

cohesion & society

journal of community cohesion

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iCoCo

Institute of Community Cohesion



Coventry
University

Welcome!

Welcome to this first edition of [Cohesion&Society: journal of community cohesion](#). This new biannual journal is launched by the Institute of Community Cohesion and will stimulate debate around all issues related to community cohesion.

[Cohesion&Society](#) will provide a much needed space for challenging and stimulating debate on social policy and, in particular, to constantly reflect on future directions for community cohesion and related issues.

[Cohesion&Society](#) will explore the changing concepts of community, citizenship, diversity, integration, identity - and many more - and how they are interpreted in policy and practical terms,

[Cohesion&Society](#) will include contributions by leading academics and policy thinkers - and will encourage practitioners to develop their ideas to support real and positive interventions.

In this first issue, we are looking at the future of community cohesion programmes in the aftermath of the general election.

We are delighted to provide this space for debate and hope you will enjoy your read.

With best wishes,
Professor Ted Cantle CBE



Welcome to the July 2010 edition

We have chosen to focus this entire edition of [Cohesion&Society](#) on the prospects for community cohesion following the general election in May.

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Please pass on details to colleagues –The iCoCo Network (formerly the Practitioners' Network) was established in May 2006. Over the last four years, it has grown in size and diversity. With a membership of over 600 (growing on a daily basis), the iCoCo Network brings together practitioners, policy makers, researchers and educators to encourage shared learning and debate. [Cohesion&Society](#) is exclusively available to iCoCo Network members, please encourage your colleagues to join the Network at <http://network.cohesioninstitute.org.uk>

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Introduction

The development of community cohesion is a remarkable story: it is only 9 years since the riots in Northern towns which brought the community cohesion concept into being. The Institute of Community Cohesion (iCoCo) has only been established for 5 years. We have seen the old ideas of multiculturalism, based upon separateness and division, giving way to a new vision of integration, in which distinctive cultures and faiths are still valued but where we work much harder to build what we have in common. We know that, in this era of 'super diversity', with 300 languages now spoken in London schools and many more faiths reinforced by diasporas, we will need to do a lot more to ensure that we can all live together in this increasingly globalised world.

Community cohesion has become accepted as the most effective and durable way of tackling prejudice and reducing community tensions. Cohesion programmes are now implemented by local and national agencies of all types and all political persuasions. It has also enabled a framework to be developed which is much wider than 'race' and ethnicity and is now applied to all areas of difference – age, sexual orientation, gypsies and travellers, disability, social class, sectarian divides, faith and special needs – and is seen to be more inclusive. Diversity is no longer about 'them', it is about 'us' too.

Community cohesion has also been a means by which the equalities agenda has been reinvigorated, as it is clearly more inclusive and positions controversial targeted programmes of positive action within a broader framework to promote the benefits of diversity more generally. The public sector, voluntary agencies and private businesses are now using the toolkits and guidance which we have developed and iCoCo already has a network of over 600 practitioners, policymakers, researchers and educators. Many countries around the world have also expressed interest in our approach.

To be cohesive, a community actually needs to exist. That means relationships matter. Social capital is not just a term; in the real world it depends upon formal and informal networks which form the glue to bind us together. Various citizenship initiatives have begun to show that we need to facilitate these networks; they do not happen on their own. And some sense of belonging built around shared values, presently rather tentatively expressed through citizenship tests, ceremonies and common language requirements, has begun to be part of everyday local lives. More needs to be done to embed these changes, to ensure that hope triumphs over hate, that knowledge of, and interest in, people who are different from ourselves, continues to grow, and that diversity is seen as an opportunity rather than a threat. But this will need more investment. The question is whether this agenda will be continued, or whether it might be taken in a different direction.

The signs, as set out in this edition of [Cohesion&Society](#), are that cohesion will emerge as part of the Big Society, though the funding, which has ironically always been very modest, must remain in doubt.

Community cohesion and party politics: prospects for community cohesion in the aftermath of the general election

This section provides an overview of community cohesion in the party politics of the UK. This analysis of all three party manifestos will outline how community cohesion can be taken forward in the new political landscape. Under the headings of immigration; the Big Society; integration, equality and class; and Prevent and extremism, this iCoCo viewpoint considers the future prospects for community cohesion.

