

SOCIAL INCLUSION POLICY

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 Members to consider the adoption of a Social Inclusion Policy, a copy of which is appended. The Policy, once adopted, will be the overarching document that covers a number of subsidiary policies, strategies and actions. Some of these are already in place (Community Transport Strategy, for example) and will need to be reviewed to ensure relevant links to the parent document.

2 CONTEXT

- 2.1 In delivering its six corporate objectives it is important for the Council to encourage social inclusion rather than alienation; hence the development of this Policy Statement.
- 2.2 The Council cannot resolve all the issues outlined in the Policy documents on its own, particularly in terms of addressing Poverty and Low Income, which have strong links to national remedies. However, through working proactively with partner organisations, the Council can contribute towards improving social inclusion rather than reinforcing social isolation.
- 2.3 The appended Social Inclusion Policy has been drafted following reference to best practice Authorities and Beacon Councils and is now submitted for Member consideration.
- 2.4 Subordinate policies, such as a Corporate Debt Policy, will need to be produced, considered and adopted over the coming months.

3 FINANCE AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 These will be considered as individual strategies, policies and actions are developed. Already, however, issues highlighted by the policy are recognised and included in the Council's budget e.g. Disabled Access Works. The document, once adopted will be published on the Council's website.

4 RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 It is proposed that Council **RESOLVES** to adopt the appended Social Inclusion Policy.

Paul Warren

Chief Executive

Background Papers:

Beacon Council Social Inclusion Policies
Salisbury District Council Social Inclusion Policy
ODPM Guidance on Social Exclusion

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Rochford District Council

Social Inclusion Policy

“Making sure no-one is left out”

Overall Aims

‘Social Inclusion’ means making sure that the Council’s services are more easily accessible to all those who want or need them.

‘Social Exclusion’ is the term used to describe the reasons that prevent people from enjoying the services to which they are entitled. We therefore aim to make all our services as accessible as possible to ensure that all our residents who want or need them can do so.

Main Causes

We have identified the following as the most common reasons for and causes of social exclusion:-

- Transportation in rural areas
- Physical Barriers
- Communication
- Discrimination
- Poverty and Low Income
- Social Isolation

Transportation

In rural areas there are often few or no public transport services. This limits peoples’ ability to access our services. Hardest hit are the elderly, young people, the disabled, and those families living on low incomes or reliant on benefits.

Physical Barriers

Many of our buildings are not fully accessible to those people who are physically challenged. This often makes some buildings impossible to use for :-

- Wheelchair users
- The elderly who find it difficult to:-
 - walk distances
 - use stairs
 - open doors
- parents with prams and pushchairs

Public transport can often be difficult to use for those people not physically fit.

Communication

The way we communicate often overlooks:-

- that some people cannot hear

- that some people lip-read
- that some people are blind or partially sighted
- that some people may not have English as their first language
- that some people have difficulty or may not be able to read or write
- that professionals often use 'jargon'.

This lack of recognition of special needs can occur when we provide information in the form of letters, notices, leaflets and agendas. Some people would be able to read if we just use larger print sizes but others might need information on audiotapes or in Braille.

Straight forward, simple language and the use of symbols or pictures would help those with learning difficulties and those with reading problems.

Discrimination

Direct, indirect or institutional discrimination means that some people may be treated less favourably than others on the basis of race, gender, disability or sexual orientation. This can lead to them receiving a less satisfactory service.

Poverty and Low Income

Many people in our District have low income levels and some people do not have paid employment at all. This can mean that they cannot afford to use all of the services provided and may have to be selective in the services they use. For those living in rural areas it can also mean that it costs money to access every day services like their doctor, dentist or the library whether they are using public transport or their car. This can have the effect of denying them the opportunities others take for granted.

Social Isolation

For a few people combinations of all these factors outlined above can result in them feeling socially and physically isolated from everyday society.

What we intend to do

The first step is to highlight the issues through this document; which will act as a reference and reminder document to ensure that in the work that the Council does, either on its own or collectively with other partners, it helps to promote social inclusion. To this end, we will continue to:-

- Review and develop our services to ensure that they recognise and reflect Equal Opportunities and Human Rights Policy.
- Progress the programme of works to Council owned buildings to ensure access for people with mobility problems.
- Develop and improve our communications and information for people with hearing, sight and language difficulties.
- Develop training programmes for all Council staff to recognise barriers to social inclusion.

- Develop our Community Transport initiative in partnership with other agencies to provide affordable transport to those having difficulty in accessing conventional forms of transport.
- Develop a Corporate Debt Policy which helps those in temporary financial difficulties.
- Progress our e-government initiatives to enhance access to our service, and yet at the same time, be mindful of those reliant on other means of communication.

Our Partners

The Council recognises that it cannot do everything on its own so we will be working with other organisations to address wider social inclusion issues. Our key partners in these areas include:-

- Essex County Council
- Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership
- STAR Partnership
- Rochford and Rayleigh Association for Voluntary Services
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Shelter (South East)
- Castle Point and Rochford Primary Care Trust

Resources

Clearly the Council's actions in many areas will be dependent upon the resources available. However, it is important that we ensure that the issues around social inclusion are considered in the delivery of our services and the operation of our facilities within the budgetary limitations set.