



Formative Evaluation of the Local Authority Social Inclusion Units

**Final Report
December 2008**

**Prepared by Kathy Walsh
for the Combat Poverty Agency**

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. The Aim of the Evaluation	5
3. The Evaluation Methodology	7
4. The Evaluation Findings	9
5. The Evaluation Recommendations	27

1. Introduction

Combat Poverty has worked since 1999, in association with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) through its Local Government Programme, to build the capacity of local authorities to play a more strategic role in the prevention of poverty and social exclusion as part of the implementation of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS). The local authority Social Inclusion Units were established in line with a commitment under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (2000) to support the local authorities (working with other agencies) to tackle social exclusion across the range of their activities in a cohesive and focused manner.

Pilot Units were based in seven local authorities over the period 2001-2005. Dublin City Council had a unit prior to the establishment of the pilots and received funding under the programme. These Pilot Units were placed on a permanent footing in 2006. Under the current Social Partnership Agreement: Towards 2016, the social inclusion unit programme was extended, with nine additional units to be established. See Table 1 for details of the various Social Inclusion Units and see Table 2 for details of the prioritised objectives provided by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government for the Units.

The units (new and existing) receive 50% of their funding from the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government the other 50% is provided by the individual local authority. The funding supports the cost of employing a social inclusion officer and a social inclusion analyst.

Table 1. The Social Inclusion Units	
Existing Social Inclusion Units	New Social Inclusion Units
Cork City Council,	Cavan County Council
Limerick City Council	Donegal County Council
Waterford City Council	Fingal County Council
Louth County Councils	Galway County Council
Wicklow County Council	Meath County Council
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown County Council	Monaghan County Council
South Dublin County Council	Roscommon County Council
Dublin City Council	Galway City Council
The Unit in South Tipperary County Council is in the process of being established	

Table 2. The Prioritised Objectives of the Units provided by the Department

Key priority: Improve access to and quality of services for people from disadvantaged communities.
1. Develop and oversee the implementation and evaluation of a social inclusion strategy for the local authority, in consultation with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the Office for Social Inclusion, the Department of Social and Family Affairs, the Local Government Management Services Board and the Combat Poverty Agency;
2. Assist the local authority to incorporate social inclusion objectives and follow through actions in the authority corporate planning / business planning processes;
3. Support for the provision of enhanced customer services, particularly for disadvantaged communities and people with disabilities;
4. Identify existing data/establish baseline data on the extent, nature and causes of poverty within the local authority area, and by this means, develop local poverty profiles;
5. Ascertain the local authority's activities relevant to social inclusion and assess their impact;
6. Promote an awareness of the social inclusion perspective, through staff training and the provision of information, and bring influence to bear across the breadth of the authority's functions;
7. Identify new and innovative opportunities in tackling social exclusion, including in relation to people with disabilities, having regard to relevant national policies, and foster their integration with the local authority's existing social inclusion activities;
8. Co-operate with other agencies involved in social inclusion and key stakeholders in the county/city to ensure a co-ordinated approach and to avoid displacement and duplication;
9. Feed into the work of the County/City Development Board and in particular, it's Social Inclusion Measures Working Group in respect of the local authority's role in social inclusion, working in partnership with other relevant agencies;
10. Provide support as appropriate, in relation to the implementation of the RAPID Programme within the local authority's area
11. Keep abreast of policy developments in social inclusion at national and local levels, including in relation to people with disabilities.

2. The Aim of the Evaluation

The aim of the evaluation is to measure the effectiveness of the Social Inclusion Units according to the following criteria:

1. Delivery of the prioritised objectives of the Units, as set out by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government
2. The extent to which the Units have supported the development of enhanced customer services, particularly for disadvantaged communities and people with disabilities
3. The extent to which social inclusion objectives/actions have been embedded across the local authorities, and the Social Inclusion Units' role in this
4. The extent to which the Social Inclusion Units have facilitated key stakeholders, including anti-poverty interests, to work collaboratively on issues relating to poverty and social inclusion, in particular through Social Inclusion Measures (SIMs) groups
5. Evaluate best practice across the Social Inclusion Units with a view to dissemination.

