

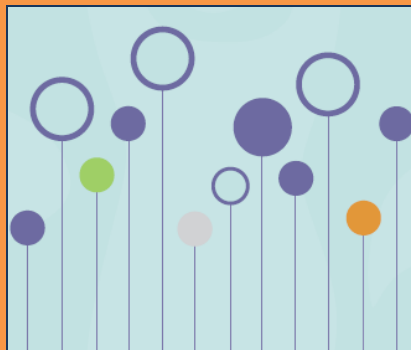


"Linking Women In The Pursuit Of Justice And Equality"



Longford  
Women's Link

# Business Plan 2008 – 2010





**Contents**

Contents..... 2

Foreword..... 4

1. Executive Summary..... 5

2. Context..... 8

    2.1 Why Gender Equality Matters ..... 8

    2.2 The Double Dividend: Equality for Women Benefits their Children ..... 8

    2.3 Disadvantage in Longford ..... 9

    2.4 Our Approach & Key Issues..... 10

3. LWL’s Vision ..... 11

4. Building a Theory for Change..... 15

    4.1 Introduction – Developing the Theory of the Problem..... 15

    4.2 Lack of Economic Independence ..... 15

    4.3 Specific Needs of Women from New Communities..... 17

    4.4 Domestic Violence ..... 20

    4.5 Theory of Change ..... 22

5. LWL’s Core Activities ..... 25

    5.1 Summary ..... 25

    5.2 Describing LWL’s Integrated Approach..... 26

    5.3 Strategic Objectives ..... 27

    5.4 Direct Support..... 28

    5.5 Building Community Capacity:..... 30

    5.6 Advocacy: ..... 35

    5.5 LWL’s 3 Areas of Activity – Inter-linkages & Mutual Support..... 38

6. LWL’s Operational Plan – Strategic Objective & Outcomes..... 39



## Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010

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6.1 Direct Support.....	39
6.2 Building Community Capacity .....	40
6.3 Advocacy .....	40
7. Organisational Infrastructure.....	42
7.1 Strategic Objectives, Actions & Outcomes .....	42
7.2 LWL Organisational Structure .....	43
7.3 LWL Governance .....	45
7.4 Risk management.....	47
8. Financial Needs & Financial Strategy .....	48
9. Phasing .....	52



### Foreword

Since its inception in 1995, Longford Women's Link has been guided by a fundamental purpose of providing a space for Longford women to 'develop their voice' in order to address the myriad issues that they and their families face. Despite major changes within the organisation and within the County over these years, Longford Women's Link remains committed to this guiding vision.

This Strategic Plan, 2008-10 is the second of our plans, devised in order to give the organisation, its Board of Management, and its staff, direction and focus. The plan reflects the growth of our work and our presence in Longford, now widely acknowledged, as we have developed our understanding of the complexities and challenges faced in addressing gender inequality and its consequences. The new Strategic Plan is acknowledgement too, that when we support the women of our community, we also support their families – our childcare, counselling, and economic independence programmes are clear evidence of this 'double dividend'. The Plan also reflects the changing face of Co Longford, and particular emphasis is given to the challenges faced by the new communities of the County, the refugee and migrant women of many countries, and their families.

The Strategic Plan 2008-10 signals a significant shift taken by the Women's Link in addressing women's issues. Whereas the range of services previously provided by the organisation were largely project-based, funding-driven and time-constrained, leading to a 'silo' type development, our process of facilitated critical reflection that underpins this Plan, undertaken over a period of two years, has determined that if our work is to achieve maximum impact it needs to be embedded firmly within advocacy and policy-influencing contexts. Furthermore, our traditional approach of supporting individual women is steadily being redirected towards a more collective approach, to the building of the community-capacity of women to act as agents of local and national influence.

My predecessor, the late Mary O'Hara (1946-2005), wrote of her experience as Chair of Longford Women's Link shortly before she died, 'My memories are of laughter and some tears, of women supporting women through good times and bad times.' We are no longer a handful of staff working in a rented office. We have grown to be a substantial local organisation, in its own premises, providing affordable childcare, training and support in employment and self-employment options, domestic violence support and advocacy, and counselling services for women and their families. Longford Women's Link has established productive working partnerships with many local agencies, and represents women's issues in an ever-increasing number of local, regional, national and transnational fora. Nevertheless, we still remain a place of 'women supporting women', and a place where women can come to share their laughter and their tears.

Elsie Moxham, Chairperson, Longford Women's Link



## 1. Executive Summary

Longford Women's Link (LWL) is a local organisation aimed at increasing the participation of women in Longford in the economic, social and cultural life of their community. From its origins in the Irish Countrywomen's Association in 1995, Longford Women's Link has grown and evolved to become an established and widely respected organisation providing a range of supports and services for the women of County Longford, particularly focusing on marginalised groups.

The National Women's Strategy<sup>1</sup> clearly demonstrates that Irish society still has a significant way to go before gender equality is truly achieved. As an organisation focused on women, we focus our efforts on identifying and addressing key inequalities that prevent women in Longford achieving their full economic potential. Statistics demonstrate that Longford is a particularly disadvantaged county, both economically and socially, and we believe that the poverty and social exclusion experienced by many women in Co Longford is compounded by the unequal position of women in society. Conversely, improving women's equality has benefits that extend further than women themselves; when women are empowered, children and whole families benefit<sup>2</sup> and the benefits can have ripple effects to future generations.

Our Vision for the future is that:

**Women in Longford can fulfill their potential in a safe and equal society**

As we developed this strategic plan, we used a framework known as the *Theory of Change* to define and document the nature of the problem that it is we are trying to address, and how the organisation can act, at a local, regional and national level to positively influence the lives of women and their families in the context of this problem, and work towards achieving our vision. We identified 3 key issues that many women in Longford face that contribute to, and maintain poverty and disadvantage for women and their families:

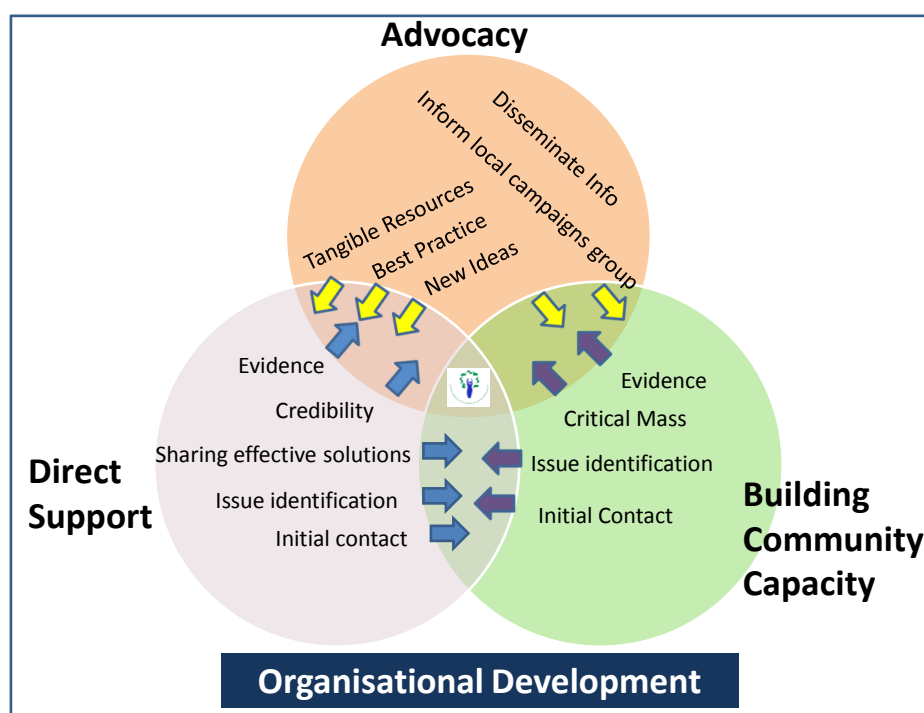
1. Economic Independence
2. Specific Needs of Women from New Communities
3. Domestic Violence

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<sup>1</sup> National Women's Strategy, April 2007, Dept of Justice, Equality & Law Reform

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF State of the World's Children Report, 2007: Women and Children, The Double Dividend of Gender Equality

These issues are not independent or stand alone, but rather they interact with each other, and with other issues, to create situations of complex disadvantage where a single intervention or change will not be sufficient to create real and lasting change. Our integrated approach looks at the various barriers and underlying issues faced by women and their families in Longford, how these issues interact, and then designs and implements interventions which feed into each other, strengthen each other and provide a multi-dimensional, holistic response. An example of this is providing support around economic independence to women experiencing domestic violence, as well as the more traditional approach of providing emotional support, and information on legal processes etc. Within this integrated approach, there are 3 main areas of focus in terms of activities for the next 3 years: Direct Support, Building Community Capacity, and Advocacy. Each of these areas feeds into each other, and provides opportunities for synergies and lesson learning:





Under each of these areas we have identified a number of strategic objectives, and then have outlined the different activities and action in each area which will contribute towards achieving these objectives.

<b><i>Direct Support</i></b>
<b>Strategic Objective 1:</b> Individual women in Longford can access their rights and entitlements for themselves and for their children
<b><i>Building Community Capacity</i></b>
<b>Strategic Objective 2:</b> Longford women's social and economic independence is increased
<b>Strategic Objective 3:</b> Women's collective voice in Longford is making a positive impact on the local community
<b><i>Advocacy</i></b>
<b>Strategic Objective 4:</b> The achievement of LWL's policy development priorities positively impact on the lives of lone parents, victims of domestic violence and new communities both locally and nationally
<b>Strategic Objective 5:</b> LWL's integrated service model is recognised as good practice and replicated elsewhere

The recognition of the need to develop our organisation to ensure the longer term sustainability of Longford Women's Link underpins the achievement of all of these strategic objectives. Without the commitment to developing a sustainable, efficient and effective organisation, it won't be possible to achieve these challenging goals. Within this context, we have set out a number of organisational development objectives that are focused predominantly on financial sustainability, organisational structure and governance arrangements.



## 2. Context

### 2.1 Why Gender Equality Matters

There is a commonly held perception that gender equality now exists in Ireland. While undoubtedly the position of women in Irish society has improved over the last number of years, evidence would suggest that there is still a long way to go before women truly achieve equality with men at all levels of society.

The National Women's Strategy, published in April 2007 by the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform points to several areas in which men and women continue to significantly differ, including:

Employment	At the end of 2006, the employment rate for men was 77.7% compared to 59.6% of women.
Income	The average hourly industrial wage in 2006 was €15.84 for men and €12.33 for women.
Caring Roles	Women take on a disproportionate amount of caring responsibilities (for children, elderly people & dependent adults). In 2002 there were 91,274 female unpaid carers compared with 57,480 male unpaid carers.
National Leadership	There are currently 21 female TD's out of a total of 166, 3 female ministers out of a total of 14, and 2 female ministers of state out of a total of 20.
Regional & Local Leadership	Women members make up only 23.4% of regional and local representative boards.

It has long been established that gender inequality is exacerbated by poverty and disadvantage, and is also a key factor in its persistence. At an international development level, this is reflected in the Millennium Development Goals, and Irish Aid has identified gender equality as one of its 4 cross cutting issues for mainstreaming into all of its programme areas as a fundamental element of all its poverty reduction strategies.

### 2.2 The Double Dividend: Equality for Women Benefits their Children

Improving gender equality has benefits in its own right, improving the ability of women to participate more fully in the social and economic life of their community. However, improving women's equality has benefits that extend further than women themselves: when women are empowered, whole families benefit and the benefits can have ripple effects to future generations. UNICEF's State of the World's Children report (2007) focuses on this, in what they call the 'double dividend'. Their research clearly shows that women with equal access to economic, educational and political rights have healthy,



educated children who are capable of transforming the communities in which they live. Gender equality and the well-being of children are inextricably linked, and in families where women are key decision-makers, the proportion of resources devoted to children is far greater than those in which women have a less decisive role. Women's increased representation at a political level also has a positive impact on the well being of children, with women in legislative bodies being especially effective advocates for children. The UNICEF report also emphasises the importance of women's grassroots groups and movements, and the role that they have in championing women's equality and informing policy development so that the specific needs of women and children are addressed.

