



DEPRIVATION AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN SHETLAND

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This piece of research intends to develop understanding of social exclusion and deprivation in Shetland, and other remote rural areas. This increased understanding, at a local level, can be used to inform local policy and delivery to better target resources and support and thereby reduce inequalities, and genuinely improve the day-to-day lives of people living in Shetland. It can also feed into discussions about how these issues can be addressed at Highlands and Islands and national levels.

In order to achieve understanding, the research was designed to establish:

- The number of individuals and households in Shetland facing deprivation and social exclusion;
- The reasons why individuals and households in Shetland find themselves in these situations;
- The impact, on individuals, households and Shetland, of being socially excluded and/or deprived; and
- The impact of current local and national policy initiatives on deprivation and social exclusion in Shetland.

Key Words: *Social Exclusion, Deprivation, Remote Rural Areas, Shetland*

Context

The research has evolved within the context of the Scottish Executive report on the development of a long-term strategy for measuring deprivation in Scotland and for different contexts within Scotland¹. The emphasis is on measuring and examining deprivation and social exclusion in a remote rural context. It builds on nationally and locally available quantitative data concerning deprivation, with detailed qualitative data about people's experiences.

¹ Bailey et al (2003)

Key Findings and Conclusions

According to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 2004, Shetland is not highly deprived at local authority level. It is the 5th least deprived local authority in Scotland and is the least deprived in comparison to similar remote and/or island authorities². However, the index shows that 6.79% of the Shetland population is income deprived, 1492 individuals³.

Shetland is characterised by a different geography and way of life than most of the UK. It is one of the most remote areas in the country, with some islands and parts of the mainland particularly remote; it has strong local cultural roots; and generally high standard of living. Therefore deprivation and social exclusion manifest in different ways.

Living in these circumstances is no better in Shetland than in any other part of the country: the day-to-day existence for individuals and households struggling to afford to eat and pay for other essentials is the same. Whilst the culture of self-reliance and high standard of living enjoyed by many, forces less fortunate people to keep these circumstances hidden. It can be particularly isolating and demoralising when people can see others around them enjoying these living standards and high quality infrastructure. There is little opportunity for social contact and support from others experiencing a similar situation.

Characteristics

The research is able to show the experiences of deprived and socially excluded people living in Shetland.

Access

- If people are unable to run a private vehicle, most opportunities available to them are severely restricted: employment, services, social opportunities, learning and leisure activities, such as swimming, for example. Weekly bus services are available, but it is difficult to get fresh food items and carry home a weekly shop;
- Many people rely on others for transport. This is humiliating and hinders independence;
- Households are not able to afford to use the bus, go to youth club or swimming.
- Access is also restricted by a lack of services close by, including childcare and for some, by illness and disability.

'You can try to get an appointment to fit in with the weekly bus trip - you have to plan when you're going to be ill!'

Community

'I would like to volunteer and be part of community things, but can't give the commitment. People do speak and say they will come along but don't. I think they may be embarrassed by a disabled child.'

- If people don't feel part of the community within which they live they tend to feel very unimportant and dissatisfied with their life;
 - Those living in communities within which they were brought up are usually able to rely on local networks of family and friends in times of need. This safety net is less readily available for incomers;
 - For most, communities are welcoming and people feel part of society. However, cultural differences, race, disability, health and past history can make people feel discriminated against, leading to extreme feelings of isolation and exclusion, both from the community and community events;
- In remoter areas the safety and feeling of safety were welcomed. However examples of anti-social behaviour, some directed at particular individuals, occur in more central areas of Shetland.

² http://www.neser.org.uk/pdf/Deprivation_2.pdf

³ 2001 and 2002 figures

Health

- Levels of anxiety and depression are particularly high amongst those who are deprived and/or socially excluded. This is particularly as a result of the daily pressures of making ends meet and feelings of isolation. This affects people's ability to access employment and other opportunities;
- General levels of health are poor: with erratic diet, lack of exercise and weight issues (obesity or underweight);
- People experiencing deprivation often smoke: this is frequently seen as people's only luxury;
- Some people living with deprivation are reaching crisis point, with serious mental health issues, suicidal thoughts and/or a dependency, all of which can lead to sudden death.

