

METROPOLITAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT GROUP

PRIORITY ISSUE PAPER

Name of Priority Issue **Social Justice**

Brief Description of Issue

Social Justice, or the more current concept social inclusion, is characterised 'by a society's widely shared social experience and active participation, by a broad equality of opportunities and life chances for individuals and by the achievement of a basic level of well-being for all citizens' Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* 2000.

The term social inclusion describes the process to ensure individuals or groups are not wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society in which they live. All levels of government have a role to play in addressing these processes. Local Government is particularly concerned with:

- Equity and fairness in the use of resources and access to the opportunities of life within respective communities.
- The development and maintenance of the social fabric of the community, including community support services, opportunities for community interaction and participation, and access to community facilities.
- The development and maintenance of a community's cultural heritage and a sense of place and identity.
- The right of all people (being particularly cognisant of race, religion, ethnicity, class, gender and disability) to participate in community life and to influence decision-making affecting their daily lives.

Local Government is increasingly being viewed by many sections of the community as pivotal to providing community information, developing the community's social capital, and driving the social planning agenda. Whilst all levels of government represent the people in their constituency and have a responsibility for social justice and social inclusion, local councils are uniquely placed to know the local issues and gain an understanding of, and respond to, changing local needs. Local Government's focus on locality, its closeness to citizens, and its interaction with other levels of government, community and private sector interests, place councils in a unique position to facilitate social wellbeing in local communities, partnerships with the non-government sector and other levels of government, and to inform the direction of future metropolitan and regional planning.

In setting out the roles, functions and objectives of councils, the Local Government Act 1999 'the Act' reflects the basic principle that Local Government councils are primarily accountable to their communities. In particular Section 6 of the Act requires that councils:

- act as representative, informed and responsible decision makers in the interests of their communities

- provide and co ordinate various public services and facilities and to develop their communities and resources in a socially just and ecologically sustainable manner;
- encourage and develop initiatives within their communities for improving the quality of life within them;
- represent the interests of their communities to the wider community; and

Section 7 of chapter 2 of the Act includes to:

- plan at the local and regional level for the development and future requirements of their area;
- provide services and facilities that benefit their area, ratepayers and residents, and to visitors to that area;
- provide for the welfare, well being and interests of individuals and groups within their communities.

Local Government in all States of Australia has had a **role in human services** and more recently community development and social planning. In South Australia, local government became involved in social justice issues such as destitution during the 1890s. From 1969 to the present there has been a progression of changes through the availability of state grants (State Grants (Home Care) Act 1969), general revenue sharing (1975), development of Community Services teams in Councils (1980s), and from 1985 South Australia leading the way through social planning in green field sites.

The 1990s saw the integration of social justice aspects such as employment, housing diversity, education, cultural development, and community safety and social infrastructure, into urban planning. Social Planners were appointed to several metropolitan Councils in South Australia to address community needs and prepare Social Plans.

Social Justice applications in Local Government now extend well beyond the provision of services and facilities for the aged and disabled, youth, families, cultural groups, financially disadvantaged etc. They also include initiatives such as:

- Development Plans, which aim to ensure development outcomes are in accordance with a Council's vision and strategic management plan as well as the State's Planning Strategy.
- Housing projects, retrofitting good urban design (refurbishment) into low socio-economic areas, urban regeneration projects.
- Community grants provide significant support to essential small-scale community support programs.
- Rate rebates and special hardship provisions.
- Community development in neighbourhood/community centres and in urban regeneration programs.
- Social planning, such as, green field and infill developments, population planning and community plans.
- Heritage, culture and arts initiatives.
- Community consultation and participation, for example, the Youth Advisory Councils.
- Human resource initiatives eg training programs.
- Volunteering across the spectrum of ages and local government programs.
- Sustainability initiatives, which are about ensuring equal cost sharing and responsibility across the generations.
- Internet access and ancillary library services.

- Recreation programs e.g., youth, disabled and aged.
- Partnerships with other levels of government, the community and private sectors to address need, for example, the Southern Social Planning Alliance, Inner Southern Social Planning Alliance, Northern Partnership, Onkaparinga Youth Development Model, and HACCC Collaborative Projects.

Community leadership is at the heart of modern local government. Councils are the organisations best placed to take a comprehensive overview of the needs and priorities of their local areas and communities and lead the work to meet those needs and priorities.

What are some of the possible metropolitan impacts?

The impact of population growth across metropolitan Adelaide, and the distributional effects of poverty and population ageing will have policy and program implications for housing, health, recreation, education, libraries and social support services.