3 independent pieces of research, yet to be published in Ireland, demonstrate that the key indicator for mental health in children is the mental health of their mothers. A recent report from the Women's Health Council (Violence against Women and Health 2007) points out that it is important to recognise that the negative consequences of Violence against Women do not only affect the women concerned but also their children, whether they witness the abuse or are themselves abused. Child abuse and partner violence are estimated to overlap in 40% to 60% of cases (Garcia-Moreno 2002). However, even children who witness abuse suffer from this experience and have been found to be significantly more at risk of health problems, poor school performance and behaviour problems (Heise et al., 1999). Moreover, witnessing acts of abuse as a child has also been identified as one of the risk factors for perpetrating abuse as an adult, thus instigating a self-perpetuating cycle of violence (WHO, 2002; Velzeboer et al., 2003).

### 2.3 Disadvantage in Longford

Longford is the second smallest county in Ireland, with a population of 34,391 (CSO, 2006), representing an increase of 11% since 2002. It is a predominantly rural county: 7,622 people live in Longford town, and only one other town in the county has a population in excess of 1,000 (Edgeworthstown).

The demographics of the county have changed in recent years, particularly in Longford town with a significant increase in the numbers of individuals and families from new communities, in particular from African and Eastern European countries. A report for the Longford Area Partnership Company concluded that Longford was among the *four most disadvantaged rural partnership areas* in Ireland. The most disadvantaged areas are situated in the North of the county but there are pockets of disadvantage scattered throughout.

Longford town itself is designated as a RAPID (Revitalising Areas by Planning Investment and Development) whole town initiative. This means that it has been identified as one of the most disadvantaged areas in the country by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and that it should be given priority attention by focusing resources available through the National



## Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010

Development Plan. The programme also requires the government departments and state agencies to coordinate and integrate their services more effectively. Disadvantage in Longford is characterised by a number of factors:

1. Very high ratio of lone parents – in Longford town, 38% of family units with children consist of mothers with children, against a national average of 22% (CSO, 2006)
2. Low levels of educational attainment – 23% of people aged 15 and over having left school with no education or only primary education against 18% nationally (CSO, 2006)
3. High concentration of refugees, asylum seekers and migrant workers – in Longford town 13% of people identify themselves as Polish, Lithuanian and 'rest of world' (non EU), against a national average of less than 6% (CSO, 2006)
4. High concentrations of unemployment – 10.1% in the county overall, the 4<sup>th</sup> highest nationally (CPA, 2005)
5. Higher than average proportion of age dependants - the 4<sup>th</sup> highest of all the counties in Ireland (CPA, 2005)
6. Relatively high levels of local authority housing – 13% of households, compared to 9% nationally (CSO, 2006)
7. Indicators of relative deprivation one and a half times the national average (CPA, 2005)

### 2.4 Our Approach & Key Issues

#### Our Approach

As demonstrated by the statistics above, the people of Longford face a wide range of challenges. We, as a women's organisation, focus our efforts on identifying and addressing key inequalities that prevent women living in Longford achieving their social and economic potential. We believe that this will benefit not only the women themselves, but also their children, family and the wider community. LWL does not discriminate against other disadvantaged groups, but feels that focusing on the inequalities experienced by women allows us to have the greatest impact, given our skills, experience and expertise.

There are 3 key issues that many women in Longford face that contribute to and maintain poverty and disadvantage for women and their families:

1. Economic Independence
2. Specific needs of Women from New Communities
3. Domestic Violence



### 3. LWL's Vision

#### 3.1 Our Vision

Our vision for the future is that:

**Women in Longford can *fulfil their potential*  
in a *safe and equal* society**

LWL's vision contains two key components:

1. The importance of women in Longford being able to ***fulfil their potential***, and
2. That they are able to do so in a society and environment that is ***safe*** and ***equal***.

Taking a broad interpretation of the term 'disadvantage' – an inability to access opportunities in life that others can avail of - many disadvantaged women in Longford are currently not in a position to fully realise their potential. This disadvantage can spring from a number of different factors including: social, economic or educational deprivation, physical or mental disability, geographical isolation, or belonging to an ethnic or religious minority.

We recognise that these factors are not simple or stand alone, but tend to interact with each other and create situations of complex disadvantage, particularly when further compounded by gender inequality. By understanding and appreciating the specific and particular needs of disadvantaged women in Longford, LWL will continue to support them in a sensitive, flexible and personalised way that will provide them with opportunities to develop their competence and confidence, and to make informed choices that are appropriate for them and for their children.

The use of the word *safe* in the Vision refers both to the physical meaning of the word – that women in Longford are free to take part in all aspects of society without fear or violence or intimidation– and also that they can express their opinions, talk openly and engage in debate, in LWL itself and in the wider society, without fear of judgement or other negative consequences. *Ultimately, we are striving to create change at a higher level – through changes in societal attitudes and through policy and legislative changes – so that equality for women is achieved, and gender is removed as a barrier to full participation at all levels of society.*

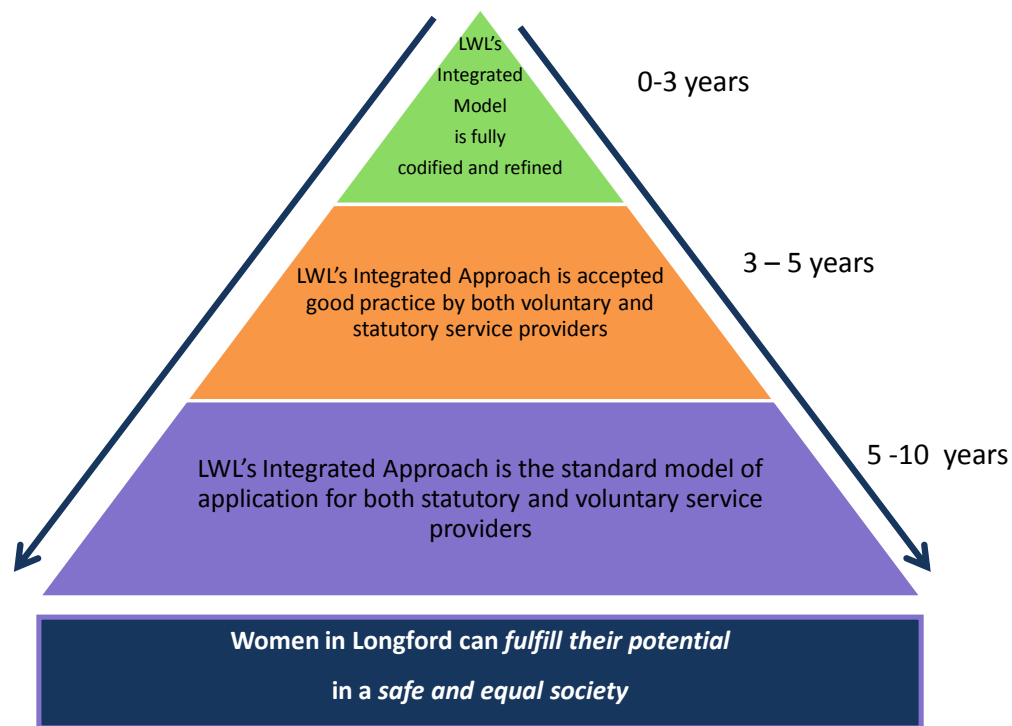


### 3.2 Achieving our Vision

In developing our "Vision" we recognise the degree of change in attitude and approach that will be required by both our local community and other service providers if women in Longford are to realise their full potential in a safe and equal society. Central to the achievement of our Vision is the further development and wider application of our 'Integrated Approach' (see section 5.2 below) as we believe it is only through the adoption of a multi-dimensional approach that we can hope to adequately address the many facets of social disadvantage that currently prevent all women from actively participating in Longford society.

We equally recognise that the incremental nature of the achievement of our vision and the need to define the key target stages to be managed and accomplished before we can hopefully realise our Vision.

The diagram below provides an illustration of the incremental stages involved, and the manner in which they each build upon previous developments, together with anticipated timelines for achievement.



*Codifying and refining LWL's Integrated Model*

A significant amount of work has already been done in articulating LWL's service model, however it is acknowledged that some work is still required before it could be considered sufficiently robust for wider application outside of Longford Women's Link. Accordingly, for the next three years we will concentrate in refining and improving our approach to the provision of services.

*LWL's Integrated Approach is accepted good practice by both statutory and voluntary service providers*

While we will continue to advocate for the adoption of an integrated approach amongst other service providers it is acknowledged that significant testing and evidence of success will be required before other bodies would consider adopting our integrated model. Therefore, once we have consolidated our approach we will collate empirical evidence of its actual benefits and advocate both locally and nationally for its wider application.



## **Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010**

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*LWL's Integrated Approach is the standard model of application for voluntary and statutory service providers*

It is our belief that once empirical evidence has been collated and levels of awareness of the benefits of the approach are more widely known then we would hope other organizations, and more importantly their respective service users, will benefit from approaching particular issues in a more holistic fashion rather than on an individual disjointed basis.

*Women in Longford can fulfill their potential in a safe and secure environment*

Through the sustained implementation of an integrated approach by all service providers in Longford model we believe it is possible our vision will be realized.



### 4. Building a Theory for Change

#### 4.1 Introduction – Developing the Theory of the Problem

Building a well-defined strategy for Longford Women's Link requires us to understand how the organisation acts, at a local, regional and national level, to influence the lives of women and their families positively in light of the problem definition set out above – *i.e. how do we create positive social change?* These positive influences must be defined to be consistent with the fundamental vision of Longford Women's Link. In order to do this, we must first establish what exactly the problem is that we are trying to address.

In Section 2.3 we identified the key issues that many women in Longford face that contribute to and maintain poverty and disadvantage for women and their families, namely Economic Independence, Specific Needs of Women from New Communities, and Domestic Violence.

Below we list each of the 3 key areas identified as being critically influential in contributing to and maintaining disadvantage. Looking in more depth at what 'the problem' actually looks like, we then go on to examine the current services and programmes available in Longford and the role that LWL plays. Once our understanding of these key issues is complete, we then look at how the issues interact and are compounded and influenced by further factors. From here, we can then go on to look at our strategy for creating change.

#### 4.2 Lack of Economic Independence

*What is the problem?*

- Socio-economic opportunity and economic independence are key factors in ensuring women's full participation in all levels of society. For women who experience disadvantage, a lack of opportunities to engage in economic activity means that they frequently become trapped in a cycle of welfare dependency and isolation.
- An assumption exists that work is the way out of poverty, but the reality is far more complex, particularly for lone parents and other carers.
- 42.1% of lone parents live below the poverty line in Ireland (Combat Poverty 2005). The vast majority of lone parents in Longford are women, and accessible, affordable, high-quality childcare is essential for engaging them in education, training and employment that could ultimately assist them to become economically independent.
- The 'activation' model being promoted by the EU acknowledges that childcare must be part of any labour market equality strategy. This is particularly challenging in Ireland where there is a very low number of publicly subsidised childcare facilities compared to other European countries.
- Disadvantaged women have other specific needs that need to be met to support them to access employment opportunities. They have frequently left education early, been out of the work force for some time, may be lacking certain skills and self confidence, or are concerned about losing certain social welfare benefits.



## Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010

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### *How can the problem be addressed? Critical Levers*

- Availability of affordable, accessible, high quality childcare to enable mothers to access employment and/or education and training opportunities.
- Education, training, and support programmes that provide women with the skills, knowledge, experience and confidence to enter the workforce, continue their education, or establish their own business.

