

**Report of Steering Committee**  
**Review of Combat Poverty Agency**

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**September 2008**

## I. Background

### Outline of terms of reference

1. The Steering Committee's terms of reference (attached as Appendix 1) focus principally on the Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) which was established by legislation in 1986. We have been asked to examine the role of the Agency in light of a range of more recent developments. Key among these are:
  - *the emergence of comprehensive strategies and programmes to promote social inclusion.* This approach is wider than the anti-poverty perspective around which historically the CPA remit was drawn up.
  - *extensive new institutional developments in support of social inclusion.* These include the Office for Social Inclusion (created in 2002), the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, Children and Integration and related Senior Officials' Group (SOGSI); new structures or agencies dealing with specific issues relevant to poverty e.g. homelessness, urban regeneration, Travellers, drugs; the expansion (now under Department of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and County/City Development Board leadership) of local and community development programmes and initiatives; and progress, led by social inclusion units, in mainstreaming social inclusion considerations in the business of central government, local government and the health sector.
  - *an increased involvement for Partnership structures* (in particular the Community and Voluntary Pillar, the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) and National Economic and Social Council (NESC)) in shaping and monitoring social inclusion policies and measures.
2. Our terms of reference require us, having regard to the above, to
  - identify the extent to which newer developments or arrangements may duplicate, overlap or complement the CPA role,
  - report on the ongoing validity of the CPA remit, and
  - bring forward proposals, as appropriate, for enhancement and/or rationalisation and make recommendations to the Minister for Social and Family Affairs.

Our examination is also to address the work programmes and operations of CPA in the context of efficiency and effectiveness and overall value for money, and

against the background of the recent OECD review of the Irish public service. On 8 July 2008, the Government announced public spending measures which included a requirement from the Minister for Finance that State agencies should be reviewed by Departments “to examine whether they can share services, whether it would be appropriate to absorb some of their functions back into their parent Departments or whether some agencies should be amalgamated or abolished”. The Department of Social and Family Affairs has indicated that it intends that the present review, already well underway at the time of the Government announcement, should inform its response to the Government on this matter.

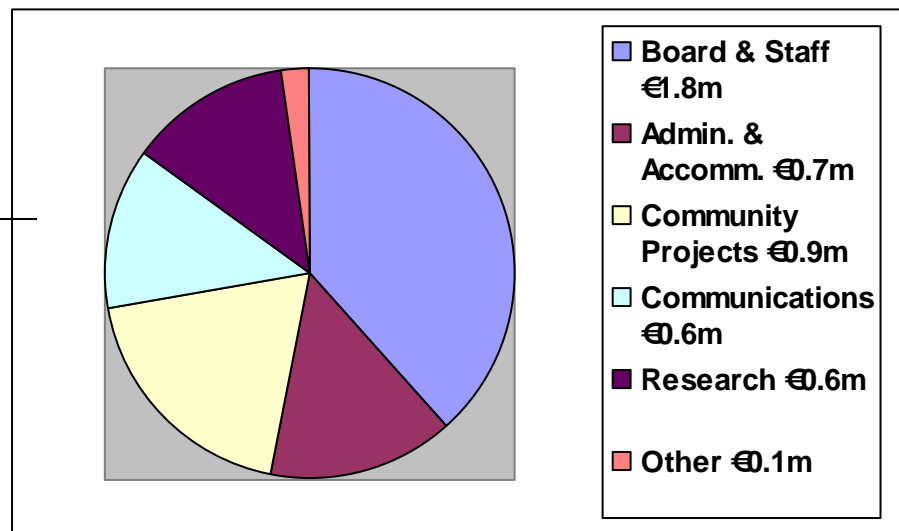
### CPA role and organisation<sup>1</sup>

3. The primary statutory functions of CPA are to:

- provide policy advice to the Minister for Social and Family Affairs on all aspects of poverty,
- undertake project initiation and evaluation,
- carry out/commission research on the nature, causes and extent of poverty, and
- promote public understanding of poverty.

A more detailed listing of CPA’s statutory functions also includes that of promoting community development. In practice, CPA has since its establishment developed a wide range of activities under all of the above headings.

4. The CPA budget for 2008 amounts to some €4.6m. Over half of this, some €2.5m, relates to organisational costs (which of course would also substantially cover the policy advice and some of the research functions). Of the balance, some €0.9m is directed to community and demonstration projects, €0.6m to (externally procured) research and some €0.7m to communications and minor expenditures.



<sup>1</sup> A more detailed note on the evolution of the CPA is at Appendix 2

5. The Agency organisation consists at present of an appointed Board (Chairman and 15 other members) and an approved staff complement of 25, headed by a Director at Principal Higher grade. Most CPA non-administrative staff (some 15) operate at AP or HEO grade equivalent and are deployed in Divisions dealing respectively with Projects, Research and Communications. These Divisions between them service CPA's core statutory functions described above.

#### **Other reviews of CPA**

6. CPA has undergone several previous organisational and strategic reviews ( listed in Appendix 3), including a statutorily based review commissioned by the then Minister in 1996 and carried out by Goodbody Economic Consultants. This concluded that the Agency should continue in existence, but that it should review its remit in response to major changes in its environment since it was established. This recommendation does not appear to have been actioned in a systematic way; and no formal change in the CPA mandate (whether by Ministerial regulations or amending legislation) has so far been made.
7. A common finding of much of this review analysis is that CPA's role and traction is better established within the non-governmental than the governmental sector; and that the Agency needs better to focus its work priorities in line with evolving developments in Government policy and economic and social changes. The most recently completed review of CPA activity (a review of the Research Programme by Goodbody Economic Consultants in May 2008) concludes that the Agency Research Programme is well structured and productive. However, the review finds no evidence that the take-up of CPA research outputs is significant or growing; and it signals concerns of certain potential users, including some relevant Government departments, about the quality and balance of some CPA research, its insufficient focus on key strategic issues, and the need for a greater focus on solutions rather than the identification of problems. For its part, CPA has signalled serious

reservations about some aspects of the research review's evaluation process, the report itself and its conclusions and recommendations.

### **Working methods of Steering Committee**

8. Our review began in mid December 2007 and involved 7 meetings of the full Steering Committee. A bilateral consultation took place between sub-groups of, respectively, the Steering Committee and the CPA Board, following which further written submissions were also made by CPA. In addition, CPA input to the process was provided through the participation in the Committee, on the nomination of the CPA Chairman, of the Acting Director, CPA. This arrangement added much value to our deliberations. However, the Acting Director, CPA is unable to associate himself with the recommendations of this report.
9. Beyond those with CPA, we undertook some 7 other bilateral consultations with both the Departments represented on the Steering Committee and with the Chairs and Directors of NESF and NESC: these latter organisations were directly mentioned in our terms of reference. We did not consider that our terms of reference envisaged that the Steering Committee should engage in wider external consultations. Extensive stakeholder consultations had been undertaken in connection with the other recent reviews conducted by CPA itself, and were available to the Steering Committee.

## **II. Views from Committee's consultations on CPA's changed operating environment**

10. This Section summarises the views expressed to the Steering Committee in the consultations undertaken with a CPA Board sub-group (including a subsequent written submission), with some government departments and with the Chairs and Directors of NESC and NESF. (A questionnaire which was designed to facilitate discussion with consultees is at Appendix 4).

### **CPA views**

11. CPA acknowledged that the institutional and policy environment for their business had changed greatly in recent years. In general, they considered that CPA was adapting appropriately to these changes and avoiding duplication with other agencies; and that the CPA mandate was not redundant or diminished. CPA did not regard the concepts of anti-poverty and social inclusion as identical. They believed that their agency status allowed CPA to speak and report with independence from Government on poverty issues and that this role continued to be important.

12. In relation to policy advice, CPA would seek to position themselves in future as catalysts for change, and to provide thought leadership. On research, the Agency would continue to reflect a strong qualitative understanding of the lived experience of poverty. CPA was successful in building capacity in voluntary groups working closely with the poor to make their voices heard. Finally, CPA could continue to add value to the work of other public bodies - strengthening their capacity to deal with anti-poverty/social inclusion issues, and moving on to new challenges as earlier initiatives became mainstreamed.

13. CPA also pointed to a number of problems limiting their impact and performance:

- it has been difficult for the Agency to engage at a sufficiently strategic or influential level with policy makers and other key stakeholders;
- there is potential for overlap in relation to research with OSI and NESF;

- the CPA Board could benefit from better representation across a range of organisations, stakeholders and skillsets; and
- staff retention can be problematic for the Agency given higher graded job opportunities in some comparable agencies and perceived difficulties around CPA decentralisation.