Prospects for community cohesion in the aftermath of the general election

Community cohesion does not feature in any significant way in the manifestos of the three mainstream parties. This is not surprising as they all appear to have embraced what is still a relatively new approach to race and diversity issues and at a local level, councils of all complexions are quietly getting on with implementing cohesion programmes. As it is not an area which divides the parties, any radically new approaches are unlikely and a period of stability in this area would certainly be welcome. However, some change in tone and style has been signalled and the aim of this section is to try to 'read the runes' and to use the perspectives provided by our party political contributors and others, to give us some pointers.

We have looked at this under the following headings:

- Immigration
- The Big Society – citizenship and community
- Integration, equality and class
- Prevent and extremism
- Some concluding remarks

From the perspective of those delivering the agenda, particularly voluntary agencies, there are a number of immediate concerns as to whether the inevitable reductions in public expenditure will fall disproportionately on cohesion programmes. We therefore need to take such concerns seriously but also consider the impact of these new policies more generally to consider future prospects. We have therefore added some further comment on 'prospects for cohesion' in the concluding section.

The immigration dilemma

It is unfortunate that the community cohesion agenda is often dominated by differences based on race and ethnicity, probably because the subject of immigration has remained such a pressing concern for so many people. Race and immigration should be separable and do need to be considered in very different ways but there are few signs yet of any new thinking.

Until the appearance of the 'bigoted woman' of Rochdale just eight days before the general election, the subject of immigration had received very little attention during the campaign. All the political parties had managed to keep it as a low level issue and, despite the usual mischief from the BNP, it was only put centre stage because of the then Prime Minister's gaffe. Given that immigration has generally been the second biggest concern expressed by the public over the last few years and only recently knocked off the top spot by the economy, it is hard to understand how the oft expressed concerns of so many people had not been much more evident until that time.



The mainstream parties had also managed to ensure that immigration had been positioned in very measured, almost administrative terms, in which various types of 'controls' had been emphasised in an attempt to provide a re-assuring consensus. Mrs Duffy, however, provided a 'no clothes' moment in which 'emperor' Brown was exposed. Senior Labour party figures¹ have since portrayed this episode as the real turning point for the Labour party which then failed to make any further headway in the general election. But all three main parties were then required to re-emphasise that they did, in fact, understand and even sympathise with these concerns and, again, that controls were the answer.

None of this should really be a surprise: the political parties are genuinely caught on the horns of a dilemma. All politicians are acutely aware of the anti-migrant sentiment, which is now shared by both white and BME British voters, and that any debate could easily turn into a gift to the far right.

In one sense, this is entirely laudable and party leaders know that the controversy which inevitably surrounds any discussion of 'race' could dramatically heighten public tensions. On the other hand they also know that any seeming unwillingness to discuss the issue plays into the hands of the far right who portray this as a conspiracy of silence and that only they are prepared to represent the real views of 'ordinary people'. The restraint on debate, however, means that the positive impact of migration is also not discussed (no doubt much to the delight of the far right) and there is little by way of an open attempt to confront the myths and to champion the economic realities. And there is also little preparedness to respond to the real concerns and grievances that result from the additional population, in terms of additional pressures on housing, health and education services.

This dilemma is not new and has characterised many previous elections. What is new is that the Conservatives have become less and less prepared to represent the anti-migrant view and David Cameron's re-positioning of the Conservative party as being inclusive and centre ground², has all but extinguished the mainstream 'anti' position. What is also new, but perhaps very much connected, is that the far right have grown significantly over the last eight years or so and have a much stronger presence across the country, fielding 300 candidates in the general election and over 1,000 in local elections on May 5th. With some further support from UKIP, and an effective ongoing campaign by MigrationWatch, the 'anti' voice is far stronger and much more shrill than for many years. The far right made no further impacts in the 2010 elections and lost ground, most notably in Barking and Dagenham, but they have continued to grow over the last ten years and have steadily built a bigger base.

¹ See for example, Ed Balls MP in The Guardian, 31st May 2010

² This is also exemplified in Paul Goodman's piece later in this journal



The Labour party, who have probably had more to lose as a result of the growth of the far right, have recognised the threat and in October 2009 the Government launched their *Connecting Communities* programme. This is currently targeted at 160 predominantly white working class areas, which are thought to be disengaged and disaffected – although they might say ‘abandoned’³. *Connecting Communities* as presented in this journal sets out an attempt to re-focus the direction of the then government on to the ‘host’ community. This was widely seen as a welcome change in direction and perhaps also a shift towards social class rather than ethnic divisions⁴.

