

## Draft National Framework Policy for Local and Community Development

### *A Submission by the Citizens Information Board (April 2015)*

#### **Introduction**

The Citizens Information Board (CIB) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the Draft National Framework Policy for Local and Community Development. Such a policy is required in order to deliver a bottom-up approach and put the citizen more at the centre of community and local development. The CIB has in various submissions<sup>1</sup> over the years regularly highlighted the need for a more integrated approach to local development. The current CIB Strategy includes a commitment to work to develop and implement an integrated service delivery model that enhances service delivery at local level as well as providing better value for money.

CIB service delivery partners -- the national network of Citizens Information Services (CISs), the Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS), the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) and the National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities (NAS) -- have significant engagement with individuals and local communities through their information, advice and advocacy roles.<sup>2</sup> These services deal on an ongoing and regular basis with people who experience significant difficulties relating to transitioning from welfare to work, housing, over-indebtedness, people at risk of homelessness and people with disabilities seeking to access supports and services. The engagement with citizens has become more complex in recent years, involving multiple information requests, requests for advice/assistance and advocacy supports (CISs and CIPS)), rescheduling personal debt with multiple lenders (MABS) and complex interventions on behalf of people with disabilities (NAS).

Feedback from CISs and CIPS, based on the experience of dealing with queries from the public, provides an insight into some of the systemic difficulties experienced by people in respect of:

- Accessing social housing
- Integrating income supports with employment activation programmes
- Accessing income and other social services to which they are entitled

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Submissions on *Migration Integration Strategy; Active Citizenship; OECD Review of the Irish Public Service* – see

[http://www.citizensinformationboard.ie/publications/social/social\\_submissions.html](http://www.citizensinformationboard.ie/publications/social/social_submissions.html)

<sup>2</sup> The national network of CISs and CIPS between them deal with over a million queries from the public annually. MABS dealt with over 40,000 clients in 2014 via the local services and the MABS National Helpline.

- Bridging the gap between welfare and work
- Dealing with the challenges of changed family circumstances
- Accessing health services in a timely manner

In recent years, MABS has been dealing with clients with significant debt problems that are associated with the economic and fiscal crisis of the past eight years.

The Framework Policy for Local and Community Development is a significant milestone in that it seeks to integrate a number of approaches and initiatives that have been to the forefront of policy development and debate at local level over a number of years. The Policy Framework seeks to implement the provisions of the EU Community-led Local Development (CLLD)<sup>3</sup>:

- Encourage local communities to develop integrated bottom-up approaches in circumstances where there is a need to respond to territorial and local challenges calling for structural change
- Build community capacity and stimulate innovation (including social innovation), entrepreneurship and capacity for change by encouraging the development and discovery of untapped potential from within communities and territories
- Promote community ownership by increasing participation within communities and build the sense of involvement and ownership that can increase the effectiveness of EU policies

The need to actively engage disadvantaged and marginalised communities, as envisaged in the Framework Policy, is a critical consideration in promoting social inclusion. Building on the potential of local communities to address the issue of poverty and social exclusion in challenging economic times presents significant challenges, not least, the need to achieve a balance between reliance on local communities and the need for exchequer funding to enable and stimulate appropriate development from the bottom up. The CIB notes the Government commitment to getting people back to work as the key to tackling poverty. The *Pathways to Work* and the *Action Plan on Jobs* initiatives are important. The introduction in 2015 of the Back to Work Family Dividend to further support unemployed families to take up employment is a welcome development as is the roll out the Area Based Childhood Programme in the most disadvantaged areas in the country.

The Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP) is identified as a key tool of Government in providing employment supports, training, personal development/capacity building and other supports for the harder to reach in the most disadvantaged areas in society. The four high level goals of the Programme are both important and ambitious:

- To promote awareness, knowledge and uptake of a wide range of statutory, voluntary and community services

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<sup>3</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/community\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/community_en.pdf)

- To increase access to formal and informal educational, recreational and cultural development activities and resources
- To increase peoples' work readiness and employment prospects and
- To promote engagement with policy, practice and decision making processes on matters affecting local communities.

