

Speaking Out Briefing No 2

The Government's Social Exclusion Agenda

Speaking Out is a partnership between the National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations (NCVCCO) and the National Council of Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) to build a voice for the children and young people's voluntary and community sector across Government. The project will develop closer links between Government departments and the voluntary and community sector in delivering cross departmental plans such as *Every Child Matters* and the direct implementation of initiatives which affect children and young people.

The project aims to support children, young people and family voluntary and community organisations to better understanding the aims and impact on their users of a wider range of government policies and provide routes to influence them. We are funded by the Office of the Third Sector part of the Cabinet Office.

Who are these briefings for?

This series of briefings intends to provide members of both NCVYS and NCVCCO and other interested parties with background and analysis on specific policy items affecting the sector.

Other activities

In addition to these briefings we will be developing work streams around the policy themes which will include:

- web forums;
- seminars and events;
- establishing communities of interest amongst members and other organisations on specific policy themes linking them into email groups and bringing them together for small round table meetings with policy makers;
- making representations to Government; and
- linking with wider campaigns NCVYS & NCVCCO may be developing.



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1. Background

This briefing paper focuses on the Government's social exclusion agenda, giving a broad overview of the policy context and some history but focusing on the current strategy to address social exclusion through the work of the newly formed Social Exclusion Task force. We will highlight how this links this with the children and young people's agenda and the possible implications for the voluntary and community sector.

The term 'social exclusion' encompasses the notions of poverty, inequality and disadvantage, the compounding effects on individuals and communities and the often inter-generational nature of poverty passing down from one generation to the next. People become excluded when they are disengaged from the processes that enable others to access the goods and services that society provides. Because social exclusion is partly a lack of the ability to participate fully in a community it can have a negative impact across a range of areas where services are delivered, such as education and health, and lead to poverty. Addressing social exclusion has been a government priority since 1997.

The Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) was formed in 1997 as a kind of inter-Government think tank to stimulate and initiate action on some of the most difficult issues in the area of social exclusion including homelessness, teenage pregnancy and employment and education and training amongst 16-19 year olds. The SEU produced over 40 reports, many of which brought about positive changes in policy, including:

- The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal which established the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit which targets deprived neighbourhoods aiming to narrow the gap between deprived areas and the rest of the country
- Their report on rough sleeping which led to the creation of the Rough Sleepers Unit and further support for the Rough Sleepers Initiative which has reduced the numbers of people sleeping on the streets by 70%
- The National Teenage Pregnancy Strategy which has led to an 11.8% reduction in conception rates for under 18's since 1998.

A decade since its launch the Government has relocated the Social Exclusion Unit to the Cabinet Office from the old Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The SEU has also gone through a re-brand and is now called the Social Exclusion Task force (SETF). The Task force has recently launched a cross government Action Plan to take forward its agenda.

2. Policy Context

A range of policy areas have an impact on the social exclusion experienced by children and young people. From education, health and social care,

criminal justice, communities and policy areas affecting families and parents the influence of social policy in the lives of socially excluded young people is both deep and wide. The recent Cabinet Office report, *Families at Risk: Background on Families with Multiple Disadvantages*, identifies seven outcome areas which illustrate the range of problems contributing to social exclusion. Another contributor is their involvement or lack of involvement in the decision making processes that affect them. Children and young people come into contact with a range of institutional decision making structures throughout their development into adulthood. All of which can lead them to become marginalised if adults making decisions fail to consider their views.

Social exclusion cuts across a number of cross government policy agendas, such as, the respect agenda, the neighbourhood renewal strategy, and *Every Child Matters*. But policy hasn't always linked together in the desired manner or has had unforeseen affects which may have an adverse affect on social exclusion. A current example has been the use of Anti Social Behaviour Orders on young people in addressing issues of anti social behaviour in communities which has, through the breaching of these orders led to an increase in the number of young people entering the youth justice system. A major challenge for the government is to ensure that its policies compliment one another and work together to alleviate social exclusion.

The Social Exclusion Unit's 2003 report, *Transitions – young adults with complex needs*, focused on the period of transition from childhood to adulthood and how for disadvantaged young people this period carried greater risks to issues such as: poor education; homelessness; long term unemployment; substance misuse or mental health problems. The report sets out the notion of service interventions working more effectively in managing transitions from children, youth to adult services and working together in a more holistic way. This has clearly been a theme that has been taken forward into the SETF's new plan.

