

KEY POLICY: FINANCE

ANTI POVERTY POLICY

1.0 Key Strategic Links

Dealing with social exclusion is a key aim for South Lakes Housing, which develops the work undertaken on antipoverty issues.

South Lakes Housing is committed to promoting social inclusion and tackling disadvantage. However, this can only be fully achieved by working in partnership with other organisations.

This policy links to community objectives (quality of life and access to services) and commits South Lakes Housing to identify and take account of the needs of its low-income households.

2.0 Related Policies

South Lakes Housing

- Rent Collection Arrears and Eviction Policy
- Corporate Debt Policy
- Rechargeable Repairs Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Business Plan

South Lakeland District Council

- Community Strategy
- Housing Strategy
- Corporate Strategy
- Housing Revenue Account Business Plan

Reference is also made to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the Commission for Race Equality (CRE) Code of Practice for Rented Housing.

3.0 Policy Standards

The aim of this policy is to commit South Lakes Housing to directing its own services towards combating poverty and its causes.

As part of this process it is necessary for South Lakes Housing to ensure that its own actions do not exacerbate existing problems.

The company must also be able to reflect concern about the effects of those existing policies that may contribute to the existence of poverty within South Lakeland, but which are outside its own control.

Poor people are easily excluded from society. They often cannot afford to join in, are less likely to make full use of public services and can feel ignored and unrepresented within their communities.

South Lakes Housing is committed to ensuring that all residents have a stake in the community and a chance to participate and contribute regardless of their financial status.

Poverty and social exclusion are interrelated although they have different definitions:

Poverty means going short materially, socially or emotionally. It affects the chances of having good health, a secure home, a fulfilling education and a decent retirement.

It prevents people from being able to plan ahead and take control of their lives. It takes away the chance for people to realise their own potential, enjoy self-confidence and to contribute towards their communities.

Social Exclusion denies people the minimum acceptable way of life because of where they live or how others perceive them. Poverty is the main but not the sole cause of this.

It refers to the way in which people are unable to play their full part as members of the community because of a lack of resources, a lack of opportunity or because barriers have been placed in their way.

4.0 Key Issues

The principal groups of people experiencing poverty can be identified as;

- Older people – with low retirement incomes and poor health
- The unemployed – including single people and young disabled
- Low paid – barriers to work exist e.g. the benefit trap
- Single parents – most vulnerable to poverty when the children are very young as responsibilities make it difficult to find work
- Disabled people – higher living costs with lower incomes plus social exclusion issues

- Poor areas – a concentration of people with problems can mean fewer resources and facilities in the area
- Rural residents – transport availability and costs may provide a barrier to participation

5.0 Aims

Having identified the groups likely to experience poverty and/or social exclusion South Lakes Housing aims to ensure continued attention in the following 4 key areas in order to prevent or combat problems:

KEY AREA

ACTION

1. Access

- Identify hard to reach groups and promote involvement
- Take a wider approach to customer contact (out of hours availability)
- Provide as many payment options as possible for payment of rent and sundry debts
- Provide information in minority languages and formats suitable for people with visual impairment or hearing difficulties
- Make all offices DDA compliant
- Provide home visits
- Hold estate walkabouts regularly
- Support residents associations and provide a presence at meetings

2. Benefits

- Carry out high profile continuous campaign to promote housing benefit uptake
- Publicise the availability of Welfare Benefits Services within the area
- Enable SLH staff to advise on housing benefit and carry out verification work
- Promote and apply the Supporting People Framework
- Ensure that there are no barriers to the efficient and sensitive delivery of benefit services

3. Dealing with Debt

- Prevent debt occurring by making early contact with tenants and debtors
- Maximise benefit advice
- Take a sympathetic and sensitive approach to debt recovery

- Encourage early contact in arrears situations
- Ensure that barriers to making payment are not created due to lack of flexibility
- Take a holistic approach to debt
- Provide a money advice referral service via Citizens Advice South Lakeland

4. Deliver Services that meet needs

- Provision of sheltered and very sheltered supported housing schemes
- Provision of community alarm scheme in non-sheltered units
- Provision of specialised accommodation for people with mobility difficulties by adapting existing properties
- Commitment to supporting SLDC's homelessness strategy
- Provision of door to door rent collection services

5. Tackling Fuel Poverty

- making improvements to and extending central heating systems, ventilation, double glazing and insulation to give a greater standard of comfort, greater efficiency and lower running costs

6.0 Objectives

- An aim to promote self help
- To direct people towards appropriate resources and services available from other organisations
- Promote social inclusion
- Build an informed and involved community
- Encourage tenants to act in a way which is empowering
- Ensure tenants are involved in democratic processes
- Promote anti discriminatory practice with regard to race, disability, age, gender and sexual orientation

7.0 Conclusion

Whilst South Lakes Housing is committed to reducing the effects of poverty and social exclusion within the area, many of the contributing factors cannot be dealt with at local level because of the influences of Central Government Policies, the economy and employment issues.

However, even within these limitations by meeting the aims and objectives set out within this policy, and by being both reactive and proactive in the performance of its functions, the organisation can make a good contribution to providing solutions.