

KIRKLEES
COMMUNITY COHESION
ACTION PLAN

Community Cohesion

The context

The disturbances in three parts of the country during the summer of 2001 were a wake-up call for many areas as well as those in which they happened - Bradford, Oldham, and Burnley. The national report by Ted Cattle on the local lessons to be learnt found that:

'many communities operate on the basis of a series of parallel lives. These lives do not seem to touch at any point, let alone overlap and promote meaningful interchanges'.

That describes the situation in parts of Kirklees. In other areas we have diverse communities working well together.

Kirklees is made up of towns and valleys with strong distinct identities. During the last 50 years it has also developed a rich and diverse mixture of cultures and faiths. This follows a long history of people and communities moving into the district - in the 19th century the towns grew as people came to work in the mills and factories. Also many people from Eastern European countries came to the district. More recently asylum seekers and refugees have begun to contribute to the life of the community.

The vision in the Kirklees Community Strategy (2002) is based on harnessing the strengths of diversity.

We are proud of the diversity of cultures, faiths and experiences of the communities of Kirklees. It is, in many ways, our greatest strength, but only if we successfully

harness a joint response to the challenges of the next 10 years.

We recognise the challenge to support and promote healthy relations between communities based on trust, understanding, respect for others, and resolving conflict. If we do not try to meet that challenge tension and conflict between communities may increase.

At times there is friction between communities in parts of the district. There are areas where people experience racial harassment and intimidation. There are also areas where there is considerable tension between younger and older people.

During the summer of 2001 there were a number of incidents that could have become more serious but did not because of the commitment of local people and organisations to work together to dispel rumour and take appropriate action.

This action plan builds on the work that is already being done. It brings together a number of strands of work and sets out an overall approach. It is a snapshot of what we plan to do at the moment. The action plan will continue to develop, particularly as we learn more about the dynamics and issues in each area and what hinders community cohesion.

What is community cohesion?

Community cohesion in Kirklees means that you feel comfortable and positive about living and working alongside your neighbours, wherever you may come from or whatever your background, family history or lifestyle.

It is about:

- building community links
- bringing communities together
- overcoming prejudice and suspicions
- combating discrimination
- promoting opportunities for all
- listening to all voices in a community
- addressing community tensions
- celebrating the different cultures within a community
- understanding, valuing and sharing community differences
- giving young people a voice.

Community cohesion incorporates and goes beyond the ideas of race equality, tackling discrimination and social exclusion. It is about the relationships within and between communities. Because of this we have to think about policies, actions and services in different ways.

Community cohesion means that we need to develop approaches to policy and resources that are, and are seen to be, fair to all and which do not lead to tension and/or segregation between different ethnic groups and communities. We need to support and promote contact between people from different communities and develop understanding and tolerance of differences, particularly racial ones.

Our commitment

The Kirklees Community Strategy from the Kirklees Partnership made a commitment to reduce all forms of discrimination and prejudice, to promote mutual understanding between communities, and to discuss and address difficult issues.

This action plan is a key part of meeting that commitment.

All organisations which are members of the Kirklees Partnership will be asked to:

- adopt this action plan
- understand the implications
- make a commitment to providing leadership in building cohesive communities and acknowledging, respecting and celebrating diversity.

We have established a programme board with representatives from the Kirklees Partnership and the political groups on Kirklees Council to develop and implement this action plan. The board is supported by a multi-agency team and a number of project groups to ensure that the actions are successful.

What are we trying to achieve?

The challenges are to:

- develop better understanding of the issues and causes of problems in local areas
- build stronger links and understanding between different communities and cultures
- promote respect for others, tolerance of racial differences and also respond strongly and consistently to racist incidents and any activity calculated to destabilise communities or cause offence
- develop an approach to policy and resources which is understood by all communities and which do not lead to tension and or segregation.

To start to meet these challenges the partner organisations will implement the action set out in this document.

How will we know if we are making progress?

We will develop ways to measure our progress. These will include:

- listening to people in local communities to find out whether they feel there is a respect for each other and interaction between communities
- information about the absolute and relative employment, health, and education outcomes for different communities
- levels of hate crime, harassment and intimidation.

An initial assessment will be made to describe the overall picture and will be updated regularly.

Not repeating other work

Community cohesion is about the understanding, relationships and respect between communities.

This action plan outlines some practical steps that can be taken.

Clearly, there are a wide range of factors affecting relationships between communities – two of the most important are equality and deprivation. These and other issues are addressed in other plans and strategies. For example:

- the Education Development Plan aims to raise the educational achievement for particular ethnic and gender groups

- the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy and economic strategies cover the regeneration and tackling of deprivation in the most disadvantaged areas
- the Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy aims to reduce anti-social behaviour
- the Equality and Diversity Strategies of key agencies promote equality in employment opportunities and the delivery of services
- responses to incidents of racial harassment are co-ordinated and monitored through a multi-agency group.

This action plan does not repeat or duplicate these earlier commitments but builds on them through the focus on the relationship between communities.

What we do already

We recognise that communities and organisations already do a great deal to improve community cohesion and that there are many examples of good practice. There are a wide range of examples including:

- The range of festivals and celebrations across the district that play an important role in celebrating cultures and developing understanding
- Projects such as 'Stories in a Suitcase' develop understanding of the experiences of different communities
- Young people at school learn about different cultures and develop personal skills
- Summer activity programmes for young people combine fun and learning through arts and music, leisure and sports

- Mediation schemes are used to resolve conflict and disputes in communities.

We will build on the existing good practice by:

Understanding the local context and developing debate in local communities

Objectives:

Kirklees is a large area with many diverse towns and rural areas. The communities are very different from one area to another and a local approach is essential to understand the dynamics in each community, to identify the issues in each area and develop the best ways to bringing communities together.

