost opportunity because of the lack of play facilities for disabled children in Swansea coupled with the lack of available funds for new play facilities.

Community consultation and involvement can help ensure limited budgets are spent wisely and the end result well utilised by the community. It also enables communities to understand budget limitations and empowers them by involving them in making the spending decisions for themselves (in some cases).

Participants appreciated that they could not expect the Local Authority to meet all their demands immediately. However participants thought that where it was agreed by both the Authority and community that services were inadequate, this should lead to a council commitment to a rolling programme of improvements. For example, participants in Swansea felt that there was a lack of fixed play facilities that catered for disabled children. This should be acknowledged by the council and should result in a commitment to consult on future upgrades of play facilities and set a time frame during which improvements would occur. The timeframe could be long-term in nature, and the commitment might be subject to Swansea Council being able to access funding.

Participants felt that funding was not sufficiently transparent or coherent. This has also created an impression amongst service users that the success of a project bore little relation to whether the funding would be continued or replicated elsewhere. The short-term focus of much funding was frustrating for both the voluntary and public sector providers and made it difficult for service users to keep track of who was providing what service, and in ensuring continuity of service. This was most pronounced in Newham with providers helping disabled people with multiple and complex needs return to employment. Some service users found it difficult to establish good relationships because organisations and personnel changed so quickly. This contrasts sharply with the experience of service users of Glasgow's Working for Families programme who are assigned one dedicated key worker to support them through the process of returning to work. All of these clients remarked that this was a central reason for their success on the programme. Service users, and indeed providers, were consistently positive regarding having a personal advisor to support them. This experience was drawn not simply from the initiatives under scrutiny in the peer review but also from their experience of other programmes.

The additional danger of short-term funding is the impact that it can have on staff retention rates. It is difficult to overstate the value of the relationships that are built up between a WFF keyworker and their clients. Committed, well-informed staff can be the lynchpin of successful programme delivery; this was certainly the case in Glasgow (see the discussion under policy objective 1 for more on this issue). But uncertainty of funding can easily result in high staff attrition rates which can be detrimental to effective delivery.

It would be useful for evaluations that include 'value for money' considerations to factor in the value of the social capital represented by established client relationships. These hard-won relationships with so-called 'hard-to-reach', disadvantaged groups will not be easily replicated by mainstream or copycat services. Many of the clients who took part in the Peer Reviews were already disillusioned with their experience of some public sector services. The 'key worker' model used in WFF, and many other publicly delivered services, would appear to represent a more positive way for the state to interact with individuals in need.

It is also important to consider the relationship between the current welfare reform agenda and the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). The CSR will put further pressure on those seeking to support disadvantaged groups into employment to ensure that programmes are delivering value for money. Partly in response to this pressure the private and voluntary sectors are being engaged more deeply in the delivery of employment programmes. Some participants in the Newham Peer Review were concerned that the greater involvement of the private and voluntary sector providers could lead, in their view, to a further reduction in the transparency and accountability of services that they were dependent upon.



3.7.2 Political Support

Political support for a policy at the national level does not guarantee political support at a local level (or vice versa). There are many factors, political or otherwise, at the local level that could result in a non-committal approach from local politicians. While local area agreements and other new approaches seek to address this disconnect, a risk remains that different political priorities at local level can be enough to cause a gap between policy objectives and the actual outcomes. Vice Versa, local and devolved governments and administrations felt that there was not enough account taken at the national level of feedback on the local experience of implementing national policy priorities. The BTPG Peer Reviews are a rare example of bringing together national, devolved and local delivery agents and service users to discuss these issues.

Policy implementation is hampered both in a tight funding environment and one in which different departments' priorities may be in competition or not clearly evident to other departments. For example, in Swansea the Council has formally endorsed the Welsh Assembly Government's Children's Play Policy. However, there are tensions between play (and the space for play) and other Council priorities, including land use planning issues such as the need for more housing. Some people in the Peer Review reported that these tensions appear to have been resolved in ways that often reduced play opportunities. Additionally, from many of the conversations at the Peer Review it seemed that many departments with the ability to positively influence play in Swansea were not fully engaged. Swansea participants felt that play needed to be pushed up the local political agenda and one way they felt this could happen would be to create a 'play champion', an influential local politician to make sure all departments fully participate in the Swansea Play Partnership and make sure their actions demonstrate a commitment to play.

