

# leading cohesive communities

a guide for local authority leaders and chief executives

community cohesion

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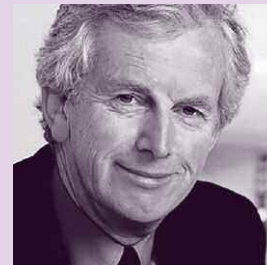
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# contents

<b>Chairman's foreword</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Local authorities – taking the lead</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Be clear about your responsibilities</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Developing a compelling vision</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>'Mainstreaming' – taking a 'whole council' and 'whole community' approach</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Cohesion – a central part of your community strategy</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Active partnerships</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Political protocols and cross-party working</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Skills, training and development for leaders</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Measurement and mapping – vital components of a strategy</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Performance and improvement</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Effective communications</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Coping with demographic change</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Civil renewal and social capital</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Central-local dialogue</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Further resources</b>	<b>34</b>

# chairman's foreword

**The creation of strong, vital and cohesive communities is one of the most important issues that we face. This is a critical factor in the quality of people's lives and for the harmony of the nation as a whole.**



We have heard a lot recently about whether multiculturalism has been over-emphasised at the expense of integration. We rightly hear more about 'Britishness' and the need to create a shared sense of belonging. No single local authority can possibly hope to address such weighty issues on its own, particularly if there is a link to international affairs. However, councils can help (and as this publication shows, already *are* helping) to create strong communities, in which the fear of difference can be broken down and everyone feels valued and safe, has an equal place and feels a shared responsibility for their community.

Just over a year ago, the LGA and its partners published an action guide which presented practical examples of how local authorities are contributing to cohesive communities. Although much has happened in the past year, that guide is still pertinent and I commend it to you as a companion piece to this publication. What the publication you have in front of you adds to that previous guide is an emphasis on *leadership*, both in the sense of local authorities' community leadership role and specifically the contribution which leaders and chief executives of local authorities can make.

Most of the debate about cohesion has revolved around ethnic and faith divisions. But it is a broader discussion than that and must tackle the divisions within society, where too many people are left disaffected and apart from the mainstream of life. The Local Government Act 2000 gives local government a clear responsibility for promoting 'well-being'. We must, therefore, build a higher level of understanding about how communities work and, in particular, about the social processes at area and neighbourhood level. This publication aims to do precisely that. All local authorities will need to ensure that they are well equipped to take on the task.

Local authorities will also clearly need to engage with partners in the voluntary and private sectors, as well as other public sector agencies, some of whom will be better placed to implement these measures. However, our vision is one of partnership, with all agencies working together and with the local authority giving full effect to its community leadership role. This publication is an embodiment of that, having been produced jointly with the Improvement and Development Agency and supported by the Audit Commission, Home Office and ODPM. We are also grateful to the Commission for Racial Equality and Inter Faith Network for their advice.

Our responsibility is to make our communities work well. We must ensure that everyone feels included and valued and can willingly accept their responsibilities and contribute to making their communities a safer and better place. Ultimately, it is the building of self-generating capacity and responsibility from within communities that will create places with a sense of belonging and neighbourhoods that are friendly, safe and attractive.

**Councillor Sir Sandy Bruce-Lockhart**

*Chairman, Local Government Association*

## Defining community cohesion

**This guide adopts the definition of 'community cohesion' established by the LGA and its partners for the guidance published in 2002 and re-iterated for the action guide published in November 2004<sup>1</sup>.**

**A cohesive community is one where:**

- **there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities;**
- **the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and positively valued;**
- **those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities and;**
- **strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds and circumstances in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.**

**The challenge for each authority is to apply this locally by developing a vision which is meaningful to each part of the community. This guide aims to assist and inspire local authority leaders and chief executives to take a lead part in this.**

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<sup>1</sup> This guide has a particular emphasis on leadership and is intended primarily for local authority leaders and chief executives. You may also like to refer to *Community cohesion: an action guide* which was written as a practical tool for local authority officers and portfolio holders and which gives more detailed advice and examples. The broad themes of the *Guidance on community cohesion*, published in 2002, are also still pertinent and although many of the specifics have been updated for this publication, there is still value in referring to the original. Full references are given in the section on further resources at the end of this guide.

# local authorities – taking the lead

**Every local authority leader is ambitious to establish his or her local area as a good place to live where everyone is valued, involved and made to feel welcome. Each local authority has statutory responsibilities as well as locally determined ambitions and it is the leader who must mesh these into a coherent vision for the good of the community. A divided neighbourhood, with no sense of place or belonging, in which one or more sections of the community are disaffected and constantly in dispute with each other, is unlikely to attract people to live or work and, still less, attract capital investment. Having to cope with disorder in the present takes attention away from the focus on improvements of the future. A vision for community cohesion, and a strategic approach to realising it, is essential and no-one is better placed than the local authority to bring this together.**

The 'community leadership' role of the local authority and its elected councillors is the bedrock of this document. No other organisation or group can claim the same breadth of interest and influence, nor the legitimacy that comes from a democratic mandate. This should not imply an overbearing or controlling role for the local authority. The strongest leadership involves well-judged devolution of power and recognition of expertise and experience well beyond the council chamber. A strong partnership, with clear lines of accountability, is essential.

Community cohesion reaches into every corner of the council's activities and has to be developed as a corporate issue. Decisions taken by the council should be constantly 'cohesion-proofed' by considering their impacts on all sections of the community. There is a danger in developing special programmes for cohesion in isolation, rather than approaching the issues through a corporate vision and strategy. Achieving community cohesion is not only about providing or enabling excellent services – it depends upon developing and promoting a clear set of values,

changing peoples' attitudes and promoting interaction with others and, critically, influencing how they feel about their area and fellow residents. This means developing new practical and leadership skills.

The starting point is a vision that everyone can identify with and understand. Local authority leaders have the responsibility to develop this and to give real and tangible meaning to community cohesion and to ensure that it is threaded through the Community Strategy (the next section takes this further) and through all other key policies. This can only be developed successfully through open and thorough discussion with the local community. Sometimes that discussion can get difficult and it is the leader's role to mediate and explain in order to facilitate full participation and, eventually, active support.

The whole authority needs to own and act on this strategy, but there are some very clear and particular responsibilities:

**The leader** will be personally identified with the need to create strong and cohesive communities; responsible for reaching out to other community leaders and providing leadership and developing key policies and strategy. This will also mean rebutting or challenging contentious and negative views of sections of the community, including those from fellow councillors; championing a cross-party consensus on community matters; fronting positive statements in the local media; explaining the reasoning behind allocation of the authority's resources and seeing that they are fairly distributed. This is about symbols and values, though expressed in practical terms, and about being prepared to challenge some of the narrow – and often populist sentiments – which threaten community harmony by unfairly isolating and targeting minority groups.

**The chief executive** will be taking the overview of the council's strategies and translating them into service plans and practical actions; gaining corporate support and compliance. This involves strengthening key policies and programmes such as the authority's

recruitment and procurement policies; ensuring meaningful measurement of the impact of council activities on cohesion; brokering practical solutions with the heads of other delivery agents; ensuring that all staff are suitably trained and informed about the authority's cohesion vision and able to apply it at the frontline. But the chief executive also has a leadership responsibility and is charged with overseeing the council's statutory responsibilities under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promote equal opportunities and promote good relations between people from different racial groups.

**All elected members** have a leadership role in relation to their local communities and this is vital in the area of community cohesion. Whilst councillors are elected to represent their constituents, they must avoid simply representing sectional interests, which are likely to damage or disadvantage others with equally legitimate and evident needs. They also have a

responsibility to promote wider community interests and to be fair minded when considering resource allocation. They must therefore have an understanding of the needs of all groups, whether or not they are represented by their constituency interests. They must also be prepared to promote an interchange and dialogue between different groups and to promote tolerance and mutual respect.

### Knowing what's going on

Local authorities should never forget that their principal role is to represent their community – and that depends upon them knowing what's going on. Often ward-level members are very well connected and are the first to recognise where tensions might arise. Keeping in touch with local people – through surgeries, meeting people in the neighbourhood, or any form of local meeting – is essential. All departments will also have a lot of local knowledge at their disposal, but they need to marshal it effectively and keep elected members informed

### In two neighbouring authorities...

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In **Sunderland** the chief executive has led the change by taking on a major restructuring to ensure that cohesion has a more prominent role. He has taken the lead in terms of vision, signalling commitment, and communicating the vision and in making clear what is expected of his managers under the banner of a 'one council' approach to cohesion. The work is being embedded in Sunderland's vision to be a 'safe and friendly' place to live. The council is now moving towards a more devolved model for delivery and accountability.

Strong political support has also been established through the portfolio holder. A key challenge has been to ensure that all elected members commit to this agenda and have a sufficient level of knowledge and awareness to lead, and scrutinise cohesion within the authority and across partner organisations.

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In **Gateshead** there is a designated cabinet member with responsibility for community cohesion, equalities and asylum seeker communities. The council also has a group director designated as an equalities champion whose remit incorporates community cohesion. A chief officer working group oversees and drives the work reporting to the lead member. Gateshead council have a corporate community cohesion strategy and programme of work is being developed and used as the basis for improving community cohesion. A Diversity Forum has also been established which is the council's official engagement forum with black and minority ethnic communities.

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Often it is local councillors and officers who can pick up on what is going on in their area and can try to make sure that there is an appropriate response before problems arise. As leaders and chief executives you need to be aware of which mechanisms are in place in your local area to facilitate this and how they can inform your own strategic decisions.

Councils need to know how the local community is changing – who is moving in and who is moving out; is one group harbouring a grievance about another, or do they feel that they are no longer getting a fair deal? Do local people feel that one or more of the statutory agencies is neglecting them, or failing to give them the protection and security they need? Do local people feel that they are losing their identity, or perhaps they feel that 'outsiders' are responsible for a new wave of criminal behaviour. None of these fears may be true, but false perceptions have sometimes led to disaffection – and worse. Equally, councils should be aware of positive interactions between local groups. Knowing what enhances cohesion, and helps it to thrive, is vital.



# be clear about your responsibilities

**This guide and the preceding action guide show many examples of authorities which see the importance of building cohesion in their communities for the benefits it brings. This ought to be sufficient encouragement in its own right but in any case all local authorities and many public bodies also have very specific and clear statutory duties to consider.**

The Local Government Act 2000 established the power to promote the social, economic and environmental well-being of the local area. More specifically, the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 gave public authorities a general statutory duty to promote race equality and when carrying out your functions to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination;
- promote equal opportunities; and
- promote good relations between people from different racial groups.

In our view, this needs to be developed more actively, with a real commitment to building a successful multi-ethnic and multi-faith society in which all citizens are treated fairly – and both accept their responsibilities as well as receiving their rights.

The Commission for Racial Equality has produced a number of guidance publications to help you meet your duties under the Act. In particular, the *Good Race Relations Guide* (available online at [www.cre.gov.uk](http://www.cre.gov.uk)) gives detailed guidance on the duty to promote good relations between people from different racial groups.

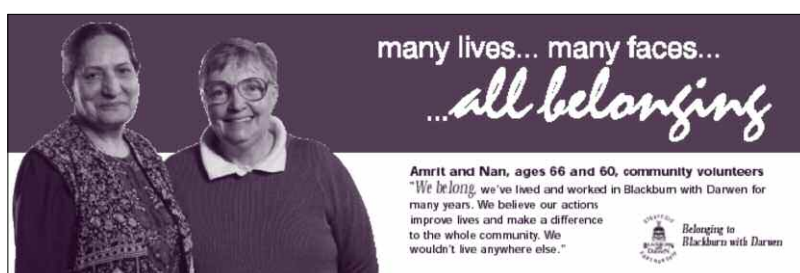
Other statutory duties are placed on authorities within the Disability Discrimination Act and the Equal Opportunities Act. From 2009, a new body, the Commission for Equality and Human Rights will begin to oversee the full range of equalities duties and responsibilities.

As well as the statutory duties, the audit and inspection regime places increasing emphasis on cohesion. Within the newly revised Comprehensive Performance Assessment, the council's approach to community cohesion will be taken into account in its overall rating, emphasising the centrality of cohesion to the council's community leadership role.

More progress will be made if these duties are addressed actively and positively and will help to ensure that particular groups do not feel isolated, unfairly treated and disaffected. It is therefore essential that the authority's strategic approach to cohesion and equality is interwoven at all levels.