'If mum or dad are feeling rubbish then I can't go out. I have to stay in to make sure nothing goes wrong'

'The house is too small, too far away from others and we are packed in together all the time and can't afford to get out.'

Housing

- Housing issues in remote areas of Shetland tend to be the poor condition of housing. Deprived inhabitants are seldom in a position to be able to pay for the necessary improvements, nor the heating costs to heat the house adequately. And poor health can exacerbate inability to resolve these issues.
- There is a shortage of housing, which is more common closer to Lerwick. This can result in cramped living conditions on a long-term basis, whilst others sleep a couple of nights at a time on different friends and families' sofas;

'It's like we are constantly walking on egg shells to avoid arguments.'

- Living in a poor and/or temporary housing situation impacts on the health of household members.
- It is particularly difficult for those on national benefits to afford electricity cards: it is common for people to go without food in order to pay for electricity.

Income and Employment

- Individuals and families in Shetland find it difficult to afford to eat; with some families living on soup to make ends meet. Buying clothes and shoes for growing children is difficult and impossible for parents.
- The benefits system, particularly national, is complex and confusing to people. People are divorced from claiming what they are entitled to. This is likely to increase with the recent centralisation of benefit administration from Shetland to Elgin and Clydebank.
- The relatively high cost of living for essential items, such as food and fuel means that nationally decided benefit levels do not buy as much as they do in some other places. Unplanned expenditure, such as an emergency admission to hospital on the mainland can push a household into debt, which they can be paying off for years;
- Employment can be difficult to access out-with central areas, particularly for those without private transport. The regular commute to Lerwick for those able to afford transport and for whom employment is 9-5 leaves behind others in the community without the same opportunities;
- Meanwhile the opportunity cost of participating in low skilled, low paid jobs is higher when the cost of private transport to access are included, but are a necessary requirement to access shift work in central areas.

'Shoes, that is such an expense for the children. It's the things you don't budget for, that's when it hits.'

Learning

- There is evidence that experiences at school, particularly negative ones, have an impact on people's inclusion and wealth later in life: for example those people who are experiencing particularly acute forms of deprivation and/or social exclusion tend to be those who did not obtain any qualifications at school;
- There is a desire to learn, but barriers, such as cost, transport and childcare, as well as people not having the motivation or time are often insurmountable to people.

'I don't feel I would do my best because of my dyslexia and folk make me feel thick'

Individuals not Communities

It is individuals and households rather than communities who face deprivation and social exclusion in Shetland, making it difficult to determine how much deprivation there is. And deprivation can affect anyone, at any point in his or her lifecycle. The research has indicated that individuals in Shetland particularly prone and vulnerable to deprivation and social exclusion are:

- young people whose parents are not able to ensure they are able to access opportunities and grow up feeling a part of the community within which they live;
- adults of any age who have low self-esteem and/or poor mental health, often due to situations which have developed as a result of negative experiences in the past and can result in homelessness and substance misuse. This is particularly acute if their situation is not understood by the community within which they live;
- those who are physically disabled or with a long-term illness and their carers, when they do not receive adequate support and understanding;
- those looking after a young family without access to their own transport, particularly those living in remote areas of Shetland;
- older people unable to access opportunities that would enable them to feel a part of the community.

There is also evidence of social exclusion for ethnic minority individuals in Shetland, whether cultural or as a result of employer barriers, and of degrees of social exclusion for white incomers to Shetland.

Numbers and Distribution

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) suggests that 6.79% of the Shetland population is income deprived, 1492 individuals⁴. The SIMD2004 uses benefit uptake to measure income deprivation. This research shows that the complexity of the national benefits system contributes to the low uptake of benefits in rural areas and means that figures are likely to underestimate the true number of deprived people living in Shetland.

There are higher numbers of deprived individuals dispersed in more remote areas of Shetland, and spatial pockets within concentrations of local authority housing. Nevertheless deprived individuals and households are fairly evenly distributed throughout Shetland.

The Research Process

The research process has provided broad qualitative information about many facets of people's lives. It is capable of being constructed into qualitative representations of inequalities faced by respondents due to ethnicity, age, disability and location, for example. This information can be used by services to address the complexity of deprivation and social exclusion in remote rural areas.

