

Executive Summary

Background

RAPID stands for Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development. It is a Government plan originally launched in cities in 2001. Last year it was extended to 20 provincial towns, one of which is Tralee. RAPID in Tralee covers 3 parts of the town: Shanakill & Ragoonane, Spa Rd & Balloonagh Estate, Mitchels Crescent & St Martin's Park.. RAPID's job is to get everyone working together locally so that the National Development plan can be delivered in a targeted and coordinated way.

The Tralee RAPID Area Implementation Team (AIT) was established in July 2002. The RAPID Coordinator was employed in July 2002 also. The AIT developed the Interim RAPID Plan for the period October 2002 to June 2003 in consultation with residents, community, voluntary and statutory organisations in each community.

Three Community Development agencies are providing ongoing support to the Community Representatives on the AIT. Partnership Trá Lí is supporting Spa Rd/Balloonagh Estate, Kerry Travellers Development Project is supporting Mitchel's Crescent/St. Martin's Park area and Tralee Community Development Project is supporting the Shanakill/Ragoonane area.

Partnership Trá Lí was the lead agency for the development of the Community Profiling reported here: it's Research & Evaluation staff oversaw the questionnaire design, trained volunteers in data inputting, conducted the analyses, presented preliminary findings to the three communities and the AIT and compiled the present report.

Summary of Findings

Respondent Profile

- ❖ **Response rate:** the overall response rate to the survey was high, representing almost two-thirds (63%) of the total number of households in the three areas
- ❖ **Age-range:** approaching 6 out of 10 (57%) are under 25 years. In the Mitchels/St. Martin's area the proportion of under-25s is particularly high, standing at 63 per cent. Dependency rates are low; 3 out of 10 (31%) are 15 years or younger and only 3 per cent of residents are of retirement age.
- ❖ **Lone parenting:** 17% of the 414 participating households said they contained a one-parent family
- ❖ **Disability:** over one quarter of the households (26%) contain someone with a disability
- ❖ **Childcare:** Shanakill/Ragoonane residents make more use of childcare facilities than people from the other two areas

Perceptions of Neighbourhoods

- ❖ In all three areas nearly one half of residents say they enjoy living in their particular locality, mostly because they have good, friendly neighbours
- ❖ 149 people - over one third (36%) of all households interviewed – said they would like to contribute their skills for the benefit of their community. In the Mitchels Crescent/St. Martin's Park the proportion of respondents wishing to be involved in community work went up to 55 per cent.
- ❖ The twin issues of lack of facilities for young people and anti-social behaviour (vandalism and under-age drinking) are the most pressing aspects identified by residents of both the Shanakill and Spa Road areas. Spa Road/Balloonagh residents are additionally concerned about drugs-related behaviour
- ❖ In the Mitchels/ St. Martin's area, poor estate maintenance is seen as the biggest problem, while the issue of discrimination towards the Traveller community follows close behind
- ❖ People from all three areas are unanimous in their call for 'proper' play areas for younger children on the estates. In addition, people from all areas prioritise street lighting, telephone and post boxes.

There are however some marked differences between areas:

- ❖ People in the Spa Road/Balloonagh area want traffic ramps to be put in place, as drivers taking short-cuts through their estate are a danger to young children.
- ❖ In the Mitchels area, residents are calling for proper management of horses, and a new wall and grotto within the estate, where they can be looked after.
- ❖ In the Shanakill/Rahoonane area, there is particular concern about the dyke area, which is perceived as a health hazard to residents living nearby.
- ❖ Issues facing young people are lack of venues and/or activities, contributing to anti-social behaviour such as drug and alcohol abuse and vandalism, whilst in the Mitchels/St. Martin's Park area discrimination is seen to be by far the biggest problem facing their young people.
- ❖ Few over-25s participate in social activities in the Mitchels/St. Martin's Park and Spa Road/Balloonagh areas. In the Shanakill/Rahoonane area however, 56 per cent of people say they use their Family Resource Centre for clubs, childcare, education courses, women's groups and dance classes.
- ❖ People in all three areas said they would like to participate in a Health/Women's group, Arts & Crafts, activities specifically for older residents, a One-Parent Family group, DIY classes, Keep Fit. Cookery. Computer Skills and sports of various kinds
- ❖ While nearly all respondents in the Spa Road/Balloonagh and Shanakill/Rahoonane estates experience no difficulties socialising outside their areas, this is true for only 39 per cent of respondents in the Mitchels

Crescent/St. Martin's Park area, with 55 per cent of people saying that discrimination is the major barrier.

Employment

- ❖ Unemployment levels in all three areas are high: in the Mitchels Crescent/St. Martin's Park area it is extremely high at 62 per cent: none of the 41 men of working age were in either full or part-time employment.
- ❖ Lack of affordable childcare was the most frequently mentioned difficulty. Residents of Mitchels Crescent & St. Martin's Park also cited discrimination against the Traveller community as a major barrier to employment prospects.

