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Foreword

‘Social inclusion matters in this region’.

These are the opening words of this Regional Social Inclusion Statement. It is because we hold them to be true that regional bodies have come together to prepare this Statement. These regional bodies comprise:

- The Assembly.
- The Government Office.
- The Housing Corporation.
- The National Health Service.
- RAISE.
- The Social Care Region.
- The South East England Development Agency.

It is not our intention to provide a rigid framework within which we want to argue that all social inclusion activity must be set. Local circumstances demand local solutions and we are aware of good work that is being done throughout the region.

Equally, we could not ignore the view articulated in a partner satisfaction study carried out for GOSE that there needed to be more leadership and integration in the region on the social inclusion agenda.

The region has already produced a policy framework - 'A Better Quality of Life in the South East' - setting 25 social, environmental, and economic objectives for all regional strategies to address. At least nine of these objectives concern social inclusion.

At the heart of this Social Statement is a handful of simple propositions.

Social inclusion in the region will not be improved unless there is better joint working.

These are easy words. But that is why the Statement makes a number of commitments about the way in which we, as regional bodies, want to work together, and others should expect us to work together, to deliver

this agenda. It is also why the Statement recognises the key role of Local Strategic Partnerships in joining up action at the local level. As regional agencies, we will all do what we can to ensure that Local Strategic Partnerships work well throughout the South East and particularly in areas of deprivation.

Local communities must be involved.

These words are easy to write. They need to be followed through. That is why RAISE, the regional voluntary/community sector network, has been an equal partner in the preparation of the Statement. That is why the Statement contains over 15 commitments about the involvement of the sector in social inclusion. That is also why we adhered to the requirements of the voluntary sector compact with Government when consulting on the draft of this document.

The issues are complex and inter-related. The Statement identifies a number of issues related to housing, transport, crime, education and skills, enterprise, health and 'quality of life' issues. Many of us may be very knowledgeable about one or more of these issues but few of us are experts on all of them. We hope that the Statement will provide an overview of the issues to new agencies such as the Small Business Service or Local Learning and Skills Councils, and emerging bodies, such as Local Strategic Partnerships and Connexions Partnerships – as well as a signpost for further information.

We will need to focus attention and support on areas where social exclusion is most concentrated. These are generally, but not exclusively, in coastal areas and in the region's largest towns and cities. At the same time, we need to do more to support the involvement of children and young people, older people, people from black and ethnic minority communities and people with disabilities together with the needs of the excluded in rural areas.

This statement is not the last word. We will be accountable for its actions and overtime, our knowledge and understanding of social inclusion issues will continue and evolve.

Summary

This Statement does seven things. It:

- Sets out how important tackling social exclusion is to the region.
- Commits various regional organisations and agencies to making social inclusion a priority.
- Sets out clear standards as to the way in which these organisations and agencies will work together to reduce deprivation and bring about social inclusion.
- Makes commitments about the way these organisations will work with the voluntary and community sector at local level.
- Informs the Partners' action plan which identifies priorities for regional action over the next 12-18 months on key issues such as crime reduction, education, health, enterprise, housing, transport and other Quality of Life issues (e.g. arts, sports, cultural and recreational activity).
- Gives a commitment to agreeing a methodology to measure whether social inclusion in the region is getting better.
- Acts as an introductory guide to the subject and a signpost for further information.

It starts from the belief that there is a clear role for regional (and sub-regional) organisations to help reinforce the clear framework set by the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal and the good work that is taking place throughout the region at local level. It is by making these links

that we are most likely to be able to put the infrastructure in place, from affordable housing to accessible transport, from care to crime reduction, that will give us a realistic chance of achieving this Statement's aim:

To reduce the gap between the 119 most deprived wards and the rest of the region by 10% by 2010.

Please see maps and lists at Annex E for details of where these wards are located.

Money will be important in reducing the gap. Several of these areas have received and continue to receive significant national, european and regional funding. The framework set out by this Statement makes it clear that these areas will continue to receive the main share of regional funding.

However, while national and regional funding is obviously important in tackling deprivation and reducing the gap between deprived areas and the rest, it cannot be enough in itself. This Statement emphasises the crucial role of Local Strategic Partnerships in bringing people and organisations together to set common priorities and targets, and use the mainstream funding power of the public sector in particular to tackle agreed priorities.

