



## Housing market renewal and community cohesion





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The findings and recommendations in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department for Communities and Local Government.

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# Contents

1.	Introduction	4
2.	The community cohesion agenda	6
	Housing and community cohesion relationship	7
3.	Understanding community cohesion	9
4.	Housing market renewal and community cohesion	12
5.	Planning for community cohesion	14
6.	Promoting community cohesion	18
	Understanding and awareness	18
	Engagement and interaction	20
	Managing community relations	21
	Extending housing choice	22
	Promoting good practice	23
7.	Conclusion	26

# 1. Introduction

The housing market change promoted by housing market renewal (HMR) pathfinders and their partners is recasting the context in which housing opportunities arise, constraints are encountered and choices are made. The result is shifting patterns of residential settlement that have the potential to challenge community relations *and* neighbourhood sustainability. At the same time, however, the pursuit of housing market change provides a significant opportunity to address the inequalities encountered by certain groups and communities.

This paper considers the extent to which pathfinders have recognised these challenges and maximised their potential to promote community cohesion, drawing on findings from a process review of pathfinder understandings and responsiveness to community cohesion concerns. Two key questions are explored. First, are pathfinders recognising and responding to the community cohesion challenges within their area? Second, to what extent have community cohesion concerns been mainstreamed with strategic thinking across the full suite of pathfinder activities and interventions?

The discussion below draws on data from three sources in order to answer these key questions:

- *A review of pathfinder documentation* that revealed definitions and understandings of community cohesion and strategic responsiveness to related issues.
- *Interviews with officers in each of the nine pathfinders* responsible for (or best placed to comment on) understanding and leading the response to community cohesion concerns. A number of these officers are quoted directly in the discussion below, in order to evidence and elucidate key points. Quotes are not directly attributed, however, in order to ensure the anonymity of respondents, which was guaranteed in a bid to promote an honest and frank dialogue.
- *More detailed discussions in four case study pathfinders* (Renew North Staffordshire, Urban Living Birmingham & Sandwell, Elevate East Lancashire and Partners in Action Oldham and Rochdale), involving interviews with partner agencies, including local lead agencies for community cohesion (local authorities, local strategic partnerships and such like) and the identification of examples of specific interventions or measures designed to address community cohesion concerns within the pathfinder. The priority during case study selection was the identification of information rich cases, where community cohesion issues were readily apparent or where the pathfinder was explicitly involved in attempts to recognise and respond to community cohesion concerns. In addition, the inclusion of Elevate and Partners in Action ensured representation from areas that have a close association with the community cohesion agenda, stretching back to its birth in the aftermath of the 2001 disturbances in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley. Urban Living was selected on the basis of being the Pathfinder with the most ethnically diverse population, whereas Renew is working in a context where the concerns of the community cohesion agenda

have become increasingly politicised, with the election of the British National Party to Stoke-On-Trent City Council.

Discussion begins with a review of the community cohesion agenda and housing's position within it, before moving on to consider understandings of community cohesion across the nine pathfinders and the recognised links between housing market renewal and community cohesion. Attention then turns to strategic planning for community cohesion within the pathfinders, before concluding with a review of the ways in which pathfinders are seeking to promote community cohesion.

## 2. The community cohesion agenda

The community cohesion agenda emerged in the aftermath of the street disturbances in the Pennine towns of Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in the summer of 2001. Seeking to respond to the violence, central government commissioned and sanctioned a number of local and national reports, which were published simultaneously in December 2001<sup>1</sup>. These various reports presented a shared vision regarding the root causes and required response to the disturbances, emphasising what Ouseley (2001) refers to in the foreword of the Bradford Race Review as *“the very worrying drift toward self-segregation”* and the importance of *“arresting and reversing this process”*. The challenge was identified as promoting community cohesion, which was broadly defined in guidance for local authorities and their partners, published by the Local Government Association (LGA) in 2002, as:

- a common vision and sense of belonging for all communities
- the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued
- those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities
- strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods<sup>2</sup>

Further clarification was provided in the Denham Report, which described community cohesion as an integrating agenda, that incorporates, but strives to go beyond the concepts of race equality, social inclusion and social mix, the stated aim being to help *“micro-communities to gel or mesh into an integrated whole”* (p70). The Cattle Report, meanwhile, distinguished between social cohesion, which it suggested could be found in increasingly divided communities where individuals are integrated into their local ethnic or religious based communities, and community cohesion, where participation is taking place across communities, knitting them together into a wider whole (Independent Review Team, 2001). This broad working definition contained in the LGA guidance and the further clarification provided in the Denham and Cattle Reports has focused the government's approach to community cohesion and informed local responses across England.

The centrality of issues of race and ethnicity to the community cohesion agenda and the emphasis placed on the need for certain groups to make greater efforts to assimilate into 'British society' have come increasingly to the fore, particularly in the

<sup>1</sup> Burnley Task Force (2002) Report of the Burnley Task Force, Chaired by Lord Clarke; Home Office (2001) *Building Cohesive Communities: A Report of the Ministerial Group on Public Order and Community Cohesion*. London: Home Office; Independent Review Team (2001) *Community Cohesion. A Report of the Independent Review Team*, Chaired by Ted Cattle. London: Home Office; Oldham Independent Review (2001) *One Oldham, One Future*. Panel Report, chaired by David Ritchie. Oldham: Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council; Ouseley, H. (2001) *Community Pride not Prejudice*. Making Diversity Work in Bradford. Bradford: Bradford Vision; Home Office (2004) *Strength in Diversity. Towards a Community Cohesion and Race Equality Strategy*. London: Home Office.