The evaluation also seeks to:

6. Assess whether there are any non-financial barriers to the Social inclusion Units' delivery of their work programme and make recommendations about how to overcome them
7. Identify the key policy issues arising from the work and bring forward specific policy recommendations on these issues for further consideration.

The evaluation builds and draws on the learning arising from the evaluation of the first phase of the Units. Key elements of the evaluation include

- The establishment of a social inclusion baseline against which progress by the Social Inclusion Units can be measured
- The identification of the needs of the new social inclusion units
- The identification of the barriers/supports (non-financial) to the work of the Social Inclusion Units at local or national level, where appropriate

- Informing and contributing to the ongoing planning of the Units' work programmes;
- Evaluating the progress of the Units vis-à-vis prioritised objectives
- Supporting the self evaluation processes by social inclusion unit staff.

3. The Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation was undertaken using a formative evaluation approach. Key elements of this approach included:

- The development by each Unit of a social inclusion baselines position for their local authority. The purpose of this was to put in place a baseline position for each Unit, given that local authorities have engaged at different levels in the social inclusion agenda. These were completed by the Units in early Sept 2008.
- The development by each Social Inclusion Unit of detailed work programmes for the period October 2008- December 2009. The Units forwarded early drafts of their work programmes to the evaluator who gave them detailed comments on both the content and the format of the plans. The Units revised and finalised their plans in the light of the comments received and the training they undertook in November 2008. The majority of the Units work programmes were completed by early December 2008. The Units in Louth and Meath have yet to submit their work programmes due to staff illness and delays in recruitment, while the Unit in Cork City has yet to submit its final work programme.
- The completion of a Quarterly Monitoring Template for the period October 2008- December 2008. These were completed by the majority of the Units in early December 2008. The Units in Louth, Meath and Cork City have yet to submit these templates again due to staff illness and delays in recruitment.

The evaluator developed the templates for each of these documents (the baseline, the work programme and the monitoring template). She also provided the Units with training and support on how to complete the templates. There were two formal training and support sessions

- *16th - 17th September 2008 in Tullamore.*

The purpose of this day and a half was to review the objectives of the Units, to train the Units on how to complete the work programme template and to consider what indicators could be used to measure the progress of the Units.

- *12th November in Waterford.*

The purpose of this half day was to give the Units some feedback on their draft work programmes and to train them on how to complete the quarterly progress framework. The evaluator also met informally with a number of Units on the afternoon of the 12th to give them more detailed feedback and input.

The findings of the two evaluation support sessions were documented by the evaluator in two brief report which were circulated to members of the Evaluation Steering Committee Membership of this group was drawn from the Local Government Social Inclusion Steering Group (LGSISG) and includes representatives from the Combat Poverty Agency, the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) and the Local Government Management Services Board (LGMSB). The evaluator also met with this group on three occasions:

- 23th July Inception Meeting
- 8th October Discussion of Interim Report and Findings
- 18th December Discussion of Final Report, Findings and Recommendations

The evaluator also attended a meeting held on the 10th October organised by Combat Poverty in association with the DEHLG to which all of the various individuals and organisations working with the Social Inclusion Units were invited. Other additional elements of the evaluation included the preparation of two brief position papers:

- A Paper on 'Getting Social Inclusion into the new Local Authority Corporate Plans' (2010-2014)
- A Paper on the Role of Research in Local Authorities –an examination of the role of the Social Inclusion Analyst

The evaluator also made a presentation on the Issues and Challenges Facing the Local Authority Social Inclusion Units at the Social Inclusion Unit Showcase on the 12th November in Waterford.

4. The Evaluation Findings

Delays in recruitment following approval and subsequent delays in the staff appointed taking up their new roles, coupled with the economic downturn led to delays in the establishment of the new Units. This delayed the request to the Units to submit their baselines, the organisation of the training sessions and the submission of the work programmes and the quarterly progress report for the period October 2008-December 2009. It also means that the evaluation is more an examination of what the Units plan to undertake (as detailed in their work programmes) rather than a detailed assessment of what they have actually undertaken.

4.1. A Profile of the Units

A total of 16 out of the 17 units have been established. The Unit in South Tipperary is in the process of being established, the Unit in Galway City was established in November 2008. At the time of the completion of the baseline (August 2008) six posts remained vacant while by December 4 posts remained vacant, with one of these posts (An SIU Analyst in Monaghan County Council) due to be appointed before Christmas 2008.

