



Draft Social Inclusion Policy

Copeland Borough Council

1.0 SOCIAL INCLUSION IN COPELAND

Social inclusion is the process of ensuring that everyone has the means and ability to readily access the services they require to participate fully in society. Copeland Borough Council recognises there are many barriers to inclusion, but will work to remove them through the implementation of this policy which covers a range of issues relevant to the services offered by the Council.

Whilst many residents within the borough enjoy a good quality of life, significant numbers do experience some form, or even multiple forms of deprivation. For instance members of low income households may be unable to afford services most people take for granted. Low income may be a result of a lack of employment opportunities, which in turn may be a result of a lack of educational opportunities, transport problems or poor health. Conversely a lack of employment itself can affect not only income levels, but also health and well-being. The council therefore has a duty in the short term to put in place enabling schemes to prevent exclusion due to income deprivation, whilst at the same time working towards the long term improvement of the economic prospects for its residents.

However, employment prospects are limited in Copeland as the borough struggles to attract new investment whilst traditional manufacturing industries are in decline, resulting in a lack of diversity and an over dependency on the nuclear sector for employment. This limited economic base has left the borough with higher unemployment levels than the regional and national averages and therefore with a significant level of income deprivation amongst its residents. Alongside the high level of worklessness which adversely affects social inclusion, the low level of educational attainment relative to the national average is also significant, as are the relatively high levels of poor health, crime and anti-social behavior, poor or unaffordable housing and inadequate transport provision in some of the more deprived areas.

Rural isolation can also impact negatively on social inclusion, particularly where accessing largely urban based services involves additional travel costs which for some can prove prohibitively expensive. This isolation is significant in Copeland as it is a largely rural borough, and whilst the majority of its 70,000 residents live in the four main urban centers of Whitehaven, Egremont, Cleator Moor and Millom, there are many low-income families living in rural areas. In addition, some of the more remote areas are poorly served by public transport making access rather than cost the main barrier.

The social nature of the borough is also changing which is likely to present further inclusion challenges in the future. Many long term residents are now retired, whilst a high proportion of young people move out of the borough to find work. Therefore, if the borough is to prosper it must encourage more young people to stay whilst attracting a range of people willing and able to take up any new opportunities created. As a result Copeland is becoming increasingly reliant on the arrival of both national and international migrants. In order to attract these workers the borough must meet their cultural, educational and housing needs. The council therefore has a duty to prevent any new incoming groups from becoming isolated by helping them interact with those that are more settled. If Copeland is to prosper, the borough must welcome migrants whilst ensuring current residents also receive the level of support they require.

2.0 THE POLICY

Whilst complete in itself, this policy does not sit in isolation. It is both complimentary to and gives support to other Council policies and should be viewed as integral to achieving the Council's Corporate Plan 2007-2012.¹

Through the implementation of this policy Copeland Borough Council seeks to prevent social exclusion occurring in the first instance, re-integrate those who have become excluded whilst maintaining at least minimum standards for everyone.

Copeland Borough Council will directly influence social inclusion through its own internal services by:

2.1 Considering social inclusion as an integral part of all future strategies and policies, both internal and external to the council. This will be supported through awareness raising and staff training to ensure access to all through the design and delivery of inclusive services *(2.4 equality of opportunity)*

2.2 Involving clients in the design and delivery of services to help ensure that those offered are appropriate to identified needs, ensure equal representation of all residential groups in local decision making and encourage all sectors of the community to use the support available *(2.1 creating opportunities for community involvement)*

2.3 Removing or minimising barriers which prevent access to services and activities or provide alternatives as detailed in the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy. For example ensuring the councils own recruitment policies and services provided for members does not exclude any sector of society from taking up such posts *(2.4 equality of opportunity)*

2.4 Presenting all council information clearly and simply, and in a variety of formats where required, to ensure all residents can access the information they need, as outlined in the Equality and Diversity Policy *(2.4 equality of opportunity)*

2.5 Offering services in an appropriate environment, for example ensuring privacy where appropriate, to ensure all clients are comfortable in approaching and accessing the services provided *(2.5 customer focussed)*

¹ Figures in brackets *(eg)* at the end of points 2.1 - 2.17 indicate the directly related 'aims and measures' outlined in the Corporate Plan 2007- 2012. Other council documents are referred to throughout as appropriate.