### *What are the current services that are available in Longford?*

- FÁS: Community Employment Schemes (CE), computer, childcare & care of the elderly courses. (However, the main FÁS centre is located in Athlone – there is a bus service but this is generally not accessible for those with caring responsibilities)
- VEC: full time adult education (e.g. PLC, Youthreach, Traveller Education, Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme), part time adult education (e.g. computers, Back to Education Initiative)
- National Learning Network: Fresh Start course (12 month course for those seeking a new career after a time out of the workforce), Turas (2 year course for learners with high levels of social isolation)
- County Enterprise Board – start up and growth supports for micro enterprises (in manufacturing, internationally tradable services, in-bound tourism & childcare)
- Local partnership (LCRL)

### *How does Longford Women's Link contribute?*

- High quality affordable childcare services
- Education/training courses based on the identified needs of local community, such as computer training, courses preparing women to return to the workforce
- Counselling and support for lone parents, addressing issues of isolation and poverty through individual support, building support networks and provision of education and training
- Support to local women's groups – creating opportunities for support and networking, providing education and training opportunities
- Community Employment Scheme providing support/training and access to labour market opportunities for participants from the most disadvantaged areas of Longford town
- Inclusive entrepreneurship training and support – in conjunction with the County Enterprise Board, the VEC, the local partnership (LCRL) with initial funding from EQUAL.
- Development of FETAC accredited modules, designed to particularly cater for women with caring responsibilities, now mainstreamed into VEC programme, and development of enterprise modules which are now integrated into VTOS programme.



### 4.3 Specific Needs of Women from New Communities

#### *What is the problem?*

Like the rest of Ireland, the population make up of Longford has been significantly altered in recent years, with large numbers of migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers from the new EU states, Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa coming to live in the county. This unprecedented and rapid change has led to a number of different challenges including:

- Negotiating the complexities of asylum seeking, residency, family reunification laws and processes, and social welfare entitlements
- Refugee and asylum seeking women having suffered trauma and abuse in their home countries
- Challenges for migrant children: difficulties with language, some children may have missed periods of schooling and need extra support to catch up, making friends and socialising in an unfamiliar environment and culture, residual trauma or distress for some refugee and asylum seeking children, separation from other family members and friends
- Different cultural attitudes towards women and the role of women, particularly in the area of domestic violence
- Issues of racism, discrimination and cultural misunderstanding
- Exploitation of migrant workers
- Language difficulties compound the other challenges and increase isolation

Many of the migrant and refugee women from a range of different cultures and backgrounds who have approached LWL, have found settling into a new country, maintaining their cultural identity, finding a job, and becoming familiar with housing, education and health services confusing and stressful, not least through the language barrier. Refugee women may also have to deal with having had to leave family members in another country. Stress, depression, feelings of hopelessness and helplessness are common among both migrant and refugee women, as are feeling alienated, unsafe and unsure about where to go for services and support. These factors can lead to migrant women being at high risk of social isolation.

Furthermore, while immigrants are a growing part of the Irish population, a family perspective has largely been ignored in public debate and integration activities. Moving to a new society can be an enriching and liberating experience, but the accompanying rupture of social relationships, rapid cultural change, and a new language can also be challenges that the family faces in its daily life. The significance of the family often increases as the rest of the social network changes or disappears. Often, however, adapting to a new society changes the relationships between family members as individuals try to negotiate a new culture, and this aspect of migration continues to feature prominently in issues brought to LWL by migrant and refugee women.



## Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010

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The increasing diversity of society also sets new demands on services providers. These services need to be client-based, flexible and respond to the needs of a diverse population. This response must be based on an understanding of individual needs in the context of negotiating family relationships and the gendered and cultural meanings through which they are experienced. This change requires new thinking in the administrative practices and services of various statutory and voluntary organisations. Comprehensive support for families requires crossing the borders between specific integration activities and basic services.

### *How can the problem be addressed? Critical Levers*

- Enhanced engagement with relevant support agencies to promote and facilitate better understanding of new communities issues and more effective work practices
- Practical supports for women and families from new communities to access their rights and entitlements
- Emotional supports (counselling, peer groups etc)
- Information provision
- Anti-racism and intercultural training and projects to encourage understanding, acceptance and positive attitudes from the local host community
- English language classes for women
- Improved access to interpreters and language-skilled advocates that can act on behalf of women and their families when engaging with local services

### *What are the current services that are available in Longford?*

- The local partnership company (Longford Community Resources Ltd), the Longford EDI Centre for the Unemployed and LWL secured funding through Pobal to develop an integration and intercultural strategy for the county which is due to be launched in April 2008.
- LaRed (Longford against Racism – Embracing Diversity) is a network of local statutory and voluntary agencies (of which LWL is a member) that are engaging directly or indirectly with minority ethnic communities in Co Longford and it aims to apply a coordinated approach to the provision of services through the exchange of information, best practice and policy development.
- 'Global Longford' is a voluntary organisation that provides advice and advocacy for new male asylum seekers in the Direct Provision hostel on a wide range of issues from the asylum process through to the provision of information on services and rights.
- The ACORN project provides independent advice, advocacy, training, and recreation facilities for socially excluded men in Longford including the Traveller and asylum seeking communities.
- The Longford EDI Centre for the Unemployed has recently employed an Employment Mediation Officer who speaks Polish
- The VEC provides some English language classes for newcomers to Longford
- Longford Library provides books and leaflets in a range of languages, hosts LaRed meetings, acts as a 'signpost' for information, and facilitates a Polish mother and baby group



## Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010

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- In addition to the standard services, the local Citizens' Information Centre has a legal advocate, a Polish information officer and a weekly Slovak information clinic.
- The Catholic Church is developing its services for the New Communities – e.g. a Polish priest is currently provided

### *How does Longford Women's Link contribute?*

- On-going personal support that takes into account the family of the women as well as her individual situation
- Interaction at different levels with relevant local statutory services, supporting women to negotiate housing, education, legal issues etc where women are unfamiliar with the Irish system and have difficulties with language
- Counselling support
- Information and practical support on a 'drop in' basis for legal issues, social welfare entitlements, asylum applications, residency issues and family reunification applications
- Dedicated domestic violence worker for migrant women (see below)
- Ensuring that LWL's other services are equally accessible to women from New Communities – e.g. Community Employment Scheme, community childcare, education programmes.



#### 4.4 Domestic Violence

##### *What is the problem?*

Domestic violence is an issue that continues to have an extremely detrimental effect on the lives of many women, and their children. Women's Aid reports that 1 in 5 Irish women have experienced domestic violence by a current or former intimate partner or husband. It is a widespread and serious social problem which is influenced by social and cultural attitudes to women and their place in society. It does not have to involve physical violence, though it frequently does, but can also involve mental and emotional abuse, sexual abuse and rape, and financial abuse.

For specific groups of, there are additional barriers to accessing help and safety:

- *Rural women:* geographical isolation, lack of public transport, Gardaí & medical responses can take a long time, women living on farms often don't want to leave dangerous situations because of fear of what will happen to the farm, to the animals, difficulties in obtaining barring orders when the home is also the place of work, family finances tied up in the farm.
- *Women from New Communities:* language difficulties (no entitlement to interpreters in family law cases), different beliefs about gender roles and who is "in charge", if residency is dependent on the male partner leaving a violent relationship can put her own legal status at risk, fear of speaking out and not knowing who to trust, lack of familiarity with statutory services, fear of being exposed to immigration authorities.
- *Traveller women:* the strong familial relations that exist within the traveller community with families often living in close proximity to one another, speaking out against a violent husband or partner can be seen as betraying the family, and to leave the violent husband can often involve having to leave the entire family, including the children.
- *Children living in households where domestic violence occurs:* a very negative impact on children and young people, recent research identified the effects on children including: fear, sadness, guilt, anger, health problems, educational difficulties, impact on relationships. Increasing evidence also suggest that violence towards women is strongly correlated with violence towards children. Supporting women to get out of violent relationships therefore has a very real and direct impact on children as well.

##### *How can the problem be addressed? Critical Levers*

- Practical supports including exploring options, acting on agreed options (e.g. legal route, housing etc)
- Emotional support (counselling, rape crisis, peer support groups)
- Crisis accommodation – which does not currently exist in Longford apart from the use of one homeless refuge



## Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010

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- Ring fenced 'move on' accommodation – which does not currently exist, but LWL is currently engaging with the Longford County Council Housing Dept on this issue
- Increased availability and accessibility of practical & legal support services: barring orders, involvement with Gardai
- Access to social welfare entitlements
- Access to childcare, transport to allow women to avail of other services
- Increased accountability for perpetrators of domestic violence
- Change in societal attitudes towards domestic violence: reduction in stigma for those affected by it, decreased tolerance and acceptance of violence
- Increased economic independence for women to reduce dependence on violent partners
- Improved interagency working
- Development of national standards in DV intervention and support

### *What are the current services that are available in Longford?*

Each agency below provides basic services as dictated by its statutory remit. However, LWL is the only service in Longford that supports women and their families to access a range of essential services, from crisis response through to economic independence and freedom from abuse. Given the importance of inter-agency cooperation, a key component of LWL's work is to ensure that each of the organisations below has a clear understanding of LWL's unique role.

- HSE – provides funding for LWL to provide domestic violence support.
- Gardai – investigation of crimes, provision of information on civil remedies and relevant services.
- Courts – hearing of cases when the woman has secured legal counsel, or if the case is being taken by the Gardai, the woman is only a witness and has no legal representation
- Crisis accommodation – available for women in Longford only in Bethany house, a hostel for homeless women.

### *How does Longford Women's Link contribute?*

- LWL provides the only support service for women experiencing domestic violence in the county of Longford
- In house and outreach services are provided – listening, information provision, safety plan development, assistance with emergency accommodation and childcare, court accompaniment, advocacy with other service providers (e.g. community welfare officers, solicitors)
- Counselling service
- Specific worker for women from New Communities (approx 50% of the cases of domestic violence that are currently presented to LWL are from the migrant community)
- Awareness campaigns and representation in national organisations
- Interagency cooperation, working with each agency to play its part in responding effectively to domestic violence i.e. Gardai, legal system, housing, community welfare officers. As domestic



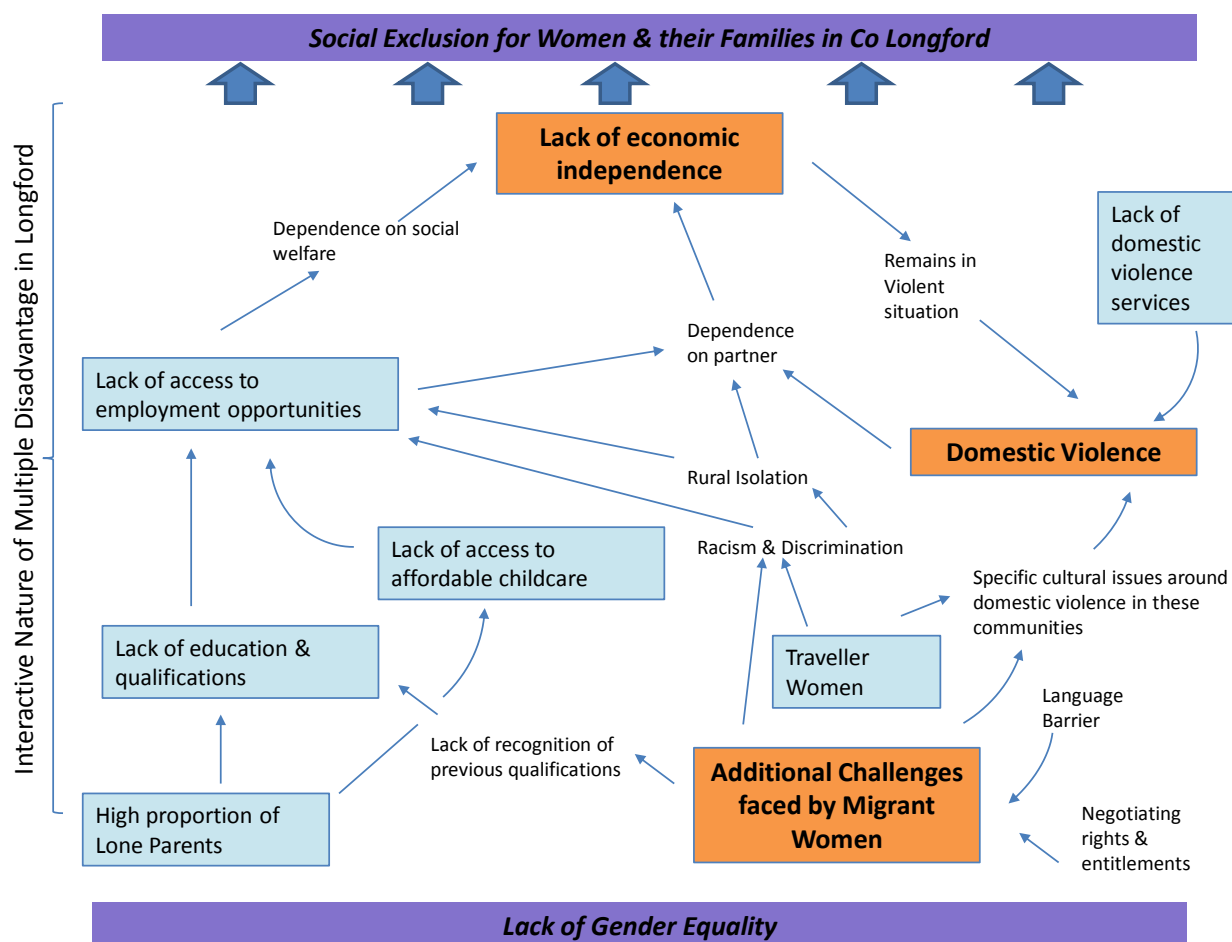
## Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010

violence is only one aspect of the work of these agencies, LWL can play a key role as a specialist in ensuring that their practice is informed and responsive to the needs of the client.