<sup>2</sup> LGA, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Home Office, Commission for Racial Equality (2002) *Guidance on Community Cohesion*. London: Local Government Association



aftermath of the events of 11 September 2001 in New York City and 7 July 2005 in London. This emphasis is clearly evident in both the government strategy on race equality and community cohesion, published in 2005<sup>3</sup>, the 2006 Local Government white paper<sup>4</sup> and the report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion published in 2007<sup>5</sup>. The strategy paper was notable in that it brought together the objectives of increasing race equality and promoting cohesion. Setting out ways in which *“the government will work with partners to help build cohesive communities”* (p42), discussion of community cohesion focused on the challenge presented by particular elements of the minority ethnic population (immigrants, extremists, the culturally exclusive or isolated). The objective was identified as generating a common sense of belonging, helping immigrants to integrate into *“our”* communities, increasing opportunities for (minority ethnic) groups to participate in civic life, tackling racism, marginalising extremists and promoting cohesion at the local level. The same themes are evident in the chapter on community cohesion in the Local Government white paper.

## Housing and community cohesion relationship

The various reports into the disturbances of 2001 regarded housing as both a cause of the perceived crisis in cohesion and as part of the solution. The physical separation of different ethnic groups, borne out of residential settlement patterns, was concluded to be an outcome of housing policy and provision. The report of the Independent Review Team (2001) asserted that housing policies are *“clearly a major determinant of the shape of communities and will have profound implications on the relationship between different races and cultures”* (p42). The Oldham Independent Review Panel (2001) drew a similar conclusion, stating that *“the segregated nature of society in Oldham is at the heart of the town’s problems, and that begins with housing”* (p16).

Action was therefore demanded from housing agencies, with attention focusing on promotion of greater ethnic mix, the assumption being that physical integration would promote social interaction and serve to breakdown the misunderstanding that feeds prejudice and intolerance and undermines cohesion. Local housing strategies were subsequently required to consider the role of housing in community cohesion, but little guidance has been forthcoming about the role that housing might play in promoting community cohesion. As the Cattle Report recognised, *“the impact of housing policies on community cohesion seems to have escaped serious consideration”* (5.12.1). In an attempt to fill this gap the Chartered Institute of Housing commissioned a number of reviews and reports, exploring the current and potential contribution of social landlords to community cohesion<sup>6</sup> and aiming to establish good practice in the promotion of community cohesion through housing

<sup>3</sup> Home Office (2005) *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society: The Government’s Strategy to Increase Race Equality and Community Cohesion*. London: Home Office

<sup>4</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government (2006) *Strong and Prosperous Communities. The Local Government White Paper. Cm 6939-I*. London: HMSO.

<sup>5</sup> Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) *Our Shared Future*. [www.integrationandcohesion.org.uk](http://www.integrationandcohesion.org.uk)

<sup>6</sup> Robinson, D., Coward, S., Fordham, T., Green, S. and Reeve, K. (2004) *How Housing Management can Contribute to Community Cohesion – A Research Report*. Coventry: Chartered Institute of Housing.

management<sup>7</sup>. More housing specific guidance has not been forthcoming, either from central government or other agencies, such as the Housing Corporation. Rather, local interpretation of the community cohesion agenda has been encouraged, to ensure its relevance to the specifics of the challenge in different places. Meanwhile, efforts have been made to support the generation of a framework of practical measures that will mainstream the process of community cohesion, rather than the development of a framework of implementation. The Community Cohesion Unit and the Community Cohesion Pathfinder programme have been central to pushing forward this approach. However, housing did not emerge as a key theme in the pathfinder programme and few housing specific lessons emerged from six councils designated beacons for community cohesion.

The HMR pathfinder programme has followed a similar approach to community cohesion, pointing to the potential of housing policy and provision to promote community cohesion, but allowing pathfinders and their partners free-reign in developing their response. The Minister for Housing and Planning speaking in 2004 about the Sustainable Communities Plan emphasised the need to “*sustain proper communities*” and “*ensuring that you have ways for people to gather*”<sup>8</sup>. Suggesting that community cohesion is very much part of this approach, she went on to compare the challenge of building new communities in growth areas of the South East, with the difficult questions to be addressed in HMR pathfinders where “*communities are already in place and sometimes where there are already tensions in place*”. However, HMR pathfinders, she concluded, represent an opportunity to address these challenges. This conclusion was reinforced by the Audit Commission (2005)<sup>9</sup>, which reported that “*some Pathfinders face issues relating to poor community cohesion, where the problems of housing market failure may be bound up with issues of race*” (paragraph 64). Recognising that local authorities are the local agencies with primary responsibility for improving community cohesion, pathfinders were also advised to ensure that “*their proposals help to build a cohesive community and that individual projects bring communities together and do not discriminate against particular groups*” (paragraph 64). Specific guidance or advice about how to pursue these objectives has not been forthcoming, however, and pathfinders have been left to develop their own particular response to whatever challenges are understood to exist within their local area.

<sup>7</sup> Blackaby, B.. (2004) *Community Cohesion and Housing: A Good Practice Guide*. Coventry: Chartered Institute of Housing; Fotheringham, D and Perry, J. (2003) *Offering Communities Real Choice – Lettings and Community Cohesion*. Coventry: Chartered Institute of Housing.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee (2004) Proceedings of the Committee – Sixth Report (para. 119). [www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmmodpm/45/4502.htm](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmmodpm/45/4502.htm)

<sup>9</sup> Audit Commission (2005) *Housing Market Renewal. Housing Best Practice Handbook*. London: Audit Commission

### 3. Understanding community cohesion

When asked to explain their organisation's understanding of the community cohesion agenda, pathfinder officers rarely referenced the official definition of community cohesion presented in the LGA guidance or the diagnosis presented in the various reports to emerge in the aftermath of the disturbances in 2001. Indeed, officers were frequently open in admitting that they were unfamiliar with the guidance:

*I am aware of the [LGA Guidance]. I have to say I have not gone through anything in detail, yes and particularly when I worked in the council we had a strategy, I dealt with that but we have not applied any of it to our [HMR] programme today, and, well, we have tried to take more account of cohesion issues in the consultations that we have been doing, in terms of reaching difficult to reach groups, that's been very important. (Pathfinder Officer)*

Rather, pathfinder officers typically referred to a combination of local challenges and ongoing or planned interventions when asked to explain their understanding of community cohesion. The result was a wide array of concerns and priorities, including:

- *Equality* – this was the most commonly referenced issue when discussing community cohesion, pathfinder officers emphasising the importance of ensuring equality of access to the opportunities generated by HMR. The importance of addressing perceived inequalities, for example, in the geography of resource allocation, which might be perceived to benefiting one group over another, was also emphasised. A minority of officers also reflected on the importance of recognising and seeking to counter historical deficits in equality, housing market renewal being regarded as an opportunity to tackle the imbalance between housing requirements and local provision for particular groups.
- *Understanding and acceptance* – a common inference during discussion about what makes a community cohesive was the central importance of shared sense of place and a commitment to the local neighbourhood, which demanded a degree of mutual understanding and acceptance among residents. HMR was regarded as an important opportunity to promote such sentiments, given the potential for engagement and interaction.
- *Well-being and quality of life* – cohesion was frequently referred to as being dependent upon social and economic well-being and intimately linked to quality of life and neighbourhood sustainability.
- *Mixing and interaction* – the pursuit of greater social mix was a common objective, reflecting recognised inequalities in access to housing in particular neighbourhoods for certain groups and a commitment to the possibility that greater mix could promote increasing engagement and interaction between different groups.

Although rarely referencing the official definition of community cohesion, all of these issues relate, in one way or another, to the official definition presented in the LGA guidance (2002). The diagnosis articulated in the various reports published in the aftermath of the 2001 disturbances is also reflected in the issues referenced by pathfinders. In particular, the emphasis on promoting mix, mirrors the prescription detailed in the Cattle Report; that from mix comes interaction and through interaction understanding and tolerance emerge. Few pathfinder officers referenced all of the issues detailed in the list above, however, and respondents were rarely able to point to an official working definition that had been adopted by the pathfinder and had been communicated to staff and partner organisations. Pathfinders had also rarely been able to buy into a shared local understanding and interpretation of community cohesion, even in locations with a local community cohesion strategy or which had been involved in the community cohesion pathfinder programme. One respondent, for example, referred to a local community cohesion strategy as “*gathering dust*”, while in another pathfinder an officer reported being unaware of any local developments associated with the activities of the local community cohesion pathfinder.

Most pathfinders associated the community cohesion agenda with issues of race and ethnicity. As well as reflecting the focus of the national agenda, this emphasis reflected local challenges evident in many pathfinders. Two of the pathfinders (Partners in Action and Elevate) are situated in locations that experienced the disturbances in 2001 that prompted the development of the community cohesion agenda. In Urban Living, more than half of the local population was reported to belong to a minority ethnic group. Tensions between different ethnic groups were also reported to have been apparent in recent years, as populations have grown and new groups have arrived. New immigration was identified as a key factor behind the, often rapidly, changing nature of local neighbourhoods and recognised as a potential impact on community cohesion in all pathfinders. Other issues apparent in certain pathfinders that help explain the focus on issues of race and ethnicity during discussion of community cohesion concerns include the rise of far right political groups and the success of the British National Party in local elections in poor, deprived white neighbourhoods, and the recognised inequalities and disadvantages that certain minority ethnic populations were reported to be encountering in particular locations. However, some pathfinders were at pains to emphasise that community cohesion was not merely about issues of race and ethnicity, but also about issues of economic disadvantage and deprivation and addressing the narrow socio-economic base within pathfinder areas:

*One thing I did miss out before, and have fallen into the trap immediately, not talking about anything other than race. Our view, very much, as a Pathfinder is that we're about encouraging a much broader economic mix in the Pathfinder. To go a couple of steps back, looking at all our market evidence, we've not only got segregation in Pathfinders in Asian communities and white communities, but we've got segregation between the Pathfinder and the outside of Pathfinder between economically inactive, and all the economic active people – the migration outwards is significant. It's a real problem for us and we've got this increasingly residualised community that's left behind, and what we're trying to do is build an attractive environment, attractive housing that will retain some of those people. (Pathfinder Officer)*

This quote raises an interesting question regarding the conceptualisation of community and the scale at which community cohesion is perceived to exist or be lacking and at what, interventions intended to promote community cohesion should be targeted. In contrast to the perspective informing the above quote, in most pathfinders, the challenge appears to be interpreted as promoting community cohesion at the neighbourhood level. 'Community' is equated with distinct ethnic populations clustered in particular neighbourhoods, rather than community as a collection of people with a shared interest, which may or may not be clustered in the same neighbourhood. This perspective was most apparent in the emphasis placed on the importance of breaking down existing patterns of ethnic segregation and promoting greater mix at the neighbourhood level:

*I'm not sure we're yet making the assumption that making the mix in terms of the housing will mean that there's a mix in the community, we recognise we need to work harder, but we know that if we don't have the mix in housing you definitely won't get the mix, so we need to work hard to make sure that there's further mechanisms for assistance and support in place to encourage that mix.*  
(Pathfinder Officer)

This quote is indicative of the importance that pathfinders commonly placed on fostering increasing social and ethnic mix through HMR. Such comments were frequently accompanied, however, by references to the importance of promoting choice, rather than adopting more coercive approaches to fostering greater social and ethnic mix:

*This is not social engineering, it really isn't social engineering and we would be extremely foolish and big headed if we thought we could impact upon an area like that. It's effecting the population in that this area has got to become one of choice rather than 'I live here because I don't have a choice to live anywhere else', and if that happens we haven't succeeded.* (Pathfinder Officer)

The clear inference here is that limited mix or segregation reflected restricted choices and that greater mix would be forthcoming if residential choices (particularly of minority ethnic households) were extended.