Population ageing and community need for 'Ageing in Place' or 'Ageing in my Place' have implications for growth in home-based care and services for aged, and increasingly those with disabilities in the government, private and community sector.

Increasing costs in property values render older people asset rich but cash poor providing older residents with increasing costs of housing maintenance, rising utilities costs and potential spikes in Council rates.

Community members see community information as the province of Local Government; this is particularly pertinent to an ageing community or a community experiencing growth in young families. Councils need to clearly identify their role in the ongoing development of community information provision.

Significant increases in property values, a declining social or public housing sector, and increasing levels of casual employment are factors, which are challenging housing affordability. Many families are resolved to being trapped in ongoing rental accommodation, overstressing mortgage payments or moving to the outer fringes of Adelaide's metropolitan area. This has implications for families who live on the margins of resources, and councils and State Government in housing affordability provision, infrastructure development, and the development and provision of community services and support.

South Australia's Strategic Plan requires all levels of government to share responsibility for long-term targets and as a result will put pressure on council resources. Councils need to map out with the State Government, which of the targets is dependent on the actions and therefore resources of councils.

Cost shifting has been the side effect of many Commonwealth and State Government policies and programs, such as, program grants being once-off or for a limited time, or program or staff being cut or limited due to change in Government policies and priorities. Councils are then in the position of resourcing the program, or perhaps funding the service-gaps left by other levels of Government. An example has been the TravelSmart Program, where 'seed funding' enabled councils to roll out initiatives like the Walking School Bus program. The resulting level of community interest and expectation put pressure on councils to continue the initiative without State funding. Better collaboration is required between the spheres of government in

identifying who should be providing what level of service and in allocating the necessary funds to achieve the appropriate level of service.

Finally, given the range of planning, programs, services and activities of Local Government outlined, in pursuit of social justice and social inclusion at the community level, the effect to local communities if Local Government were to withdraw or change its level of involvement without commensurate increase in in-kind support and service provision from other levels of government would render communities unsafe, increase levels of social isolation, result in extreme hardship for vulnerable groups (eg withdrawal of services to the frail aged) and increase significantly the mental health issues of communities.

Suggest a Possible Process for Further Investigation and Development of Implementation Strategies

The release of the "Rising To The Challenge" report examining the financial sustainability of Local Government (August 2005) recommends, in relation to service levels and resource allocation policies, that councils:

- consider further resource-sharing initiatives;
- develop policy frameworks that clearly specify its policies regarding the number and nature of services to be delivered and the methods for delivery;
- subject their current service programs to regular review;
- subject proposals for new or additional services to review;
- publish the results of the outcomes of their service reviews;

1. In light of the 'Rising to the Challenge' Report - Strengthen the State-Local Government Relations Agreement 2004 to strongly reinforce:

1.1 Commitment to Shared Strategic Directions

- Share, understand and build on the strategic plans of each sector and levels of government by identifying shared objectives and shared strategic directions. (e.g. State Strategic Plan).
- To jointly identify and explore priority areas that will make a fundamental difference to reform and shared strategic directions.
- Better coordinate activities and enable more strategic and regional approaches to responding to community needs.

1.2 Commitment to Respect and Recognition

- To gain agreement between the levels of government for what each level's responsibility is in relation to planning, funding and service provision in relation to social development and management.

1.3 Commitment to Results

- That the Metropolitan Local Government Group promotes the need for councils to recognise, reinforce and improve its human service and social planning provision areas as set out in the recommendations of the Rising to the Challenge report.
- Increase the efficiency, effectiveness and coordination of services and infrastructure of State and Local Government.

1.4 Commitment to Review

- To review and evaluate progress regularly.

2. Amend the LG Act to clearly articulate a policy position, role and level of responsibility for social development and management.

Who are the Key Stakeholders?

- Councils
- Local Government Association
- Government Ministers for Family and Community Services, Housing, Health, Transport, Education, Planning, Local Government.
- Local communities / Community Groups
- Government Agencies/ Departments e.g., Department of Family and Community Services.
- Universities e.g., UNISA Social Policy Research Group, Hawke Research Institute. Flinders University SA Community Health Research Unit. University of Adelaide, Australian Institute of Social Research.
- Private Sector Organisations e.g., Aged, Housing, Employment
- 'Peak' or Industry bodies e.g. South Australian Council of Social Services, Planning Institute of Australia, Social Planning Chapter.
- non-Government Organisations e.g. Anglicare, Centacare

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