The majority of the Units adopted the Officer and Analyst model. There are a number of local adaptations of this model in, in Donegal and in Louth. The Unit in Louth has an Officer and a part time Research Analyst, while the Unit in Donegal has a Social Inclusion Officer at Grade VII and an assistant Social Inclusion Officer at Grade V level. The Social Inclusion Unit in Donegal also works in close collaboration with Donegal County Councils Research and Policy Unit. The Research and Policy Unit in Donegal employs a Research and Policy Manager and two full time Research Assistants. The Units in Dublin City, South Dublin, Roscommon and Meath all have staff officers rather than research analysts.

The majority of the 27 staff employed in the Social Inclusion Units had already been employed in the local authority system. Only five individuals came from outside the local authority system. Of the staff that had been working in the local authority system, 9 individuals have been working within the system for over 10 years, 13 individuals for 3 to 10 years and 4 individuals had been working in the local authority system for less than three years.

The individuals who have been employed as the Officers have worked in a variety of different local authority sections including Finance, Housing, Capital Projects, Planning, Research and Policy, Community and Enterprise, Environment, Engineers, Human Resources, Recreation and Fire Brigade.

In the pilot Social Inclusion Model the second post in the Social Inclusion was identified to as a Social Inclusion Analyst. In reality a number of individuals were recruited as staff officers rather than social inclusion analysts. As such it was perhaps not surprising to find that at least 7 individuals appointed to what envisaged to have been the Analyst post had no research analysis training or background, while four individuals have quite extensive research and analysis skills and experience. It is also the case that a third of the all of the staff appointed to work in the Units stated that they had no experience of social inclusion work.

4.2. The Priorities of the Units

Each Unit is required to meet both the 11 prioritised objectives set for them by the Dept. of Environment Heritage and Local Government and also the objectives and priorities of their particular local authority. Key Departmental priorities identified the baselines submitted by the Units included:

- Working to embed social inclusion at a corporate level (policies, strategies, annual business plans)
- Developing and implementing a local antipoverty/social inclusion strategy
- Promotion of greater levels of awareness of social inclusion across the organisation
- Poverty Impact Assessment of all plans policies and expenditure

- Continuing to implement equality legislation through equality promotion policies and complaint procedures
- Compilation of up to date research and statistics to provide effective service delivery.
- Development of poverty profiles

The Units also identified a number of local authority specific priorities. Some common priorities for the Social Inclusion Units also emerged from the baselines submitted. These are listed below:

- Promote an greater understanding of social inclusion (e.g. through the development of staff booklets, the provision of staff training, and the development of a directory of services)
- Collation of data, development/updating poverty profiles
- Development and Coordination of the Anti-Racism and Diversity Strategy/Team in action implementation
- Compilation of a detailed work programme for the Unit
- Establishment of a Social Inclusion Working Group within the local authority and working through this group to enhance, increase and focus the social inclusion capacity
- Supporting and working with CDB/SIM to deliver on their social inclusion commitments

Some Units included a relatively limited number of objectives in their work programmes as suggested by the evaluator in the support sessions, others for a variety of reasons included significantly more. See Table 3 for details of the number of objectives included in the various SIU work programmes.

Table 3. Analysis of the Number of Objectives in the Final SIU Work Programmes submitted

Name of the Unit	No of Objectives in the Work Programme	Name of the Unit	No of Objectives in the Work Programme
Wicklow County Council	8	Cavan County Council	7
Limerick City Council	7	Donegal County Council	10
Waterford City Council	8	Fingal County Council	6
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown County Council	4	Galway County Council	5
South Dublin County Council	8	Monaghan County Council	4
Dublin City Council	5	Roscommon County Council	6
		Galway City Council	5

4.3. An Assessment of the extent to which the Units meet/plan to meet the Departmental Social Inclusion Unit Objectives

With many of the Units only becoming operational since the end of August it is not possible to make an in-depth assessment of the extent to which the Units have met the departmental objectives. What is possible is an assessment of the extent to which the Units plan to address the Departmental objectives, as detailed in their work programmes, together with an assessment of the extent to which the Units state that they have met the targets they set for themselves over the period Sept- Dec 2008. The information on progress made over the period September- December 2008 is drawn

from the Quarterly Monitoring Report completed and submitted by the Units, using the template provided.