Critical to obtaining political support is a good communication strategy that effectively puts across the size and scale of the potential impact of the policy and how it will be achieved.

3.7.3 Partnership Working

The complexities inherent in the issues of poverty and social exclusion are reflected in the number and type of organisations dedicated to tackling them. Such complexity means that a partnership approach is needed if real progress is to be made. There are few organisations well resourced enough to be able to tackle all of the issues confronting one individual; coupled with the fact that each individual will present a different combination of issues, the likelihood of an isolated organisation helping that individual reduces even further. Service users could however, realistically expect advisers and support workers to be knowledgeable about the range of services available that may help their clients return to employment or training. For these reasons, effective partnership working came through as a particularly important issue, especially for those responsible for delivering services at the local level.

Strong partnership working would ensure that this is more than just a signposting service. Employees engaged in service delivery need continuous training and up-to-date information in order to pinpoint the most appropriate service and understand whether it suits the needs of their clients. In the absence of suitable local services, advisers need sufficient training to be flexible in the support they provide. This may include helping the client with funding childcare or transport, or helping a client with poor literacy fill in application forms for training places.

Many problems associated with social exclusion require a complex interaction between local policies and services on the one hand and central government strategies on the other. Partnership working provides an opportunity to bridge this gap and helps to ensure that funding decisions are made in the context of an understanding of local issues and delivery arrangements. For example, the relationships built in Glasgow between the Working for Families Fund, Local Economic Development Agencies, JobCentre Plus, and local voluntary organisations, are predicated on complementary service provision. Some service delivery participants in the Peer Reviews felt that central government should be more sensitive to the fact that changes to funding structures of one organisation could impact the ability of other agencies to deliver their services successfully. Issues of governance are discussed in more detail in section 4.

3.7.4 Consultation

Both in discussion and in formal evaluations of the Peer Reviews, participants were overwhelmingly supportive of the incorporation of consultation of this type into the policy making processes. People were clear that they wanted consultation to be quick, meaningful and result in action. The benefits of consultation are numerous but perhaps the most noticeable is the contribution it can make to create a sense of community. There were good examples of this in Swansea where participants felt that consultation had not only helped to build a sense of community, but also a sense of ownership in local play provision.

People viewed consultation as the backbone of community support. With meaningful consultation there was an increased possibility that policy developments would be sustainable. To be effective, consultation shouldn't take too long, must be followed up and should happen at a local 'neighbourhood' level. In this way, people are more willing to participate because they can understand the problems, provide solutions and (should) see the outcome of the consultation.

Participatory Policy Assessment: The Methodology for the Peer Reviews and Lessons for Governance

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Engaging people who are directly affected by policies to enable them to play a greater role in their evaluation and future development is not new, but has become increasingly important to policy makers over the last decade. There are a variety of reasons why policy-makers, NGOs and others want to achieve more participation in policy making from the service users and community members:

- by engaging those with direct experience of a policy there is the potential to uncover innovative or unexpected responses to problems that may not have emerged through more traditional means;
- Increased participation also can help provide legitimacy for particular policy responses;
- The ability to play an active role in shaping the development of policies or initiatives that affect an individual's life is regarded as a right by many organisations.

Greater engagement and participation has been an important priority in the EU social inclusion process where engagement has been seen as 'essential to the creation of more focused actions to tackle poverty.'

In the UK there have been numerous developments, both at the national and devolved levels of government, which have sought to increase the participation of those affected by poverty and social exclusion. Many of the initiatives that have been developed, both by statutory and voluntary organisations, are focused on the local level ¹⁷.

One of the aims of the BTPG project was to demonstrate how greater participation of people with experience of poverty could be achieved in developing national strategies that draw upon the experience of delivery at the local level.

