

Learning Lessons from thematic social inclusion partnerships (SIPs)

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by

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Glossary

Name and focus of thematic Social inclusion partnerships (SIPs):

Name of SIP	General SIP Information
The Big Step	Young people leaving care in Glasgow Core funding 1999 to 2004 – £2,351,550 This SIP sought to influence the development of services for care leavers by agencies in the city, putting in place a range of activities around themes of: accommodation; employment and training; and health.
Borders SIP	Young people at risk of social exclusion in Scottish Borders Core funding 1999 to 2004 – £1,223,134 This SIP focused centrally on addressing the social exclusion of young people from across Borders area, supporting project activity to achieve their aims.
Dundee Xplore	Young people at transition ages in Dundee Core funding 1999 to 2004 – £2,076,429 This SIP aimed to create opportunities for disadvantaged young people, whilst establishing positive lifestyles and social relationships. The SIP has worked at both strategic and operational level, with Xplore staff and Steering Group members actively involved in trying to influence partners' strategic direction.
Dundee YCP	Young people with caring responsibilities in Dundee Core funding 1999 to 2004 £458,262 The smallest SIP in Scotland, DYC was managed by the voluntary sector and have chosen to focus on the direct delivery of services for young carers as their main activity, in so doing themselves working as a project to achieve their aims.
Edinburgh YIP	Excluded young people in Edinburgh Core funding 1999 to 2004 – £2,561,246 This SIP is a learning organisation, working with agencies to support them rethink the way they were delivering services for young people, with project delivery intended to pilot new services, while supporting action research and development projects.
FRAE Fife	Black and minority ethnic communities in Fife Core funding 1999 to 2004 – £631,705 This SIP was established with the aims of building the capacity of and empowering black and minority ethnic (BME) communities in Fife, tackling social exclusion and improving delivery of services to BME communities. The SIP has worked at both operational and strategic level to raise awareness of racism in Fife, giving BME communities 'a voice' and establishing a BME infrastructure in Fife.
GARA	Black and minority ethnic young people in Glasgow Core funding 1999 to 2004 – £3,703,854 This SIP has gone through two Phases, the first in which

they were intended to work as a vehicle for agencies to put in place anti-racist or race equality activities identified as needed in the city and the second in which attempts were made to be more strategic through more centralised control and direction of their work.

HISIP	<p>Young people vulnerable to social exclusion within specific areas of Highlands & Islands Core funding 1999 to 2004 – £3,869,623 This SIP set out to address some of the disadvantages faced by young people (aged 14 – 25 years) across the local authority areas of Highland, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Orkney Islands Council.</p>
Moray YouthStart	<p>Young people in Moray Core funding 1999 to 2004 – £2,397,999 This SIP has focused centrally on ensuring that all young people (aged 15 to 24 years) live in a healthy community. A project approach has been taken to achieve their aims and objectives.</p>
Perth Go	<p>Young people leaving care in Perth & Kinross Core funding 1999 to 2004 – £929,631 This SIP worked with young care leavers, with a delivery focus leading to this SIP working as a project to deliver services to care leavers across Perth and Kinross.</p>
Routes Out	<p>Women involved in street prostitution in Glasgow Core funding 1999 to 2004 – £1,265,928 This SIP focused on preventing women becoming involved in prostitution and preventing further harm by supporting those involved to leave prostitution.</p>
South Coatbridge SIP	<p>To address health inequalities in S. Coatbridge Core funding 1999 to 2004 – £3,258,469 This SIP focused centrally on the health of people in South Coatbridge, recognising that changes in health outcomes require long-term changes in social behaviour.</p>
Tranent SIP	<p>Young People in transition in Tranent and within Ross High School catchment area Core funding 1999 to 2004 – £709,893 This SIP has focused on young people (aged 0 to 25 years) around four key themes of: transition from school to post-school; working with excluded groups; youth empowerment; and engaging the wider community. The SIP developed a large number of projects and events to achieve their objectives.</p>
West Lothian SIP	<p>Early years and young people in transition to work in West Lothian Core funding 1999 to 2004 – £1,097,651 This SIP provided support through integrating services for children, young people and families with young children at risk of social exclusion. The SIP has worked at both operational level to deliver projects and strategic level to change ways of working and thinking.</p>

Executive summary

Social inclusion partnerships (SIPs) were a key part of the Scottish Executive's Social Justice policy agenda in the late 1990s. The SIP approach saw the introduction of new thematic partnerships which focused on the social exclusion of particular social groups, as well as an expansion in the number of area-based partnerships which targeted the most deprived communities in Scotland. This report identifies the lessons which emerged from the practices of thematic SIPs, and finds that a range of distinct practices emerged within many of the thematic SIPs that differed from the approaches and rationale informing the work of area-based SIPs.

Partnership building

In general both area-based and thematic SIPs undertook similar processes of partnership building, although there was some diversity between area based and thematic SIPs in how they engaged the voluntary and private sectors. For example, for several thematic SIPs voluntary sector engagement focused on building relationships with established voluntary sector organisations where there was shared concern with specific (social) groups rather than building the capacity of smaller, localised voluntary sector organisations, which was the priority of many area-based SIPs. In addition, several thematic SIPs highlighted specific concerns that the private sector was more focused on moving excluded groups into the labour market than with promoting a wider notion of 'social inclusion'.

Different approaches to leadership emerged within thematic SIPs, with less attention being given to community leadership and more to specific service delivery partners taking on an advocacy role on behalf of excluded groups.

Both area-based and thematic SIPs had successful links with strategic level regeneration partnerships where these existed. A small number of thematic SIPs also made links with specific external policy initiatives, although there was greater potential for this type of activity than was being realised in many SIPs.

Thematic SIPs offered a new approach to partnership working when compared with area-based SIPs, bringing together a wider range of partners, as well as those from established networks, to work on shared priorities.

Engaging communities

Thematic SIPs promoted a diverse range of approaches to community engagement, from formal participation in management boards to the provision of support and project workers to build relationships with relevant groups. This diversity of approaches reflected the difficulties in engaging socially excluded groups in formal participatory activities.

The social inclusion policy agenda was central to the emergence of a concern with the community engagement of groups who were not previously a focus of policy-making. This policy focus on excluded groups explains the thematic SIPs' efforts to offer creative and diverse approaches to engaging previously overlooked social groups.

There was evidence within the individual evaluation reports that many thematic SIPs did not emphasise the provision of a range of forms of participation

between communities of interest within the strategic levels of thematic SIPs e.g. on management boards and through formal SIP engagement. More attention was however paid by thematic SIPs to encouraging a diverse range of forms of involvement within project level activities.

Strategic development

Thematic SIPs shared many of the same priorities as area-based SIPs, although they also highlighted specific concerns with issues such as profile-raising, promoting the rights and responsibilities of the group of concern to the particular SIP. Thematic SIPs also worked to influence the activities of mainstream service providers, to better meet the needs of specific socially excluded groups.

There were however variations in the methods thematic SIPs employed to achieve their objectives. A small number of thematic SIPs replaced project funding with either a direct service delivery role or a focus on influencing the delivery of services within mainstream partner agencies.