These goals are relevant to and provide a framework for the development and delivery of information, advice, advocacy and money advice services. There is potential for more collaboration between CIB Service Delivery Partners and other agencies at local level to enhance people's (individuals and groups) ability to access and use information to enable a more effective engagement with developmental opportunities and support services.

### **Role of Information in Local and Community Development**

It is widely acknowledged that access to information plays a key role in individual and community capacity-building and in enabling people to both access services, benefits and supports to which they are entitled and to engage in meaningful dialogue about their needs and how these needs are to be addressed.

CISs/CIPS users regularly report difficulties with accessing information from public bodies about services and supports to which they are entitled including, in particular, difficulties with telephone access to public offices. Services for people on the margins frequently depend on the performance of frontline staff and on their ability to engage with the user and to provide full transparency about the way decisions are made and the underpinning eligibility criteria for different services and supports. The negative experiences of some CIS/CIPS users in this regard are a cause for concern. It is also sometimes the case that public officials may need to facilitate or support individuals with complex needs in 'navigating' their way around the system in order to explore all possible support avenues. There are clearly some people who do not have the confidence or the skill to deal with statutory agencies in the form of complaining about delays and/or following up on applications.

Advocacy is a key element in accessing public services and CIB Service Delivery Partners play an important role in this regard. For example, the information may be there but people have to search it out and may need help in this regard. There is potential to build on the contribution of CIB Service Delivery partners in the context of local and community development.

On the broader question of access to on-line information which is becoming more and more a key component of both service delivery and community participation, there are important deficits which almost certainly impact on citizens and local communities and specific population groups. According to Census 2011, only 74.3% of households had a personal computer<sup>4</sup> and only 65.3% of households had broadband internet access. Over a quarter

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<sup>4</sup> Fingal had the highest proportion of households with a PC (84.5%) followed by Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown. At the other end of the scale Leitrim had the lowest (64.6% of households), followed by Limerick City (64.9%).

(26.4%) of homes had no internet connection. There is also an urban/rural divide. While 70% of urban households had broadband, only 56.5% of households in rural areas had broadband. Also, a greater proportion of rural households had no internet connection when compared with urban households, (31.9% and 23.3% respectively).

In order to address the ongoing digital divide, it will be necessary to put a stronger focus on making IT accessible to all citizens and communities, including an emphasis on their accessibility to people who are currently disadvantaged in that regard, in particular, older people, people not in the paid workforce and people with disabilities. A much stronger resource commitment is needed to developing structured and sustainable engagement with digital information among disadvantaged groups and individuals. This should be an integral part of local development structures and be aligned closely with wider social inclusion objectives.

### **Enhancing the Role of Local Government**

The Framework Policy is rightly focused on a core tenet of local government reform -- to move local authorities from 'a peripheral involvement in local development programmes' to being the 'primary vehicle of governance and public service at local level' (p.9). It seeks to integrate the core principles of stronger local government with new structures and processes at local level<sup>5</sup> as a result of '*Putting People First: an action programme for effective local government*'

An enhanced role for Local Government in Ireland is very much related to public sector reforms which focus on amongst other things, improved customer service and new and innovative service delivery channels. Implementing this type of reform at local level will require adding value to community participation in a mixed economy of welfare provision.

### **Integrating Local Development and Community Development**

The Framework Document refers to local and community development without fully exploring the fact that there may be important differences between the two approaches. The particular characteristics of the community development approach needs to be acknowledged, reflected more strongly and integrated into the policy framework.

