

# The Social Exclusion Unit's Policy Action Team Approach to Policy Development: The Views of Participants

Social Exclusion Unit  
and CMPS

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# 1 SUMMARY

At the end of 1998, 18 Policy Action Teams (PATs) were set up by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) to help the Government tackle the intractable problems faced by people living in deprived neighbourhoods. PATs were an important departure from the usual model of government policy-making. They represented the biggest exercise to date in joined-up government and brought together Government officials from a range of departments with outside experts – including residents – who lived and worked in deprived neighbourhoods.

Previous policies had been fragmented and had failed to address both the multifaceted nature of the problems faced by those living in deprived neighbourhoods and the poor quality of public services in these areas. Nor were policy-makers learning from examples of excellent practice, such as the huge improvements in attendance and attainment achieved by some schools in deprived neighbourhoods or innovative schemes to help homeless people access decent homes and to support them on a range of financial and health issues.

The SEU looked to the PATs to inject rapid, radical and innovative thinking into the creation of an overarching strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. People with different perspectives on deprived neighbourhoods – people living and working there, voluntary organisations, the private sector and civil servants – made recommendations for the Government. Many of these recommendations formed the building blocks for the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. Each PAT has made a huge contribution towards changing the policy and delivery for key services in poor neighbourhoods.

This report looks at the experiences and perceptions of some of the individuals at the heart of the PAT process. What made it tick? How did a group of individuals from diverse backgrounds manage to work together so productively? What worked best for them in galvanising their efforts and encouraging creativity? And what was it that made this approach feel new and inclusive for those involved?

Among other issues the report looks at the dynamics of getting the Teams working effectively together; the role of the chair and ministers and the relationship between the different PATs. Those interviewed for this study felt the PAT approach should be used again particularly to tackle complex, cross-departmental issues that require an innovative perspective; that involve people from across the social spectrum and where local stakeholders need to take ownership of solutions at local, service delivery level. We hope that policy-makers using a similar approach to policy development in the future will be able to learn from the observations and experiences of those involved in PATs. The key learning points in section 5 of the report are intended to help this process.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of a study commissioned by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) and the Policy Studies Directorate in the Centre for Management and Policy Studies (CMPS). The purpose of the study was to explore the approach to policy-making adopted by Policy Action Teams (PATs) and draw out lessons for inclusive, joined-up and evidence-based policy making.

In-depth interviews were carried out with a number of people who had been involved - members of PATs and the SEU, Ministers etc - and sections 4 and 5 of this report are based on their perceptions and experience of the PAT process. The research was carried out by the National Centre for Social Research, working with a CMPS consultant. More detail of the research method employed is at Annex 2.

The Centre for Management and Policy Studies is committed to identifying, describing, analysing and disseminating good practice in policy making. A recent report, *Better Policy Making* identifies a number of principles for good practice in policy making. The PAT approach developed by the SEU follows a number of these principles. This report looks at how the PATs worked and the experience of developing policy in this way from the perspectives of those who were members of, or were closely involved with, the PATs.

Section 3 of the report looks at the background to the establishment and work of the PATs. Section 4 looks in detail at various aspects of the process adopted by PATs, such as briefing and preparation; composition; monitoring and reporting. It identifies what worked best for participants and records differing views on other elements. The overall aim of the report is to provide an insight into this approach to policy-making from the perspectives of those directly involved.

### 3 THE CONTEXT FOR ESTABLISHING POLICY ACTION TEAMS

**This section looks at the background to PATs; describes what they are and looks at why they were set up; how they differed from more traditional policy-making forums and how their methods differed from traditional approaches. It considers why 18 Teams were set up by the Social Exclusion Unit and briefly discusses the management issues arising from this. Finally, it considers the initial impact of the PATs.**

#### 3.1 The context in which Policy Action Teams were set up

When the Prime Minister set up the SEU one of the issues he asked it to report on was: “how to develop integrated and sustainable approaches to the problems of the worst housing estates, including crime, drugs, unemployment, community breakdown and bad schools etc”.

In response, the SEU published a report in September 1998<sup>1</sup> that set out the need for a National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal – to be an agreed response, across Government and beyond to the problems of deprived areas. The goals for the Strategy would be:

- to bridge the gap between the most deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of England; and
- in all the worst neighbourhoods, to achieve lower long-term worklessness; less crime; better health; and better educational qualifications.

Achieving these goals meant reversing the trends of the 1980s and 90s. SEU reports have documented how the gap between poor neighbourhoods and the rest widened over the 1980s and into the 1990s. Communities became less mixed and more vulnerable, with poor people more likely to be concentrated in the same places. Spatial inequalities in employment, health and other areas widened. The proportion of people living in relatively low-income households more than doubled between the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1990s. Child poverty more than trebled between 1979 and 1995-96. Entrenched poverty and breakdown in some neighbourhoods created a spiral of decline. As areas with high crime and unemployment rates acquired poor reputations, so people, shops and employers left. High turnover and empty homes created more opportunities for crime, vandalism and drug dealing.

Previous policies had not succeeded in tackling these difficult issues, and sometimes had been part of the problem. Departments had worked individually on problems that required a joined-up response. Government efforts at regeneration had relied on short term initiatives in a limited number of areas. Little attention was paid to the relatively poor performance of mainstream public services in some neighbourhoods. At local level there were examples of excellent practice: neighbourhoods where,

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<sup>1</sup> *SEU Bringing Britain together: a national strategy for neighbourhood renewal (C 4045), TSO, 1998*

despite high levels of poverty, dramatic changes had been achieved. Yet Government seemed unable to learn from what worked or to harness the knowledge and energy of local people to empower them to develop their own solutions. Some rapid radical and innovative thinking was obviously needed and the Policy Action Teams were set up to provide this.

### **3.2 What is a Policy Action Team and why did the Social Exclusion Unit establish them?**

*Bringing Britain Together* proposed that one of the building blocks of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal should be 18 Policy Action Teams which would take forward an intensive programme of policy development. Each Policy Action Team would focus on a particular problem faced by deprived neighbourhoods, like anti-social behaviour.

