

# Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2004: A Response from the Cookstown Local Strategy Partnership

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 This paper presents the response of the Cookstown Local Strategy Partnership (LSP) to the NISRA Consultation document on the NI Multiple Deprivation Measure 2004 (NIMD 2004). Cookstown LSP is one of 26 such Partnerships established across NI and brings together representatives from local government; the statutory sector; and the “four pillars of the social partnership” (business; trades unions; community/voluntary sector; and agriculture/rural development). In common with the others it has four main strategic roles:

- ⇒ to draw together an Integrated Local Strategy for its District
- ⇒ to develop partnership working locally
- ⇒ to allocate (some) Peace 2 monies locally
- ⇒ to identify and pursue other funding opportunities for the District.

1.2 The LSP’s submission is based on its experience of these roles to date and, specifically, on:

- ⇒ its use, in a practical decision-making setting, of the Measures of Deprivation 2001 (NIMD 2001 or “Noble”)
- ⇒ its development during 2004 of a Social Inclusion Audit for the District.

1.3 The submission essentially reflects the sequence of, and responds to the questions posed by, NIMD 2004. It is thus structured as follows:

- ⇒ general, strategic comments
- ⇒ domain-related comments
- ⇒ data time point, denominators and spatial scale comments
- ⇒ methodology comments.

1.4 Finally, the LSP welcomes the opportunity to comment on the document and commends NISRA in the effort it has put into the consultation process.

## 2.0 GENERAL, STRATEGIC COMMENTS

2.1 These can be summarised as follows:

- ⇒ there needs to be a much clearer connection between what's eventually highlighted in/by NIMD 2004 and public sector strategies and plans: the LSP's experience has been that whilst use of NIMD 2001 has been virtually "mandatory" for LSPs re their funding allocation decisions, it seems to be seen as much less significant at the higher levels of public policy development and decision-making
- ⇒ greater correlation/synergy needs to be developed between NIMD 2004 and the core thrust/content of the "New TSN - The Way Forward" consultation document: for example many of the indicators in Annex 3 of the New TSN document don't appear in NIMD 2004 ... and vice versa. In the same way NIMD 2004 could/should reflect the three categories of poverty targets (Consensual; Relative Income; and Absolute Income) proposed in the New TSN draft. Greater consistency and more joined up thinking are required here

- ⇒ the LSP is concerned that many indicators exclude people aged over 60/65 and those aged 16/18 and believes there is a Section 75 issue here
- ⇒ the concept of Multiple Deprivation may merit a closer consideration. The LSP's recent Social Inclusion Audit highlighted, among many other things, the fact that deprivation/disadvantage, in its many facets, is well spread across Cookstown District. Thus wards which "top the table" in terms of some NIMD 2001 domains are at the "bottom of the table" for others. Over-reliance on a composite measure can hide these on-the-ground realities. There is also the practical consideration that since most public organisations and policies tend to be sector or issue-specific, (eg health; housing; education) no one organisation has ownership of the Multiple Deprivation measure.

2.2 Finally the LSP believes the indicators used should reflect the good practice guidance re indicators issued by the Audit Commission. That means they should be:

- ⇒ **relevant** to policy makers and organisations (ie see the points made in paragraph 2.1 above)
- ⇒ **clearly defined**
- ⇒ **easy to understand and use** by "non-technical" people
- ⇒ **comparable** over time and space
- ⇒ **verifiable**
- ⇒ **cost effective**
- ⇒ **unambiguous**

- ⇒ **attributable** back through the policy/decision-making processes
- ⇒ **responsive** to actual changes
- ⇒ **avoid perverse incentives**
- ⇒ **allow innovation** in terms of policy responses.

Some of these issues will be dealt with in the detailed comments which follow.

## 3.0 DOMAIN-RELATED COMMENTS

- 3.1 These relate to the domains in the sequence in which they appear in the document.