Community development literature<sup>6</sup> and related reflexive practice focuses on social change linked to social justice and based on independence, negotiation and consent. The community development approach is based on the principles of collective action, the participation of the most disadvantaged people and communities, addressing root causes of poverty, social exclusion and inequalities in a way that ensures that those affected have a say in how the issues are addressed. Individuals and groups share in identifying their needs and in identifying solutions to those needs. Local development, on the other hand, may be

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<sup>5</sup> These included the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC), the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP); the development of a 6 year Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) and the Public Participation Network (PPN) through which each Local Authority will interface with community organisations.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Combat Poverty Agency, Community Development Programme 2007-2013 Submission to the Department of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs [http://www.combatpoverty.ie/publications/submissions/2007\\_Sub\\_CommDevDisadvantageCDP.pdf](http://www.combatpoverty.ie/publications/submissions/2007_Sub_CommDevDisadvantageCDP.pdf)

more focused on local and regional development priorities identified by people who are not an organic part of a local community. It is also the case that a key feature of the community development approach traditionally (and the related involvement of NGOs at local level) was to pioneer new and innovative responses to local needs.

### **Integration of Services at Local Level: Inter-agency Collaboration**

The shortfalls in the availability of services are sometimes compounded by poor joint working at both national and local levels, e.g., between housing and health authorities. While there has been much discussion about the need to co-ordinate and integrate services at the point of delivery and, while much of this is provided for at policy level, there are notable shortfalls in actual practice. An ongoing problem with a system of functionally organised delivery of services is their inability to deliver integrated packages of services and supports. The multiplicity of public sector agencies and organisations and the large number of services they deliver make the delivery of *seamless services* to citizens difficult. Higher levels of co-operation between departments and other service providers in the private and voluntary sectors are required. For example, there is a basic question as to whose responsibility it is to ensure that appropriate integrated support systems between housing, income and welfare support are in place for families and individuals with complex needs. The model of service delivery that exists, by its very nature, makes an integrated approach to local development difficult to implement.

While a stronger e-government approach has more potential to enhance inter-agency collaboration, to address complex and multi-faceted problems, e-government is much more than simply putting services online – it requires a level of collaboration across agencies and public services that has not emerged to date. It also requires an approach which would include the community and voluntary sector in the process which may be difficult to implement. One of the most urgent tasks is to integrate and co-ordinate e-Government in a manner which facilitates people who regularly need to contact a number of departments/agencies in order to deal with a single service need, e.g., housing and related supports.

The experience of CISs/CIPS shows that service providers at local level tend to define need in line with the type of entitlement or service they offer. This has a tendency to create 'provider-centred' definitions of need according to which people whose needs are not met by a given provider or do not come within its functional responsibility are outside its line of vision. It may be the case that when service providers come across cases for which they have nothing to offer, there may be an implicit assumption that the needs of an individual or family will be met elsewhere, by another agency or through some other entitlement. While this is sometimes the case, it is not always so. Also, a person may frequently require the co-ordination of several elements to meet a particular service need. How to ensure integration of service delivery remains an ongoing challenge.

Networks such as CISs and MABS are in a key position to identify the concerns of individual citizens and accordingly to provide feedback to policy-makers about how policies and practices are impacting on people's lives - anomalies, inadequate service provision, emerging trends in particular areas and discrepancies between Government stated policy and citizen reality.

## **Integrating the Community and Voluntary Sector**

The central role of the community and voluntary sector in the context of a bottom-up approach needs to be made more transparent in the Policy Framework, with particular reference to implementing a truly partnership-based approach to development. It is widely acknowledged that consultation with local communities is the key to public services understanding needs and expectations. Despite the fact that some parts of the Irish public service already have a strong track record in consultation with individuals and local communities, people still sometimes have to adapt to the way the system works rather than the system anticipating and responding to their needs. The reality remains that many public service users continue to remain outside the consultation loop. While it is becoming increasingly recognised that services can only become truly people-centred when the perceptions, concerns, experiences and expectations of consumers are fully taken into account, protocols for engaging effectively with some groups are still largely underdeveloped in Ireland. There is an important and crucial distinction between consultation and partnership. Those who are consulted offer their opinions which are taken into account more or less by those making the decisions. Those who participate share directly in the decision-making process. The challenge is to develop a wide range of protocols and practices to engage people in a meaningful and active way in shaping services according to their needs and expectations.