There were difficulties in measuring the impact of thematic SIPs, as a result of a lack of available baseline data, changes to SIP priorities and activities over time, and the divergences in approaches within different thematic SIPs. The evaluations did however report progress in partnership building, engaging communities and achieving objectives.

Little evidence was available whether the more varied approaches to service delivery that were adopted by thematic SIPs had led to greater success in achieving sustained changes to services for specific groups.

Mainstreaming SIP activities

Thematic SIPs had limited success with 'bending' the spend of mainstream partner agencies.

Profile-raising did emerge in the evaluations as a central route for several thematic SIPs to encourage mainstream agency partners to think about the needs of particular excluded groups in their work beyond the life of the SIPs.

One route suggested by some thematic SIPs to overcome questions about the longer term sustainability of SIP partnerships after the end of SIP funding was the development of a shared commitment within some SIP partnerships to sustaining the SIP's partnership formations.

Several thematic SIPs had success accessing a number of specialist funding sources and in-kind resources in the form of partner time involvement and staff secondments to SIPs. However, thematic SIPs faced greater difficulties influencing the spending of partner agencies than did area based SIPs. This may reflect a combination of the wide range of competing demands on partners' resources, as well as the more explicit targeting of resources by larger service provider organisations to areas of deprivation, rather than towards specific social groups.

Learning lessons from thematic SIPs

Partnerships that focused on the social inclusion of particular groups offered a positive opportunity to bring partners together who have not previously worked

together, to engage communities who were not previously involved in partnership initiatives, and to target resources towards groups who were previously overlooked in both policy and practice.

Advocacy emerged as a central priority for several thematic SIPs. This focus was in response to the lack of attention that was previously paid to particular groups and the need to ensure that service delivery partners were encouraged to take a positive and informed view when developing services for excluded groups.

Perceived differences between the priorities and concerns of the private sector (who were perceived as being more concerned with promoting labour market participation) and those of statutory and voluntary sector partners, led many thematic SIPs to overlook the potential contribution of the private sector to the promotion of social inclusion priorities.

Thematic SIPs undertook a diverse range of approaches to community engagement in response to the challenges they faced in engaging excluded groups within traditional participatory approaches. This experience offers the potential for other partnership initiatives to learn lessons about more creative and varied approaches to community engagement. This would potentially allow a wider range of groups to play a more active role in influencing policy and practice developments.

Greater attention was given within thematic SIPs to maintaining partnership networks and changing the thinking and practices of service delivery partners as mechanisms to promote the sustainability of the SIPs work, rather than focusing on sustaining the activities which were funded by thematic SIPs. This approach offered an important change of emphasis, relying on changing the activities of partners rather than sustaining project funding.

Modifying and revisiting partnership priorities was seen as important to clarifying and narrowing the focus of many thematic SIPs as partnerships developed. It is important however that partnerships are allowed to change and evolve as a natural part of their development, rather than change only occurring as a reaction to the promptings of evaluations and policy developments.

While some work had been done within a small number of thematic SIPs to develop links with other policy initiatives, there was greater potential to build links between different policy initiatives with shared concerns with particular social groups. The sustaining of thematic SIP priorities within CPPs offers the potential for greater linking of different policy initiatives focusing on particular social groups.

While thematic SIPs focused on particular social groups, they gave little recognition to the diversity *within* these particular social groups. This is therefore something that requires greater attention.

Recognising diversity as both a priority for community engagement *and* as a focus of partnership working, does however bring particular challenges in choosing which groups should be prioritised – with inevitable winners and losers emerging from these decisions. Decisions on these questions can only be made at the local level, with knowledge of who the community are and their needs. This can allow equalities priorities to be incorporated into both neighbourhood and group based activities.

Introduction

This report offers an opportunity to highlight the practices taking place within thematic SIPs and to explore the lessons that can be learnt from this policy initiative.

Policy context

SIPs were a key part of the Scottish Executive's Social Justice policy agenda that developed in the late 1990s. Central to this was the development of thematic SIPs, which brought to the fore concerns with the social exclusion of particular social groups. At the same time, the number of area-based SIPs was increased, to further focus on the needs of the most deprived areas in Scotland. The SIP initiative saw a joining up of area renewal and equalities concerns, and focused attention on the social position of specific social groups both within and beyond the most deprived areas of Scotland, as well as developing the long-held policy priority of tackling area deprivation.

With SIPs now integrated into Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs), this report reflects on the lessons that might be learnt from the specific contribution made by thematic SIPs in Scotland. A review of the published evaluation reports from the fourteen thematic SIPs (see glossary), together with a sample of ten area-based SIPs, provided an opportunity to consider these issues. This report compares practices within both area based and thematic SIPs to highlight the lessons emerging from thematic SIPs.

Focus of report

This report presents data from the evaluation reports on key aspects of practice in thematic SIPs. The following chapters focus on the lessons from thematic SIPs on:

- partnership building
- engaging communities
- strategy development
- mainstreaming of SIP activities.

The key trends emerging from the thematic SIP evaluation reports are identified around these themes, which in turn are used to inform a wider discussion of the lessons emerging from thematic SIPs on the broad themes of equalities mainstreaming, governance and sustainability.

It is worth noting finally that while a diverse range of approaches and practices were identified across the fourteen thematic SIPs, not all of these are considered within the confines of this report. Examples are however provided throughout the themed chapters to highlight specific areas of practice and to give some flavour of the differences between particular thematic SIPs.

1 Partnership building

Introduction

This chapter explores the partnership structures in place in thematic SIPs, and highlights some important aspects of partnership building, including leadership and internal and external collaboration. The engagement of communities within thematic SIPs is discussed in Chapter 2.

Representation in SIP structures

All of the SIPs had similar structures in place to manage their activities, based around a strategic body (SIP Board or Management Group), one or more operational level sub-groups who took forward particular aspects of SIP work, and a staff team who supported the work of the partners/SIP.

The partner agencies represented within these structures were also broadly similar, with some variation depending on the location and focus of the specific SIP. Thematic SIPs worked as multi-sectoral partnerships, where the partners included local councillors, local authority officers (e.g. education, social work, housing), NHS Scotland/Health Boards, Communities Scotland, Scottish Enterprise, the police, JobCentre Plus, local colleges, community members, the voluntary sector, and the private sector.

Private sector representation

Research has found that there was much less private sector representation within thematic SIPs than there was in area-based SIPs, with just over a third of thematic SIPs reporting private sector representation compared with two thirds of area-based SIPs (Glass et al 2001).

The SIP evaluation reports highlighted similar findings, with only a few thematic SIPs pointing to positive relationships with the private sector (see Box 1.1).

Box 1.1: West Lothian SIP

West Lothian SIP evaluation reported that the involvement of the private sector in the partnership and in SIP projects was exemplary. The SIP, the voluntary sector, and the private sector were reported to have worked very well together, with relationships, structures and ways of working having been established that will outlive the SIP.

A number of barriers were cited in the evaluation reports as limiting private sector involvement within SIPs. The central difficulty was the sustainability of private sector involvement, and there were broader difficulties in getting private sector agencies to participate in the formal structures of the SIPs. Some SIPs also identified a lack of local private sector organisations upon which to draw, especially in areas where there were no large private sector employers.