## Views of Government departments

14. The Steering Committee sent a questionnaire to nine Government departments<sup>2</sup> seeking information on their involvement, and that of their agencies, in the anti-poverty and social inclusion agendas (see Appendix 5). All departments replied: the general tenor of the replies was that departments and their agencies were becoming increasingly engaged with the social inclusion agenda, and that this was giving rise to a fairly crowded institutional space.
15. In general, Government departments considered that overlap and duplication were for the moment being avoided, including in relation to CPA. The Agency's activities in the research and project innovation areas were regarded as those with greatest potential at present for overlap with programmes of other agencies.
16. In addition, a sub-group of the Steering Committee held bilateral meetings with 5 of the above government departments<sup>3</sup> to examine in greater depth their working arrangements for anti-poverty and/or social inclusion, and their business relationships with CPA. All departments considered that supporting and implementing social inclusion objectives was now an important dimension of their business, and that of their agencies concerned. Some recent good collaborations between departments/working agencies and CPA were mentioned in this connection: the *Building Healthy Communities* programme developed with HSE; the *Having Your Say* programme in which D/CRAGA had assisted; and CPA's work with local government to assist capacity building for social inclusion in that sector.

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<sup>2</sup> Departments of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Social and Family Affairs, Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Finance, Health and Children, Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Taoiseach and Education and Science

<sup>3</sup> Departments of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Social and Family Affairs(OSI), Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Health and Children, Education and Science

17. Departments also shared the view that social inclusion was becoming more mainstreamed in their business areas. An important consequence of this was that departments were increasingly able to look to some of their own front line agencies or practitioners for a better understanding of the conditions and causes of poverty and social exclusion. Reference was made in this regard to:

- the HSE Population Health Division and the (all Ireland) Institute for Public Health,
- the Homeless Agency and various urban regeneration bodies,
- Pobal and its extensive network of community bodies,
- the National Drugs Strategy structures, and
- the National Educational Welfare Board.

This development was seen by some departments as in practical terms diminishing the potential contribution of CPA to their business.

18. In relation to the effectiveness of CPA as an influencer for new/changed policies, some departments cited their strengthened links with, and accountability to, the Social Partnership process and considered this at present to be a stronger influencing force on their business. Some departments also felt that more visible leadership by OSI of some elements of the social inclusion agenda would be beneficial.

## **Views of NESC and NESF**

19. Bilateral discussions between a sub-group of the Steering Committee and the Chairs and Directors of both NESC and NESF elicited the following assessments and suggestions. The importance of the strategic social inclusion approach was strongly affirmed, although income poverty still remained an important challenge and valid benchmark and needed to be reported on impartially and regularly. In its earlier days, CPA would have operated in a relatively uncrowded institutional environment and its reports and other products would have had little or no parallels. That situation had totally changed, by virtue of the empowerment of both new public bodies, notably OSI, and of the Community and Voluntary Pillar of Partnership. On the one hand, involvement of a greater number of organisations with social inclusion demonstrated progress with this agenda and was a good thing. On the other hand, having too many organisations dealing with the same agenda could overload the governmental system and lead to policy drift.



20. Despite the expansion of organisations dealing with poverty and social exclusion, NESC indicated that it still had to rely significantly on overseas, rather than Irish, research in developing its work in this area. The Lifecycle Approach adopted in Towards 2016 would add to the need for more research and policy development; at the moment this was only a framework and much more work was needed to develop it.

### **III. Identification and analysis of key issues**

21. In this Section, the Steering Committee identifies some issues which emerged in our deliberations as key to the main questions which we are asked to address. We now analyse and establish an approach to these issues as a basis for assessing the current validity of the CPA remit (Section IV) and dealing with options for change and recommendations (Section V).

#### **Anti-poverty and social inclusion approaches**

22. It is a matter of history that CPA's statutory mandate was framed (in 1986) before the so-called strategic approach to social inclusion became widely established within developed countries, and particularly in those of the EU. Reflecting this tendency, the Irish national policy framework has now also undergone a transition from an anti-poverty to a social inclusion approach. This has culminated in the development of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPInclusion) 2007-2016 into which the former NAPS process has been merged. The NAPInclusion process is also strongly embedded within Towards 2016 and the National Development Plan.
23. Prima facie, the transition just described and the predominance generally of the social inclusion perspective might appear to call into question the CPA mandate as being too narrowly framed in anti-poverty terms. The CPA response (see para.11) has been that the concepts of poverty and social exclusion are not identical and that a capacity and expertise must be maintained for reporting on the incidence and causes of, and the most effective remedies to, poverty.
24. The Steering Committee recognises that poverty and social exclusion are not entirely identical concepts. Equally, it is clear that the strategic social inclusion approach, focusing on the multi-faceted causes of poverty, is widely considered as the best way of dealing with most poverty issues. The Steering Committee also notes that CPA has in fact developed an explicit involvement in some social inclusion related work (e.g. with local government) so that its mandate now *de facto* includes both anti-poverty and social inclusion elements.
25. It is not however the case that leadership for the social inclusion agenda has been entrusted to CPA. That lead role was assigned by the Government in 2002 to the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) operating under the Minister for Social and Family Affairs. This Office has responsibility for co-ordinating the development and monitoring of the NAPInclusion 2007-2016 and other Government strategies on

social inclusion, and for reporting on progress, together with other support functions; these include the development of the following -

- an effective poverty proofing process and ensuring that it is put into operation in all relevant Government Departments;
- a Data Strategy (supported by a Technical Advisory Group, made up of specialists in data collection and research);
- a formal Research Programme, which would integrate current research activities and budgets across Departments;
- cooperation with the Combat Poverty Agency;
- development of Ireland's input to the (EU) social inclusion strategic process (preparation of National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion - NSSPI);
- internal and external communications for the NAPinclusion;
- formal evaluation of progress under Government strategies for social inclusion through an annual Social Inclusion report for Government.

26. OSI currently has 10 staff and an administrative budget of €307,000. It was originally envisaged that the Office would include experts seconded from relevant Departments and agencies, as well as specialist staff: this has not so far been actioned.

27. The Steering Committee is clear that OSI is now intended by the Government to provide the main focus and leadership for policy, research and monitoring of progress in relation to social inclusion; and notes that the Programme for Government 2007-2012 expressly provides for continued support of OSI. The present review must also take account of this situation.

### **Changes to institutional landscape, including increased Social Partnership role**

28. As illustrated in the organigram in Appendix 6, a very complex arrangement of institutions has now evolved around poverty and social exclusion; this is further described in Appendix 7. Although this undoubtedly carries risks of inefficiency and overlap/duplication between public bodies, it also reflects, and arises from, the relatively successful mainstreaming of the anti-poverty/social inclusion agenda within the Irish governmental system. In the main, Government departments consulted by the Steering Committee spoke of complementarity rather than overlap in terms of the business relationships operating within the above network. While the Steering Committee considers that complementarity across a wide range of activities may in practice also pose risks of duplication and overlap, it does not believe it appropriate to base specific findings in relation to CPA on this consideration alone.

29. More important in the Steering Committee's view is the adequacy of CPA's connections with the wider system described. We have been informed of, and acknowledge, much valuable joint working between CPA and other bodies. However, in relation to the key CPA functions of policy advice and research on poverty issues, the Agency operates (consistently with the 1986 legislation) within standalone governance arrangements comprising its executive and an appointed board. In the meantime, the policy centre has expanded beyond the Agency's parent department, D/SFA, to include the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, Children and Integration and the associated Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion (SOGSI); in addition, the progress monitoring and negotiation of social inclusion measures also directly involve Social Partnership interests. It appears to the Steering Committee that CPA's connections with this policy centre are at present relatively weak and that this issue must be addressed in our recommendations.

### **Uptake of CPA policy advice**

30. CPA has acknowledged to the Steering Committee (see para.13) that it has been difficult for the Agency to engage at a sufficiently strategic or influential level with policy makers and other key stakeholders. The recent review of the CPA research function identified that a total of 25 policy submissions or statements were produced by the Agency in the period 2005 – 2007. Roughly half of these were in response to Government plans or strategies under preparation or already published, or were pre-Budget submissions. The remainder had a more specific focus.