In practical terms community cohesion means making sure that different groups can get along with each other and develop relationships based on mutual trust and respect. This will depend upon regular contact and interchange. It means breaking down segregated and separate lives and ensuring that no group is discriminated against or suffering such disadvantage that they feel that they have no meaningful stake in society.

The role of local leaders is to ensure that these ideals are not just empty rhetoric but are also reflected in the strategies and policies, as well as the everyday activities of local authorities and their partners.



From Blackburn with Darwen's  
*We all belong* campaign

# developing a compelling vision

**For those authorities which have achieved significant improvement in the cohesion of their communities, the first step has invariably been to build a compelling vision for the area, which everyone understands and feels able to accept. If local people are part of the process of preparing the vision they will be more likely to take ownership of it and support it in practical terms.**

Local authorities, in their community leadership capacity, are best placed to begin this process. They can ensure that, with the active participation of their communities and partners, the vision informs all of the key policy areas of the authority and the activities of all local stakeholders. Ultimately, this vision needs to be integral to the council's community strategy.

An effective local vision will be drawn up following open and thorough discussion with the local community. Giving people of different groups a chance to come together and to develop greater trust and respect is essential, even if it is occasionally uncomfortable. Even though there may be real debate and disagreement, this will provide the opportunity to establish what local people really think about the vision and to ensure they feel genuine ownership of it.

Many discussions have been less successful than they might have been because they have emphasised differences, rather than what we hold in common. The Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality has described an integrated society as comprising equality, participation and interaction and these three concepts could form the starting point for the vision. The definition offered at the beginning of this guide could be referred to. Local discussion could encompass the following topics:

- What do we all understand by a cohesive community?
- What are the key improvements which we all want to see to bring this about?

- How can we develop pride and a sense of belonging in our local area?
- What are the values which we all believe should underpin our vision for a cohesive community?
- How do we promote common interests and a sense of belonging whilst respecting differences and diversity at the same time?
- How do we promote positive cross-cultural and inter faith contact?
- What do we understand by 'Britishness' and 'citizenship' and our own local identity?
- Is there equality of opportunity for all sections of the community to participate in the decisions affecting the community?
- Where might we need to build capacity to enable individuals or parts of the community to participate fully?
- How can we welcome newcomers and help them to understand local norms whilst also understanding their needs and valuing their past experiences?
- What more can be done to combat discrimination on the basis of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability and age?

Particular efforts will be required to engage those who are not usually involved in formal consultation, such as young people, asylum seekers and refugees, Gypsy and Traveller groups and people in isolated or deprived areas. Consideration must be given to whether representatives from these groups are involved and whether they have been given time and resources to help them to participate effectively.

To make a vision into a reality, it must be woven into the key strategy documents, including the community strategy. Consideration must be given to the best way

to communicate it to others, through channels such as local press and media, leaflets or a poster campaign.

It is important to undertake internal visioning within the council as well as externally with the community. The former can have medium term impacts in terms of strategic planning and resourcing, while the latter can have longer term outcomes in terms of participation and inclusiveness.

But a vision, or the strategy that arises from it, should not be a dry document full of 'worthy' statements. In fact it need not be a document at all (although some authorities have taken this approach and found it an effective way of communicating their vision and strategy). There are many approaches which councils and their partners have taken to try to win the hearts and minds of local people. Symbols, and actions which are consistent with the vision are also very important to set the right tone and to establish respect through ethical leadership. Most importantly, the vision needs to be at once the property of the whole community and the responsibility of the leader of the council. By taking ownership of the vision and accompanying strategy, the leader can take it off the page and ensure delivery in practice.

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## **Building commonalities – respecting differences**

We know all too well that minorities are often the most disadvantaged groups in our local communities and that equal opportunities and anti-discrimination legislation alone cannot combat disadvantage. Some communities have closed in on themselves, possibly for protection, or to cling to their distinct values and that this separation has militated against mutual trust and respect. Parts of the white community (and longer standing BME community) are also very disadvantaged and have become alienated and defensive.

A key challenge for any local area is, therefore, how to ensure that multicultural and other differences are respected, but that we also invest in creating commonalities and avoid reinforcing separateness and divisions.

This will involve some very difficult discussions about what is expected of local residents, as citizens, as well as what protection and resources they and their different communities might expect. It is also important for newcomers to be made welcome – to understand local norms of behaviour, whilst also allowing us to realise the benefits of greater diversity.

Some of these discussions will inevitably be linked to wider issues about ‘Britishness’ and the nature of identity in modern multicultural countries. Local authorities cannot be expected to resolve all such issues. However, they can influence who different groups interact with, they can promote and foster tolerance and understanding and they can also ensure fair play. In order to break down the barriers between groups, authorities must first understand where they exist, the nature of the differences and keep in touch with the way in which communities are constantly changing.

Many different agencies now have plenty of experience of supporting different groups by providing them with their own facilities and by ‘capacity building’ their support networks. These have often taken the form of specific community centres, special projects to improve employment prospects or develop business interests, celebratory events like carnivals and festivals and targeted provision of services in the arts, sports, health and education delivered through culturally sensitive schemes. However, there is much more limited experience in promoting cultural interchange and in projects and services which emphasise similarities and common interests. Again, the starting point will be building an understanding of the present level and nature of ‘social capital’ and developing a programme in response. This may mean doing things in very different ways – and this is only likely to be successful if a consensus is firstly built around those changes.

### **Ted Cattle**

*IDeA Associate Director and Chair, The Institute of Community Cohesion*

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# 'mainstreaming' – taking a 'whole council' and 'whole community' approach

**To be fully effective, the cohesion strategy cannot be the responsibility of one local authority department working alone, or of one group of members working independently of the rest of the council. It must be a corporate responsibility and grow out of a shared vision which is owned and acted upon by the entire authority and, ultimately, by the entire community. It is tempting to describe this as 'mainstreaming' but this underplays the complexity of the challenge. It may be better to think of this as a 'whole council' and 'whole community' approach.**

The vision cannot be dispensed from one 'well-spring' alone. Member champions or a dedicated department may be effective in some respects (in scrutinising the activities of the whole council, for example) but they cannot by themselves deliver the whole vision. Rather, the leader and chief executive of the council must promote the vision in a way which empowers others to take action in the authority and the community at large. Council leaders and chief executives should be applying a more strategic and vision-led approach to changing behaviour among those they work with.

Good communications are essential, particularly to support new and wide ranging policies. It is unlikely that they can be simply cascaded in the more traditional sense and will generally require some new, innovative and participative approaches to engender support and understanding.

The whole council approach is also about ensuring that all of the council's principal services are engaged with the agenda and that they are delivering cohesion through their everyday activities. There is a real danger that new and specialist teams and services – including pilot schemes and demonstration projects – will be set up to deal with cohesion but that the council, as a whole, will change very little. Some local authorities may be tempted to resource community and voluntary sector organisations to do the cohesion work on their behalf. Whilst such organisations have a valuable role to play, they cannot be expected to deliver the council's principal services or compensate for the work that these service do – or fail to do.

The work of mainstream and specialist services and teams also has to be monitored and evaluated on a regular basis in order to ensure that strategic objectives are being met. This is taken up in later sections on measurement and performance.

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There is strong political and managerial support within **Gravesham Borough Council** which is driving forward the theme of community cohesion within the council's own organisational structure, as well as providing a basis for improving services tailored to the needs of the local community and individual service users.

A top level Community Cohesion Group was set up by the authority in 2003 to advise and co-ordinate community cohesion and race equality issues across the council and this has been a major driver for change. The group is chaired by the executive director of corporate services, and includes an officer from North West Kent REC, and the lead cabinet member for community well-being. The council also works with local voluntary and community groups. The group meets monthly to co-ordinate community cohesion issues across the council. All service departments, under the guidance of the group, are required to play an active role. The group is responsible for co-ordinating the development, implementation and review of race equalities policy and community cohesion issues, as well as driving best practice and change within the council's corporate structure.

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Following the disturbances in 2001, the publication of the Oldham Independent Review and the national reports into community cohesion, **Oldham** Council has attached high priority to building community cohesion in Oldham. This is central to the borough's community strategy and the council's corporate plan, in which it is one of the council's six key priorities.

Working with a range of partners, including the Community Cohesion Partnership, the council has developed a programme of work to strengthen community cohesion, and developed the Forward Together Strategy and Action Plan to take this forward. This seeks to involve all the partnerships of the Oldham Partnership in contributing to this work.

The council completed a detailed review of the impact and outcomes of its work to build community cohesion in October 2004. This identified a need to analyse the gaps in this work and identify areas for further development. Since then the council's leader and chief executive have also carried out a wide ranging 'Listen and Learn' programme to gather views from across the communities of the borough to find out what they think are the priority issues to be addressed in building community cohesion.

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# cohesion – a central part of your community strategy

**Cohesion ought to be a central theme of the community strategy. If a separate community cohesion strategy is prepared then this needs to be complementary to the community strategy.**

It should also be noted that the government has supported re-designating community strategies as 'sustainable community strategies'. This is a useful development because, whilst there are slightly different interpretations of 'sustainability' they all imply the integration of economic, environmental and social objectives and community cohesion clearly fits in to this picture.

The links between sustainable community strategies and the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) have yet to be fully developed but there will almost certainly be important implications for the ways in which authorities approach cohesion.

Further, the new eight part definition for a 'sustainable community' clearly indicates the need for cohesion to be an important part of any new neighbourhood development and renewal process<sup>2</sup>.

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**Tameside MBC's** leadership commitment to the community cohesion agenda is emphasised through the community strategy and local strategic partnership (LSP). The strategy was developed from a definition and set of action points for the authority, LSP and the community, generated directly from public consultation.

From this, Tameside's 2003-06 Community Strategy identifies six priorities for the borough:

- supportive communities;
- a safe environment;
- a prosperous society;
- a Learning Community;
- a healthy population; and
- an attractive borough.

The priorities within the strategy are supported by the board and eight thematic partnerships, which together make up the Tameside Local Strategic Partnership.

Promoting cohesion and inclusion cuts across all of the themes in the strategy, but is picked up in particular under the supportive communities theme. This priority aims to reduce the differences in education, crime, housing, employment and health between different communities, whilst improving levels overall.

The chief executive of Tameside has established regular meetings with the chief executive of neighbouring Oldham to discuss cohesion issues (particularly important since many extended families live either side of the authorities' boundaries).

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<sup>2</sup> This definition can be found in Appendix A of *Securing The Future: Delivering UK sustainable development strategy*, ODPM, March 2005

# active partnerships

**Although local authorities have a lead role in realising community cohesion, they cannot deliver it alone. Partnerships are vital to making progress on cohesion, be they informal alliances or formally constituted bodies. Partnerships should not just be developed after something has gone wrong, they need nurturing over time and continuity to ensure a commitment from all sectors. Partnerships work best when there is a common vision which brings people with particular roles in the community together. Those links might comprise a range of different relationships – as various as those with faith leaders, chairs of sports clubs or local GPs for example, as well as with the political leaders and other community representatives.**

Leaders and chief executives will mostly be involved in the more high level and strategic partnerships and have a key role to play. Typically, though not exclusively, they may chair many of them, and are most likely to play a key role in the local strategic partnership (LSP) which is tasked with developing the community strategy.

A vision for community cohesion needs to be developed with partners to ensure consensus and ownership. This is very important as those partners will play a key role in leading culture change or handling conflict resolution. To effect change and ensure delivery it is often most effective to establish joint agreements, shared targets and if possible pooled resources and budgets between the authority and its partners. This may be within the framework of Local Area Agreements (LAAs).

The Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, which has statutory status, is of particular importance. Breakdown in cohesion can manifest itself in crime and fear of crime. It is easier for people to act in a criminal or anti-social manner towards people or property if they see no common link between themselves and their targets. The extent to which the

members of the CDRP relate improving cohesion to reducing crime and disorder is important to the success of both.

One element in both reducing crime and improving cohesion is “having the right people who can provide an appropriate service and communicate effectively with all communities” (to quote the current National Policing Plan). In its original context this is meant in relation to the workforce but the principle could be applied more widely to partnerships and also to other areas of delivery besides crime and safety issues. It is not feasible to have all parts of the community represented in a single partnership but it is more realistic to identify the best lines of communication between the partnership and the community as a whole.