## 4. Housing market renewal and community cohesion

Pathfinder officers were of the opinion that HMR represents a significant opportunity to address the inequality and disadvantage in housing and neighbourhood choices and outcomes that is perceived to underpin community cohesion concerns. Officers therefore talked about the positive contribution that renewal activities will make to the promotion of community cohesion. In particular, three broad areas were recognised, through which this contribution will be delivered:

- *Community engagement, participation and involvement* – the HMR process provides a vehicle through which different sections of the local population can be brought together and involved in meaningful and purposeful dialogue about their neighbourhood.
- *Tackling deficits in equality* – HMR pathfinders are in a unique position to effect a rapid transformation – through the development of new stock and renewal activities that renovate and convert existing properties – in the local stock profile and address long standing deficits apparent in certain neighbourhoods between the local housing stock (location, size and design) and the requirements of particular groups. This will help renewal and new build developments in the private and social rented sectors responding to the distinct situations, aspirations and requirements of different groups.
- *Extending choice and promoting mix* – the scale of renewal and new build interventions planned and ongoing in the pathfinders provides an opportunity to open up sectors of the housing market historically closed to certain minority ethnic groups and to break down barriers preventing the movement of particular groups into certain neighbourhoods. The presumed result is greater social mix and associated gains, in terms of interaction.

As well as recognising the potential for HMR to impact positively on community cohesion, respondents also raised concerns about the potential for housing market renewal to have a negative impact on community cohesion. Officers pointed to the importance of the pathfinder managing the impact of shifting patterns of residential mobility, social interaction and local housing market dynamics brought about by HMR on neighbourhood sustainability and community relations.

HMR has the potential to dramatically alter the character of neighbourhoods. This might involve a shift in the ethnic profile of an area. Relations between different groups might prove to be relatively benign, but the process of change might also raise tensions *within* neighbourhoods. Interventions will therefore be necessary to ease the transition of new groups into the neighbourhood and to avoid tensions and conflict between different groups:

*People are alienated by change aren't they – change in their neighbourhood is an alienating process which makes some people choose to leave inevitably and that kind of change is organic if you like, population change is driven by*

*people exercising choices therefore in this instance the ethnic profile change can also be wrought by HMR. You have a new development and the population changes – it might bring in different kinds of householder not merely be as you say ethnicity that's changed – it could be class or family make up or such like. People could struggle with change so it's something to be managed. (Pathfinder Officer)*

In addition, HMR activities might have unpredictable and unforeseen impacts on neighbourhood sustainability. The complex patchwork of mobility patterns, that are related to shifting demand profiles for different locations or segments of the housing market and shaped by the pattern of local housing opportunities and constraints, are notoriously difficult to predict. Exactly how long-standing residents of an area will react to changes in the social composition of their neighbourhood is difficult to predict. Certainly, the in-migration of new households that might be of a different age, class or ethnicity and the transition to a more mixed community will not necessarily be a smooth experience. At least in the short-term, neighbourhood stability might be undermined:

*It's a clear risk of market renewal – we're actually going in and changing neighbourhoods and it's a huge risk – community cohesion – but it's also potential – it's a really – it could be very very positive as well ... . (Pathfinder Officer)*

## 5. Planning for community cohesion

The general consensus across the pathfinders was that HMR has the potential to promote community cohesion, while a lack of community cohesion can undercut the objectives of HMR. The pursuit of community cohesion was therefore viewed as both a responsibility and a necessity (although often not a reality, as we will see). Pathfinders had arrived at this shared viewpoint via different routes.

Community cohesion was central to strategic objectives and planning in the two Pathfinders working in locations that experienced major street disturbances in 2001. Building community cohesion was identified as one of five overarching objectives in the Elevate Pathfinder prospectus published in 2004<sup>10</sup>, while the Partners in Action prospectus, published in 2003, placed “*community cohesion at the core*” and asserted that the pathfinder was “*totally committed to the principle that the ultimate success of this HMR Prospectus hinges upon our ability to deliver the programme hand-in-hand with the achievement of community cohesion in both boroughs.*”<sup>11</sup>. In addition, the Urban Living prospectus<sup>12</sup> also identified the central importance of community cohesion to the delivery of the pathfinder’s objectives. All of these pathfinders emerged in areas with an ethnically diverse population where tensions between different populations had become manifest through street disturbances, which had prompted a local and, in the case of Oldham and Burnley, a national political and policy response. The national community cohesion agenda was rooted in these locations and it is hardly surprising that these Pathfinders were responsive to and considerate of community cohesion concerns when drafting their prospectus and subsequently developing their strategic plans.

Attention to community cohesion concerns was less apparent in the other six pathfinders. Passing references to cohesion issues were sometimes made in the pathfinder prospectus or scheme update, but generally little attention was paid to community cohesion in the early years of their existence. Various developments, however, had prompted these pathfinders to pay increasing attention to community cohesion. These included:

- *Growth of the local minority ethnic population* – the relative and absolute size of the minority ethnic (non white-British) population was reported to have increased rapidly in recent years in all pathfinders, driven, in large part, by the new immigration of refugees and migrant workers. The increasing presence of minority ethnic groups, often in locations with limited previous history of minority ethnic settlement, was reported to be driving change at the neighbourhood level and prompting new challenges, including community relation issues.