The absence of mainstream debate is simply likely to reflect the view that the party leaders see little to gain in discussing the matter in anything more than the most limited of terms. Despite the priority afforded to this issue by the electorate, the Economist noted that ‘immigration merits about a page in each of the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat manifestos’⁵. Considering that each of these manifestos are over a hundred pages long, it could be argued that this is indeed scant regard for the issue. When the matter did

surface after the ‘Rochdale bigot’ gaffe, it did receive more air time, but the differences between the parties were somewhat exaggerated.

The Conservative agenda was in fact set out under the positive heading of ‘Attract the brightest and best to our country’ and contained an aspiration to reduce inward migration, supported by fairly modest proposals to impose a cap on non-EU migrants (this has since become part of the Coalition agreement), with tighter controls on economic migrants and students. Reference was also made to the need for more ‘integration’ but expressed only in general terms of ‘embracing our core values’ and English language tests for spouses. Labour positioned its approach to the issue in a section on ‘crime and immigration’ and this reflected its emphasis on the use of identity cards, border controls and tackling illegal migrants. Again, the emphasis was on limitation, using the points systems and other controls on economic migrants. Raising the bar on English language proficiency was also included.

The Liberal Democrats also set out their vision in similar terms – ‘a firm but fair immigration system’. This also emphasised the need for controls, especially in respect of borders and checks on businesses exploiting ‘illegal labour’. They proposed a point system on a regional basis and came forward with the boldest suggestion of ‘earned citizenship’ after 10 years, subject to learning English and a ‘clean record’. This applied to people who did not have the ‘correct papers’ and was widely seen as an amnesty for illegal migrants. Nick Clegg appeared to back-pedal in the last of the television debates and it was the Conservative ‘cap’ on non-EU migrants which emerged as coalition policy and the amnesty idea did not even make it on to the negotiating table.

³ John Denham’s article in this journal, written whilst he was still Secretary of State for Communities, outlines the programme at that time, when a lesser number of areas were being targeted

⁴ A point picked up in Paul Scriven’s article for this journal

⁵ The Economist, May 1, 2010

It is unlikely that any of the above commitments would have assuaged public opinion – and the Lib Dem amnesty idea soon fell foul of it. By contrast the UKIP and BNP manifestos had no such qualms and repeated their demands for ‘ending mass uncontrolled immigration’ through leaving the EU (UKIP) ⁶ and a similar ‘halt to immigration’, deportations and voluntary repatriation and the preservation of the right of the ‘indigenous population’ to ‘remain the majority in our nation’ (BNP) ⁷ .

The uneasy relationship between the mainstream political parties and the electorate on immigration therefore seems set to continue, as does the constant barrage from the far right who will continue to demonise migrants and to claim that the BNP are the ones to take immigration concerns seriously. To some extent, national government can afford to sit on the fence and neither seek to justify and support the current levels of migration, nor oppose them, as the impacts are generally felt locally. Many local authorities and their partners also appear to be coping with the pressures, implementing tension monitoring and community cohesion programmes to guide interventions and to build understanding and respect of the ‘other’. This may mean that the Conservatives are disposed towards reducing the number and size of nationally developed and co-ordinated programmes and simply expecting local areas to respond ⁸.

This approach will also be tested by local government who have already expressed concern about the impact of a rising population on education, housing, health and other services, especially as resources are distributed on the basis of unreliable population estimates ⁹. To some extent, the heat may go out of the argument as the latest International Passenger Survey shows that long-term immigration to the UK declined in the year to September 2009 by 9 per cent and that of citizens of the A8 Accession countries declined by 55% ¹⁰.

If public concern does in fact reduce it may well dent the resolve of the political parties and it seems unlikely that there would be sufficient political will to develop a more imaginative and longer term strategy which could begin to grapple with even more difficult casual factors: the huge disparity between rich and poor countries; the worldwide growth in population and the imperative of economic growth which drives the labour market. (This theme will be developed in a future issue of Cohesion&Society).

⁶ *Empowering the People*. UKIP Manifesto 2010

⁷ *Democracy, Freedom, Culture and Identity*. The BNP General election Manifesto 2010

⁸ This approach is hinted at in Paul Goodman's article, but the influence of the Liberal Democrats remains to be seen.