In order to encourage new, joined-up thinking on the causes of and solutions to the long standing problems of deprived neighbourhoods, as well as to ensure commitment from all relevant government departments to their analyses and recommendations, each Policy Action Team was composed of representatives from a cross-section of government departments, as well as experts from outside government – particularly people who lived or worked in deprived neighbourhoods. They were also encouraged to engage in blue-skies thinking, but all their recommendations had to be evidence-based.

More specifically, each of the 18 PATs:

- was chaired by a senior civil servant;
- had a “Champion Minister”, who was assigned to each PAT to take a proactive role in its work;
- consisted of between 20-46 members drawn from relevant policy divisions in government departments, Regional Government Offices and other government agencies, local authorities and from outside government;
- had an SEU link person to keep discussion 'on track' and inject strategic thinking. The lead department provided a supporting secretariat;
- adopted an open and evidence-based approach to their research, analysis and policy formulation, visiting deprived neighbourhoods and consulting widely, particularly with people who lived and worked in deprived neighbourhoods and drawing on good practice;
- gave specific consideration to race and ethnic minority issues relevant to their topic;
- considered how to maximise the contribution of communities themselves and what capacity building was needed to promote that; and
- produced clear recommendations for follow-up work.

The PATs thus brought together expertise from those ‘on the ground’ – living and working in deprived areas on a day-to-day basis, often in innovative ways - with that of civil servants from different government departments who had been working on these issues, but often in isolation with no remit to either tackle aspects of the problem that did not touch on their departmental agenda or to work closely with other departments or those living and working in deprived neighbourhoods. The PATs also engaged ministers to act as advocates for each topic covered.

The PATs visited a large number of deprived neighbourhoods to root their reports in first hand experience, and worked in an open and consultative way. Civil servants, experts from local government, voluntary and community and private sectors and those living and working in deprived areas found themselves working in equal partnership with a remit to tackle problems that had eluded them in the past. It was particularly innovative to have representatives from different government departments working in a cross-departmental, collegiate fashion alongside external representatives who represented the views of the “end customers” for the policy. The whole process was co-ordinated by the SEU.

### 3.3 Why establish 18 PATs?

The SEU’s original intention was to establish four to five PATs. However, through the process of writing *Bringing Britain Together* it became apparent that more would be required if each one was going to be asked to focus exclusively on one of the main problems commonly faced by deprived neighbourhoods (see annex 3 for a full list of the PATs). This imposed a significant demand on the SEU’s management resources. If PATs are to be used in the future, depending on the breadth and complexity of the issue to be tackled, the number of teams could be varied.

### 3.4 The PAT approach: developing modern approaches to policy making

Annex 1 sets out the nine features of new and innovative approaches to policy making discussed in a recent report on “Better Policy Making”<sup>2</sup>. The PAT approach encapsulates all but two of these. It was:

- **Forward looking**, developing a vision for the next 10-20 years that no-one should be seriously disadvantaged by where they lived; this vision sat comfortably alongside many of the Government’s other long-term aims.
- **Outward looking**. A good deal of research was carried out looking at best practice in Britain and at how other countries had tackled the issue of neighbourhood renewal and the crosscutting issues involved. PATs also drew heavily on “outsiders”; built on visits to local areas and projects, and drew on extensive consultation outside of Whitehall. The Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy was built on the premise that neighbourhoods suffer similar problems –

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<sup>2</sup> Cabinet Office/CMPS, *Better Policy-making*, November 2001.

but recognised that an understanding of local variation is key to solving those problems.

- **Innovative, flexible and creative.** PATs brought together people with local knowledge of deprived areas and civil servants from different government departments – innovative in itself. They were also given relatively loose remits to enable them to be flexible, creative and innovative in terms of the way they worked and the proposals they developed.
- **Evidence-based.** The whole process of policy analysis and formulation was evidence based, both through the extensive research gathering that preceded the establishment of the PATs and the continued research that was conducted by each individual PAT, including their fact-finding visits to local areas.
- **Inclusive.** The PATs involved 400 people from inside and outside government and thousands more in consultation events. This ensured that Policy Action Teams understood the likely impact the policy would have on different groups and harnessed the skills and experience of as wide a range of people as possible.
- **Joined-up.** The PATs – individually and jointly - took a holistic view, looking beyond institutional boundaries to the Government’s strategic objectives. Ten different government departments or parts of government were involved – including the Treasury and Cabinet Office; Government Offices for the Regions; local government, the No 10 Policy Unit and delivery Agencies, including Benefits Agency and the Employment Service. The private, community and voluntary sectors were also involved. Thus both horizontal and vertical linkages across government and across sectors were forged.
- **Learned lessons.** Lessons were learned through drawing on evidence of approaches that had worked in deprived neighbourhoods in England and abroad.

The two elements of modern policy-making that were not encapsulated by the PAT process are those that relate to the monitoring of the success of existing policies - **Review** and **Evaluation**. However, both are reflected in the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. They are being taken forward by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) which is charged with implementing the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy.

### 3.5 The impact of PATs

The PATs were asked to report in three tranches during 1999 – in April, July and December. Reports from all 18 are available on the SEU web-site (click on the “Published Reports” button on [www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/index.htm](http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/index.htm)). A summary of main PAT findings and recommendations is available in a compendium document<sup>3</sup>. A PAT Audit was also published in January 2001 setting out for each PAT recommendation whether the Government had accepted it; where it had, which

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<sup>3</sup> SEU, *National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal Policy Action Team report summaries: a compendium*, TSO, 2000

department is leading on its implementation and the progress made to date; and where it had not, why not<sup>4</sup>.