The Units generally adopted one of two different approaches to addressing the Departmental objectives in their work programmes. The first was a comprehensive approach (eight Units) where the Units state that they intend to address either all or indeed a very high percentage of the objectives. Five of the Units (Donegal, Fingal, South Dublin, Dublin City and Dun Laoghaire Rathdown) adopted this approach in full, intending to address all of Departmental Objectives in 08-09. Three Units stated that they intended to address more than 80% (9 of the 11 Objectives). Limerick City's SIU will address all but Objective 1 and 10, while Wicklow SIU will address all but Objectives 9 and 11 Cavan SIU will address all but Objectives 7 and 11. The omission by Limerick City SIU of the highest priority departmental objective in their work programme was an issue that was raised by the evaluator with the Unit. Their response was that this was not a Limerick City SIU priority for 08-2009 but perhaps it could be in 2010.

The second approach adopted by the six of the Units was a more focused approach. The Units that fell into this category chose to focus on the achievement of a more limited number of departmental objectives. Roscommon intend to focus on 7 departmental objectives (Objectives 1,2 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9) and one local additional locally focused objective. Waterford City focused their work programme on the achievement of six objectives (Objectives 2, 3, 4, 8, 9 and 10) in 2009 as indeed did Galway City (objectives 1,3,5,7,10 and 11). Galway City also included an additional local authority objective 'Access Officers in accordance with the provision of the Disability Act 2005'. The Unit in County Galway intend in their plan to focus on the achievement of five core objectives (Objectives 1,2, 4, 6 and 9) and does the Unit in County Monaghan (Objectives 1, 2,3, 4 & 6).

All of the quarterly reports submitted by the Units for the period Oct- Dec 2008 show that the Units have generally made good progress in the achievement of the targets they set themselves. Delays in the achievement of particular targets were variously attributed to budget constraints, slow buy in from the internal and external working

groups, and lack of time and staff availability. Some actions were also somewhat delayed because they were awaiting approval from senior staff, elected members and/or internal and external steering committees. Some Units also reported delays arising from difficulties in relation to accessing localised data.

4.4. An Assessment of the nature and extent to which the Units plan to support the development of enhanced customer services, particularly for disadvantaged communities and people with disabilities;

All of the various objectives and actions being undertaken by the Units should indirectly support the development of enhanced customer services. For example, the development and updating of poverty and household profiles by many of the Units (e.g. County Galway/Dun Laoghaire Rathdown /Wicklow/South Dublin /Limerick City/Fingal/ Galway City and Cavan) will assist in the identification of the nature and extent of the challenges facing excluded groups and should ultimately assist the better targeting of resources at those most disadvantaged. Waterford City SIU is currently working on the development of a pilot data sharing protocol within the Council to assist in the process of data sharing and the development of enhanced customer profiles.

Getting social inclusion embedded in the Corporate Planning Process and into the annual operational programmes/business plans and ultimately into individuals work programmes should also ultimately result in positive changes in the way services are delivered in general and to disadvantaged communities and people with disabilities in particular. As a part of this process, Fingal SIU are working with their communications office to ensure that social inclusion is part of their local authorities wider communications agenda.

In addition, actions identified in relation to the promotion of a great level of awareness of social inclusion and equality among local authority staff and elected members should also support the provision of enhanced services in the medium to longer term. Actions currently being undertaken or planned by the Units to raise awareness include:

- The provision of social inclusion training both as part of general induction and specific social inclusion training, for example, Limerick City SIU and Fingal SIU are working to provide Plain English and Literacy awareness training to staff

and to incorporate this training into wider more mainstream training. Fingal SIU are also currently working to survey local authority staff attitudes and understanding of social inclusion and plan to use this information as a baseline for future social inclusion focused staff training.