While these difficulties were also faced by area-based SIPs, it has been argued that thematic SIPs in particular were singularly affected by a perception that the private sector would not want to participate in social inclusion programmes or did not have the necessary expertise to work with socially excluded groups

(Glass et al 2001). Similar views were expressed in several of the thematic SIP evaluations, suggesting a perception within some SIPs that the private sector was only concerned with getting people into work, rather than engaging with the broader 'social inclusion' agenda. The partnership approach for many thematic SIPs centred on building relationships with the public and voluntary sector agencies who were involved with providing services to the particular social groups who were the focus of the thematic SIP.

Voluntary sector representation

There was some variation in practice in the involvement of the voluntary sector within thematic SIPs. One element of this related to the strategic level involvement of the voluntary sector at the Board level within some thematic SIPs, which offered a potentially influential role for the sector (see Box 1.2).

Box 1.2: Involving the Voluntary Sector

The Big Step had strategic and service level involvement from Who Cares? Scotland, Barnardos and NCH Action for Children during the SIP's early years.

HISIP had service level involvement of voluntary sector partners from Save the Children, the Princes Trust and NCH Action for Children.

Many thematic SIPs worked at local authority level and were able to engage larger, well established voluntary sector organisations in their work, overcoming some of the difficulties faced by area-based SIPs in sustaining the involvement of small, relatively poorly resourced, local voluntary sector organisations. The thematic SIP focus was therefore on making connections and building partnerships with established voluntary sector organisations, with only a few thematic SIPs working to build the capacity of smaller community based voluntary organisations.

Many thematic SIPs saw that voluntary sector partners performed a useful complementary role alongside public services. Voluntary sector partners were felt to be able to provide a more direct focus on targeting services to specific client groups, and to promote more innovative and experimental approaches to service delivery than might be possible within mainstream public services.

The thematic SIP evaluations also highlighted the need to carefully consider how to best involve the voluntary sector in SIPs, in order to use their expertise in ways that helped both the Partnerships and the voluntary sector partners. A range of forms of involvement and engagement with voluntary sector partners in the different aspects of SIP practice were identified within the evaluation reports, offering different ways to effectively manage voluntary sector involvement.

Aspects of partnership working

Leadership

Leadership is an important aspect of partnership working, with partnerships being more likely to succeed if they have senior level commitment from partner agencies and 'champions' leading on particular issues (Hudson & Harding 2002).

While there was no explicit discussion of leadership within the thematic SIP evaluations, a small number recognised the importance of promoting the SIP's work and identity to the outside world. In some cases this emerged through the Chair of the management Board acting as an external advocate for the SIP (see Box 1.3).

Box 1.3: Profile-Raising

Tranent SIP chose a local well known community member to chair the local management board as he was known locally and was thought to be able to effectively spread external enthusiasm about the SIP.

Routes Out highlighted the role played by the SIP Chair in taking on a joint role with another partner to maintain contact with the media to provide resources and support to publicise the Routes Out message.

In some thematic SIPs this 'public relations' role was thought to be most effectively undertaken via SIP partners taking back messages from the SIP to their own agencies or when externally networking. For others, the SIP managers were tasked with motivating SIP partners to play an active role in SIPs. Leadership was therefore recognised as an important activity to either promote the SIP externally or to drive the internal work of the Partnership.

In contrast with the approach taken within several area-based SIPs, thematic SIPs placed much less emphasis on political leadership, with local councillors or community activists not playing such a central role within these Partnerships and therefore in leadership within SIPs. In contrast, agency partners and thematic SIP staff took on a more central role – both internally and externally – in promoting and taking forward the work of thematic SIPs.

Collaboration within SIPs

Good partnership working relies on an orientation towards collaborative working, with partners having to learn to work together effectively (Dean et al 1999). The SIP evaluations highlighted awareness of this, with particular gains seen through:

- Participation: where some thematic SIPs were able to successfully bring together a wide range of partners, including senior agency representatives, with consistent and active membership over time.
- Inclusiveness: where SIPs had involved a range of partners, inclusive of most interests, and with a clear focus on social inclusion issues.
- Promoting better working practices: with the partnership structure both focusing on how partners could work more efficiently and effectively, and from this recognising that partnerships offered an appropriate vehicle for taking forward shared concerns.

All thematic SIPs made progress with developing partnership working, bringing partners together, building formal and informal structures to manage their activities and offering forums for discussion and progression of working practices. All viewed working in partnership as offering opportunities to share ideas, resources and bring together those with a common interest. However, there were two main challenges faced by the SIPs in delivering this vision.

Firstly, there were markedly different levels of input by some partners in some partnerships, with some SIPs noting that smaller organisations could not invest time in SIPs while larger organisations (such as local authorities and health authorities) found it more difficult to engage at the appropriate level due to their organisational complexity. Secondly, concerns about a lack of strategic direction in the activities of some SIPs meant some partners were either not fully engaging in SIPs or had difficulties with getting senior level involvement in SIPs.

Unlike area-based SIPs, thematic SIPs did not face conflict or tension from interactions between community members and other partners. The lack of historical involvement of many communities of interest in partnership working offers one explanation for this. The groups involved and the approaches taken to promote involvement in thematic SIPs may also have meant communities were less likely to challenge the power and decisions of other partners, so reducing the potential for tension to arise.

External collaborations

As well as internal partnership working, thematic SIPs also built links with external structures. Many SIPs built external links with strategic regeneration partnerships at local authority level (see Box 1.4).

Box 1.4: Strategic Level Partnerships

Glasgow Alliance (a city wide partnership concerned with the regeneration of the city and its communities) took on management of all SIPs in Glasgow, except **GARA** who set up a limited company. **HISIP** similarly linked into (and was managed by) **Well-being Alliance** in Highland and Islands.

South Coatbridge SIP linked with the two area-based SIPs in this local authority area into **North Lanarkshire Partnership**, while the two thematic SIPs in Dundee both linked with the **Dundee Partnership**.

Most thematic and area-based SIPs had beneficial links with strategic regeneration partnerships. This relationship was identified as bringing opportunities for co-ordination of SIPs with local authority level activities, and also saw links between SIPs within this structure.

The main limitation was the concern that local authority level partnership activity would lead to rationalisation of SIP staffing within individual SIPs, with questions arising within a small number of SIPs about the potential for local control and management of SIPs within this wider structure.

Beyond these strategic regeneration partnership links, there was limited evidence of either thematic or area-based SIPs making positive formal links with external initiatives. For some thematic SIPs there was however evidence of specific links with other policy initiatives, notably with Children's Service Planning frameworks (see Box 1.5).

There were few other examples of formalised links between thematic SIPs and external initiatives. While activities were undertaken to recognise wider policy developments, few thematic SIPs successfully gained access to more formal linkages with many wider policy/practice developments.

Box 1.5: Links with Children's Service Planning

The Big Step fed into Glasgow's Children's Service Planning structures, with the SIP partnership manager (a secondee from Social Work) chairing the Leaving Care subgroup, and forming links between the SIP Working Groups and this subgroup.