⁹ “Estimating the Scale and Impacts of Migration at the local level”, Institute of Community Cohesion, November 2007, <http://resources.cohesioninstitute.org.uk/Publications/Documents/Document/Default.aspx?recordId=56>

¹⁰ Office of National Statistics (ONS) 27th May 2010

The Big Society

The notion of a Big Society is very welcome, representing a significant change in direction for the Conservatives and potentially is very closely aligned with the community cohesion agenda – though it is not as yet entirely clear what this new term actually entails. All three mainstream parties have some sort of vision for a re-building of our local or national sense of community, even if this has been represented in various ways.

The Conservatives are the architects of the Big Society and set out their vision in general terms:

So we need a new approach: social responsibility, not state control; the Big Society, not big government. Only in this way will we tackle the causes of poverty and inequality, rather than just the symptoms (To) transform the quality of our public services...and...rebuild shattered communities and repair the torn fabric of society. So we will redistribute power from the central state to individuals, families and local communities. We will give public sector workers back their professional autonomy. They will be accountable to the people they serve and the results they achieve will be made transparent. If people don't like the service they receive they will be able to choose better alternatives. In this way, we will create opportunities for people to take power and control over their lives. Our approach is absolutely in line with the spirit of the age: the post-bureaucratic age ¹¹.

They translate this into a mixture of more specific and practical measures:

- 'To help stimulate social action, helping social enterprises to deliver public service through a Big Society bank
- Training new community organisers to help achieve our ambition of every adult citizen being a member of an active neighbourhood group.
- Funding to those groups that strengthen communities in deprived areas
- The introduction of a National Citizen Service, initially for 16 year olds to develop the skills needed to be active and responsible citizens and to mix with people from different backgrounds, and start getting involved in their communities
- To empower communities to come together to address local issues ... to enable parents to start new schools, to take over local amenities such as parks and libraries that are under threat; give neighbourhoods greater control of the planning system and; enable residents to hold the police to account in neighbourhood beat meetings
- Launch an annual Big Society day to celebrate the work of neighbourhood groups' ¹²

The Conservatives say that these policies will give new powers and rights to the 'little platoons' of civil society, which they see as the institutional building blocks of the Big Society. They also say that they will 'develop a measure of well-being that encapsulates the social value of state action'. The Conservative approach survived the coalition horse trading and was enshrined in the coalition government statement ¹³ and in a separate Big Society policy document issued soon after the government was formed ¹⁴.

¹¹ *Invitation to Join the Government of Britain: The Conservative Manifesto 2010*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *The Coalition: Our Programme for Government*. HM Government. May 2010

¹⁴ *Building the Big Society*: HM Government May 2010

Labour expressed a similar wish to promote 'strong community life' but expressed this in rather more prosaic terms. Firstly, in terms of 'protecting community life', Labour dwelt upon the proposed to support ailing post offices and pubs. They also indicated that they would give further support to social enterprise and community shares in local shops, football clubs and renewable energy companies. However, they also promised 'greater support for third sector organisations' and in similar terms to the Conservatives, proposed a youth



community service for young people to give 50 hours of community service by the age of 19. Specifically, they also undertook to 'actively combat extremist groups who promote fear, hatred and violence' ¹⁵.

The Liberal Democrats, surprisingly, had rather less to say, contenting themselves with a general statement which indicated that they: 'are committed to handing power back to local communities. We believe that society is strengthened by communities coming together and engaging in voluntary activity, neighbourhoods free to tackle local problems' ¹⁶. Paul Scriven in this journal adds a very interesting reflection on the Lib Dem approach which suggests that he at least, would also want to see more emphasis on structural issues which create inequalities. Nevertheless the Big Society goes with the flow of devolution which is often espoused by Liberal Democrats.

At one level the manifestos might be seen as 'much of a muchness' with a very similar direction and with small differences in the details – and titles – of the various initiatives. The Labour government implemented many short term programmes to promote civil renewal, empowerment, 'respect' and active citizenship, which could easily fit within the concept of the Big Society. Indeed, there may have been so many initiatives in this area that further schemes may be viewed with some cynicism, especially as the new government is having to embark on a cost cutting programme in which 'rolling back the state' might be taken as a means of using volunteers as cheap labour.

The Big Society might also be greeted with some cynicism if it is also seen as a means of restoring the Conservative party's image as a caring party, hoping to live down Margaret Thatcher's comment in 1987 that 'there is no such thing as society'. In fact, there is some dispute about the exact context of the quote but it did appear to dismiss any sense of collectivism, either based upon voluntary effort or upon the state: 'There are individual men and women, and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look to themselves first. It's our duty to look after ourselves and then, also to look after our neighbour' ¹⁷.