31. The Steering Committee regards the above output as commendable in relation to the available resources of CPA. In general however these policy submissions do not appear to have had a formative or other major effect on policy development by Government departments. It is not possible for us to establish definitively the reasons for this, but the following may be contributing:

- a perception within departments that CPA's proposals are constructed too much in the manner of external third party submissions, and show insufficient appreciation of implementation constraints and competing societal interests; and
- CPA's current remoteness (see para 29 above) from the policy centre.

32. Regardless of the precise reasons for CPA's difficulties of engagement in this matter, the Steering Committee believes that it is important that the policy advice function should achieve better uptake and make a more practical and collaborative contribution to policy development. The Committee would also observe that the national

social policy framework is now well developed for the medium term, and specifically until 2016, in plans and programmes such as Towards 2016 (whose Lifecycle Approach is based on the NESC Developmental Welfare State), the National Development Plan 2007 – 2013 and the NAPinclusion 2007-2016.

### **Value of CPA independent role**

33. The Steering Committee believes that it is appropriate that some independence should attach to the reporting of the conditions of poverty, and of progress or otherwise in alleviating and eliminating these conditions. CPA under the governance of an external board at present contributes towards this independent perspective. However, independent reporting and commentary on poverty and social exclusion issues has also developed in other important ways in recent years:

- Social Partnership, of which the Community and Voluntary sector forms a Pillar, has a key role in developing, monitoring and evaluating programmes and plans targeted at poverty and social exclusion;
- Irish data on poverty conditions are compiled and reported on by CSO for the EU-SILC process in accordance with the international standard protocols operated by national statistical agencies;
- Ireland is required to submit every two years to the EU Commission a report on its strategies for social protection and social inclusion. The Commission arrange for an independent critique of national strategies and prepare a comparative 27 country report based on this.

34. The Steering Committee therefore considers that the function of independent reporting and commentary in relation to conditions of poverty is now significantly less dependent on CPA than in the earlier stages of its existence.

### **VFM issues**

35. This review's terms of reference include the requirement to examine the work programmes of CPA in the context of efficiency and effectiveness and overall value for money.

The Steering Committee notes that the Agency has been proactive in regularly evaluating and reviewing its programmes, services and organisational arrangements: CPA has commissioned comprehensive evaluations of its successive 3 year strategic plans, reviews of organisational structures and resources, and VFM and effectiveness

reviews (see Appendix 3). As part of these reviews, the Agency has also consulted widely with key stakeholders and other interests.

36. Having examined the relevant background, the Committee considers that CPA has in place an appropriate VFM framework in relation to its functions; and that it has sought to ensure that structures, processes and mechanisms reflect best practice in corporate governance. Further in-depth scrutiny of VFM issues has not been possible within the timescale and resources of the current review. However, in a broader sense we believe that our examination, at a high level, of the CPA role in a changed institutional landscape, and our resulting recommendations, will have relevance to the optimal allocation of resources in the social inclusion area.

## **IV. Assessment of validity of current CPA remit**

### **General considerations**

37. Reducing, eliminating and preventing poverty are important objectives of the Government and of the implementing public bodies concerned. Explicit targets (to reduce the number of those experiencing consistent poverty to between 2 per cent and 4 per cent by 2012, with the aim of eliminating consistent poverty by 2016) and agreed strategies for achieving them have been set in National Action Plan for Social Inclusion; these are also endorsed in Towards 2016, the NDP and the Programme for Government 2007 – 2012. There is a commitment to regular and clear reporting of progress towards poverty elimination targets (in particular through CSO and the EU-SILC process, as well in reports compiled by OSI). And poverty proofing of policy and spending proposals is being carried both through the process of poverty impact assessment (for which agreed methodologies are in place throughout the public sector) and the amendment of Cabinet Procedure Instructions requiring all memoranda for Government decision to specify the implications of their proposals in relation to poverty.

38. Poverty is still real in Ireland and work remains to be done to eliminate it in line with the agreed deadlines. Therefore, nothing of what follows in the Steering Committee's analysis or recommendations can or does rest on the mistaken view that poverty has been overcome or no longer challenges Irish society. Our terms of reference instead seek the improved mobilisation of resources towards poverty elimination.

### **CPA remit**

39. The Steering Committee considers that much valuable contribution has been made by CPA to policy and programme development, and to the public debate, during its two decades of existence. The organisation and its staff have in particular succeeded in reflecting clearly and authoritatively the lived experience of poverty. CPA has supported and built valuable links with voluntary groups working with the poor and disadvantaged. The Agency has also assisted a range of other public bodies with the design of programmes and initiatives in response to poverty and provided valuable support in relation to technical aspects of policy development.

40. Nonetheless, the analysis in Section III of key issues relevant to our terms of reference raises some questions about the current validity of the CPA remit; these are further discussed below.

## **Community development**

41. It is noted that CPA began to cede some of its role in relation to community development from the early 1990s and that this process has continued to the point where this role is substantially diminished today. There is now a well developed infrastructure of organisations, which does not significantly involve CPA, dealing with the promotion of community development. The Steering Committee does not therefore consider that the CPA remit needs to retain any responsibility for fostering or assisting community development.

## **Project initiation and assistance**

42. CPA activity in the area of project initiation and assistance involves an expenditure of some €0.9m in 2008. Of itself, support by CPA for demonstration or pilot projects relevant to its general mandate is justifiable. In the wider context however, grants to community and voluntary bodies for purposes related to poverty reduction and prevention are made by a wide variety of public bodies, in many cases on a much greater scale than that of CPA. It is not therefore evident that there is added value in continued direct involvement by CPA in this area, or that useful research activity and /or evidence could not be built around projects grant assisted by other public bodies.

## **Policy advice, research and promoting public understanding of poverty**

43. The Steering Committee considers the core functions of CPA at present to consist in providing policy advice to the Minister on all aspects of poverty, undertaking or commissioning research and promoting public understanding of poverty. In the Committee's view, these functions remain valid in themselves, although the Agency's current positioning is problematic in relation to the optimal performance of the policy advisory role.

44. The Steering Committee strongly concurs with the views of NESC and of the recent review of the CPA Research Programme that more and better research on poverty in Ireland is needed. We believe that the recommendations of the latter review have the potential to strengthen performance in this area and improve coordination with relevant programmes of other agencies, notably OSI and ESRI.

45. CPA has over time developed a strong expertise in promoting public understanding of poverty; and this should be preserved through any change process. The Steering



Committee notes that there is an inherent tension for CPA (or for any similar organisation) between the policy advice and promotional functions; and that this was indeed adverted to in our consultations by CPA themselves. The more an organisation becomes associated with active campaigning for particular propositions, the less it may be regarded as having sufficient objectivity and impartiality properly to perform the policy advice function. We regard this difficulty as requiring good practical judgment from an organisation and not as ruling out the combined roles of policy advice and promoting public understanding.

46. In relation to policy advice, there was a simpler and clearer alignment of the CPA statutory role with the national social planning and policy framework while a national anti-poverty strategy (NAPS) was the main embodiment of this, and a national anti poverty unit operated in parallel from within D/SFA. This alignment became more complex/less transparent from 2002 with the merger of the NAPS and the NAPinclusion processes (culminating in a National Action Plan for Social Inclusion in 2007) and the absorption of the former D/SFA anti-poverty unit into the new Office for Social Inclusion.

47. This consolidated social inclusion agenda is now supported by a very broadly based institutional network, headed by the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, Children and Integration and coordinated beneath this level by SOGSI. Importantly, the Community and Voluntary Pillar of Partnership also has an accredited role in the monitoring of progress under the NAPinclusion.

48. All of these developments make for a less clear alignment between CPA and the national planning and policy framework relevant to its work; and potentially place greater distance between CPA and the central policy arena. The Steering Committee understands that CPA was not significantly involved in the elaboration of recent major social policy reviews (such as the NESC Developmental Welfare State), nor practically speaking was this opportunity open to it.

49. It generally appears to be more difficult within the above operating environment for CPA to achieve traction in relation to its policy advisory role. Difficulties in this regard have been signalled by CPA and confirmed in the information and views supplied to us by Government departments.

50. In light of the above, and specifically with reference to the criteria we have adopted for this purpose, it is clear to the Steering Committee that the CPA remit for policy advice cannot today be as valid as in earlier stages of its operation.

