

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

REPORT

To: Policy and Resources (Community Development) Sub Committee	Subject: Service Plan Activity Information
From: Chief Executive	
Date: 14 January 1999	Ref: CE/012/002/

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Sub Committee with positional statements on activity areas as agreed in the Chief Executive's Service Plan.

2.0 Background

2.1 Following discussions at the Policy and Resources (Community Development) Sub Committee at its meeting on 25 November 1998, regular information updates on policy development was requested.

2.2 Positional statements are attached as appendix 1 and regular updates will be provided at future Sub Committee meetings.

3.0 Recommendations

3.1 It is recommended that the Sub Committee:

- i) note the contents of this report.


 Chief Executive

SOCIAL STRATEGY

The Council's Social Strategy is a cornerstone of the North Lanarkshire Corporate Plan and the Council is committed to tackling poverty and deprivation and promoting social inclusion and improved quality of life for those North Lanarkshire communities experiencing disadvantage in any form. A number of practical initiatives have been developed corporately to implement the Social Strategy.

Social Inclusion Conference

The Social Inclusion Conference was one of the first events of its kind to be held within a local authority and provided an opportunity for members and senior officers of the Council to examine those issues which limit the capacity for social inclusion within particular communities. Those issues raised at the conference, and the identification of approaches which may developed by the Council, will inform future Social Strategy projects. As a direct result of the Social Inclusion Conference, North Lanarkshire Council has been invited to join an inter authority/Warwick University/Local Government Information Unit task group examining the effects and responses to social inclusion in a national context.

Early Action Projects

The Council's Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 8 December 1998 also agreed a number of early action projects following on from those issues raised at the Conference. These include:-

- the further integration of benefit and advice services;
- consideration of New Deal placements;
- develop proposals to attract socially excluded young people to use leisure facilities;
- bid for 'Listening to Communities' resources; and,
- liaison/discussion with Lord Sewell, Government Minister with responsibility for Social Inclusion.

Health and Homelessness Project

A pilot programme, working directly with young people, and examining the links between poor health and homelessness was successfully delivered from the Old School Court Housing Complex in Coatbridge over a three month period. The success of this pilot has led to it being replicated within the Blue Triangle Housing Project in Viewpark and it is planned to roll out the initiative to other areas.

Integrated Benefits Booklet

The Social Strategy Working Group has recently published a guide to benefits and discounts provided by North Lanarkshire Council. This comprehensive booklet is available through local offices and libraries and will be formally launched by the Council later in January.

Future Developments

Given the importance and potential impact of the Social Strategy on both the delivery of Council services and the policy thinking that determines Council objectives, there is now a need to develop appropriate training and awareness raising at all levels within the Council, including front line staff.

There is also the requirement to promote the Social Strategy and foster a sense of shared ownership and common objectives at both a departmental level and with the Council's strategic partners.

DECENTRALISATION

The Council has adopted a comprehensive approach to decentralisation involving political, managerial and physical changes as well as the development of a supportive organisational culture. Through decentralisation the Council is aiming to provide quality services which people want and need and increase public involvement in decision making.

The Policy and Resources (Community Development) Sub Committee is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the decentralisation scheme. The role of the Chief Executive's department is to develop the decentralisation strategy, support a corporate approach to change, facilitate implementation of the scheme and monitor progress on an ongoing basis.

Progress on the key tasks of Area Committees and Area Teams has been slower than initially envisaged. The development of area profiles is behind schedule and to date little attention has been given to improving access to the Council, considering the feasibility of first-stop shops or developing service integration at an area level.

However the Council has made a positive start to decentralising. In most areas the establishment of Area Committees Area Teams and Community Forums has generated opportunities and expectations and a potential to achieve the objectives identified in the decentralisation scheme.

Having established the main area structures decentralisation is now entering a new phase where issues generated by community representatives, Area Committees and through area profiling will demand carefully managed responses and in this context further attention must be given to a number of internal issues concerning roles, responsibilities and resources.

The first annual review of decentralisation is nearing completion. Through the review the Council will reconsider the objectives of decentralisation, provide some impetus in areas which require further development, strengthen and clarify the role of the 'centre' and agree a number of changes to ensure that decentralisation progresses smoothly over the next year or so.

In addition to co-ordinating and progressing a number of specific actions arising from the decentralisation review current key tasks for the Chief Executive's department include providing further guidance on the production of area profiles and organising a conference for community forums.

VOLUNTARY SECTOR STRATEGY

There are hundreds of voluntary organisations in North Lanarkshire active in a wide range of areas including social care, housing, education, community development, arts, sport, health and the environment. Voluntary organisations and community groups make an important contribution to the quality of life of all sections of the community and can offer valuable experience and insights across the range of local authorities responsibilities and concerns.

All Council departments have a stake in the relationship between the Council and the voluntary sector. Some departments rely on voluntary organisations for service provision, community and customer liaison, needs assessment and policy and practice development. In turn hundreds of voluntary organisations rely heavily on Council funding, contracts or support for their existence, activities and development.