2.6 Where resources allow, providing those on low income access to supporting services such as housing and council tax benefits, housing renovation grants, concessionary charges and, when necessary, sensitive debt and arrears policies (2.4 *equality of opportunity*)

Whilst recognising that local, regional and national factors influence social inclusion, Copeland Borough Council is committed to working to increase social inclusion across the borough. Through its community leadership role, the Council will seek to ensure that other agencies also have a positive impact on social inclusion ensuring local facilities and services are available to all. To achieve this, the Council, in partnership with other relevant organisations will endeavour to:

2.7 **Employment:** Increase employment opportunities through business support schemes and help people back into work across the borough through targeted programmes, including grant and training schemes delivered by the Council's economic regeneration and community renewal services (3.1 *sufficient & diverse job opportunities*)

2.8 **Education & Training:** Support programmes that increase access to relevant training and educational opportunities to ensure that local people are equipped with the skills they require to take advantage of job opportunities across the borough through programmes supported by the Council's community renewal service and human resources (2.3 *improving skills and education*)

2.9 **Housing:** Support the provision of affordable and good quality housing through the Housing Market Renewal Strategy to improve social housing estates and meet the objectives set out in the Copeland Local Plan which aims to ensure that the housing needs of the community are met locally with decent and good quality affordable homes available to all. As the strategic housing authority the Council will work to achieve a balanced housing market which meets decent homes standards in both the private sector and across the social housing sector through its work with Registered Social Landlords. (3.5 *quality housing*)

2.10 **Health:** Support work to provide equal access to both primary healthcare and health services, and promote healthy lifestyles as outlined in the Council's Health Strategy which includes for example; supporting smoking cessation programmes and promoting active lifestyles (3.7 *improving health*)

2.11 **Environment:** Ensure that both the built and natural environment promotes people's well-being through the provision of accessible green spaces, the maintenance of local / neighbourhood environments, the implementation of neighbourhood renewal strategies within the most deprived areas of the borough with the adherence to sound planning policies and the continuing work of leisure and environmental services across the borough (3.4 *sustainability*)

2.12 **Crime & Community Safety:** Tackle crime and antisocial behaviour and increase community safety through active involvement in the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, and through involvement in key community renewal programmes such as the Neighbourhood Management scheme and Cleaner, Safer Greener programme which will increase the number of police community safety officers within target areas (3.2 *safer Copeland*)

2.13 **Transport:** Advocate for the provision of affordable and appropriate transport as set out in the Cumbria Local Transport Plan, ensuring that the most deprived and isolated areas are not neglected *(3.8 Flexible Transport Infrastructure)*

2.14 **Rural Isolation:** Ensure that those living in isolated, rural areas have access to the services they need either through improved access and use of information communication technologies (ICT) enabling access to centralised services, or by increased outreach through the provision of mobile services *(2.4 equality of opportunity)*

2.15 **Governance & Democracy:** Encourage and improve democratic engagement across the borough to increase awareness of and enable people to advocate for their rights with the support of their council through the work of the communications service, community forums and new neighbourhood governance arrangements *(2.1 creating opportunities for community involvement)*

2.16 **Leisure & Culture:** Ensure the widest possible access to all leisure, cultural and local heritage services and promote collections and exhibitions that reflect the historical and contemporary social and cultural diversity within Copeland through the work of the cultural services department *(3.6 Leisure & Culture)*

2.17 **IT & Digital Technology:** Support initiatives to improve access to ICT giving residents a greater opportunity to use e-services and e-government and promote digital inclusion *(2.4 equality of opportunity)*

3.0 RECOMMENDED PRIORITY ACTIONS 2007- 2012

Whilst working towards full social inclusion, the council recognises this will not be achieved during the period of the current Corporate Plan (2007 – 2012). Whilst we hope to make progress in all areas listed above, the agreed priorities for this period with regards to social inclusion are:

- To consider social inclusion as an integral part of all future strategies and policies as this is fundamental to the implementation of the policy.
- Whilst the policy will be implemented across the whole borough, areas of high exclusion, particularly where people are excluded on several fronts, will be given priority for additional support eg. areas of particularly high unemployment and subsequently low incomes which can in turn contribute to poor health, poor housing and a poor living environment. These areas are nationally recognised through 'Super Output Area' deprivation scores and the council will target those areas which score highly on this index.
- To effectively implement the South Whitehaven Neighbourhood Management Programme which will result in changes in service delivery both by Copeland Borough Council and other relevant organisations to increase social inclusion across an area recognised as currently receiving inadequate service provision.
- Specific groups who experience exclusion on a variety of levels, but whom are not necessarily geographically defined, will also be given priority for additional support such as; the vulnerable and homeless, benefit claimants, older people and women.

4.0 IMPLEMENTATION & MONITORING

To ensure that this policy is actively implemented across the council, social inclusion targets will be included in relevant service plans and monitored on an annual basis. In relation to the priority actions listed above the council will ensure that:

- All strategies and policies developed after the adoption of the Social Inclusion Policy include consideration of the likely impact on social inclusion. (*Policy & Performance*)
- Those areas selected for targeted support will show outputs relating to increased social inclusion (*programme / project managers*)
- Achieve measurable changes to service delivery as a result of the South Whitehaven Neighbourhood Management programme. (*SW Neighbourhood Management Board & Council Executive*) Where successful this model will be rolled out to other priority areas

This Policy is relevant to all departments of the council and as such a coherent response is required, and will be evident in the progress made towards achieving social inclusion across Copeland. However, the changing demography of the borough also ensures that this work will be ongoing as the council responds not only to the present circumstances, but also responds to the changing circumstances of the future.