Leaders and chief executives have a crucial role in ensuring that decisions made within partnerships are communicated appropriately and explained fully and also in representing (or at least acknowledging the views of) parts of the community which otherwise would not have a voice. Doing so is crucial to the realisation of cohesion, since it is often the lack of access to decision-making forums which lies at the heart of disillusionment with the political process and leads to alternative structures being created.

Formal partnership structures and processes are only one way of enhancing cohesion. A great deal can be achieved by simply bringing people together on an occasional basis and talking through the issues. These sorts of discussions should not be left to moments of crisis when everyone is looking for someone to blame and when it will be much more difficult to build mutual trust. This more informal level of engagement can be a valuable way of reaching people who may be excluded or under-represented in more formal structures. Full and proper engagement with the views of women in the community, for example, will not be achieved if women are under-represented in some or most of the formal bodies active within the community. The role of women in providing strong role models is often cited as a factor in reducing or



avoiding tensions in communities and so the need to hear women's views is not only an equalities issue. In order to engage women's views fully, authorities will need to understand the informal or voluntary networks which exist within the community. It is the role of the leader and chief executive to question whether these networks are being accessed and actively seek out opportunities to develop links themselves.

Often, leaders and chief executives will be providing a common link through membership of various partnerships and will be able to provide a continuity and consistency of message, by promoting the cohesion vision in each of the different forums.

It is crucial in partnership working for there to be clarity on who is taking the lead for particular actions and, more importantly, who is accountable, ultimately, for performance. The key accountabilities should be established at the outset with regular reporting mechanisms put in place. Blackburn with Darwen

provides an example of where there are clear leads on each of the strategic priorities in the community plan.

Faith groups are usually, rightly, identified as key partners. The local authority is well-placed to encourage inter-faith dialogue as well as nurturing bi-lateral engagement. Discussion with faith groups can help leaders to appreciate how far the services and activities of the authority are sensitive to the needs of the particular group (and in some cases where the needs of different groups need to be reconciled). In engaging with faith groups, however, leaders need also to be alert to sections of the community which require additional effort to reach, either because they belong to a faith which does not have a strong or visible organisational structure (ie there may not be an obvious leader with whom to meet) or because the faith group itself finds them 'hard to reach' (for example, engaging young people in a meaningful way is as much a challenge for faith groups as it is for local authorities, and therefore the need for sharing learning on 'what works' is high).

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When particular tensions arise, most recently after the London terrorist bombings, **Kirklees MBC** move quickly to express a unified Kirklees voice, supported by the council, faith leaders, community organisations and the police. They also maintain an information network, with key nodes in the council, community and police structures, to pick up tensions (real and rumoured) and manage effective responses.

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# political protocols and cross-party working

**A number of local authorities have successfully developed and agreed protocols on a cross-party basis to reassure the local community that no-one will seek to heighten tensions or exploit divisions. This does not in any way inhibit free speech and simply makes sure that debates are held within a responsible context.**

It has also been possible to extend these cross-party agreements to cross-agency protocols and they have been used within a specific context too, such as for inter faith work.

A range of agencies should be invited to 'sign up' on the basis that this should go beyond the political sphere and involve wider civil society and also include public figures (such as local GPs) or celebrities (such as football managers).

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## Coventry



In Coventry all parties share a vision of community cohesion, based on our long history of welcoming people to the city from all over the world. We are committed to building on our good community and race relations and we are not complacent.

The challenge of community cohesion is in the recognition and indeed celebration that people and communities are different and have different needs but in so many ways are the same. We have the same aspirations and we need to be integrated. All elected members have a critical role to play in this.

We must strive to bring people from different backgrounds together so that we do not lead separate lives. We are different as individuals but the same as Coventrians. Everyone in Coventry needs to be valued by and proud of their city.

### **Councillor Tony O'Neill**

*Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Equalities, Coventry City Council*

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## Hounslow

Our political protocol has provided reassurance to the many different and diverse groups within Hounslow. It has been signed by the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties and simply states: 'We will not, in our campaigning materials or in our dealings with constituents and other members of the community, seek to create or exacerbate divisions between groups within the community'.



### **Councillor Colin Ellar**

*Leader, London Borough of Hounslow*

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## Kirklees

Here in Kirklees ensuring good community relations is a key feature of our work across sectors and with other agencies. The state of community relations across Kirklees is of extreme importance to the council and our partners. Although there are good community relations in general within Kirklees, there are some signs that this is not the case in all areas. We are engaged in work to better understand the factors that create community tension and have worked with front-line workers, community activists and our partners to identify concerns and equip people with the skills and tools to address them positively.



This approach is led by the leader of the council who uses meetings of all party leaders to maintain an informed and strong unified political voice amidst the complexities of a minority administration.

### **Councillor Kath Pinnock**

*Leader, Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council*

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# skills, training and development for leaders

**Fostering cohesion in the local community will present some of the biggest challenges faced by leaders and chief executives. There will always be a need to hone skills which are both specific to cohesion issues as well as more general leadership skills. There is also a need to ensure a much wider capacity of all elected members and senior officers, as well as the many staff who need general awareness and practical skills.**

Among the key training and development areas may be:

- Developing a specific understanding of the statutory and regulatory framework relating to cohesion, race and equalities (and how this applies to the council's activities). A previous section entitled 'Be clear about your responsibilities' summarises the main statutory duties.
- Understanding how the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 places a specific duty on delivering training itself – stating that authorities have to demonstrate through their race equality scheme how they will train staff on issues relevant to the duty.
- Understanding how to develop a community cohesion strategy, the principal components and how to measure progress.
- Awareness of the cultural diversity within the locality and how it is changing by means of locally and nationally available tools for monitoring and gathering information.
- Facilitating effective dialogue with the local community and being aware of tensions and sensitivities – and what can serve to heighten or resolve conflicts.
- Developing and communicating a vision within the authority and the community at large and brokering partnerships to deliver it.

- Building alliances to challenge extremism and prejudice and working more effectively with the press and media.
- Being aware of good practice from elsewhere, learning from each other and keeping abreast of developments nationally (and internationally).

The best form of learning will be by seeing what others are already doing and applying it to local circumstances, by discussing real challenges and not merely trying to apply theoretical frameworks.

The key to addressing issues of cohesion is not to consider them in isolation but to apply an understanding of what makes a community cohesive to everything the council and its partners do. Training and development need to be put in the same context by being tailored to the specifics of the local area whilst also taking in the broader policy and performance challenges within which the authority operates. Enhancing skills and knowledge on cohesion issues should not be separated from the approach taken to develop the skills of members and officers on the core work of the authority, namely delivering the outcomes of the community strategy or outcomes related to CPA or the LAA.

With this in mind the IDeA has formed a partnership with the Institute of Community Cohesion and established a range of support for local authorities and their partners:

- **A Leadership Academy module on community cohesion** This is part of the IDeA's overall work on leadership and will be one of a number of modules in that programme. It also forms part of the work that the IDeA is doing to improve capacity on sustainable communities more generally.
- **An introductory session for all councillors/senior officers and partners**, with the option to develop action frameworks with ongoing support. These workshops are provided at a local level and are intended for local authority members and officers, together with their partner agencies.

- **Peer reviews of community cohesion** The IDeA runs a number of peer reviews using councillors and officers from other authorities to act as 'critical friends'. Peer reviews use the expertise and experience of the family of local government to assist the improvement process.
- **Support to community cohesion practitioners** Many authorities now have a dedicated officer, on a full- or part-time basis, with responsibility for community cohesion work. This new network will provide those officers with support, best practice advice and guidance and developmental opportunities.
- **Bespoke programmes of support** Every council is different and has different support needs. This programme allows for very specific tailored assistance to be provided, again from within the family of local government.

This is a new agenda. It means new approaches, with new political skills and new techniques for officers. It also means being aware of what others are doing and what has helped – and hindered – cohesion. Is your authority properly prepared for the challenge?

# measurement and mapping – vital components of a strategy

**Community cohesion is a complex concept and not one that can be mapped and measured in its entirety, but some form of baseline is essential as a starting point. There is a range of tools available which can help inform the development of vision and strategy.**

Chapter 4 in the LGA's *Community cohesion: an action guide* provides a useful summary and the Home Office's *Building a Picture of Community Cohesion* provides a mixture of hard and soft indicators. There is, however, no simple set of indicators that will tell the whole story. From the leader and chief executive's point of view, measurement and mapping tools will be a starting point for the more complex and intuitive processes of engaging with different sectors of the community effectively.

Understanding the strength of community cohesion locally requires a strategic overview of a range of indicators. Alongside baseline data on, for example, demographic mix, leaders need to understand how factors such as levels of satisfaction with local services or indicators of relative disadvantage relate to cohesiveness. Often tensions arise in the community because of the perception of how certain services are delivered or resources distributed. By monitoring satisfaction rates on particular services and considering how they are viewed in specific parts of the community, leaders and chief executives can establish where tensions might arise and head them off. Equally, by understanding how relative disadvantage drives isolation or actual community tensions, leaders can make decisions on resource allocation which have a positive effect on cohesion.

Sometimes it is not merely perception of how resources are allocated but the actual outcomes of difficult decisions, taken in the context of limited resources, which benefit some parts of the community but not others and which result in social instability. Strong data collection and analysis ought to guide an evidence-based approach to decision-

making and policy development. Having the full evidence trail for how a decision is made will make the lines of accountability more transparent and the reasons for decision-making clearer and more readily explained. Parts of the community which do not benefit directly from an initiative can easily feel alienated from the decision-making process (which in itself harms cohesion) or react negatively or even aggressively to those who have benefited. This is less likely if the reasoning for the decision is fully explained at an early stage.

Mapping and measuring indicators in relation to cohesion is not only an exercise in knowing how a community got to where it is, therefore, but also a tool for determining where it needs to go next.

Often, partner organisations hold important data that can help to inform the authority's approach to community cohesion. In forging partnerships with other key agencies, leaders and chief executives should recognise the importance of agreeing to share data wherever possible, with a view to developing jointly shared strategies and targets. Development of LAAs could potentially assist in this.

Another key reason for establishing solid data and intelligence is that it relates directly to Comprehensive Performance Assessment and the comparison of performance and practice with other authorities and partners. The next section of this guide considers this further.

Alongside data about the community as a whole, the leader and chief executive must be on top of the data regarding their own authority. The Race Relations Amendment Act places a statutory duty on public bodies to monitor its workforce, and applicants for jobs, training and promotion, and to publish the results annually, for example. It is the collection and presentation of data such as this which will give the authority credibility as a local leader of cohesive communities.

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**Kirklees MBC** have made community cohesion one of their core council priorities.

Over the last four years they have used LSP networks to pull together a partnership focused on the issues. The emphasis has been on action first, with consolidation into an action plan as responses matured. Early actions were focused on understanding perspectives and issues at neighbourhood level, an approach that was recognised by the Home Office in the Community Cohesion Pathfinder Programme.

As learning developed, the authority has used the more successful elements to identify specific areas of Kirklees where community relations are poor or potentially unstable. Follow-up work has focussed on listening to locally based staff (across agencies and sectors), local councillors and community voices. The decision was made to extend the MORI residents' perceptions survey to incorporate questions that allowed the authority to complement soft information with measurable attitudinal information. All of this has been facilitated by Kirklees' approach to devolving responsibility for cohesion to members at ward level, each of which has its own action plan.

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# performance and improvement

**Revisions to the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) for the 2005 round mean that the council's performance on cohesion will be taken into account in the Audit Commission's overall assessment rating. Whilst the CPA score should not be the defining reason for developing a community cohesion strategy, nevertheless it can provide a focus for cascading messages about improvement throughout the authority. Furthermore, it can enhance the authority's credibility in the eyes of the community by providing external recognition of how seriously the authority takes its role in fostering cohesion.**

The CPA also establishes a consistency in approach by which authorities can compare their performances. Perhaps most importantly, it reinforces that community cohesion is important to all authorities regardless of demographic make up and history of community relations.

Performance management is not simply a technical exercise and should be about ensuring that the council's corporate and statutory priorities are delivered. In this context, the leader and chief executive have the challenge of seeing that every aspect of the council's work enhances and communicates the local vision of cohesion. This will extend to those services delivered by the council directly, those which are delivered at arms length and even those delivered independently by partners.

