

TIPPERARY SOUTH RIDING COUNTY DEVELOPMENT BOARD

FOURTH MEETING REPORT

Meeting held: September 4, 2000
Members present: 21 (75% attendance)
Chair: Cllr. Tom Wood.

SUMMARY

Cllr Tom Wood is the new Chair of Tipperary (South Riding) County Development Board.

Tipperary (South Riding) County Development Board focused on the evolvement of a County Social Strategy at its September meeting. Board members welcomed the strong focus on social inclusion but highlighted the key challenges that need to be met.

- ❑ To ensure that the general public and their community groups are willing to accept those who are being discriminated against in their communities
- ❑ To resolve the conundrum of a decline in volunteerism in Irish society and the more effective outcomes achieved by community-based, community-led public funded social inclusion strategies
- ❑ To address the fall out of Irish education - the competitive model throws up a majority of winners but is community and co-operative endeavour the ultimate loser?
- ❑ To address social care needs in a holistic manner including those of lone parents, separated parents, youth, elderly, the Traveller community, disabled, refugees, asylum seekers, those in distress, etc.

Decision: Tipperary (South Riding) County Development Board agreed to progress the County Social Strategy using the following segment groups and segment champions.

- Health (South Eastern Health Board)
- Education and youth development (Tipperary (South Riding) Vocational Education Committee)
- Achieving adequate family income (DSCFA)
- Childcare (South Eastern Health Board will be establishing a County Committee)
- Unemployment and social cohesion (FAS)
- Housing (Tipperary (South Riding) County Council)
- Transport (Barrow Nore Suir Rural Development Ltd)
- Community development (South Tipperary Voluntary Community Group Platform).

Decision: Tipperary (South Riding) County Development Board agreed to endorse the co-ordination of social inclusion measures at local level. The Director of Community and Enterprise is to activate the co-ordination process by inviting the relevant agencies onto a Social Inclusion Measures Working Group.

1. New Chair of Tipperary (South Riding) Co Development Board

Cllr Tom Wood, the new Cathaoirleach of the County Council, chaired the fourth County Development Board meeting in South Tipperary.

Cllr Tom Wood, who was elected Cathaoirleach of the County Council on July 4, became an ex-officio member of Tipperary (South Riding) County Development Board, replacing outgoing County Council Cathaoirleach, Cllr Pat Norris.

Further to Section 2.31 of the Guidelines for County Development Board, a meeting of the Corporate Policy Group (the local authority SPC chairs and the Cathaoirleach) elected Cllr Wood as chair of Tipperary (South Riding) County Development Board in place of Cllr Pat Norris on July 10, 2000.

2. Board input into a Social Review of the County

Tipperary (South Riding) County Development Board focused on the evolvement of a County Social Strategy at its September meeting.

Oliver Clancy (FAS) gave an **overview on the process** of developing a County Social Strategy and progress to date. The County Social Strategy needs to be address the key questions:

- Where are we now? What is the social situation of the County?
- Where do we want to be? How should the social situation of the county be changed by the year 2010?
- How do we get from where we are to where we want to be? (County Social Strategy).

The Board had formally established a Social Inclusion Working Group to carry out the preparatory work needed to address the strategic questions above. The recommendation of the Social Inclusion Working Group is that social inclusion needs to be broken down into manageable units. The following eight social segment groups (led by individual champions) are proposed.

- Health (South Eastern Health Board)
- Education and youth development (Tipperary (South Riding) Vocational Education Committee)
- Achieving adequate family income (DSCFA)
- Childcare (South Eastern Health Board will be establishing a County Committee)
- Unemployment and social cohesion (FAS)
- Housing (County Council)
- Transport (Barrow Nore Suir Rural Development Ltd)
- Community development (South Tipperary Voluntary Community Group Platform).

The segment group chairs will be coordinated by the Office of the Director of Community and Enterprise and will be briefed on the outcomes of the Board's Social Review of the County.

Decision: Tipperary (South Riding) County Development Board agreed to progress the County Social Strategy using the recommended segment groups and segment champions.

Further presentations were made to the Board by John Quinn (Director of Community and Enterprise), Brigid O'Keeffe (Social Partners Sector), Cllr. Susan Meagher (Local Authority Sector) and Mick Cummins (State Agency Sector).

From **a national and county perspective**, the following was noted:

- ❖ The South Eastern Health Board has mapped material deprivation in South Tipperary
- ❖ Social exclusion is perhaps best defined in Partnership 2000 as cumulative marginalisation from production (unemployment), from consumption (poverty), from social networks (community, family and neighbours), from decision making and from an adequate quality of life.
- ❖ The main target groups include those with no qualification; those with no job; those who are poor (below 50% of average household income); those needing a home; those who suffer discrimination; those without access to childcare facilities; those abusing substances; those who are disaffected; those who are not participating in decisions being made about them (either through community or political structures); and those urban and rural areas which have significant numbers of socially excluded.
- ❖ The Task Force on Local Government and Local Development Systems has produced a matrix highlighting the complexity of the social inclusion agenda. The matrix includes 38 target groups, 40 social inclusion measures in the remit of nine government departments with a multiplicity of bodies at national, regional, county and community levels implementing the measures.
- ❖ The Task Force will be requesting the Co Development Board to endorse the co-ordination process at local level by establishing a Social Inclusion Measures Working Group.

Decision: Tipperary (South Riding) County Development Board agreed to endorse the co-ordination process at local level and the Director of Community and Enterprise is to activate the process by inviting the relevant agencies onto the Social Inclusion Measures Working Group.