<sup>10</sup> Elevate East Lancashire: *The Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder Prospectus*, March 2004

<sup>11</sup> *Transformation and Cohesion: The Housing Market Renewal Prospectus for the Oldham and Rochdale Pathfinder*, December 2003 (p4)

<sup>12</sup> *Executive Summary of the Prospectus for Housing Market Renewal in the Birmingham and Sandwell Pathfinder Area*, February 2004



- *Increasing local political significance of race-related issues* – local political developments had prompted some pathfinders to turn their attention to the issue of community cohesion. This included the rising profile of far-right political organisations, including the success of the British National Party in local government elections. The increasing tendency for community cohesion to be associated, in national debates, with discussion about the future of multiculturalism, extremism and terrorism was also reported to have prompted closer attention to the issue in some pathfinder areas.
- *The promotion of the community cohesion agenda by local agencies* – at least one pathfinder reported becoming engaged with community cohesion issues following the emergence of a local community cohesion partnership, prompted by the new found interest within the local authority to community cohesion concerns.
- *Arrival of new pathfinder staff* – the arrival of new staff members with relevant expertise and a personal interest and commitment had prompted increasing attention to community cohesion issues within some pathfinders.
- *Responding to criticism* – there was evidence to suggest that some pathfinders had been forced into reflecting on ethnic diversity and community cohesion concerns within their area, following the criticisms of regulatory agencies.

All pathfinders were able to point to an officer who was responsible for community cohesion issues, although this role was typically shared with other portfolio responsibilities (such as the Respect agenda). In some pathfinders, attention to the community cohesion within the institutional infrastructure of the pathfinder extended no further and the mainstreaming of community cohesion concerns appeared to consequently reflect the personal resources and influence of these individual staff members. In contrast, the three pathfinders with a long-standing commitment to the agenda had mainstreamed community cohesion within their procedures and processes.

Partners in Action was perhaps unusual, in that the pursuit of cohesion is one of the primary objectives of the pathfinder. The removal of barriers thought to be restricting housing choices, reinforcing segregation and limiting engagement and interaction between different groups was reported to be the core concern of the pathfinder:

*Very generally, our current policies and strategies are around making sure that we provide opportunities, that we remove barriers, physical barriers in many cases, that divide communities and that's what our masterplan is about. Making sure that, physically, the communities can be brought together. And also in the development of any new developments that we undertake, will have a mix of properties by size, type and tenure. Now that doesn't in itself, clearly doesn't create cohesion – we recognise that it's just part of the role that we can play, part of the wider Oldham/Rochdale debate, but if it's not a positive act towards creating cohesion, it's not a negative act, in terms of reinforcing segregation.*  
(Partners in Action Officer)

Urban Living seeks to support the mainstreaming of community cohesion through its board structure, the main board being supported by three sub-boards, one of which is the cohesion sub-board. The sub-board's purpose is defined as ensuring

that “community cohesion is integral to Urban Living’s strategy, programme and infrastructure” and its terms of reference focus on the development and implementation of the Urban Living *Community Cohesion Action Plan*<sup>13</sup>. Membership of the board is wide-ranging, drawing in senior staff, for example, from housing associations, the chief executive of a local strategic partnership (LSP), a local authority community cohesion officer, chief executives of black and minority ethnic-led housing associations:

*The point is, is that they all have got expertise and most of them have got clout in the organisations. ... We will allow them to send someone to represent them if they can’t come on the understanding that we really want them and that they must send someone who is able to make intelligent contribution to the conversation.* (Urban Living Officer)

In addition, the pathfinder has three dedicated staff members actively promoting the pursuit of community cohesion.

*We’ve actually got staff dedicated to this work in the sense that you’ve got me who is senior in the structure and pretty much I have dropped everything apart from cohesion work, for a variety of reasons, one of which, whilst much good work is done in partner organisations someone has to grab it by the scruff of the neck and make sure that is happening and direct. We are not always a doing organisation, we are too small so we are a co-ordinating, leading, pushing, shoving, prompting, funding, monitoring type of organisation, and otherwise we would have a huge team of community engagement officers, but we haven’t. We have got two officers, middle managers, you know serious people looking at cohesion, respect, engagement along with myself it so happens they are both secondees, but we have them on the structure so they can be permanent staff at any time, one of which is the community coordinator, sorry the community cohesion coordinator for the government office for this region, and another is a fairly senior engagement neighbourhood practice management office from the biggest RSL in this region ... So there is human resource, there is not only a structure, but people there to push and prod.* (Urban Living Officer)

The generation of a cohesion partnership structure, through the sub-board arrangement and the recruitment of dedicated staff, represents a unique response to a problem faced by the majority of pathfinders. In few instances had pathfinders been able to identify and bind themselves into partnership organisations or structures focusing on community cohesion. An obvious exception to this situation was Elevate, which had close links with the East Lancashire partnership, which it had also supported financially, and other agencies working within the realm of community cohesion. These links were reported to have been vital to assisting the pathfinder develop its understanding and response to local community cohesion issues:

*I haven’t seen any guidance from the Government direct to Pathfinders around cohesion issues. To a certain extent we are working with assisting partners, assisting structures and sort of being guided by their assessments, as well as our own, of what our impacts could be through HMR, on that, and it could be that*

<sup>13</sup> Urban Living Community Cohesion Sub-group: Terms of Reference

*some slightly clearer guidance might help us, and, sort of, then measure what the impacts are.* (Elevate Pathfinder Officer)

Elevate was unusual, however, in being able to call on this support network. Despite the fact that the majority of local authorities or LSPs in the pathfinder areas had produced community cohesion strategies, partnership structures were rarely in place to support the delivery of these strategies. Indeed, in a number of instances pathfinder staff reported that local cohesion strategies were just “*gathering dust*”.

