

Social Inclusion Policy and Strategy

Introduction

1. The Social Inclusion Policy and Strategy aims to support the overall vision for the Council 'to improve the well-being of the people of the South Hams'. The Council has six ranked priorities, relating to affordable housing, promoting better jobs, maintaining a quality environment, achieving a clean environment, improving access to services, and providing value for money. Social inclusion particularly relates to Council priorities CP1 (housing), CP2 (prosperity), and CP5 (access to services). It also closely relates to the Council's commitment to 'equality of opportunity, particularly targeting hard to reach and vulnerable groups'. In December 2005 the Council reviewed its corporate priorities and confirmed the current CP1 to CP6 but with some increased emphasis to be given to the needs of younger people and facilitating a healthier community. Most of the Council's services support social inclusion, either directly or indirectly and the Council actively promotes equality under the law without discrimination. Action to promote social inclusion is also taken with partners, particularly through the Local Strategic Partnership.
2. It must be recognised that addressing issues of social inclusion and community cohesion is a complex process and requires long term commitment, and effective partnership.

What is Social Inclusion?

3. Social exclusion describes the processes through which individuals or groups are either wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society in which they live. Local government policy in the late 1980s and 1990s focussed on poverty and low income as being the main cause of inequality in society. In response, anti-poverty strategies were developed which were aimed at alleviating poverty by introducing initiatives such as welfare benefit take-up campaigns and discount schemes for services such as leisure activities. Whilst they could be regarded as being successful, it was argued that they did not address the root cause of poverty, or the wider causes of exclusion.
4. The term social inclusion was therefore introduced to broaden the range of actions beyond, but still incorporating, anti-poverty work. The government has defined social exclusion as "a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown." This is a deliberately flexible definition and reflects the fact that any number of interrelated problems can result in an individual or group becoming socially excluded. What is clear, however, is that certain groups are more at risk of exclusion than others. Vulnerable groups can include those on low incomes, from an ethnic minority, living in deprived areas, from within certain age groups and people with a disability. An important element

therefore when developing a strategy to tackle social exclusion is having a clear understanding of which client groups or geographical areas within the district are at the greatest risk of exclusion. This is achieved by community profiling.

Social Exclusion in a Rural Area

5. The LGA's Rural Commission's publication, "Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Exclusion", points out some of the key features of rural disadvantage, including:-

- Seasonal, casual and temporary employment with low wages i.e. underemployment rather than unemployment;
- Lack of access to opportunities (jobs and training), services (health, care, education, shops and leisure) and information (welfare advice and information);
- Lack of and infrequent public transport services meaning higher dependency on private vehicles and therefore higher proportions of income spent on this;
- Additional costs of services e.g. transport, food, clothing and utilities;
- High cost of housing (relative to local income levels) and problems of second homes;
- Marked contrast between high and low level income groups; and
- Limited childcare provision and difficulties accessing it.

6. A particular issue in rural locations is that disadvantaged and poor households are unlikely to be concentrated in specific situations. In rural areas people tend to live amongst more affluent people, and the actual numbers of those experiencing social exclusion can be relatively small in some areas. This means that such households can be hidden, particularly when basing action on published deprivation indicators.

Community cohesion – what is the relationship?

7. Community cohesion is a newer term than social inclusion and is not necessarily related to deprivation. The Local Government Association offers the following definition, "Community cohesion incorporates and goes beyond the concept of race equality and social inclusion. The broad working definition is that a cohesive community is one where:

- There is a common vision and sense of belonging for all communities;
- The diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and positively valued;
- Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; and
- Strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods".

8. Linked to community cohesion is community development. The Council values the high levels of action that takes place every year through community and voluntary sector groups and organisations, statutory organisations, businesses and charities. Their combined effort adds to the diversity of the South Hams, to the strength of local communities and to overcoming the causes of social exclusion.