This may be achieved partially through monitoring and evaluating formal service level agreements with contractors or through joint commitments with partners. A key outcome should be when partners and contractors apply the principles of the local community cohesion vision to all of their undertakings, not only those which relate directly to the council's work.

Many authorities are developing their own localised measures of the effectiveness of their strategies. The

Home Office/ODPM publication *Community Cohesion: Seven Steps* has a useful chapter which describes a broad process. The degree to which a sense of cohesion is linked to a feeling of trust and confidence in local leadership is a crucial element for leaders and chief executives to explore in measuring their improvement. At a delivery level, stretch targets within LAAs can align the ambitions of partners to outcomes which promote cohesion.

Within the authority, leaders and chief executives need to promote the vision through their own example, perhaps with member champions or scrutiny panels challenging member and officer colleagues to adhere to the vision in their own work. Where the impact on cohesion can be considered at the beginning of the policy-making process rather than when thinking is already advanced (or worse, already complete) the better the chance of a positive outcome.

At officer level, operational guidelines backed by strong leadership by example will deliver results. The considerably stronger focus within the CPA on community cohesion provides a good starting point for the development of operational level guidelines.



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## A strong emphasis on the security function

**Luton Borough Council's** leadership placed a strong emphasis on the scrutiny function and set up a panel of councillors not so much to find out the facts, as a wealth of information was already available, but to find out what people felt and thought about what it was like for them to live a multi-racial, multi-cultural society and to find out whether there were issues bubbling away under the surface that needed to be discussed more openly. The secondary objective was to promote discussions about issues that had previously not been widely debated.

*Three Counties*, the local BBC radio station, helped to raise awareness about the study and *The Herald and Post* (the free, weekly newspaper) not only distributed leaflets for the authority but also included some editorial about the study. The leaflet itself served several purposes:

- it was designed to raise awareness and prompt discussions;
- it was a way of 'taking the temperature' locally;
- it served as a safety valve; and
- it enabled the council to say that everyone had had a chance to put their point of view forward.

Everyone who contributed their points of view was invited by Luton Borough Council to a half day event to check whether they had correctly interpreted what people had said and whether the preliminary conclusions of the panel were well founded and if they had missed anything out. The outcome was very positive and provided reassurance about the validity of the findings as a correct interpretation and summary of what we had been told. Ten key issues and actions were identified resulting in the production of a report entitled *Sticking Together*. The council is now working with private, voluntary and public sector bodies and carrying out the recommendations.

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### There are no quick fixes

Addressing the cohesiveness of a whole community needs a complex analysis and action on multiple fronts in order to be effective.

**Oldham MBC's** report *Forward Together: Building Community Cohesion in Oldham*, for example, provides a commentary and list of actions, covering all of the following issues and a range of other initiatives:

- primary, secondary and further education, particularly in respect of twinning mono-cultural schools and encouraging mixed intakes;
- youth and community work, including sports development;
- segregated residential areas in social and private housing;
- regeneration and renewal practice;
- tackling racist incidents;
- health, in primary and acute settings;
- employment opportunities in the public sector;
- policing and community safety; and
- private enterprise.

Most importantly, the entire community was encouraged to sign up to the Oldham strategy, reinforcing that the complex set of actions and ambitions could not be delivered by the council alone.

Similarly the **London Borough of Tower Hamlets'** community cohesion strategy provides an action plan of around 150 separate points to tackle the range of activities required to address the present situation comprehensively. Tower Hamlets achieved this by 'cohesion proofing' the corporate strategy using the published guidance as a risk assessment tool and focusing on positive scenarios. Each action therefore aims at a specific positive outcome.

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# effective communications

**The press and media should be seen as part of a much broader based communications strategy, to develop pride in the local area and to dispel myths and to stop rumours from reverberating around communities and undermining good relations.**

There are lots of channels which can be used to communicate, some directly in the council's control and others requiring confident relationship management. They range from the professional (local and regional news media) to the informal (parish newsletters, football fanzines). Some are long-term and targeted (a piece of public art or an advert on a local bus route) while others are one-off and possibly even spontaneous (an intervention at a public meeting). The skill of the leader is knowing which to employ any given time. Different media can have different effects and images are often more powerful than wordy documents.

The media can be an important influence on an individual's perceptions of the area they live in – sometimes as important as direct experience. Fear of crime, for example, may be heightened by media reporting even though an individual may never have been a victim of crime personally. Likewise, misleading impressions about faith communities and their views can be caused by media coverage which gives undue prominence to particular individuals linked to a religious tradition, according them a representativeness which they do not have. Especially damaging can be portrayal of extremist views from individuals in this way, as if these are part of the mainstream tradition. Ideas or prejudices concerning parts of the community can sometimes be formed from media representation alone, in the absence of direct contact. Local authorities can counter this through both media interventions and enabling community interaction which dispels preconceptions.

It is not the media's role to focus only on good news stories or to be a mouthpiece for the council. So the leader has a challenge of developing a positive relationship with local media partners and to be

aware of the impact of broader media reports and images on the mood of the community as a whole – while at the same time maximising the benefits of communications which are directly in the council's control.

Practical advice on relating to the media positively was set out in the LGA's *Community cohesion action guide* and in other toolkits referenced in the 'further resources' section at the back of this guide. More recently, the LGA's *Reputation* pack contained a thorough checklist of effective media management, internal communications and broader information and communications activities. It contains some specific action points for leaders which are worth repeating here. These are:

- to commission a communications strategy for the council and community partners, which is widely owned and understood;
- to agree the key messages in that strategy and ensure that they are constantly developed and reinforced through all available means and by all partners;
- to recognise that there are many target audiences and hard to reach groups – for example young people – who may need a very different approach to other sections of the community;
- to communicate all the time and not just in moments of crisis;
- to recognise that people like celebrities, sportsmen and women and influential individuals like GPs, can sometimes get a message across more powerfully than councils can; and
- to see the press and media as a resource not as a problem – they have a vested interest in building readers and viewers and in attracting advertisers from all sections of the community. They also need help to build their relationships with different faith and ethnic groups.

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As editor of the *Leicester Mercury*, I regularly meet with the different faith groups and make sure that we are in touch with all sections of the community. If we receive a report of a potential problem, I can simply pick up the phone and speak to one of the faith leaders and get it checked out. We know what is sensitive and have a keen sense of our responsibility. This is not just for social reasons, we are a business too and I want the widest possible readership, the biggest group of advertisers – and we want the city to thrive and be a good place to invest.

**Nick Carter**

*Editor, Leicester Mercury*

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# coping with demographic change

## **Demographic change brings particular challenges for authorities in relation to maintaining or promoting cohesion.**

Such change can come in many forms:

**Rapid and potentially short term** – eg the arrival of Gypsy or Traveller communities who may eventually move on; changes arising from the arrival of refugees or asylum seekers (some of whom may settle permanently); and migrant or seasonal workers who may influence the population of an area on an occasional but often predictable basis.

**Gradual change** – the ebb and flow of different communities over several years, influenced by multiple factors such as housing policy, economic climate, job opportunities and so forth. This may relate to national immigration and emigration rates or more regional or local dynamics. The issue of an ageing population also means that inter-generational cohesion becomes an important consideration.

**Large scale expansion** – such as the expected outcomes of the Sustainable Communities Plan where ambitious new housing targets are set, particularly in the south-east of England. Large scale developments such as the Olympics 2012 bring visitors as well as ambitions for permanent regeneration.

The ability of the statutory agencies and the local community to cope may depend partly on how involved they have been in the planning and understanding of the change. For example, managing the arrival of Traveller and Gypsy communities – both in terms of providing appropriate services for those incoming and minimising the impact on resident communities – will be influenced by the degree of forward planning based on previous experiences and established protocols.

Some local authorities and local agencies have involved the local community in the practicalities of integrating newcomers – for example, befriending, buddying and mentoring schemes. This has helped

the longer term residents to get to know the newcomers and to see them as individuals and families with whom they can relate. It also provides reassurance that the newcomers are being familiarised with the values of the local community. The newcomers also generally welcome the support at a human level.

A longer term process such as delivering the housing targets of the Sustainable Communities Plan will involve leaders and chief executives in complex negotiations over a number of years. Much of this will involve making the case for funding and delivering the infrastructure of services and facilities that will enable communities to thrive. Maintaining the best aspects of the existing community whilst also factoring in considerable population growth will present one of the biggest challenges for the cohesion agenda over the next decade or so. This also relates to a much wider considerations of economic development policies, in particular the requirements of the local labour supply. Working with employers and FE and HE colleges will therefore also be important. However, cultural factors are also very important to ensure that any new area will be attractive to all sections of the community and not just reinforce any existing separate patterns of settlement.

There are numerous tools which can help leaders understand the demographic make up at any given time including the Audit Commission's Local Area Profiles (details of which can be found on the Audit Commission website at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk))

# civil renewal and social capital

**A cohesive community is an active one. It is one in which everyone is able to participate freely and equally and knows that their contribution is valued.**

Building social capital – that is, facilitating active participation and networks in the life of the community – is one of the biggest political challenges of the day. The extent to which the lack of community cohesion, along race, faith or other lines, is a result of low social capital is an important theme to explore.

The concept of 'bridging' social capital has also become more important with recognition that different communities need to interact with each other as well as promote participation within their own groups. Without 'bridging', each group is in danger of remaining isolated and may be unable to develop any knowledge of others and unable to build mutual trust and respect. The council's policies and practices need to reflect this, for example by making sure that integration is promoted in housing and schooling and that voluntary organisations do not provide services which exclude any group or individual unfairly.

It is essential that all leaders and chief executives have an understanding of the health of local social capital. It is also important to ask whether the levels of activity and participation are proportionate to the demographic mix of the locality. Are some groups under-represented and, if so, what are the barriers that make them so?

Local authorities can play an important role in encouraging greater levels of participation. This may involve reaching out to individuals who do not play an active part in the life of the community. It may also require engagement with networks or groups, some of whom may be in conflict with the authority or each other. Achieving this successfully requires knowing the limits of what can be achieved by any of the actors individually (including the local authority itself) and if necessary relinquishing power or

resources within an agreed framework (most likely the community strategy). The LGA's manifesto, *The next four years* (published in September 2005), describes this as "devolving power beyond the Town Hall".

Determining the level of intervention/devolution whilst also assessing the impact on cohesiveness brings further challenges. It is here that a community strategy which has a robust underpinning in a cohesion vision will be most thoroughly tested. Leaders and chief executives must ensure that the community strategy is fully understood and owned within their own authority and the community at large and becomes the starting point for attempts to grow social capital.

Closely linked to the theme of social capital is the concept of 'citizenship'. National government initiatives such as the instigation of citizenship ceremonies as the final stage of naturalisation for new immigrants or the regulations requiring applicants for British citizenship to demonstrate a basic to moderate standard of English, reinforce both the social and practical dimensions of being part of a new community. Local leaders need to assess how far local people – both newly arrived or long standing – share a sense of place and have the practical skills (such as language skills) to participate and contribute. Beyond that the leader needs to determine how best the council can take an active role in providing the tools or forums to improve cohesion in a way that includes and integrates rather than alienates or frustrates.

As this guide hopes to have shown, the best approach is not only to foster cohesion through activities which have this as their explicit and sole aim. Cohesion is as much an outcome of participative democracy and the way communities are involved in decisions about their own well-being. In this sense, the OPDM-led *Local: Vision* and the Lyons review of local government are as important to the improvement of community cohesion – because of their implications for social capital and civil renewal – as more explicitly cohesion-focused strategies

(nationally or otherwise). The development of sustainable community strategies needs to address the complexity of local needs and build on the best elements of strategic planning already being delivered by the best authorities. The way in which local and central government participate in those debates will be crucial to the cohesiveness of communities. This is explored further in the next and final section.

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### **Indicators of social capital**

Some indicators of social capital are:

- voter turn out in local and general elections;
- viability and sustainability of locally organised events such as festivals and carnivals;
- the number and membership of local clubs and voluntary organisations;
- availability and use of social and recreational facilities;
- participation in locally elected bodies such as schools (governors) or Primary Care Trusts;
- participation in activities which have a faith dimension (such as attendance at places of worship);
- the extent of volunteering; and
- local perception of the trust in statutory agencies and other residents and networks.