One of the most distinctive aspects of the EU social inclusion process has been the emphasis that it has placed on the involvement of people affected by poverty and social exclusion. This has been a prominent feature of the approach that has been taken to developing the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion in the UK. The current UK NAP outlines a variety of activities that took place during the preparation stage in 2005-06. In addition to the various examples of coordination of social inclusion policy between UK Government departments and devolved administrations, the NAP also highlights the role of the Get Heard project in ensuring that the voices of people experiencing poverty were heard in the development of the NAP.

Bridging the Policy Gap follows up the lessons of the *Get Heard* project, as it attempts to ensure that the experience of people living on low incomes or in situations of exclusion informed the thinking in the NAP Inclusion. However, whereas *Get Heard* adopted a very open approach to accessing the views of people in poverty, BTPG has taken a more focused approach, seeking to explore in more depth specific policy issues in key areas of social inclusion. In addition, this project has emphasised the importance of dialogue, not simply between different parts of government, but between these different parts and those who are affected by policy.

17. For example, many of the projects and initiatives included in the recently launched 'people and participation.net' web resource are local projects. For further information visit: <http://www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/Involve/Home>



The involvement of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion is at the heart of Bridging the Policy Gap project. In addition to important lessons and recommendations in the policy areas covered by the project, there is also substantial learning regarding the involvement of people with experience of social exclusion in processes of policy dialogue. This section of the report presents the lessons that have been learned about involving people experiencing poverty in policy dialogue.

4.2 The Peer Review Process

There were four key areas where people experiencing poverty and social exclusion were directly involved in the project: the Reference Group, the Preparation Meetings, the Peer Review meetings, and the Follow-up Meetings. Some of the issues arising from this involvement are presented before the recommendations for future action.

The Reference Group

It was vital that the views and experiences of people who have first hand experience of living on a low income or in social exclusion were involved in the planning of the project. The Reference Group played a central role in the project, helping determine the policies and initiatives under review, advising on the structure for the Peer Reviews, as well as participating in each of the Reviews in order to help draw out lessons. The commitment required to take part in the Reference Group should not be underestimated. Attendance at meetings of the Group took place in London, with each of the three two day Peer Reviews generally requiring at least one night away from home.

Despite the significant time commitment, four grassroots participants participated in the Reference Group, one from each of the areas where the Peer Reviews were taking place and one participant with experience of national dialogue through his participation in the group which launched the project. All of the grassroots participants brought a range of experience to the Reference Group – experience of being active in their local community, of living on a low income, of low paid employment, of disability, of being a paid worker in a community setting. All of this experience enriched the working of the Reference Group and made it more responsive to issues that could be raised in the Peer Reviews.

The Preparation Meetings

These meetings were designed for the service users and people with experience of poverty who had volunteered to participate in the Peer Review. The purpose of the two preparatory meetings was to build people's capacity to ensure they could participate as fully as possible in the Peer Review event. This included explaining the purpose of the project and how important their individual experience was, both to the project and the wider context of making and evaluating social policy.

The first meeting focused on introducing the group and explaining the project and the process. It was important to ensure that the group established a good working rapport so they could rely on each other for reassurance and encouragement during the project.

The second preparation meeting was used to continue building the rapport of the group and the confidence of the individuals. However, an important aspect of this meeting was the discussion around the questions to be posed at the Peer Review itself. Having those who had first hand experience of the policy determine the questions that would create the structure of



the Peer Review was important to ensure that the event was not dominated by the concerns of either voluntary organisations or of representatives of local or national government.

The Peer Review

The purpose of the Peer Review was to create a purposeful conversation about policies aimed at tackling poverty and social exclusion between people whose lives and/or work are affected by those policies.

