



Community Work Ireland working collectively
to support and promote community work as a means
of addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequality

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Community Work Ireland

Submission on LECP
Monitoring & Evaluation

Introduction

Established in 1981, Community Work Ireland (formerly the Community Workers' Co-operative) is the leading national organization that promotes and supports community work as a means of addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequality and ultimately as a means of achieving social change that will contribute to the creation of a more just, sustainable and equal society.

CWI has in excess of 800 individual and organisational members working in and with the most disadvantaged communities throughout Ireland (urban, rural and issue based). Since its establishment, Community Work Ireland has been concerned to promote best practice and a commitment to social justice and inclusion in policies, programmes and measures with the remit and/or potential to address poverty, social exclusion and inequality.

Community Work Ireland (CWI) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government on the implementation, ongoing monitoring, review and reporting of Local Economic and Community Plans. CWI bases its submission on consultation with our members on their experience of LECs and their governing structures.

Context

Community work Ireland is aware that though economic indicators have begun to improve following the recession, many communities remain marginalised and affected by poverty and inequality. The impact of the cuts to the community sector are still apparent and organisations continue to struggle to do more with less.

Changes to the infrastructure as envisaged by *Putting People First* and the Local Government Reform Act 2014, have resulted in significant changes to the operation and management of social inclusion programmes in the country.

Community Work Ireland would like to acknowledge the potential of Local Economic and Community Plans to pursue the integrated local, economic and community development of an area. However, it must be acknowledged that many of the LECs were developed with little or no consultation with marginalised communities or the organisations that represent them. Remedial action must be undertaken to ensure that LECs reflect the real issues on the ground and develop collaborative ways of identifying initiatives to address these issues.

Implementation

As the structure charged with responsibility for the implementation of LECs, the Local Community Development Committees must be fit for purpose. CWI members have indicated that LCDCs in a number of areas are not currently adequately functioning. They report poor attendance by members of statutory agencies and LCDC members that remain unclear about their role and not suitably qualified or experienced in relation to economic, local and community development. In a number of areas, the PPN representatives have poor accountability mechanisms and do not represent the wider issues in the area.

A review of the LCDCs to ensure appropriately qualified and experienced membership should be undertaken. Protocols to ensure that appropriate mechanisms to allow for the work of the LCDCs to be discharged in full should be developed and applied in each local authority area.

Resourcing of the LCDCs is crucial. A dedicated full-time Chief Officer should be appointed to each LCDC. The Chief Officer should have the qualifications, knowledge, skills and experience to guide the work of the LCDC and to ensure the implementation of the LECP.

The CEO of the local authority and the appropriate Director of Services should attend LCDC meetings.

The integrated nature of economic and community elements of the LECP is one of the most innovative features of the strategy. At the development stage, integrated working groups drawing on members from the LCDC and the appropriate SPC were established in most areas. However, in many areas these working groups are no longer operational. To preserve the objective of integrated implementation, the working groups should be reestablished in each local authority area. They should have the ability to go beyond the current membership of the LCDC and SPC and include appropriately skilled others.

While the LECPs are in place in all local authority areas, implementation plans provide the opportunity to address a number of the issues with their development including the lack of consultation highlighted above.

Implementation plans should:

- Be multi-annual and based on an up to date needs analysis of the area in which they are to be implemented. A specific focus of the needs analysis should be on the needs of the most marginalised individuals and communities. The limitations of the Pobal HP index, particularly in the context of rent supports for people renting in the private rented sector, should be acknowledged;
- Be underpinned by a set of shared values that should be developed collaboratively and cross-sectorally;
- Establish goals that are shared between the local authority, the community sector, the local development sector and the economic development agencies;
- Identify actions and initiatives that make progress towards the social and economic inclusion of marginalised communities;
- Identify and implement actions to achieve the goals using a collaborative, multi-partnership approach. Unilateral actions should only be included in exceptional circumstances;
- Include acknowledgment and plans to implement the forthcoming National Women's Strategy and the Traveller and Roma Integration Strategy as well as others;
- Include an Equality and Human Rights Statement and associated actions to ensure compliance with the Public Sector Duty.

Community work Ireland has consistently emphasized the importance of agency buy-in. In the experience of many CWI members, a number of agencies involved in the LCDC and the LECP are still struggling with the relevance of developing actions that go beyond their immediate remit but LECP actions must add value to what would be done anyway. Agencies must be provided with direction from the parent bodies or departments to enable them to participate in the planning and implementation of partnership actions and initiatives. The HSE has done some work on this and might be reviewed as a model to follow.

An oversight committee should be established at national level to ensure that LECPs are

Ongoing Monitoring and Review

Each LECP should include a plan for ongoing monitoring and review. This should be based on a framework that is developed on the basis of the values and goals, against which progress can be assessed. Particular assessment questions might be:

- What partners have been involved in the implementation of this action or initiative? Have efforts been made to ensure the inclusion of partners representing marginalised communities?
- How did this action or initiative impact on poverty?
- How did it impact on equality?
- How did it impact on the social inclusion of marginalised communities?
- How did it impact on the economic inclusion of marginalised communities?
- What impact has it had on the social and economic inclusion of women, particularly marginalised women?
- How is it evident that the economic strands and the community strands are being implemented in an integrated way?
- How is the work contributing to achieving the goals of international and national strategies and targets such as those under Europe 2020, the Sustainable Development Goals, the National Women's Strategy, the National Traveller and Roma Integration Strategy, etc.

Review of the LECP must be a standing order item for each meeting of the LCDC and the appropriate SPC. The Integrated Working Group should have a particular remit to monitor the integrated nature of implementation. An annual joint workshop of the Integrated Working Group, other members of the LCDC and SPC and the local, community and economic development sectors should be convened to review implementation. Reviews should be based on participatory review with a range of stakeholders including the most marginalised groups and communities.

Leadership from top must be apparent and the CEO of the local authority and the appropriate Director of Services should attend monitoring and review meetings.

Annual regional meetings of LCDCs and SPCs for Economic Development should be hosted by the Department to exchange learning and good practice in relation to the development and implementation of the LECPs.

Measurement and Reporting of Progress

The identification of appropriate measurement systems should be a priority for the Department.

While it is recommended that implementation plans can be multi-annual, time bound indicators towards achievement of goals must be included.