¹⁵ A Future Fair For All: The Labour party Manifesto 2010

¹⁶ Liberal Democrat Manifesto 2010

¹⁷ The *Woman's Own* interview by Douglas Key was published on 31 October 1987 but differs from a statement issued by No.10 in July 1988 at the request of the *Sunday Times* and from other accounts

Nevertheless, there seems to be a real and broad based desire to rediscover the value of community and to locate it within a longer term vision to get people working together and looking out for each other. This also taps into those who believe that there is a spiritual need to redress in a materially dominated consumer society. As in Margaret Thatcher's original remarks, the new approach also seems to place as much emphasis on the role of the family as it does on community. This is exemplified by the Conservative's continuing commitment to a tax advantage for married people. As with previous initiatives, there is a real danger that the Big Society confuses the many different roles that people can play as a part of their community. The concept of 'citizenship' is essentially about playing a part in polity, taking part in decision making and contributing to ideas and debates – and in this sense 'caring' about future society. But citizenship can also be interpreted as being about ideas of duty and personal responsibility and in this sense implies 'giving something back' to the community, by way of volunteering and taking on unpaid roles.

The Big Society idea seems to be more orientated towards the latter role, with the suggestion that this would entail not only being able to reconfigure local services but also to take over of the provision of hitherto and professionally run and organised services, such as schools, parks and libraries. Rob Whiteman, the new head of the Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government (IDeA) developed this theme in an interview for *The Guardian* directly after the election. This supported the vision for 'a small army of volunteers to take over services, alongside an ambitious new structure, perhaps emulating the National Trust, to run parks and other facilities' ¹⁸.

The vision is compelling in many senses - people caring about their environment, civil society and fellow man - and holds out the prospect of reduced crime and vandalism, more democratic debate and engagement and compassion and concern about those with whom we share our neighbourhoods. It stands in contrast to remote forms of government, in which decisions are taken on our behalf, with everyone retreating behind their own front doors, unwilling to work together, or even speak and relate to our neighbour. Who could possibly disagree?

But quite apart from the cynicism about expenditure cuts referred to above, which this new initiative will have to overcome, there are some very real conceptual and practical problems. Firstly, a premium is still placed upon individualism and the notion of 'looking to ourselves first' as Margaret Thatcher put it ¹⁹. Personal choice still drives public services and our lives more generally. We complain about the local school when its standards fall, but do not hesitate to exercise our personal choice to withdraw our child and exacerbate the decline; we condemn the failure of 'the authorities' to notice that an old person has been left alone for weeks, but do nothing ourselves; we all rail against 'excessive' health and safety rules but have no compunction to use the litigation option whenever the chance arises; and we all decry the way in which organisations like the neighbourhood watch scheme, the local guides or scouts, or the community centre have inadequate resources, but claim that we are 'just too busy' to help.

Actually, many people are too busy, the long hours culture, partly by choice and mainly from necessity has shown no signs of lessening. Commuting long distances, as mobility in the labour market increases and the expectation that both partners will be in employment has tended to reduce local connectivity. The home, as the centre of privatised and independent entertainment and recreation, through the use of television, internet and social media, pushes the door further shut on meaningful interaction.

¹⁸ 'In Our Hands' in *The Guardian* 12th May 2010

¹⁹ *The Woman's Own* interview by Douglas Key was published on 31 October 1987 but differs from a statement issued by No.10 in July 1988 at the request of the *Sunday Times* and from other accounts

The academic term which has underpinned much of this debate - social capital – was popularised by Robert Putnam in his seminal work *Bowling Alone*²⁰, which was published in 2000. Most of the discussion since that time has revolved around whether social capital has declined or increased and whether Putnam was right to assert that it declined as a result of increased neighbourhood diversity. It did not help that much of Putnam's early work was in relation to the United States and that subsequent studies by others in relation to the UK were not conclusive – indeed, there are no universally agreed measures of social capital. From the perspective of community cohesion, a renewed focus on building social capital is essential – it is simply not possible to create meaningful interaction between people of different backgrounds where no such networks exist. The Conservative manifesto seemed to understand that whilst social capital itself has some value, the reference to 'mixing with people from different backgrounds' acknowledged that 'bridging' social capital also had a particular value.