Improving Access to Council Services for all of our Communities

9. One of our key priorities (CP5) is to be an accessible Council, which includes providing access to our services to information and advice about our services. The services we provide are there to serve every section of our community and customers are entitled to expect high quality services that fully address their needs. Our aim is for all of our services to be accessible to all customers in the way that best suits their needs. To meet this aim, three specific customer access objectives have been identified:

- (i) Provide accurate information and advice on the services we provide, so that people are aware of the services available to them.

This objective will be achieved by the following means:

- Provide accurate and accessible information and advice about the services we offer including providing information and advice in a variety of formats to suit customers' diverse needs.
- Develop ways to engage with all sections of our community, to ensure that information, advice and services are accessible to all.
- Keep information on services up to date and clearly advise of any changes to advertised services.

- (ii) Provide services in a flexible way to meet the different needs of members of our community.

This objective will be achieved by the following means:

- Make services more flexible to meet the needs of different groups.
- Provide joined-up and integrated services.
- Increase physical and electronic access to information, advice and services, including increased use of Information Communication Technology to allow access to on-line services which are available 24 hours a day.

- (iii) Increase public confidence in Council services

In order to ensure that the people who need to access our services are accessing them, we not only need to effectively communicate details of

our services and how to access them and provide services in a flexible way to meet customers' needs, we also need to increase public confidence in Council services.

This objective will be achieved by the following means:

- Ensure that the services we provide represent value for money and are provided in the most efficient and cost effective way possible.
- Monitor customer satisfaction with the services, information and advice they receive from us.
- Increase take-up of Council services and information and advice provision, for example by increasing use of the Council website as a means of providing information and advice on Council services.

10. Over the coming years we will be building on existing and developing new ways for our customers to contact us and improving provision of information, advice and services.

The Policy context

11. The Social Inclusion Policy has links to a number of other external strategic documents, and internal policies. The key ones can be summarised as follows:

- South Hams Sustainable Community Strategy
- South Hams Local Development Framework
- South Hams Housing Strategy
- South Hams Prosperity Strategy
- Safer South Hams Community Safety Strategy
- Devon Community Strategy
- Devon Supporting People Strategy
- Devon Children and Young People's Plan
- South Hams Corporate Equality Scheme
- Asset Management Plan and Capital Strategy
- Child Protection Policy
- Communications Policy
- Community Consultation Strategy
- Community Involvement Policy
- Equal Opportunities within the District – A policy for the management of equal opportunities in the Delivery of services.

12. The Action Plan takes into account these related policies and strategies, and current evidence relating to social exclusion. It is important to note that there is a district wide as well as an area basis to social exclusion.

- a) District wide: - Groups of people who share common experiences, and face common problems, sometimes referred to as 'Communities of Interest'. Such communities within the South Hams includes those on low income and experiencing financial exclusion; older people; children and young people; people with a disability; gender differences, BME groups, travellers and other vulnerable groups.
- b) Area based: - Communities of place (i.e. defined geographical communities and neighbourhoods). Such areas include parts of Dartmouth, and Totnes in relation to income, child poverty, employment and health, and large swathes of rural areas such as Eastmoor, Garabrook, West Dart, Saltstone, and Charterlands in relation to access to services.

Community Profiling

13. The image of South Hams is one of prosperity, relative affluence, and a high quality of life. This picture is a gross over simplification of the reality for many people. Community profiling is a way of challenging such perceptions.

a) District wide Communities of Interest

This section focuses on the following communities of interest; older people, children and youth, disability, gender, low income/financial exclusion, black and minority ethnic groups, travellers, and other vulnerable groups (e.g. ex-offenders and substance abusers). The following is a summary of the issues identified in more detailed background work.

- (i) Age related deprivation and social exclusion

14. The district has an aging population, and an older age profile than many areas, resulting from the pattern of inward migration, lifespan changes, and decreasing birth rates. The communities with the lowest proportion of older people are Bickleigh and Shaugh, parts of Cornwood and Sparkwell, and Ivybridge (Central, Filham and Woodlands). These communities are largely urban and have experienced rapid population growth and are closely associated with Plymouth as a source of the city's labour.