A common format was designed to ensure a uniform approach to all three Reviews. The use of a similar structure for each of the Peer Reviews allowed a consistent approach to be taken when looking for transferable lessons from each of the events. However, there was also flexibility in the structure to allow the use of different approaches and methods in each of the Reviews. For example, in the Glasgow Peer Review a DVD was produced to allow the stories of people who had been through the WFF programme to be told without participants needing to stand in front of an audience. It also allowed people who were unable to attend the event (for example because of childcare, employment or training commitments) to participate.

The common elements of each Peer Review included:

- **Introductions (Plenary)**
- **Overview of Project and NAP Social Inclusion (Plenary)**
- **Overview of Policy under review (Plenary)**
- **Impact of policies on the lives of service users (Plenary)**
- **Site Visits (only if appropriate)**
- **Assessment according to pre-determined benchmarks (Group work)**
- **Identifying the transferable elements (Group work)**
- **Evaluation and conclusions (Plenary)**

Two weeks prior to each Peer Review the Reference Group received paperwork setting out the final programme and a number of background papers. These set context for the policy at the local, national and European levels; gave a brief overview of the vital statistics, history of the policy, operational information, take-up rates, evaluations and set out any relevant current issues at national and European level but particularly at the local level.

Each of the Peer Reviews were two day events, starting with a half day seminar on the first day. The aim of day one was to create an understanding of the project (for local participants), and of the policy under review. This first day was important in getting grassroots participants to begin to openly discuss some of the problems and issues they had encountered in relation to the particular policy under review.

Following the first day seminar, the Reference Group then attended meetings or went on site visits to gain a better understanding of the local context in which the project or policy initiative was operating. These visits and meetings were vital in giving the Reference Group members access to important contextual information which allowed them to more effectively draw out transferable lessons and to begin identifying policy gaps. The Reference Group concluded day one of the event with a reflection meeting to consider the main issues that were emerging and to identify key themes to pursue in day two. All of these meetings were recorded to ensure that all of the learning could be later used to inform the main reports.

The aim of day two of the Peer Review was to understand why (or if) the policy implementation was successful and determine what lessons could be applied to social policy implementation in the future. During day two all participants were split into small groups made up of a mix of grassroots participants, local authority representatives, voluntary sector representatives and national or devolved Government representatives. Each small group had a facilitator and a note taker to ensure accurate recording of discussions.

The Concluding Meeting

The final meeting was arranged six to eight weeks after each Peer Review. This meeting was led by the BTPG project's National Coordinator and the local coordinator and was intended to give grassroots participants an opportunity to feedback on the draft report from the Peer Review. This was an important opportunity to find out whether people valued the experience and if they had any suggested changes to the format. In addition, it further demonstrated the project's commitment to involving grassroots participants, and ensuring that their views and experiences were properly represented in the key findings in the report.

4.3 Learning about Participation

There are a number of existing 'toolkits' that were used during the development of this project. These include: The *Get Heard* Toolkit, Oxfam documents on Participatory Appraisal, the annual pan European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty which takes place under the Presidency of the European Union and the European method of Peer Reviews which has been designed to identify and exchanging best practice in social inclusion.¹⁸ These sources provided excellent advice about running events which engage people outside the usual 'policy process' in evaluating or modifying government policies. It was the purpose of this project to build on that work rather than replicate it. Below this report provides additional lessons learnt as a result of the unique nature of the BTPG project which focused on bringing together a broad range of actors including people who make and deliver the policy, those who work with or study the policy and those who are meant to benefit from the policy.

Consultation must lead change

All participants need to feel that their time and contribution has been worthwhile. It was of the utmost importance to most participants (but particularly community members) that some change resulted from their participation. If no actions result then not only will people feel that their time has been wasted but success of future consultations will be jeopardised. For this reason it is critical that consultation only occurs before relevant decisions have been made and also to consult at a time when recommendations resulting from the peer review can be implemented.