Absence of social capital may manifest itself passively (absence of community groups or low voter turnout or volunteering rates) or actively (levels of crime and fear of crime and anti-social behaviour). Furthermore, lack of social capital is not synonymous with inactivity. Sometimes networks or forums develop out of frustration with the 'mainstream structures'. These networks may have a very valid and important contribution to make but if there is no means for them to bridge with the wider community they can act, unintentionally, as a mechanism of separation and exclusion. Cohesion requires that networks serving the interest of individual communities bridge well to wider society. The chair of the CRE's description of an integrated society needing to incorporate equality, participation and interaction (all equally important) reinforces this point. Participation without interaction shows lack of social capital not excess of it.

# central-local dialogue

**Most of this guide has been about the relationship between local authority leaders, their authorities, their partners and their communities. We hope to have emphasized that these are the relationships which will have most effect on improving cohesion. Those relationships will be influenced, however, by the broader framework of central-local relations and the national policy and statutory framework.**

There is not enough space in this guide to map the entire picture of central-local relations, even if the focus were kept to the theme of improving cohesion. The main body of this guide has attempted to show where established national frameworks such as the government's Race Equality and Community Cohesion Strategy or Comprehensive Performance Assessment or the Race Relations Amendment Act have set parameters for the way local authorities approach cohesion locally. This final section flags up some of the current and possible future developments which may affect how local authorities contribute to the cohesiveness of local communities.

The LGA's manifesto *The next four years* (published September 2005) proposes a set of actions for local government and a set for national government during the life of the current parliament. By taking these actions, we will, we believe, move towards realizing a vision of independent, self-governing communities by 2014 (a vision set out in the LGA's previous paper *Independence, opportunity, trust*). Among our ambitions is the establishment of "safe, strong, inclusive and cohesive communities". The full document can be found on the LGA website ([www.lga.gov.uk](http://www.lga.gov.uk)).

The LGA manifesto sets the framework within which we want to relate to central government in the near future. It expresses a broad but realistic ambition for improving the life of local communities. It engages with emerging central government thinking on the future of local government, most clearly articulated (at the time of writing) in the ODPM's *Local: Vision*

work. By recognizing that cohesiveness is a core element of a thriving community, the LGA also recognizes that progress will only be made by discussions and actions across government. Although the Home Office has the lead for community cohesion, many other departments can affect the framework within which local authorities are able to promote cohesion locally. This may range from the broad (such as the ODPM considering the future of local government) to the specific (such as the DCMS's role in enabling local authorities to promote cohesion through sport or the arts).

Locally, leaders and chief executives are likely to be most involved in making sense of and influencing the national policy framework. This might be through direct involvement with the LGA, through individual discussions with particular government departments or Regional Government Offices (negotiating a LAA, for example) or through responding to government consultations. In each instance, it is important to question what impact a particular national policy development will have on cohesiveness locally. The roots of breakdown in cohesion (and even sometimes the factors which enable its sustainability) often reside in policy decisions removed from the cohesion debate which result in unforeseen consequences. Economic policy, housing policy, crime and disorder or regeneration policies all impact in their own ways. It will be local leaders and chief executives who will be best placed to recognize the possible impacts and be in a position to argue against negative outcomes or consequences unforeseen by the national policy-makers.

In addition to monitoring and influencing the broader strategic picture, leaders and chief executives need to be aware of central-local engagements which relate specifically to key themes in community cohesion. The following short section on further reading and resources highlights some of these and the LGA's *Community cohesion – an action guide* goes into more detail.



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LAA's are a more formal way of cementing the partnership arrangements. For example, **Tameside's** second generation PSAs were "constructed with a view to reducing exclusion and improving quality of life, a theme that cuts across 11 of the 13 stretch targets we are now working towards by 2007:

"In selecting improvement priorities and measures for the second round PSA, the council and Tameside Strategic Partnership decided to cover each community strategy theme, but with a focus on inequality and promoting cohesion, reflecting the cross-cutting theme of 'supportive communities'.

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The **Home Office's** *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society* is the national strategy to increase race equality and community cohesion. Published in January 2005, it is available on the Home Office's website ([www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk)).

As well as the relationship with central government, there are national agencies and organisations which are important sources of information and advice as well as being partners in joint working (sometimes through local or regional offices). Among these are:

The **National Asylum Support Service**, which has a particular responsibility to liaise with local councils, to ensure that decisions to locate asylum seekers in any area are agreed and can be effectively catered for and supported – and that potential tensions can be anticipated and minimized.

The **Commission for Racial Equality** was set up under the 1976 Race Relations Act and its work covers England, Wales and Scotland. It has three main duties:

- to work towards the elimination of racial discrimination and promote equality of opportunity;

- to encourage good relations between people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds; and
- to monitor the way the Race Relations Act is working and recommend ways in which it could be improved.

The **CRE** is an important source of advice and information for local authorities.

The **Institute of Community Cohesion** which is already mentioned in the section on skills and training and which will also be establishing a Practitioner Network and interactive website to constantly update and report on developments in this area.

The **Improvement and Development Agency** whose work on community cohesion and leadership has also already been outlined in the earlier chapter entitled 'Skills, training and development'.

The **Inter Faith Network for the UK** which works to build good relations between the different religious communities in the UK at both national and local levels. It produces a directory of inter faith organisations in the UK as well as other resources helpful to local authorities.

## further resources

**This section refers you to further reading and practical resources that could help you develop a vision of cohesion and put it into practice. Space does not allow for a fully comprehensive list but most of these documents and resources signpost further material.**

In content, most relate directly to cohesion but also included are a few resources on general topics such as building social capital, working with the media and other themes covered in this guide.

### Key publications

*The next four years: the future is local*, Local Government Association, September 2005

*Community Cohesion – an action guide: guidance for local authorities*, Local Government Association, November 2004. Produced in partnership with the Audit Commission, Commission for Racial Equality, Home Office, Improvement and Development Agency, Inter Faith Network, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

*Building a picture of community cohesion – a guide for local authorities and their partners*, Local Government Association, Commission for Racial Equality, Home Office, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, June 2003

*Guidance on Community Cohesion*, Local Government Association, in partnership with the Home Office, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Commission for Racial Equality and Inter Faith Network, December 2002

*Faith and community – a good practice guide for local authorities*, Local Government Association and Inter Faith Network, February 2002

*Community Cohesion – A New Framework for Race and Diversity*, Ted Cattle, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005

*Community Cohesion – seven steps: a practitioners' toolkit*, Home Office and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, March 2005

*Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society: the Government's strategy to increase race equality and community cohesion*, Home Office, January 2005

*The End of Parallel Lives? The Report of the Community Cohesion Panel*, Home Office, July 2004

*Community Cohesion: Report of the Independent Review Team*, Home Office, 2001

*Promoting Good Race Relations: a guide for public authorities*, Commission for Racial Equality, July 2005

*The Local Inter Faith Guide: Faith Community Cooperation in Action*, Inter Faith Network with the Inner Cities Religious Council and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, second edition, 2005

*Community Cohesion*, MORI Social Research Institute, April 2004

*A practical toolkit for cohesion work with young people* (with DVD), IDeA, Unison and Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, 2005. Available from IDeA via [ruby.dixon@idea.gov.uk](mailto:ruby.dixon@idea.gov.uk) or Unison via [f.hont@unison.co.uk](mailto:f.hont@unison.co.uk)

*Scrutiny of community cohesion issues – an LGIU Guide*, Local Government Information Unit, sponsored by the IDeA, February 2005. Available via [info@lgiu.org.uk](mailto:info@lgiu.org.uk)

*A councillor's guide 2005-6: the essential guide for all new councillors* (see section 5 on community leadership and community cohesion), IDeA, May 2005. Available from [ideaknowledge.gov.uk/councillors](http://ideaknowledge.gov.uk/councillors)

The Beacons programme, delivered by the IDeA in partnership with the Advisory Panel, ODPM and beacons councils, has focused on community cohesion (round 4), promoting race equality (rounds

3 and 6), and other cohesion related themes. For further details see the IDEa website: [ideaknowledge.gov.uk/communitycohesion](http://ideaknowledge.gov.uk/communitycohesion)

### **National organisations**

#### **Local Government Association**

Local Government House  
Smith Square  
London SW1P 3HZ  
Tel 020 7664 3131  
Email [info@lga.gov.uk](mailto:info@lga.gov.uk)  
[www.lga.gov.uk](http://www.lga.gov.uk)

#### **Improvement and Development Agency**

Layden House  
76-86 Turnmill Street  
London EC1M 5LG  
Information 020 7296 6880  
Email [ihelp@idea.gov.uk](mailto:ihelp@idea.gov.uk)  
[www.idea.gov.uk](http://www.idea.gov.uk)

#### **Audit Commission**

1st Floor, Millbank Tower  
Millbank  
London SW1P 4HQ  
Tel 020 7828 1212  
[www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)

#### **Commission for Racial Equality**

St Dunstan's House  
201-211 Borough High Street  
London SE1 1GZ  
Tel 020 7939 0000  
Email [info@cre.gov.uk](mailto:info@cre.gov.uk)  
[www.cre.gov.uk](http://www.cre.gov.uk)

#### **Home Office**

Direct Communications Unit  
2 Marsham Street  
London SW1P 4DF  
Tel 0870 000 1585  
Email [public.enquiries@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:public.enquiries@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk)  
[www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk)

#### **Institute of Community Cohesion, Coventry**

*See IDEa website for details*

#### **The Inter Faith Network for the UK**

8A Lower Grosvenor Place  
London SW1W 0EN  
Tel 020 7931 7766  
Email [ifnet@interfaith.org.uk](mailto:ifnet@interfaith.org.uk)  
[www.interfaith.co.uk](http://www.interfaith.co.uk)

#### **Neighbourhood Renewal Unit**

[www.neighbourhood.gov.uk](http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk)

#### **Office of the Deputy Prime Minister**

Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
London SW1E 5DU  
Tel 020 7944 4400  
Email [enquiryodpm@odpm.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiryodpm@odpm.gsi.gov.uk)  
[www.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.odpm.gov.uk)

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Office of the  
Deputy Prime Minister  
Creating sustainable communities

For further information, please contact  
the Local Government Association at:  
Local Government House  
Smith Square, London SW1P 3HZ

LGconnect, for all your  
LGA queries 020 7664 3131  
Fax 020 7664 3030  
Email [info@lga.gov.uk](mailto:info@lga.gov.uk)  
Website [www.lga.gov.uk](http://www.lga.gov.uk)

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# leading cohesive communities

examples of leadership in action

community cohesion

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# contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Boston Borough Council</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Gravesham Borough Council</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>London Borough of Hounslow</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Luton Borough Council</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Bracknell Forest Borough Council</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Sunderland City Council</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Bristol City Council</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council</b>	<b>24</b>

# introduction

**This booklet is complementary to the *Leading cohesive communities* guide.**

It illustrates some of the main themes of that publication through specific examples of local authority leaders or chief executives contributing to the cohesiveness of their local communities.

These authorities have been selected to give a range of examples and, while we think each of the illustrations has something which other authorities could learn from, they are not intended as a comprehensive list of good practice in local government.

Rather we hope that taken alongside the guide, the examples will stimulate ideas and debate within all authorities on how community cohesion can be addressed within the work of the authority and what the leader and chief executive can do in particular to establish and realise a vision for community cohesion which is effective locally.



# Boston Borough Council

## Context

The borough of Boston is located in south-east Lincolnshire and borders The Wash to the east. It is one of the most productive agricultural areas in England and contains the largest port in the East Midlands region. Boston borough has a population of around 55,750 (census 2001), which comprises the historic market town of Boston and 18 rural parishes.

At first glance, the ethnic profile of the area appears to be relatively homogenous. The population of the borough is predominately white British (98.5 per cent), with one of the largest minority ethnic groups being Chinese (0.3 per cent). However, the demographic profile is dynamic as new communities are arriving to the area on an increasingly regular basis. Current figures are thought to disguise a significant proportion of migrant workers, often employed in the agricultural and food packing sector.

## Community cohesion in Boston

In Boston issues surrounding migrant workers entered the public consciousness in February 2003 and remained a feature and issue, particularly in the local press and subsequently the national media. This was fuelled by the activities and local presence of representatives of the British National Party in the run up to the May 2003 local elections.

