

Appendix 1

PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION IN WEALDEN- POLICY STATEMENT

What is social inclusion?

A socially inclusive society is one where every individual is able to attain a decent standard of living and to easily access the services they need, free from discrimination and fear.

The failure of some people to integrate fully into society can be the result of one or more factors, including low income, lack of skills, fear of crime, poor housing, family breakdown, experience of discrimination, lack of transport or physical access difficulties. Government research has shown that certain groups, such as young people in care, those growing up in low income households or with family conflict, people with disabilities and people from minority ethnic communities are disproportionately at risk of social exclusion.

Why is this an issue for the Council?

Socially excluded people can suffer from feelings of isolation, stress, and ill-health as a result of a low standard of living and poor access to services. The wider community can experience higher levels of stress and reduced mobility as a result of reduced social cohesion and increased fear of crime. Businesses can suffer too, from a less-skilled and less-diverse workforce as well as lost customers and markets.

The Council therefore recognises that it will improve quality of life in the District for everyone if social inclusion can be increased.

Overall Aim

The Council will work with partners to tackle the causes of social exclusion so that we can improve quality of life for everyone in our District.

We will achieve this by following the principles of the Wealden Equality Scheme and by making sure that:

- 1) Members and Officers understand the causes and consequences of social exclusion.
- 2) We promote inclusiveness in all the Council's policies, strategies and services.
- 3) We work with the Wealden Local Strategic Partnership and other partners to jointly plan services and join-up delivery where practicable. In particular, we will address the following issues:

Transport

As a very large, predominantly rural District, the limited transport infrastructure and lack of public transport restricts 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.

To improve access to services, we will:

- Work closely with Local Strategic Partnerships in East Sussex to develop an integrated Sustainable Community Strategy.
- Continue to work with the 'Access East Sussex Partnership' to increase the number of services which we can take to the customer rather than expecting the customer to come to us, such as Community help Points and Kiosks in key locations.
- Continue to work with local advice services so that they can assist with claims for benefits and provide housing advice on our behalf.
- Promote regeneration and social inclusion through our land use planning policies.
- Try to house people as close to employment, services and/or family as possible.

Physical Barriers

Many buildings in the District are not fully accessible to people with sight or mobility problems, including wheelchair users, people with prams and pushchairs and people who find it difficult to walk distances, use stairs or open doors.

Public transport, even where available, can often be difficult to use for those people not physically fit and, in some villages without pavements and which suffer from speeding traffic, roads can be perilous to walk along and cross.

To improve physical access we will:

- Ensure, in compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act, that our own buildings are as accessible as possible and provide advice to local businesses through leaflets and seminars.
- Continue with our assisted waste collection scheme for people who have difficulty moving their wheelie bins.
- Help people with disabilities by offering more suitable accommodation or by providing aids and adaptations to all tenures.

Communication

The way we communicate can overlook:

- that some people have hearing difficulties
- that some people are blind or partially sighted
- that some people do not have English as their first language
- that some people have difficulty reading or writing or using modern technology
- 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, agendas or on our website.

To improve our communication, we will:

- Use a mix of communication methods, including providing information in leaflets and on the website.
- Use straightforward, simple language in all our forms, letters, leaflets and publications.
- Provide translations of key documents, or copies in other formats, where required.
- Secure the services of interpreters for residents who wish to access services but who either do not speak English or who wish to use British Sign Language.
- Target information where appropriate, for example through the development of a Youth Matters website to provide information and advice for young people.
- Pilot the use of tactile interpretation signs on the Cuckoo Trail.
- Continue to develop the accessibility of our website.
- Continue our participation in the Connecting Communities Plus Project, with public authority and voluntary sector partners.
- Use a variety of methods when we consult to ensure we make contact with hard to reach groups.

Discrimination

Some people may fear that there is a risk of being treated less favourably than others on the basis of their race, gender, disability, age, religion, belief or sexual orientation. They may have needs which mean that they require assistance to ensure they receive a satisfactory service.

We will continue to:

- Train our staff and councillors to raise awareness of equality issues and to make sure that everyone is treated fairly and with courtesy.
- Work to achieve the targets in our Equality Scheme, including auditing all our services to identify and improve any areas of potential discrimination.
- Continue to ensure we adhere to the Commission for Racial Equality's Code of Conduct for Housing and undertake ethnic monitoring of housing allocations and homelessness.
- Continue to implement our Gypsy and Travellers Strategy in partnership with other public authorities and representative groups.

Poverty and Low Income

Some people in our District have low income levels and this can mean that they 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

the doctor, dentist or the library. This can have the effect of denying them the opportunities others take for granted.

In order to combat difficulties caused by poverty and low incomes, we will:

- Bring all our homes up to the national Decent Homes Standard by March 2008
- Promote economic development and learning in the District to maximize employment opportunities and develop skills in the workforce.
- Continue to work with voluntary and community organisations to run take-up campaigns for state benefits, including training voluntary workers.
- Refer people to local advice services if appropriate
- Reduce fuel poverty by providing energy efficiency advice and issuing grants to enable householders to undertake energy conservation and insulation works.
- Give loans to cover a deposit so that people can access private rented accommodation.
- Continue to give advice to tenants in financial difficulty to prevent arrears and potential homelessness.

Fear of Crime

The fear of being the victim of crime can be paralysing even where actual rates of crime are low. For example, nervousness about approaching groups of youths or going out at certain times can make certain facilities or services inaccessible.

We will work to improve community safety by:

- Continuing to support other agencies in the use of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts and Anti-Social Behaviour Orders where appropriate.
- Working with the Safer Wealden Partnership support diversionary projects to help improve community safety.
- Follow up upon the findings of the Open Space audit with the aim of developing open spaces which are multifunctional, safe and accessible to all.
- Giving advice to older people on how to prevent burglary and providing door-chains and intercoms to vulnerable tenants.
- Closing alleyways on our housing estates where these make houses vulnerable to burglars.
- Employing Community Wardens on our estates who aim to maintain community safety for residents through visible patrols and to improve the local environment particularly in relation to litter, vandalism and antisocial behaviour.

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.

We will work to prevent social isolation by:

- Promoting Lifeline services to vulnerable people, helping them communicate and get the services they need.
- Employing Tenant Participation officers to help improve communication between us and our tenants.
- Working with Anchor Staying Put to help elderly and vulnerable people to stay in their own homes and continuing to provide sheltered and extracare housing for those that need it.
- Trying to house older people close to relatives where requested.
- Aiming, through the Local Plan, to mix affordable homes throughout developments.
- Continuing to work with Southdown Housing Association to provide outreach to vulnerable adults through the Wealden Independent Living scheme.