Moray YouthStart was a member of the 'For Moray's Children Group' who were responsible for the Children's Service Plan for Moray.

West Lothian SIP made strong links with the local Children's Service Plan.

Conclusions

Both area-based and thematic SIPs undertook similar processes of partnership building. There were however differences in patterns of engagement with the private and voluntary sectors, with several thematic SIPs prioritising partnership building with established voluntary sector organisations and with statutory service providers rather than with the private sector. Approaches to leadership also differed, with community members playing a much less central role in profiling the work of SIPs externally than within area-based SIPs. The less central role played by community members may explain the absence of tension between community members and other partners in thematic SIPs, as well as the lack of a leadership role being performed by these groups.

Most SIPs had links to strategic regeneration partnerships, with thematic SIPs also having developed limited links with other relevant policy initiatives. While there is limited evidence that links between thematic SIPs and external policy initiatives had influenced the SIPs' work, there was greater potential for this to occur given the shared concerns of many thematic SIPs and specific policy initiatives. This suggests that the thematic focus may offer something specific to the partnership setting by bringing together a wider range of partners than had occurred in previous regeneration initiatives.

2 Engaging communities

Introduction

Engaging communities has been a key feature of regeneration initiatives since the late 1960s. This chapter highlights the forms of community engagement that were used by thematic SIPs, the reasons they put forward for promoting engagement, the progress thematic SIPs made in promoting community engagement, and the extent to which diversity between communities was been recognised through their community engagement practices.

Forms of community engagement

The evaluation reports highlighted four different approaches to community engagement in thematic SIPs.

Formal representation/participation

For several thematic SIPs, formal representation on the SIP management board was a central feature of community engagement. In some this meant allocated places were set aside on the SIP Board to ensure representation of communities of interest (e.g. the Big Step), while for others there was a more general commitment to ensuring that there was significant representation of community members within the formal structures of the SIP (e.g. West Lothian SIP).

Youth forums

Two SIPs established specialist Forums to engage young people. These Forums sat alongside and fed into the decision-making structures of the SIPs. In practice however, Dundee YCP moved further along this path than did Tranent SIP.

It was thought that these Youth Forums allowed young people to formally meet and discuss issues, while offering a mechanism which fed their voices into the work of the SIPs. This meant young people did not need to participate in the formal structures of the SIPs.

Support staff

Several thematic SIPs recruited staff to support community engagement in policy decision-making or in service delivery. Particular emphasis was placed on promoting access to participative structures, and to promoting the voice of communities of interest in policy and practice decision-making. These staff also supported community members in their participative roles.

Non-direct engagement

Thematic SIPs also pursued a range of other indirect approaches to engage communities. Some focused on encouraging communities to engage with specific activities led by the SIP e.g. involvement in events/conferences, selection and recruitment of SIP staff and SIP website design. Others focused on engaging communities in project level activity, with this then leading to

further opportunities for service users to then go on to influence mainstream service delivery or policy decision-making (see Box 2.1).

Box 2.1: The Go Project

Perth GO used their funding to recruit a staff team to directly deliver support and services to young people leaving care in the Perth and Kinross area. The SIP directly managed and ran the GO Project. Service users dropped into the project informally, using the project workers as a source of advice and support. This both aided access to support, including financial assistance, and offered young people a welcome alternative to statutory agencies that were seen as creating barriers to participation. This was suggested to facilitate engagement of young people, so enabling more and better participation in the SIP.

Barriers to involvement

In contrast to area-based SIPs, thematic SIPs identified a number of particular barriers when engaging communities of interest. With less historical use of thematic partnerships, some SIPs had little experience of working in partnership and therefore took time to build networks with the communities they planned to engage. It was also recognised that some communities of interest were particularly difficult to engage. This was a result of both a lack of historical measures to engage their participation, and specific difficulties faced by some excluded groups in engaging in these forms of activity.

Some thematic SIP evaluations also raised concerns about whether formal engagement of communities within the structures of the SIPs was the most appropriate way to manage engagement, identifying a need to avoid 'tokenistic' involvement that was not meaningful to community members.

Reasons for engaging communities

The SIP evaluations did not explicitly report the reasons why SIPs promoted community engagement. The variety of approaches to participation highlighted above does however suggest that there were a range of different reasons for promoting participation within individual SIPs.

Policy drivers

With community engagement a central ethos of the SIP programme, SIPs are likely to have promoted engagement mechanisms in direct response to this wider policy context. As the SIP evaluations did not explicitly consider the reasons for promoting engagement, this suggests that this activity was undertaken as an accepted part of the partnership focus pursued by SIPs.

Influencing service provision

The perception within some SIPs that community members could play a role in influencing service providers suggests another reason for promoting their involvement in SIP activities. With some SIPs promoting engagement as a means to influence service providers, it is clear that this was considered an important reason to have community members participating either in SIP activities or in other forums where they might be able to influence service providers.

Community capacity building

Some thematic SIPs highlighted community capacity building as an aim in promoting community engagement. The approaches to achieve this differed between SIPs, ranging from the participation of communities in SIP management boards to moves by the SIPs to encourage engagement between communities and service providers.

Promoting social inclusion

While the above explanations for community engagement are likely to be similar for area-based SIPs, engagement with particular excluded groups was a central role of thematic SIPs. The policy focus on social inclusion that led to the development of SIPs, and particularly the creation of thematic SIPs, brought with it a commitment to engage and encourage the participation of specific excluded groups within SIPs and other policy initiatives

Measuring progress

Given the diversity of approaches to involvement that were promoted by the thematic SIPs, it is not a straightforward process to attempt to summarise the progress made in promoting the involvement of excluded groups. This is further complicated by the use of a variety of different criteria by the different evaluators who assessed the impact of thematic SIPs. As a result, it is difficult to draw any specific conclusions about the progress made by thematic SIPs to engage community members.

The information available suggests mixed results, with some thematic SIP evaluations presenting a positive picture of progress made, while others suggested that there had been little impact (see Box 2.2). The overall view of the evaluations was that much was still required to be done to meaningfully engage communities of interest in SIP activities.

Box 2.2: The Big Step

The Big Step evaluation reported that while young people acknowledged that there were personal gains from involvement with the SIP, they had mixed views on the extent to which they had truly participated in the activities of the SIP. Some felt that they were listened to and supported, while others found the formal business less interesting and did not feel heard in that environment.

Community Empowerment Fund

In 2000 the Scottish Executive introduced Community Empowerment Funding (CEF) to support community engagement, which led to a range of new SIP activities promoting community engagement. Most prominent within thematic SIPs was the funding of support workers to facilitate engagement with communities either within SIP activities or with service providers. Funding was also being used to finance the costs of community participation, including training and dissemination of information to the wider community about activities performed by the SIPs.

Few evaluations reported on the progress or impact of this funding over time, although those that did noted that it allowed SIPs to prioritise and further support community engagement activities. This funding source offered a useful

resource to focus attention on engaging communities. For some SIPs this meant additional activities were developed, while for others it allowed for the consolidation or development of work already planned or being progressed by SIPs.