51. We respond in Section V to the key issues identified in this Section.

## **V. Options for change and recommendations**

### **CPA: need for change**

52. The following assessments already developed by the Steering Committee indicate the need for changes in the mandate and/or organisational positioning of CPA:

- the strategic approach to social inclusion is now widely regarded as the most effective way of dealing with the causes of poverty and of combating poverty. The Agency's legislative remit pre-dates this approach, although in practice CPA activity now partly extends into promoting social inclusion. However, the lead role for social inclusion has since 2002 been assigned by the Government to OSI;
- Fostering or assisting community development is now comprehensively catered for by a range of agencies and bodies (mainly under D/CRAGA coordination and/or sponsorship) and the need for/impact of CPA programmes in this area is marginal;
- the need to continue CPA activity in relation to project initiation and assistance is also questionable given the limited scale of this CPA programme and the expanded activities of a range of other bodies in this sector;
- independent commentary, monitoring and reporting on poverty issues and the conditions of poverty are now being significantly provided by other structures, including those of Social Partnership, in addition to CPA; and
- as acknowledged by CPA, the Agency's policy advisory role is not achieving sufficient engagement or influence with policy makers; and its connections with the policy centre are weak.

### **Options for Change**

53. The most important requirement for change is to overcome the Agency's present distance from effective influence and collaboration. To this end CPA has stated to the Steering Committee that the Agency

“would welcome the development of more formalised structures or mechanisms in place to facilitate Combat Poverty in engaging in the policy-making process, so that it can fulfil its policy advice remit even more effectively. Combat Poverty would welcome a recommendation on how to do this, as a result of the review.”

54. In trying to determine the most effective direction for change and improvement, the Steering Committee has to bear in mind that ad hoc coordination between CPA and the policy centre has in fact been the preferred approach during the current decade. The Committee would not be optimistic that continued reliance on this approach, even with more formalised structures, would necessarily integrate the organisational capacities

and efforts of the different players to best effect. There may be some tension, and an element of necessary trade off, between a standalone, independent role for CPA and its full and active engagement with the cross-cutting social inclusion agenda. In addition, the Steering Committee is required to consider opportunities for enhancing or rationalising arrangements between bodies now operating in the social inclusion area, and to have regard to the analysis of the recent OECD review of the Irish public service. The Government's recently announced public spending measures, which envisage some rationalisation of State agencies and boards, add urgency to this requirement.

55. In relation to other relevant organisational issues, the Steering Committee considers as most important the need more fully to operationalise OSI in line with the mission assigned to it in 2002. While OSI has successfully delivered important new strategies and policy products, its capacity in relation to research, consultation and communications has been less developed.

56. In relation to lessons from the OECD analysis, the recent review has devoted considerable attention to the management of public sector agencies in Ireland. A central conclusion is that Ireland has not established a clear governance framework for agencies nor a well considered rationale for the different types of agencies. In particular, the OECD has urged that closer attention should be paid in each specific situation as to whether a differentiated top governance structure with a governing board is the most suitable model or whether a "departmental agency" (increasingly favoured in OECD countries) could provide a better solution.

57. Taking account of all the above factors, the Steering Committee considers that the best future options for CPA could consist in the Agency moving towards closer partnership/integration in either of two directions:

- with one or both of the NESDO bodies, NESC and NESF; or
- with OSI.

### **NESDO - CPA transformation: considerations**

58. A closer approximation of CPA to the NESDO institutions, NESC and /or NESF could add depth to the Agency's policy advice and research functions. CPA linkages with the community and voluntary sector could be maintained, although within a framework more formally aligned with the Partnership process. It would be less feasible than under present arrangements for CPA to operate project and community development activities from within a NESDO setting: this would in any event be consistent with the Steering Group's view on the future of these activities.

59. A repositioning of CPA within NESDO would presumably entail the adoption for the Agency of NESDO style Partnership-based governance arrangements. Participation in NESDO could also involve the transfer of central government responsibility for CPA from the Minister for Social and Family Affairs to the Taoiseach.

60. The Steering Committee considers this option to be a viable one. However certain imbalances would have to be overcome in order to make it succeed:

- (a) the policy/research perspectives of CPA and the NESDO bodies, while both covering anti-poverty and social inclusion concerns, are different. The NESDO mandate is much broader, encompassing all aspects of economic and social development. It is also less immediate and more strategic; its purpose is to facilitate high level re-positioning of policies rather than to identify solutions to immediate or short term problems. By contrast, the CPA mandate has been exercised in relation to more concrete and immediate issues; and
- (b) the mismatch in staff numbers between CPA and NESD/NESF. The total approved staff complement of CPA is 25 while the combined NESD/NESF staff cohort, albeit a more highly graded one and servicing a very wide social and economic remit, is 14.

If this option is to be pursued further, account would also need to be taken of the review of NESDO at present under way under the direction of the Department of the Taoiseach.

### **OSI – CPA transformation: considerations**

61. OSI and CPA agendas and functions have much in common, but are at present conducted under different governance arrangements (albeit both operate ultimately under the aegis of the Minister for Social and Family Affairs). Both organisations devote considerable time and effort to developing evidence based policy advice, supported by their work in relation to research, stakeholder consultation and international exchanges. Both are also involved in monitoring and assisting the implementation of strategies designed to combat poverty and social exclusion; and in communicating and building support for these strategies and related implementation measures across government and wider society.

62. The Steering Group has also assessed some weaknesses in the performance and/or positioning of both bodies. CPA is inadequately connected at present with the policy centre. OSI, while embedded in the Government process, has not yet operationalised sufficiently in relation to research, consultation and communications.

OSI needs also to mobilise and connect more actively in relation to local authorities and other agencies operating at a local level.

63. There would be obvious advantage if a closer integration or organisational alignment between OSI and CPA could be developed in a way that made good these respective weaknesses and strengthened organisational performance and positioning all around. This approach would also be consistent with the current Government requirement regarding rationalisation of State agencies. The Steering Committee believes that such a win:win transformation should be possible under this option, the broad elements of which are now further outlined.

### **Main elements of possible OSI – CPA transformation**

64. In its definitive stage, the OSI-CPA transformation would result in an integrated organisation, and one better resourced and stronger than both current structures. The status of the new agency/partnership could, if desired, be that of a “departmental agency”, a model advocated in the recent OECD report. More specific templates for such agencies are likely to emerge from the implementation process for the OECD report. These measures would of course entail legislative change.

65. It is unlikely that an external board would be the appropriate governance arrangement for the above new structure. However, the role of the present CPA board will be most important in supporting the transitional stage (see para. 69 below). There might also be scope for continuing the contribution of the present Agency board in an advisory capacity under the new arrangements.

66. There should be benefit to both staff groups from the integrated solution now outlined: to the OSI group because of the new professional expertise and analytical capacity being added; and to the CPA group, because of the range and depth of experience in policy development available in the new organisational setting.

67. The Steering Committee does not consider that details of changes, arising from the above, in the status or tenure of staff should be addressed in this report. These important consequential issues would appropriately be dealt with through the established procedures for progressing public service change and reform.

68. The enhanced organisation would develop effective procedures to ensure that the views of the social partners, and other non-governmental stakeholders, including people experiencing poverty, are available to Government in developing the social inclusion strategies, and in monitoring and evaluating implementation; and that progress is communicated to the public as pledged in the NAPinclusion.

69. The progression to the above definitive stage of OSI – CPA alignment would be mediated by an important interim or transitional stage. This would arise principally because of the continued existence of the current statutory CPA body pending legislative change. It would be most important in this transitional stage for the Minister and the Agency board to work in close cooperation towards the new arrangements. For example, in the short term the organisational strategies of OSI and CPA should be closely aligned, and human resources issues managed, with a view to supporting the required change programme.

## **Recommendations**

70. The Steering Group recommends that

(a) the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) and the Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) should be integrated, to the mutual strengthening and enhancement of both; the governance model for this integrated arrangement is unlikely to require an external board, but could possibly be structured on the lines of a departmental agency;

(b) the new organisational arrangement should develop effective procedures to ensure that the views of the social partners, and other non-governmental stakeholders, including people experiencing poverty, are available to Government in developing the social inclusion strategies, and in monitoring and evaluating implementation; and that progress is communicated to the public as pledged in the NAPinclusion;

(c) pending completion of the legislative changes necessary to give effect to the above, OSI and CPA should intensify their cooperation, through inter alia close alignment of their strategies, and actively support the required change programme;

(d) changes, arising from the above, in the status or tenure of staff should be addressed through the established procedures for progressing public service change and reform; and

(e) independently of (a) to (d) above, direct involvement by CPA in promoting community development or in project initiation and assistance is no longer appropriate given the extensive range and scale of programmes in these areas now operated by other public bodies.