15. The communities of Saltstone, Skerries, Stokenham, Salcombe, Malborough and Thurlestone have both the highest proportion of residents aged 60 and over (over 40%) and the highest mean age (54). They are popular retirement locations and have high proportions of properties that are second homes. These communities are contiguous and, with the exception of Salcombe, deeply rural.

16. Age can result in a number of lifestyle difficulties, for example:

- long term limiting illness
- general health deterioration
- lack of mobility / social exclusion
- access to appropriate accommodation.

17. A high proportion of older people in a population can have a range of influences, for example:

- contributing less to the economy through work and spending
- relatively wealthy retirees can create a perception of overall wealth that hides pockets of income deprivation
- placing greater strain on health services through age related illness

18. A high proportion of older people in a population can, however, be an untapped resource of:

- experience
- available time
- community involvement.

(ii) Children and Young People

19. The South Hams population is described as 'top heavy' with a greater proportion of older people than the average. This situation is exacerbated by the low proportion of younger people. The reasons for the low numbers of people in the 16 to 24 age bracket include:

- Low birth rates in recent years (part of a wider trend and worsened locally by the higher proportion of older people and consequent lower proportion of residents of an age to start families).
- Out-migration of younger people for education, employment and lifestyle reasons.

20. The South Hams communities with the lowest proportion of 16 to 24 year olds are: Saltstone, Skerries, Stokenham, Salcombe Malborough and Thurlestone (which are also those with the highest proportion of 60+ residents) as well Newton & Noss, Wembury & Brixton, Dartmouth & Kingswear, East Dart, Marldon and West Dart. These areas correlate strongly to the communities with high average ages and are also the communities with the lowest proportion of the largely economically active age bracket 30 to 44. Clearly there is a conflict in resource demands on the Council in these communities.

21. The responses to recent consultations in the district have revealed a range of deprivation and exclusion issues that concern young people locally:

- Attitude of older people towards young people
- Lack of food & drink facilities
- Housing
- Shops
- Skateparks
- Sports facilities
- Having a place to meet with friends.
- The negative attitude of adults.
- Drugs and alcohol.
- Having people to talk to.
- Boredom and having nothing to do.
- A lack of transport and mobility.

(Source: Ivybridge Youth Centre Project data)

(Source: South Hams Community Strategy 2003 -2006)

(iii) Disability

22. Deprivation and social exclusion caused by disability is not restricted to lack of mobility and poor access to services. Auditory, visual and cognitive disabilities can create barriers to full involvement in society and the ability to make use of services and opportunities taken for granted by the more able. Where pockets of disability can be highlighted geographically it is likely that age is a strong factor in influencing the distribution.
23. It is clear that in a rural district such as the South Hams, where large sections of the population are disadvantaged in terms of access to services, that people with a disability will suffer even greater disadvantage. Disabled people are increasingly dependant on community and voluntary transport with increasing severity of disability.

(iv) Gender and Sexual Orientation

24. At the time of the 2001 Census, the resident population of the South Hams was 81,849 people, of which 48% were male and 52% were female. Men and women might experience social exclusion, on the grounds of gender, in a number of areas e.g. within the jobs market, in relation to access to services and in relation to general treatment in society. Whilst it is accepted that gender discrimination has reduced in recent years, largely due to raised awareness of the issue and anti-discrimination legislation, there is still a real or perceived lack of equality in certain areas. This requires the Council to consider the different needs and experiences of men and women when reviewing existing or developing new policies and functions. For example, by improving access to information and services, so that men and women have equal opportunity of access; by making services more flexible to meet the needs of different groups; and by continuing to take steps to eliminate gender discrimination within the workplace and within service provision.
25. The 2001 Census recorded the number of people over the age of 16 years living in a household as a same sex couple. A same-sex couple consists of two people of the same sex identifying the other as a partner. The South Hams is recorded as having 94 people living in a same sex couple household. However, it should be noted that the Census figures will not be an accurate indication of the number of lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or transgender (LGBT) people living in the South Hams, as presumably some will live alone and others may be living in households with partners of the opposite sex.