The work of the PATs:

- Generated much interest among policy makers and stakeholders as a new way of developing policy, in particular in bringing outside expertise to bear on government policy and bringing together different departments and levels of government to work jointly with each other and with other sectors.
- Gave licence to more enlightened ways of working. One respondent said that PATs generated 'energy, ideas and relationships...and threw a bit of useful disequilibrium into ... internal policy-making processes.' They were felt to have had an energy and freshness that was highly valued. There was a sense of cohesion and team work generated, and a constructive free flow of ideas and common purpose, together with a commitment to moving beyond exploring problems to generating solutions and actionable policy outcomes. These features underpinned a sense among participants that the approach was innovative and different. The PATs were able to generate and rely on leadership and a real will from the centre of government to make 'joined-up' working effective.
- Resulted in high quality and robust reports the SEU could use and rely on in developing the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal.
- Influenced the Government's Year 2000 Spending Review. One of the main outcomes here was the development of floor or minimum targets so that, as from 2001, government departments are judged for the first time on progress in the areas where they are doing worst, rather than on the national average. For example, the Home Office has a target to ensure no district has a burglary rate more than three times the national average and the Department of Health has committed itself to narrowing the health gap between socio-economic groups and between the most deprived areas and the rest of the country.
- produced a set of evidence-based recommendations, within a very short space of time, many of which were accepted by the Government and have become part of Government policy.

Collectively the PATs made 569 recommendations for the Government to consider as it developed the National Strategy. A total of 492 (86%) were accepted by the Government and only 10 (2%) were rejected. NRU are looking at how best to follow-up the remaining 67 and monitoring the progress of all accepted PAT recommendations. Those that were accepted fed into the framework version of the National Strategy published for consultation in April 2000<sup>5</sup>, and along with the Government's spending review and other policy developments, informed the final National Strategy Action Plan<sup>6</sup> published in January 2001. As the PAT Audit shows, many are also being taken forward separately by the Department responsible for taking the lead. The PATs'

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<sup>4</sup> SEU, *National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal: Policy Action Team Audit*, TSO, 2001

<sup>5</sup> SEU, *National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal: a framework for consultation*, TSO, 2000

<sup>6</sup> SEU, *A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal*, TSO, 2001

recommendations have therefore had a considerable impact on government policy.

## 4 PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE PAT APPROACH

This section is based on in-depth interviews & group discussions involving a total of 32 people from 3 out of the 18 PATs (including departmental leads and Chairs) and from the SEU and Ministers. The 3 PATs covered were all ones that reported earlier, to ensure the study covered the complete PAT process. This may not be representative of the entire process, but the interviews offer valuable insights into what this new approach to policy-making felt like for some those involved. All members of the remaining 15 PATs were invited to comment on emerging findings.

The interviews with PAT members and key players identified a number of key lessons for supporting and developing the PAT approach. Such learning emerged from both:

- the characteristics and achievements of the PATs, for example in terms of their diverse composition and their strategy for developing their recommendations; and
- the challenges encountered by PATs and their members in coping with working in a new and different way.

Those interviewed expressed clear appreciation for the PAT approach as a new and inclusive approach to policy making. They also expressed a range of opinions on other aspects of the process – briefing & preparation; composition; the role of the Chair and Champion Minister etc. This section reviews each of these areas, covering the features and characteristics of PATs that worked well for their members, and those which some thought could be improved in any future similar exercise.

### 4.1 Appreciating PATs as a 'new' approach to policy-making

Members of Policy Action Teams expressed a clear sense of being part of a new, different and better approach that had been manifested when Policy Action Teams were working at their best. There were three aspects to this: the wide membership and external focus of the PATs; the process and mode of operation of PATs and the commitment of government departments and Champion Ministers to the PATs.

#### 4.1.1 *Membership and external focus*

First, there was a recurrent view that, when it worked well, the PAT approach had been a highly effective way of engaging a wide range of different people and organisations, bringing together key players and stakeholders in different policy areas.<sup>7</sup> The diverse composition of PATs drew together a range of different perspectives within and beyond Government, and PAT members felt this led to

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<sup>7</sup> Some of those interviewed had ideas as to how to further improving the balance and diversity of PATs and these are discussed in para 4.3 below.

deeper and better analysis and coverage of the issues, and to more informed debate and recommendations.

Having the opportunity to carry out site visits and to commission research was also highly valued. Being involved in site visits sometimes left a lasting impression on members, giving them first hand experience, often for the first time, of the problems and issues the PAT was tackling. Where it had been carried out effectively, it was thought that this sort of fieldwork had helped PAT members to understand what was happening on the ground, had given insights into different practical approaches and good and bad practice, and had generated new ideas for ways of tackling problems. It helped to move the discussion beyond theoretical to practical issues, and to make recommendations more informed and 'reality tested'.

Where research had been commissioned or reviewed, this was felt to have helped to move the debate forward and to provide real depth and substance to discussion and analysis.

#### **4.1.2 Process and Mode of Operation**

Open and inclusive discussion meant that representatives from outside Government had played a key role, which had moved beyond consultation or acting as a 'sounding board', to active, equal involvement in policy development. There had also been wider consultation exercises when people or organisations not represented on the PAT had been involved through conferences, seminars or local events, and this too was felt to have enhanced the outward focus and inclusiveness of the PATs.

When the PATs were working at their best, the quality of debate in PAT meetings was regarded as impressive. There was praise for the wide-ranging approach taken, drawing in different perspectives, which had led to a raft of solutions, rather than partial coverage of issues. Discussions had been creative and challenging, with a high level and wide range of expertise drawn in through the contributions of members both generally and through focused papers.

Policy Action Teams were felt to have had an energy, dynamic and 'freshness' that was highly valued. There was a sense of cohesion, teamwork, enjoyment and common purpose, and a commitment to moving beyond exploring problems to generating solutions and actionable policy outcomes.

There was praise for the openness and commitment generally displayed in PAT meetings. There had been a constructive free flow of ideas and discussion, with a willingness to listen, share ideas, information and research. The frankness and honesty of members was valued, as was their open-minded approach and their willingness to take risks by moving beyond public or accepted positions.

A further feature of the positive operation of the PATs was that the openness and wide-ranging nature of the debate had been balanced with effective management and direction. Within PATs, this had been provided by constructive chairing which had marshalled discussion without inhibiting or limiting it; by the involvement of Ministers adding a helpful pragmatism, and by SEU link people helping to keep discussion 'on track' and injecting strategic thinking. The steps taken by the SEU to help to 'join up' the work of the individual PATs were valued.