## **Acknowledgments**

71. The Secretariat to the Steering Committee was provided by OSI and led by Cathy Barron, Assistant Principal. The Steering Committee greatly benefited from the papers, research and high quality support supplied by its Secretariat; we wish to record our

appreciation of this exceptional assistance. For its part, OSI, to whom the present review was entrusted, is most grateful to the Government departments concerned and to CPA for supplying senior personnel to the interdepartmental Steering Committee; and to Committee members for their work in completing this report.

### **Members of the Steering Committee**

Niall Callan – Chairperson

Mary Doyle, Assistant Secretary, Department of the Taoiseach

Fred Foster, Principal, Department of Finance (replaced Dermot Quigley)

Catherine Hazlett, Principal, Department of Social and Family Affairs

David Moloney, Principal, Department of Health and Children

Jim Mulkerrins, Principal, Department of Education & Science

Philip Nugent, Principal, Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Govt. (replaced John Laffan)

Kevin O' Kelly, Acting Director, Combat Poverty Agency

Kathleen Stack, Assistant Secretary, Department of Community Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs (replaced David Brennan)

### **Secretariat**

Cathy Barron, Assistant Principal, Office for Social Inclusion

**9 September 2008**

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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

**Subject of Review:** The Combat Poverty Agency.

#### **Introduction and background**

The Government has decided that a review of the future of the Combat Poverty Agency will be undertaken by the Department of Social and Family Affairs in association with other relevant departments (Government Decision; of 6 June 2007).

The Review of the Combat Poverty Agency will be undertaken as part of the Value for Money and Policy Review Initiative 2006-2008 of the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

The context for the review relates to the structures established in recent years to progress the achievement of the Government's social inclusion strategies viz. the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 -2016, the social partnership agreement *Towards 2016* and the social inclusion chapter in the National Development Plan *Transforming Ireland* 2007-13.

In this regard, the monitoring, research and evaluation, consultation and advisory roles of a number of national structures and offices, including the NESDO and its constituent agencies, the NESC and the NESF, are relevant to the review. A key question for the review relates to the extent to which there are overlaps or duplication in the remits of these bodies and the Agency and the consequences this poses for coherence in the implementation of Government policy and for cost to the Exchequer.

The review of the Irish Public Service by the OECD is also relevant. The context for that review specifically refers to the effectiveness of Government structures for tackling horizontal issues such as 'poverty reduction, as well as the structures for addressing broader issues, the systems for policy development, implementation evaluation and feedback and the connectivity between them and the Government.

#### **Terms of Reference**

The terms of reference proposed for the review of the Combat Poverty Agency are:

- 1) Examine the role of the Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) as set out in the Combat Poverty Agency Act, 1986.
- 2) Examine the work programmes and operations of the CPA in the context of efficiency and effectiveness and overall value for money.
- 3) Having regard to the social and economic developments that have taken place in recent years and the resultant changes that have come about in the institutional structures for the formulation of Government policy; including the development of

- social inclusion responsibilities within and across Government departments and state agencies,
  - organisations and expert bodies with remits in research, information and advice to Government;
  - new mechanisms for consultation, monitoring and participation in the development and implementation of social inclusion strategies. These include social partnership structures, Government programmes with corporate (social partnership) arrangements, and the provision made for regular consultation with groups established to represent people experiencing poverty and social exclusion.
- Identify where services, programmes or functions duplicate, overlap or complement the Agency's role, and where pertinent, any gaps in institutional arrangements for advancing the Government's social inclusion strategies.
  - Report on the ongoing validity of the remit which is exercised by the Agency in these areas.
  - Bring forward proposals for enhancing the delivery of services/ functions, including rationalisation as appropriate, that will include recommendations as to the body or organisational arrangement most suitable for their delivery.

4) Identify and bring forward proposals which would contribute to the progression of Government social inclusion strategies.

5) Make recommendations to the Minister for the future of the Combat Poverty Agency and its functions.

### **Undertaking the Review**

The review will be undertaken by the Office for Social Inclusion as part of the Department's Value for Money and Policy Review Initiative 2006-2008. It will be overseen by a Steering Committee at official level with some consultancy expertise. Membership of the Steering Committee is as follows:

Chairperson: Mr. Niall Callan, former Secretary General of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Dept of Social and Family Affairs: Catherine Hazlett

Dept of the Taoiseach: Mary Doyle

Dept of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government: John Laffan (replaced by Philip Nugent)

Dept of Health and Children: David Moloney

Dept of Education and Science: Jim Mulkerrins

Dept of Finance: Dermot Quigley (replaced by Fred Foster)

Dept of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs: David Brennan (replaced by Kathleen Stack)

Combat Poverty Agency: Kevin O Kelly, Acting Director

Secretariat : Cathy Barron, AP, Project Manager

01 704 3775 [cathy.barron@welfare.ie](mailto:cathy.barron@welfare.ie)

### **Timescale and Work Plan**

The Review will be completed within 4 to 6 months of the establishment of the Steering Committee.

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **EVOLUTION OF THE COMBAT POVERTY AGENCY (CPA)**

#### ***1. Early background to CPA***

A conference on poverty organised by the Council for Social Welfare in Kilkenny in 1971 generated a wide debate on the causes, effects, and extent of poverty in Ireland and on solutions required. One response of the then Government was to seek expansion of the European Commission's Social Action Programme to include pilot anti-poverty schemes.

The Government set up the National Committee on Pilot Schemes to Combat Poverty (NCPSCP) in 1974 to initiate and co-ordinate pilot schemes to combat poverty. The NCPSCP, with funding from the First European Community (EC) Poverty Programme, supported a range of community development projects and undertook research studies on poverty issues. At the end of 1980, the work of the NCPSCP was terminated, partly because EC funds for further projects were no longer available. The Committee's final report called for the establishment of a national agency to further develop and expand the work of the pilot schemes.

#### ***2. CPA establishment and functions***

An Interim Board of Combat Poverty operated from 1984 to 1986. Based on proposals from this Interim Board, the Combat Poverty Agency Act was enacted and the Agency established in 1986. Section 2(1) of the Act provided that the Agency would have four general functions as follows:

- advising and making recommendations to the Minister for Social Welfare on all aspects of economic and social planning in relation to poverty in the State;
- the initiation of measures aimed at overcoming poverty in the State and evaluation of such measures;
- the examination of the nature, causes and extent of poverty in the State and for that purpose the promotion, commission and interpretation of research;
- the promotion of greater public understanding of the nature, causes and extent of poverty in the State and the measures necessary to overcome such poverty.

These functions are further detailed in section 2(2) of the Act which moreover authorises CPA to perform such special tasks, including related reports, as the Minister may request from time to time.

Section 4 (3) provides that the Minister may, with the consent of the Minister for Finance by regulations amend, modify or withdraw any of the functions set out in section 4 (2) or confer additional functions with the Agency. These powers have not been exercised.

#### ***3. CPA governance***

CPA governance involves a Board appointed by the Minister. Section 7 of the Act provides that the Agency shall comprise 16 members. The number of members was increased from 10 in 1986 to 12 members in 1989 and to 16 in 1993. The appointment of the Chair and of ordinary

Board members is at the discretion of the Minister. It is not tied to any nominating process or to the holding of prescribed qualifications. In practice, CPA Boards have embodied a mix of persons with backgrounds in social work/community/ voluntary activity, business and academe; and have always included a serving officer of D/SFA. Members serve for a term of 5 years (increased in 2006 from 3 years) and are eligible for reappointment when their terms of office expire.

#### **4. CPA strategic plans**

The CPA is statutorily required to submit strategic plans to the Minister for each three year period. These may be subjected to review by the Minister. A formal review was carried out in 1996 after 10 years experience of the operation of CPA. This review dealt with the operation of the Agency since 1986 and not just the three year period of the strategic plan. The review concluded that the Agency should continue in existence, but that it should review its remit in response to major changes in its environment since it was established. To date no formal change in the CPA mandate (whether by Ministerial regulations or amending legislation) has been made.