Promoting diversity

There has in recent years been a growing awareness of diversity in understanding of the term 'community', with different groups and spatial levels recognised as 'communities' (Hayton 1996). This has led to challenges to the dominant focus on adult community involvement within deprived neighbourhoods (Taylor 2003), instead focusing on the involvement of young people (Fitzpatrick et al 1998, Matthews et al 1998), minority ethnic communities (Anastacio et al 2000, Brownhille & Darke 1998) and disabled people (Edwards 2001). This recognition of diversity between communities should therefore be considered when looking at the practices of thematic SIPs.

Thematic SIPs focused on particular communities of interest, notably groups of young people (e.g. young carers, young people leaving care), minority ethnic communities and women involved in prostitution. The evaluations however contained little that illustrated a recognition of the diversity between individuals *within* particular communities of interest e.g. based on age, gender, ethnicity or disability. Notable exceptions were Dundee YCP, which stated that support was given regardless of gender, disability, ethnicity etc., and FRAE Fife, who recognised the need to do more to engage young people from BME communities. Greater recognition of the diversity between groups was however evident through project level activity, with many thematic SIPs supporting projects that focused on specific groups within the broader concerns of the SIP.

When compared with area-based SIPs, thematic SIPs – through their group focus – were more aware of the position of specific social groups, although there was limited explicit attention to recognising diversity within communities. Area-based SIPs on the other hand continued their historic focus on a generic 'community' of local residents in deprived neighbourhoods, adding to this a specific focus on young people as a distinct group of local residents.

Conclusions

Thematic SIPs promoted a diverse range of approaches to community engagement, from formal participation in management boards to building relationships with relevant groups through the activities of support and project workers. With the limited available evidence of the impact of these diverse approaches to engagement, it is difficult to assess how successful these activities have been within thematic SIPs. The difficulties faced by thematic SIPs in engaging socially excluded groups in formal participatory activities offers one explanation for the emergence of more diverse and varied approaches to engagement within thematic SIPs, with the recognition that less formal forms of engagement may suit some groups better.

This, alongside a recognition of the importance of the social inclusion policy agenda as a driver of a new commitment to community engagement by specific groups, meant that thematic SIPs prioritised the participation of some social groups who were not previously of concern to policy makers. This further explains the desire to offer creative and diverse approaches to engagement of particular social groups.

The failure to give explicit attention to questions of diversity within particular communities of interest that were targeted by thematic SIPs illustrates an issue that appears to have been overlooked in community engagement activities. There is therefore a need to recognise diversity both *within* and *between* communities of interest. While some attention to this issue emerged at project level, there was little recognition of the importance of this issue in engaging excluded groups directly or indirectly at decision-making levels.

3 Strategy development

Introduction

This chapter examines the strategic development of thematic SIPs as they worked to promote social inclusion between 1999 and 2003. The analysis focuses on the objectives set by these SIPs, the extent to which SIP priorities changed over time, the operational practices used by SIPs to achieve their objectives, and the progress made by thematic SIPs in achieving their objectives.

SIP priorities

Many of the priorities identified by the thematic SIPs in shaping their work were common to all SIPs. The main priorities were:

- Post-School Transitions to Employment: supporting young people in making the transition from school into training or employment.
- Education and Employment: education was identified as a goal by many SIPs either in itself or through links to improving access to employment.
- Housing and Independent Living: supporting young people to live independently and on providing good quality housing.
- Health/Well-being: improving health, reducing misuse of drugs and alcohol and promoting awareness of mental health issues affecting some groups.
- Community Participation/Engagement: a central objective of many SIPs to ensure that community members played a role in the development of new services.
- Community Capacity-Building: linked to community engagement, focusing on offering opportunities for development or capacity-building of community members.

In addition to these priorities, which were largely shared by area-based SIPs, a number of distinctive thematic SIP priorities emerged:

- Profile-Raising: focusing on raise the profile of particular socially excluded groups either by challenging public attitudes to the particular group, or in drawing policy-makers' and service providers' attention to their needs.
- Raising Awareness of Rights/Responsibilities: a small number of thematic SIPs identified a role for the SIP in better informing both communities and service providers about their rights and responsibilities (see Box 3.1).
- Influencing Provision of Mainstream Services: focusing on changing the delivery of mainstream services to ensure they were informed more by community views or that services were better targeted to the needs of particular excluded groups.

Given the lack of historical use of thematic partnerships, these particular priorities may have been influenced by the thematic SIPs' desire to challenge and change mainstream service provision, as well as to increase knowledge

and positive attention to particular excluded groups. These priorities highlight a particular role and focus of thematic SIPs.

Box 3.1: FRAE Fife

FRAE Fife highlighted a concern with promoting community development, capacity-building, consultation and improvements in service delivery to BME communities in Fife. This was done through the development of a BME infrastructure in Fife which aimed to both improve engagement by statutory and voluntary sector providers and to inform BME communities of their rights and responsibilities.

Revisiting SIP priorities

While priority setting was an important part of the application process in gaining access to SIP funding, it was common for SIPs to revisit and change their aims, objectives and planned activities.

The majority of the thematic SIPs changed their priorities over time, with the rationales for this varying between SIPs. Within the thematic SIPs there was a wish to increase the clarity of SIP objectives, to respond to emerging themes, or to redefine the specific focus taken. Changes in priorities that occurred in most thematic SIPs were however not significant, re-emphasising and better identifying and clarifying the SIPs focus rather than leading to explicit change (see Box 3.2).

Box 3.2: HISIP and Routes Out

HISIP had developed 'organically' rather than having rigid aims and objectives at the start of its life. Their 'action learning' approach led to changes in their priorities, targets and objectives on the basis of experience and practice.

Routes Out narrowed their focus over time as it became clear through practice that it would not be possible to undertake all of the activities and objectives outlined in their original funding bid.

A similar pattern was also evident within area-based SIPs, although the influences steering change differed. Unlike the thematic SIPs, there were concerns that the priorities and practices of area-based SIPs were influenced by the voice of community members emerged, while there were also explicit concerns within area-based SIPs on clarifying links with Community Planning Partnerships (CPP's).

Change within thematic SIPs' priorities were therefore influenced by a desire to narrow and better clarify goals; with community and external policy drivers having less influence on the SIPs' changes.

Approaches to operational practice

The different elements of SIP work in practice can be grouped in three broad categories: partnership development, community engagement, and service delivery. Each of these is characterised by:

Partnership development

- bringing partners together to a common agenda
- encouraging greater linkages between individual partners
- working to address social, economic and physical/environmental priorities
- linking into other policy and practice developments at neighbourhood, local authority or national level.

Community engagement/capacity building

- supporting community engagement
- targeting communities of interest for engagement e.g. young people
- linking communities with partners' decision-making structures
- developing community capacity and confidence.

Service delivery

- delivering services directly
- delivering services via the voluntary/community sector
- delivering services via mainstream partner agencies
- jointly funding capital/revenue developments with other partners.

Partnership development and community engagement were discussed in previous chapters. Four distinct approaches to service delivery were found within thematic SIPs: funding projects, match-funding new initiatives, directly delivering services, and funding initiatives delivered through mainstream partner agencies.