### **4.1.3 Government commitment**

There was a sense that the SEU and lead departments were clearly committed to the inclusive approach to policy development, taking seriously and placing a high value on the contributions of representatives from other departments and beyond Government. Where lead departments had been fulsome in their commitment of human, research and financial resources, this was seen as evidence of their support for the work of PATs.

### **4.1.4 Other positive features of the PAT approach as a 'new' approach to policy development**

The general view of respondents, from which very few deviated, was that the PAT approach was a worthwhile and valuable mechanism for policy-making, and one that had clearly added value to more traditional approaches. The key components of this were:

- the breadth and depth of each PATs exploration of issues relevant to their topic, and the systematic and thorough approach taken: this was seen to be underpinned by the involvement of a wide range of experts and by the focused and dynamic approach taken in PAT deliberations;
- the creative nature of discussions and of the recommendations generated, which it was felt was less constrained than those which would have emanated from more traditional approaches. It was felt that the PAT approach had 'moved thinking on' and generated new ideas. This was underpinned by the diversity of composition of the PATs, the dynamism of debate within the PATs, the experience of site visits and the integration of research into PAT thinking;
- a view that the recommendations generated were of particular value and utility because they had been 'reality tested'. As one respondent put it, they 'had the imprint of life'. Again, this was underpinned by the diversity of Team composition and by the opportunity to carry out site visits which enabled people to see first hand the reality of deprived neighbourhoods and to talk to people with experience of living in them and tackling the problems they raised;
- a view that the recommendations had particular credibility and were likely to be influential: underpinned both by the involvement of experienced organisations and individuals beyond Government Departments, and by the cross-Departmental focus which was seen to have led to greater 'buy in' across Government; and
- the quality and scope of the reports, particularly given the timetable within which they were produced.

Respondents also talked about what they had gained personally and professionally from being involved in a high profile and wide-ranging process which involved key players and stakeholders within and beyond central government.

## 4.2 Briefing and preparation

The briefing and preparation of key players and members for their role within the PATs emerged as an important influence on the way they went about their work. Attendance at a meeting to launch the PAT approach provided an important symbol for PAT Chairs that they were about to embark on a different type of policy-making process. PAT members interviewed understood at the outset that the approach was building on good policy-making practice and that its key principles were : that it was to be 'outward facing'; to involve people from within and outside central government; to consider in depth a series of topics concerned with neighbourhood renewal which would contribute to the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal; to be evidence-based and to be conducted within a set timetable.

There was broad acknowledgement that in order for the work of the PATs to contribute effectively to the National Strategy, some consistency was required in the approach and style of individual PATs. However, some felt that owing to the speed in setting up the SEU PATs and the newness of the approach, it was not possible to prepare the PATs in sufficient detail before they embarked on their work. There was also little prescription as to how the PATs would operate. The SEU had decided that in order to create an environment that would encourage innovation, it would deliberately leave some aspects of the PATs' work ambiguous. While some PAT members felt that in this environment they were able to develop their own ways of working which were innovative compared to traditional forms of policy development, others felt that clearer direction at the outset would have been helpful.

Getting a balance between prescriptions and creativity – between “tight” and “loose” control – will always be difficult. The areas in which some felt clearer direction at the outset would have helped them were:

- **The processes by which PATs should operate**

Some saw the freedom to decide how each team wished to work as fostering creativity and a sense of ownership. Others felt more guidance would have helped them get the PAT up and running more quickly.

- **The status of the PATs, their members and outputs**

Some PAT members were unsure whether their role was to act as an “expert” on the particular topic or to represent the interests of their organisation or government department. The PAT approach challenged traditional approaches to representing sectional interests in the process of policy development. Some people found this easier to respond to than others. Making it more transparent from the outset could help.

- **Expectations of the final product**

Some PAT members were clear from the outset that the output would be a written report with specific recommendations feeding into the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. Others, especially non civil servants, were not. For the latter group this meant the shift from discussion and evidence-gathering to reporting felt abrupt. The same people felt disappointment that PATs were disbanded before implementation.

Initial lack of clarity around how a PAT should work resulted in significant challenges for some PATs. Nevertheless, there was value in the SEU approach of not making the PAT approach too specific from the start. One result of this ambiguity was that individual PATs were sometimes highly innovative in their approach to their task, even though they were not always sure that they were moving in the required direction. Consequently the process generated considerable learning and creativity that otherwise might not have been achieved.

### 4.3 The composition of the PATs

The aspiration to be inclusive and joined-up was fully understood, with the varied composition of the PATs seen as an important element of this. Many PAT members felt that PATs 'opened up the pool of ideas', largely as a result of the creative mix of practitioners, academics, researchers and policy-makers that were on them. This mix provided the resources needed to facilitate deeper and better analysis and coverage of the issues, and more informed debate and recommendations. The selection of PAT members was seen as being vital to this.

The importance of rigour and transparency in the formation of a PAT was repeatedly emphasised throughout the study. A clear set of guiding principles emerged on this:

- The need for *balance* in the make-up of a PAT was highlighted. Although a PAT might have representation from many constituencies, it was essential to prevent over or under representation of some quarters.
- The need for a PAT to reflect the diversity within society was emphasised. There was general applause for the specific inclusion of participants from a diverse range of ethnic, cultural and faith communities - an integral part of the success of the PAT approach. Also mentioned was the need for the involvement of other minority groups such as disabled people, and lesbians and gay men. Many of those from outside central government felt that, although all key constituencies were represented, PATs could have benefited from an even greater representation from the community or grassroots levels.
- The need for open-minded, as well as innovative and creative, members was considered pivotal to the PATs. PAT members who demonstrated listening skills and a readiness to value the contribution of others and learn from the emerging outputs of the PAT were highly valued by other members.
- PAT members from local communities expressed concern about their ability to represent their whole community. However, the SEU had selected such members to bring their own experience to the table, not to speak on behalf of others in their communities. Greater clarity about this would have helped them.
- It was recognised that adherence to all of these principles – particularly those relating to inclusivity and diversity – could result in a PAT that was unwieldy in terms of its size. One solution suggested was to keep the core membership small and to involve other constituencies through research or consultation. Alternatively, it was felt that any tension between size and inclusivity could be overcome by having a flexible approach, such as a core membership with flexible peripheral members.