From a **local community perspective** the following questions were raised concerning five critical issues:

- ❖ **Unemployment:** What are the real training needs of the unemployed? Is the training being provided a response to real needs and real opportunities? Is there an effective local employment service to link unemployed who are trained with work?
- ❖ **Accommodation:** What is the full extent of the housing need? Is there a housing accommodation plan that can reduce time on a waiting list to 18 months? Is there a good public-private mix in the siting of housing? Are there amenities and facilities adjacent to housing provision?
- ❖ **Life long Learning:** Who is promoting life long learning and how is it being promoted? What soft supports are available in terms of personal development, parenting skills and child care?
- ❖ **Health care:** Each community wants an effective health care service. The shift to community care is to be welcomed. Can South Tipperary be a pilot area for the 24 hour primary care service?
- ❖ **Involvement:** The South Tipperary Voluntary Community Platform Group needs to be strengthened so that is accountable to the community groups. There is also a need to develop the capacity of community activities and people generally as people need to be involved in the decision making on decisions being made about them.

From a **local public representative perspective**, key issues that need to be addressed include:

- ❖ The clarification of what added value the Co Social Strategy will bring to address entrenched social issues such as the exclusion caused to huge areas of the county by poor public transport systems.
- ❖ When providing a public response to social inclusion, there is a need for a holistic approach rather than a focus on one particular need. For instance when housing single mothers, there is a need to structure housing provision so that the mothers have access to family and community supports. Solving a housing need without a childcare option will simply create an environment where social exclusion is reinforced. The single mother may end up with a poorer quality of life.
- ❖ There is a huge need to maintain services in rural areas. This will only be done by maintaining rural populations. Planning policy must focus on achieving this objective rather than preventing it.

From a **state agency perspective**, the following issues also need examination:

- ❖ Given the huge job creation in the past few years, the focus of social strategy has changed substantially. Targeting unemployment would have been the priority focus of a County Social Strategy in the past, whereas a desired outcome now is a better quality of life for those in need of social inclusion. It is a challenge to develop a strategy that has the flexibility to cope with changes that are difficult to forecast.
- ❖ The focus on social inclusion is enshrined in government policy and in the provision of additional resources. But resources are finite. There is a major challenge in targeting these resources at the area of greatest need. The work in preparing a County Social Strategy needs to focus on vision and a strategy to achieve the vision not on detailed operational issues.
- ❖ The inclusion of the socially excluded in the process of developing County Social Strategy is an important principle.
- ❖ There are skills shortages in key social areas - for example teachers, specialist medical personnel, etc.
- ❖ In preparing a County Development Board statement on social inclusion, cognisance needs to be taken of: lifelong learning (illiteracy is a major handicap); childcare; access (transport to services, learning and work opportunities); elderly (helping maintain independent environments for as long as possible); youth (access to facilities and services); travellers, refugees and asylum seekers (that they are socially included); etc.

Members of the Tipperary (South Riding) County Development Board added the following key points for consideration by the Social Inclusion Working Groups:

- ❖ The County Development Board **welcomes the strong focus on social inclusion** in developing a County Strategy. It also welcomes recent and forthcoming Government initiatives including the White Paper on Voluntary Activity and the White Paper on Adult Education.
- ❖ **The challenge is to devise and oversee a County Social Strategy to address the issues.** The issues need to be well identified and the focus must be on strategy to address the issues in a holistic way. For instance in relation to groups experiencing discrimination (such as travellers, disabled, youth, refugees, etc), the main issue is to ensure that the general public and their community groups are willing to accept those being discriminated against in their community. No top-down approach is likely to succeed unless there is local community endorsement. However, communities do need to be challenged to do their part in alleviating the experience of discrimination.

- ❖ The principle of delivering social inclusion programmes via area based and community networks is accepted **but there is a conundrum** between the public policy of addressing social inclusion by community based/led strategies and the decline in volunteerism in Irish society. The past five years (of the Celtic Tiger) have brought about major changes, none more so than the de-communitising of local areas? The social structure and the community structure are changing. There is a need to liaise with local communities in order to identify new models of intervention between the community and the state.
- ❖ **A feature of Irish education has been the focus on competition** between pupils and between schools. The majority of pupils benefit from the competitive model. But there are losers including those who are unable to read or write. And those who fail to achieve a second level qualification are at a severe disadvantage in the jobs market and at unlikely to enjoy a good quality of live. **And the community is often the loser** - the competitive model does not develop the co-operative life skills necessary to sustain community endeavour.
- ❖ **Elderly people have much to offer a County Social Strategy:** Rather than branding the elderly as a burden on the state, focus on an outcome where the elderly can contribute to social inclusion.
- ❖ The **elderly, travellers, disabled, and refugees/asylum seekers** are four client groups which **have special needs**. For example, there are large cohorts of elderly living in remote areas and few support groups. It is difficult for the Health Board to source both professional and home help in some of these areas. The numbers of nursing home beds is increasing. Should South Tipperary depend on nursing homes as the key social care response for the needs of the elderly? It is important not to ghettoise client groups such as the elderly in the implementation of a County Social Strategy.
- ❖ **Distress** may well become the **most common illness of the 21st** century. There is increasing pressure on parents' time and resources to structure a good quality of life for their children. In many families both parents have to work thus reducing the time available to their children. Young men in particular also appear to have difficulties in coping positively with stress in their lives - increase in random violence, substance abuse, suicide, high speed accidents, etc.
- ❖ **New target groups** are emerging: young couples migrating back from the UK are coming onto the housing lists; fathers who are separated/divorced may require housing for the 2-3 days a week they have full access to their children; the farming sector who will be struggling to adjust as incomes fall, etc.
- ❖ The **partnership approach needs to be central** to the County Social Strategy. A holistic rather than single agency approach is needed to address social inclusion issues. Access to information and to personnel is vital.