#### **5. Work of CPA**

**5.1** In 1986, the main substantial source of information on poverty in Ireland was the Household Budget Survey, 1980. To address the scarcity of data enabling evaluation of public policies/programmes to address poverty, ESRI, with funding from the D/SFA, CPA and the EU undertook a major survey on poverty in Ireland in 1987. Drawing from the 1987 and subsequent surveys, the CPA commissioned a wide range of research projects; these provided information on important policy issues such as the definition and measurement of poverty, child poverty, low pay, the distribution of wealth, the allocation of incomes within households, factors contributing to movements into and out of poverty, and the geographical distribution of poverty. Planning and policy development, in the D/SFA and other relevant government departments, was also informed by the survey results and subsequent research outputs.

**5.2** The focus of the Agency's work in the early years in developing the evidence base on poverty and supporting the community sector through, inter alia, the allocation of funding, made a very significant contribution to the whole of government approaches to tackling poverty – which have received Europe-wide recognition. Ireland was the first EU state to develop a national anti-poverty strategy (NAPS) in 1997.

**5.3** Over time, the Agency has developed a framework for identifying and supporting innovative anti-poverty projects, supported by a programme of public education and policy liaison initiatives, incorporating events, publications, public relations and web activities to promote the outputs of its work and raise public understanding of poverty in Ireland and solutions to tackle it.

**5.4** Early on, support for community development was one of the main pillars of the Agency's activity, in particular since the Community Development Programme commenced in 1990 in D/SFA. Following the establishment of the new Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (D/CRAGA), certain functions of the Minister for Social and Family Affairs relating to the community and voluntary sector, including the Community Development Programme, were

transferred to D/CRAGA in June 2002. From 1 January 2004, administration and funding of CPA's *Working Against Poverty Grants Scheme* and *National Anti-Poverty Networks Programme* transferred to D/CRAGA. The CPA continues to maintain a significant role in community development and the community and voluntary support sector.

**5.5** Strengthening the capacity of local government to tackle poverty, as part of the wider process of local government reform and the NAPS, has also been a significant part of the Agency's activities since 1999. This support mainly involved the commissioning and reporting on appropriate research, the payment of grants to NGOs for local anti-poverty projects - in association with local authorities; and the establishment and management of the Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network (LGAPLN) in collaboration with the D/SFA and the DEHLG.

In 2005, training on poverty and social inclusion transferred from CPA to the Institute for Institute of Public Administration (IPA) for incorporation into the Institute's mainstream training provision for local authorities. In 2006, the management of the LGAPLN transferred to the IPA. CPA continues to participate in the Local Authorities Social Inclusion Steering Group and in pilot projects on local authority anti-poverty strategies.

**5.6** The CPA along with Pobal (formerly Area Development Management Limited) has, since 1995, been a joint intermediary body for the EU PEACE Programme promoting cross-border peace and reconciliation and targeting the Border Counties and Northern Ireland. The Agency's involvement in this area of work is due to end in 2008.

**5.7** Over the past decade the Agency has continued to engage with Government Departments to advance the social inclusion agenda across specific policy areas (e.g. Building Healthy Communities Programme) to advise on the development of national policies as they relate to poverty and social inclusion and to work to build the capacity of individuals and communities to tackle poverty. It has continued to develop links with EU themes including Mainstreaming Social Inclusion and newly emerging initiatives in relation to financial exclusion.

**5.8** Many of the developments that the Agency has supported and advocated since its establishment have helped to consolidate and mainstream the anti-poverty agenda at every level of government, national and local and have assisted the emergence of stronger and wider institutional structures for social inclusion in Ireland.

## **APPENDIX 3**

### **REVIEWS OF THE COMBAT POVERTY AGENCY ORGANISATION, ADMINISTRATION AND FUNCTIONS**

**(i) Review of the Combat Poverty Agency (1996)**

Initiated by: Department of Social and Family Affairs

Undertaken by: Goodbody Economic Consultants

**(ii) Internal Audit Value for Money Review on the Effective Use of Consultants (Feb 2006)  
including follow-up Review (March 2008)**

Initiated by: CPA

Undertaken by: PricewaterhouseCoopers

**(iii) Combat Poverty Agency Organisational Resource Review (September 2006)**

Initiated by: CPA

Undertaken by: Deloitte

**(iv) Survey of Public Attitudes to Poverty, (December 2006)**

Initiated by: CPA

Undertaken by: Millward Brown IMS

**(v) Review of Combat Poverty Agency's Strategic Plan 2005-2007 (June 2007)**

Initiated by: CPA

Undertaken by: Eustace Patterson Ltd.

**(vi) Evaluation of the Combat Poverty Research Programme (March, 2008)**

Initiated by: CPA and OSI

Undertaken by: Goodbody Economic Consultants

**(vii) Review of the *Having Your Say* Programme (April 2008)**

Initiated by: CPA

Undertaken by: Eustace Patterson Ltd.

## APPENDIX 4

### QUESTIONNAIRE TO FACILITATE DISCUSSION WITH CONSULTEES

1. The context for the review of the future of the Combat Poverty Agency relates to structures established in recent years to progress the Government's Social Inclusion strategies, for example, those provided for in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007- 2016, under *Towards 2016* and in the social inclusion chapter in the National Development Plan 2007-13.

The introductory paragraphs of the Terms of Reference make specific reference to the *monitoring, research and evaluation, consultation and advisory roles of a number of national structures and offices, including the NESDO and its constituent agencies, the NESI and the NESF*, as being relevant to the review.

Having regard to the significant changes in the institutional landscape that have come about in recent years, a key task for the Review Steering Committee detailed in the Terms of Reference (par 3) is, *"to identify where services, programmes or functions duplicate, overlap or complement the (Combat Poverty) Agency's role and where pertinent, any gaps in institutional arrangements for advancing the Government's social inclusion strategies"*.

It would be interesting to discuss the following questions with reference to the above:

- **What are the views of the (relevant Department/NESF/NESI) regarding overlap / duplication / complementarity between its statutory remit and more generally its work programmes and that of the CPA in relation to (i) monitoring, research and evaluation of social inclusion policies/activities (ii) the provision of policy advice and (iii) advocacy and consultation**
- **What, if any, does the (relevant Department/NESF/NESI) see as the gaps?**

2. The Steering Committee's terms of reference (para.3) request it to *"bring forward proposals for enhancing the delivery of services/functions, including rationalisation as appropriate, that will include recommendations as to the body or organisational arrangement most suitable for their delivery."*

- **Given that the Steering Committee must consider organisational improvements in the context of the extensive institutional development which has occurred and to support evolving policy directions, does the (relevant Department/NESF/NESI) have a view on appropriate and effective solutions and design options?**