### **Income**

- 3.2 Income continues to remain central to the whole deprivation/disadvantage debate, notwithstanding the growing sophistication of that debate based on concepts such as social exclusion. It therefore needs to enjoy a central position within NIMD 2004. The LSP believes the focus proposed however is too heavily reliant on benefits. That means:

- ⇒ several of the indicators are difficult for “non-experts” to understand
- ⇒ people not on benefits are excluded
- ⇒ full account is not taken of employed people on low wages (a crucial issue in Cookstown District)

- ⇒ issues such as seasonal or cyclical incomes (still central to farmers ... who still remain important in rural NI) may not be fully appreciated/quantified
- 3.3 If survey data re incomes are not available at the small area level it should nonetheless be factored in at whatever level (be that District or above) it is available. A capacity to “pro rata” higher level rates or incidences down to a more local level to provide an estimate of the numbers of people affected locally is a very useful capacity.
- 3.4 Finally, it is important that any consideration of income factors in the implications of the decoupling of farm support away from production (via subsidies and premia) and onto a single payments regime. This will have major consequences for rural Districts like Cookstown where, for example, over 2,650 people were involved in the agricultural labour force in 2003. The rolling out and subsequent impacts of these payments (which are not inflation-proofed) will be a major consideration in terms of the actual, real incomes of farm families.

## **Employment**

- 3.5 Our main comments here are:
- ⇒ again the proposed indicators are benefits/programme-related: this not only means that many other out-of-work people will be excluded but also that particular rural-related issues such as under-employment and unpaid family farm employment are unlikely to be picked up
  - ⇒ young people aged 16-18 (3.2% of NI’s population and 3.8% of Cookstown’s population) and older people aged over 60/64 (up to 11.7% of NI’s population and 10.3% of Cookstown’s population are aged 60 to 74) are excluded: the Census for example counts people aged 16-74 who are in employment
  - ⇒ information from the Agricultural Census might usefully be included here

⇒ Census of Employment data might provide a useful picture of the “structure” (and thence the value/robustness) of local employment, eg highlight the reliance on “old”, declining industries etc

3.6 Unpaid care, as presented in the 2001 Census, should be included here.

## **Health & Disability**

3.7 This persists as a clear example of an area where on-the-ground deprivation realities do not appear to affect the shaping of higher level health and social care strategies. As the LSP’s Social Inclusion Audit has shown, it is also an area of major importance for local people. In more specific terms the LSP’s concerns here are:

⇒ for Cookstown residents, emergency admissions to hospitals are increasingly to Antrim and Craigavon Area Hospitals as opposed to the traditional destinations of the Mid Ulster (Magherafelt); South Tyrone (Dungannon); and Tyrone County (Omagh) Hospitals. A distance/decay function is very likely to set in here, ie the further away the hospital is, the less likely is an emergency admission. This indicator will therefore be skewed in favour of those parts of NI that enjoy close-at-hand acute hospitals

⇒ health-related data from the Census (eg limiting long term illness; permanently sick, disabled) should be included

⇒ the dental health indicator from NIMD 2001 should remain

⇒ if possible, some measure of addictions should be included.

3.8 The LSP believes Low Birth Weight is a powerful indicator and should be included, even if it cannot be made available down to ward level.

## **Education, Training and Skills**

- 3.9 We find it difficult to understand the rationale behind the “grammar school” indicator, particularly in the light of the major ongoing policy debate re post-primary selection.

## **Geographical Access to Services**

- 3.10 As might be expected in a largely rural District, this domain is of significant interest to the Partnership. Our 2004 Social Inclusion Audit identified the following as core areas/issues under this heading:

- ⇒ people place great value on good access to GPs (primary care) and acute hospitals (secondary care) but believe these core services are being removed/retracted
- ⇒ the “near-at-hand” and “the local” are hugely important for people.

The Partnership is also convinced that a District with high levels of deprivation but with good access to services at least has “solutions/remedies/responses” available: a similarly-deprived District meanwhile which has poor access to services actually has its deprivation compounded.