We know that some areas have good relationships with contact between the different communities .In other areas communities live more separate lives and resentment, racism and aggression has developed. We need to understand why.

In some areas funding opportunities have created competition between communities; in others, housing issues, anti-social behaviour, or problems between different age groups cause tension.

We need to develop information about the relationships between communities in local areas and understand them.

Action required:

- identify priority areas
- organise discussions in those areas with councillors, community leaders, and community cohesion workers

- develop work through area committees
- create opportunities for discussion between groups including faith and inter-faith networks.

Leadership

Objectives:

Leaders in communities (including elected councillors and service providers) need to be committed to community cohesion and confident in proactively pursuing relevant issues.

We need to ensure that leaders are confident in both developing links between communities and in challenging divisive behaviour.

Action required:

- partnership organisations to sign up to the action plan
- key service provider organisations to agree protocols and understand the implications
- leaders in communities to agree protocols
- provide support and mentoring when needed
- organise workshops to discuss approaches to difficult challenges
- learn from good examples and celebrate strengths.

Young people and learning

Objectives:

The role of young people in our communities is crucial. They often experience the problems that result from a lack of community cohesion. They can also be the cause of those problems. We need to:

- find out what young people think and feel about the development of cohesive communities
- directly involve young people in defining and shaping the community cohesion policy
- develop schemes and activities that engage young people, increase mutual understanding and value the diversity of cultures, customs and histories
- encourage children and young people to work together to develop the community
- promote changes in the attitudes of young people who show signs of hostility and racism towards others
- understand young people's perspectives to inform action plans and to act swiftly on issues raised by them
- enable children and young people to gain greater understanding of other communities
- develop opportunities for children and young people to work together in groups and organisations
- develop aspirations of children and young people through access to a wide range of role models

- provide good practice guidelines for community cohesion programmes which work with young people

Action required:

- deliver a young people's action research project into community cohesion issues
- create clear and accessible mechanisms for young people to bring community cohesion issues to the attention of policy makers and service managers
- provide guidance on the development of shared time in classes, and also on class and school councils. Develop the citizenship curriculum. Develop the 'Powercrowns' project. Provide information and awareness of faiths and cultures.
- continue to develop curriculum material that reflects the cultures of local communities
- create and support opportunities to build stronger links between communities and between schools
- introduce summer and half-term schemes within stronger and more challenging structures
- develop arrangements for rapid involvement of young people when community problems surface, especially in areas of potentially high tension
- encourage colleges to develop approaches to foster community cohesion.

Finding solutions to conflict

Objectives:

When problems occur, it makes sense to develop local solutions to resolve conflict within local communities. We need to

- ensure that frontline staff, communities and young people are able to deal with conflict as it arises-;
- help young people to be able to offer mediation and support for their peers
- develop positive relationships and understanding of difference within and between target communities.

Action required:

- create pilot school peer mediation programmes in target schools
- develop a pool of at least 10 trained mediators, from within communities and including young people, to deal with racial and community conflict
- provide conflict resolution and mediation training to frontline staff across agencies.

Support for individuals and groups

Objectives:

- Staff in organisations and people in communities face many difficult challenges in race and community cohesion. We need to: support people to develop better understanding about issues and ensure that staff and communities feel confident in working with diverse communities and in dealing with conflict and inappropriate behaviour.

Action required:

- equip officers with the skills to support community cohesion through their actions and behaviour
- provide training in conflict resolution and mediation
- make sure the development strategies of key agencies include skills and abilities to support community cohesion
- organise networks and workshops to allow frontline staff to share issues and develop particular strengths
- ensure support is available from managers, teams and specialists
- develop codes of practice.

Cultural identity and celebrating communities

Objectives:

All communities are rightly proud of their culture and there is much to be gained from developing greater mutual understanding of cultures and histories. We need to use cross-community activity to develop understanding of differences, to value diversity and to develop strong and positive relationships.

Action required:

- aid the sharing of community histories and cultures
- understand what is going on
- develop approaches that work within and between communities
- work with faith groups and inter-faith networks to develop greater understanding
- develop grants for cross-community work and celebrations
- organise at least 10 community arts and leisure activities across age, gender and race.

Intelligence gathering

Objectives:

Individuals and organisations already hold a lot of information about what is happening in local areas, but the information is often held by different people and is unco-ordinated. We can improve the ways we rapidly share information and use it to tackle problems at an early stage.

We need to have an effective system to gather information quickly and share it with the people who need to know and who can take appropriate action.

Action required:

- develop an understanding of the need to share intelligence
- create a central resource for analysis and co-ordination
- sift and manage information
- establish processes to receive information and send it to the right people
- develop and support local networks.

Communication

Objectives:

A key way for community cohesion to be understood and valued is to improve our communication. We need to communicate to all audiences the value of diversity, to challenge myths and to promote what is being done.

Action required:

- clarify the message
- get key themes across
- improve supporting processes
- counter misinformation
- develop a communications strategy.

The next stage

This action plan is driven by a belief that local solutions work. It starts with a reference to our vision based on the strengths of diversity. Those strengths come from the communities of Kirklees. The crucial part of the next stage is to:

- work with community organisations and individuals in specific areas
- stimulate local debate about the nature of community cohesion and how it can be strengthened
- promote local action.

This action plan is the start of a process that will continue to develop. It has a range of ideas that will provoke discussion.

The action plan will continue to develop as our awareness of the issues grows and we develop our understanding of the changes that might to policies and the delivery of services.

If you would like to contribute to the work on community cohesion please contact:

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