The absence of any institutional infrastructure supporting the pursuit of community cohesion was found to undermine information sharing and collective learning about local challenges and relevant responses. In some instances, this failing had been addressed by individual pathfinder officers seeking out and developing productive working relations with officers responsible for community cohesion issues in local organisations, such as local authorities and LSPs. For the majority of pathfinders, however, the lack of any co-ordinated local response to cohesion issues raised the real possibility that the efforts of one agency to promote community cohesion might (unknowingly) be undermined by the activities of another.

## 6. Promoting community cohesion

Pathfinders recognised that promoting community cohesion was a responsibility and a necessity and talked about the full range of HMR activities – from community engagement, through to stock development – when discussing their current and potential contribution to the pursuit of community cohesion. In addition, when asked to provide specific examples of interventions promoting community cohesion, all pathfinders were able to point to aspects of strategy, policy and practice that were reported to be furthering community cohesion. However, in many cases it appeared that the examples cited did not form part of a co-ordinated response to community cohesion issues. Rather, it appeared that pathfinders were often pointing to interventions that *happened* to be addressing community cohesion concerns. This finding is not surprising, given the absence of local structures that pathfinders have been able to tap into for advice and support in understanding and responding to the local community cohesion challenge, the apparent lack of information sharing on cohesion issues between pathfinders and the absence of any national guidance on the possibilities for promoting community cohesion through HMR. This is not to say, however, that the activities spotlighted by pathfinders when asked about interventions promoting community cohesion were not having a positive impact. It is a point of concern, however, that community cohesion is often not part of the strategic thinking of pathfinders.

The examples of current or planned practices and interventions reported by pathfinders that were thought likely to further, or were reported to be explicitly addressing, community cohesion priorities can be organised under five broad headings:

- understanding and awareness
- engagement and interaction
- managing community relations
- extending housing choice
- promoting good practice

### Understanding and awareness

There was a striking lack of substantiated understanding across the nine pathfinders of the local community cohesion situation. Pathfinder officers were typically able to provide a detailed overview of the area and dynamics of change and localised tensions, but such insight was more often based on anecdote and first hand accounts, than rigorous analysis. This lack of analytical insight into the local community cohesion situation was often recognised as a failing by officers, who acknowledged that research and analysis should be central to efforts to manage

and promote community cohesion. Indeed, research and analysis was recognised as having the potential to support efforts to promote community cohesion in at least four ways:

- increasing awareness and prompting greater responsiveness to the diverse housing situations and requirements of different groups
- fostering acknowledgement and greater understanding of housing inequalities and helping to target the efforts of policy and practice to ensure people from different backgrounds have similar housing opportunities
- monitoring the process of change wrought by HMR and the differential impact on different neighbourhoods and groups
- predicting and revealing points of tension and conflict where intervention will be required

All pathfinders were able to point to efforts made to improve understanding and awareness of the diverse situations and requirements of different groups living within their area. In some cases research focused on profiling and understanding the situations and experiences of particular groups, such as research funded by Gateway exploring the new and growing migrant worker and asylum seeker populations. Most pathfinders, however, had commissioned research focusing on the specific *housing* experiences and needs of different minority ethnic groups. Much of this work appeared to be rooted in the race equalities agenda and focused on appreciating the diversity of housing (and other) situations and requirements among and between different groups and understanding housing inequalities, in order to contribute to efforts of policy and practice to ensure people from different backgrounds have similar housing opportunities.

Research analysing the impact of housing market trends and interventions on different groups was less common, possibly reflecting the early stages of activity in some pathfinders. Partners in Action, however, had commissioned research exploring attitudes toward housing opportunities and different neighbourhoods, which has explored the preferences for living in different types of neighbourhood among different ethnic groups, identified on the basis of actual and perceived ethnic profile. This has allowed a frank assessment of the challenges that the pathfinder might face in pursuing its objective of breaking down historical barriers between neighbourhoods and ethnic groups and promoting greater residential choice and mixing. Bridging NewcastleGateshead had also commissioned research exploring attitudes to particular neighbourhoods among different ethnic groups and revealing potential barriers restricting access to the new housing opportunities being developed within these neighbourhoods. This had led to the production of a geographically sensitised strategy for promoting cohesion through HMR.

Research and analysis predicting points of tension and conflict where intervention will be required was less apparent. In some cases pathfinders were buying into research commissioned by other agencies (primary care trust, local authority, LSP and such like) that explored neighbourhood attitudes and commitment and interaction with fellow residents. These studies of community relations and well-being frequently employed the same indicators to measure cohesion, drawing on guidance issued by the Home

Office<sup>14</sup>. While acknowledging concerns about exactly what is being measured by these questions, pathfinders suggest that they served as a useful proxy indicator and served to alert them to emerging problems or tensions at the neighbourhood level:

*They were asking people in surveys how they feel about their neighbourhood, whether they got on with people of different ethnic backgrounds, their activity in local community projects and things like that to gauge – I think if I understand it right there's a national set of indicators to identify a cohesive community. So how often you get involved in local community indicates how much, how cohesive your community is and I think that doesn't apply to me but I don't feel – it strikes me that a lot of those apply to poor areas where's there's lots of activity. However, they're undertaken that and ... what it has identified is that this is a big problem in an area called [name of neighbourhood] ... there's a lot of unrest, a lot of, ... it's a neighbourhood that's got increasing cohesion issues and exploring a little bit more we believe that's an area that's undergoing change and there's Asian households moving in there and the white community is not very happy. We hadn't picked it up on our radar so it has helped ... it just signals, doesn't it, and you can then start looking into locations and try to understand what is going on and what the problem might be, so it allows you to get in there before it kicks off – whatever that might be, be it tensions that manifest themselves in more severe ways or people leaving then undermine the stability somewhat. (Pathfinder Officer)*

It was rare for such surveys to be conducted on a regular basis. The monitoring of change, including the emergence of tensions, appeared to be more reliant on anecdote and first hand insight, than rigorous analysis of time-series data capable of providing a picture of change across different neighbourhoods.