Funding projects

Several thematic SIPs followed the pattern set by area-based SIPs, funding local community organisations or other groups to provide localised or small scale project activity for a particular client group with a particular remit (see Box 3.3).

Box 3.3: Moray YouthStart and Tranent SIP

Moray YouthStart initiated and funded a range of projects to address the needs of young excluded people in Moray. Much of the focus was on housing, transitions to employment and training, some areas of health promotion and support for young people with caring responsibilities.

Tranent SIP funded a number of long term 'core' projects as well as short term projects, research and publications. Their focus was varied, including youth arts work, school attendance and attainment and work to address crime, drug and alcohol misuse.

Match-funding new initiatives

Many of the projects and service delivery activity funded by SIPs involved SIPs offering match-funding with other funders (e.g. Lottery or European funding) or with specific SIP partners. This match-funding partly links to the ethos of partnership working, which promotes the sharing of responsibility and funding of activities between organisations, while at the same time reducing the financial costs to individual partners or organisations.

Directly delivering services

A small number of thematic SIPs took a distinct approach that delivered services rather than funding others to provide services on their behalf (see Box 3.4).

Box 3.4: Dundee Xplore and Dundee YCP

Dundee Xplore did not fund projects, but instead used their funding to target support for young people delivered by means of a 'client-centred approach'.

Dundee YCP concentrated on filling gaps in provision for young carers via provision of one-to-one support/advocacy services, befriending, and the establishment of an Older Young Carers Group. YCP developed awareness-raising training with professionals and delivered information and support within secondary schools, including the provision of a drop-in facility for young carers.

Funding initiatives delivered through mainstream partner agencies

Another distinctive feature of the thematic SIP approach to service delivery was the funding of new initiatives or pilot service ideas that were managed and delivered within mainstream partner agencies. This approach was thought to offer partners 'ownership' of the service, with the aim that they would take over funding after the piloting of the new service (see Box 3.5).

Box 3.5: The Big Step

Service delivery was not a significant element of their work, but **The Big Step** funded initiatives with mainstream partners to be managed and taken forward by mainstream partners on a pilot basis. For example, supported by Beattie funding, the SIP contributed short-term funding to 'Positive Futures: Leaving Care Services', a city-wide vocational guidance and support service run/supported by Social Work Services and Careers Scotland.

Many of the thematic SIPs incorporated a combination of different approaches to service delivery to achieve their goals. Thematic SIPs illustrated a greater diversity and innovation in approaches than did area-based SIPs, which focused on project and match-funding activities alone.

Achieving SIP objectives

Accurately measuring the progress made by SIPs is limited by a range of factors, not least of which is the lack of consistent and measurable baseline data and the difficulties in assessing progress with changes to SIP activities occurring over time.

As with other aspects of their activities, there are mixed messages in the evaluations about the success or limitations of the achievement of objectives by thematic SIPs. Some evaluators opted to emphasise successes, and others focused on where work was required or where achievement fell short of the objectives set. This made making comparisons between SIPs (and SIP evaluations) difficult.

Both area-based and thematic SIPs reported progress on community engagement, partnership building and in the funding of initiatives. More work was required in both area and thematic SIPs to increase community engagement within particular settings. The lack of strategic direction within much project based activity was recognised as limiting the potential for linkages to wider policy agendas.

There were also mixed messages on the relative success of the diverse and innovative approaches to service delivery adopted by several thematic SIPs. While some evaluations indicated success in achieving objectives or progressing new working approaches, others reported more mixed results; with time limitations, lack of consensus on goals, and variations in the commitment of individual partners limiting the development of new working approaches.

There was no substantive evidence that the more innovative approaches taken by thematic SIPs had led to greater achievements during the life of the SIPs. It is not clear whether this is a result of not enough time have passed between the creation of the SIPs and their evaluations for change to have occurred, a lack of adequate evaluation tools, or whether this suggests a real limitation within these approaches.

Conclusions

This chapter has highlighted a number of priorities that were shared by all SIPs, while also identifying three particular priorities for thematic SIPs – profile-raising, promoting rights and responsibilities, and influencing mainstream service provision. Their need to focus on excluded groups offers one explanation for why thematic SIPs adopted these priorities, which challenged historically negative views of particular socially excluded groups. There were also variations in the methods employed to achieve objectives within thematic SIPs, with a small number moving beyond project funding to adopt more innovative and varied approaches.

Measuring progress made by the thematic SIPs was limited by a lack of baseline data which could be used to assess impact, by changes to SIP priorities over time, and by divergences in the approaches between SIPs which made comparisons between individual thematic SIPs difficult. Successes were however reported on partnership building, on engaging communities, and on achieving objectives.

There was no clear evidence that the more varied approaches to service delivery adopted within thematic SIPs had led to greater success in achieving change. When considering the impact from thematic SIPs, it is important to consider the potential for mainstreaming thematic SIP activities. This issue is explored in the next chapter.

4 Mainstreaming thematic SIP activities

Introduction

In order to examine the potential for mainstreaming of SIP activities, this chapter explores the extent to which resource sharing has occurred as a result of thematic SIP activity, the influence that SIPs have had on individual partner agencies, and the potential for sustainability of activities as a result of the approach taken by SIPs.

Sharing resources

Several approaches were taken to best use the resources available to SIPs, and to add to these via additional funding and in-kind contributions of resources from partners. Efforts were also made to mainstream SIP projects, and to attract additional external funding streams towards SIP priorities.

Attracting additional funding

Several thematic SIPs reported success in accessing additional funding streams that complemented and added to SIP activities. Much of this funding came from short term specialist funding sources e.g. Beattie, Rough Sleepers and Empowering Communities funding, while there was also some evidence of success accessing mainstream funding e.g. local authority and NHS funds. However, mainstream budgets were generally more difficult to access, with few partners willing or able to 'bend' their spending to fit with thematic SIP priorities.

Mainstreaming SIP projects

While there was limited direct 'bending' of mainstream budgets, a number of thematic SIPs successfully mainstreamed projects initiated with SIP spending. This offered a specific form of 'bending', as partners took on mainstream funding of initiatives started by SIPs. Some SIPs therefore saw their role as 'pump priming' new initiatives until they could be mainstreamed by statutory service providers (see Box 4.1).

Box 4.1: GARA

During Phase 1 **GARA** funded four projects for young black people in Glasgow. Staff from these projects were employed by the partner agency who was hosting the project. In moving to Phase 2, two of these projects gained continued funding from partner agencies to sustain their activities.

Accessing in-kind resources

Another form of resource allocation came via in-kind partner investments. Two distinct approaches were visible: partners' time involvement in partnership working, and staff secondments from partner agencies, which occurred in a small number of thematic SIPs.

Although area-based SIPs had similar successes accessing additional resources, thematic SIPs placed more emphasis on mainstreaming project activities as a key priority and had more success gaining staff secondments

from partner agencies to support their work. These developments show distinctiveness in the approach and routes to accessing resources by thematic SIPs.