(v) Low income / financial exclusion

26. Despite an increase in local income levels over the last ten years, the average South Hams wage is just 77% of the national average. Compared to the UK, South Hams has a significantly higher proportion of female employees, part-time employees, and self-employed people; each of these is likely to hold down income levels. The steep decline in agriculture

coupled with well-represented low wage and seasonally affected tourism and retail sectors have a further depressing effect on average incomes.

27. The combination of high house prices, and high transport costs combined with a low average income, dependence on seasonal employment and self employment results in low levels of disposable income for many households to spend on essentials such as food, clothing and healthcare. Though evidence suggests that disposable incomes in the South West are on a par with the UK average, additional factors further reduce householders ability to buy non essential products and services. An example of this is the high ownership of cars and vans in rural areas. The South Hams has notably high car/van ownership with 46% of households having at least one car or van but the difference in dependency on private transport is particularly noticeable when comparing second car/van ownership (30.2%) with that for England (23.5%).
28. Low disposable incomes reduce the efficiency of circulation and the amount of money driving the local economy and deter investment. Income support is a benefit which is a strong indicator of low income as it is awarded to bring the income of an individual (be it from wages, benefits or a pension) up to a basic means tested level. Working Families Tax Credit acts as a similar indicator for families with low earning parents. South Hams residents rely less on Income Support than average, while use of Working Families Tax Credit varies little from the national or regional rates. Caution should be used when interpreting 'need' from benefit claimant statistics as benefit uptake can vary geographically and over time there can be reluctance in the community to apply for benefits due to negative perceptions associated with them and lack of knowledge surrounding eligibility. People may also supplement their income in different ways, for example - alternative benefits, second jobs or the 'black economy'.
29. Low earned income can be caused by a number of factors, for example:
- Lack of basic skills – a greater proportion of the South Hams population has poorer literacy than both the national and regional averages, they are however more numerate.
 - Low or no qualifications – the South Hams has a lower proportion of the 16+ aged population without qualifications than both England & Wales and the South West region, however there are communities in the district that are particularly deprived for 'education, skills and training'.
 - Lack of quality job opportunities - the South Hams economy is known for its prevalence of small businesses. In 2005 the average gross weekly wage in the South Hams was 77% of that for the UK.
30. Low income can result from a variety of life circumstances, for example, lone parent households with dependant children, or being a full time carer. Low income can result in a range of lifestyle difficulties, for example, long hours worked, poor health, difficulty finding accommodation, particularly owner occupation, and unhealthy lifestyle behaviours.

(vi) Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Groups

31. The South Hams has a small non-white ethnic community (0.91%). Although this figure has more than doubled since 1991, people from other ethnic backgrounds living in the South Hams numbered only 745 people in 2001. Language and cross-cultural communication barriers have been highlighted in feedback from BME groups as the biggest problem faced. This could lead to women, in particular, who are not working but looking after a family, feeling isolated and unaware of facilities, services and rights.
32. The South Hams showed an above average level of people stating their religion as Christian (74.68%, compared to the England and Wales average of 71.75%), and also above average levels of people stating the religion as Buddhist, other religion or no religion.
33. People from different ethnic, cultural and faith backgrounds may feel excluded for a number of reasons, including language and communication barriers, lack of support groups and networks, lack of facilities (e.g. religious or community establishments) and lack of understanding about their background and particular needs. People from different ethnic, cultural and faith backgrounds might also experience discrimination and victimisation on the grounds of their background or belief, due to their diet or dress.