- Data collection, as a tool to support women accessing the domestic violence service and also to provide important information to the National Network of Women's Refuges and Support Services for analysis, thus feeding into national statistics.

### 4.5 Theory of Change

These three issues are not independent or stand alone, but rather they interact with each other, and with other issues, to create situations of complex disadvantage where a single intervention or change will not be sufficient to create real and lasting change. The following diagram shows some of the ways in which these issues interact and reinforce each other, with the key issues highlighted in yellow:



Longford Women's Link acknowledges the complexity of this kind of disadvantage and social exclusion which is underpinned by inequality and thus recognises the importance of taking a multi-faceted approach to tackling these issues, working with different stakeholders and using a variety of methods.



## Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010

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A simple framework, known as the *theory of change*, or *social change model*, was used to document Longford Women's Link's work in the sector in the context of positive social change. The framework defines how we interact with, support and influence 5 key stakeholders:

1. **Women living in Longford** (with a particular focus, in many aspects of work, on immigrant women living in the Longford region)
2. **Service providers in the Longford region** who cater to the needs of women and their families, amongst others (e.g. health services, social welfare, employment services etc.)
3. **Local and national political and policy making institutions**
4. **The public** (in particular established, or "old," Irish communities with respect to issues concerning immigrant issues)
5. **Other community and voluntary organisations** working in this sector in general or community and voluntary organisations providing services to women and their families in the Longford region.

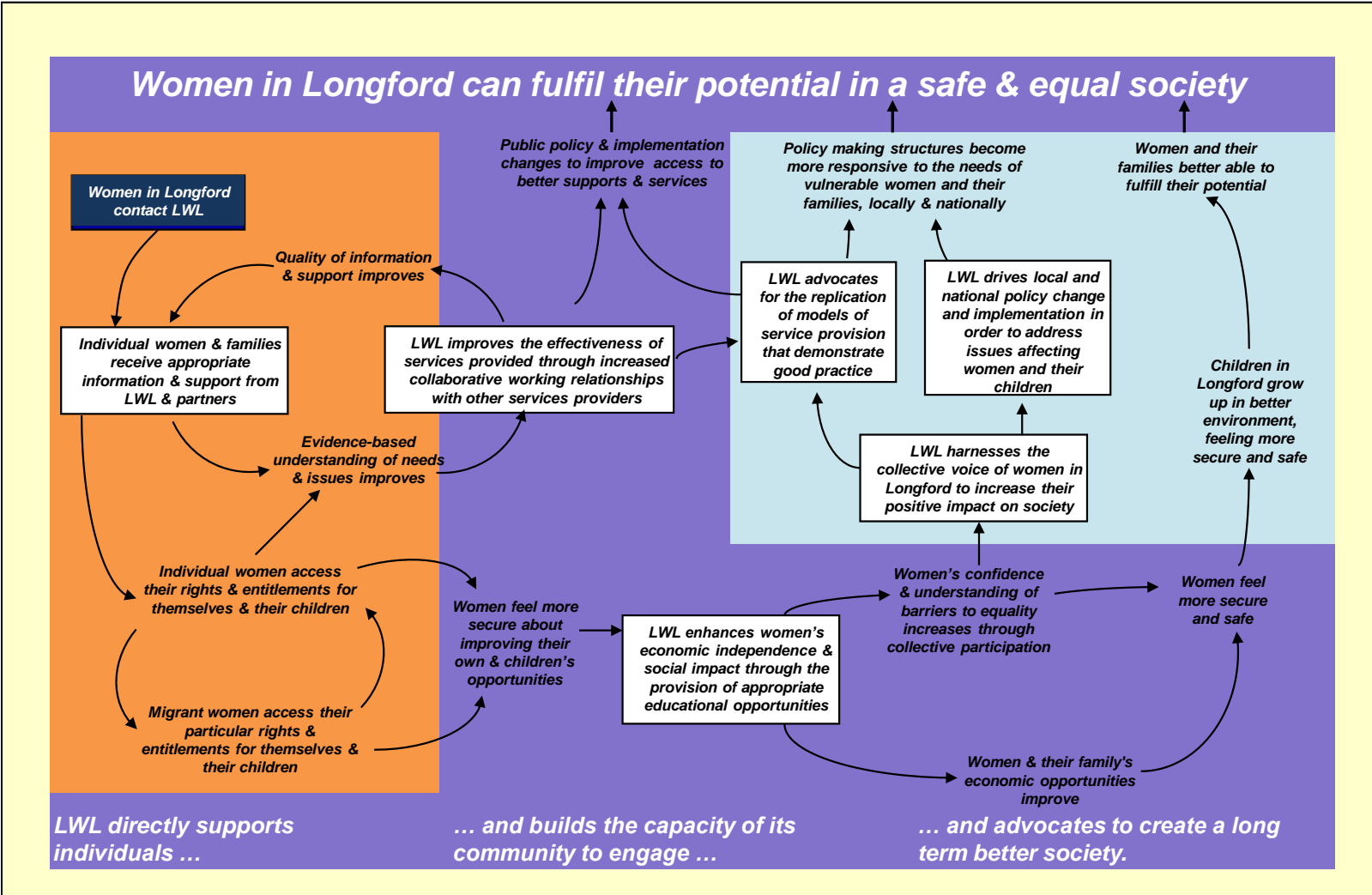
The Theory of Change framework allows us to document the major chain of events that are typically required to drive change in the key areas in which Longford Women's Link works. These will include changes in the welfare of women and their families and / or the attitudes, behaviours and actions of any and all of the other stakeholders listed above. By including Longford Women's Link's activities within this framework, it is possible to identify *how our actions influence changes in society, and how these changes drive the knock-on effects that result in positive social impact.*

In some cases the focus might be on our work with individuals or groups; in other cases we may be working with other community and voluntary organisations and/or mainstream service providers to influence policy change.

The theory of change helps us to understand how all of those activities sit together in an integrated way to drive real social impact for our constituency.

The following diagram sets out our theory of change framework and how our headline interventions precipitate specific chains of events that contribute to social impact:

# LWL's Social Change Model



## 5. LWL's Core Activities

### 5.1 Summary

Having used the Theory of Change model in order to identify the way in which change can be effected at a conceptual level, we now need to look at how these can be achieved at a practical and implementation level. In order to do this, we have identified three key focus areas which will help to guide our activities: **1. Direct Support**, **2. Building Community Capacity**, and **3. Advocacy**. Underpinning our implementation activities in these areas is our recognized need to develop our organisation, to ensure that LWL is sustainable in the longer term. We feel that implementing activities within these relatively broad categories is the most strategic way that we can effect change for women in Longford, and for their children and families, over the next 3 years.





## 5.2 Describing LWL's Integrated Approach

At the core of all of LWL's work is a commitment to working in a fully integrated way, which acknowledges that disadvantage and social exclusion is rarely simple or one dimensional. This integrated approach looks at:

- the various barriers and underlying issues facing women and their families in Longford,
- how these issues interact and are co-dependent on each other ,
- Designing and implementing interventions which feed into each other and provide a multi-dimensional, holistic response.

An example of this can be seen through the way in which we provide support around economic independence to women experiencing domestic violence, as well as the more traditional approach of providing emotional support, and information on legal processes etc. Another example can be seen in the way this integrated approach also allows LWL to respond rapidly to the needs of women from new communities – when the population make up of Longford began to quickly change and rapidly acquired a more ethnic mix, LWL was in a position to widen the reach of its services to include minority women, but in a mainstream rather than a segregated way.

While LWL has practised this 'integrated approach' for a number of years, actually articulating it and codifying it has been more challenging. In 2007, LWL commissioned a project looking at the domestic violence services and its various constituent pieces, and articulating the way in which women can move through the multiple aspects of the service, in a way that is tailored to address their particular needs. This is currently being finalized to provide a replicable model whose basic principles can be applied across a range of other appropriate services.

Over the years, LWL has seen the benefit and strength of working with this integrated approach, and a key part of their advocacy strategy going forward will be to promote this model to other organisations, both voluntary and statutory, who work with sections of society that face social exclusion. To do this, we will be concentrating on building our evidence base and developing a model that demonstrates the approach in a way that is easy to communicate and provides practical benefits to our clients.



### 5.3 Strategic Objectives

In pursuing the further development of our 'Integrated Approach' across each of our focus areas, we have identified a number of strategic objectives:

<b><i>Direct Support</i></b>
<b>Strategic Objective 1:</b> Individual women in Longford can access their rights and entitlements for themselves and for their children
<b><i>Building Community Capacity</i></b>
<b>Strategic Objective 2:</b> Longford women's social and economic independence is increased
<b>Strategic Objective 3:</b> Women's collective voice in Longford is making a positive impact on the local community
<b><i>Advocacy</i></b>
<b>Strategic Objective 4:</b> The achievement of LWL's policy development priorities positively impact on the lives of lone parents, victims of domestic violence and new communities both locally and nationally
<b>Strategic Objective 5:</b> LWL's integrated service model is recognised as good practice and replicated elsewhere

In the following sections we define our Strategic Focus Areas, explain why we think that each one is important, and what the activities are that fall broadly within each area of activity. A more detailed description of what this will actually look like in practice is included in the Implementation Plan & Appendices.



**5.4 Direct Support**

*Strategic Objective 1: Individual Women in Longford can access their rights and entitlements for themselves and for their children*

*Direct Support* refers to the services provided directly by LWL to individual women i.e. women who “come in through the door”. For women experiencing difficulties, whether they are chronic or acute, LWL’s *Direct Support* can assist them to access information and services (either through LWL or by directing them to the appropriate place) that can improve their situation and bring them to a point where they are in a position to take more control over their lives.