- Clarity of members' roles and purpose was seen as central to a successful PAT. In the main, it was felt that members should carry sufficient authority to be able to speak on behalf of the department or organisation for which they worked. Having members who were unable to contribute effectively without having to 'check with their chiefs' was generally felt to be unhelpful. In particular, it was regarded as unhelpful if members were not clear about their role or the purpose of their involvement on a PAT; or if they did not attend regularly or sent inadequately briefed substitutes.

#### 4.4 The role of the Chair and the Champion Minister

Another feature of the positive operation of the PATs was that the openness and wide-ranging nature of the debate they had was balanced with effective management and direction. PAT members felt the Chair and Champion Minister were particularly important in facilitating this.

**The Chair.** As the person responsible for the content and conduct of meetings – the main discussion forum of the PATs - the Chair of each PAT was central to the effectiveness of the approach.

Most Chairs were senior civil servants from the department leading for the Government on their PAT. Some representatives from non-governmental organisations and community members felt Chairs should also have been drawn from outside central government. By contrast, civil servants felt that inside knowledge of central government, as well as access to key players and resources within their department, were important components of being a successful Chair.

PAT members judged commitment to, and understanding of, the issues relating to the PAT topic as vital to being a good Chair. Where a Chair did not have a full or thorough knowledge of the topic area, it was felt their effectiveness was impeded.

There were different views of how the role of Chair should be played, but in general PAT members felt Chairs were most successful when they were open and willing to entertain new policy directions and allowed ideas to emerge, as opposed to favouring particular policy directions from the outset. Apart from this, different styles of chair were valued: both those who provided a strong lead in formulating the agenda of a PAT and also those who played a more facilitative and supportive role. The ideal PAT chair would give a strong lead initially, providing a framework and leadership at the outset, but take on a more facilitative and supportive role later on.

Chairs operated most effectively when acting as inclusively as possible in their management of discussion, and it was important that they were seen to invite contributions from all constituencies within a PAT. The importance of fostering creativity and open exploration of issues was also stressed. Chairs who were able to draw on techniques to encourage strategic thinking, problem-solving and creative thinking in meetings also made a significant difference to the effectiveness of PATs.

The value of a neutral Chair was underscored by many. A Chair who developed familiarity with the Champion Minister's own views about the PAT topic and who could steer the work of the PAT in that direction was valued by others. This was seen as fostering a more successful PAT in terms of the number of

recommendations that would be adopted by the Champion Minister and ultimately by the Government.

**The Champion Minister.** One of the unique features of the PAT approach was that each PAT had a 'Champion Minister', a minister who acted as an advocate for each topic covered. Champion Ministers attended some PAT meetings, talked to PAT members; met people living and working in deprived neighbourhoods; commented on draft reports and produced a foreword for their own. There was overwhelming support for having a 'Champion Minister'. This was felt to give the work more of a driving force. Indeed, PAT work was seen as being prioritised across Government as a result of direct input from ministers. The involvement of ministers lent a sense of kudos to the whole endeavour, especially among PAT members from outside central government. Ministers' active interest in progress signalled that the PAT's work was being taken seriously.

Some PAT members felt "their" Minister should have been more proactive in their relationship with their PAT. Others felt more involvement from Ministers could have constrained the debate within the PAT. Ministers themselves highlighted the competing demands on their limited time and felt it was perhaps unrealistic to expect them to be more heavily involved in the process.

Although Champion Ministers came together on several occasions to discuss and reflect upon emergent issues, there was support for strengthening inter-ministerial collaboration, reflecting the role of PATs in 'joining up' policy.

#### **4.5 The inclusiveness of the PAT process and the importance of building the team**

There was a general view that inclusivity was one of the fundamental pillars of the PAT approach. Respondents from outside central government laid particular emphasis on the need for the PATs to be as inclusive as possible in the way they operated and were structured. As already discussed membership was important in this, as was the approach taken by the chair. The latter was particularly important in making non-governmental organisations (NGOs) feel they were working as part of a team.

Site visits were also seen as adding to inclusiveness. They were valued for this, as well as a tool for gathering evidence and to focus the activity of the PAT on real, not abstract, issues was repeatedly stated. They helped to build a sense of team membership by uniting a PAT in common purpose. PAT members stressed the importance of the social element of site visits, for example as away days, where members could discuss issues more informally.

To encourage a more relaxed way of working together, it was suggested that meetings should be located outside central government buildings, which were felt to be somewhat daunting to those not used to the policy-making process, and therefore less conducive to free-thinking.

Trust and openness were key elements of a successful PAT which meant relationships between lead departments and some PAT members that predated the life of the PAT needed careful handling. There was unease from some members over the potential for bilateral discussions to occur behind the scenes, either to

assuage certain members' concerns, or to steer the agenda of a PAT. This was a particular fear where powerful lobby groups were represented on a PAT.

#### **4.6 The dynamics of the PATS**

Those PAT members who were interviewed praised the energy and dynamism of the PAT approach. They also made a number of suggestions on how this energy could best be nurtured and sustained.

- **Meetings**

Shorter and more frequent meetings were advocated by some. Meetings lasting less than four hours were seen as desirable and neutral locations helped to create the most appropriate working climate. And in order to be effective within the tight timetable, members felt PATs should meet at least once a month. Meeting less frequently meant that the PAT was in danger of losing momentum.

Meetings went well for participants when an informal physical environment was matched by an informal style of running the meeting. Open agendas which allowed NGOs in particular to raise issues were an important component of successful meetings.

- **Teambuilding**

The PATs which generated most sense of team working were led by chairs who actively tried to create a culture of interdependence and trust between the participants. Site visits and away days, especially with a social component, facilitated teambuilding and many wished that they had occurred earlier in the PAT process. PATs worked best where overt teambuilding activity was undertaken.