(ii) Travellers

34. Travellers can include Romany Gypsies, Gypsies (traditional travellers), new age travellers, circus workers, showmen and fairground workers, boat people including barges and Irish and Scottish travellers. Travellers may be settled, on permanent sites, transient or orbiting i.e. moving around an area as a result of being evicted. The Race Relations Act 1976 (as amended) recognises Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers as an ethnic group.
35. The 2001 Census identified the number of people living in caravans or other mobile or temporary structures, under the category of accommodation type. For the South Hams the number of people recorded as living in caravans or other mobile or temporary structures was 338 (0.42% of all people living in households). This is below the figure for Devon (0.53%) but above the figure for England and Wales (0.30%) as a whole. It should be noted that not all those recorded as residing in a caravan or other mobile or temporary structure will be Gypsies / Travellers e.g. mobile structures includes mobile homes for the elderly, or agricultural workers and not all Gypsies / Travellers will have been counted.
36. People who move frequently are a group recognised by the DCLG as being at risk from social exclusion. For those already excluded, moving frequently can worsen the effects of their exclusion. Some of the groups are people in transition, such as those leaving hospital or the care system as well as people who are traditionally mobile or move to find work such as Gypsies/Travellers and seasonal workers.

37. Gypsies / Travellers and other people who move frequently might experience social exclusion in a number of areas, including lack of information and access to services, lack of understanding of their needs, and real or perceived feeling of prejudice directed at them from the receiving community.

(viii) Other vulnerable groups

38. Ex-offenders and substance abusers are considered under this heading. Ex-offenders may experience exclusion in a number of areas e.g. within the jobs market, in relation to access to services and in relation to general treatment in society. The Council is aware of its obligations under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, in relation to applications for employment.

39. Substance misusers may experience exclusion in a number of areas e.g. within the jobs market, in relation to access to services and in relation to general treatment in society (because of a perception that substance misuse is linked to rising crime levels). Substance misusers may also have specific health care needs.

(b) Area based communities of place

40. Deprivation indices are a useful tool for enabling the relative quality of life for inhabitants of defined geographical areas to be compared. It is important to note when interpreting measures based on geographic areas, rather than individual circumstances, that not all deprived people live in deprived wards, just as not everybody in a ward ranked as deprived are themselves deprived.

41. The Indices of Deprivation (ID), compiled by the Social Disadvantage Research Centre of Oxford University for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, is one of several commonly used deprivation indices, for example the Jarman Underprivileged Area Score and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Breadline Britain Score. The ID 2004 builds on the ID 2000 information and has become the preferred index to use. Improvements incorporated in the ID 2004 include additional domains and a change in the geographical areas used from larger electoral wards to smaller Super Output Areas (SOAs). The ID 2000 was constructed at 1998 ward level, whereas the ID 2004 is constructed at SOA lower layer. There are 32,482 SOAs compared to the original 8,414 wards used in the ID 2000. The areas presented as large wards in the ID 2000 have now been broken down into small components for the ID 2004. For example, in ID 2004 there are three SOAs representing Dartmouth and Kingswear. Each SOA represents approximately 1,500 people on average.

42. IMD 2004 is a measure of multiple deprivation made up of seven SOA level Domain Indices. Each Domain contains a number of indicators. The seven Domain Indices are:

- Income
- Employment
- Health Deprivation and Disability
- Education, Skills and Training
- Barriers to Housing and Services
- Crime and Disorder
- Living Environment

43. Each of the domains has two main data outputs:

- The Domain Score - constructed by combining the indicators within that domain.
- The Rank of the Domain Score. The SOA with a rank of 1 is the most deprived and 32,482 is the least deprived, for each domain.

44. The scores should not be compared between Domains as they have different minimum and maximum values and ranges. To compare between Domains, the ranks should be used.

