



**EAST MIDLANDS  
REGIONAL ASSEMBLY**

*• Progress Through  
Partnership*

## Social Inclusion Task Group

# UPDATE

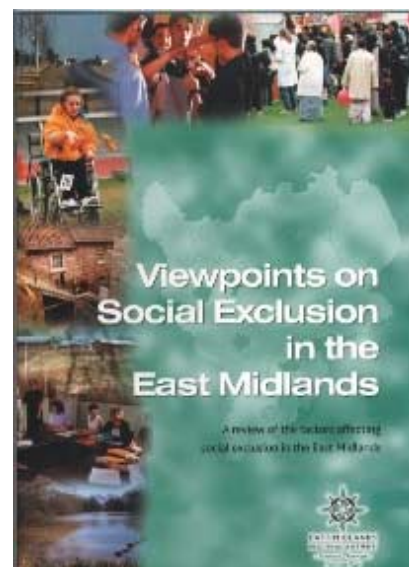
JUNE 2001



*WELCOME to the Regional Assembly's first newsletter spotlighting the work of the Social Inclusion Task Group. This newsletter looks specifically at the group's ground-breaking document, Viewpoints on Social Exclusion in the East Midlands and summarises the responses and contributions received at the consultation events. The six events held around the region were very well supported and I would like to thank everyone who helped organise them as well as those who participated. The views expressed at the events will be considered shortly and will influence the future workplan of the Task Group.*

*Councillor Ross Willmott  
Chair, Social Inclusion Task Group  
Leader, Leicester City Council*

For further information on the Assembly, its partners and task groups, please contact Simon Brian, Communications Officer on 01664 502563 (502571 Direct Line) or 07747 638772. You can address your email to [simon@emrlga.clara.net](mailto:simon@emrlga.clara.net) or write to the Assembly at The Belvoir Suite, Council Offices, Nottingham Road, Melton Mowbray LE13 0UL.



### **EVALUATION AND KEY MESSAGES**

The vast majority of participants felt the events helped them to better understand the organisations and structures of those engaged in addressing social exclusion in the East Midlands.

They also felt that the "Viewpoints On Social Exclusion" document would influence them in the future in a number of ways. These included its usefulness for planning, in helping shape the research agenda, as an exchange of information, and by encouraging participation at a local level, as well as developing themed events.

There was some criticism that the equalities agenda was not outlined clearly enough in the Viewpoints document, especially concerning disability and racial equality. Some Housing Association representatives expressed a wish to explore in more detail the way the content relates to tenants and local communities.

When asked about future events some participants felt that Lincolnshire was so large and disparate, with local rural difficulties, that more work should be undertaken to help groups in the county shape the agenda in the future. Some participants from Northamptonshire also expressed a feeling of alienation from the process. Most participants however, wanted more events that are themed and a focus on issues that needed local solutions.

Engage East Midlands, the Voluntary Sector Forum, responded in a comprehensive way. It argued that organisations could empower socially excluded people, design specific projects, ensure that a policy of tackling social exclusion was part of an underpinning culture, develop inclusive management styles and develop an advocacy role.

Regionally, the organisation felt five key themes could be pursued: capacity building, information exchange, funding, resources and timescales. It also felt that there should be more respect for grassroots organisations dealing with social exclusion and that these bodies should be listened to and action taken. The view was widely expressed by other participants that lead times for new initiatives were too short to prepare adequately.

Participants asked for more information and the means to discuss common problems in the future, as well as more information on the precise role of bodies such as the East Midlands Local Government Association (EMRLGA).

*(Continued overleaf)*

One delegate summed up an aspiration "we want to see how the region all fits together". It was argued that there is clearly an uneven flow of information and participants clearly wanted to see the big picture or overview

#### MAJOR EMERGING THEMES FROM THE EVALUATION

- More locally-based lead action is needed to combat social exclusion
- More strategic planning is needed at all levels
- More research is required
- A better exchange of Information is essential
- The economic and environmental factors underlying social exclusion need to be explored more thoroughly
- More long-term resource and finance regimes are needed for organisations locally tackling social exclusion
- 'Partnership' needs to be more than a phrase, particularly on health and local issues
- A number of participants called for a review of progress in 12 months time or even a permanent Forum
- There was a call for an improvement in networking methods.
- It was hoped that Regional Bodies would react to these needs.

#### THEMES EMERGING FROM WORKSHOP DISCUSSION GROUPS

Interesting comments included a call to explore long term solutions based on robust information and shared knowledge. Longer term funding was again a recurring theme of participants, who also wanted more transparency in all processes.

It was agreed that no strategy to combat social exclusion would succeed if it were not sustainable or targeted. Some participants still felt rural areas of the East Midlands were neglected and most felt accessing Regional cash was a problem.

Some participants expressed the view it was time to think regionally and act on Regional Priorities. Neighbourhood mapping could then inform all concerned of the emergence of local strategic partnerships. Others felt events were 'too closeted' and more effort should be made to hold meetings in local communities using appropriate language. It was widely acknowledged that more use should be made of existing websites in the region. Access to information and the application of data were recognised as powerful tools and therefore need to be managed on an inclusive and equitable basis. In addition, the way in which information is collected and made accessible were seen to be key factors affecting inclusion. A number of issues and factors came to the fore:

- boundaries are a real issue for many voluntary sector organisations; in order to improve planning, strategy and the distribution of funding it was argued that Government should review all of the boundaries utilised by other agencies to ensure that they are coterminous

- data needs to be collected in a sensitive manner and the techniques employed must be appropriate to the task and process
- data needs to be presented in an 'apolitical' manner and be accessible to all
- to ensure that data is available for all, regional agencies should augment the functions of the Regional Observatory to house all regional data relating to inclusion issues; this would be a standardised dataset

As already mentioned, some participants favoured themed events e.g. around disability issues, working with young people. the role of sport in overcoming social exclusion and the imaginative use of Neighbourhood Renewal. Other opinion sought to develop a local 'county voice', although these were not necessarily contradictory positions. A widely held view was that a lot more work is needed before it is possible to lobby the European Union coherently on this issue. Other topic groups explored the concept of social capital and social enterprise. It was agreed that the infrastructure relating to social inclusion (and regeneration more widely) is complicated and onerous, reflecting the European, national, regional and local dimensions of the debate.

The explosion of partnerships and the relative roles and responsibilities of these was debated with many unclear about how things fit together and whether there is a governing architecture for all of the different interventions.

A number of discrete action points were identified and included:

- a regional map of partnerships and programmes should be produced which demonstrates how everything fits together
- it was felt that there were too many partnerships which is having a detrimental impact upon the ability of voluntary and community representatives to engage
- the group also pointed out that having a seat on a committee did not in itself guarantee effective representative; support is needed to ensure that the voluntary and community sectors can fully represent their constituencies
- in terms of impact and the ability of partners to affect change, the view was expressed that only full subsidiarity in programme design and funding decisions would allow for the necessary impact, in terms of national to regional and regional to local subsidiarity and empowerment

In conclusion, the topic groups were lively, full of positive ideas that need to be 'fleshed out' and explored over the next period. It is clear that the report has assisted the process of thinking about social exclusion but much more working together is required before a broad consensual view is articulated.



For further information on the Social Inclusion Task Group please contact Mick McGrath (Policy Officer) on 01664 502563 or by email to [mick@emrlga.clara.net](mailto:mick@emrlga.clara.net)