

## Agenda Item 4

### SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Date: 27 October 2000

Subject: Social Inclusion Select Committee

Report of: Chief Executive

#### Recommendations:

That the Executive Committee considers the report of the Select Committee, together with the comments on the draft report arising from consultation with those who gave evidence.

That the outcome of the Select Committee, including any additional points made by this Executive, contribute towards the formulation of the Regional Social Inclusion Statement now in preparation between the regional partners, namely GOSE, the Assembly, SEEDA, the Housing Corporation, Social Care and Health.

#### 1. Introduction

Earlier this year the Assembly agreed to set up, as a pilot, a Select Committee on Social Inclusion. The Select Committee convened five times in all, taking evidence throughout July and meeting again in early August to consider the first draft of its report. During September, those who had given evidence were given the opportunity to comment upon a further draft of the Committee's report.

Assembly member, Canon David Grimwood, representing faith communities, chaired the Select Committee, and will be in attendance at this meeting of the Executive in order to present its report. Assembly member Jacqui Bremner, representing the voluntary/community sector, acted as the vice-chair of the Select Committee.

I should like to record my thanks not only to all the members of the Select Committee for their work, but also to those many individuals and organisations who took the trouble to present written and oral evidence to the Select Committee. In addition, I was assisted in drawing together the Committee's findings by Anne Fox, a senior officer seconded by Thanet

District Council, to whom thanks are also due.

2. The Select Committee's findings
  - 2.1 The report agreed by the Select Committee is annexed herewith. It is in the nature of the Select Committee process that the resulting report reflects the Committee's 'take' on the evidence submitted to it. It aims to be neither a comprehensive overview of the – very broad and complex – question of social inclusion, not even a comprehensive commentary on the evidence submitted. Indeed the strength of the Select Committee process is its deliberative nature; it is the evidence that 'hits home' that finds its way into the Committee's thinking and therefore into its findings.
  - 2.2 Because of this, the opportunity was given to those presenting evidence to comment upon the final draft report of the Select Committee. Many responses to this consultation were simply congratulatory, but three have made further constructive comments which I summarize here. The Committee is invited to consider these additional observations.
  - 2.3 The Government Office is currently leading a working group of regional partners in the preparation of a regional statement on social inclusion, the aim of which is to provide a coherent, regionally specific policy framework for regional and local actions. As reported to this Committee when the Select Committee was proposed earlier in the year, the regional statement comes in the context of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, and seeks to secure the commitment of all the regional partners, namely GOSE, the Assembly, SEEDA, the Housing Corporation, Social Care and Health.
  - 2.4 As well as providing a range of recommendations in its own right to government, regional partners, local authorities and other bodies, the Select Committee's report forms a significant contribution to the regional statement. In this respect, the Executive Committee may wish to augment the Select Committee's report with the further representations made in response to it, summarised below.
  - 2.5 Surrey Economic Partnership (SEP) submits that a number of observations in the report might be augmented and/or made into recommendations, and that some recommendations themselves should be developed further. Firstly, with reference to paragraph 4.9 it is suggested that a clear recommendation could be added requiring all agencies and organisations to address their policies and plans clearly to the three types of communities identified, that is, neighbourhoods, communities of interest, and/or communities of need.
  - 2.6 Secondly, referring to paragraphs 4.4 following, it is proposed that more should be made of the importance to social inclusion of wealth creation and job creation by business. Businesses need to be encouraged to employ the socially excluded, and to see the payback from investing effort and capital in regenerating deprived

- communities long term. SEP suggest that committed employers who have participated in tackling social exclusion should be celebrated as role models for the business community – a task for SEEDA and economic partnerships.
- 2.7 With reference to recommendation 9, SEP draws attention to the difficulties of ‘capacity building’ where the socially excluded are dispersed geographically. The recommendation to SEEDA, GOSE, councils and economic partnerships should therefore be expanded to promote inter agency collaboration and the use of technology to overcome such fragmentation. In the same vein, an addition to paragraph 4.27 is proposed emphasising the potential benefit of information and communications technology to all three types of community identified.
- 2.8 East Sussex, Brighton and Hove Health Authority submits that while ultimately the effects of social exclusion are felt by individuals, the emphasis in tackling the problem should not be on an individual basis alone, but should be a combination of national and neighbourhood measures. The Health Authority further submits that the success criterion (a place where people choose to live) is too simplistic, and refer instead to factors behind that measure, such as jobs, well-being, safety, education and health.
- 2.9 The Health Authority would also wish to see early intervention stressed in relation to children and families specifically, and would put as much emphasis on employment as housing in promoting inclusion. Finally, firmer and clearer recommendations on health and social inclusion are called for, although no specific proposals are made.
- 2.10 Age Concern South East (ACSE) suggests that the recommendations should be read as a package; their strength is in their inter-relation. ACSE record their disappointment that there is little reference to the evidence they gave to the committee on the demographic changes the region will experience over the next 20 years: older people will be victims of social exclusion as well as themselves offering a resource for community capacity building that is too often overlooked in regeneration initiatives.
- 2.11 In respect of paragraph 4.21, ACSE would emphasise the need for accessible, as well as adequate and affordable public transport. The importance of considering health needs holistically is stressed (paragraph 4.23); key links need to be made in community regeneration initiatives with health and social services. In respect of paragraph 4.26, the success rate of business start ups by those aged 45 and upwards is higher than those of younger people, reflecting the experience and maturity older people bring to employment. On learning resources (4.27) ACSE again wish to draw particular attention to the retraining needs of older people, and to the potential resource of older people as community volunteers, given appropriate skills development.

- 2.12 SERPLAN gave evidence on the need for spatial discretion in tackling social exclusion and propose that finding (xxii) should be amended to read ‘Social inclusion efforts are required across the region as a whole, while regional initiatives to create new jobs and support existing ones should be focused on the acknowledged priority areas’.
- 2.13 Finally, Runnymede Borough Council is concerned that insufficient recognition is given in the report to the need for well thought through and accurately targeted initiatives to achieve long term gains as opposed to high profile but short-term pilot schemes.

### 3. Conclusions

- 3.1 Since the Select Committee process was expressly an experiment, some reflection is warranted as to the usefulness of this approach in regional policy development, and the lessons learned. Firstly, in order to maintain momentum the process needs to be quite intensive, requiring the input of considerable amounts of time by committee members – in this case four full Mondays in July, plus a further day in mid August.
- 3.2 Secondly, the term ‘select committee’ creates the expectation of a scrutiny process, and may well have deterred potential contributors. In fact the committee adopted a discursive approach, with presentations on related themes followed by questions, answers and debate. Having said that, the select committee approach did provide an opportunity to hear from key regional partners GOSE and SEEDA what measures they were taking in respect of the social inclusion agenda. It was unfortunate, however, there were practical difficulties with this first session which in the event prevented the debate proceeding to the level of examination that committee members expected.
- 3.3 Thirdly, in inviting contributions, the identification of specific issues for discussion within the wide spectrum of the social inclusion agenda did seem to work reasonably well, allowing the committee to theme each of its meetings and organise evidence accordingly. With hindsight, we needed to allow contributors more notice to offer evidence than the month given.
- 3.4 Overall, the value of developing an in depth understanding of specific dimensions of the matter in question must in practice be balanced against the fact that a select committee’s work cannot pretend to offer as an outcome a comprehensive analysis and policy statement. The select committee approach probably works best as a means of developing a contribution to a wider policy debate, as is proposed here, rather than offering the route to policy conclusions in its own right.

**Paul Bevan  
Chief Executive**

**16 October 2000**