

Gillian Barnes
South East England Regional Assembly
Berkeley House
Cross Lanes
Guildford
Surrey
GU1 1YA

Neil Couling
Director Jobcentre Plus
South East Region
Ranger House
Walnut Tree Close
Guildford
GU1 4UL

Telephone: 01483 446051
Fax: 01483 446115

Your Ref:
Our Ref:
Date: 27 June 2005

Response to SQW report to SEERA Select Committee Examination of Social Exclusion

You asked for comments to the report being submitted to the select committee by 27 June.

I feel the report provides the impetus for a review of the Assembly's Social Inclusion Statement to take place. The report also highlights the key factor of worklessness in social inclusion and draws attention to the fact that this is not included explicitly in the statement (para 3.9)

If the statement were to be reviewed I would welcome increasing employment rates from the most disadvantaged groups being included as an element of social inclusion. Plans in place within Jobcentre Plus will help facilitate this.

The Department for Work and Pensions Five Year Strategy, launched in February 2005 highlights the actions that we will take to reduce poverty and so aid social inclusion. Work has to be at the centre of any social inclusion strategy. So we have set our aspiration within the strategy to achieve an employment rate of 80%. To achieve this we must increasingly concentrate our activities on those people who are most disadvantaged in the labour market. This will include

- Support for children and families, including helping lone parents into work by making work possible and making work pay.
- Help for people in incapacity benefits to get the support they need to fulfil their own ambitions to return to work; and
- Help to break down the barriers that prevent disabled people, older workers and ethnic minorities from fully realising their own ambitions.

The report highlights the economic benefits of work both for individuals and for their communities. Work brings the additional benefits of improved health, social networks and reduced isolation, equally important factors in addressing exclusion

Jobcentre Plus will engage more and more with partners both regionally and sub regionally to help these groups so welcome the emphasis in the report on this aspect, particularly LSPs and the new Local Area Agreements. We have also recently applied to SIPSE for membership, which, if granted, will give us a strong platform for working even more closely with the voluntary sector.

Finally, p22 notes that some partners feel we concentrate too much on our core client groups. While I understand this concern to an extent I also take it as a compliment that we are carrying out the function we have been set up for and promoting the needs of our disadvantaged customers. I feel the message here is that our core customers, as outlined above, are customers that all parties involved in the social exclusion agenda have in common.

Neil Couling
Director
Jobcentre Plus South East Region