- Regular updates on the local authority intra-net and website. South Dublin SIU is also involved in the implementation of an E-Inclusion initiative and is responsible for the management of the staff language skills initiative to assist migrants accessing the services provided by the Council.
- The organisation of events (including in some cases a Social Inclusion Week by South Dublin and Limerick City to support the development of enhanced levels of staff awareness and ultimately customer services for those most excluded.
- Some units, for example Monaghan and Limerick City have also produced a social inclusion calendar
- A number of Units including Donegal are planning to produce a handbook on social inclusion for all local authority staff, while Waterford City SIU are planning to update the Council's 'Access for Everyone' DVD in an effort to continue to promote awareness of the need for adequate disability access.
- The Unit in Dun Laoghaire Rathdown is working on the development of a poverty impact assessment and equality proofing template and also on the organisation of an information fair for people with disabilities.
- The Unit in Roscommon is working on the organisation of a county level inter-cultural conference and facilitation of the meetings of the Media Campaign sub-group of the Inter-cultural group by
- The Unit in South Dublin is involved in the organisation of a Social Inclusion Competition and the provision of social inclusion training for Secondary Schools.

Many of the Units are also undertaking and supporting the implementation of objectives and actions that will proactively support the development of enhanced customer services. For example the Units in Cavan and in Waterford City are carrying out an audit of all community facilities with the county, part of that will include an assessment of the physical accessibility and costs associated with the local centres. This it is expected will raise economic and physical accessibility as an issue at a local

and county level and will it is hoped ultimately support enhanced levels of accessibility across the county. Some Units including Wicklow have produced a Customer Services Directory as part of the process of enhancing customer services. The Units in Waterford City and Limerick City are planning to develop a customer satisfaction survey, while the Unit in Fingal is currently reviewing the current customer service facilities, charter and feedback mechanisms with a view to improving these and enhancing access to services for customers.

Other initiatives the Units are involved in that will ultimately support the development of enhanced customer services include:

- Involvement in initiatives to promote active citizenship through participation in the 2009 local and European elections. The Unit in Wicklow has a particular focus in its work on engaging with and supporting groups that support people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and older people
- A number of the Units e.g. Donegal, Louth and Galway City have also become involved to a greater or lesser extent in the development and/or implementation of Disability Implementation Plans
- Some units have also become involved in the development and implementation of a number of county and city levels plans and strategies that will ultimately have an impact on disadvantaged groups. The Unit in Donegal for example is currently involved in the implementation of the Councils Sport, Play and Recreation Policy and the CDB's Interagency Group in Traveller Issues

4.5. An Assessment of the extent to which the SIU plan to feed into ensuring that social inclusion objectives/actions are embedded across the local authorities

The Units can be seen to be working and planning to work to ensure that social inclusion objectives and actions are embedded across their particular local authorities in three distinct ways.

Firstly and perhaps most importantly the majority of Units(10 out of the 13 who submitted their final work programmes: Monaghan, Cavan, Galway County,

Roscommon, Wicklow, Dublin City, Waterford City, South Dublin, Limerick City and Fingal) plan to feed into, represent and spread social inclusion objectives and actions across the development of the new Corporate Plans in 2009. This would appear to be the most strategic way to ensure that social inclusion is embedded across local authorities on an ongoing and structured way. Most of the Units also state that they plan to monitor the implementation of the new Corporate Plans and main operational/business plans in subsequent years

The second way many of the Units plan to embed social inclusion across their local authorities involves the Units undertaking an audit or updating an existing audit of social inclusion activities undertaken by the various sections of the local authority. Examples of Units using this approach include Donegal, Fingal, Dublin City, Monaghan, Cavan, Galway County and Roscommon. This would be followed by and used in the development and implementation of an internal local authority focused social inclusion strategy/LAPSSIS¹. Interestingly in many cases the Units believe that this internal strategy will feed into the development of a wider county/city level local anti-poverty strategy. Interestingly and in contrast the Units in Dun Laoghaire Rathdown and Limerick City plans to progress the social inclusion agenda across the organisation through the implementation of a programme of activities focused on the promotion of social inclusion all of which will be undertaken by the Office of Community and Enterprise staff.