18. For further information and to download the Get Heard toolkit visit: <http://www.ukcap.org/getheard/>

To download the Oxfam Resource: "Have you been PA'd? Using Participatory Appraisal to shape local services" visit: <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/ukpoverty/resources.html>

To find out more about the European 'Peer Review' method visit: <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/>



Including all of the 'Peers'

The unique selling point of the Peer Review as undertaken by the BTPG project was the diversity of the participants, from a range of grassroots, government, academic and community backgrounds. Particularly unusual but important to achieving the aims of the project was the participation of both local government and central and devolved administrations with people experiencing poverty. This was essential if the project was to identify the gaps between what 'ought' to be happening according to national policies targeting poverty and exclusion and what is the implementation and outcomes of those policies. The involvement of representatives from national and devolved administrations provided insights into the objectives of the relevant national policies, as well as a critical link to the policy processes at a national level, ensuring that results from the Peer Review would be fed into those processes. The participation of local authorities served equally important functions. Firstly, as implementation of policy is usually the remit of local government, it was a practical necessity that a local authority lead on the Peer Review. This enabled identification of relevant staff (operational, policy and management), as well as the identification of clients, community groups, politicians, contract or service providers who should also be engaged in the process.

From the community members' point of view the involvement of the local authority is critical as it will allow for implementation of any recommendations resulting from the Peer Review. The local authority has much to gain from participating in a Peer Review which is a short, intensive learning process which can result in better services, improved community relations (which often result from meaningful consultation) and more effective relationships with central government and devolved administrations.

Local to national feedback

National strategies can sometimes be viewed as removed from local life and experience. It can be difficult for people consulted to see the results of their input if consulting on a national strategy document such as the National Action Plan. There is therefore a value in engaging locally to ensure that the connections between local actions and national policy are properly highlighted and feedback processes are created between national policy design and local implementation. Again, this highlights the importance of engaging both local and national governments in a Peer Review.



Reinforcing local community engagement in policy

The consultation events had a number of positive benefits for the local community including a welcome opportunity to feed into local policy processes and improve services for the local community. However, there was a broader benefit derived from engaging more people in the governance of their community. Involvement in the Peer Review was for many grassroots participants the first time they had engaged with government policy and government officials as active influencers rather than as passive recipients of a policy. In an age of falling voter turnout local re-engagement in policy-making processes is critical for governments to retain their democratic legitimacy. The benefit for local democracy and local community include:

- **Community support for policies (see section 3.7.4 on 'Consultation' in the cross-cutting section for further details);**
- **Better community relations as people come together to confront problems;**
- **Improved opinion of the role of the Local Authority if they join with the community to understand and improve issues facing the community;**
- **Participants realised / understood that they can influence what is happening in their area. Many participants have benefited from their engagement in the Peer Review and have continued their participation in different ways. For example, in Swansea, several participants have volunteered to promote the play strategy to various organisations, others have undertaken to review the final play strategy to make sure it is written in plain English and others are now working on other issues that they feel strongly about such as the promotion of healthy eating for children.**

Participation must take place in all aspects of the project

This begins with project planning. As mentioned above (paragraph 4.2) the BTPG project engaged people from the communities we were working in from the early stages of implementation. These community representatives were people who had lived in the local area and had a deep, personal understanding of the issues facing local residents. Their unique insights and contributions were invaluable for project planning and they also provided excellent contacts within the communities themselves. Not only was this important for recruiting other local community participants but it also confirmed the project's commitment to participation to other people engaging with the project.

Preparation before engaging in participatory policy assessment

As described above (paragraph 4.2) the project had two pre-Peer Review meetings built into the programme. These meetings were solely aimed at community participants and were conceived as both a ‘capacity-building’ exercise and as an opportunity for community participants to highlight the key priorities for discussion. An important element of the BTPG project was to have a policy and implementation assessment of ‘what works’ and what does not work, from the perspective of the target group themselves. Part of this process was for people to realise the importance of their personal experience, and how this can be used to influence government policy.