As well as launching its Action Plan on tackling social exclusion the SETF also launched a report highlighting the Government's successes over the last 10 years. Some of the key points from the Task force's report 'Reaching Out: Progress on Social Exclusion' were:

- the bottom 20% of the population have seen their incomes grow faster than the top 20% between 1997 and 2004;
- since 1997, 1.6 million children have been lifted out of poverty;
- the number of young people leaving school with no qualifications has been halved since 1997, while the proportion leaving with five good GCSE's has risen from 45% to 58%;
- since 1998, primary schools in the areas of highest poverty have improved at nearly twice the rate of schools in the most affluent areas;

- Positive Activities for Young People supports over 290,000 teenagers (the majority at risk of social exclusion) and helps reduce anti social behaviour and street crime in some of the most deprived localities; and
- because of the Government's successes in improving the position of the poor in society the Social Exclusion Task force could now focus on the two-three% of society who experience deep rooted and persistent exclusion.

The contributors to these successes have been a mixture of factors and measures, including:

- a period of sustained strong economic growth;
- increased public expenditure in health and education;
- specific Government programmes such as Sure Start;
- support for working poorer families through the tax credit system; and
- the minimum wage.

A key target for the Government has been to halve child poverty by 2010 and to end it by 2020 which was announced in 1999 by the then Prime Minister Tony Blair. Child poverty has been reduced with more than 700,000 fewer children being in poverty than in 1998/99. However the report *'What will it take to reduce child poverty?'* released by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2006 stated that the government was unlikely to meet its 2010 target unless it significantly increased expenditure on benefits and tax credits and that the 2020 target would be even harder to reach. Taking these children out of poverty would require more than the current policy of redistributing wealth to the poorest families through tax credits but improving outcomes in education and training for these families and addressing affordable childcare and the low pay experienced by women.

The prime focus for the Task Force's work is the two-three% of the population who experience deep-rooted exclusion. The often, cyclical nature of social exclusion passing from one generation to the next is a major focus for the Task Force. For example, the daughter of a teenage mother is twice as likely as an older mother to become pregnant in her teens.

Reaching Out: an Action Plan on Social Exclusion sets out how social exclusion will be tackled across Government. It highlights guiding principles in the Government's approach and looks in detail at the different life stages, the work so far and new policy interventions that will address the challenges.

The plan sets out a number of guiding principles that will steer the Government's response to social exclusion. It starts off from the premise that a great deal of resources are invested in services for the most socially excluded groups of people, but most of this investment goes on the symptoms rather than causes of social exclusion.

The plan sets out five guiding principles to change the current position and re-orientate public services to earlier interventions and prevention. The five themes are as follows:

- 1. Better identification and earlier interventions** - This will involve the development and use of better prediction tools for use by practitioners that can support the better follow up for those identified as at risk.
- 2. Systematically identifying what works** - The introduction of a common approach to rate programmes on the quality of the evidence they produce. This will support commissioners in their decisions particularly in children and families services.
- 3. Promoting multi-agency working** - Local Area Agreements will be strengthened. The Government will publish more information about the cross-agency costs of social exclusion, and extend data sharing on excluded groups across relevant agencies.
- 4. Personalisation, rights and responsibilities** - The SETF will pilot service delivery models based on budget holding lead professionals.
- 5. Supporting achievement and managing underperformance** - The SETF will work with other Government departments to ensure their targets through the Public Service Agreements (PSA's) adequately address the needs of the most disadvantaged. They will also challenge local areas to develop proposals to address social exclusion in their local areas.

The Action Plan proposes a life stage approach to tackling social exclusion. It sets the issue within the life-stages of individuals from early years to childhood and teenage years through to adulthood. Exploring the risk factors and potentially successful interventions, that can be utilised at each stage to address social exclusion.

The early year's section of the Action Plan focuses on the pre-school interventions that can change a child's life chances in later life. Highlighting the successes of the Sure Start programme this section aims to build on research which suggests that intensive health-led home visiting during pregnancy and the first two years of life can improve outcomes for the most at risk families and children.