The third route adopted by a number of Units (e.g. Cavan, Galway City, Roscommon, Monaghan, Fingal and Donegal) to embed the social inclusion agenda across the local authority is through the establishment/re-establishment of an internal Social Inclusion Steering Group, involving sufficiently senior staff members from across a range of functional areas. This structure provides a very useful mechanism and support for cross departmental working on social inclusion issues. In some instances, the Units plan to develop a single purpose social inclusion specific steering groups. In other local authorities the Units plan to use existing cross departmental groups. The Units in County Galway and Wicklow plan to use the existing cross departmental Customer Services Groups to progress the social inclusion agenda. The sheer scale of the

¹ The terms social inclusion strategy and local antipoverty strategy are used interchangeably by the various Units

operations in the Office of Community and Enterprise in Dublin City Council has also prompted the Unit there to establish regular communication channels with the various units operating within the Directorate that have a social inclusion focus.

4.6. An Assessment of the Extent to which the Units plan to facilitate key stakeholders, including anti-poverty interests, to work collaboratively through the Social Inclusion Measures groups (SIMs) in particular

Again the majority of Units (8 out of 13: County Galway, Roscommon, Galway City, Wicklow, South Dublin, Limerick City, Fingal and Donegal) have identified the need to feed into and support the work of the SIM Group as a priority in their work programmes for 2009.

The level of support to be provided by the Units to SIM varies from Unit to Unit, in Roscommon staff from the Unit attend the meetings and provide research, information and advice on social inclusion issues, while the Unit in Donegal is responsible for the overall co-ordination and support for the work of the Group.

Other examples of the types of supports provided/to be provided by the Units to their local SIM groups would include the following:

- The provision of data
- The Unit in Galway City are planning to do an audit of social inclusion agencies and organisations and the services they offer in Galway city in order to support the SIM and the Unit in its work
- The Unit in South Dublin is involved in the development of a Local Anti-Poverty Strategy for South County Dublin in conjunction with SIM and the local Social Inclusion Network

Some Units have also prioritised working with other local groups in their 2009 work programme. For example a number of Units including Waterford City are planning to support the work of their Traveller Interagency Group. The Unit in Limerick City is facilitating the work of the City and County Integration Steering group and Sub groups and will be supporting the development of an integration strategy for the city. A

number of Units will also be actively involved in the development of Anti-Racism and Diversity Plans for their local authority area, while at least three Units Dublin City, Limerick City and Fingal are also actively involved in the RAPID Programmes in their areas.

4.7. The Further Training and Support Needs of the Units

As part of the development of the baselines the Units were asked to identify their particular training and support needs, See Table 4 for an analysis of the needs identified by the Units.

Table 4. An Analysis of the Training and Support Needs of the Units²

General Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report Writing • Facilitation/Consultation Skills and PLA supports • Facilitating leadership • General Project Management training • Time Management
Training Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training to be Trainer • Developing training courses • Presentation skills and communication
Research Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training on how and where to source data • General research & data analysis training • Training on the use of various computer packages
Social Inclusion Type Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding social inclusion issues • Training on how to undertake Poverty Impact Assessments • Training on how to develop poverty profiles • Understanding community development and community infrastructure • Understanding equality and diversity issues • The needs and issues facing marginalised groups
Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing information about national policy and funding opportunities • Sharing information re: conferences, workshops and training available • Quarterly meetings with other SIU's • Sharing of training programmes developed by the Units and others • Information on what is & is not working in other local authorities

² These needs were identified by the Units as part as the development of a baseline of the Units

At least five different types training and support needs were identified by the Units, some are general project management type training needs and could may indeed be available within the local authority, others are more specialist training needs that can only be met with more specialised input.

The more specialist training needs identified by the Units include

- The need for training on how to develop and implement training courses. The Units believed that they would benefit from receiving 'training the trainers' training thereby reducing the amount of external training they would need to buy in if they were able to develop and deliver the training themselves. There was also a suggestion at the support session that different Units could develop different training programmes and would deliver these training programmes for other Units on a reciprocal basis.
- The need for specialist research training. This need is particularly acute for the individuals who have taken up the analyst post with no research background. Combat Poverty sought to partially address this need by the provision of technical support to assist the units develop their poverty profile. However, more support is needed for the Units next year.
- The need for social inclusion type training. This need is relevant to all those individuals who do not have a background in social inclusion. Again Combat Poverty sought to partially address this need through the provision of technical support to assist the Units develop their poverty profile and through the provision of a half day support session and various information packs and emails sent to the Units. More support is however needed for the Units next year.