Education

- ❖ Levels of educational attainment are low, with only 10% overall having a third level qualification, while 35 per cent, in the Spa Road & Balloonagh area, being the highest proportion having obtained their Leaving Certificate.
- ❖ The Mitchels Crescent & St. Martin's area has by far the highest levels of educational disadvantage, with 70 per cent of its surveyed population having either primary level only (36%) or no formal qualification at all (34%).
- ❖ Levels of young people opting to stay in school appear to be low: people from all three areas were calling for study/homework support schemes.
- ❖ Figures for current participation in adult education and training courses are similarly low, ranging from 11 to 22 per cent overall. Respondents would be interested in attending Computer Skills, hobbies and Third Level studies.

Satisfaction with Services

Mainstream Agencies

- ❖ In the context of generally positive levels of satisfaction with mainstream agencies, relatively high levels of dissatisfaction were recorded for both Tralee Town Council and the Garda Síochána
- ❖ Most complaints regarding the Town Council are about house repairs, general estate maintenance and residents not knowing who to approach.
- ❖ Tenants would like to have a resident liaison person or caretaker who could respond to needs as they arise
- ❖ One third of residents overall think the Gardai in general could be more helpful. Suggestions included: more foot patrols, marked cars and working together with young people
- ❖ Particular issues are drug dealing (Spa Road/Balloonagh), under-age drinking (all areas) and harassment by Tralee Gardai (Mitchels/St. Martin's Park).

- ❖ Regarding the other main services there are a significant proportion of people saying that they are unaware what services are offered.

Community Services

- ❖ There is a high proportion of residents of all three areas who appear to have little or no awareness of many of these community services.
- ❖ While levels of dissatisfaction were generally low, comments included lack of information about/access to Cumann Iosaef, the inclusion of young people, an unwillingness to employ Travellers and a perception that these services do not operate in the Mitchels Crescent/St. Martin's Park areas.

Community Consultation

- ❖ The preliminary main findings of the surveys were made the focus of community consultations and residents agreed responses in terms of recommendations to go forward to the Area Implementation Team.
- ❖ These meetings produced some very positive recommendations to add to those emerging from analyses of the questionnaire data.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, five distinct themes were identified that encompass people's primary concerns in all three RAPID areas of Tralee. These are: young people and families, estate management and community safety, quality childcare, Traveller inclusion and community development and health.

4.1 Young People and Families

Issues facing young people came up time and again as a major concern in all three RAPID areas. These issues are multi-faceted: for example, a lack of facilities or places to socialise in the community are seen to be contributing factors to the problem of alienation, symptoms of which are under-age drinking, drug-taking and general anti-social behaviour, such as vandalism. A tendency for teenagers to leave school rather than study for their Leaving Certificate is an allied source of concern to parents interviewed on doorsteps.

Recommendations

Agencies with particular responsibility for young people could take a partnership approach to develop an integrated, sustainable strategy, using pooled resources, that has the potential to address all facets of a young person's life. Of crucial importance is the inclusion of young residents themselves in the process, to facilitate the development of 'ownership' of their lives and communities.

Specific actions could include:

- ❖ *The Gardai and Tralee Town Council to commit to engaging in long-term consultation with young people;*

- ❖ *Study Support schemes/After-School programmes/Home-School Liaison and an Educational Welfare Officer to be made available in all areas;*
- ❖ *The process of sourcing funding for play areas for younger children in all areas to be begun, with timescales;*
- ❖ *The development of an integrated family support service;*
- ❖ *Respond to the call for the introduction/continuation of parenting skills classes.*

4.2 Estate Management and Community Safety

A common concern in the three areas is the environment in which people have to live, especially the need for house repairs and improved estate maintenance. Other issues that arose varied from area to area. In the Shanakill/Rahoonane area, the state of the dyke is causing a great deal of concern. In the Spa Road/Balloonagh area people are particularly worried about cars from outside the area speeding through the estate in the mornings. These residents are equally concerned about the incidence of drug-related behaviour, including reported drug dealing, which they see as a threat to their younger family members. In the Mitchels Crescent/St. Martin's Park area of town, residents are primarily highlighting the need for their houses to be upgraded, especially with regard to heating.

Recommendations

An integrated, sustainable yet realistic plan needs to be agreed between residents and Tralee Town Council that can maximise the use of scarce resources in the current climate of Government cut-backs. In this regard, the willingness of a third of all residents to participate in community work could be harnessed to good effect if the current momentum is acted upon without too much delay.