<b>Direct Support Service</b>	<b>Key Activities</b>	<b>Numbers served in 2007</b>	<b>Key Development Areas over next 3 years</b>
Migrant Support Services	-One to one support services -Diversity Training -English classes	66 visits/contacts (Jan- Oct 2007) Funding for this position ended in October – some of this work has been incorporated into specific DV service for migrant women	-Ensuring all LWL services are ‘migrant friendly’ -Focus on integration across Co Longford
Domestic Violence Support	-One to one support services -Outreach support -Court accompaniment -Individual advocacy - Tailored service for migrant women	142 Women -With 177 children between them -87% of women economically dependent on partner -35% of support services provided on an outreach basis -47 non-Irish EU women -21 3 <sup>rd</sup> country nationals	Using the experiences of individual women to work with key service providers to ensure that the needs of this vulnerable group are responded to appropriately  Develop relationships with key service providers so that agreed guidelines for inter agency cooperation can be developed  Continue 16 days of action events to raise local awareness of the issue



## Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010

Counselling	-Providing space for a number of service providers to offer affordable counselling: - Provided & funded by a combination of: MRCS, Midland Rape Crisis Centre, Teen Between, HSE, Family Support Agency and LCRL	1164 individual sessions provided	Continue using this cost neutral model of service provision but try to secure at least one full time counsellor rather than always using counsellors who are contracted in on a sessional basis
Community Childcare	-'Catkins' childcare service - Employment opportunities via Community Employment scheme	91 Children – 48 Irish and 43 from various New Communities 15 Childcare assistants (13 of whom are lone parents) (see 5.3 for more details)	Service provision continues but is used to complement the economic independence programme and is increasingly used as an evidence base for lobbying for improved access to affordable childcare throughout the county and at a national level
Outreach Community Childcare	-New pilot programme - Innovative model of childcare to facilitate improved access to education & training	The manager for this project has been appointed and will start work on 18 March	Funding has been provided for the next 3 years. At the end of this period, the model will be comprehensively assessed for potential roll out and funding of the model in other areas across the country



### 5.5 Building Community Capacity:

*Strategic Objective 2: Longford women's social and economic independence is increased*

*Strategic Objective 3: Women's collective voice in Longford is making a positive impact on the local community*

The next stage in achieving our Vision involves us *Building Community Capacity*. Within this area, we move from providing direct support to women to providing opportunities which will help them to develop themselves. This is achieved predominantly through the provision of appropriate education and training supports. A key priority for LWL within this area of activity is to support women who may be lacking in confidence, who may have had negative experiences of education in the past, who may wish to up-skill or who want to get themselves back into the workforce.

These kinds of opportunities begin to develop the capacity of individual women themselves, with knock-on positive impacts for their children, families and the broader local community. As well as providing women with the skills that can develop their potential for economic independence and civic engagement, building towards a critical mass of women who are both active in the local community and working towards creating change and improving circumstances for those who continue to be affected by disadvantage in Longford.

*Educational Approach:* The twin objectives for the majority of the educational opportunities are to provide women with opportunities to increase their economic independence, and to develop their capacity to participate in the local community through the building of support networks. The support networks can in turn lead to critical social analysis and change.

*Accreditation:* LWL has been a FÁS Gateway training centre since 2003. LWL is also a FETAC accredited training centre which means that we can choose the modules we deliver, enabling flexible responses to the changing needs of women in Longford and ensure all qualifications are recognised nationally.

*Women's Economic Independence Programme:* To date, LWL has delivered a number of effective economic programmes; however, until recently they have primarily been stand-alone programmes, largely due to funding criteria. As the activities within this plan are implemented, it is planned to refine the focus of all the education and training activities so that they fall within the broad context of women's economic independence, and provide an increasingly integrated approach. Developing preliminary assessment skills within the LWL staff, providing fluid multi-progression options (i.e. via employment, self employment, community employment, social enterprise, further education), and providing support and mentoring for the participants will all play a role in developing a truly integrated and effective Women's Economic Independence Programme.



**Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010**

<b>Education Initiative</b>	<b>Key Activities</b>	<b>Numbers served in 2007</b>	<b>Key Development Areas over next 3 years</b>
FÁS Gateway	<p>Training modules for women wishing to return to work</p> <p>8 week full time course run biannually and funded by FÁS</p>	20 (7 have progressed into employment, 10 into further training)	<p>Planned and scheduled Education &amp; Training 'induction' intake (2 intakes per year)</p> <p>Each induction course will carry out a preliminary individual needs-interests-assessment of course participants to inform future strategic planning</p> <p>LWL will liaise with FETAC to produce a new 'Pre-Employment' FETAC – accredited module to support the Gateway programme</p>
VEC – Back to Education Initiative	<p>Flexible courses aimed at increasing participation of those with low levels of formal education</p> <p>Funded by DES</p> <p>Range of courses provided by LWL in 2007 included: computer literacy, interpersonal skills, English language skills, child development</p>	67 broken down as: IT skills & computer literacy: 26 English Lang: 15 Work Exp: 10 Childcare: 8 Personal & interpersonal skills: 8	<p>Planned and scheduled Education &amp; Training 'induction' intake (2 intakes per year)</p> <p>Each induction course will carry out a preliminary individual needs-interests-assessment of course participants to inform future strategic planning</p> <p>Subsequent to the Induction Course, Participants will be supported into Employment/Self-Employment /further Education options – BTEI permits a broad range of options that supports this approach</p>



## Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010

<p>Business Development &amp; Enterprise Skills</p>	<p>This programme was originally run as part of the EU funded EQUAL project which focused on encouraging under represented groups (women, in this case) in entrepreneurship</p> <p>The EQUAL programme has ended, and ongoing support structures for the projects are still being clarified (early 2008).</p> <p>LWL is still regarded as a key Partner in the inter-agency approach to supporting female entrepreneurship, and in developing plans and applications to extend the work of the EQUAL project (2002-07)</p>	<p>Business Development Training: 17</p> <p>Enterprise Training: 11</p> <p>Training to establish web presence : 6</p> <p>Individual Mentoring: 24 sessions</p> <p>Women in Business Network meetings &amp; 1 show case event: 82 different women</p> <p>7 FETAC accredited modules in this area have been developed by LWL to date, including Level 5 'Business Development Skills' in 2007</p>	<p>Development of a cohesive, integrated 'Women's Economic Independence' programme at LWL, that also includes employment and further education progression options</p> <p>Development and advocacy of an inclusive, inter-agency Rural Enterprise Strategy for Co Longford</p> <p>Development of an inclusive female-entrepreneurship programme for the BMW region</p> <p>Participation and advocacy on female entrepreneurship at a national level</p> <p>Accreditation of further modules (e.g. 5 submitted at end of 2007 to FETAC, decision pending)</p>
<p>ECDL</p>	<p>-Basic computer literacy -3 courses per year (2 basic, 1 advanced) -75% FÁS funded, 25 % participant funded</p>	<p>39 women and men</p>	<p>Planned and scheduled Education &amp; Training 'induction' intake (x2 intakes per year)</p> <p>The package of ICT training options will become more integrated into the overall Training programme, particularly in support of Women's Economic Independence</p>



## Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010

Community Employment Training & Supervision	-Training and supervision provided, and reported to FÁS -Includes both individual and group training and support, as well as post training planning - one third of participants in 2007 moved directly into employment	15 participants Modules included: Fire safety, first aid, manual handling, IT, Sage, Child protection, Core skills, FETAC interpersonal, childcare, advocacy training	
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### Building Collective Voice

In order to improve the network of women in Longford, to provide peer support, to encourage active participation in society and to provide further outlets for learning and confidence building, LWL facilitates a number of other activities that also fall under the 'building collective voice' heading. 4 of these are listed below, with more detail on them included in Appendix E.

<i>Group</i>	<i>Key Activities</i>	<i>Numbers served in 2007</i>	<i>Key Development Areas over next 3 years</i>
Lone Parents Group	Supporting the setting up and development of HOPE group (Honouring One Parent Equality)  Planning, designing and delivering the Personal Development course for lone parents  Childcare and transport provided to enhance ease of access	34 women in group  11 involved in planning and designing course  21 participants on 11 week course	Year 1: Secure funding to develop HOPE programme including group capacity building, study visits, identification of issues and voicing of experiences through creative methodologies  Year 2: Improve development of group skills and analysis, support group to formalise structures, membership etc, develop lobbying and advocacy skills aimed at lone parent issues in local and European elections  Year 3: HOPE develops its own strategic plan and funding



**Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010**

			application to support its independent development and self sufficiency
Local Campaigns Group / Civic Engagement	<p>To date this group has been relatively ad hoc – coming together at times of particular issues e.g. general election in 2007</p> <p>Other events include those around International Women's Day and the 16 Days of Action events</p>		<p>Year 1: Use International Women's Day event to broaden the base of women involved in LWL</p> <p>Develop a programme of capacity building around women's leadership with a focus on local and EU elections in 2009</p> <p>Year 2: IWD event used to galvanise women's collective voice for local/EU elections</p> <p>Election strategy developed with key issue identified</p> <p>Year 3: IWD event used to maintain momentum and support women at a local level into leadership roles</p>
Women's Studies	<p>Supporting women and providing infrastructure for women to take part in UCD's outreach certificate in women's studies programme</p> <p>Provision of progression opportunities through diploma programme</p>	<p>11 (72 expressed an initial interest)</p> <p>29 women now registered for diploma</p>	<p>First 29 women will successfully complete diploma programme</p> <p>Secure funding to support 25 educationally disadvantaged women to complete certificate programme</p> <p>Secure longer term funding to support Diploma programme</p>
Creative Activities	E.g. In 2007 a Creative Writing course was held, that both facilitated confidence building in written expression and basic literacy.	12 – produced a book of the writings	Development of a programme of creative activities that both develop skills and confidence, and also develop team work and networking among groups of women



## 5.6 Advocacy:

*Strategic Objective 4: The achievement of LWL's policy development priorities positively impact on the lives of lone parents, victims of domestic violence and new communities both locally and nationally.*

*Strategic Objective 5: LWL's integrated service provision model is recognised as good practice and replicated elsewhere*

LWL's aim within this focus area is to *advocate* for the long term change of local, regional and national policy and practice in order to improve the lives of disadvantaged women and their families in Longford.

Through the wide range of services that it offers, LWL has developed a joined up view that is lacking in many service providers and policy makers. It is through LWL's longstanding experience in the provision of Direct Support and its involvement in developing Community Capacity that LWL has now established itself as both a credible and influential voice on issues relating to women and their families at a local and national level.

However, it is important to stress that the issues LWL witnesses on a daily basis are not unique to Longford, with women, children and families in other rural counties and areas facing similar difficulties. For this reason LWL recognises the importance of building and maintaining a solid evidence base that can be used to illustrate and strengthen arguments for positive change in wide range of communities.

Given human and financial resource constraints it is impractical for LWL to attempt to impact significantly on policy change and development across all areas of LWL activity and interest. Accordingly, following application of key assessment criteria (i.e. consistency with LWL strategic objectives, numbers affected, specific LWL expertise, emerging need, interdependency, long term benefit) to more than 15 areas of LWL interest, five priority areas were selected (more detail is included in Appendix E). It is in the following five areas LWL now intends advocating for meaningful policy development at both local and national levels on:

- a) Replicating the LWL model of integrated service provision
- b) Increasing lone parents economic independence
- c) Provision of community childcare in disadvantaged rural settings
- d) Establishing a safe environment for families experiencing domestic abuse
- e) Managing issues facing immigrant families