At the first full partnership meeting of the Boston Area Partnership (LSP) in February 2003 it was agreed a new Theme Group (Equality and Diversity Theme Group (E&DTG) be established to consider and address issues regarding new and hard to reach communities. This group developed a statement of inclusion that has been adopted by all partners and partner organisations: 'For Boston to be a community in which all people are respected and valued'.

The E&DTG immediately identified community cohesion as the most compelling challenge and recorded the numerous components of this theme that needed addressing as a high priority. Early

meetings focused on establishing contacts in all minority groups, including ethnic minorities but also young people, people with disabilities, gay, lesbian, bisexual groups etc. Community cohesion remained high on the agenda and extensive work continued and developed through the first phase of a Community Cohesion Best Value Review instigated by Boston Borough Council.

Following on from this work, the borough council has undertaken significant changes in its direction and organisation reinforced by the authority's peer review self-assessment, the CPA report and feedback from local understanding partners following low key social disturbances in 2004.

Over the last few years, Boston Borough Council has shown its commitment and willingness to respond to the community cohesion agenda and has focused its response by taking a strategic partnership approach.

Within Boston the development of the Boston Area Partnership (BAP), chaired by the council's chief executive, has been the key to enabling a common approach across the agencies, and the pooling of resources and energies to achieve the best outcome for all local people and organisations. Given that promoting community cohesion involves many partner organisations and local people, the BAP has a vital role to play. The Boston Area Partnership is well placed to lead approaches to making the borough, and all of its communities, a more prosperous, cohesive place to live and work.

## Focus on leadership

The chief executive has taken an instrumental role in driving the community cohesion agenda forward. This has included visible, high profile commitment through attendance at sub-regional events, observing Councillor Community Cohesion workshops, and undertaking an active role within the Lincolnshire Assembly. The chief executive has also overseen a managerial recruitment drive and change programme of which community cohesion is a major component.

A community cohesion review was undertaken in partnership with the BAP and E&DTG and split into two phases, the first concentrating on integrating ethnic minorities and migrant workers. The second phase (2005/2006) focuses on the lessons learned with regard to other hard-to-reach groups and to wider community cohesion issues.

Members of the review team included officers and elected members of Boston Borough Council, the Chair of the E&DTG, and representatives from Boston Council for Voluntary Services (CVS), Boston Mayflower, Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), East Lincolnshire Primary Care Trust (PCT), Government Office for the East Midlands (GOEM), Jobcentre Plus, Lincolnshire County Council Multi-Cultural Development Services, Lincolnshire Police, Medcam, Neighbourhood Wardens, Rainer, South Holland District Council, Sure Start, The International Centre Project, The National Farmers Union (NFU), and Zion Methodist Church.

The first task of the review team was to set out the terms of reference including the objectives or anticipated outcomes of the review. Under these themes, several actions were put in place and prioritised. Agreements from the BAP executive board, the full partnership assembly and the E&DTG were gained to ensure that actions not under the scope of Boston Borough Council would be taken forward and monitored by the E&DTG. One key response to the initial review has been the appointment of an officer within Boston Borough Council who holds a specific community cohesion remit.

### **Why are leadership lessons for Boston important?**

Boston is a relatively small authority, which typifies the challenges of community cohesion in terms of migrant workers, the local economy, housing, community engagement and in ensuring that the host community is not overlooked. The authority is at the start of its journey in cohesion improvement, but the charismatic, personal commitment of the chief

executive in championing the change has put down the foundations for sustainable and effective change, whilst strengthening the capacity and supporting infrastructure via broader engagement and partnership working.

### **Contact**

#### **Richard Miller**

*Community Cohesion Co-ordinator*  
richard.miller@boston.gov.uk

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### **Leadership profile in summary**

- Championing cohesion
- Building organisational capacity for sustainable cohesion
- Communicating cohesion aims and actions
- Partnership approach to change

### **Leadership styles**

- Leading the agenda – the chief executive supervises and drives things through
  - Transformational – aims for impact, real change and devolves leadership
-

# Gravesham Borough Council

## Context

Gravesham is located in North Kent, 25 miles from London. The 2001 census shows approximately 96,000 people living in the borough, in around 38,000 households. Gravesham is a culturally diverse area with the largest minority ethnic community in Kent. The minority ethnic community makes up 10.9 per cent of the people living in the borough, with the thriving Sikh community constituting nearly seven per cent of the borough's population.

Gravesham is one of the Thames Gateway's major regeneration areas, and has taken a proactive approach to ensure that community cohesion is at the heart of the regeneration agenda, and that the whole community shares fully in the benefits that this regeneration brings to the area.

## Community cohesion in Gravesham

A core element of Gravesham's cohesive community is the symbiotic relationship that the council has built up with the North West Kent Racial Equality Council (NWKREC). A representative from NWKREC sits on several corporate groups within the council, maintaining the relationship of a 'critical friend' and ensuring that positive links are sustained between the council and the local minority ethnic community.

Gravesham has deliberately avoided developing a specialist race equalities team, and has adopted an alternative corporate approach. A top level community cohesion group was set up by the authority in 2003 to advise and co-ordinate community cohesion and race equality issues across the council; this has been a major driver for change. The group is chaired by the head of policy and partnerships, and includes the executive director of corporate services, an officer from the NWKREC, and the lead cabinet member for community health and well-being. The group meets monthly to co-ordinate community cohesion issues across the council and all service departments, under the guidance of the group, are required to play an active role. The group

is responsible for co-ordinating the development, implementation and review of race equalities policy and community cohesion issues, as well as driving best practice and change within the council's corporate structure. The council also works with local voluntary and community groups and is a member of the Government Office of the South East (GOSE) Community Cohesion Network.

## Focus on leadership

There is strong political and managerial support within Gravesham Borough Council to the Race Equality Agenda. This approach is driving forward the theme of community cohesion within the council's own organisational structure, as well as providing a basis for improving services tailored to the needs of the local community and individual service users.

The council's leader has a key role in leading the council's executive team, which is committed to championing the benefits of social inclusion and community cohesion. The lead member for community health and well-being, along with cabinet members, has clearly defined work plans and roles, which include a strong commitment to race equality.

There is a firm political and corporate commitment not only to consult with minority ethnic communities on key strategic and policy areas, but also to ensure through the use of more innovative consultation methods, that engagement with harder to reach groups within the community is continuously improved.

## Contact

### **Deborah Carson**

*Policy and Projects Officer*

[deborah.carson@gravesham.gov.uk](mailto:deborah.carson@gravesham.gov.uk)

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### **Leadership profile in summary**

- Strategic – can see the big picture, and works jointly towards common outcomes
- Setting clear direction and priorities
- Capturing and sharing learning with others

### **Leadership styles**

- Political leadership
  - Community/civic leadership – authority plays a facilitative role by enabling and devolving leadership responsibilities
  - Mainstreaming cohesion by avoiding a silo type equality model
-

# London Borough of Hounslow

## Context

The London Borough of Hounslow in West London has a population of 212,341 and has one of the most dynamic and diverse populations in the UK due to its proximity to Heathrow Airport. Hounslow is the UK's gateway to the world with an estimated 62 million people passing through the borough every year.

Some 36 per cent of the population come from minority ethnic communities, and 25 per cent are born outside the EU. Almost 50 per cent of the boroughs school children are from minority ethnic communities and over 140 languages are spoken in the borough. This ethnic diversity is mirrored in Hounslow's faith communities with nearly 20,000 Muslims, 16,000 Hindu's and 18,000 Sikhs calling Hounslow their home. The latter of these makes up the largest Sikh community in London and the second largest in England and Wales.

## Community cohesion in Hounslow

In order to deliver tangible outcomes to redress disadvantage and discrimination Hounslow has developed a simple, strategic, five-point plan, which provides a comprehensive framework for the community cohesion strategy group. The five objectives incorporate:

- 1 Promoting community leadership and community cohesion
- 2 Improving communications and promoting consultation
- 3 Promoting equality in service delivery
- 4 Promoting equality in employment and training
- 5 Evaluating the success of our equalities commitments

The community cohesion strategy group comprises representatives from the voluntary sector, community groups, all council departments and other key

stakeholders and has responsibility for the leadership, direction and monitoring of cohesion outcomes within the council and across service providers.

As part of the West London Community Cohesion Partnership, Hounslow is pioneering the way forward for the public, private and voluntary sectors to address community cohesion issues, at both the borough and sub-regional levels. Working along three themes, the partnership is working to ensure better engagement and understanding of the changing population of West London.

The establishment of a cabinet position in Hounslow has created the driving force to promote community cohesion within the council, between the LSP, which embraced the community plan *Celebrating Diversity, Building Cohesion* and across the West London Alliance (WLA) and West London Community Cohesion Partnership.

As well as being one of the first boroughs in the country to introduce a dedicated Faith Liaison Officer to forge links with people from its diverse local communities, Hounslow pioneered community safety partnerships to develop a local needs-led blueprint to tackle crime in the borough.

## Focus on leadership

Leadership and commitment are essential to the development of community cohesion. Such an integrated approach to community cohesion has only been possible because of the importance given to the agenda by the chief executive and leader. This can be seen with:

- The creation of an Executive Portfolio for Community Cohesion that gave the strategic objective a permanent presence and acts as a driver for ensuring key stakeholders make community cohesion an integral part of their service delivery
- The embedding of the importance of community cohesion to the council through its position as a key

priority in the Executive Business Plan and community plan

- Service providers taking community cohesion on board when developing their own business plans
- The chief executive chairing the WLA community cohesion partnership in developing sub-regional projects that promote community cohesion across West London in partnership with the voluntary and public sector
- Training and development – a whole raft of programmes from befriending, induction right through to MBA programmes for its diverse staffing structure.

### Contact

#### **Sabin Malik**

*Community Cohesion Co-ordinator*  
sabin.malik@hounslow.gov.uk

---

### Leadership profile in summary

- Mainstreaming and placing community cohesion at the heart of everything the council does
- Setting clear direction and priorities
- Ability to build trust and partnerships

### Leadership styles

- Political leadership
  - Transformational – aims for impact and real change
  - Leading by example – the chief executive drives the agenda, through commitment, monitoring of progress and acting as an ambassador for community cohesion on a sub-regional basis
-

# Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council

## Context

Kirklees is an area of marked urban and rural contrasts. It stretches from the slopes of the Pennines in the west to the former coalfields of Barnsley and Wakefield to the east. It takes in part of the Peak District National Park in the south and communities, which border Leeds, and Bradford in the north. At 40,910 hectares it is the third largest metropolitan district by geographical area and, with almost 390,000 inhabitants, the seventh largest by population.

The main towns of the district are Huddersfield, Dewsbury and Batley. However, despite its metropolitan status, over two-thirds of the area is protected rural landscape.

A number of towns in the district suffer from urban decay and dereliction caused by the decline of traditional manufacturing industries, particularly textiles. In the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods these problems are compounded by high levels of unemployment, crime and poor health.

## Community cohesion in Kirklees

Kirklees MBC have made community cohesion one of their core council priorities. Over the last four years they have used LSP networks to pull together a partnership focused on the issues. The emphasis has been on action first, with consolidation into an action plan as responses matured. Early actions were focused on understanding perspectives and issues at neighbourhood level, an approach that was recognised by the Home Office in the Community Cohesion Pathfinder Programme.

As learning developed the authority has used the more successful elements to identify specific areas of Kirklees where community relations are poor or potentially unstable. Follow-up work has focussed on listening to locally based staff (across agencies and sectors), local councillors and community voices. The decision was made to extend the MORI residents'

perceptions survey to incorporate questions that allowed the authority to complement soft information with measurable attitudinal information.

Responses include:

- Mediated discussion of issues of concern
- Developmental work with multi-agency and multi-sector frontline staff and activists
- Support and training for councillors and others with local leadership roles
- Work in schools, and between schools
- Development of shared community histories
- High profile celebrations of diversity and inter faith strengths, and high profile responses to shared remembrance events
- Activities for young people that cut across communities

When particular tensions arise, most recently after the London terrorist bombings, Kirklees MBC move quickly to express a unified Kirklees voice, supported by the Council, faith leaders, community organisations and the police. They also maintain an information network, with key nodes in the council, community and police structures, to pick up tensions (real and rumoured) and manage effective responses.

