

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

REPORT

To: Policy and Resources (Community Development) Sub-Committee	Subject: Social Strategy Working Group - Early Action Projects and Social Exclusion Conference
From: Chief Executive	
Date: 16 April 1997	Ref: CE/012/002/003A

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Sub-Committee on the work of the Social Strategy Working Group and to enable the Sub-Committee to consider proposed arrangements for a seminar on social exclusion.

2.0 Background

2.1 The Social Strategy Working Group comprises around 20 officers representing all Council departments and is chaired by the Assistant Chief Executive (Operations). During the period to January 1997 the group worked intensively to develop goals, objectives and principles for the Social Strategy.

Based on the following 5 key issues, objectives, priority groups and policy measures were developed

- Poverty
- Health
- Education & Training Opportunities
- Unemployment
- Living Environment

2.2 This work formed the basis of the Social Strategy section in the Corporate Plan which has been approved by the Council.

2.3 The Working Group was reconvened in October 1997 to begin the task of developing plans to implement the Social Strategy. A twin track approach has been adopted. Firstly through an action planning process the group is auditing existing activity which contributes to the social strategy, identifying gaps, developing new programmes and identifying potential links between departments and with partners.

Secondly, 3 specific short term projects are being developed by sub-groups on the following issues:

- integrated benefits
- youth information
- health and homelessness

3.0 Early Action Projects

- 3.1 The overall aim of the projects is to ensure early action on implementing the Social Strategy which benefits communities, demonstrates the value of inter-departmental and partnership action and builds experience of corporate working within the working group and between departments.
- 3.2 Each project has been initiated and managed by a sub-group of the Social Strategy Working Group but other appropriate staff are also involved in the project teams.
- 3.3 Integrated Benefits - the main objective of the Integrated Benefits Sub-Group is to devise a procedure and system whereby applicants who receive one benefit eg, Council Tax Rebate are automatically assessed for all other benefits which the Council administer. Significant progress has already been made by merging the procedure for claiming Housing Benefit and Council Tax Rebate.

The application form for these benefits now includes a tick box which asks claimants if they require information on any other benefits administered by the Council.

As a first step of progressing an Integrated Benefits System a leaflet entitled "A guide to benefits and discounts provided by North Lanarkshire Council" is being produced which details the full range of benefits available through the Council and sets out the eligibility criteria for claimants.

- 3.4 Health and Homelessness - Young homeless people are known to be at risk of poor health due to a range of factors including poverty, unemployment, lack of social support and lack of a home. This can result in poor diet, vulnerability to drug and alcohol abuse, difficulties in accessing primary healthcare, poor mental health and low self esteem.

The sub-group has developed a programme designed to improve aspects of the lifestyles of young homeless people which will impact positively on their health. The eight week programme is being developed and piloted with people aged 16-25 who have taken up supported accommodation at Old School Court in Coatbridge. The programme combines group discussion, peer education, visits and physical activities and is intended to be informative, educational, supportive and enjoyable. Ten young people are involved.

The project will be evaluated and if successful may be replicated and extended to benefit other groups of homeless people. Lanarkshire Health Board have expressed interest in a partnership approach.

- 3.5 Youth Information - The third sub-group considered a range of issues concerning access to information and opportunities for priority groups and young people as having a particular need for information which is currently not available in a concise and accessible format.

The group has designed and drafted three information products:

- booklet on Council services/emergency numbers
- bookmark
- youth information card.

These will be available soon and will be distributed widely.

The group has also arranged training for a range of staff involved in providing service to young people and secured space in North Lanarkshire News for a special feature aimed at young people.

3.6 These pilot projects will be evaluated by the Social Strategy Working Group and a report on outcomes will be made to the Sub-Committee in due course.

4.0 Social Exclusion Seminar

4.1 The Social Strategy Working Group held a planning day in February to assist in planning the implementation of the Social Strategy. One of the main proposals emerging from the day was to hold a seminar on social exclusion.

4.2 One of the objectives of the event is to consider the links between the Government's emerging approach to social exclusion and the Council's social and economic strategies.

The event is being planned to take place in late May or early June. Lord Sewell the Scottish Office Minister responsible for social exclusion has been invited to make the keynote address.

It is intended to invite all members, chief officers and key staff to participate.

Details of the arrangements will be submitted to the Sub Committee in due course.

5.0 Recommendations

5.1 It is recommended that the Sub-Committee:

- a) request the Chief Executive to submit a report on the outcomes of the Social Strategy early action projects in due course;
- b) note the proposals to hold a seminar on social exclusion; and
- c) otherwise note the contents of this report.


Chief Executive

APPENDIX ONE

Social Exclusion Conference /Seminar - Briefing Note

Conference Aims

- to consider the key characteristics of social exclusion
- to examine the Government's proposals for tackling social exclusion
- to explore the nature and level of social exclusion in North Lanarkshire
- to identify the role for local government in combating social exclusion
- to identify key issues for North Lanarkshire Council
- to consider the role of the Council's social and economic strategies in tackling social exclusion
- to agree the key dimensions of an effective and sustainable approach to building social inclusion in North Lanarkshire
- to identify the next steps

Potential Outcomes

- raised awareness of the extent, and nature of social exclusion and opportunities to respond
- improved working relationships involving Members/Chief Officers
- better understanding of Corporate Plan and Social Strategy
- shared vision/commitment to corporate action
- political and managerial leadership on social exclusion established

Invited Participants: All Members (69)
Chief Officers (38)
Other key senior staff nominated by departments

Date: End May/Early June (depending on availability of Lord Sewell)

Venue: Concert Hall, Civic Centre (if available)

Invited Speakers: Lord Sewell (Minister responsible for social exclusion)

Programme: Balanced programme, emphasis on participation and enabling an agreed way forward

Indicative Programme

9.30	Registration, coffee
10.00	Introduction and Welcome (Leader of Council)
10.05	Keynote Address (Lord Sewell)
10.35	Questions /Open forum (Chair: Chief Executive)
11.00	Coffee
11.15	'Responding to the Challenge' (Leader of Council)
11.30	Workshops
12.30	Lunch
13.30	Workshops
14.30	Feedback - key issues from workshops
14.45	Coffee
15.00	Plenary Discussion 'The Way Forward' (Chair: Assistant Chief Executive (Operations))
15.45	Close

Workshops: two sets of the same five workshops are proposed with participants attending one workshop in the morning and a different one in the afternoon. Workshops could be chaired by an elected member and led/facilitated by officers. For example each of the nine Directors and the Assistant Chief Executive (Policy) could lead one workshop. Support in preparing for the workshops could be provided by appropriate members of the Social Strategy Working Group. The following themes are suggested:

Health
Early Intervention
Poverty
Community development
Employment and training

Brief input would be followed by a structured discussion to identify key issues, opportunities and proposed actions with an emphasis on corporate and partnership responses.

Plenary: It is anticipated that the plenary discussion 'The Way Forward' would concentrate on the keys to making things happen such as leadership, resources, policy framework, partnership, corporate working, implementation structures, community involvement and review process.

Preparing Participants:

A leaflet /pack of information should go to participants before the event including brief summaries of Government's consultation document/ proposals, North Lanarkshire Council's response, Corporate Plan, Social Strategy, conference aims, key issues, and programme.

A brief input at the corporate management team, departmental management team meetings and political group meetings may also be worthwhile.