Additional benefits of the preparation meetings included:

- **An opportunity for people to get to know other participants (including project organisers) in a relaxed environment. These relationships built people’s confidence and a sense of mutual support for the participants.**
- **Spreading the word: It was common for people to attend the event and then go home and discuss it with friends, families and neighbours who then wanted to participate themselves.**
- **Understanding barriers: It allowed the event organisers to understand any barriers that may be preventing people from participating and allowed time to try to overcome these issues in advance of the Peer Review meeting.**
- **Recruit participants to tell their story on the day: People who were comfortable with this were given the option of presenting this verbally or as a written document. If budgets and resources are available we would recommend video presentations. This technique was used for the Glasgow Peer Review where five clients and four staff told their stories about their experience of the Working for Families initiative. This was a very powerful and effective tool for explaining how the Working for Families policy operated and the impact it had on people’s lives and set an excellent tone for the two day event.**

Engagement of local politicians as well as local officials

There was initial concern about the involvement of politicians for fear that some participants may have found their presence intimidating. In the experience of this project, that fear was unfounded and those politicians that did participate found it to be a very productive way to engage with local people about local problems. Most participants found their presence encouraging as it demonstrated the consultation was being taken seriously by the local authority. One issue which emerged was the challenge of engaging politicians in the full Peer Review events. While it may be difficult for politicians to set aside the time to attend full day events, it was clear that more could be done to achieve a higher level of engagement. Participation from start to finish is preferable as it enables a full understanding of the outcome of the Peer Review (or similar events) and a part-time presence can send negative messages to the other participants about the importance of the consultation.



Key Recommendation

Given the experience highlighted above it is clear that the Peer Review process that was adapted and developed for the *Bridging the Policy Gap* project holds valuable lessons on how to effectively engage people with experience of social exclusion and poverty in the review and development of policies. Crucially, it contains lessons on how this can be done in a way that also develops enhanced dialogue between local and national government on important aspects of social inclusion policy. Given this learning the project makes the following recommendations for the development of future National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (or, indeed, similar national approaches to tackling poverty):

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.

Conclusions

The broad aim of the *Bridging the Policy Gap* project has been to raise awareness of the EU Social Inclusion process in the UK. However, raising awareness is a somewhat limited goal - the real challenge has been to demonstrate what the EU process adds to the fight against poverty in the UK. In the act of raising awareness of the social inclusion process it has been the project's goal to generate new ideas and new insights into how to combat poverty and social exclusion. In this way we believe that the project has not only strengthened the EU social inclusion process in the UK, but has made a practical contribution to making an impact on the poverty and social exclusion that blights the lives of millions of people in the UK.

One of the problems the project set out to explore was the 'policy gaps' that were seen to be emerging between priorities set at the national level and those set at the local level. To this, we may add the gap in experience, knowledge and involvement that has, to a large extent, developed between policy makers and implementers and people with experience of poverty and social exclusion. If these gaps are to be filled then practical methods need to be developed in order to achieve the 'joined-up' thinking and positive action that is so clearly needed.

So in this respect the project has reinforced a view expressed by the Social Policy Task Force in its submission to the last NAP in 2006, that is, that the EU Social Inclusion process provides an impetus for national government, devolved authorities, voluntary organisations and people with direct experience of poverty to work together to find new solutions to the problems they face. The partners in this project have worked together to show that the participation of people with experience of poverty is not simply an 'added extra' in the evaluation and development of policy, but is essential to a correct assessment of impact.

The methodology used in the Peer Reviews has built on the experience that was gained through the *Get Heard* project in 2004-06, a project in which many of the current partners also played a leading role. However, where *Get Heard* was an attempt to gather the general views of people living in poverty, *Bridging the Policy Gap* has attempted to deepen the dialogue between policy makers and those who experience poverty and social exclusion. *Bridging the Policy Gap* is an essential and necessary next step to develop the expansive dialogue that *Get Heard* initiated and which opened out to a national debate in the first UK People Experiencing Poverty Conference, which took place in June 2006, supported by the Department for Work and Pensions. The methodology outlined in section four of this report provides an innovative approach to bringing together those responsible for developing and implementing policy to combat poverty and social exclusion and those experiencing it, to play their part in dialogue about what works and what must change.