It also sets out key principles that we would expect Local Strategic Partnerships (and other regeneration partnerships) to follow:

- Strong community involvement - as decision makers.
- Effective private sector involvement.
- A clear vision for the future.
- Clear objectives.
- A commitment to working in partnership.

And encourages them not to overlook the interests of groups who are more likely to be

vulnerable to exclusion, notably:

- The young.
- Older people.
- Black and minority ethnic.
- People with disabilities.
- Those physically isolated by poverty.

1 Introduction

1.1 Social inclusion matters in this region. It matters to individuals and affects their communities if they are unable to share in the prosperity of the South East, which many take for granted. It matters to local authorities seeking to raise the quality of life for people living and working in their areas. It matters, too, to regional bodies. In the words of the Regional Economic Strategy:

“Economic disadvantage and social exclusion are characteristics found in both rural and urban areas, and their eradication presents one of the greatest challenges to the region as a whole.”¹

1.2 As the Regional Assembly has identified, there are 4 main reasons to be concerned about social exclusion in the South East just as much as any other region:

- It is economically inefficient – it represents an under-use of human resources where labour is in short supply.
- Those who are socially excluded are prevented from enjoying a fulfilling life, often suffering from low self-esteem with subsequent effects on personal aspirations. This can affect their health and realisation of potential, as well as the life chances of the next generation.
- It generates unnecessary costs for us all in welfare and health services and benefits.

- It has social impacts (e.g. crime, drugs) which can affect all society and are self-aggravating – i.e: there is a ‘vicious circle’ effect.²

1.3 In short, not only does social exclusion deprive the economy of workers, customers, entrepreneurs and taxpayers, and costs society dear in terms of higher unemployment, poor health and high crime rates, the extent of deprivation in urban neighbourhoods also contributes to the outflow from cities to the edge of town and the countryside.

1.4 It need not be like this. In February 2001 the Assembly agreed:

“The South East could and should be a region in which we achieve social progress which recognises the need of everyone with strong communities free from high levels of crime and discrimination; with ready access to jobs, education, homes, services and amenities; diverse opportunities for everyone to live fulfilled and healthy lives and to realise their full potential.”

1.5 There is much excellent work already happening in the region and we have sought to capture some of this on each partner's websites as well as being available from GOSE in hard copy. as they demonstrate, in many cases local solutions can be found.

1.6 And yet, people doing excellent work at a local level tackling social exclusion can feel unsupported. This Statement aims to change that. Moreover, a regional framework for local action has been missing – as identified in a GOSE customer perception survey.

1 Regional Economic Strategy (SEEDA), p33

2 Report of the Social Inclusion Select Committee (the Assembly), p5

1.7 The regional bodies³ have, therefore, come together to produce this statement. It seeks to begin the process of setting a regional framework which:

- Commits each of the regional bodies to making social inclusion an integral part of their functions.
- Will, over time, set a common framework at the regional level for policy, funding and other purposes.
- Responds to the commitment in the Regeneration and Communities Action Plan within SEEDA's Regional Economic Strategy.
- Sets out clear standards as to the ways in which regional bodies and others need to work if the framework is to deliver positive results.
- Identifies priorities for regional action over the next 12–18 months.
- Develops a regional response.
- Commits Partners to agreeing on indicators through which we can measure whether social inclusion in the region is getting better.
- Creates a Regional Social Inclusion Task Group to take forward and monitor the effectiveness of the commitments made in this document.

Definitions

1.8 Before going further, we need to attempt a definition. In this document, the term social exclusion is defined as:

“an inability (of individuals) to participate effectively in economic, social, political and cultural life; alienation and distance from mainstream society.”⁴

1.9 The important thing to grasp is that social exclusion is not the same as poverty. It is often caused by poverty but there are people living above the poverty line who can be socially excluded, for example frail older people. The term social exclusion seeks to capture the less tangible aspects that we associate with being poor, such as low morale, isolation from social or spiritual networks or cultural resources.

1.10 The term social inclusion aspires to tackling the exclusion of individuals, neighbourhoods, districts and communities of interest.

3 They are: the Government Office for the South East (GOSE); the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA); the South East England Regional Assembly (the Assembly); Regional Action and Involvement in the South East (RAISE - the regional voluntary/community sector network); the NHS; the Social Care Regional Office; and the Housing Corporation South East.

4 Duffy, K (1995) 'Social Inclusion and Human Dignity in Europe,' Report for the Steering Committee on Social Policy, Council of Europe.