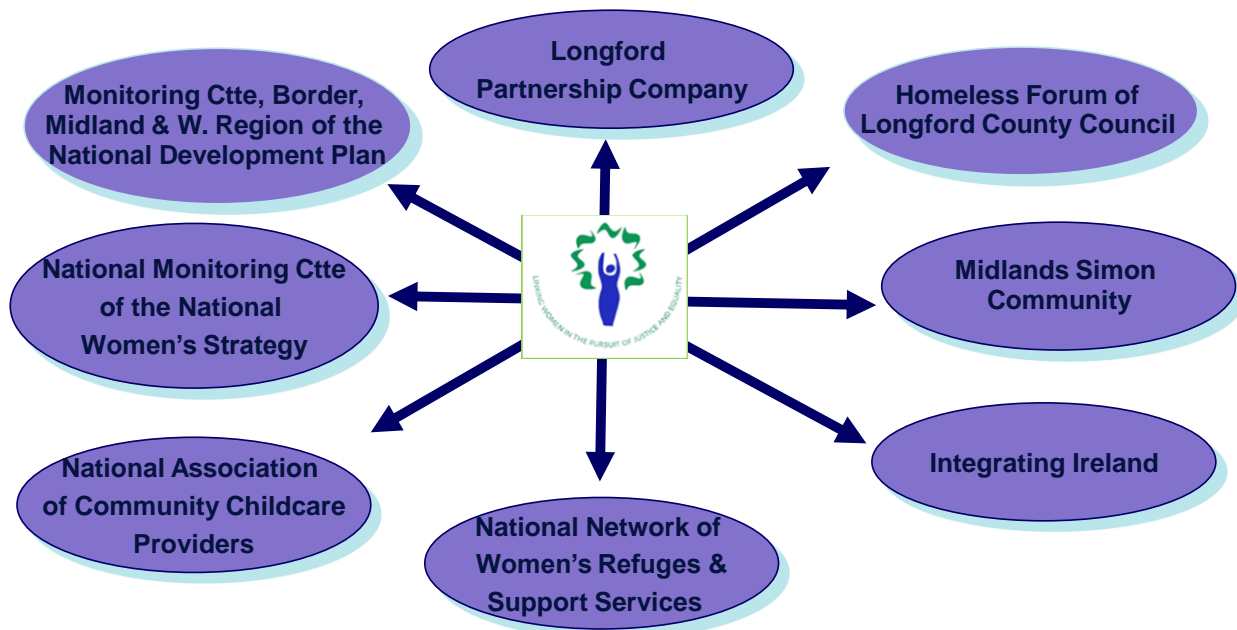


## Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010

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Focusing on these areas will help to concentrate the strengths and impact of LWL. The development of policy and advocacy positions and campaigns will be based on a four-strand approach:

1. **Developing and articulating an informed and balanced policy position** that is grounded in facts and experience. LWL policy is based on human rights agreements e.g. CEDAW and Beijing Platform for Action which informed the National Women's Strategy. All of LWL's policy positions need to be strengthened by *developing and systematising data collection* that then provides the hard evidence needed to build and enhance credibility and influence.
2. **Lobbying based on consultation with and active participation of individuals and groups affected by the issue.** This crosses into the Building Community Capacity focus area and is concerned with facilitating and supporting individuals and groups of women to get directly involved with lobbying and campaigning themselves, as well as using their voices and stories to strengthen the overall voice of LWL.
3. **Local media and communications.** In several of the areas in which LWL works, societal attitudes, misinformation, stereotypes and stigma play important roles – especially in the areas of domestic violence, and integration of New Communities. While acknowledging that attitudinal change is a difficult and long process, LWL is committed to continuing to contribute to the wider debate in Longford by the use of the media and local campaigns in an effort to effect that change, gradual though it may be.
4. **Relationship building, information exchange and collaboration** with other voluntary organisations and statutory agencies. LWL is currently well represented on the boards of regional and national organisations (e.g. Midlands Simon, National Network of Women's Refuges and Support Services, Monitoring Committee of National Women's strategy – see following diagram below for a more complete list). LWL will consider how best to maximise this influence and how to leverage it for long term positive change. At a more local level, LWL will continue to collaborate with a wide range of agencies and service providers to demonstrate the benefits of taking an integrated approach and encouraging them to take on board some of the learnings from LWL to develop and enhance the quality of their services for disadvantaged women and their families. LWL will also engage with other organisations to develop joint projects (e.g. Intercultural Strategy for Longford) that benefit from the combination of strengths and experiences from a range of different organisations.



*Some of the boards and committees on which LWL is represented*



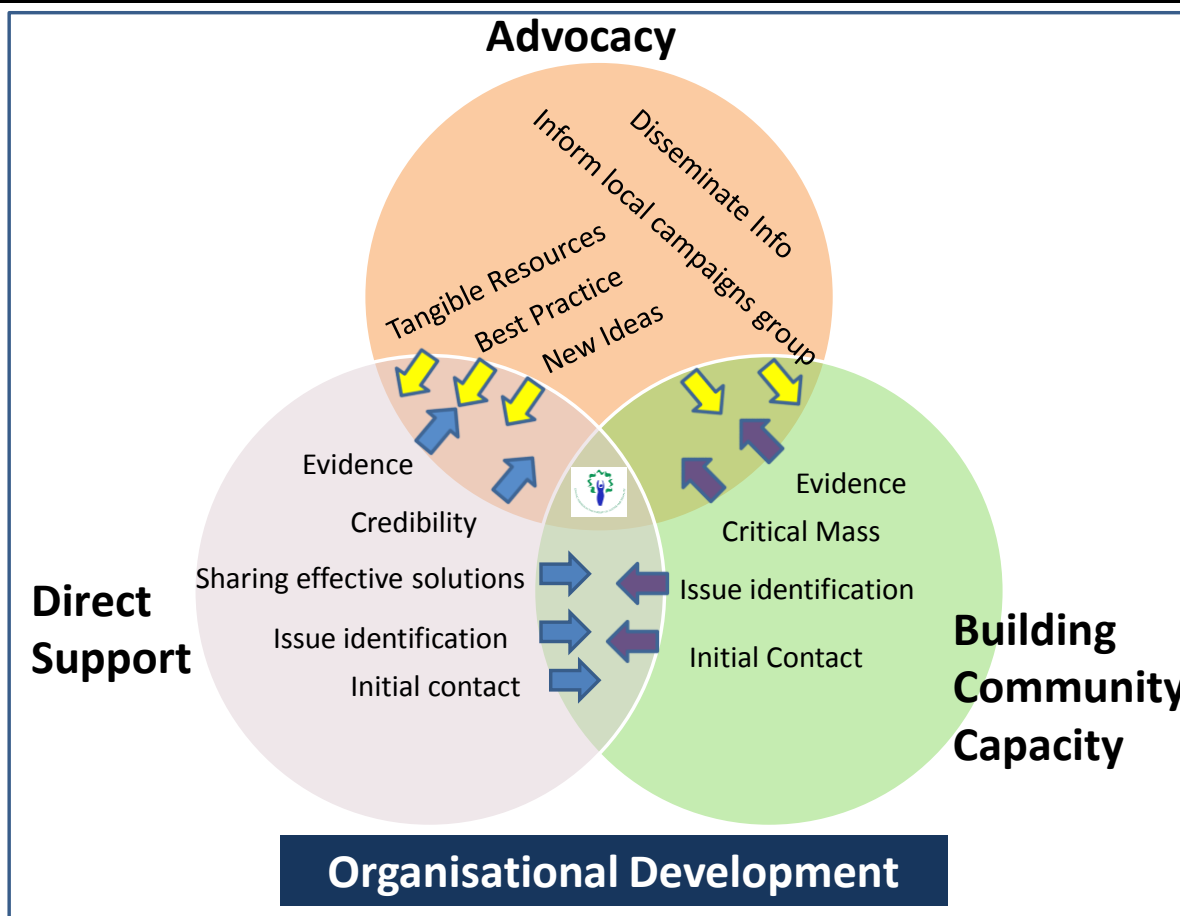
### 5.5 LWL's 3 Areas of Activity – Inter-linkages & Mutual Support

The 3 focus areas of Longford Women's Link combine to form a single mission for the organisation as follows:

*Longford Women's Link will:*

- (1) provide and facilitate a range of supports and opportunities for vulnerable women and their children,*
- (2) support women in Longford to develop their economic independence and social engagement,*
- (3) drive policy change in order to address issues affecting women and children.*

Dividing our work into focus areas is helpful in clarifying our thinking; however, it is important to remember that these areas are not stand alone: the synergies and lesson learning that exist between them is essential in enhancing our understanding of the issues involved as well as our direct impact. Each of the 3 areas both feeds into and benefits from activities in the other areas. For maximum benefit and learning, internal processes and information capture and sharing within LWL will need to be developed further and formalised.



**6. LWL's Operational Plan – Strategic Objective & Outcomes**

Within each area of activity we have identified a number of key actions that need to be completed during the lifetime of this plan in order for us to deliver on our strategic objectives (see Appendix G). The tables below identify the key developments and benefits we want to affect and achieve through the delivery of our strategic objectives.

**6.1 Direct Support**

**Strategic Objective 1**

Individual women in Longford can access their rights and entitlements for themselves and for their children.

**Desired Outcomes**

- Numbers attending direct support increase in the shorter term, but reduce in the longer term as Community Capacity further developed and established



## Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010

- Quality of services offered improved as they become more targeted on specific needs
- Collaboration with other organisations improves the availability and accessibility of a broader range of services for service users
- Migrant women are supported to integrate into the wider Longford community
- Women who experience domestic violence have access to a holistic, high quality service that supports them to live in safety
- Lone parents have built their capacity to continue supporting each other independently

### 6.2 Building Community Capacity

#### **Strategic Objective 2:**

*Longford women's social and economic independence is increased*

#### **Desired Outcomes**

- Increased economic and social independence for women
- Greater numbers of women actively engaged in Longford society
- Increase in women empowered to support themselves and their families
- Community needs being increasingly met by women

#### **Strategic Objective 3:**

*Women's collective voice in Longford is making a positive impact on the local community*

#### **Desired Outcomes**

- Increased awareness of local and national issues affecting women
- More participation of women in campaigning and voluntary support
- Collective voice of women heard by key gatekeepers
- Increased levels of expertise on how to address issues affecting women

### 6.3 Advocacy

#### **Strategic Objective 4:**

Achievement of LWL's policy development priorities positively impact on the lives of lone parents, victims of domestic violence and new communities both locally and nationally



## Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010

### Desired Outcomes

- More informed policies and policy implementation on women's and children's issues
- LWL seen as lead/ key voice on issues for disadvantaged families in rural settings
- Local and national policy developments in the key focus areas improves the lives of women and their families in Longford
- Increased public awareness of issues and their impact leads to changes in societal attitudes
- Through their representation with other organisations, LWL are in a position to use their experience and evidence base to positively influence policy, planning and implementation of other services

### **Strategic Objective 5:**

*LWL's model of integrated service provision is recognised as good practice and replicated elsewhere*

### Desired Outcomes

- People availing of services both within LWL and external organizations have a more enriched and complete experience as result of the cross learning / opportunities integrated work practices present
- Benefits of adopting an integrated model recognized by policy makers and other organizations operating in similar fields to LWL
- Policy is developed in such a way as to recognize and encourage a more joined up approach to service delivery

## 7. Organisational Infrastructure

LWL's Business Plan for the period from 2008 to 2010 is ambitious, and will require a significant commitment to organisational development if the objectives within the three key areas of activity. Developing a sustainable, efficient and effective organisation will provide the foundation on which everything else can be built and will provide the opportunity for all staff members to work to their potential in a supportive yet challenging environment where lessons can be shared and used to achieve the overall objectives of the organisation.

This section sets out the strategic objectives and the fundamental outcomes under the general heading of organisational development, followed by a more detailed analysis of the structure of the organisation, and the governance arrangements.

### 7.1 Strategic Objectives, Actions & Outcomes

Two strategic objectives have been identified for LWL under the heading of organisational development, in the key areas of finance, and organisational structures & governance.

