

Section I: Introduction

Chapter I: Executive summary

Where are we now?

1.1 The UK is a country of growing prosperity. The last decade has seen many more people in jobs, thanks to record levels of employment; crime has fallen by 44 per cent; the vast majority of people – 19 out of 20 – have seen their incomes rise by 2 to 3 per cent each year; 800,000 children and 1 million pensioners have been lifted out of poverty; and we have experienced year-on-year increases in educational attainment and life expectancy. These improvements have benefited less-well-off people the most, extending the opportunities of living in the UK to a wider section of our society than ever before.

1.2 But we can do more. We live in a society that aspires to be fair and just. To achieve this aspiration we must recognise that social exclusion and the subsequent waste of human potential is bad for the whole country, as well as for those individuals suffering from it.

1.3 Because of this achievement in reducing poverty and increasing affluence, the persistent and deep-seated exclusion of a small minority stands out ever more starkly. The disadvantages these individuals face are usually apparent early in life and can persist long into adulthood and old age.

1.4 Equally troubling is the 'cycle of disadvantage', which shows that deprivation in one generation is likely to pass down to the next. For example, the daughter of a teenage mother is twice as likely as the daughter of an older mother to become pregnant in her teen years. It is, of course, not a certainty, but it does illustrate the fact that early experiences in life have major effects on a person's future life chances.

1.5 These patterns of early and persistent problems are troubling, but predictions don't have to come true. This Action Plan offers a

series of opportunities that, if taken, will mitigate the lifelong effects of social exclusion and prevent them being passed down to future generations.

1.6 This Action Plan shows that through early identification, support and preventative action positive change is possible. We can tackle problems before they become fully entrenched and blight the lives of both individuals and wider society.

1.7 Some might ask why this agenda is still important, particularly against a background of general success. The Government's view is that it is precisely because of those successes that it is vital to do more. No civilised country should ignore the plight of the most excluded in society and no one should be shut off from the opportunities, choices and options in life which most of us take for granted. We know that once people are given the opportunity to excel, they often do. The year-on-year increases in educational attainment in our schools, for example, have happened because of the hard work of students and families that have taken advantage of the conditions the Government created in the classroom. It is this commitment to opportunity which is the driving force behind the policies set out in this Action Plan.

1.8 Tackling social exclusion also matters because failing to do so creates a cost for society. The UK has enjoyed a strong economy and growing prosperity in recent years, but we would be even more prosperous if the talents of each and every member of the community could flourish. The need today to act to ensure that opportunity is enjoyed by the whole community is ever more urgent and demands a response from government.

1.9 It is also the case that the behaviour of some people – particularly some of the most challenging families – causes real disruption

and distress to the community around them. The Respect Task Force is coordinating the Government's response to this issue. This Action Plan applies a similar practical approach, but with a focus on interventions to reduce a wide range of adverse outcomes, of which anti-social behaviour is only one.

1.10 So both to enhance the opportunities for individuals and families and for the good of the country as a whole, we set out here a renewed government commitment to tackling the social exclusion that remains even after the progress of recent years.

Where are we going?

1.11 It has become clearer that there are small groups of people whose needs are unique and complex and who are particularly difficult to reach. Highly localised and tailored responses will be needed to extend the opportunities enjoyed by most people to those suffering the effects of social exclusion.

1.12 This Action Plan opens the next chapter in our attack on entrenched exclusion, setting out:

- **the principles** that drive our approach, and how these will inform our actions; and
- **a series of immediate changes and pilots** built around a lifetime approach to tackling exclusion.

A renewed approach: guiding principles

1.13 A lot of money is spent through public services on the most socially excluded people. But much of this spending is directed at managing the symptoms of exclusion once problems have become entrenched. The Government will build on its reforms of recent years, as set out in *Support for Parents:*

The Best Start for Children, to shift efforts from 'treatment' to 'prevention' and break the cycle of disadvantage.

1.14 Five key guiding principles will inform the Government's approach and actions:

- **Better identification and earlier intervention.** We will develop and promote better prediction tools for use by front-line practitioners, for example health visitors and community midwives, and will seek to ensure that those identified as at risk are followed up.
- **Systematically identifying 'what works'.** We will introduce a common approach across government to rate programmes by the quality of the evidence behind them. Approved and rated programmes will be given the opportunity to highlight blockages to delivery. We will strengthen the capability of commissioners of public services and will explore the best ways of disseminating what works, particularly around excellence in children's and family services.
- **Promoting multi-agency working.** The Government will strengthen the role of Local Area Agreements, publish information about the cross-agency costs of social exclusion, and will explore how to extend data sharing in relation to the most excluded or at-risk groups, including any additional powers that may be necessary.
- **Personalisation, rights and responsibilities.** We will pilot and explore service delivery based on budget-holding lead professionals and on brokering as ways of providing tailored programmes of support built around strong and persistent relationships with those at risk. In this context, we will also trial extending tariffs for delivery of particular outcomes, and we will encourage practitioners and brokers to agree explicit 'compacts' with at risk families and individuals.