The challenge for local communities and local partnerships is to ensure that all citizens - taxpayers, social welfare recipients, workers, students, people with disabilities, members of the Travelling community and ethnic minorities, migrants, family carers – have a voice. While community and voluntary organisations have a crucial role to play in this regard, their capacity to do so needs to be stimulated and supported by Government on an ongoing basis. Local community and voluntary organisations have increasing demands in relation to legal and technical requirements which puts significant pressures on some organizations, particularly smaller organizations involved in service delivery.

Capacity-building among voluntary and community organisations to engage in a partnership approach to planning and policy-making should take into account the need to:

- Eliminate local and regional discrepancies in levels and methods of funding
- Eliminate dysfunctional competition
- Maintain a balance between service provision/development activities and fundraising requirements

## **Involving Citizens in Developmental Processes**

More work is required to develop and target services to the needs of comparatively disadvantaged groups. This requires recognition of the fact that, as already stated, consultation cannot be regarded as a static or once-off event, as expectations and needs change continually. A distinction needs to be made between user-friendly approaches where the user remains external to the service and participatory approaches, which imply user involvement in the definition of need and in the planning, management and delivery of

services accordingly. Impediments to participation – linguistic, cultural, social, educational and geographical -- need to be acknowledged and addressed.

### **Supporting Care in the Home as a Core Component of Integrated Development**

Many people, particularly women, take on dual responsibilities - caring within the family for children and for other dependent groups (people with disabilities and vulnerable older persons) -- and contributing to economic growth through participation in the workforce. There are two factors here that need to be taken into account in local and community development. Firstly, care in the home differs from other economic activities in that it involves a form of engagement which limits its potential for productivity increases. As a result, so-called 'non-economic' processes may be invisible and not included in the overall assessment of economic output. Secondly, the non-availability of affordable child-care in many areas presents a significant barrier to parents (particularly lone parents) in taking up work or activation programmes. This issue is regularly referenced in feedback from CISs and CIPS.

### **Key Points Requiring Further Consideration**

- ❖ It is important that the Framework Policy is fully integrated with other government strategies and programmes, including, in particular, the social housing strategy; the range of work activation programmes; community child-care programmes and the Migration Integration Strategy;
- ❖ A strong and effective voluntary/statutory partnership is necessary in order to develop and maintain active citizenship (including volunteering) -- a question thus arises as to how the Framework Policy will relate to the 2001 White Paper, *Supporting Voluntary Activity*, and how the underlying principles stated therein are to be implemented;
- ❖ There is a need to create a climate where people are both encouraged and feel the need to become involved in the community across a wide spectrum of activities, social cultural, sport, service provision and community development;
- ❖ Building on the concept of inter-generational solidarity, the potential of older people working as mentors to younger, less experienced people is one that could potentially should be applied much more widely than is currently the case – in business settings, schools and colleges, local community development initiatives and training and development;
- ❖ Resources available to local communities from different government programmes should be pooled and integrated in order enhance collaboration, minimise dysfunctional competition and optimise value for money;
- ❖ It is essential that decision-making which under new structures is vested in Local Authorities does not result in pushing the decision making process further away from

local communities – this is a vital consideration;

- ❖ The potential of social enterprise at local level to create viable and sustainable jobs should be further explored with a view to facilitating the entry/reentry to employment of specific social groups (people with low qualifications, young people who have never been employed, migrants and older workers who have been made redundant and women who have been out of the work force because of child-rearing responsibilities).

### **Overview**

The developmental welfare state has three inter-related components – income support (working age social transfers to enable participation, a minimum pension guarantee, and child income supports); the provision of services including housing, education, health, transport, child and older person care and employment support services; and activation measures designed to help people return to employment and/or education. The Framework Policy for Local and Community Development needs to be fully cognisant of these inter-related development components and have mechanisms to deal with both their implementation and addressing any circumstances where, for whatever reasons, the implementation of any of these components falls short. The policy-making cycle at both national and local levels needs to be open to evidence at each stage of the process, from the outset when an issue or problem is identified for policy attention to the development of the most appropriate response, and subsequent evaluation of its effectiveness. The monitoring of the implementation of the Framework Policy will thus be of critical importance in advancing the developmental welfare state concept.