- **Size**

A smaller group could be seen as exclusive rather than inclusive, but there was a general preference for a smaller rather than a larger forum. It was felt that a smaller PAT contributed to more focused activity and inspired a greater sense of commitment from members. The optimum size of a PAT was judged to be around 20 people. Where larger PATs operated, they sometimes used subgroups as a way of overcoming the disadvantages of their size. However, there were mixed views about the utility of these. Some felt that they were an effective way of dividing up the work of a PAT. Others felt that they created further work because the work of sub-groups ultimately needed communication to and deliberation by the full Team.

- **Sustaining commitment**

The importance of sustaining commitment among PAT members was emphasised recurrently. Success of the PAT was directly related to the considerable motivation and commitment of its members. In this, feedback on progress from the SEU link person or from the Champion Minister was greatly valued by PAT members. Regular stocktaking against their brief and the work of other PATs was also seen as essential in sustaining members' interest and enthusiasm.

Some PATs experienced problems with attendance at meetings, particularly from some representatives of government departments. This was generally perceived to be counter productive, since the more departments invested in a

PAT the greater the return they got. Some spoke of the deleterious effect non-attendance had on the progress of a PAT, for example, needing to revisit old debates because some people had not been present to contribute. It was also felt that regular absences of members could affect the balance of views within a PAT and that the demands of contributing to a PAT should be spelled out at the beginning and an informal contract made to commit to the process.

- **Pace**

One of the ways in which the PAT approach was perceived as different to traditional consultative approaches to policy-making was the short timescale for the work. Many PAT members commented that the brisk pace gave a clear focus compared with the longer timeframes of other approaches, such as departmental working groups. Some found juggling the demands of a short timescale and an evidence-based approach demanding.

- **Resources**

The resources allocated by lead departments to individual PATs varied considerably. The PAT members interviewed felt this reflected the amount of enthusiasm within different lead Departments for the approach. Whatever the cause, it resulted in some Departmental secretariats struggling to meet the demands of their role, while others were more than adequately resourced to do so.

For Government representatives, those from large non governmental organisations and from the commercial sector, participation in PATs was an integral part of a paid job. This was not the case for community practitioners and representatives. Smaller NGOs said that involvement in the PAT approach had been a considerable drain on their already over-stretched resources and that, without some consultancy fee for involvement, they would be forced to decline future offers of such involvement.

It was also felt by some that the methods used for paying and reclaiming expenses assumed that all PAT members had funds to cover costs in advance, which was not always the case.

#### **4.7 The collection of evidence**

The PATs used a variety of means to collect evidence relating to the problems, causes and policy questions at hand including: drawing on the expertise of individual members – through either informally or formally commissioning papers and presentations from members or sometimes other outside experts; drawing on existing research; visits to various projects and sites throughout the country; and research commissioned on behalf of a PAT by the lead department (or, more rarely, commissioned by a PAT in collaboration with an external body).

Site visits as a tool for building teamwork and uniting PATs was repeatedly emphasised. They also often left a lasting impression on PAT members, providing vivid insights into what was happening on the ground and into good and bad practice. They were also valued as a means of generating new ideas about how to tackle problems. However, it was also recognised that site visits could not serve as a

substitute for evidence derived from more formal research and evaluation and that they needed to be grounded in a systematic analytical approach.

Where research was commissioned or reviewed, the debate was moved forward and depth and substance were added to the discussion. The amount of research commissioned varied between the PATs. Where there was little, there was some concern the evidence base on which to build policy was too narrow. There was some discussion of the difficulties experienced in getting relevant research commissioned within the timetable the PATs were working to. It was viewed as highly desirable for departments to consider the research and evaluation needs of PATs when formulating their annual programme of work. The commitment of departments to the work of the PATs was felt to have had as much of an impact on research funding as it did on other resources made available to PATs.

#### **4.8 Monitoring, liaison and collaboration between multiple PATs**

In order to co-ordinate the work of 18 different PATs the SEU set up and managed various monitoring and liaison systems. There was broad acknowledgement that this was a considerable organisational task, and the efforts of the SEU in this respect were praised.

The main mechanism for cross-PAT liaison and collaboration was the group of SEU link people. One of these was assigned to each PAT and they were co-ordinated and directed within the SEU by an 'Air Traffic Control Team'. These SEU link people were repeatedly praised for their ability to see 'the big picture'; understand how the work of individual PATs contributed to the development of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal and communicate this to PAT members.

In addition, there were several cross-PAT groups – such as the Inter-Departmental Group and the Core Group. The Inter-Departmental Group facilitated cross-departmental scrutiny of the PAT reports and considered their contribution to the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. It was made up of civil servants and PAT members. The Core Group was a smaller group of cross-departmental officials who helped to develop the National Strategy and identify links with related policy developments in government (such as Welfare Reform, the New Deal, etc).

Responsibility for 'joining up' PATs was generally seen to rest firmly with the SEU and not with individual PATs or Chairs. Perhaps because of this, there were concerns about the lack of communication between individual PATs. This was judged to be one of the main shortfalls of the process. There was appreciation that the number of topics involved made cross-PAT communication difficult. However, such communication was felt to be an important way of avoiding duplication between PATs and of ensuring that certain policy questions did not remain unanswered. Where PATs did share information, for example through representatives within the same Government Department or large non governmental organisations, those interviewed felt this led to greater congruence in the recommendations delivered.

There were several suggestions on how liaison and collaboration could be improved in the future. First, there was general encouragement for increased resources for 'joining up'. The SEU links and the 'Air Traffic Control Team' were felt to be over-stretched and in need of greater support. Secondly, liaison between PATs could have been enhanced by the establishment of better networking systems between Chairs. Establishing thematic groupings of PATs at the outset of the process was

another suggestion put forward aimed at ensuring that liaison between PATs was not solely reliant on the SEU.