## Focus on leadership

The Kirklees analysis, shared by the community and other agencies, is that the leader of the council should provide leadership of the LSP and be high profile on major issues such as cohesion. Both the leader and chief executive continue to attach high importance to the approach and discuss issues arising frequently. Kirklees MBC leadership team work directly with senior police officers, Home Office GO reps, community representatives and other politicians and

use meetings of all party leaders to maintain an informed and strong unified political voice amidst the complexities of a minority administration.

### Contact

#### **Karen Johnson**

*Head of Community Support Services*  
karen.johnson@kirklees.gov.uk

---

### Leadership profile in summary

- Leadership from the front
- All party agreements
- Engagement of other bodies

### Leadership styles

- Transaction – activity focused approach
  - Situational – reactive to local situation and circumstances
  - Transformational – aims for impact, real change, devolves leadership
  - Political – one of the first authorities to introduce community cohesion ward level plans, thus prioritising community cohesion at the neighbourhood level
-



# Luton Borough Council

## Context

Luton is one of the largest towns in south-east England and is home to 184,000 people, speaking over 100 languages. The population is projected to rise to 189,000 by 2010. Approximately 28 per cent are of black and minority ethnic origin (BME), with significant Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian, African Caribbean and East European communities. Luton is located approximately 30 miles north of London and has excellent transport links.

Luton is a significant sub-regional employment centre with approximately 90,000 jobs, but there are still areas of the town with high levels of poverty and deprivation. There is also inequality between 'Lutonians' as social class, income, ethnic origin and disability all have an impact on people's opportunities in life.

## Community cohesion in Luton

In response to the social disturbances experienced by some towns in the UK in the summer of 2001 there was some anxiety that some of the issues may impact upon Luton. A Luton Borough Council member who had studied the Ouseley Report was keen to examine its relevance to Luton.

## Focus on leadership

Luton Borough Council's leadership placed a strong emphasis on the scrutiny function of the council as a vehicle to examine the issues of community cohesion in Luton.

A community cohesion scrutiny panel of councillors was set up not so much to find out the facts, as a wealth of information was already available, but to find out what people felt and thought about what it was like for them to live in Luton as a multi-racial, multi-cultural society and to find out whether there were issues bubbling away under the surface that needed to be discussed more openly. The secondary objective was to promote discussions about issues

that had previously not been widely debated. The councillor panel sought the views of local residents and worked in partnership with the local media to publicise the project and to obtain as much feedback as possible.

*Three Counties*, the local BBC radio station, helped to raise awareness about the study and *The Herald and Post* (the free, weekly newspaper) not only distributed leaflets for the authority but also included some editorial about the study.

The leaflet itself served several purposes:

- it was designed to raise awareness and prompt discussions;
- it was a way of 'taking the temperature' locally;
- it served as a safety valve; and
- it enabled the council to say that everyone had had a chance to put their point of view forward.

Everyone who contributed their points of view were invited by Luton Borough Council to a half day event to check whether they had correctly interpreted what people had said, whether the preliminary conclusions of the panel were well founded, and if they had missed anything out. The outcome was very positive and provided reassurance about the validity of the findings as a correct interpretation and summary of what the authority had been told.

Ten key issues and actions were identified by the councillor panel. The idea was to focus attention on relatively few issues so that the council's efforts were not dissipated over a large number of less important issues. The result of the project was the production of a report from the scrutiny review panel on community cohesion entitled *Sticking Together*. The council is working with other private, voluntary and public sector bodies in Luton through the Luton Forum to improve community cohesion. Together

with its partners the council is carrying out the recommendations of the *Sticking Together* report.

### Contact

#### **Hafsha Ali**

Community Cohesion Policy Officer  
hafsha.ali@luton.gov.uk

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### Leadership profile in summary

- Strengths in the following areas of leadership for cohesion
- The community leadership role of councillors
- Engaging with partners on the issues
- Responsive to national issues at the local level

### Leadership styles

- Community/civic leadership – authority plays a facilitative role
  - Situational – baselines local situation and circumstances for forward planning
  - Transformational – aims for impact, real change, devolves leadership
  - Political – focus on scrutiny role had impact and significance on policy development (Executive) and community engagement (neighbourhood) roles of councillors
-

# Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council

## Context

Tameside lies at the eastern edge of the Greater Manchester conurbation, bordering onto the Pennines. Created in 1974 of nine towns – Ashton under Lyne, Audenshaw, Denton, Dukinfield, Drolydsen, Hyde, Longdendale, Mossley and Stalybridge – it now has a population of around 214,000. There is a wide mix of urban and rural landscapes and varied scenery.

Tameside retains a strong manufacturing tradition particularly in the areas of textiles and engineering, food industries and manufacturing of electronic and computer products. However, service industries have grown in the last two decades so that they are now the largest employment sector. At 3.2 per cent, unemployment is slightly lower in Tameside than the 3.6 per cent average for the rest of the north-west. However, this overall figure contains pockets of higher unemployment, and youth unemployment that is higher than the national average.

Tameside has a rich mixture of different cultures, religions and ethnic groups. The ethnic minority population is estimated now to be six per cent and includes Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Afro Caribbean, Chinese and East African families and many other people who live here have Irish, Italian, Polish or Ukrainian backgrounds.

## Community cohesion in Tameside

Tameside MBC's leadership commitment to the community cohesion agenda is emphasised through the community strategy and local strategic partnership.

Tameside's 2003-13 community strategy identifies six priorities for the borough:

- 1 Supportive communities
- 2 A safe environment

3 A prosperous society

4 A learning community

5 A healthy population

6 An attractive borough

The priorities within the strategy are based upon an extensive recent community engagement programme, and are supported by the board and eight thematic partnerships, which together make up the Tameside Strategic Partnership (TSP).

Promoting cohesion and inclusion cuts across all of the themes in the strategy, but is picked up in particular under the supportive communities theme. This priority aims to reduce the differences in education, crime, housing, employment and health between different communities, whilst improving levels overall.

## Focus on leadership

Community cohesion is actively championed at the member level. Cllr Margaret Oldham the Cabinet Deputy with responsibility for community cohesion describes how Tameside's second generation LSPA was "constructed with a view to reducing exclusion and improving quality of life, a theme that cuts across 11 of the 13 stretch targets we are now working towards by 2007. This has meant that as well as tackling issues around education, crime, the environment & health and social care, we have been able to focus attention on deprived or vulnerable groups including disadvantaged young people, vulnerable older people and deprived communities. The LPSA2 agreement also supports work towards the six community strategy themes".

In selecting improvement priorities and measures for the second round PSA, the council and Tameside Strategic Partnership decided to cover each community strategy theme, but with a focus on inequality and promoting cohesion, reflecting the

cross-cutting theme of 'supportive communities'. The second round PSA priorities are:

- Tackling underperformance in educational attainment
- Reducing the variations in crime between different communities, through reducing crime levels in target areas/groups
- Improving the cleanliness and overall quality of the environment
- Improving social care and health

Tameside's focus upon community cohesion across each of these priorities reflects the council's commitment to improving the quality of life for all the borough's residents, recognising that different communities and groups have very different experiences.

As Cllr Philip Wilkinson (Cabinet Deputy with responsibility for the Tameside Strategic Partnership and community strategy) explains "In consultation with local people, supportive communities was identified as one of the six themes of the Tameside Strategic Partnership's community strategy which was adopted by all partners involved in the TSP. Identifying this as a clear local priority at the highest planning, partnership and leadership levels has helped to embed the importance of cohesive communities across Tameside."

### Contact

#### **Sarah Newsam**

*Policy Advisor*

sarah.newsam@tameside.gov.uk

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### Leadership profile in summary

- Partnership working, including a dedicated community cohesion partnership
- Joined up working
- Involvement of the voluntary and community sector

### Leadership styles

- Civic/community leadership role
  - Situational – reactive to the local situation and circumstances
  - Transformational – aims for impact, real change, devolves leadership
-

# Bracknell Forest Borough Council

## Context

Bracknell Forest Borough is located in central Berkshire, approximately 30 miles from central London and between the M3 and M4 motorways. It contains six parishes; Bracknell Town, Binfield, Crowthorne, Sandhurst, Warfield and Winkfield. Covering an area of 10937 hectares (27024 acres) the borough has an estimated population of 110,100 (Office of National Statistics Mid Year Estimate, 2003). The majority live in the built-up areas of Bracknell, Sandhurst, Crowthorne, Binfield and North Ascot. These communities all have their own unique identity and perspective. There are also a number of communities of interest and need that cut across geographical areas. Bracknell Forest is within the top 20 per cent of least deprived borough's in the country although there are small pockets of relative deprivation.

## Community cohesion in Bracknell Forest

The council has established 'All of Us' as an umbrella brand incorporating social inclusion, community cohesion, and related statutory duties such as the Race Relations Amendment Act and Disability Discrimination Act. The 'All of Us' brand allows the council to interpret these agendas in a way that is responsive, reflective and proportionate to the borough's local circumstances. A key element of the council's approach to 'All of Us' is a three year strategy, which was adopted in Spring 2004 following widespread consultation. The strategy provides a full assessment of community cohesion in the borough and the council's contribution. It clearly articulates a vision and goals supported by a three year 72 point action plan and targets for a basket of performance indicators.

The action plan contains responsibilities, timescales, and performance measures which feed into the council's performance management framework, including regular progress reports to the Executive and Public Scrutiny Commission.

The council's recently published first annual community cohesion report showed that much has been achieved to date, and includes:

- 1** A three year communications plan to promote awareness of community cohesion, through such means as a user-friendly strategy summary and a programme of community days
- 2** A community engagement strategy to better communicate with a range of stakeholders, including 'harder to reach groups'
- 3** An equalities impact assessment framework, which ensures that all services consider and address all relevant community cohesion issues
- 4** Making community cohesion a fundamental part of the council's member and officer induction and training programmes, including workshops to challenge the thinking of all members, departments, and senior managers facilitated by Lord Ouesley
- 5** Ensuring that community cohesion is a key part of the council's performance management framework, including the service planning, budgeting and performance reporting mechanisms. Each department has a requirement to address proposals for community cohesion in its departmental action plan and consequently to inform service and budget planning
- 6** Engaging members in delivering the strategy, where the leader of the council is also the lead member for community cohesion, and the Public Scrutiny Commission monitors progress in delivering the strategy

## Focus on leadership

The strong leadership brought to this agenda by both the leader and the chief executive has been a critical success factor in the council's achievements to date. Their high levels of strategic and personal commitment have clearly conveyed to all concerned

that the council will continue to give a high priority to promoting community cohesion.

The strategic commitment is evident in their insistence that 'All of Us' is given a high priority in the community plan, the council's vision and medium term objectives, and in the council's CPA improvement plan. Furthermore, the chief executive initiated the production of the council's corporate community cohesion strategy and appointed a member of corporate management team, with a previous successful track record of promoting community cohesion, to lead the corporate working group responsible for developing and implementing the strategy. An appointment of this nature, with appropriate expertise, corporate capacity and knowledge base on cohesion, has proven to be fundamental to the strengthening the council's success to date.

The personal commitment of the leader and the chief executive has been particularly important. Both have consistently given key note addresses at a range of 'All of Us' fora with staff, member, and partners. The chief executive's address to the council's most recent community cohesion stakeholder conference was well received and set the tone for a productive series of workshops from which the strategy emerged. The leader played the key role in briefing members and the LSP by clearly explaining why the potentially abstract concept of community cohesion was relevant to Bracknell Forest. The leader has worked particularly closely with officers in developing the council's new approach to community engagement and has been keen to develop new mechanisms for ensuring the council engages with all members of the community. Furthermore, the leader has dovetailed his key role in national ICT projects with that of local champion for community cohesion and community engagement by promoting the council's socially inclusive approach to administering free school meals through Smartcard technology.

## Contact

### James Griffin

Senior Performance and Improvement Officer  
james.griffin@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

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## Leadership profile in summary

- High level strategic and personal commitment
- Setting a clear direction and priorities
- Communicating cohesion aims and actions

## Leadership styles

- Charismatic – application of personal leadership attributes of chief executive and leader
  - Leading by example – drives the agenda through and supervise progress and performance. Top team capacity strengthened, with an issue owner role
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# Sunderland City Council

## Context

Sunderland lies on the north-east coast of England. It is the largest city between Leeds, in Yorkshire, and Edinburgh, in Scotland, with a population of approximately 279,000 and an area of 138 square kilometres. The city has a strong manufacturing and commercial economy and employs approximately 104,000 people. It also has a new, large, thriving university, with 15,000 students, which attracts students from a range of backgrounds from across the UK and overseas. Although a metropolitan city with a strong industrial tradition, over 40 per cent of its area is rural including farmland and large countryside recreation parks.