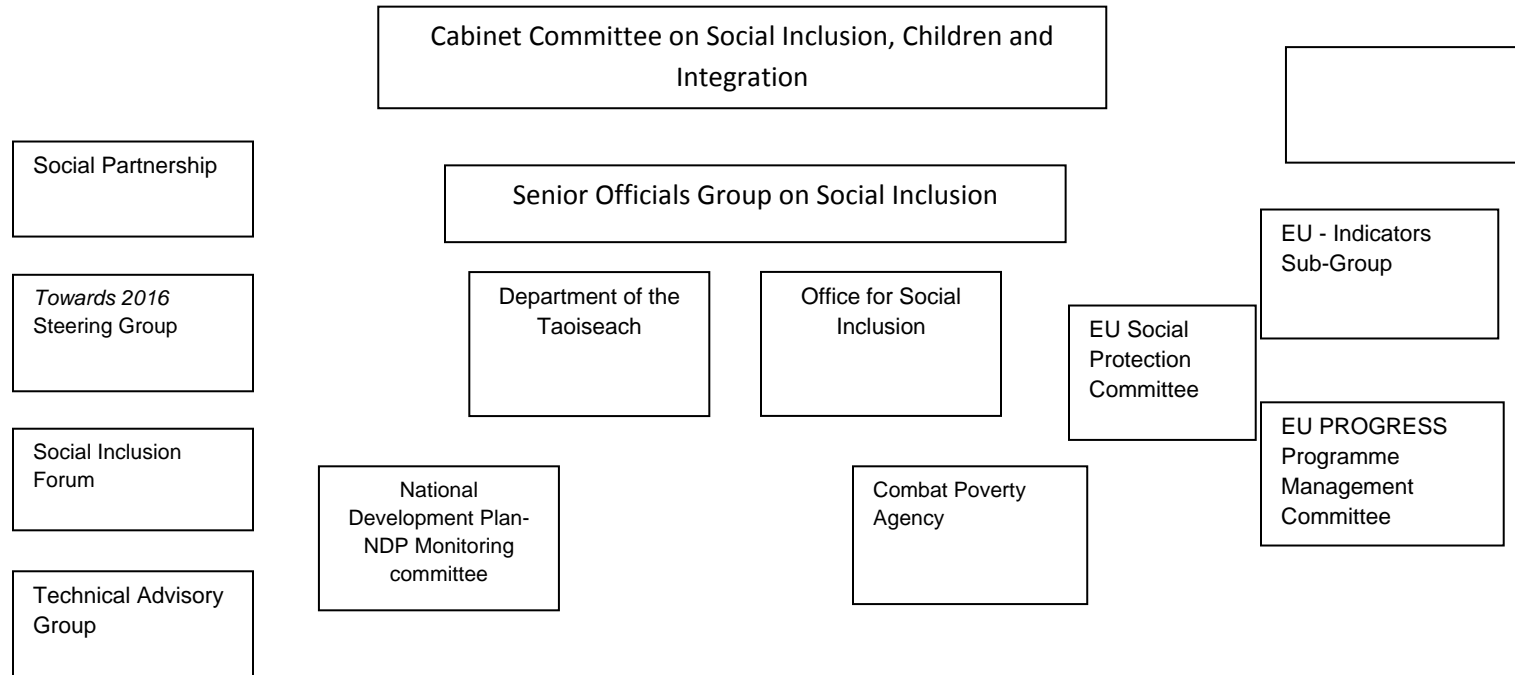
## APPENDIX 5

### QUESTIONNAIRE SEEKING INFORMATION RE THE WORK AREAS OF DEPARTMENTS AND THEIR AGENCIES AS THEY RELATE TO THE FUNCTIONS OF THE COMBAT POVERTY AGENCY

Dept./ Relevant Agency	Role/ Mandate	Overlap/Duplication/ Complementarity with CPA function ?	Extent of overlap/duplication/ complementarity with CPA function?  (short commentary including quantifiable indicators – eg annual budget, staff committed etc.)	Other comments?
		(i) Policy Advice (on Social Inclusion issues) Y/N  (ii) Research (re poverty and social exclusion) Y/N  (iii) Public Education/ Communication (on social inclusion issues) Y/N  (iv) Project Innovation		

		(including community development/funding) Y/N		
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## APPENDIX 6 - INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES



### Government Departments

#### D/Taoiseach

National Economic and Social Development Office:

- National Economic and Social Council
- National Economic and Social Forum

Central Statistics Office

#### D/Finance

#### D/Education and Science

National Education Welfare Board

Higher Education Authority/National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education

Vocational Education Committees

National Council for Special Education

#### D/Enterprise Trade and Employment

FÁS

#### D/Health and Children

Health Service Executive

Institute of Public Health

Office of the Minister for Children

National Council on Ageing and Older people

#### D/Justice, Equality and Law Reform

Equality Authority

National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism

National Disability Authority

Irish Youth Justice Service

Probation Service

Irish Prison Service

#### D/Social and Family Affairs

Citizens Information Board

Family Support Agency

Pensions Board

MABS

#### D/Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

National Advisory Committee on Drugs

Pobal

#### D/Environment, Heritage and Local Government

Local Authorities

City/County Development Boards

The Housing Forum

Local Government Social Inclusion Steering Group

## **APPENDIX 7**

### **CHANGES TO THE INSTITUTIONAL LANDSCAPE FOR COMBATING POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION**

This paper provides an overview of significant developments in the evolution of the institutional landscape for combating poverty and social exclusion since 1986, when the Combat Poverty Agency was established.

#### **1. *The development of Social Partnership***

**1.1** The difficult economic circumstances which existed in the mid-1980s prompted a search for an alternative strategic policy approach. This search involved the social partners, government Departments and key analysts and was centred in the National Economic and Social Council (NESC). Analysis undertaken by NESC at this time provided a basis for Government and the social partners to reach a consensus on a Programme for National Recovery (PNR), which included a series of policy commitments and reforms aimed at stabilising the Irish economy. The negotiation of the PNR in 1987 marked the beginning of the process of social partnership which has resulted in six further agreements, culminating in the current ten-year framework agreement, *Towards 2016*.

The social partnership process is managed by a Steering Group which includes representatives of Government Departments and each of the social partners. The Steering Group is an important mechanism for monitoring progress in relation to the non-pay policy commitments contained in the social partnership agreements. These include Government commitments in relation to social welfare, health, education, justice, housing and other fields of social policy that are central to Government objectives for the achievement of a free and fully inclusive society. The Steering Group prepares the ground for the periodic Plenary meetings of the social partners. In addition, both the Steering Group and the Plenary meetings provide an opportunity for the social partners to raise issues of concern.

#### **1.2 *Participation of the Community and Voluntary Pillar***

During the 1990s the social partnership process was broadened to give a voice to those experiencing poverty and social exclusion. A fourth pillar or strand was added to the process which included a number of community and voluntary sector organisations. There are now some 17 members of the social partnership community and voluntary pillar, many of whom act as representative bodies at partnership for a wider range of voluntary and community organisations. This has helped to increase the emphasis on 'social policy issues' in more recent social partnership agreements. The special initiatives under Sustaining Progress and the adoption in *Towards 2016* of a fresh approach to social policy development and service delivery designed to address the citizen's needs throughout the life course through adopting the lifecycle framework illustrate this point.

Under social partnership, funding is being provided to support the participation of Community and Voluntary Pillar organisations in the policy-making process. In addition, there is a range of sectoral mechanisms in place across the administrative system which provide the means to consult and engage with the social partners, including the Community and Voluntary

Pillar, on policy issues and the development of new policy proposals, e.g. the Housing Forum and the disability consultative for a in each government department.

As a result of the above developments, the Community and Voluntary pillar has developed a distinct advocacy role in relation to poverty and social exclusion issues, collectively as a social partnership pillar (e.g. CORI, SVP, INOU, Community Platform etc.). This role is further reflected in their individual organisational effort on behalf of people who are disadvantaged

## **2. Social Partnership consultation fora**

### **2.1 NESF**

The National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) was established by the Government in 1993. Its membership is comprised of a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson and 15 representatives from each of the following four strands -

- The Oireachtas;
- Employer, trade unions and farm organisations;
- The voluntary and community sector; and
- Central government, local government and independents.

Its original mandate was to contribute to the formation of a wider national consensus on social and economic policy initiatives, particularly in relation to unemployment, which was a key policy concern at the time. In 1997 its remit was amended placing more of a focus on monitoring and analysing the implementation of specific measures and programmes identified in the context of social partnership arrangements, especially those concerned with the achievement of equality and social inclusion. Since its establishment, the Forum has published research on a range of poverty and social exclusion related issues including on such issues as -

- Mental Health & Social Inclusion;
- The Arts, Cultural Inclusion and Social Cohesion;
- Creating a More Inclusive Labour Market;
- Care for Older People; and
- Early Childhood Care and Education.

Following its reconstitution in 2007, the Forum is currently in the process of developing a new work programme. It is envisaged that the new work programme will involve the Forum adopting more of an evaluative role focusing on how design and delivery of services and income supports could be improved in the context of the lifecycle framework set out in *Towards 2016*, the NDP and the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016.

### **2.2. NESC**

The NESC continues to make an important contribution to the policy-making process by analysing and reporting on strategic issues relating to the efficient development of the economy and the achievement of social justice and the development of a strategic framework for the conduct of relations and the negotiation of agreements between the

Government and the social partners. Significantly, the membership of NESC has been widened to include representatives from the Community and Voluntary Sector. Its membership is comprised of a Chairperson and five members nominated by each of the following –

- Agriculture and farming organisations;
- Business and employers organisations;
- The Irish Congress of Trade Unions; and
- Community and voluntary organisations.

In addition, ten other members including Secretaries General of government departments and a representative of the Local Government system are nominated by the Government.

The Council have been responsible for a number of important research reports of relevance to policy on poverty and social exclusion in recent years. These include the *Developmental Welfare State* (2005) and *Managing Migration Policy in Ireland* (2006). The NESC is currently developing a 'Social Report for Ireland'. The purpose of the social report will be to analyse and interpret key social trends to inform future social policy.