However, this project was not solely about piloting participatory methodology nor even solely about demonstrating the benefits of this approach for assessment of local policy implementation. It was important that transferable policy lessons emerged that can be fed in to the development of the next UK National Action Plan on Social Inclusion (2008-11). Section three of this report shows that significant transferable policy lessons were learned in the areas under Peer Review which can be taken up in the preparation of the next NAP Inclusion. There are, of course, lessons also for NGOs that are concerned with poverty and social exclusion and the Social Policy Task Force of NGOs following up the NAP will take these forward in their own work



We have noted a range of policy issues and key recommendations throughout this report, but it is useful to highlight a number of more general lessons:

The importance of play for combating child poverty and exclusion. The Swansea Peer Review highlighted a policy area that has been rather over-looked in the development of child poverty policy. Whilst increasing income is central to the strategy to tackle child poverty, it is not the only element necessary to the quality of a child's life. If combating child poverty is about more than just raising low income, then delivering improvements to the lives of poor children will be more than simply the responsibility of one or two departments of the UK Government. The importance of child play highlights the significant contribution that other parts of government, particularly local government, have in improving the well-being of children from low income families

Welfare reform, and welfare to work programmes, will remain a central part of national Government policy. The role of local government and of the voluntary sector in the delivery of innovative services and support has been clear throughout this project. However, some aspects of welfare reform will remain controversial and will divide opinion. Issues regarding increasing 'conditionality' or compulsory elements in the welfare system have long been the subject of heated debate. There is compelling evidence from this project that greater compulsion in the welfare system may not be appropriate for many people who are currently relying on state support. The Working for Families Initiative received strong support from people who had been through the programme, support that was based on the fact that they received the appropriate support at the right time. There was no question that people would be pushed into work before they, or their advisor, felt that they were ready. Both advisors and clients felt that the fact that people were not compelled to take part in the programme contributed to its success.

Further, it was very clear in both the Glasgow and Newham Peer Review that support measures – from childcare to 'one-stop' information to anti-discrimination are not sufficiently in place to enable poor and disadvantaged groups to access jobs. Nor was it evident that many of the jobs available in those areas could lift lone parents and people with a disability out of income poverty. In these circumstances greater conditionality and compulsion will not succeed in combating poverty. For example, people with a disability who participated in the Newham Peer Review were clear that they wanted to undertake employment but they wanted government employability initiatives to provide support for moving into careers, rather than 'just any job'. They reiterated that discrimination remains an everyday barrier for disabled people and gave many local examples. Participants were keen to see education campaigns to help overcome this prejudice and also improved and more visible enforcement procedures to accompany the disability discrimination legislation.

If the recent progress that has been made in tackling poverty in the UK is to be sustained then there will be an even greater need for more co-ordinated action to tackle poverty. The Peer Review model that we have used in this project has been adapted from the European model in operation cross-nationally. These models have shown that there is much to learn from other member states in the EU. The Bridging the Policy Gap project has shown that there is also much to learn from within the UK. It has also demonstrated that better coordinated action does not simply mean central government communicating better with its own departments, nor even with devolved government or local government. Rather, coordination means that central government must reach out to all those who have a stake in tackling poverty and social exclusion, particularly those with direct experience of poverty. By building genuine dialogue between all the relevant players we stand a better chance of making the decisive impact on poverty that is our shared goal.

Appendix: Reference Group Members

Member	Organisation
Clare Batty	Local Authority Social Exclusion Network, Warwick Business School
Chris Burston	Department for Work and Pensions
Dave Clarke	Bristol City Council
Richard Court	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Janice Docherty	Community Member/support from Tea in the Pot
Katherine Duffy	Social Policy Task Force/EAPN England and Europe/ De Montfort University
Tricia Griffiths	Department for Work and Pensions
Karen Grunhut	City & County of Swansea
Shona Honeyman	Glasgow City Council
Debbie Jones	Community Member/support from Blaenymaes Trust
Peter Kelly	The Poverty Alliance/EAPN Scotland and Europe
Neil Langhorn	Scottish Government
Sally Mackenzie	<i>Bridging the Policy Gap</i> National Co-ordinator
Ian Mather	Community Member/Anti-Poverty Network Cymru/ Social Policy Task Force
Celia Moignahan	London Borough of Newham
Ali Safder	Community Member/support from Action and Rights of Disabled People in Newham
Angela Spence	Wolverhampton City Council
Michael Wright	Scottish Government
Chairpersons	
Glasgow	Prof. Alan McGregor, Glasgow University
Swansea	Alice Greenlees, WCVA
Newham	Patrick Stack, Disability in Camden (DISC)