⁴ 2001 and 2002 figures

As a result of the process developed the research is also able to conclude that:

- A holistic approach must be taken to address issues of deprivation and social exclusion: only by taking this approach can a full understanding be achieved; problems tackled successfully; and gaps in service provision for those most in need be removed;
- It is important for staff within organisations to get out of the office, into the communities and spend time speaking to individuals in order to fully understand people's circumstances;
- People have solutions: both participants and researchers came up with ideas about how services could be improved⁵ ;
- All service providers must be aware of what level of quality of life is or is not acceptable in Shetland, so that people are treated fairly and equally and standards raised to a minimum across the islands.

Current Local Policy and Service Initiatives

There are a number of policies and initiatives developed locally that make a positive difference to the lives of people living in Shetland. However, these tend to be service specific and rarely span all aspects of an individual or household's life. The research has demonstrated the complex nature of deprivation and social exclusion in Shetland and the process used has illustrated the value of working with an individual or household in relation to all their needs rather than just the area of interest of one particular service.

In addition to ways of working across services this research highlights examples of good practice and of where services in Shetland could be improved.

Current National Evidence Base and Policy Initiatives

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) provides a geographic distribution of relative deprivation across Scotland, capable of identifying spatial concentrations of deprivation on the scale of datazones. However in Shetland, where deprived individuals are spatially distributed and circumstances of deprivation have more to do with an individual's characteristics than the area within which they live, the SIMD is unable to provide an accurate measure or adequate understanding of deprivation:

- The spatial scale of datazones used by the SIMD2004 is too blunt and indicators chosen to make up the index are less sensitive to the characteristics of deprivation and social exclusion found in Shetland.
- The SIMD is unable to consider the complex issues that have to be overcome when tackling deprivation and social exclusion in remote rural areas and the thematic nature of deprivation in remote areas.

Because the SIMD is not designed to measure the manifestation of deprivation experienced in Shetland and other remote areas of Scotland, it should be used with care in relation to distribution of resources.

Allocation of the Scottish Executive Community Regeneration Fund (CRF) and Community Voices (CV) using the SIMD2004, in order to bring improvements to Scotland's most deprived areas and help individuals and families to escape poverty⁶, is focused on the most deprived areas, which means Shetland receives a comparatively small sum from this funding stream.

Recommendations Identified

These recommendations, developed by the Project Team with input from researchers, are addressed to the Community Planning Board (CPB) in Shetland, as the body responsible for developing community planning in Shetland. This is in recognition that well-developed and outcome focused community planning process are key to tackling inequalities.

⁵ Examples of solutions can be found in Appendix I

⁶ Scottish Executive Six Closing the Opportunity Gap objectives
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Social-Inclusion/17415/opportunity>

Local

In order to genuinely tackle deprivation and social exclusion it will be necessary:

- To develop an understanding of deprivation and social exclusion in Shetland within communities and agencies;
- For services to work less in isolation, breakdown organisational and service boundaries and treat individuals and households as a whole rather than in relation to service specific issues; and
- Be more creative in the way that people experiencing deprivation and social exclusion are reached and involve them in developing solutions.

1) *The Community Planning Board should raise awareness and increase understanding of deprivation and social exclusion within Shetland. An acceptance that people in Shetland are living in these conditions must be developed. There is a general assumption that everyone is able to access Shetland's high quality infrastructure. This belief must be challenged as it compounds feelings of exclusion for those that feel it is necessary to hide their circumstances.*

This can be achieved by:

- a) Developing a common understanding of deprivation and social exclusion in Shetland. This must include a minimum standard for quality of life across the isles to ensure people are treated fairly and equally;
- b) Encouraging staff to spend a greater proportion of time in communities to fully understanding circumstances. Opportunities such as shadowing of staff could be considered;

2) *The Community Planning Board should ensure all policy and service planning in Shetland uses evidence from this research to reduce inequalities in Shetland.*

This can be achieved by:

- a) Incorporating this evidence into community, corporate and service planning, including the strategic partnerships of the CPB;
- b) Ensuring all service providers are responsible for reducing inequalities by using this evidence to explore inequalities within their service area or geographic community and implement changes to service delivery in order to reduce inequalities;
- c) Recognising that intervention at an early stage of an individual or households journey into deprivation and social exclusion is less costly in the long-term;
- d) Increased targeting of mainstream funding to those that need it: for example to enable young people to go on school trips or go swimming;
- e) Increased targeting of additional funds to those that need it: for example the Community Regeneration Fund.