45. The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2004 is constructed by combining the seven domain scores, using the following weights:

- Income (22.5%)
- Employment (22.5%)
- Health Deprivation and Disability (13.5%)
- Education, Skills and Training (13.5%)
- Barriers to Housing and Services (9.3%)
- Crime and Disorder (9.3%)
- Living Environment (9.3%)

46. It is not possible to say, for example, that an SOA with a score of 40 is twice as deprived as an SOA with a score of 20.

47. It is important to note that areas compared using this score can rank as similarly deprived despite profound differences in their nature. For example, for similar IMD 2004 ranks an urban area could be heavily biased by low 'employment' and 'crime and disorder' scores while a rural area could be heavily biased by low 'income' and 'barriers to housing and services' scores.

48. The South Hams has SOAs that fall within the 20% most deprived nationally, in the following domains: 'Employment', 'Education, Skills and Training', 'Living Environment' and most noticeably, although perhaps predictably, 'Barriers to Housing and Services'.

49. The following tables show the South Hams SOAs that fall within the 20% most deprived nationally, by domain.

Employment

This domain measures employment deprivation conceptualised as involuntary exclusion of the working age population from the world of work. Details of each of the domains are set out in Appendix B.

Table

SOA Code (last 3 digits)	SUPER OUTPUT AREA (SOA)	EMPLOYMENT SCORE	RANK OF EMPLOYMENT SCORE
155	Dartmouth Townstal	0.17	5,637
183	Totnes Town	0.17	5,646

Education, Skills & Training

This domain captures the extent of the deprivation in education, skills and training in a local area. The indicators fall into two sub-domains: one relating to lack of attainment among children and young people and one relating to lack of qualifications in terms of skills.

Table

SOA Code (last 3 digits)	SUPER OUTPUT AREA (SOA)	EDUCATION SKILLS & TRAINING SCORE	RANK OF EDUCATION SKILLS AND TRAINING SCORE
155	Dartmouth Townstal	40.18	5,106

Barriers To Housing and Services

The purpose of this domain is to measure barriers to housing and key local services. The indicators fall into two sub-domains: “geographical barriers” and “wider barriers” which include issues relating to access to housing such as affordability.

Table

SOA Code (last 3 digits)	SUPER OUTPUT AREA (SOA)	BARRIERS TO HOUSING & SERVICES SCORE	RANK OF BARRIERS TO HOUSING & SERVICES SCORE
142	Allington & Loddiswell	48.50	490
143	Avon and Harbourne	47.87	578
145	Bickleigh and Shaugh	40.58	2,084
147	Charterlands	53.63	96

148	Cornwood and Sparkwell	38.36	2,771
149	Cornwood and Sparkwell	46.21	848
150	Dartington	34.85	4,248
153	Dartmouth and Kingswear	40.44	2,137
156	East Dart	34.31	4,517
157	Eastmoor	53.97	88
159	Erme Valley	41.80	1,718
160	Erme Valley	45.60	933
171	Newton and Noss	33.98	4,700
172	Salcombe and Malborough	38.57	2,697
174	Saltstone	58.06	27
175	Skerries	40.62	2,072
178	Stokenham	35.75	3,819
179	Thurlestone	49.30	382
182	Totnes Town	36.42	3,508
186	Wembury and Brixton	34.87	4,236
188	West Dart	51.45	175
189	Westville and Alvington	34.18	4,594

Living Environment

This domain focuses on deprivation in the living environment. It comprises two sub-domains: “indoors” living environment which measures the quality of housing and the “outdoors” living environment which contains two measures about air quality and road traffic accidents.

Table

SOA Code (last 3 digits)	SUPER OUTPUT AREA (SOA)	LIVING ENVIRONMENT SCORE	RANK OF LIVING ENVIRONMENT SCORE
152	Dartmouth and Kingswear	47.13	3,153
159	Erme Valley	41.25	4,641

The Top 10 Most Deprived South Hams SOAs by IMD overall score

50. There are no South Hams SOAs that fall within the 20% most deprived in the combined Index of Multiple Deprivation. The table below shows the district’s ten most deprived SOAs by IMD overall score, out of 32,482 nationally – where 1 is the most deprived.