The Council's voluntary sector policy sets out the principles on which to build a partnership between the Council and voluntary organisations. The associated strategy identifies a number of key issues (including consultation, participation, funding policy and infrastructure). Some of these are being taken forward unilaterally and others have been identified as requiring joint consideration by the Council and voluntary sector representatives.

The Policy and Resources (Community Development) Sub Committee is responsible for overseeing Council policy on the voluntary sector. The role of the Chief Executive's Department is to lead the development of a corporate and strategic approach to partnership with the voluntary sector.

The implementation of the strategy is still at an early stage. Regarding those issues which require joint consideration further work is needed to develop a capacity to represent the Council in discussions and to bring about changes in policies and practices operated by departments. Similarly North Lanarkshire Network as the key umbrella voluntary organisation require further support to build their capacity to link with a larger number of voluntary organisations and to represent the sector more effectively on strategic issues.

However progress has been made recently. The voluntary organisations database has been expanded and developed allowing a more effective flow of information between the Council and the voluntary sector and enabling benchmarking, comparative analysis and monitoring of changes and trends in the sector.

Dialogue with North Lanarkshire Network on how to jointly take forward the agenda of issues identified in the strategy has been initiated. Network with support from the Council have secured a £40k grant from the European Social Fund to develop the voluntary sector infrastructure.

A draft volunteering policy has been agreed and is currently the subject of consultation with NLVDA.

Arrangements for the participation of voluntary sector interests in the urban regeneration partnership structures have been established.

Consideration is currently being given to re-establishing a corporate grouping to take forward other aspects of the voluntary sector strategy and prioritise and progress key tasks including a review of funding.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Community development is central to the Council as a working method, an approach to service delivery and a distinct professional contribution to the development of corporate policy and strategy.

The term community development is widely used within the Council. Community development is applicable as an approach to a range of service activities both in terms of tackling issues and in delivering and developing services. Community development approaches are employed to make services more responsive and attractive, to direct services to target groups, to encourage community self help and voluntary action and to develop partnership and co-operation between agencies and communities. Currently a number of departments engage community development staff.

At the present time there are no mechanisms for co-ordinating and evaluating community development across departments. The Council does not have a community development policy and the role of community development in relation to the Council's corporate priorities remains undetermined.

As the Council faces a range of challenges which would seem to require extensive community development expertise (social inclusion, decentralisation, community planning, best value, partnership development, social strategy, youth strategy, anti-poverty strategy, equal opportunities initiatives, new deal, etc) community development resources are stretched and uncoordinated on a corporate basis.

These issues and others are identified in the Chief Executive's Department Service Plan for 1998/99. The Service Plan identifies a role for the department in co-ordinating the development of a corporate community development strategy.

At its meeting on 25 November 1998 the Policy and Resources (Community Development) Sub Committee approved proposals for a corporate review of community development. The purpose of the review is to clarify the role of community development within the Council and identify arrangements to ensure that community development is effectively co-ordinated, directed and focused in relation to the Council's corporate priorities.

The Sub Committee approved an approach which:

- involves staff from several departments
- involves communities
- links community development to corporate priorities
- engages politicians and senior managers

An in-house working group will review community development across the Council, prepare an interim policy statement on community development and develop a set of proposals or 'action plans' on key issues. The group will be led by the Chief Executive's department and comprise a representative of each department which identifies itself as being involved in community development. All Directors are being invited to nominate a representative on this basis. In parallel with the working group community development strategies will be developed in 2 distinct areas which have yet to be selected. The main purpose of these strategies would be to develop, pilot and evaluate an inter-departmental and inter-agency approach to area-focused community development which if successful could be adopted on a wider scale. The pilots will also help inform the Council working group of real issues affecting the practice of community development. Financial support for these pilots may be available through the governments 'Listening to Communities' initiative.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Whilst Community Safety is not one of the activities detailed in the Service Plan for 1998/99 there is a requirement for policy development to occur. The Environmental Services Committee initially set up an Accident Committee, which shortly after being established agreed that its remit should encompass all matters of community safety and accordingly be renamed. More recently it has been agreed that the responsibility for community safety move from Environmental Services to Policy and Resources thereby becoming a function of the Chief Executive's department.

Strathclyde Police have seconded an Officer to the Council to assist in the development of a Community Safety Strategy for the Council. This officer currently relates directly to the Assistant Chief Executive (Operations).

The Council in partnership with others has developed a community safety strategy which was launched on 2 November 1998 by Scottish Office Minister for Home Affairs, Devolution and Local Government, Henry McLeish. The aim of the strategy is to make people safer - at home, at work, at school, at play, on the roads and when they are out and about. It's important also that people feel safe when they're at home and when they go out.

The Community Safety Task Group has identified 5 priority themes namely:

- Home Safety
 - Transport Safety
 - Domestic Violence
 - Opportunities for Young People
- Alcohol and Drug Abuse

The implementation of the Strategy is being developed by a task group which has been established by the Council. It includes representatives from the police, fire service, health board, transport police, RoSPA, North Lanarkshire CCTV Ltd and the Procurator Fiscal's Office.