As with many other major cities, the population of Sunderland has declined in the last 10 years although at the same time it is a city of increasing diversity – its BME (black and minority ethnic) population has increased from 1.1 per cent in 1991 to 1.9 per cent in 2001. Whilst this figure is low compared to the national figure of 9.1 per cent it is more comparable to the regional (north-east) 2001 figure of 2.4 per cent.

There are significant areas of social deprivation across the city with 20 of its 25 wards amongst the most deprived in the country. Gross Domestic Product per head is amongst the lowest nationally and employment rates are below the national average, at 71.2% in 2004 compared to a national average of 75 per cent.

The local authority, Sunderland City Council has a CPA rating of excellent. The city also has an active and dynamic local strategic partnership overseeing its current period of regeneration and development.

## Community cohesion in Sunderland

Sunderland's proactive approach to community cohesion was influenced by both national and local drivers and corresponded with the city council's wider strategic change programme. Sunderland is keen to

address key local challenges – including deprivation, an ageing and declining population and a lack of knowledge and understanding of new communities – and adopted the LGA/Home Office community cohesion guidance, which provided a framework to take the agenda forward in a strategic and meaningful way.

It was decided from the outset to progress community cohesion at a local strategic partnership level, with the city council taking a leadership role. In December 2003 *Creating Inclusive Communities* was prioritised by the Sunderland Partnership as one of the city's eight strategic objectives – its key targets focussing on working towards community cohesion, equal opportunities, social inclusion and active citizenship. Significant NRF resources were committed to developing the objective and a partnership board steering group was established to oversee the work.

The partnership's *Creating Inclusive Communities* strategy and action plan was developed around key foundation activities, such as emerging structures and protocols to equip Sunderland with the necessary capacity to develop its actions further. Significant training and awareness raising exercises have created buy-in across the partnership. In September 2004 the Sunderland Partnership commissioned the IDeA to facilitate a major conference *Creating Inclusive Communities* in Sunderland. The event – chaired by the Chair of the Sunderland Partnership (who is a prominent member of the city's faith sector) examined different aspects of cohesion in Sunderland.

The council has built on this foundation by making itself more open to scrutiny from Government Office North East (GONE) and the Home Office. This enabled Sunderland to work closely with the latter, to hold a contingency emergency planning event (facilitated by Mediation Northern Ireland) and a senior management conference for top tier managers of the partnership in May 2005. At the conference, the chief executive outlined his plans for 'raising the bar' for Sunderland's equalities and cohesion performance.

### City council structures

The council has a cohesion champion at director level in a cross-cutting development and regeneration portfolio. The director is accountable to the chief executive and to the lead member for regeneration and social inclusion. Until recently the community relations team was located within this directorate, and reported to the cohesion champion. This provided linkage both at policy and operational level. Under a restructure process, which will organise the council to deliver cohesion and be fit for purpose, the community relations team will be merged with the corporate equalities team and transferred to the chief executive's department – bringing together some key corporate strands of activity incorporating equalities and community cohesion and giving it a more strategic remit.

### Focus on leadership

- The chief executive has led the change both in terms of vision, signalling commitment, communicating the vision and what is expected of his managers under the banner of a 'one council' approach to cohesion, and embedding this in Sunderland's vision to be a 'safe and friendly' place to live.
- The current director champion will retain his role for promoting cohesion given his experience and expertise and will continue to report to, and advise, the chief executive, but the council is moving towards a more devolved model for delivery and accountability.
- Sunderland's chief executive has established strong political support through the portfolio holder, but the key challenge will be in ensuring that all elected members commit to this agenda and have the same level of knowledge and awareness to lead, and scrutinise cohesion within the authority. There will be a similar challenge across partner organisations but their commitment and determination to improve is strong.

### Quote from the Chief Executive, Ged Fitzgerald

"The national and local agendas around equality, social inclusion, community cohesion and participation are complex and fast changing. They often include difficult and sensitive social and political issues. However, as with most matters, this complexity usually requires a simple and focussed approach to challenges based around respect, honesty and openness.

It is essential that as a city we have a common understanding of our policies and plans for *Creating Inclusive Communities* in Sunderland. By working in partnership we are demonstrating a commitment to tackle the challenges we face as a city and make progress on the way forward. We are confident that together we can make a difference."

### Contact

#### Jacqueline Campbell

Community Relations Manager

[jacqueline.campbell@sunderland.gov.uk](mailto:jacqueline.campbell@sunderland.gov.uk)



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## **Leadership profile in summary**

The chief executive has shown strengths in the following areas of leadership for cohesion:

- Creating a vision and getting shared ownership of that vision
- Seeing the big picture
- Building trust and partnerships across the city
- Setting clear direction and priorities ('one council' approach)
- Communicating cohesion aims and actions
- Scrutinising and reviewing cohesion performance
- Building organisational capacity for sustainable cohesion and improved quality of life

## **Leadership styles**

- Transactional – activity focused, 'directive' approach
- Situational – reactive to local situation/circumstances
- Transformational – aims for impact, real change, devolves leadership

Sunderland recognises the often sensitive and difficult challenges it faces in progressing towards its vision of being a confident, successful and culturally diverse city. As a city, Sunderland believes that its commitment and robust structures will enable it to do this successfully and to the benefit of all of its communities.

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# Bristol City Council

## Context

Bristol is the biggest city in the south-west with a population of 380,000. The community is diverse with 8.2 per cent of the population being BME according to the census 2001. Although economically successful the city has some of the most deprived wards in England alongside some of the most prosperous. In recent years the city has actively recognised and documented its links with the Transatlantic Slave Trade. There are a wide range of faiths represented in the city, two per cent of the population is Muslim, 0.6 per cent Hindu and 0.5 per cent Sikh. Over 50 languages are spoken in Bristol and the greatest demand for the council's interpreting service comes from the Somali community.

The council has a long-standing commitment to equalities and cohesion and has sustained strong policies and activity throughout periods of political change. The first Liberal Democrat administration was formed in May 2005. Previously the council has been Labour controlled apart for a period in 2003/04 when the council was run by a coalition of three parties.

## Community cohesion in Bristol

The council adopted a community cohesion framework and action plan in February 2004 and benchmarked against community cohesion indicators suggested in the Home Office guidance. The Bristol approach has been to focus on developing key areas of work that will contribute to and build cohesion, most notably:

- Work with young people (a dedicated community cohesion co-ordinator in young people's services)
- Faith communities
- Tackling racial and religious harassment
- Targeted neighbourhood work in an inner city regeneration area that has seen community tensions (Barton Hill)

- Support to asylum-seekers and refugees through strong partnership working.

## Focus on leadership

Throughout changing administrations and political leadership the council has maintained a strong commitment to racial equality and the emerging community cohesion agenda. For example the portfolio holder for equalities in 2003/04 has actively championed community cohesion and race equality through public events, explicit statements and by championing innovative methods of implementation such as the cross party BME councillor shadowing scheme delivered in partnership with Operation Black Vote. This lead member has an active involvement in asylum-seeker and refugee issues, chairing the regional partnership and has championed the need for robust race equality impact assessments in key decisions, including the impact of policies and strategies on good race relations.

In the present administration, there has been a public statement following the London bombings, to appeal to communities in Bristol to maintain positive relations. The council leader, Councillor Barbara Janke, called on all communities in the city "to work together to maintain harmonious community relations in the aftermath of the recent London bombings".

Reinforcing positive and hard hitting messages Council Leader Janke stated "in Bristol, the city council and faith leaders will not be diverted by the violence committed by a small minority of people. We will continue to work together to further build a successful and positive city where everyone, whatever their background can flourish. We would urge all residents to join us in that endeavour".

The LSP, Bristol Partnership, has also taken an inclusive approach with all partners signing up to an equalities protocol and commitment to cohesion. The partnership includes equalities representatives; recruited to advocate on equalities issues, as well as

equalities voluntary sector representation and faith representation.

Since 1999 the council has led the Joint Declaration Partnership on Racial Equality – a local ‘leadership challenge’ which now includes 19 of the major public and private organisations in Bristol, including local media. All partners are signed up to the declaration and senior representative’s meet regularly to lead on progress in the field of race equality.

### Contact

#### **Gillian Douglas**

*Equalities Team Manager*

[gillian\\_douglas@bristol-city.gov.uk](mailto:gillian_douglas@bristol-city.gov.uk)

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### Leadership profile in summary

- Ability to build trust and partnerships
- Scrutinising cohesion
- Building organisational capacity for sustainable cohesion

### Leadership styles

- Community/civic leadership – authority plays a facilitative role by enabling and devolving the leadership role to communities
  - Transactional – activity focused, dispersed infrastructure for community cohesion created
  - Political leadership
-

# Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council

## Context

Gateshead, situated in the north-east of England, stretches almost 13 miles along the River Tyne and covers an area of 55 square miles. Although over half of Gateshead is rural, it also has a large urban centre. Its environment ranges from areas of outstanding natural beauty to areas with a legacy from the region's industrial past. The population of the area is 197,000, which comprises a large Jewish community. The Index of Multiple Deprivation (2004) ranks 33 areas in Gateshead within the top 10 per cent most deprived areas of England and the index also shows that nearly half the population of Gateshead fall within the top 20 per cent most deprived areas of England.

The development of the arts and tourism has become increasingly important to the area with the decline of the mining, ship building and engineering industries. This regeneration has both generated employment and attracted investment.

## Community cohesion in Gateshead

Gateshead council recognises that to build a cohesive community there has to be someone taking responsibility for driving through the initiatives and championing the changes demanded by the community cohesion agenda. There is, however, no single leadership model to achieve community cohesion and in an area like Gateshead with its strong traditions of partnership work and voluntary sector contributions, a combination of high profile leadership and low key approaches shape the nature of the community cohesion agenda.

## Structural issues

There is a designated cabinet member with responsibility for community cohesion, equalities and asylum seeker communities. The council also have a group director designated as an equalities champion, whose remit incorporates community cohesion. A chief officer working group oversees and drives the

work reporting to the lead member. Gateshead council has a corporate community cohesion strategy and programme of work that is being developed and used as the basis for improving community cohesion. A diversity forum has also been established which is the council's official engagement forum with BME communities. This broader infrastructure supports both community driven and council cohesion activity.

## Community cohesion pathfinder

The council participated in a national programme of community cohesion pathfinders and complemented its work on community cohesion with initiatives with young people and partnering with projects like Positive Images, in promoting integration through music and cultural activities. This work targeted those areas identified through Gateshead's baseline report on community cohesion as being the potential weak links in the chain of community cohesion.

The chief executive of Gateshead council has taken an active role in supporting a range of community cohesion projects and led a group of senior officers on tour to The Avenues Project (a youth and community based initiative doing work with the local BME and faith communities). The message was that the involvement of young people from the BME community is "vital for the effective delivery of services for the local authority and it could greatly enhance relations with other communities in Gateshead".

The chief executive's visibility to youth was demonstrated when he hosted a reception for young people from the Gateshead BME Youth Forum and took them on a tour of the council offices in order to explain the decision-making processes of the council. The message given was that "young people ought to be seen as leaders in the communities where they live and as opinion-makers in their own right". Young people were encouraged to undertake regular dialogue with himself and other senior officers of the local council, making the authority less distant and young people more engaged and assertive.

## Contact

### **Stephen Lamienie**

*Community Development Officer*  
stephenlamienie@gateshead.gov.uk

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### **Leadership profile in summary**

- Championing cohesion
- Communicating cohesion aims and actions
- Making a difference for communities – bonding and bridging, valuing and celebrating diversity

### **Leadership styles**

- Leading by example – the chief executive drives the agenda through and raises its prominence
  - Transformational – aims for impact, real change and devolves leadership
  - Political leadership
  - Democratic engagement – getting closer to young people
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For further information, please contact  
the Local Government Association at:  
Local Government House  
Smith Square, London SW1P 3HZ

LGconnect, for all your  
LGA queries 020 7664 3131  
Fax 020 7664 3030  
Email [info@lga.gov.uk](mailto:info@lga.gov.uk)  
Website [www.lga.gov.uk](http://www.lga.gov.uk)

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