The Units also indentified the need for regular networking with one another and with others. Again Combat Poverty in partnership with the DEHLG facilitated this through the organisation of three support sessions for the Units and the half day social inclusion unit showcase event. Given that many of the staff in the Units are new and are only finding their feet, it is anticipated that the continuation of this type of event in 2009 would be strongly welcomed by the Units.

4.8. The Challenges/Barriers facing the Units locally and nationally.

The economic down turn and the general budgetary constraints this has caused both nationally and locally has and indeed will mean that some projects that were to have been progressed by the Units will not now happen. Budgetary constraints within local authorities are also leading to more limited staff resources and this has resulted in

Units being drawn into activities that they had not anticipated being involved in. This in turn has consequences in terms of reducing the time they have available to meet the targets identified in their work programmes. It has also meant that staff time is increasingly at a premium and that staff generally have less time to engage in what they might consider 'non-core' functions. This is probably inevitable in a time of budgetary constraints.

Some Units have also experienced challenges and difficulties in getting access to sufficiently localised data in general and data from groups in particular. Accessing and gaining the trust of vulnerable households in order to facilitate their participation in particular schemes/ and projects has also causes some delays for some Units in terms of getting schemes and projects off the ground. Gaining and sustaining trust among vulnerable groups and households is an ongoing issue for social researchers. It takes time to establish and sustain. While training on doing research with excluded groups is quite specialised, it is available in the UK and would be of benefit to the Analysts doing this type of primary research.

Getting others 'buy in' to participate in internal and indeed external working groups has proved challenging for some Units. Indeed some Units report that poor attendance at meetings has led to significant delays related to the need to re-schedule these meetings. At a very practical level some of the Units have reported that many local authority staff have been very preoccupied with budget preparation over the period Sept-December 2008, but believe that these staff may have more time in the new year.

A number of the Social Inclusion Units have reported delays in progress related to the delays in getting approval from senior staff, internal and external steering committees and elected members. Social inclusion issues, papers, strategies can be seen to regularly fall off some County/City Council meeting agendas, when they get too crowded.

It is also the case that in a number of local authorities there has been a lack of clarity about the role of the Social Inclusion Unit and as such, staff from these Units have got drawn into a wide range of activities. The existence of work programmes for the Units should reduce the risk of this happening in 2009.

The newly appointed Unit staff are all enthusiastic about their roles, but the majority lack experience in the area. It is probably not surprisingly therefore to learn that many of the Units underestimate the amount of time particular tasks would take. Many cited a lack of time/time constraints as the most frequent reason for not meeting the targets they had set. The ability of the Units to realistically assess how long a particular activity will take is something that will improve with time and experience.

4.9. An Identification of Some Good/Innovative Practices across the Units

It is too soon to identify innovative practices across the Units given that many of them are not long established, but it is possible to identify both innovative ideas incorporated into the format and presentation of the work programmes and also innovative activities to be implemented by the Units.

Innovations in the Format, Presentation and Content of the Work programme include the following:

- The identification by Galway County SIU of the various challenges and obstacles associated with implementation of particular actions with ways found to address these in the sub-actions
- The inclusion by South Dublin SIU and others of the history of the Unit, its aims and role in a local authority context and a summary of some of the key achievements of the Unit over the period Nov 2006- Oct 2008
- The development of very clear action plan templates related to
 - the development of a poverty profile in the Cavan SIU work programme
 - the establishment of a cross departmental internal working group in the Monaghan SIU work programme
 - Social inclusion awareness raising work in the Donegal SIU work programme
 - Embedding social inclusion in the Corporate Planning process in the Roscommon SIU Work programme

Innovative activities being/to be undertaken by the Units would include the following:

- The development by Waterford SIU of neighbourhood strategies to cover all areas of the city Waterford. The strategies will include an identification of gaps in services and incorporate and an audit of community, sports and arts facilities.
- The development of partnership working between all the different Units working to support social inclusion in the Office of Community and Enterprise in Dublin City Council
- A joint social inclusion audit of Fingal County Council and Fingal County Development Board
- A research study currently being undertaken by the Limerick City SIU to identify best practices in the design, management and maintenances of local authority estates
- The development by Wicklow SIU of a customer services directory
- The publication and promotion of the Galway City Atlas by the Galway City SIU
- Building on the work already undertake by the Unit in Waterford City the Dun Laoghaire Rathdown SIU is planning to conduct an detailed Audit of Social Inclusion Spend in each directorate.