## Engagement and interaction

The mechanisms and processes of community engagement and participation in the HMR programme were identified as having the potential to promote community cohesion in two key ways:

- fostering a shared understanding and a common sense of purpose and vision and assisting with the development of strong and positive relationships between people within local neighbourhoods
- assisting with efforts to ensure that the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated within the renewal programme

In Urban Living, the importance of community engagement was underlined through reference to the development of an engagement action plan. In other pathfinders, activities focused more on the efforts made to ensure the inclusion of a wide range of community interests, groups and representatives at pathfinder consultation events. Venturing beyond the pathfinder and discussing engagement issues with other agencies, however, revealed some concerns about the commitment or effectiveness

<sup>14</sup> Home Office (2003) *Building a Picture of Community Cohesion. A Guide for Local Authorities and their Partners*. London: Home Office.

of pathfinder engagement activities. For example, the director of a black and minority ethnic-led housing association pointed to perceived inadequacies in his local Pathfinder's approach to community engagement:

*The HMR does not do a lot to engage with refugee organisations and does not have any people on the ground, and dedicated people who stay in the office after work, for example, out of hours meetings, which are essential to understanding the issues in the area. This means that the Pathfinder has no roots into the community. (Director, black and minority ethnic-led housing association)*

## Managing community relations

Poor community relations and rising tensions between groups are a key manifestation of poor community cohesion. Problems with community relations are also an immediate concern for HMR, for at least three reasons. First, the housing market decline that pathfinders are charged with tackling can be directly associated with poor community relations and the consequent unpopularity of particular neighbourhoods. Second, ongoing problems and tensions between different groups can undermine the success of pathfinder efforts to transform local neighbourhoods. Third, the changes wrought by HMR might result in population changes that serve to raise tensions.

An obvious example of a pathfinder response to these three challenges is the Good Relations programme being delivered in the Elevate East Lancashire Pathfinder. The project is funded by Elevate and Burnley Borough Council and aims to foster better relationships between different groups and to defuse tensions and potential conflicts in the town. The programme is facilitated by Mediation Northern Ireland (MNI), a group of social mediators. The stated aim of the programme is to “*build up local capacity to address the issue of community cohesion*”<sup>15</sup>. To this end, the group has developed a training course for Burnley residents and agencies. The course aims to teach people ways to support residents going through change, and focuses on bringing people together, managing conflict, meeting new people and gaining new skills. The initial phase of the programme has focused on improving understandings about community relations within Burnley. Attention focused on the themes of segregation, identity, civic leadership, the community sector, social and economic change and market renewal, the latter being intended to assist Elevate with efforts to promote community cohesion across the whole of East Lancashire.

The agencies element of the programme had served to bring different, and often opposed, interests together to talk about the current situation and to begin to plot the path ahead:

*I've been sat in on some of the workshops, a series of about four or five workshops last year with different community leader, interfaith groups, community groups, people who work in Burnley, East Lancashire Partnership*

<sup>15</sup> Elevate Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder Quarterly Summary of Activity: First Quarter 2006–2007 (1 April To 30 June 2006).

*were included, the local authorities, the police, it was very interesting session, because we were there, members of the BNP were there at all the sessions. Mediation Northern Ireland were fostering the style of starting to get people talking who had diametrically opposed views. (Elevate Pathfinder Officer)*

The community training involved training 25 community representatives in mediation skills. The current intention is for these people to be deployed into specific areas where problems are most obviously manifest and are also likely to emerge as a result of changes prompted by HMR activities:

*Its very specific at the moment, it's because Elevate is a key funder, obviously they are trying to tie things to the achievement of our objectives in terms of market renewal, we're particularly interested in interventions in and around our three extension areas in Burnley. But suffice to say, you know, that work is being rolled out probably a bit wider than that. I think in time, and I think the Burnley focus probably does reflect the great vary in community relations, Burnley is still probably one of our weakest market areas, and there is only one particular part of Burnley. (Elevate Pathfinder Officer)*

The principles of mediation were also reported to be in the process of being rolled out more widely by local agencies involved in the programme:

*the group meeting I went to just a couple of weeks ago the police there involved in mediation in Burnley, the police were saying 'well we need to look at this in terms of getting it into our training program'. You know, I think mediation can still diffuse a potentially harmful situation before it gets a bit out of hand. So I think that's very exciting and tackles really trying to get to the bottom of how these communities work and how they can build bridges between people following a break down. We just set up a group now to look at managing the project of mainstreaming almost, so that the leadership of the project combines the Mediation Northern Ireland plans and is adopted by those key partners locally and rolled out. (Elevate Pathfinder Officer)*

## Extending housing choice

Extending housing choice through the development of new properties and the renewal of existing stock as part of the HMR process represents a significant opportunity to promote community, by:

- bringing the profile of the local stock more in line with the requirements of the local population
- promoting greater residential mixing of different population groups, through the provision of more diverse accommodation types and tenure opportunities
- underpinning the sustainability of an area, by drawing in new residents, who might not have previously considered moving into a particular neighbourhood

Most pathfinders pointed to the ways in which new development and/or stock renewal activities were recognising and seeking to deliver on this potential. Reference



was made, for example, to issues relating to the location of new developments, site layout and the mix of stock, design considerations, including sensitivity to cultural preferences and requirements, and specific room by room issues. However, new developments and stock renewal will only succeed in extending the housing choices of disadvantaged groups if the impact of various other factors on the housing choices of these groups are recognised and addressed. New housing opportunities will need to be effectively marketed, so that they appeal to all. Effective neighbourhood management and support mechanisms will need to be put in place, to manage potential tensions and conflicts between established and incoming residents.