Limits to resource sharing in practice

The main limitations in resource sharing within thematic SIPs were the difficulties faced in 'bending' mainstream funding towards their priorities. The evaluations indicate that this may reflect both a lack of attention within SIPs to achieving this goal and a lack of expertise within thematic SIPs to pursue this goal. These limitations were also recognised within area-based SIPs. However, the greater success area-based SIPs had in accessing funding from mainstream service delivery partners (e.g. Communities Scotland and NHS funds), suggests that some partners in area-based SIPs were more willing or able to allocate funding to deprived areas than to specific excluded groups.

Influencing partners' activities

Thematic SIPs' influenced mainstream partners through influencing policy and practice developments and through profile-raising.

Influencing policy and practice developments

A central theme for several thematic SIPs was influencing the policy and practice of mainstream partner agencies. While there was evidence of specific areas of success in this activity, few SIPs were able to show real impact on this goal. The key barriers identified in the evaluations were the lack of influence over individual partners, cultural barriers to change, a lack of responsiveness to issues of concern to individual SIPs, and more general difficulties with partnership working.

Profile-raising

Profile-raising was one specific route pursued by thematic SIPs to both influence policy and practice developments and to change attitudes to particular social groups. This meant focusing on changing the working practices of SIP partners, while increasing understanding of the social position of particular excluded groups (see Box 4.2).

Box 4.2: Routes Out

Routes Out wished to influence the views, understanding and responses of mainstream agency partners towards street prostitution in Glasgow, and to facilitate moves away from harm reduction and towards preventative approaches. Some progress has been made in raising awareness of prostitution in Glasgow and increasing both the number and focus of services. The evaluation also reports changes in the attitudes of partner agencies in response to the work of **Routes Out**.

Profile-raising was a key activity for several thematic SIPs. However, this activity alone was not necessarily the only cause of changes in service provision or in the awareness of the needs of particular excluded groups. For example, developments in race equality activity were the result of the introduction of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act (2000) placing a statutory duty on public service providers to promote race equality.

That said, this profile-raising role performed by thematic SIPs was generally viewed in positive terms. While some changes may reflect the changing policy climate, there was recognition that the energy and commitment of particular SIP partners also affected and led to changes in service provision and awareness of the needs of particular excluded groups.

Limits to influencing in practice

Not all thematic SIPs prioritised or had success in influencing changes in services or attitudes. In part this reflects that some partners involved in some SIPs did not have sufficient seniority or influence within their partner organisations to feed back these messages from SIPs. The project focus of some thematic SIPs also limited the strategic capability of SIPs to focus on influencing partner agencies. Furthermore, a small number of thematic SIPs felt that influencing partners was an unrealistic goal, given the combination of the size and duration of these Partnerships, and the limited resources available within SIPs to take on this role.

In comparison with area-based SIPs, there was little evidence of an explicit influencing role for community members within thematic SIPs. This was unlikely to be a central priority within many thematic SIPs, given the difficulties in engaging many socially excluded groups within formal SIP structures.

Achieving sustainability

Sustainability is a difficult goal in practice, with many organisations having little previous experience of collaborative working. Organisational differences between partners also create difficulties with collaboration in practice, in finding a common clarity of purpose and finding understanding between organisations (Williams and Thomas 2004). These insights offer explanations for the lack of extensive influence by SIPs over individual agency partners, while also raising questions about the potential for longer term sustainability of SIP activities to secure lasting social and/or economic change from regeneration activity (Fordham 1995).

Promoting sustainability

While acknowledging these difficulties, many thematic SIPs identified sustainability as a key principle of their working approach. For some, this led to a focus on mainstreaming project activity initiated by SIPs. The SIP evaluations further highlighted a desire to move away from project funding, with the suggestion that SIPs could offer a more 'enabling' role in future, for example through the sharing of the good practice that emerged from SIP activities.

Project sustainability

A small number of thematic SIPs whose approach was focused on project funding were aware that SIP funded projects should be explicitly encouraged to prioritise sustainability as part of the SIP funding contract. This approach was a response to the recognition that SIPs were not able to provide long term funding for projects, so SIPs were encouraging SIP funded projects to start planning for their longer term sustainability beyond the availability of SIP funding.

Partnership sustainability

An alternative perspective offered by several thematic SIPs was to emphasise the sustainability of the structures of SIP partnerships. For some thematic SIPs this approach offered the chance to maintain networks with key partners and carry on progressing work to meet the needs of specific communities (see Box 4.3).

Box 4.3: Edinburgh YIP

Edinburgh YIP's evaluation recognised the driving force of the SIP in bringing organisations from diverse areas together in both formal and informal partnerships and networks to improve communication between agencies. Delivery partners noted that relationships formed through work with the SIP continued long after direct involvement with the SIP ended.

Through this approach, sustainability was ensured through the continuation of a commitment to a shared agenda, rather than through continuing the specific activities and delivery aims set out by the SIPs. The key distinction here is in the emphasis that these thematic SIPs placed on sustaining partnership working, with the long-term aim of delivering a longer term commitment to changing organisational practices to better meet the needs of specific social groups, rather than focusing on mainstreaming SIP projects or activities.

Unlike many area-based SIPs, thematic SIPs did not promote community capacity building as a route to achieving sustainability. Given the challenges with engaging communities of interest in formal SIP activities, this was unlikely to be a central element of the approach to sustainability of thematic SIPs.

Conclusions

While thematic SIPs had limited success 'bending the spend' of mainstream partner agencies, profile-raising emerged as an alternative approach within several thematic SIPs to promote the mainstreaming of SIP activities. Concerns about the potential long term sustainability of SIP activities were to some extent overcome with some thematic SIPs emphasising the sustainability of partnership arrangements, rather than SIP activities, an approach that does not rely on financial support to maintain working relationships.

Some thematic SIPs were successful in accessing specialist funding sources and through utilising partners' time through involvement and secondments. However in practice the impact on partners' spending patterns and on changing the working practices of partner agencies was more limited. This is not surprising, given the competing demands on partners' resources and the range of barriers encountered with partnership working in practice, both of which limited the potential for sharing budgeting decisions with the SIP context.

5 Learning lessons from thematic SIPs

Introduction

This final chapter reflects on the lessons that have emerged from thematic SIPs on mainstreaming equalities, progressing local governance and achieving sustainability within local partnership working.

Mainstreaming equalities

One of the central aims of the thematic SIP agenda has been the integration of a focus on equalities groups in a localised partnership context. This first section therefore considers the progress in mainstreaming equalities through thematic SIP activities.

Links with the wider policy context

There was some evidence of an awareness by SIPs of the value in making links with wider strategic policy and practice developments, as well as recognising their role in delivering wider policy goals at the local level. However, the lack of formal links to other policy initiatives by all but a few thematic SIPs suggests that there is greater potential for formal links to be made between different policy initiatives that share similar or overlapping priorities.

SIPs have tended to take an internal focus, centring on service delivery activities, which helps explain the lack of attention to these wider policy linkages. In practice, most SIPs have limited their external links to local authority level regeneration partnerships and other SIPs, rather than linking up with other policy initiatives. These wider policy linkages do however allow greater opportunities to share information and resources, to raise the profile of particular groups within different policy and practice networks, and to offer opportunities to share good practice. Thematic SIPs were uniquely placed to take on this role, given their focus on specific social groups. Pursuing this goal would however require some degree of trade-off with other service development priorities.