#### *Strategic Objective 6*

**LWL's long-term viability is secured**

##### **Desired Outcomes**

- LWL in a position to address the root causes rather than the symptoms of issues faced by LWL service users

#### *Strategic Objective 7*

**LWL's organisational and governance structures support the delivery of our vision**

##### **Desired Outcomes**

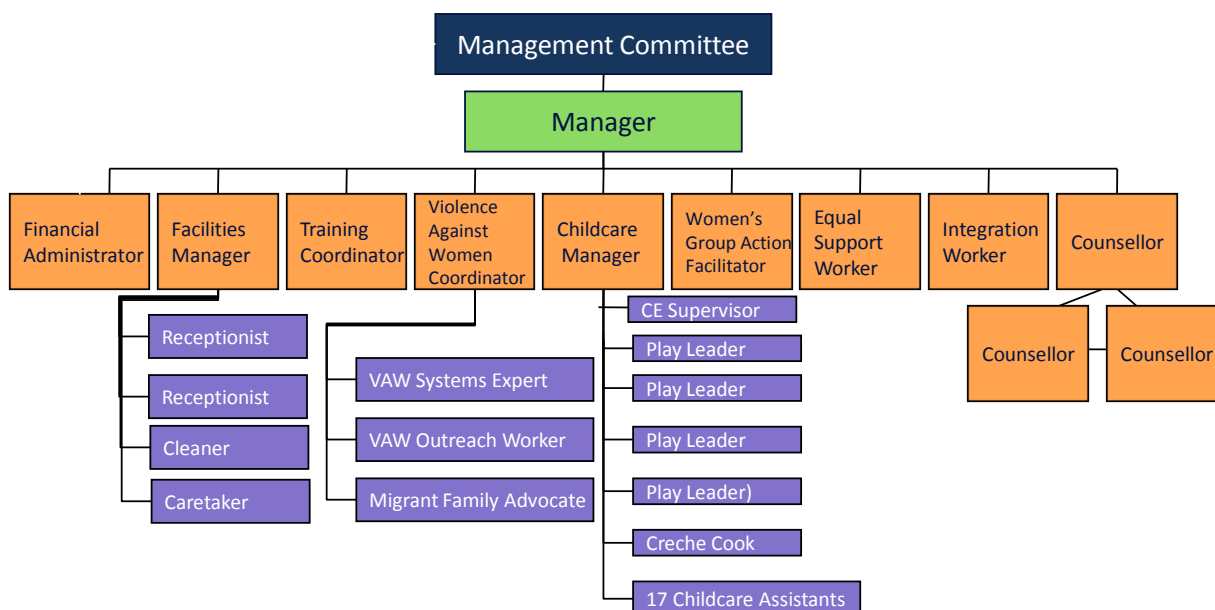
- Strategic goals met
- LWL's Board and management structures actively support and drive the achievement of the organizations objectives



## Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010

### 7.2 LWL Organisational Structure

LWL is currently organised as follows:



#### *Challenges presented by the Current Structure:*

The structure has essentially grown organically as the organisation has grown, and funding opportunities have allowed extra human resources to be utilised to deliver various projects and programmes. At this point in the organisation's growth, however, this current structure presents a number of difficulties, including:

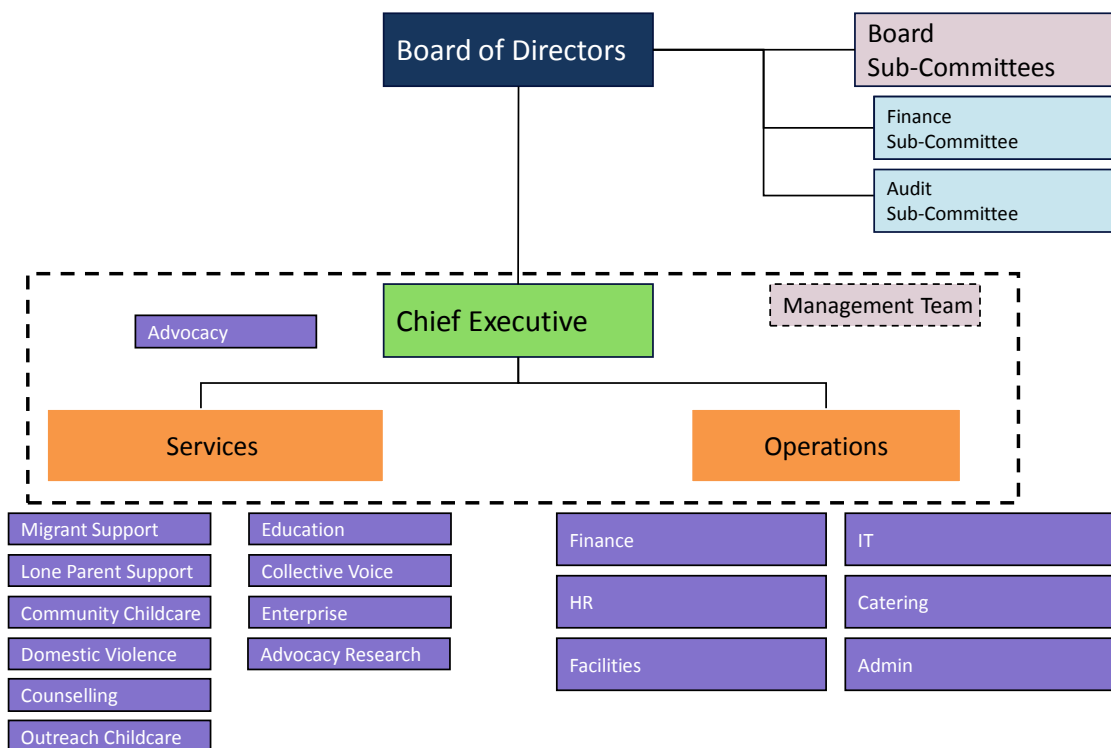
- Overly centralised structure with a very large number of direct reports to the manager
- There is limited communication and systematised lesson learning across some functions
- No obvious succession planning
- Ambiguity around some of the management committee / staff roles (addressed further in section 7.3)



## Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010

Funding for a number of the current positions has also either recently ended or is due to end in the near future including the integration worker, Equal support worker and some of the domestic violence workers.

The following organisational chart shows a proposed new structure for LWL, and represents expectations for the optimum structure over the period of this business plan:



This proposed revised structure shows a number of key changes:

- The Manager is renamed the CEO; the Management Committee is renamed the Board of Directors. This is to reflect the development of the organisation and the degree of responsibility that both the CEO and the Board have, and the different roles therefore required.



## Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010

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- Two additional management positions are introduced – a Head of Services post, and a Head of Operations post – providing a 3 person senior management team (represented by the dashed line). These roles are described in more detail in Appendix D.
- The Head of Operations will take over responsibility for the day to day running issues of the organisation (finance, HR etc). By taking these responsibilities away from the CEO, it is estimated that approximately 50% of her time will be freed up and this time will be spent on high level networking & advocacy issues.
- An additional advocacy post is envisaged. This would be a research & policy role, focused on capturing and sharing information across the organisation and providing the evidence to feed in to the CEO's advocacy activities (the role is described in more detail in Appendix D).

There are a number of benefits to the revised structure:

- By grouping areas of responsibility, there is greater potential for a team based approach to managing staff
- It should facilitate improvements in communication
- There is improved succession planning for the CEO
- The number of direct reports to the CEO is reduced, and her time will be freed from operational issues.

Putting this structure in place is dependent on 3 key factors:

- 1) Funding being available to finance the new posts
- 2) Finding suitably qualified & appropriately experienced people to fit the new posts
- 3) Openness on behalf of all current and future staff to work to the best of their ability in the new structure

The structure, as represented diagrammatically above, shows a number of teams and functions rather than individual posts under each of the two senior management posts. All posts are funding dependent.

### 7.3 LWL Governance

Governance is about shaping the strategic direction of an organisation in the long term, guiding management performance and monitoring progress towards objectives through the establishment of a formal board structure. It is *not* about managing the organisation on a day-to-day basis.

To date, LWL's governance and management has been the responsibility of the Management Committee, a group of committed women who have given their time on a voluntary basis to meet once a month and provide practical support and direction to the Manager and staff of the organisation. This



## Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010

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has worked well to date, but to continue to develop the organisation, particularly in light of the Charities Bill, a few key recommendations for LWL's future governance structures have been agreed:

- The Management Committee will be renamed the Board of Directors
- Some of the practical activities that the Management Committee are currently involved in (e.g. approving day to day finances) will be moved back to the CEO and senior management team, freeing up the Board to concentrate on higher level strategic issues and significant strategic matters.
- A Charter of Good Governance will be adopted by the organisation (see Appendix C) to enshrine the principles and policies of the organisation with respect to governance.
- Key roles of the new Board will include:
  - Providing strategic direction and advice to the Management Team
  - Monitoring the implementation of LWL's Business Plan
  - Building LWL's reputation both locally and nationally
  - Increasing LWL's network and influence with key stakeholders
- New members will be strategically headhunted, as soon as is practicable, for the following skills and experience (listed in order of priority):
  1. Finance
  2. Fundraising
  3. Legal
  4. Human Resources
  5. Understanding of relevant research & policy
  6. Business & Enterprise
- A greater gender balance on the Board will be sought (it is currently all female)
- A number of sub committees will be established – in particular, an Audit sub-committee, and a Finance sub-committee.

A more detailed description of the role of the Board (individually and collectively), the role of the CEO, the role of the Chairperson of the Board, and the role of the Secretary to the Board is included in Appendix C.



### 7.4 Risk management

As part of the detailed working through of the operational aspects of this Business Plan it will be necessary to carry out a full Risk Assessment and to set out our responses for minimising the risks identified. This will be carried out within the first quarter of 2008. There are a number of initial overarching risks facing the organisation including:

- **Failing to secure sufficient funding** to maintain core services and required expansion of our programmes: setting up a Fund-Raising Task Force and engaging professional assistance for this function will be the most critical determinant of the Business Plan. Operationally it will be necessary to ensure that activities can be scaled up or scaled back depending on financial progress, and that no commitments are entered into that cannot be supported.
- The danger of **losing expertise as a result of staff turnover** needs to be addressed through ensuring as far as possible that staff are properly supported and that workloads and expectations are managed properly.
- As for all NGOs, there is an equal danger of **losing volunteer expertise and interest**. This requires that we ensure that volunteer expectations and workloads are managed properly and that fresh blood and new perspectives are actively sought and valued by the organisation.
- Inevitably, any plan setting out our intended areas for future focus is going to come under **pressure to extend activities in response to crises** and pressure from our members, our board and our frontline staff. If we are to operate strategically to further our objectives a cultural shift is needed involving the recognition that we cannot be simply a 'demand-led' organisation. Instead, we must plan what we do and do what we plan.
- **Safeguarding the reputation of the sector** requires having contingency plans in place lest actions involving any members bring the sector into disrepute. Risks here would include industrial relations disputes, or allegations of financial irregularities or failures in relation to child protection.

For any plan to succeed, it is essential to identify the potential risks upfront so that they can be monitored, and appropriate steps can be taken to reduce the chance of their occurring (internal risks) and to minimise the impact on the organisation if they do occur (internal and external risks). It is the responsibility of the CEO and the Board of Directors to closely monitor the risks, identify new or changing risks, and review the vulnerability of the organisation to such risks.



## 8. Financial Needs & Financial Strategy

### Budget Projection

For the current financial year in 2007, LWL had a total expenditure of approximately €976,001 which includes all core direct support services and training and education programmes, but also the operation of the EQUAL Community Initiative fixed-time European programme.

A rigorous analysis of LWL's current resources and allocations has been carried out and a baseline of resourcing (both people and financial) has been estimated. The organisation is expected to require a minimum income of approximately €1,192,145 in 2008, rising to an estimated €1,316,543 in 2009 and €1,378,524 in 2010. A summary of costs is shown in the following table. A more detailed breakdown can be found in the Appendices of this plan.

**Table 1: Projected Expenditure by Type**

LWL Expenditure by Type								
	2007 (Base Year)	%	2008	%	2009	%	2010	%
Employee Costs	€704,704	72	€876,029	71	€1,006,175	74	€1,050,117	74
Staff Related Expenditure	€51,787	5	€59,505	5	€61,781	5	€65,470	5
Establishment/ Capital Expenditure	€20,645	2	€49,677	4	€32,061	2	€33,514	2
Running Costs	€52,676	5	€63,650	5	€67,342	5	€71,219	5
Communications	€13,404	1	€14,699	1	€15,169	1	€15,988	1
Project Costs	€99,168	10	€110,271	9	€114,785	8	€122,024	9
Planning & Evaluation	€33,617	3	€18,313	1	€19,229	1	€20,190	1
Contingency	€0	0	€50,000	4	€50,000	4	€50,000	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>€976,001</b>		<b>€1,242,145</b>		<b>€1,366,543</b>		<b>€1,428,524</b>	

There is an average increase in expenditure year on year of, 22%, 10.4% and 4.7%.