The Action Plan commits to establishing pilot intensive parent support projects, which will be evaluated based around established Sure Start Children Centres targeting the most disadvantaged mothers and children. It also promises to work with the midwife and health visiting professions to improve skills and practice in this area, and to produce commissioning guidance in this area to spread best practice.

The section on children and teenagers identifies children in care, teenage parents and those with low educational achievement as the highest risk groups. While acknowledging the improvements of the Every Child Matters programme the Action Plan concedes that progress is patchy.

The commitments include taking forward the *Care Matters Green Paper*, which was launched in October 2006 and the consultation for which closed in January 2007. There will also be a revised teenage pregnancy strategy, which will focus on those areas where rates of teenage conceptions remain high, and pilot projects to test new methods in addressing mental health disorders in childhood.

The section on adults with chaotic lifestyles promises to launch pilot projects to test alternative approaches to improving outcomes for people with chaotic lifestyles. There will be support for efforts to find employment for those with severe mental health problems and to publish the report from the Leith review which will make further recommendations on addressing the poor economic prospects of those with few qualifications and skills.

The Action Plan outlines further action that will be taken to take forward its work in combating social exclusion which includes:

- Continued stakeholder engagement and discussion feeding into its 10 year review of the drivers of social exclusion and the effectiveness of the government responses.
- The Action Plan will be a key reference in framing the Government's approach to tackling disadvantage in the comprehensive spending review process which will be completed later this year.
- The families at risk review is a cross government review on interventions for excluded and at risk families, which will seek to develop interventions that can combat poor outcomes and provide better support. It was launched in February 2007 and will be concluded in the summer 2007.

3. Legal Context

A range of primary legislation has been enacted since 1997 aimed at tackling social exclusion, both by bringing communities closer to decision makers – addressing a deficit the government has identified as a driver of social exclusion – and allowing targeted groups of marginalised children to articulate their own views on how specific services should be delivered to them. The following are a selection of those that impact significantly on children and young people.

Communities, via the activities of the voluntary sector are given an opportunity to work through local government as a result of **The Local Government Act 2000**. This act provides local authorities with a power to take any steps to promote or improve the economic, social or environmental well-being of their local community. The Act requires local authorities as strategic decision-makers to exercise this duty against the background of their community strategy, and allows authorities, and other bodies who provide local services, to establish common priorities and determine the steps which they would take to address them. The range of partners for voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations to engage with tackling social exclusion is extended through the **Local Government and Public Access to Health Bill 2007**, which in its current form proposes to extend opportunities for communities to become involved in decision making processes as a way of targeting local social issues through reformed parish councils as a way of targeting local social concerns.

Specific groups of children and young people are the subject of a range of legislation addressing areas where they are at risk of becoming socially excluded:

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 recognises that care leavers are a group vulnerable to becoming socially excluded, often featuring low on statistical outcome indicators across education and employment in relation to children in mainstream settings. The Act introduces a duty for local authorities to keep in touch with care leavers, develop pathway plans covering for education, housing and employment, and Young Persons Advisor to help take the plan forward. Local authorities are under an additional duty to provide assistance with further education or employment, including costs beyond age 21 'to the extent that his welfare and educational and training needs require it'.

Other legislation seeks to tackle exclusion in educational settings.

The Special Education Needs and Disability Act 2001 addresses the social exclusion amongst children and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities which prevents them from fully participating in the education system. A key feature of the act is the introduction of 'reasonable adjustment' under which schools and educational institutions have to take the steps considered reasonable to allow children and young people to remain in their learning environment. Steps include providing learning resources and materials in a range of alternative formats allowing children with impairments other ways accessing lessons.

4. Findings from Research/Practice

The Action Plan cites a number of examples of evaluated interventions that are making a clear contribution to addressing social exclusion. Two of those are highlighted below.

Teens and Toddlers is a voluntary organisation that delivers a successful teenage pregnancy intervention programme. It targets 14-17 year olds who are at risk of early pregnancy and parenthood. Teenagers spend two hours a week with a toddler in the nursery to get hands on experience of what it is like to care for a child. In addition, the young people receive life coaching and educational, social and personal development objectives are built into the programme.