An obvious example of such a programme of activities aimed explicitly at extending the residential choices of minority ethnic households is the Community Induction Project in Rochdale, which has been running for a number of years, but in recent times has received financial support from Partners in Action, who are helping to extend the project into Oldham. The Community Induction programme has frequently been held up as an example of good practice within the field and Partners in Action were quick to recognise the importance of the project to its core objective of extending choice and promoting residential mix, given the project's focus on:

- extending the limited housing opportunities and poor living conditions experienced by the local South Asian population
- addressing the limited interaction and integration between different ethnic groups
- underpinning the sustainability of local estates

The Community Induction Project serves as an intermediary between applicants and landlords, as well as supporting new and existing tenants through community development and advice work. Key lessons learnt during the delivery of the project are reported to include:

- the importance of landlords working together to achieve common goals and the importance of core management tasks to support community cohesion
- the fact that significant gains can be made by actively engaging with housing applicants about what is or is not available, talking through their options and explaining the consequences of holding out for a popular area
- gains can only be sustained through continued attention, which points to the importance of on-going funding and the mainstreaming community cohesion principles within core management tasks

## Promoting good practice

Restrictions on revenue funding can be argued as limiting the role that pathfinders can play in directly addressing community cohesion concerns. There is no doubting that neighbourhood management initiatives, such as the community induction project or the other interventions detailed in CIH research exploring the potential

of housing management to promote community cohesion<sup>16</sup>, are resource hungry activities. Community cohesion, however, is a policy agenda without a funding stream, the logic always being that attention to community cohesion should be mainstreamed into all aspects of policy development and practice. In addition, pathfinders are in a position to influence and inform the policy and practice of partner agencies, through the control they exercise over the allocation of HMR funds. Urban Living reported using this power to promote greater attention to community cohesion concerns among its partners' agencies. In particular, significant community engagement has been demanded as a prerequisite for funding:

*We've got an engagement action plan, we've got this cohesion element to it ... the projects, the project managers who we fund are required to demonstrate to us how they have engaged the local people or they don't get it. To that end, we have a system whereby in our funding application forms you, as a project manager, do that, you demonstrate to us what engagement you have done over and above planning or you don't get the money. (Urban Living Officer)*

In a bid to formalise this process, which was reported to have "worked well in some areas but not in others", Urban Living has developed a community engagement checklist, which is appended to its funding application form:

*We've given them a community engagement check list, you will fill this in, you will tell us what age, what ethnic group, hailed by what medium, in what meetings, in what leaflets and what the response was, what you have done about it and what the changes were, and if you don't give us that you don't get the money. Remember that it is all funded retrospectively, so if they are waiting for £2 million of our money they are going to fill in this form, and they know now that if they don't do it to our satisfaction they are spending £2 million at risk. Now I've got a copy of that community check list ... it says 'did you use a web page, did you phone, did you text, did you use a news letter, show us demonstrate to us, show me your leaflet, tell me how many people turned up to the meeting, what did they say, what percentage thought it was a good idea, why not, did you change the railings if people didn't like those railings'. Sounds daft, but if your living there it's not daft, that was the first thing, the second thing we do to them is we say to them 'did it impact system have on your local communities, what's the mix of population there, is this going to have a negative impact on this population, that population, that age gender, you prove it?'. (Urban Living Officer)*

The stated intention of the form is to "assist project delivery organisations inform Urban Living about how they will engage and involve local communities in the design and implementation of their project, how this will affect project delivery and outcomes and how community engagement has been monitored or evaluated". A similar approach had been taken to equalities issues, with Urban Living also having developed an equality impact assessment tool that project delivery organisations are also required to complete:

<sup>16</sup> Robinson, D., Coward, S., Fordham, T., Green, S. and Reeve, K. (2004) *How Housing Management Can Contribute to Community Cohesion*. Coventry: Chartered Institute of Housing

*If they fill this in, and they have got to do it not us, and we check it, it will tell us whether a full equality impact assessment is required and if it is it is pretty much a red light. So you demonstrate to us that this is not going to negatively impact upon the Asian community in this area in favour of everybody else ... That's a requirement. ... Now it is not possible for a partner that is being funded to take our funding for granted without doing the right thing. (Urban Living Officer)*

In contrast, a respondent in another pathfinder partner organisation criticised the pathfinder for not challenging the commitment of housing associations and their record of delivery on community cohesion concerns. One suggested way to prompt greater attention among local housing associations was to seek relations with housing associations from beyond the pathfinder area, that have a proven reputation of delivering on cohesion issues.

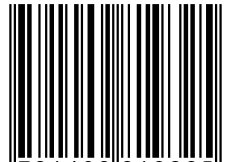
## 7. Conclusion

The community cohesion agenda recognises housing policy and provision and the operation of local housing markets as a cause of, and a potential solution to, problems of community cohesion. Pathfinder officers appeared to recognise this potential, although awareness of the community cohesion agenda varied across the nine pathfinders. So why are so few pathfinders actively seeking to understand and deliver on their potential to promote community cohesion? A number of explanations emerged. First, there is a lack of understanding about what community cohesion is and what pathfinders should be aspiring to achieve; what does a cohesive community look like and how can housing market change promote this ideal situation? Second, there is limited awareness about how to assess community cohesion and monitor the changes wrought by HMR; what tools might be used to determine local cohesion challenges, priorities for action and change through time? Thirdly, there is limited awareness of how cohesion might be achieved and maintained; what interventions limit the negative consequences and maximise the positive impact of HMR on community cohesion? Finally, pathfinders are under no explicit instruction to attend to community cohesion concerns and have been provided with no advice or guidance about how to go about doing so.



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