

Buckinghamshire County Council

Best Value Review of Social Inclusion

Summary Report

August 2004



1. What we set out to do

- To understand what social inclusion means in Buckinghamshire
- To identify examples of good practice and barriers to success
- To identify some common principles that we can apply across all that we do to increase social inclusion in Buckinghamshire
- To work out how to put these principles into practice and to be sure that they make a difference

2. Definitions we used

Social Exclusion is an inability (of individuals) to participate effectively in economic, social, political and cultural life.

Social Inclusion is a means of combating exclusion experienced by residents and communities. It is the outcome of a range of activities by which the varying needs of a community, and the groups which constitute it, are recognised, prioritised and met. The aim of these activities is wherever possible to enhance the abilities of individuals and communities to help themselves.

Target communities identified as those more likely to be vulnerable to exclusion are:

- The young (under 25)
- Older people (over 65)
- People with physical, sensory, learning difficulties or mental health needs
- People from black and minority ethnic communities
- Those physically isolated by poverty
- Those physically isolated by geography

3. Who we consulted and what they said

We have listened to both users and non-users of council services from the target communities. We have also listened to what front line employees and representatives from public and voluntary organisations have to say about:

- The way information is made available
- The way in which services are made available
- The experience of service delivery
- The way in which other services/organisations are signposted

This is what you said:

The two greatest barriers to accessing services are the **availability of information and of transport.**

4. Council image

- The council is viewed by many as an unapproachable, authoritative organisation
- There is confusion amongst residents in the target communities over responsibility for services within and between councils
- There is a perceived lack of trust between some communities and the council
- People experience differing levels of service across the organisation
- The Council can do more to celebrate successes and advertise good news

5. Information availability

- Most information is currently provided as “one size fits all”
- Current information channels do not reach people from target communities
- Lack of information prohibits individuals from making informed choices and gaining access to appropriate services
- Community newsletter needs to address issues relating to target communities
- The council needs to pay more attention to listening and to be open about council limitations
- Insufficient time is allocated for meaningful consultation with target communities
- The council should use the expertise from the voluntary sector in reaching out to excluded groups
- People with sensory impairments are aware of services that are available
- Website needs updating and made more accessible for target communities
- Low awareness of support services restricts access to those services
- The council needs to feed back the outcome both of consultation activity and what has happened as a result

6. The way services are made available

- Poor transportation links and costs exacerbate rural/physical isolation across all target groups and limit both access to and take up of services
- The council needs to be creative about providing local access to services
- There needs to be a greater emphasis on people rather than purely targets
- The council needs measures of success for participation by target communities
- The council needs to make additional efforts to reach out to target communities who do not have a history of using council services
- Use of translation and interpreter services is neither consistent nor measured for effectiveness
- The council could make more use of school resources outside core time
- Negative perceptions of social care services prevents access, although actual experience of the adult services is positive
- Lack of affordable childcare facilities restricts access to universal services
- Service provision in unfamiliar environments prevents those with mental health needs from accessing them
- Membership of certain faith groups prevents participation in some activities

7. Experience of service delivery

- Effective joint working is recognised as the way forward but is not happening consistently across the council
- Data is not shared effectively and there is confusion amongst professionals over the extent to which information can be shared
- Service provision and client need do not necessarily match and there should be a greater awareness of cultural differences and language needs
- There is a need for more person centred planning
- Services are aimed at satisfying the majority need; additional effort is needed to extend services to target communities
- There is perception of low teacher expectation and discrimination against some target communities

8. Partnership

- The council needs to work in partnership within and between organisations to deliver a more effective service with agreed measures for success
- The council should consider using existing mobile services to deliver additional services
- There is a need for more effective, equal partnerships with the community and representative organisations
- Some services are skilled, others very limited in their ability to signpost to services within and outside the council
- There is a need for a greater understanding and recognition of the shared benefits across and between organisations of the value of preventative work

9. Workforce

- There needs to be ownership across the workforce that all have a part to play in anti- discriminatory practice
- There is a need for a more diverse workforce to encourage openness and approachability
- Front line employees need greater ownership of customer queries
- People from target communities are sometimes viewed as a “problem”
- Front line employees have an uneven experience of training and a desire for a better understanding of good practice in working with people from black, Asian and European cultures
- There is perception of discrimination in the council’s recruitment activity