Some of outcomes that have been achieved through the programme are as follows:

- Greater knowledge and understanding by participating teenagers of sexual health, safer sex practices, contraception and broader health risks.
- Better social and relationship skills and emotional health of participating young people.

- Improved parenting skills and understanding of the needs and developmental demands of young children.
- Supported preparation for work, which led to greater involvement in school and community.
- Improved outcomes for the toddlers who took part in the project.
- Reductions in teenage conceptions.

Evaluation of the programme has highlighted the cost effectiveness of the intervention, which costs just £1000 per teenager compared to £60,000 in health and benefit costs in the first five years of teenage pregnancy. It is well received by participants and practitioners and is currently running in a number of London boroughs.

The development of budget holding lead professionals is a key strand of the Action Plan. The lead professional acts as the point of contact for the family/service user and will work with the family in ensuring purchased services meet the specific requirements of that family in the most effective way.

The lead professional also facilitates effective coordination and communication across the many practitioners and agencies working with the family/service user. They hold an individual budget for the service user/family and makes purchasing decisions in consultation with the family/service user. The single Account Holder Pilot scheme was announced in the 2006 budget and included 15 local authorities. These pilots began in summer 2006 for an 18 month period and will be evaluated. Budget holding lead professionals are also a central recommendation in the Care Matters Green Paper. The concept could form a central tenet in transforming how social and health care services are commissioned in the future.

Within the broader context of education policy and children with special needs the lack of awareness about a pupil's special educational needs, or inability to bridge a communications gap can lead to some children failing unnecessarily in mainstream education settings. Despite almost seven% of children in the UK (770,000¹) having some form of disability surveys of parents have shown that 64% consider the level of support available to their child was a factor influencing the range of school activities available resulting in disabled children being unable to take part in a range of school activities². The same Disability Rights Commission survey found that 78% of respondents said that even the curriculum was not accessible for their child³. A lack of awareness on the part of adults working with vulnerable children and young people is a problem leading to almost half of young people interviewed by the Disability Rights Commission saying they had experienced problems at school because of their impairment.⁴

1 www.dcsf.gov.uk

2 DRC Research Report - Experiences of disabled students and their families: Phase 1, Ann Lewis, Christopher Robertson, Sarah Parsons School of Education, University of Birmingham, June 2005

3 DRC Research Report - Experiences of disabled students and their families: Phase 1, Ann Lewis, Christopher Robertson, Sarah Parsons School of Education, University of Birmingham, June 2005

4 DRC Education Research: Key Findings 2002-2003

As a result The Shaw Trust has found that disabled people 'are more than twice as likely as non-disabled people to have no qualifications at all' (27% as opposed to 11%).⁵

Children in care face a similar risk of exclusion. Nearly 15,000 children in care are also disabled, often being placed out of their area making it difficult for parents and carers to speak up on their behalf relying on the availability of advocates to ensure they are included in the decisions made about them. Other children in care suffer disproportionately worse outcomes than young people outside the care system, leading to the over-representation of cared for young people across a number of indicators for social exclusion including educational attainment and the prison population. According to a Social Exclusion Unit report children in care are ten times more likely to be excluded than other children, whilst those in education are more likely to leave school with no qualifications at all – 48% of children in care left school without any qualifications in 2003 compared to only five% of all other children.⁶

5. Issues for the Voluntary Sector (VCS) Children and Youth Organisations

The VCS is well placed to work with groups who, because of a long-term exclusion from services, are suspicious of public services and care professionals. Children and young people with parents who misuse drugs, Traveller and Gypsy children and children with long term exclusion from school are just some of the groups who often have a reluctance to engage with statutory services, often relying on outreach services in order to access information about the availability of services.

A range of models of service delivery exist where VCS organisations can reach children and young people at risk of social exclusion: from outreach work with young rough sleepers and the homeless; to specialist services for under 16 year olds who have runaway from abuse within the family home; through to specialist provision for young people excluded from school who are not attending a Pupil Referral Unit or some other form of direct service from the education services. The sector is making a huge contribution, often adapting to changing needs in a fashion statutory provision often finds difficult.