#### **4.9 Reporting PAT recommendations**

Each PAT was required to produce a written report, in which it presented the evidence gathered relating to the topic under investigation, and put forward policy recommendations. The drafting of reports was largely the responsibility of the lead departmental secretariat and the Chair. However, it was PAT members who decided the content of the report and formulated policy recommendations. Broadly, those interviewed were happy with the content of the reports. There was a general view that they represented a balanced summary of the issues discussed within the PATs, although, inevitably, some people felt that greater or lesser emphasis could have been placed on certain recommendations.

Some from outside central government wanted more inclusivity in the process of report writing. Having one or two civil servants responsible for drafting the final report was viewed in sharp contrast to the inclusiveness of the rest of the process. Efforts were made by some PATs to ensure their reports reflected the collective view - such as holding away days to discuss and comment upon report structure and content, or allowing members to redraft sections of the report which they felt were unrepresentative – but these did not completely satisfy all members. Indeed, members of one PAT noted that the final report included material not generated by PAT deliberations. On the other hand, there was resistance to ‘drafting by committee’.

Concern was also registered about the transition within the life of a PAT from evidence gathering and debate to the reporting stage. For some, this shift felt abrupt. Members described being ‘hurried along’ and sensed undue pressure to come up with recommendations for inclusion in the report, which affected the creativity of the PAT approach. This difficult transition seems to have resulted primarily from the timescale assigned to the earlier reporting PATs. However, as noted earlier, lack of clarity about the brief and, to a certain extent, about expectations for the final product also contributed. Such difficulties were less common when recommendations were developed throughout the life of a PAT rather than confined to the last few meetings. In these instances, members felt recommendations benefited from being fully ratified by the entire group.

There was some discussion of the varying styles of reporting across the PATs. Some commented in particular on the widely divergent ways of presenting recommendations and also on the number of recommendations generated. It was felt that clearer guidance could aid more cohesion.

Finally, there was a general preference for more clarity over the status and ownership of the PAT reports. Confusion (both within the PATs and more widely) about whether the report belonged to ministers, the SEU or to the PAT itself did not help the drafting phase. While it was ultimately decided that the lead department should publish reports, it was felt that this should have been established at an earlier point in the drafting process to give members a clearer steer on what they were drafting.

## **5 BUILDING ON THE PAT APPROACH**

### **5.1 Uses of the PAT approach**

The general view was that the PAT approach could, and should, be used again. The approach was felt to be particularly suited to tackling issues that:

- are complex and cut across traditional Departmental boundaries;
- require innovative and fresh perspectives; and
- would benefit from the application of practical experience and specialist knowledge;
- involve stakeholders from across the social spectrum;
- require stakeholders to take ownership of issues at local/service delivery level.

### **5.2 Suggestions for future use of the PAT Approach**

The key suggestions for policy-makers intending to use a PAT approach are:

#### **Preparation and Briefing**

- Weigh up the balance between prescription and creativity. Some guidance on the principles of the approach is necessary, but beware of stifling innovation. If there is ambiguity in some areas, explain the reasons for this;
- provide induction for members on specified roles and required behaviours – if any. The induction process should build trust and teamwork;
- offer Chairs training about their role in a way that does not constrain the approach of individuals;
- plan for lead-in times that allow for scoping the work and reviewing or commissioning research.

#### **Composition and membership of the Policy Action Team**

- consider the make-up of the Team. You will want to ensure diversity, inclusivity and balance. The optimum size for a PAT was felt by participants in this study to be about 20 people;
- provide for flexibility in composition, for example, by expanding or contracting membership as required and consideration of associate member status;
- include those with direct and in-depth experience and knowledge of the issues;
- let members know why they have been approached to participate and whether they speak as individuals or as representatives of their communities, organisations or professions;
- encourage team building activities early on.

## **Ministerial and Departmental Buy-In**

- work to ensure buy-in from Ministers and senior officials;
- if more than one Minister and/or department is involved, build structures that support them to join-up and coordinate.

## **Evidence-based policy development**

- encourage members of Policy Action Teams to gain first-hand experience of the policy issue, for example through site visits;
- insist on a rigorous approach to collecting and reviewing evidence;
- evaluate what is presented as good/poor practice;
- systematically review the available research, and where possible, commission research to fill gaps.

## **Monitoring and Communication**

- monitor and steer the PAT's work, focusing on the substantive progress made and the issues and ideas being discussed, rather than on the achievement of particular milestones;
- use mechanisms for monitoring which involve personal contact and dialogue;
- think about how the PAT relates to other policy development forums and consider how best information might be shared between these;
- be clear about the processes that allow for communication within and between PATs and other forums and where responsibility for communication lies;
- generate mechanisms for information sharing – for example about key players and projects – as necessary.

## **Resourcing the Process**

- be clear about the resources needed to support successful PATs in terms of staff skills and time; financial resources etc;
- consider funding individual member's participation – particularly those from smaller organisations and local communities;
- think about resourcing certain functions of the policy development process, such as commissioning and conducting research, administration, report-writing and co-ordination;
- recognise the resource demands on link people and those with overall co-ordinating roles.

## ANNEX 1

### NINE FEATURES OF PROFESSIONAL POLICY MAKING FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

#### 1. Forward Looking

The policy-making process clearly defines outcomes that the policy is designed to achieve and, where appropriate, takes a long-term view based on statistical trends and informed predictions of social, political, economic and cultural trends, for at least five years into the future, of the likely effect and impact of the policy. The following points demonstrate a forward-looking approach:

- A statement of intended outcomes is prepared at an early stage
- Contingency or scenario planning
- Taking into account the Government's long term strategy
- Use of DTI's Foresight programme and/or other forecasting work

#### 2. Outward looking

The policy-making process takes account of influencing factors in the national, European and international situation; draws on experience in other countries; considers how policy will be communicated with the public. The following points demonstrate an outward looking approach:

- Makes use of OECD, EU mechanisms etc
- Looks at how other countries dealt with the issue
- Recognises regional variation within England
- Communications/presentation strategy prepared and implemented

#### 3. Innovative, flexible and creative

The policy making-process is flexible and innovative, questioning established ways of dealing with things, encouraging new and creative ideas; and where appropriate, making established ways work better. Wherever possible, the process is open to comments and suggestions of others. Risks are identified and actively managed. The following points demonstrate an innovative, flexible and creative approach:

- Uses alternatives to the usual ways of working (brainstorming sessions etc)
- Defines success in terms of outcomes already identified
- Consciously assesses and manages risk

- Takes steps to create management structures which promote new ideas and effective team working
- Brings in people from outside into policy team

#### **4. Evidence-based**

The advice and decisions of policy makers are based upon the best available evidence from a wide range of sources; all key stakeholders are involved at an early stage and throughout the policy's development. All relevant evidence, including that from specialists, is available in an accessible and meaningful form to policy makers.