- **Supporting achievement and managing underperformance.** We will work across Government to ensure that the next generation of Public Service Agreements adequately address the needs of the most disadvantaged. And we challenge local areas to come forward with appropriate and imaginative proposals to address the needs of the most excluded. The forthcoming Local Government White Paper will set out a clear intervention strategy for underperforming local authorities, while at the same time giving effective service providers more room to innovate.

1.15 The challenges identified in this document are profound and may take years to address. But these guiding principles offer a clear direction of travel that the Government will pursue vigorously, notably in the context of the Comprehensive Spending Review, and other forthcoming policy developments.

A lifetime approach

1.16 In this Action Plan we have focused on some of the most excluded groups, such as children in care or adults leading chaotic lives – groups that have generally failed to fulfil their potential and accept the opportunities that most of us take for granted.

1.17 System reform can take years to deliver, and results can take decades to show. We will supplement our drive for deeper reform with more focused and immediate action that we are confident will make a difference. This Action Plan establishes a range of specific proposals that we believe to be of pivotal importance throughout an individual's lifetime, both in terms of their impact on the life chances of the most excluded and in order to strengthen the case for wider reforms.

1.18 In the **early years** of life, long before a child enters school, behaviours are established that profoundly change that child's life chances for better or worse. We have introduced a wide range of measures to improve the well-being of all children by working to tackle child poverty, establishing Sure Start Children's Centres, and creating the National Academy for Parenting Professionals. But now we want to go further. International evidence suggests that intensive health-led home visiting during pregnancy and the first two years of life can radically improve outcomes for both mother and child, particularly in the most at-risk families. So we will:

- establish 10 health-led parenting support demonstration projects from pre-birth to age 2, building in a rigorous evaluation of different levels of targeted support. These will be based mainly around Sure Start Children's Centres; and
- work with midwives and health visitors to improve their skills to promote support and intervention during the early years; and develop commissioning guidance to encourage the spread of best practice nationally.

1.19 For **children and teenagers**, those particularly at risk include children in care, teenage parents and those with the lowest educational achievement, and these groups significantly overlap. *Every Child Matters* is transforming children's services and bringing many important innovations.

1.20 However, progress is patchy, and on some issues, rigorous evidence about what works does not always inform how services operate. There is a lack of appropriate data on outcomes for some groups, hindering services from identifying those at risk and from

intervening early. There remain shortfalls in the availability of high-quality services for children, which results in variable and ineffective practice, and there are significant barriers to multi-agency working. Our objective is to deliver more personalised, holistic and evidence-based support to those who need it. Building on the *Every Child Matters* agenda, the Government will:

- publish a Green Paper in October 2006 on children in care, setting out the Government's proposals to transform outcomes for this high-risk group, including individual budget-holding arrangements to ensure that every child in care has someone who understands their needs and has the leverage to secure the right support for them;
- publish a revised and updated Teenage Pregnancy Strategy with a particular focus on areas where rates have either not fallen appreciably or have risen, including improved social and relationships education; an expanded media campaign; and better access to contraceptives;
- launch a series of pilots to test different approaches to tackling mental health and conduct disorders in childhood, including intensive home-based interventions (such as multi-systemic therapy) which will complement the Treatment Foster Care pilots that are already under way; and
- continue to improve provision and capability around parenting support and training; pilot budget-holding practitioner models for children with additional needs; ensure these actions are delivering a coherent whole-family approach for families at risk.

1.21 **Adults living chaotic lives** are often in contact with multiple agencies, with each person costing statutory services tens of thousands of pounds every year. Individual agencies sometimes miss those who have

multiple needs, and may fail to look holistically at the individual. The Government will therefore:

- launch pilots to test the effectiveness of alternative approaches to improving outcomes for people with chaotic lives and multiple needs, the results of which will feed directly into further policy development;
- accelerate measures to encourage employment for those suffering from more severe mental health problems, including the encouragement of individual placement and support approaches and anti-stigma employer-based campaigns; and
- publish the Leitch Review later this year setting out progress and further measures to address the poor lifetime prospects of those with few qualifications and skills.

Next steps

1.22 In the coming months, the Government will complement this Action Plan by implementing further policies to improve outcomes and opportunities for socially excluded people.

1.23 The Government will continue a programme of active stakeholder engagement and discussion to inform these actions. Stakeholder discussions will also feed into a wider 10-year strategic review of the long-term drivers of social exclusion and government responses. This Action Plan will help to frame the Government's approach to tackling disadvantage through the Comprehensive Spending Review, which will report in 2007.

1.24 A progress report on this Action Plan will be published in summer 2007, setting out: progress and early results; the conclusions of stakeholder discussions; and policy changes and investments resulting from the various

government papers and reviews relating to exclusion that will be published over the coming year:

1.25 Social exclusion cannot be addressed by government alone. Individuals and the wider community, in addition to the private and third sectors, all have a role to play. But most of all, people who are suffering social exclusion must want progress for themselves and those around them. By working together we can ensure that even the most excluded have a stake in the society and economy of tomorrow by seizing the opportunities that life in the UK offers today.