Current work is focused mainly on tackling violence against women and researching and analysing information about safety issues in North Lanarkshire to maximise opportunities to enhance community safety through existing services and through partnership working.

STRATEGY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Progress /Activity areas

The Member/Officer Group established in February 1998 has been working towards development of the Strategy by approving and organising a programme of consultation events.

These have taken place as follows:

- A one day 'Open Space Event' for Youth Work Practitioners in November 1998
- A one day 'Open Space Event' for Young People which took place in early January 1999

Reports on the outcomes of both of these events are available.

Future Events include;

- A two and a half day Conference involving Elected Members, Senior Officers from Council departments, young people and representatives from partner agencies
- A one day Conference for Young People at which a draft Strategy for Young People will be presented.

RURAL STRATEGY

The development of North Lanarkshire Council's Rural Strategy is in the formative stages, although a number of significant foundations have been laid which will help to ensure the long term success of initiatives and appropriate methods of service delivery in rural areas.

North Lanarkshire Council Initiatives

Council departments have been requested to identify particular projects which have been developed in rural areas in response to circumstances or issues individual to that rural area.

Similarly, departments have been requested to provide details where Council services are delivered in an innovative way in recognition of particular factors within a rural community. It is intended that this information may inform the Council's Rural Policy and provide examples of good practice which may be replicated in other rural communities.

Rural Forum

Links have been made with Rural Forum which is the national umbrella organisation responsible for raising awareness of rural issues and furthering the development of social, environmental and economic initiatives in rural areas. North Lanarkshire Council has continued to support the Rural Initiatives Small Grants Scheme which is operated by Rural Forum in partnership with the Scottish Office, SCVO and Shell UK Limited. Through this Scheme small grants of up to £1,000 are awarded to community and voluntary organisations in rural areas to assist in tackling rural issues or providing services or amenities.

Lanarkshire Rural Development Group

Lanarkshire Development Agency is currently developing its rural strategy as a key objective within its 'Changing Gear' policy. North and South Lanarkshire Councils, together with Scottish Homes are contributing to this process.

Rural Database

A mailing list of more than 130 community and voluntary organisations in rural areas is being produced. This will provide a comprehensive group of organisations with whom the Council and other agencies may consult when seeking local responses to rural issues.

Special Projects

A number of special projects designed to provide services and improve the quality of life in rural areas have been supported including Longriggend Village Hall, Glenboig Family Support Project, Eastfield and Croy.

North Lanarkshire Rural Conference

Initial plans are now underway to organise a North Lanarkshire Rural Conference to be held in June of this year. The conference will be targeted at members, Council officers, community representatives from those rural areas identified above, and representatives from partner agencies. The aims of the conference will be:

- to identify the social, economic and environmental issues which may be compounded by the rurality of an area;
- to identify particular issues individual to rural areas in North Lanarkshire;
- to highlight examples of innovative service delivery or good practice within existing rural areas in North Lanarkshire; and,
- to hear of and replicate projects or services from other areas where appropriate.

It is intended that those issues identified at the rural conference, together with examples of good practice will form the basis of the Council's Rural Strategy and Action Plan.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

The Equal Opportunities Sub-Committee held its first meeting in October 1997. Since that time it has considered matters of policy development and supported and encouraged local initiatives and projects.

There is a considerable amount of work to be done under equal opportunities much of which is required to be done in conjunction with the Personnel Committee which would compliment and enhance the Councils Equal Opportunities Policy in promoting equality and eliminating discrimination.

The key tasks for 1998/99 as identified in the department's Service Plan are:

- identifying areas of activity and opportunity
- developing a network of officers from each Department
- devising an awareness raising programme
- preparing an implementation plan
- identifying training needs
- adopting the Commission for Racial Equality Standard
- devising implementation, review and audit mechanisms to achieve the Commission for Racial Equality Standard.

To date the Council has:

1. Adopted the Commission for Racial Equality Standard
2. Initiated the first training event for Members and Directors
3. Convened one meeting of the Officers Group (this is now replaced by corporate officers group which is yet to meet)
4. Collated information from all departments on statistical data current activity, practice guidance which will form part of the Action Plan
5. Established a Disability Advisory Committee and continued to support disability organisations working on strategy development.
6. Agreed to carry out training and information gathering on the implications of Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.
7. Supported a range of organisations through the provision of financial support, eg Ethnic Link Committee, North Lanarkshire Coalition of Disabled Groups.
8. Contributed to Scottish Office and CoSLA consultation documents on matters of mainstreaming, violence against women and harassment.

Way Forward

The Corporate Officers Group will be responsible for preparing and implementing the Councils Action Plan. It is envisaged that through this group short term working groups will be established to consider and develop the policy on matters of race, disability and gender issues. These groups would report to the Corporate Officers Group. Work requires to be developed in training and awareness raising and at the same time the development partnerships with external organisations require to be maximised. Early consideration requires to be given to how the Council produces its information and minimum standard levels require to be set to ensure that information is available in appropriate formats to all sections of the community.