It remains to be seen how the new government will develop their Big Society idea and turn it into a practical reality – especially with no additional resources. It is hard to believe that a real sense of community will grow and develop without some form of meaningful intervention and incentivisation. There is also a real danger that it will simply repeat the Labour government's approach, which was to develop a series of initiatives which were never really embedded and did not lead to a real building of civil society organisations and social capital. We also need to recognise that this debate is also fundamentally about 'values'. Public engagement and involvement has to be seen as a public 'good' with people rewarded in non-financial but equally tangible and meaningful ways. It would imply a fundamental shift away from our obsession with individual consumerism and material wealth to valuing community service and human and personal growth. This leaves aside whether poorer people could afford such a shift, let alone whether it can become regarded as a desirable end in itself. The recent reports and debates about 'happiness' and 'well being'²¹, seem to suggest that this is a direction which can be underpinned by different values, but they also underline how new and fragile this agenda is.

Note: The coalition government have now signalled their intent on this agenda by appointing Lord Wei of Shoreditch as their Big Society adviser.

²⁰ Putnam, R.D. (2000) *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster).

²¹ See for example: *The State of Happiness, Can Public Policy Shape People's Wellbeing and Resilience?* Young Foundation. 2010 and *The Good Life*. Demos 1998

Integration and equality and class

The Conservative part of the new government seems to be much more interested in 'integration' than their Labour predecessors. This stems in part from their analysis that Labour was responsible for the 'failed policy of multiculturalism' (see Goodman article), but is also partly a view that deprivation and need, rather than ethnicity, should be the target. To this extent, Goodman appears to be supported by the Liberal Democrats (see Scriven) and by Denham (see article) who refer to the 'growing self-confidence of minority communities' and the 'ongoing importance of class'.

However, Goodman suggests a much more bullish approach in which the Conservatives will 'lead the integration drive' and will 'put in place a proper integration strategy'. In this, he has been supported by current ministers – for example Michael Gove, who talks in terms of 'build(ing) an inclusive British citizenship – reject separatism'²²; and by Teresa May who reinforces this policy direction:

building stronger, more integrated communities is central to our vision for Britain. Under Labour, state-driven multiculturalism, uncontrolled immigration and the threat of extremism have led to an increase in distrust and segregation, and left us with divided communities²³.

Fears of a new 'assimilationist' approach to integration may be premature as the policies that May and Goodman propose seem to be very similar to the Labour policies of promoting and requiring English language proficiency, tackling forced marriages, teaching history in schools and 'celebrating England's national day'²⁴. There is also the same nod towards promoting 'shared values', but again like Labour, little by way of meaningful commitment at this stage.

There has also been no suggestion of 'breaking down segregated areas' in the sense of some form of enforcement of mixed communities, though Paul Scriven (see article) makes some interesting observations about how different types of segregated areas (such as students) become 'self-fulfilling prophecies' and talks in terms of smart interventions to counteract these trends. In fact, Paul Goodman seems to suggest that integration should be a national responsibility, whereas cohesion is local. In the end note to this journal, Ted Cattle pushes the boundaries of 'difference' to include politicians themselves (see 'Reconnecting the political class').

The backdrop for any new approach to 'integration' is now rather different from any previous Conservative approach. David Cameron has set out to recognise the value of diversity²⁵ and mentions ethnic minority colleagues in the Cabinet and party with some pride. He is keen to present the party as 'inclusive'. In some ways too, the Conservatives appear to be more in touch with grass roots Muslim opinion (see Prevent and extremism below). It therefore seems unlikely that the Conservatives – especially as part of a Lib Dem coalition - will develop any form of integration policy which upsets minority opinion and is seen to do anything other than value distinct cultures.

²² Michael Gove 2006. *Celsius 7/7*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson

²³ Teresa May. *We are all in this Together. – A Contract for Equalities*. May 2010

²⁴ *ibid*

²⁵ David Cameron. Speech to the Conservative party conference, October 2007

Nevertheless, all three of our contributions from politicians do seem to believe that the lack of integration, including that of disaffected white communities and the separation of other groups, can be problematic. The consensus is around the easy part of solutions; making English language universal, a common history and citizenship and celebratory days. The notion of 'shared values' is also agreed but it is doubtful whether the new government will be any more successful in building a consensus on what this means in practical



terms, than the previous one. Any sense of breaking down segregated areas in a physical sense – whether these are in schools, workplaces or neighbourhoods – has not been developed in practical terms and any process which smacks of social engineering or enforced mixing is not on the agenda. Paul Scriven, however, hints at a new way forward of 'smart interventions' which rely upon facilitating more open spaces and bringing people together through collaboration.