What we said about ourselves

10. Organisational culture

- One of the council aims is to be open and accountable. We need to work hard to change the way people see us
- The council has recently adopted a Customer First strategy, the aim of which is to change how we do things by placing the customer’s needs rather than service need at the centre of planning. The need to embed inclusion and diversity is recognised within all work streams

- The council has not yet reached Level 1 out of 4 of the Equality Standards for Local Government and needs to prioritise activity to ensure prompt progress to Level 1 during 2004/05 with a clear action plan for achieving Level 3 by 2006/07
- The council has a duty to promote race equality and monitors the number of racial incidents reported
- The terms of reference for the Community Relations Forum have recently been refocused to clarify the roles of the respective councils

11. Information, communication and consultation

- Whilst some services have developed expertise in information, communication and consultation, there is not as yet a corporate overview of what issues need to be consulted upon, how to be effective, who to involve and the timescales required for meaningful engagement with the target communities
- Limited information is collected on the impact of activity specifically aimed at addressing social inclusion. The majority of services rely on customer satisfaction surveys, public participation and feedback, which only measure views of the users, not non-users

12. Transport

- The council is currently undertaking accessibility planning with partners. The aim is to make more effective use of existing resources, in particular providing access to employment, health facilities, food shops and education for those at risk of social exclusion. The precise mix of services is yet to be determined but could include demand responsive transport, taxi sharing, community transport and conventional buses.
- Work is at the early stages of reviewing the bus network to ensure there is a core network of high frequency bus corridors with shorter circuit feeder services linking into the network.
- To improve accessibility to public transport, the council has commissioned five fully accessible 'kneeling' buses for rural routes and three accessible minibuses to provide services to the outskirts of Aylesbury. The council is also piloting three accessible minibuses to provide demand responsive transport in rural areas. Investment in these buses aims to target those areas in which a high proportion of users, or potential users, are elderly or travel with pushchairs and young children
- Dial-a-ride services are limited to those who have physical mobility problems, and whilst they are supported financially by the council and are now on the council contract list (which opens up opportunities for increased income) they are still unable to offer services to the wider travelling public. Whilst provision has grown, with additional vehicles, demand has also grown and continues to outstrip supply

13. Removal of barriers to services

- Services need to work together to address the needs of particular groups and individuals
- Senior managers should champion the needs of particular groups
- Services need to share good practice

- The council is undertaking a major review with partners of the access needs to key services of residents, especially those at risk of social exclusion. This includes a review of how and where people want to gain access to their goods, services and activities. This will affect not only transport but also locations for service delivery and options such as mobile delivery, home delivery and Internet services

14. Quality assurance and performance management

- Services collect a range of performance information to assess the effectiveness of their approach to social inclusion. However, there is no overview of how effective the council is in addressing social inclusion

15. Partnership working

- The council recognises the need for improvement and that PSA is a good example of partnership working. The critical success factors identified in the PSA work for making an impact on social inclusion through partnership working are
 - Targeted resources
 - Joined up services either within the council or interagency
 - Understood, shared priorities and enthusiastic project leaders
- Proposals to develop closer links between Local Committees and District Local Strategic Partnerships will help to develop local solutions to local issues
- We need to be clear with partners about how available funding will be used to support work with particular groups
- We need to make best use of available external funding opportunities

16. Achieving a more diverse workforce

- The council wide diversity steering group has a role in promoting best practice both in employment and in service delivery. The group needs to refocus its work to ensure that it makes a difference
- There have been attempts made to recruit employees from the target communities. However, the workforce is not representative of the people of Buckinghamshire. The impending review of workforce development will provide an opportunity to develop a more focused approach within an overall framework

17. What other councils are doing

Members of the team visited Devon, Northamptonshire and Staffordshire County Councils to find out how other councils approach social inclusion. Many of their ideas are reflected in the recommendations and will inform some of the more detailed work that will need to be done to implement them.

18. What we have done as a result of the review

Following further discussion within and outside the county council, a set of principles has been drawn together to underpin the council's approach to social inclusion. These are supported by recommendations, an outline of the member involvement and employee role and a detailed improvement plan.