Key points of an evidence-based approach to policy-making include:

- Reviews existing research
- Commissions new research
- Consults relevant experts and/or used internal and external consultants
- Considers a range of properly costed and appraised options

#### **5. Inclusive**

The policy- making process takes account of the impact on and/or meets the needs of all people directly or indirectly affected by the policy; and involves key stakeholders directly. An inclusive approach may include the following aspects:

- Consults those responsible for service delivery/implementation
- Consults those at the receiving end or otherwise affected by the policy
- Carries out an impact assessment
- Seeks feedback on policy from recipients and front line deliverers

#### **6. Joined up**

The process takes a holistic view; looking beyond institutional boundaries to the government's strategic objectives and seeks to establish the ethical, moral and legal base for policy. There is consideration of the appropriate management and organisational structures needed to deliver cross-cutting objectives. The following points demonstrate a joined-up approach to policy-making:

- Cross cutting objectives clearly defined at the outset
- Joint working arrangements with other departments clearly defined and well understood
- Barriers to effective joined up clearly identified with a strategy to overcome them
- Implementation considered part of the policy making process

#### **7. Review**

Existing/established policy is constantly reviewed to ensure it is really dealing with problems it was designed to solve, taking account of associated effects elsewhere. Aspects of a reviewing approach to policy-making include:

- Ongoing review programme in place with a range of meaningful performance measures
- Mechanisms to allow service deliverers /customers to provide feedback direct to policy makers set up
- Redundant or failing policies scrapped

## **8. Evaluation**

Systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of policy is built into the policy making process. Approaches to policy making that demonstrate a commitment to evaluation include:

- Clearly defined purpose for the evaluation set at outset
- Success criteria defined
- Means of evaluation built into the policy making process from the outset
- Use of pilots to influence final outcomes

## **9. Learns lessons**

Learns from experience of what works and what does not. A learning approach to policy development includes the following aspects:

- Information on lessons learned and good practice disseminated
- Account available of what was done by policy makers as a result of lessons learned
- Clear distinction drawn between failure of the policy to impact on the problem it was intended to resolve and managerial/operational failures of implementation.

### Research methods for this study

The research study was carried out by William O'Connor and Jane Lewis of the National Centre for Social Research with Steve Turner, a consultant to CMPS. It focused on 3 out of the 18 PATs. The selected PATs were ones that reported reasonably early, rather than the later-reporting PATs. This was to ensure that the study looked at the completed PAT process. The study involved a series of in-depth interviews and group discussions with:

- senior members of the SEU involved in the establishment and co-ordination of the PAT approach;
- the Champion Ministers for the three PATs;
- the Chairs of the three PATs;
- representatives of the lead Departments; and
- other members of the three PATs, involving people from different Government Departments and from a wide range of organisations and groups outside Central Government.

Fieldwork was carried out in summer 2000 and involved a total of 32 people from the PATs, SEU etc. in 17 in-depth interviews and five small group discussions. A topic guide was developed mapping the issues to be explored, open-ended and interactive questioning was used, and all interviews and group discussions were tape-recorded and transcribed. The data was analysed using Framework, a systematic method for content analysis.

To provide some understanding of how relevant the findings from this study were to the other 15 PATs, all members of the other PATs were invited to submit written comments on particular issues, and a small number did so. The responses from other PAT members suggests that many of the key findings of this report are in keeping with the experience of other PATs. The research team also reviewed responses to a self-completion survey that had been sent to all PAT Chairs by the SEU earlier in 2000.

## ANNEX 3

### LIST OF POLICY ACTION TEAMS

The 18 PATs were:

<b>PAT Subject Matter</b>	<b>Lead Dept</b>	<b>Chair</b>	<b>Champion Minister</b>
PAT 1: Jobs	DfEE	Mark Neale	Tessa Jowell
PAT 2: Skills	DfEE	Derek Grover	Tessa Blackstone
PAT 3: Business	HMT	Philip Rutnam	Stephen Timms
PAT 4: Neighbourhood Management	SEU	Jon Bright	Hilary Armstrong
PAT 5: Housing Management	DETR	Mike Gahagan	Nick Raynsford
PAT 6: Neighbourhood Wardens	Home Office	Lynda Locker then Richard Kornicki	Charles Clarke
PAT 7: Unpopular Housing	DETR	Mavis McDonald	Hilary Armstrong
PAT 8: Anti-Social Behaviour	SEU	Zena Peatfield	Charles Clarke
PAT 9: Community Self-Help	Home Office	William Fittall	Paul Boateng
PAT 10: Arts and Sport	DCMS	Paul Bolt	Kate Hoey
PAT 11: Schools Plus	DfEE	Rob Smith	Estelle Morris
PAT 12: Young People	SEU	Moira Wallace	Paul Boateng
PAT 13: Shops	DOH	Eileen Rubery	Patricia Hewitt
PAT 14: Financial Services	HMT	David Alexander	Melanie Johnson
PAT 15: Information Technology	DTI	David Baxter then Jenny Searle	Michael Wills
PAT 16: Learning Lessons	SEU	Jon Bright	Charles Falconer
PAT 17: Joining it up Locally	DETR	Andrew Whetnall	Hilary Armstrong
PAT 18: Better Information	SEU	Moira Wallace	Hilary Armstrong