All three political parties also seem to be moving in a direction towards a sharper focus on poverty rather than ethnicity. This may developed through a reduction in automatic funding for Black and Minority Ethnic groups (BME), a move which has already been foreshadowed in the opposition to single identity funding²⁶ and has also been picked up by Conservative ministers, in relation to Muslim organisations²⁷. Given that Britain is now super diverse and that despite the fact that in overall terms BME groups are more deprived, many sections of the ethnic minority community are developing ahead of the majority population in certain respects and a more refined basis of funding and support seems inevitable.

Again, there seems to be some consensus across the political parties that there is some sort of problem, but whilst the rhetoric has been raised slightly, little by way of any real change in policy has been indicated either in terms of integration policy or a shift towards class rather than 'race'. It is possible that the coalition government will gradually strengthen its resolve and perhaps pilot a number of 'smart interventions'.

²⁶ Commission for Integration and Cohesion (2007) *Our Shared Future*. HMSO

²⁷ Michael Gove 2006. *Celsius 7/7*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson

Prevent and extremism

The new government seems intent on changing the previous government's policy on Prevent. Paul Goodman refers to the need for an 'overhaul ... independently reviewing the programme' because Prevent 'has not yet been proved to work'. This review is now in place, with the government withdrawing civil servants from conferences on Prevent directly after taking office whilst the review is in progress.

The previous government had also recognised that Prevent needed to change:

We have recognised that the label originally attached to the funding – preventing violent extremism - was seen by some as stigmatising for Muslim communities as a whole and in particular for those who participated in the Prevent work.

So last August, Alan Johnson and I wrote to Prevent partners to encourage local partnerships to move away, if they wanted, from titles, labels and language which created unnecessary obstacles to participation.

We also responded to the perception that Prevent money could only be spent on and in the Muslim communities ²⁸.

The House of Commons Select Committee on Prevent ²⁹ also reported earlier this year and sought to take this somewhat further. Perhaps its most significant conclusions were:

- All community cohesion work and work focusing on shared values should be decoupled from the Prevent agenda and brought under CLG's broader responsibilities for cohesion and integration.
- Specific cohesion work which is directly aimed at preventing extremism should be addressed through one broad programme encompassing all types of extremism – from al-Qaeda-inspired extremism, to that inspired by the far right – and clearly focused on tackling disadvantage and exclusion, as opposed to being targeted at a single social, cultural or religious group.
- The government should learn lessons from the Prevent experience, that any programme which focuses on a single community risks alienating that community, and ignores the fact that no section of a population exists in isolation from others ³⁰

The new government will be obliged to respond to the Select Committee report but as this seems to chime with their pre-existing views, it seems likely that this is a direction that they will want to follow.

Indeed, Baroness Neville-Jones, the new Secretary of State for Security in her first interview ³¹ (which was interestingly with the Islam TV Channel) immediately indicated a review of Prevent and other security measures which had been seen to disproportionately impact upon the Muslim community. Neville-Jones recognised that the Prevent programme was to some extent counterproductive and said that the government would look at separating integration issues from intelligence matters and that the programme would cease to be narrow in its implementation. The government would develop a strategy that deals with right wing extremists as it deals with Muslim extremists and indeed extremists from all sections of society regardless of race, nationality or faith. She emphasised that this was about promoting 'one society' and, again, stressed the need for an 'integration strategy'.

²⁸ John Denham (2010) Speech to the PVE National Conference

²⁹ Communities and Local Government Committee, Sixth Report of Session, 16th March 2010

³⁰ *ibid*, paragraph 169

³¹ Baroness Neville-Jones, Islam TV Channel, May 21st 2010

The direction seems clear – and builds upon the somewhat slow and belated drift of the previous government. The security service in Whitehall is powerful however and has simply failed to see the point of the changes demanded so far and will no doubt continue to press for the status quo to be maintained.



Prospects

The prospects for community cohesion seem to be little changed by a new government at least policy terms but the level of community based interventions, particularly through voluntary organisations is at risk. The recently announced reductions in funding for both cohesion and Prevent programmes will fuel concern for the future direction. There is also a danger that with the reduced support for the far right in the 2010 elections (see separate iCoCo report on the far right, available on the iCoCo Network site at www.cohesioninstitute.org.uk) and a change in direction over Prevent the heat may be taken out of some of the current debate and that short term considerations will mean that longer term strategies are placed on the back burner – at least until some new incident arises.