3) *The Community Planning Board should ensure robust processes are in place in order to reduce inequalities.*

This can be achieved by:

- a) Encouraging a holistic approach to addressing the needs of individuals, households and communities in order to ensure that problems are successfully tackled at the correct level and that gaps in provision are covered, particularly for those most in need. For some, at certain times, this may require concentrated one-to-one support;
- b) Recognising that in addition to mainstreaming community planning process, existing tools for assessing needs (such as Integrated Assessment Framework (IAF) for young people and their families, Single Shared Assessment (SSA) for adults) are key to addressing inequalities. These tools can be enhanced by incorporating findings from this research, including key questions to ask around inequalities and triggers to using the whole deprivation tool;
- c) Recognising the link between reducing inequalities and geographic-based planning;
- d) Encouraging all service providers to actively unearth deprivation and social exclusion;

- e) Encouraging local policy makers to explore ways in which hidden deprivation and social exclusion can be tackled;
- f) Recognising that people have their own practicable solutions about how quality of life can be improved: workers, communities and individuals, and that they need to be empowered and relationships built in order to be able to explore and find ways to improve quality of life; and
- g) Ensuring agencies communicate effectively about the services and opportunities available.

National

In order to genuinely tackle deprivation and social exclusion it will be necessary:

- To improve the understanding of rural disadvantage nationally and methods for measurement; and
- Be more creative and flexible in the way national policy is delivered.

In collaboration with the other Highland and Islands Community Planning Partnerships (including at the next Highlands and Islands Convention in October 2006), the Community Planning Board in Shetland should:

- a) Continue to improve the evidence base of rural disadvantage in Scotland, taking into account rural development needs;
- b) Encourage the Scottish Executive to develop a complementary approach for measuring deprivation in rural areas, where deprivation is spatially dispersed, not spatially concentrated. This must recognise the thematic nature of deprivation in remote rural areas and that rural disadvantage requires different indicators to those required in order to identify areas of multiple deprivation. For example recognising the limitations of using benefit uptake as a measure of income and employment deprivation; the inclusion of new domains such as population sparsity and population decline; making allowances for variations in cost of living.
- c) Ensure policy makers are aware of the limitations of SIMD as a tool to understand need in rural areas or to make comparisons between urban and rural areas and therefore that it should only be used to allocate funds aimed at tackling concentrations of multiple deprivation;
- d) Ensure the SIMD is not used as a proxy for need or deprivation other than as a measure of concentrations of deprivation;
- e) Ensure individual and household deprivation becomes part of the national vocabulary;
- f) Encourage the Scottish Executive to recognise the complexities of Closing the Opportunity Gap in remote rural areas and the challenges and resources required to address and reach individuals who attempt to hide their circumstances; and
- g) Encourage increased flexibility and creativity in the way CPPs are able to deliver national policy, including the opportunity to rural and island proof national policy.

Monitoring and Evaluation

In order to ensure that inequalities in Shetland are reduced the Community Planning Board should:

- 1) Ensure the evidence in this report is updated on a regular basis, for example with the update of the SIMD later in 2006;
- 2) Consider returning to participants in two years time to establish whether their quality of life has improved, and if so, whether this is a result of improved service delivery; and
- 3) Request that those delivering services in Shetland provide regular updates to the CPB on what has been achieved in reducing inequalities.

Research

There is considerable value in undertaking a piece of research that uses front-line staff to undertake the primary research: it alters their perception of the circumstances being faced by people who are receiving services; increases their knowledge and motivates them to improve the service they are providing. However, it is time consuming to implement and obtain sufficient data to draw conclusions.

Shetland's Community Planning Board approved these recommendations on 13 June 2006, requesting that an action plan to address them be developed and tabled at their next meeting. This action plan can be accessed at::

http://www.shetland.gov.uk/datashare/upload/documents/FINALSOCDEP290506_1.pdf

FURTHER INFORMATION

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**A full copy of the report can be accessed at:
[http://www.shetland.gov.uk/datashare/upload/
documents/FINALSOCDEP290506_1.pdf](http://www.shetland.gov.uk/datashare/upload/documents/FINALSOCDEP290506_1.pdf)**