4.10. The Learning arising from the Units to date

One of the most striking things to emerge from this formative evaluation is the recognition that the 16 Social Inclusion Units now in place are all different and operate in very different organisational environments, reflecting local priorities. It was envisaged that the established Pilot Units would be more similar to one another than perhaps the new Units. The reality was different however given that many of the original pilot Unit staff have moved on with new staff appointed (indeed only four of the original Pilot Unit staff remain in post).

The Social Inclusion Unit Model of an Analyst and an Officer has not been followed in each local authority and this has implications for the ability of the various SIU's to meet the objectives identified by the Department. This is particularly the case where the Analyst or Grade 5 Staff Officer has no research background and where a Unit does not yet have its full staff complement. An analyst has yet to be appointed in Limerick

City, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown and Monaghan while an Officer has yet to be appointed in Meath.

Local authorities by their nature tend to be focused on service delivery. This poses challenges for the Social Inclusion Units who have to try to resist being drawn into project implementation and stay focused on achieving the more strategic objectives identified by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The Units do however have a role to play in pilot projects or in supporting others doing pilot work but need to resist the temptation of becoming involved in more regular project work. The work programmes developed by the Units and signed off by their line Manager and Director should assist the Units to stay focused on their core functions.

The Units need to demonstrate additionality and therefore should be careful not to displace other staff from their established roles. As only 50% of county / city local authorities have social inclusion units and the Units need to make sure that the role and added value of the Units is visible to others inside and outside the local authority. In this context it is important that the Units share practices and learning with the local authorities without social inclusion units.

In a time of acute budgetary constraints the Units need to give more detailed consideration to what additional and follow up actions they can generate from materials they produce to ensure the materials are 1) useful 2) user-friendly 3) readily accessible and 4) capable of being disseminated across the local government system. The Units also need to give further consideration as to how they will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of their work for the wider local authority. This is critical to the sustainability of the Units in the longer term,

The development of work programmes by the majority of the Units for the period October 2008-December 2009 has been useful in terms of ensuring the Units have a clear strategic focus to their work, with some of the work programmes are more

strategic than others. The most useful and effective of the work programmes will however be those that are used as working documents, with progress reviewed and monitored every quarter. It remains to be seen to what extent the Units will use the work programmes to help them focus their work.

5. The Evaluation Recommendations

Three different types of recommendations are identified. The first set of recommendations are for the Units, the second group are for the local authorities that have the Units while the third group of recommendations relate to the supports needed by the Units.

5.1. Recommendations for the individuals Social Inclusion Units

1. The Units use the Work Programme they have developed to guide and direct their work in 2009
2. Where the Units are given additional tasks or expanded roles they should amend and update and where necessary re-prioritise their Work Programme accordingly
3. The Units review progress on a quarterly basis in relation to the achievement of the targets identified in their work programme.

5.2. Recommendations for the Local Authorities with Social Inclusion Units

4. Local authorities with social inclusion units should actively encourage and support other key relevant local authority staff to actively participate and attend the meetings of the cross departmental social inclusion steering committee
5. Local authorities should facilitate the input of the their Social Inclusion Units into their corporate planning processes.

6. A regular agenda item be introduced at both Corporate Policy Group and Cross Departmental Senior Management Team Meetings, to discuss progress and identify blockages to addressing social inclusion across the organisation.
7. Where possible social inclusion type training developed by the Unit should be
8. The good practices and learning arising from the work of the Units should be identified and shared across the Units and across the local government system generally.

5.3. Recommendations for Supporting the Units

9. The Units continue to need to be provided with specific social inclusion skills training
10. The Analysts continue to need specific research skills and training, as well as information and support in relation to accessing various types of data
11. The Units need ongoing support to encourage and assist them to engage in a process of ongoing self evaluation for example regular requests and feedback on the quarterly work programme progress reports would be useful in ensuring this happens.
12. The Units have got a lot of value and support from meeting as a group and there is value in seeking to support regular networking between the Units perhaps linked to the provision of skills training.
13. The introduction and development of appropriate social inclusion indicators for use in the Corporate Plans would strengthen the cross cutting nature of social inclusion and the role of the Units.