Specific suggestions included:

- ❖ *The perceived health hazard caused in the dyke area of Shanakill/Rahoonane to be dealt with as a priority;*
- ❖ *The provision of traffic calming measures, especially in the Spa Road/Balloonagh and Rahoonane areas to be prioritised for funding;*
- ❖ *Discussions with Traveller men and the Town Council on horse management to come to agreement as soon as possible and a scheme implemented;*
- ❖ *A caretaker available at set times to respond to issues as they arise and/or a specific Council staff member to be given responsibility for each area, so that people know who to contact at the Town Council offices;*
- ❖ *If a little financial help from the Town Council could be made available to purchase shrubs, residents would provide free labour for community planting;*

- ❖ *Community clean-ups would be organised by Residents Associations if the Town Council would provide trailers at agreed intervals;*
- ❖ *Estate Management courses to continue, empowering residents to take charge of their own neighbourhoods;*
- ❖ *Clarify and standardise the role of the Community Gardai.*

4.3 Quality Childcare

Overall, levels of educational attainment, participation in training courses and employment were found to be low, Participation in both courses and employment in all three Tralee areas is hampered by a common difficulty, namely, a lack of affordable childcare places. Under the National Development Plan, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform initiated the ‘*Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme*’ 2000-2006’ The subsequent establishment of the Kerry County Childcare Committee has provided a much-needed point of co-ordination for childcare provision in County Kerry,

Recommendations

Since childcare has been identified as a major barrier to progression into the workforce, it is in the interests of a broad range of agencies, community groups and employers to plan a local strategy, liaising with the County Childcare Committee.

Specific actions should aim to:

- ❖ *Increase the number of childcare places by supporting existing childcare provision to develop and expand their services;*
- ❖ *Improve the quality of services by facilitating childcare staff training in, for example, Special Needs and Behavioural Difficulties;*
- ❖ *Promote the profession by supporting potential students to undertake Childcare Level 2 training;*
- ❖ *Support/ expand the local childcare network, disseminating information about local facilities/training to parents, providers and the general public;*
- ❖ *Support more special needs places;*
- ❖ *The potential for course and work-place crèches in the Tralee area could be explored with local employers and education/training organisations.*

4.4 Inclusion of Travellers

Discrimination against Travellers was cited as a serious barrier to education, training, employment and social activities, by residents of the Mitchels Crescent/St. Martin’s Park area. This is undoubtedly the issue that dominates all areas of the lives of people

living in this Tralee community. While recent legislation and the establishment of the Equality Authority have raised awareness, the effect at local level is slow to be felt and much can be done within local communities.

Recommendations

All sectors, from statutory agencies to community groups and private businesses, need to come together with the Traveller community to support improvements to Traveller quality of life in Tralee

Specific activities could include:

- ❖ Assist agencies to question and improve approach to Traveller community;*
- ❖ Consultation between agencies and Travellers of all age-groups in order to develop a strategy for Traveller inclusion in the town;*
- ❖ Exploration of ways to integrate young Travellers into mainstream sporting organisations, using a positive discrimination approach;*
- ❖ Create for a to raise awareness of Traveller issues amongst the settles community: anti-discrimination packages to be sourced for Community Centres and schools;*
- ❖ A Horse Management scheme to enhance both Traveller culture and employment in the area;*
- ❖ The creation of opportunities for young people from diverse cultural backgrounds to socialise together;*
- ❖ Programmes and courses in the local Community Centre aimed at increasing confidence and self-esteem*
- ❖ Support for those Travellers who do participate in mainstream activities/employment to act as role models/mentors, especially to younger members of the local Traveller community.*

4.5 Community Development and Health

In the case of general community development., the survey findings showed both a widespread interest in personal capacity-building and a willingness to become involved in community-led activities aimed at benefiting the community as a whole. The reporting of under-age drinking and drug-related behaviour among young people in all three areas indicates the need for a strategic, pro-active health education programme to be put in place.

Recommendations

There is an important role for local support agencies and Community Centre management committees in prioritising and facilitating community empowerment by means of capacity-building activities. Likewise, the Southern Health Board and Tralee Town Council are perhaps best placed to address the health issues identified by residents of the three communities.

Specific actions could include:

A long-term approach to community development:

- ❖ Wider representation in Residents Associations and on Community Centre management committees, ensuring equality for marginalised groups;*
- ❖ Training and support for new members eg. in Estate Management and Committee Skills;*
- ❖ Computer, hobbies, personal development, Third Level and Return-to-Work courses, to reflect people's stated preferences;*
- ❖ Developing strategies to involve young people in estate management activities;*
- ❖ A feasibility study of community gardening/composting;*
- ❖ Develop a Directory of Services, regular Newsletters and/or Information Points in each area;*
- ❖ Continue to support and develop community representatives and community cluster groups.*

A strategic focus on family health, developing a community-based approach:

- ❖ Health promotion activities for all age groups, using a 'fun' approach*
- ❖ A visiting nurse in all schools;*
- ❖ Targeting under-age alcohol abuse, drug-taking and depression, reaching young people through schools and their parents via open talks and discussions in Community Centres;*

In conclusion, this survey of three areas of Tralee town has yielded valuable insights. In terms of progressing local communities, both common and divergent needs have been identified. Perhaps above all however findings have demonstrated the importance of an inclusive, participative, bottom-up approach. This was reinforced by the finding that over one third of the households visited said they would be willing to contribute their skills in any community-led activities on behalf of their neighbourhoods. If residents are involved at centre-stage with key agencies from the very outset, the resulting regeneration will be equitable, more meaningful to all stakeholders, more relevant to people's circumstances and therefore is likely to be more sustainable in the longer term.