Bridging the Policy Gap Partners

City and County of Swansea (CCS)

CCS has a long history of promoting the role of Local Government in mainstreaming social inclusion. Since 1996 Swansea has adopted a formal commitment to tackle poverty and social exclusion and as such it is a key cross-cutting theme of the Council's Corporate and Community Plan.

The project is the responsibility of the Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion team which aims to strengthen, support and promote local actions that tackle social exclusion, address poverty, and bring about improvements in the lives of the most disadvantaged citizens of Swansea.

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

The Government Department with lead responsibility for many of the key social inclusion strategies, including child poverty, labour market, pensions and health and safety issues. DWP provides central strategic functions including advising Ministers and Parliament, reporting annually on progress against poverty indicators and leading for the UK on the EU's open method of co-ordination in the field of social inclusion including writing the National Action Plans. DWP also contains three important delivery organisations – Jobcentre Plus, the Pension Service and the Child Support Agency.

Glasgow City Council (GCC)

Glasgow has developed a wide range of programmes designed to address economic and social inclusion. The Council Development And Regeneration Services Team is responsible for managing many of these programmes including the Working for Families Fund. This initiative was launched in January 2003 when the Scottish Executive invited GCC to become a pilot area for Social Justice Funding for Childcare. The purpose was to develop pilot projects that 'allowed parents from disadvantaged areas or groups to enter or sustain training and employment, while also providing good quality and stable childcare services.'

Local Authority Social Exclusion Network (LASE), Warwick Business School, University of Warwick

The Network provides a practical forum through which colleagues working against social exclusion from within local government can learn from one another.

London Borough of Newham (LBN)

The project is being delivered by Newham's Social Regeneration Unit which works to maximise the incomes of local people by providing up to date information and advice needed to claim benefit entitlements, providing information on how to sort out debts, as well as making flexible savings and low cost loans available to all Newham residents through NewCred, the community credit union.

Social Policy Task Force (SPTF)

The SPTF was founded by the European Anti-Poverty Network and is a joint working group of anti-poverty networks and organisations specifically formed to follow up the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion in the UK. It meets with the DWP NAP Inclusion team every two months and has been engaged in joint activity over a period of several years. The SPTF launched and oversaw the *Get Heard* project and provides written submissions on the NAP Inclusion and related matters. It lobbies and provides advocacy in the poverty field and supports the key principle of participatory democracy.

The Poverty Alliance (TPA)

TPA is the national anti-poverty network in Scotland. It aims to tackle poverty by: working with communities to enable them to tackle poverty; working with professionals to support them to tackle poverty; working to develop social policies which address poverty more effectively.

The Poverty Alliance is responsible for the day-to-day management of this project.

The Scottish Government

The Scottish Government is the devolved administration for Scotland. It is responsible for most of the issues of day-to-day concern to the people of Scotland, including health, education, justice, rural affairs, and transport. The Scottish Government has a range of policies designed to tackle poverty and social exclusion covering a range of areas including child poverty, employability, health inequalities and financial inclusion. The Scottish Government's anti-poverty strategy is coordinated through the 'Closing the Opportunity Gap' approach.

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For an electronic or large format version of this report please visit www.povertyalliance.org/btpg or contact The Poverty Alliance.



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DWP Department for Work and Pensions



Tea in the Pot
Anti Poverty Network Cymru
Social Policy Task Force



LASE
Local Authorities &
Social Exclusion Network

Action and Rights of Disabled People in Newham