### **2.3 NESDO**

Since 2002, the NESC and the NESF, together with the National Centre for Partnership and Performance have been brought together under the umbrella of the National Economic and Social Development Office (NESDO). The primary role of NESDO is to add value to the work of its constituent bodies by creating the conditions under which synergies can be released, joint projects pursued and the potential for duplication minimised. In particular, the Office performs its role by facilitating and promoting complementary programmes of research, analysis and discussion by the NESC, NESF and NCPP.

## **3. Central and cross-departmental co-ordinating structures**

### **3.1 Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, Children and Integration**

During the 1990s, as part of the Strategic Management Initiative, a series of measures were taken to promote a more effective cross-departmental approach to policy-making. These measures included the establishment of a number of Cabinet sub-Committees. In the social policy area, a Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion was established. The Committee is chaired by the Taoiseach and its membership includes Ministers and Ministers of State with social policy related portfolios. The Cabinet Committee provides the means for more effective engagement between the political and administrative spheres on poverty and social exclusion issues. It also helps to foster a collective political approach to social policy issues which cut across a number of Government Departments. Since that time the Committee's remit has been extended to include children and integration.

### **3.2 Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion**

The work of the Cabinet Committee is supported by a senior officials group, chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach and consisting of representatives from Departments concerned with social policy development and delivery. The Group plays an important role in helping to advance a coherent and integrated approach to policy on key cross-cutting social inclusion

issues. Sub-groups of the senior officials group are established from time to time to take forward a particular piece of work. Examples include the sub-groups on disability and lone parents.

### **3.3 Office for Social Inclusion (OSI)**

The Office for Social Inclusion replaced the original National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) Unit in 2003 as the Government office with responsibility for co-ordinating the development of government strategies for social inclusion (Towards 2016, the NAPinclusion 2007-2016 and the National Development Plan) and for the monitoring and evaluation of those strategies. The key challenge for the OSI is to ensure that meeting the government's social inclusion targets and implementing the actions to give effect to the high level vision, goals and objectives for social inclusion are effectively monitored and reported on and that outcomes being achieved are appropriately evaluated. The Office produces an annual report on the co-ordinated strategies. It is also responsible for reporting to the EU on the social inclusion priorities of Ireland's National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion. In carrying out these monitoring and reporting functions, the OSI consults with social partners and with other interests.

Key support functions of the Office include poverty impact assessment, the development of research and data strategies and the implementation of a social inclusion communication strategy to increase awareness of the government's social inclusion agenda.

### **3.4 Mainstreaming social inclusion throughout government**

Poverty Impact Assessment is the process by which government departments, local authorities and state agencies assess policies and programmes at design, implementation and review stages in relation to the likely impact that they will have or have had on poverty and on inequalities which are likely to lead to poverty, with a view to poverty reduction.

Poverty Proofing, as poverty impact assessment was formerly known, was introduced in 1998 as a result of a commitment in the then National Anti-Poverty Strategy. Since then it has been a requirement in the cabinet handbook that Memoranda for Government involving significant policy proposals "indicate clearly the impact of the proposal on groups in poverty or at risk of falling into poverty".

The National Economic and Social Council (NESC) carried out a review of the poverty proofing process in 2001 and recommended a number of improvements. The Office for Social Inclusion (OSI), drawing largely on this NESC review and on a further process of consultation, developed a new set of guidelines for Poverty Impact Assessment. The change of name seeks to make it clear that the assessment of impacts of policies on poverty should form an inherent part of the policy making process, rather than an exercise which takes place after a policy has been adopted. Guidelines to assist government departments in carrying out poverty proofing exercises are available from the OSI website – [www.socialinclusion.ie](http://www.socialinclusion.ie)

Parallel to the OSI rollout to government departments the Combat Poverty Agency has, through the Local Government Social Inclusion Steering Group (LGSISG), been working with local authorities on piloting the PIA guidelines for use at local level.

### **3.5     *Cabinet Committee on Health***

The HSE's Health Service Reform Programme will play a significant role in ensuring equality of access and uptake of services among those experiencing poverty and vulnerable groups in society. The Cabinet Committee on Health, chaired by the Taoiseach, plays a key role in overseeing implementation of this programme of reform as well as driving improvements in selected priority health service delivery areas. This Committee includes a number of Ministers and is supported by a senior officials group, chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach.

## **4.     *Measuring poverty and monitoring progress***

### **4.1     *National Statistics Boards (NSB) Strategy for Statistics 2003-2008***

In the NSB's *Strategy for Statistics 2003-2008*, the Board articulated a strategy to support the development of Ireland's statistical system. The key pillars of the strategy included the development of detailed frameworks for economic, social and environmental statistics, and the creation of a network which links the CSO and all relevant Government Departments and agencies to maximise the effective use of administrative data to generate statistics that are both relevant and of high quality. The four strands of the Strategy that are being implemented include:

- Establishing a comprehensive set of frameworks for national statistics in Ireland covering three broad areas – the economy, society and the environment;
- A networked infrastructure for developing statistics in Government Departments and Agencies;
- A mechanism for determining statistical priorities; and
- The development of statistical competence within the public service.

Since the publication of the NSB Strategy, good progress is being made in maximising the use of administrative data in generating statistics, and generally in advancing the development of the Irish Statistical System particularly to support policy formulation and monitoring.

### **4.2     *EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU SILC)***

Since 2003 the CSO have been responsible for the collection of information on the income and living conditions of different types of households, in order to derive indicators on poverty, deprivation and social exclusion via the EU SILC. This provides an important mechanism for the monitoring and evaluation of progress in relation to social inclusion policy.

## **5       *Development of National Anti-Poverty Strategies***

### **5.1     *National Anti-Poverty Strategy 1997-2007 (NAPS)***

Ireland introduced a strategic approach to combating poverty in 1997 with the introduction of the NAPS. This first NAPS was a major cross-departmental policy initiative developed by an



Interdepartmental Policy Committee designed to place the needs of the poor and socially excluded among the issues at the top of the national agenda in terms of Government policy development and action. The development of the Strategy involved wide-ranging consultation and participation with the voluntary and community sector, the social partners, users of the services and those with first-hand experience of poverty, with the Combat Poverty Agency playing an important supporting role.

The overall global target for the NAPS was to significantly reduce consistent poverty over the period to 2007. In addition targets and policy actions were identified around five key themes – educational disadvantage, unemployment, income adequacy, disadvantaged urban areas and rural poverty. The NAPS identified a need for strong institutional structures to underpin the Strategy including a Cabinet Sub-Committee on Social Inclusion.

## **5.2 Review of the NAPS under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness**

Ireland's economic progress over the initial five years of the NAPS brought significant improvements in living standards with the scale of the improvement exceeding expectations. Accordingly agreement was reached through the national social partnership process that a review of the NAPS would be undertaken in consultation with the social partners to:

- review the underlying methodology
- review and revise existing targets
- where appropriate, consider new targets in the areas of child poverty, women's poverty, health, older people and housing/accommodation
- update the analysis to include emerging causes of poverty (e.g. racism)

In February 2002, *Building an Inclusive Society* was launched. The overarching goal was to reduce to below 2% and if possible eliminate the numbers of those who were 'consistently poor' by 2007. In addition, targets were identified relating to income adequacy, employment and unemployment, education, health, housing and accommodation, urban poverty and rural disadvantage and vulnerable groups including children and young people, women, older people, Travellers, people with disabilities, migrants and members of ethnic minorities. The revised strategy provided for a strengthened Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) to be set up to replace the existing NAPS Unit in the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. It also provided for a Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion to support the Cabinet Committee, and for a Technical Advisory group to be set up to support the OSI in developing a data strategy.

## **5.3 National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion) 2007-2016**

The current ten year national strategy for social inclusion was published in February 2007. The NAPinclusion builds on the national social partnership agreement, *Towards 2016*, which was agreed in June 2006 and is complemented by the social inclusion elements of the National Development Plan. It sets out a wide ranging and comprehensive programme of action to address poverty and social exclusion. The Plan has a strong focus on actions and targets. By adopting a lifecycle approach (children, people of working age, older people, people with disabilities) it supports the development of a more joined up and multi-disciplinary approach to social inclusion policy making, with co-ordinated inputs from a range

of actors. In addition, as many policies affect a range of groups or geographical areas, the Plan also contains a chapter on communities.

The overall poverty goal in the current Plan is to reduce the number of those experiencing consistent poverty to between 2% and 4% by 2012, with the aim of eliminating consistent poverty by 2016. The Plan contains twelve high level goals backed up by over 150 targets and actions.