⁵ <http://www.shaw-trust.org.uk/page/6/89/>

⁶ Truancy and Exclusion, SEU, 1998

Both children's centres and extended schools offer support to parents and children. There are currently 1,250 centres in operation, with the Government intending that by 2010 there will be 3,500. The children's centre model allows access to children and young people through their parents by co-locating a range of children's services together with parenting support in a single location. Due to the range of services on offer through Children's Centres there are a number of opportunities for VCS organisations to reach socially excluded families. The range of services on offer comprises a core offer of wraparound children's services including: childcare; advice; parenting advice and support services; and onward referral to other services.

Extended schools offer a menu of activities designed around the needs of children and young people in education, including homework clubs, study support, sporting activities and music lessons, and special interest clubs and volunteering opportunities.

6. Comment and Analysis

The work of the Social Exclusion Task Force is welcomed by both NCVCCO and NCVYS. The Action Plan will have a major impact in the development and implementation of Government Policy affecting children and young people over the coming years. The interim report from the Children and Young people's Comprehensive Spending Review clearly takes its lead from the Social Exclusion Action Plan with its emphasis on re-orientating services towards prevention, early intervention and targeting those in greatest risk.

The voluntary sector should welcome this commitment but as always the implementation and delivery will be crucial. One of the key challenges in making this shift from acute/crisis point service entry towards more prevention and early intervention will be the ability of public services to assess, develop and grow many of the kind of successful interventions highlighted in the Social Exclusion Action Plan.

The voluntary and community sector knows all too well the difficulty in the current public service environment of 'mainstreaming' and growing successful projects. Some of which fail to deliver successful outcomes, but many successful projects don't find continuation funding and are forced to close regardless of the outcomes they have achieved. Current models of commissioning will not just have to change but may have to be transformed and there is a tacit acknowledgement of this in the proposals in the Third Sector Public Service Delivery Plan to train Commissioners in working with the sector. But this will be a long hard process.

There is also the issue of how different public service commissioners work together and supporting interventions that work across multiple issues which is the case for many voluntary and community sector services. Budget Holding Lead Professionals (BHLF) is an initiative that could impact positively

here. But could we see BHLF based within a Voluntary and Community Sector provider? Or at least working with independent advocacy services? These are possible points for the SETF to consider. Certainly setting children and young people at the heart of the commissioning process is something both NCVYS and NCVCCO believe must be at the centre of this transformation process. The Care Matters agenda and the new Teenage Pregnancy Strategy will provide an early litmus test. Crucially lacking within the Action Plan is a clear understanding of how the voluntary and community sector can contribute to this agenda. There is an acknowledgement of the contribution that the sector can make but no clear route for the sector to prepare, develop and make its input.

More thinking needs to go into this and some of the work being carried out through the DCFS funded VCS engage programme should inform the SETF thinking and debate. One of the points the SETF may wish to consider is that if using the voluntary and community sector as a seed bed to incubate new projects and approaches is having limited success in terms of mainstreaming through primarily local funding/commissioning routes, maybe we need to think of new ways of mainstreaming successful interventions? This is all very relevant in how children's trusts develop and grow but is absent from the current debate.

The Social Exclusion Action Plan, along with the ten year youth strategy, the third sector public service delivery plan, and the local government bill all envisage a new way of delivering public services with community/user involvement at its core. Aspiring to this new form of public service delivery is of course far easier than addressing the issues around the current channels of delivery in order to achieve this new environment. The role of the voluntary and community sector is crucial and needs to be given more thought through this process.

7. Resources

In addition to the Government papers used in this briefing there are a number of useful web-based resources on the issue of social exclusion:

1. Responsibility in Government for Social Exclusion resides with the Social Exclusion Task Force. The Task Force carried a range of information relating to the different ways children and young people can be excluded including the recent action plan, Reaching Out. For more information visit:
http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social_exclusion_task_force/.
2. A range of archived materials relation to past initiatives in Government can be found from the Social Exclusion Unit at <http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/seu/>
3. Research on the causes of social exclusion from an independent non-government source can be accessed through the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE), a research unit of the London School of Economics; <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/case/>
4. The Guardian Society website carried news and reporting articles on a range of issues related to the issues of exclusion. The site is available at:
<http://society.guardian.co.uk/socialexclusion/0,,630068,00.html>