From the Table 1 above, it can be seen that the biggest spend year-on-year is on staff salaries.

Table 2 shows the same expenditure amounts but breaks them down by each work activity area and represents them as percentages of the overall cost for each financial year. Any centralised functions or activities of the organisation are bundled under the 'Core' programme area description, which is currently the second largest programme area in terms of spend, with 'Childcare' being the largest and 'Domestic Violence' being the third largest.



## Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010

**Table 2: Projected Expenditure by Activity Area**

LWL Expenditure by Programme								
	2007 (Base Year)	%	2008	%	2009	%	2010	%
Core	188,947	19	254,551	20	282,587	21	296,719	21
Domestic Violence/ VAW	111,430	11	96,959	8	88,637	6	93,071	7
Childcare	329,888	34	488,696	39	554,748	41	576,122	40
Counselling	69,147	7	45,765	4	45,046	3	47,301	3
Training & Education	55,053	6	63,848	5	64,033	5	67,237	5
Migrant/ Integration Worker	97,335	10	88,647	7	83,530	6	87,709	6
Lone Parents + Womens Studies	62,100	6	82,416	7	83,530	6	87,709	6
Advocacy	0	0	121,265	10	164,432	12	172,656	12
Economic Indep. Training	62,100	6	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>€976,001</b>		<b>€1,242,145</b>		<b>€1,366,543</b>		<b>€1,428,524</b>	

### Expenditure Analysis

The bulk of LWL expenditure (over 72%) is spent on employee costs and staff related expenditure (see Figure 1, above). This amount will increase by just 24% from the current year to 2008 with the introduction of critical new core staff as outlined in the business plan (Head of Operations, Head of Direct Services & Capacity Building, Migrant Support Worker, and Research & Policy Officer) which will be critical to ensure a systematic running of all operations and ensuring that the advocacy pillar of the plan is incorporated from all other areas of work. However other staff positions are also dependent on various sources of programme funding which all have their own project life cycle. It is envisaged at this point that programme costs for these positions will be continued, thus reflecting the projections shown, however these funds are not guaranteed or sometimes are paid later than expected, which may show as fluctuations in the projections shown.

### Income Forecast

Figure 1 below illustrates the potential income to be secured, broken down by the source, against the predicted expenditure. As the graph indicates, a gap quickly begins to emerge in terms of secured income and projected expenditure, especially for the last two years of the business plan. This gap will need to be filled by sourcing additional funds, while also trying to attract core funding for the operation of the centre to ensure the sustainability of the organisation in the long-term. While this gap may seem initially large, it is the role of the CEO and the Board to ensure this gap can be met.



## Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010

Figure 1: Projected Income by Source versus Expenditure

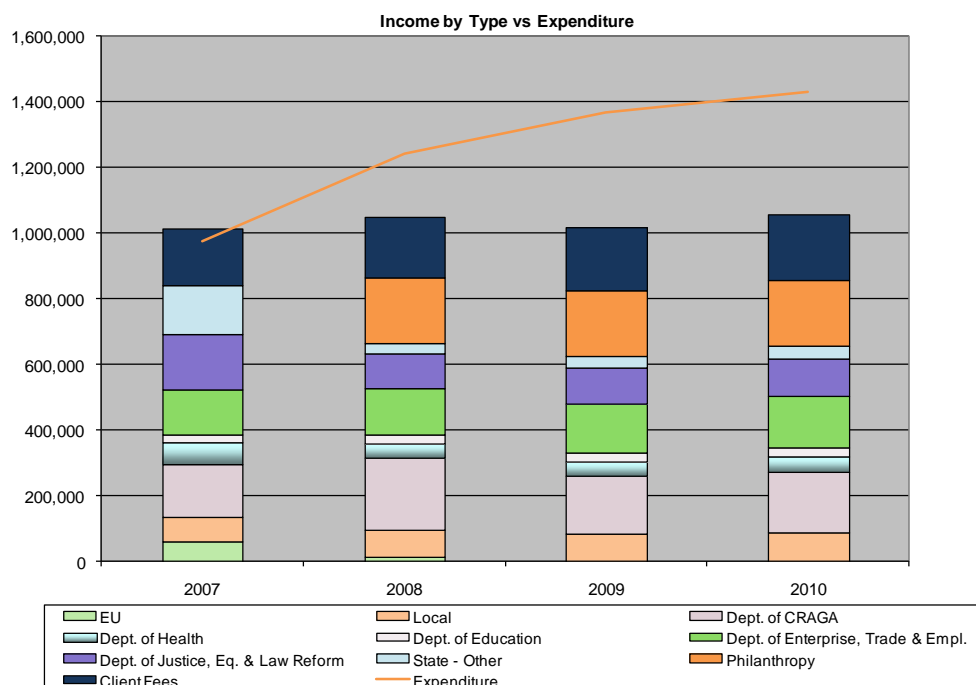


Table 2: Projected Funding Gap (€) by Year

LWL Funding Gap				
	2007 (Base Year)	2008	2009	2010
Expenditure	976,001	1,242,145	1,366,543	1,428,524
Income	1,015,009	1,049,662	1,018,331	1,059,247
<b>Gap</b>	<b>€39,008</b>	<b>-€192,484</b>	<b>-€348,212</b>	<b>-€369,276</b>

### Sources of Funds

LWL has established good funding relationships with a number of different funding sources from local, national and European levels including:

- Longford Court Donations
- Longford County Enterprise Board
- Local County Partnership
- Dept. of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
- Dept. of Social and Family Affairs



## Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010

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- Dept. of Education & Science
- Dept. of Justice, Equality & Law Reform
- EU EQUAL Communities Initiative

As previously mentioned, LWL has a good track record of acquiring programme funding against the operation of critical activities. Some of this programme funding has been instrumental in piloting new models of support; for example, the 'Outreach Community Childcare' facility which will begin in 2008 and will be the only such model of mobile child support in operation in the country, funded and supported by the Dept. of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs through Pobal. The nature of this type of programme funding is that it is granted in cycles, can often be granted behind schedule, is very rarely transformed into core funding and is influenced by political factors which can vary and therefore may not be guaranteed in the medium- or long-term future.

### **Sustainability**

In order to ensure financial sustainability it is essential that LWL continues to maintain a diverse funding source over the plan whilst exploring alternative options for core funding. It is important that LWL does not rely too heavily on a single source of funding and leverages the potential philanthropic funding to attract core funding post the plan. This shall remain as key goal of the CEO and the Board. To date, LWL has not had a track record of attracting philanthropic funding but has started looking into this area towards award schemes run by a number of philanthropic bodies as ways of attracting core funds or funds against existing expense lines and activities.

Some of the funding options to be investigated are:

- 1) Ensure all services are 100% funded by mainstream departments
- 2) Build in management fee of 15% and sign service level agreements with all funding organizations
  - a. Currently the Manager and Admin staff are being funded by this method
  - b. Next 3 years is opportunity to increase management fee charges to cover additional posts
  - c. All new funding applications moving forward will include a management fee to reflect core expenditure
- 3) Make a case to HSE for core funding
- 4) Explore strategic partnerships for core funding
  - a. e.g. CRAIGE; FSA; HSE; Anti Poverty Network, Office of Inclusion; POBAL; COSC; Commission for the Support of Victims of Crime; Department of Justice



### 9. Phasing

As outlined in the chapter on 'Financial Analysis', LWL is very much dependent on programme funding and thus those programme funding cycles. These cycles not only determine when funding can be drawn down and when it will end, but also determines how long staff contracts can be issued and how long such positions will run for. Therefore it is important to have an overview of when these cycles occur and how they need to be taken into consideration when planning to continue existing work with new sources of income or initiate new areas of work. This section looks at the cycles and phasing considerations required for the areas of:

- Funding
- Staff recruitment and discontinuation
- Infrastructural planning

#### Funding

The table below illustrates the funding cycles for the main funding streams and lists each streams % of overall income in 2007.

	2007	2008				2009				2010			
Funding Cycles	%	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
FAS	27												
Equality for Women Measure (Clar)	14												
Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme	10	Being replaced by the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme											
HSE	8												
EU EQUAL Initiative	7												
LCRL	6												
ONE Foundation	5												
Back to Education Initiative	3												
Commission for the Support of Victims of Crime	3												
Family Support Agency	3												
Dormant Family Advocate	2												
Longford VEC Grant	2												
EOCP Extension Fund	1												
FAS Gateway	1												

Re-apply  Ends  Ongoing



## Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010

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As can be seen, the following funding streams will continue throughout the lifetime of this business plan:

- **FAS**
- **HSE**
- **Longford Community Resources Ltd.**
- **Back to Education Initiative**

The following funding streams will continue for just some of lifetime of this business plan and need to be reapplied for or replaced:

- **Equal Opportunities Childcare Prog.**
- **Commission for Support of Victims of Crime**
- **Family Support Agency**
- **Longford VEC Grant**
- **FAS Gateway**

Finally, the following funding streams will have stopped or will stop during the lifetime of this business plan and associated activities will therefore stop, or new funding will need be secured to continue these activities:

- **Equality for Women Measure (Clar)**
- **EU Equal Initiative**
- **Dormant Migrant Family Advocate**
- **EOCP Extension Fund**

### **Staff Recruitment**

The following table illustrates the staff recruitment relating to new areas of activity and the current status of positions will not be continued due to the discontinuation of funding cycles as outlined previously.



Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010

Recruitment Plan	Status	2007	2008				2009				2010			
		Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
<b>CEO</b>	In place													
<b>Services Manager</b>	Recruit													
<b>Operations Manager</b>	Recruit													
<b>Advocacy/ Research Officer</b>	Recruit													
<b>Migrant Support Worker</b>	In place/Recruit													
<b>Mobile Childcare Manager</b>	Recruit													
<b>Mobile Childcare Administrator</b>	Recruit													
<b>Mobile Childcare Supervisor</b>	Recruit													
<b>Mobile Childcare Assistants x6</b>	Recruit													
<b>Financial Manager</b>	In place													
<b>Facilities Manager</b>	In place													
<b>Training Co-ordinator</b>	In place													
<b>Violence Against Women Co-ordinator</b>	In place													
<b>Childcare Manager</b>	In place													
<b>Women's Equality Facilitator</b>	In place													
<b>Equal Support Worker</b>	In place													
<b>VAW Systems expert</b>	In place													
<b>VAW outreach Worker</b>	In place													
<b>Migrant Family Advocate</b>	In place													
<b>CE Supervisor</b>	In place													
<b>Play Leader x4</b>	In place													
<b>Creche Cook</b>	In place													
<b>Counsellor x3</b>	In place													
<b>Receptionist (FAS)</b>	In place													
<b>Receptionist (Rural Social Scheme)</b>	In place													
<b>Cleaner</b>	In place													
<b>Caretaker</b>	In place													
<b>14 Childcare Assistants FAS</b>	In place													

As can be seen, the recruitment of newly funded areas of activity – Services Manager, Operations Manager – will be phased in sequence in order to allow an effective recruitment process as well as allowing the current team adjust to the new roles which will come into play.

Funding for the role of the Migrant Support Worker stopped in October 2007 but will be recommenced as funding for this position is being replaced by private funding, as this role is seen as being critical to enabling direct support to migrants in Longford and generally enabling integration to happen in a more structured manner in the region.





## Longford Women's Link : Business Plan 2008-2010

### Infrastructural Planning

Show a table relating to action points such as:

- Developing Policies and Protocols
- Implementing hard systems (IT, reporting systems)
- Develop & implement new Governance processes
- Upgrading facilities
- Redesigning website?

	2007		2008				2009				2010			
Infrastructural Planning	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
<b>Employee Handbook</b>														
- Health & Safety														
- Equal Opportunities														
- Internet, Email, Phone														
Diversity Policy														
Guidelines for DV advocates														
Childcare														
I.T. Systems Review														
Facilities Upgrade - for training														
Website Redevelopment														
Plan Ratification														
AGM														
New Board Development Recruitment														

Review    In Place    Ongoing   