Table

10 Most Deprived SHDC SOAs	SUPER OUTPUT AREA (SOA)	IMD SCORE	RANK OF IMD (where 1 is most deprived)
1	Dartmouth Townstal	29.15	8,517
2	Westville and Alvington	25.74	10,214
3	Charterlands	23.08	11,688
4	Eastmoor	22.80	11,869
5	Totnes Bridgetown	22.47	12,081
6	Totnes Town	22.44	12,097
7	Totnes Town	20.93	13,130
8	Cornwood and Sparkwell	20.31	13,636
9	Totnes Town	19.05	14,587
10	Dartmouth Townstal	18.45	15,026

Note: SOAs appearing in the top 10 may only be one of several SOAs in a ward area

51. Additional information can be provided from the baseline profiles developed by Devon County Council. The profiles provide a statistical overview, based on a series of facts and figures, of what life is like in each 'Devon Town' area. The profiles contain a range of information which supports local knowledge on Social Inclusion issues. The profiles can be viewed by going to the following web page:

www.devon.gov.uk/index/democracymunities/neighbourhoodsvillages/devontownprofiles.htm.

The Social Inclusion Policy

52. Taking account of the community profiling, and a range of consultation, it is suggested the Council's Social Inclusion Policy should be as follows:

'South Hams District Council's vision is to improve the well-being of the community. We are committed to equality of opportunity in the provision of services to all sections of the community and the Council values people both as individuals and as members of social and community groups. The Council also recognises that diversity exists within the community it serves and is committed to achieving an inclusive community in partnership with statutory and voluntary organisations'.

In short the policy is about 'making sure no-one is left out'. In implementing this policy the Council will continue existing programmes that promote social inclusion, and develop new activities subject to consultation, stakeholder views, and resource availability.

Where are we now?

53. As part of the Corporate Improvement Plan the Council is committed to developing socially inclusive policy and practice. Based on community profiling we now have an understanding of the diverse needs within the district. Other work undertaken to date has improved understanding of the social inclusion agenda, its cross cutting nature and how to improve linkages to the Council's priorities and commitments. We have partly improved communication and participation with hard to reach groups. Specific actions to improve inclusion outcomes have included the adoption and further development of equal opportunity policies; auditing activities that contribute to social inclusion, adopting a Sustainable Community Strategy and associated linked strategies which support social inclusion; establishing a range of representative groups (including Sounding Board as a representative consultation forum and undertaken a Cultural Audit); undertaking diversity awareness training; improving awareness of social exclusion data available; and from 2006 we will be seeking social inclusion improvements to be identified as part of service planning, and revisions of major policy and strategy. The formal preparation of a Social Inclusion Strategy is a further step forward to embedding social inclusion within the organisation. Current actions within services which contribute to social inclusion are summarised in Appendix A.

Where do we want to be?

54. The Council aims to ensure that its community leadership role on social inclusion and diversity is acknowledged by partners and stakeholders, that joint action is central to the delivery of the Social Inclusion Strategy, and that we are able to secure top quartile performance for access and social inclusion performance indicators which are a priority for the district. To achieve that aim we recognise that our LSP Partners will need to develop common agendas regarding social inclusion issues, and that there is consensus for taking action. During consultation with LSP partners on the draft strategy, it became apparent that agencies such as the police have information on social exclusion in rural areas, and housing organisations have a lot of experience responding to social; inclusion issues.

The Social Inclusion Action Plan

55. The following is the action plan which has been subject to consultation with key services and agencies. The action plan does not replicate actions in other strategies, but identifies related strategies and linkages. The role of the action plan is to provide an umbrella document to map action in other strategies and within partner agencies, and to identify new actions, which a social inclusion policy can act as a catalyst for, using multi agency approaches to add value. Through increased awareness and updating of community profiling, and customer and agency feedback, the action plan will be refined over time.