- 3.11 In addition to the above, our detailed comments re the NIMD 2004 proposals are as follows:

- ⇒ the proposed reduction from nine to five indicators here is unacceptable: those included in MIMD 2001 should essentially be retained
- ⇒ the breadth of the indicators needs to be improved. For instance elsewhere in NIMD 2004, Education is deemed to merit domain status in its own right ...yet access to education is not factored in to this domain. In the same way, benefits almost wholly underpin the Income and Employment

domains yet people's access to the delivery of those benefits via Social Security Offices etc is not considered. Finally, key services such as recreation/leisure and banks need to be included

- ⇒ travel times as opposed to road distances are the key component within Access: at a minimum, road quality and winter conditions (eg provision of gritting) need to be factored in
- ⇒ travel times to GP out-of-hours centres (as well as to GP premises) need to be included: for 70% of the time (6.30pm to 8.00am Monday to Friday and all through weekends/public holidays) GP/primary care services are available via out-of-hours centres only
- ⇒ the simple local presence of a bus stop provides no indication whatsoever of the quality/frequency of service from that stop: it is not sufficient to qualify this with a "crude measure of bus/train frequency information".

## **Living Environment**

3.12 Whilst housing is central to Living Environment, we believe that having five out of the six proposed indicators in this domain housing-based or sourced skews the domain too much. In any case NIHE through its regular House Condition and other Surveys and its waiting-list analyses etc provides a whole raft of consistent, locally-relevant and regularly up-dated housing information that can be used for local planning and strategy development purposes.

3.13 The LSP's additional specific comments here are:

- ⇒ a focus on pedestrian and cyclist casualties will necessarily introduce an urban bias into the measure

- ⇒ to what extent does the proposed local area problem score relate to (a) the presence and (b) the condition/appearance of NIHE estates ... and thereby introduce an urban bias?

## **Crime**

3.14 The LSP's Social Inclusion Audit also highlighted the importance of this broad domain to local people - although we accentuated the positive by calling it Safety rather than Crime. The four indicators suggested seem fine but we would add two comments:

- ⇒ all four focus on "crime against the person/personal property" whilst in Cookstown District some of the really significant criminal activity impacting on quality of life has, for instance, been in the area of illegal dumping/handling of waste. Is it therefore possible to include dimensions such as this?
- ⇒ at the start of the Peace 1 process, offender data (primarily the numbers of offenders from areas) was used to good effect in building up local profiles which in turn influenced Peace 1 spending: can a similar approach not be used here?

## **4.0 Data Time Point, Denominators Geography & Spatial Scale**

4.1 The LSP has four comments under this heading:

- ⇒ the fact that most of the NIMD 2004 indicators are based on 2003 information is welcomed
- ⇒ at the same time, more use could be made of 2001 Census material: the Census remains a key planning tool and should be a key building block of any NIMD

- ⇒ it is vital that changes over time are reflected in the NIMD process. For us that essentially means NISRA publishing **now** a schedule of **when** NIMD 2004 will be updated over the coming years. Given the nature of the core databases suggested, an updating every three years (at least) should be achievable. One of the main selling points of NIMD 2001 (“Noble”) was that, unlike “Robson”, it could and would be regularly updated. That didn’t happen ... but instead the current significant reconfiguration is proposed.
- ⇒ SOAs seem to form an effective geography for the revised measures. As pointed out earlier however, if certain information is available at District level only, it should still be included in NIMD 2004. The perfect should not be allowed to become the enemy of the good: District-wide information is better than no information.

## 5.0 METHODOLOGY

5.1 For most non-statisticians, the Methodology involved in NIMD 2004 is highly technical and difficult to understand. It is therefore, literally taken on trust. The LSP commends NISRA for its traditional openness and willingness to explain complex, technical considerations: the recent consultation meetings re NIMD 2004 were just one example of that approach. Once NIMD 2004 is finalised, the LSP would welcome a presentation from NISRA – open to any interested parties in Cookstown District – re the Measures; how they are assembled/calculated; and what they tell us about Cookstown.

5.2 In terms of the weights suggested, Cookstown LSP believes:

- ⇒ income deprivation merits at least 25% ... but the domain would need to be more broadly based than at present

- ⇒ unemployment, if it continues to be as narrowly-based as at present (ie heavily benefits/programme related and exclusive of the “very” young and old) does not merit a 25% weighting
- ⇒ access to services is critical to quality of life and particularly so in largely rural Districts such as Cookstown. It should have a weighting greater than 10%.

## 6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 Finally, Cookstown LSP again stresses its appreciation of the opportunity to make these comments and commends NISRA, not just on this exercise, but on the full breadth of the work it carries out.