

Prime Minister's preface



Tackling social exclusion is at the heart of this government's mission. It is our fundamental belief that everyone should have the opportunity to achieve their potential in life.

Since 1997 we have made great progress. Over 2 million more people are in work. 800,000 children and 1 million pensioners have been lifted out of poverty. A minimum wage is in place. We have eradicated long-term youth unemployment. As a consequence of the policies the Government has put in place, many more people in the UK enjoy more opportunities now than was the case a decade ago.

This Action Plan examines the reasons why, despite the huge progress we have made, there are still individuals and families who are cut off. About 2.5 per cent of every generation seem to be stuck in a lifetime of disadvantage. Their problems are multiple, entrenched and often passed down through generations.

But the message in this Plan is an overwhelmingly positive one. We believe it is possible to extend opportunity to the least advantaged so that they enjoy more of the choices, chances and power that the rest of society takes for granted.

To achieve this, we need a radical revision of our methods for tackling social exclusion. This Plan is guided by five principles: early intervention; systematically identifying what works; better co-ordination of the many separate agencies; personal rights and responsibilities; and intolerance of poor performance. It proposes a range of systemic reforms aimed at fundamentally changing the way we deliver help and support to the socially excluded.

This Plan also concentrates on some key groups. We propose more support for very young children born into vulnerable circumstances because we know the crucial importance of the first months and years of a child's life in framing their opportunities.

We propose action to reduce teenage pregnancy because we know that despite the good job many young mothers do, teenage motherhood often leads to reduced opportunities for mother and child alike. We will publish a Green Paper on Children in Care aimed at increasing educational attainment and ensuring greater stability and continuity in care, including through an expansion of budget-holding lead professionals. We propose a more personalised service for adults with multiple problems, because we

know that tailored help is needed to address their needs, and that passing vulnerable people from service to service is neither good for them nor for the wider community.

This document is marked by ambition. The issues it deals with are not easy to solve, but the belief that social exclusion is not inevitable, that it can be tackled, and that we can work together to spread opportunity runs through every page.

Tony Blair

September 2006

Foreword by Hilary Armstrong



When I worked as a community worker 30 years ago, I saw at first hand the difficulties and challenges that face the most deprived and excluded members of our society. It was clear just how hard it was for people to develop and achieve the aspirations that the rest of us took for granted.

I also learnt that in all deprived communities people who wanted to improve their lives, with the right help and support, could achieve their aspirations. People who want to turn their lives around can.

I have always believed that it is wrong for a society or a government to write people off. The cost is too great for them, their children and our society as a whole. We need to ensure everyone gets the opportunity to fulfil their potential, and to contribute to, and benefit from, our wider society.

This government has already created the opportunities which have enabled many more people from disadvantaged backgrounds to realise the aspirations they hold for themselves and their families.

A stable economy with investment and reform of public services has provided the opportunities which, together with people's hard work, has meant that incomes have risen and educational attainment and employment increased, and programmes like Sure Start ensure that many get a decent chance in life.

The less well-off have generally benefited most from our measures, extending the opportunities of living in the UK to a wider section of our society than ever before.

Now we want to build on this progress to go further. We want to work with everyone to help them reach their potential. A society where most can improve their lives is better than one where only a few do. And a society where everyone can improve their lives is better than any.

This Action Plan shows our determination to ensure that even the hardest to reach, who may not have been able to benefit from our reforms, get the chance to turn their lives around. For these few people, their many disadvantages work together to make even having the aspiration to succeed very difficult.

In every generation, opportunity and aspiration increase the life chances for more sections of our society – but around 2.5 per cent of every generation seem caught in a lifetime of disadvantage and harm.

We are not a government willing to accept this as inevitable.

That is why we have produced this Action Plan to renew our drive against social exclusion throughout the life-cycle. I am grateful to the many stakeholders who have contributed to the development of this Action Plan.

It starts with our principle of early identification and intervention. I have always felt frustrated when services have failed to use their understanding to intervene effectively and prevent foreseeable problems down the line – a tragedy of wasted potential and wasted lives, and a reinforced cycle of deprivation. We must ensure people have access to help and support before problems escalate.

And we know what works. There are some great people driving excellent programmes, often outside the state sector, that are really making a difference to people's lives. We will highlight these and strengthen support for them, ensure the best work is shared, and where intervention is failing, we will take action.

At the moment the most disadvantaged are offered the same public services as the rest of us. That simply isn't working – a one-size-fits-all approach lets down our most needy and hard to reach. We therefore need to personalise our services, be more persistent and coordinated, and fit them around the needs of individuals if we are ever going to tackle the hardest complexities of people's lives.

Government can't do it all. For too many people the problems have appeared insurmountable and the system too inaccessible, preventing them from taking responsibility for their lives. We are an enabling government – supporting the groups and organisations helping people get themselves out of their difficulties and to gain control of their lives. To do this, people need support, encouragement and often a tough challenge.

No one should be written off – no one is too hard to reach. I don't believe anyone doesn't want a better future for themselves and their children. This Action Plan will help individuals and the services that support them unlock their aspiration and help lift them out of poverty and exclusion.



Hilary Armstrong
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and Social Exclusion