Recognising diversity in communities

In rolling out equalities mainstreaming through local partnership working, thematic (and area-based) SIPs still had a long way to go in recognising the diversity of their communities. Thematic SIPs were explicitly concerned with socially excluded groups, but were not explicitly promoting a recognition of the diversity between the members of their community of interest. Some progress was however being made in targeting the diverse needs of particular groups in project activity. There is therefore still much to be done to ensure that diversity is considered when working to engage community members in partnership decision-making. Thematic SIPs did offer some interesting alternative approaches to engaging harder to reach groups, and lessons could therefore be taken forward from thematic SIPs to promote more diverse approaches to engaging excluded groups.

Progressing governance

Partnerships offer the potential to bring stakeholders together to achieve shared objectives, with decision-making opened up to a range of actors to develop local governance structures. The second set of lessons therefore focus on the successes of thematic SIPs in building strong partnership structures, bringing partners together to a common agenda and linking up with local authority level regeneration partnerships.

A commitment to partnership working

Positive messages were reported on both the potential and commitment to partnership working, particularly between partners in the statutory and voluntary sectors. Historic limitations of partnership working did however continue to create barriers in achieving successful partnerships. In particular, tensions emerged from differences in the levels of commitment to partnership working between different partners. Progress in achieving SIP objectives was limited where SIPs lacked a clear strategic focus to their work.

Promoting inclusion

The partnership approaches of thematic SIPs reflected their focus on prioritising socially excluded groups, many of whom were previously overlooked or underrepresented in policy and practice decision-making. The development of social inclusion policy was therefore seen as a positive policy shift which helped to foster more inclusive approaches to partnership working.

Promoting advocacy

A strong advocacy approach emerged within several thematic SIPs, with profile-raising emerging a central priority. This focus reflects the SIPs' efforts to challenge negative attitudes, and was their response to the lack of knowledge about the needs of specific socially excluded groups on the part of both SIP partners and wider society.

Both private sector involvement and community engagement emerged as particular partnership challenges for thematic SIPs. Addressing both of these issues requires more creative approaches, more innovative practices and an acceptance of the practical limitations of partnership working if thematic partnerships focusing on the inclusion of particular social groups are to continue.

Private sector engagement

In addition to the general difficulties in engaging private sector representation that were reported by both area-based and thematic SIPs, thematic SIPs were found to be particularly sceptical about the commitment of the private sector to thematic SIP priorities. Several thematic SIPs perceived that private sector partners had a relatively limited understanding of 'social inclusion' which focused exclusively on increasing labour market participation by excluded groups. As a result, the primary focus of several thematic SIPs was on building relationships with statutory and voluntary sector partners at the expense of private sector engagement.

Engaging communities

Engaging communities and specific excluded groups in SIP activities was a complex issue for many thematic SIPs, who developed a more diverse range of approaches to engaging communities than occurred within area-based SIPs. The formal engagement of communities in participatory settings was not always seen as the most appropriate or effective route to engage socially excluded groups. A range of more informal and innovative approaches therefore emerged within several thematic SIPs as a means to engage communities.

These innovative approaches reflected attempts to be responsive to these difficulties in engaging excluded groups, while encouraging opportunities to engage community members through the most appropriate routes. However, it was recognised in some SIPs that more work was required to rationalise their approach in order to ensure that specific community members could meaningfully participate in partnership working.

Promoting sustainability

The final set of lessons that emerge from thematic SIPs are on efforts to promote the sustainability of thematic SIP activities, which covers sustaining SIP activities, sustaining SIP partnerships, profile-raising and the relevance of change to partnership activities.

Sustaining SIP activities

A number of SIPs used their funding to support project activity, with thematic SIP funded projects (either with or without match-funding) filling gaps in services to particular social groups. This approach was similar to that adopted by area-based SIPs. However, a small number of thematic SIPs opted to pursue more innovative approaches to achieve their aims, focusing on working with mainstream service providers to encourage them to change their service provision for particular groups.

There were practical difficulties in attempting to identify the potential for sustainability of the varied activities performed by thematic SIPs. This is partly explained by the difficulty in measuring the impact of attempts to influence mainstream partners' activities over such a short time frame. It is also difficult to accurately assess whether impact emerged from activities undertaken by SIPs or from other influences on partners' activities. Alternative approaches to sustainability did however emerge from the attempts to sustain partnerships beyond the life of SIPs and from the profile-raising role performed by thematic SIPs.

Sustaining partnerships

A small number of thematic SIPs offered a different way of thinking about sustainability that focused on maintaining formal and informal partnership structures once thematic SIP funding had ended. This approach provided partners with the opportunity to continue networking without longer term funding. However, it is not clear whether the lack of funding to support these informal partnerships would maintain or promote a wide membership, whether some funding would be required to support their activities, and whether there would be a commitment within this framework to support communities of interest to engage in ways that suited their needs.

Profile-raising

The profile-raising role performed by some thematic SIPs was also thought to promote sustainability. Profile-raising was thought to offer opportunities to raise partners' awareness of the position and needs of particular social groups, leading to changes in the delivery of services and engagement of particular communities. This approach clearly brings challenges to partners regarding their practices and with it potential tensions within partnerships. However, this approach could also lead to organisational change in the medium to long term.

Learning through change/review

The changes in individual SIPs suggests an opportunity for partnerships to learn through change and through reviews of practices. While implementing changes to priorities or practices can lead to difficulties in monitoring SIP progress, it suggests that time and experience has led to greater clarity of goals and approach within these thematic Partnerships. This renewal and revisiting of goals as partnerships mature could lead to greater achievements and more sustainability of activities as partners feel they have influence over activities, and as discussions lead to increased clarification and ownership of goals. Learning and change could therefore be an important part of successful partnership approaches.

However, while review and change may be beneficial for learning and reflection, it is important to be cautious. The process of review and evaluation, often accompanied by changes in policy, can lead to a perception that change is always required. It is important therefore that review and evaluation does not necessarily impose change. These processes should be seen as opportunities to both identify and embed good practice and to confirm the direction and focus of partnerships. They also provide a mechanism to consider the adaptation and modification of activities if this is perceived to be necessary and useful.

Conclusions

This final chapter has highlighted the lessons we can learn from thematic SIPs by focusing on the three key themes of mainstreaming equalities, promoting governance and achieving sustainability. This chapter has shown that thematic SIPs made new and innovative contributions to partnership practices in Scotland. In moving beyond the traditional area-based focus to engage with excluded groups within and beyond the most deprived neighbourhoods, thematic SIPs highlighted recognition of the particular needs of specific social groups and offered unique contributions to partnership practice. While there was evidence of diversity between the approaches taken by different thematic SIPs to develop partnership practices, it is important to highlight is that this initiative offered a new way of approaching partnership working *in practice*. The lessons highlighted in this chapter are therefore potentially important to the practices of future partnerships which are either focused on deprived areas or on the needs of particular social groups.

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