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**DELIVERY OF A SOCIAL INCLUSION STRATEGY FOR DARLINGTON**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member(s) - Leader of the Council, Councillor Williams**  
**Responsible Director(s) - Chief Executive, Barry Keel**

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**Purpose of the Report**

1. This report outlines the reasons why the council needs to have a social inclusion strategy and invites members to agree the strategy attached as **Appendix A**.

**Background**

2. The origins of the social inclusion strategy lie in the extensive consultation undertaken for the development of the community strategy.
3. Members of the public and partner organisations were very clear that improving quality of life in Darlington in accordance with the vision of the community strategy means improving quality of life for everyone in Darlington.
4. New legislation on equalities means that a commitment to fairness and equality cannot be a vague aspiration but must be a robust and accountable method of promoting fairness. This will be tested rigorously in future inspections and audit. To ensure that the authority is well placed to meet this challenge, it is essential that good use is made of the evidence available nationally that particular groups are more likely to suffer from exclusion and identify actions required to prevent this.
5. The social inclusion strategy in no way implies that these groups are more important than others in Darlington or that identification within the strategy confers special status in some way. Indeed the council is particularly aware that community tensions can result from any perception that certain parts of the community are treated differently or are above the law. The actions in the strategy must not lead to any detrimental impact on the population of Darlington as a whole.

**Information and Analysis**

6. The strategy document is structured around seven main sections:
  - (a) Context;
  - (b) Introduction to the issues in the borough of Darlington;
  - (c) Improving social inclusion performance at Darlington Borough Council;
  - (d) Framework for driving change across the wider borough;
  - (e) Chief Executives' noticeboard (a technique used within the consultation exercise where those consulted were asked to consider the message they would like to give to the chief executives of all the agencies who are members of the Darlington Partnership);

- (f) Conclusion;
  - (g) Key contacts.
7. The strategy proper does not start until section (c) above. The consultation process has yielded substantial revisions to the “fully costed” action plan. The vast majority of the funding for the strategy has already been identified. Requests for extra funding from Darlington Borough Council are being considered now as part of the usual budgetary process. When reading the strategy it is important to remember that the Council is already clear about where it is now and where it wants to go. The consultation process has helped us to understand what we need to do to bridge the gap between the two.
  8. The rationale behind the inclusion of some groups (and, by implication, not others) in this section is given in the main document (pp 12-13). Essentially, these groups have been highlighted in the draft because the Strategic Social Inclusion Group felt ‘that they are people whose life chances stand to benefit most from a strategic, multi-agency approach to social inclusion’.
  9. It is worth repeating that the interests of one group do not override either the law or the interests of all the other groups. The strategy is about resolving tension and promoting community cohesion and fairness. Specifically, it is about "improving the life chances of those who experience discrimination and disadvantage". It avoids both political correctness and positive discrimination. It outlines instead positive actions that agencies can take to ensure that those who are at risk of discrimination and disadvantage play on a "level playing field" of opportunity in Darlington.
  10. The strategy will do six things:
    - (a) define Darlington Partnership and Darlington Borough Council’s approach to a complex policy area;
    - (b) define what social inclusion means in Darlington;
    - (c) describe where are now;
    - (d) outline where we would like to get to in the future;
    - (e) identify target groups;
    - (f) commit Darlington Partnership and Darlington Borough Council to a programme of action.

### **Outcome of Consultation**

11. The consultation programme for the strategy ended on August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2004. Views have already been sought from each Council scrutiny committee. More than 450 groups and individuals were involved in the eight month long consultation process.

### **Legal Implications**

12. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

## **Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

13. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

### **Council Policy Framework**

14. The issues contained within this report do not represent change to Council policy or the Council's policy framework.

### **Decision Deadline**

15. For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter.

### **Conclusion**

16. This report summarises All Together Now: A Social Inclusion Strategy for Darlington.

### **Recommendations**

17. It is recommended that:
  - (a) the Council receives and notes the contents of the draft Social Inclusion Strategy;
  - (b) the Council endorses Darlington Partnership as the agency responsible, with support from Darlington Borough Council, for the delivery of the strategy.

### **Reasons**

18. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:
  - (a) It is important to make Council aware of the corporate approach to social inclusion.
  - (b) Social inclusion is a collaborative agenda best delivered by Darlington Partnership.

**Lorraine O'Donnell**  
**Head of Policy**

### **Background Papers**

There are no background papers.

David Plews: 2023  
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