We therefore propose that the new coalition government build upon some of the initiatives which they have already signalled and:

- Develop an integration strategy which is based upon their emerging idea of 'one society', which fosters diversity but includes a new approach with smart interventions to encourage shared spaces and collaboration
- Recognise the need to invest in interventions which embed change by building social capital and civil society, rather than continue with a series of specially funded initiatives
- Similarly, place much more emphasis on mainstreaming cohesion work and, for example, build upon the success of schools under the 'duty to promote community cohesion' and the emerging practice within the workplace
- Recognise that we are now in an era of super diversity, with a growth in the influence of diaspora communities and that 'learning to live together' in an increasingly globalised and complex world will require more investment – and that this has to be ongoing
- Develop a longer term migration strategy which is linked to optimum population requirements and de-coupled from race. A new and transparent strategy, which confronts the Far right, will need to be developed to tackle the undoubted concerns of the many people
- Recognise that cohesion is not just about race and faith and that all difference represents a threat to people who are uncomfortable with diversity. This also means tackling class inequalities, rather than a simple focus on BME or other broad categories which fail to identify particular needs
- Support the recommendations of the Select Committee on Prevent

Connecting Communities

John Denham MP, Former Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government; Labour party.

In this article, Denham outlines the Connecting Communities programme which was launched by the Labour government in 2009. The article describes the pressures on the most disenfranchised parts of our society and how government policy affects communities in the UK.

Over the past decade, the government has devoted unprecedented resources to investing in strong and cohesive communities – to tackling worklessness and anti-social behaviour, investing in skills and regeneration: in many cases, transforming towns and cities beyond all recognition.

And yet, there are still some communities which share a sense of dissatisfaction, of unfair treatment, a feeling that they have been left behind. These are communities which were least likely to prosper when the economy was booming. They have proved vulnerable to recession. They may feel under pressure, or threatened, by changes within society. And they are less likely to be confident about sharing in recovery.

Of course, these communities haven't been neglected or overlooked over the past decade. On the contrary, almost without exception, they have benefited from unprecedented public investment. Most will have Sure Start centres. School standards will have risen. Most public housing will have been brought up to modern standards. Neighbourhood policing has been introduced. Public spaces improved. And many families have gained significantly from tax credits.

But this investment has been taking place against a background of wider forces – forces over which they have little control and which tend to undermine their confidence and sense of security. Firstly, traditional, often semi-skilled, industrial jobs have continued to decline in some of these areas, with newly created higher paid jobs open only to those with higher skill levels. More recently, these are some of the communities which have been hit hardest by the recession. Where there is a prevalence of low-paid work, in industries which have proved vulnerable. Or where there are relatively low levels of skills and high levels of long-term worklessness. Secondly, in predominantly white areas, recent migration is sometimes perceived as changing communities, and creating new competition for jobs and social housing. Thirdly, although anti-social behaviour has fallen across the country, it remains a real challenge in these areas and creates tensions between the majority of hard working families and the troublesome minority.

People in these communities see their neighbours in the estate down the road moving into new housing and wonder why they've been on a waiting list for so long. They are worried about low-level crime and may not see visible efforts to clamp down on the problems. They think that their area is changing, but feel powerless to do anything about it. They feel that they work hard, pay taxes and follow the rules: but ask whether they get a fair deal in return.

Sometimes, local issues arise which bring these generalised worries and concerns to the surface. For example, in my own area, a new fast food franchise on the edge of a relatively deprived estate chose to hire staff from an agency which was much used by local workers. In another area I've visited, a former council house was being rented out by an irresponsible landlord to tenants who were wreaking havoc in the neighbourhood with their anti-social behaviour. From the outside, it looked as though the council was to blame for not dealing with the tenants. The only way to deal with issues like this is to tackle them head on: not allowing them to fester, and making sure that efforts are visible, so that people know that their concerns are being addressed. Both local and national government have to be quicker and more effective at responding to concerns like these. If we fail to address these concerns, if there is no obvious, visible and active leadership, we create a vacuum which may be filled by apathy, by resentment at those who are perceived to be better off, or by those who want to exploit these problems. Either way, there are real dangers for community cohesion.



This has three major implications for the way in which government policy affects these communities. First, a government's action to address national priorities has got to feel real at a local level. These efforts to make sure that everyone has a chance to increase their skills, to go to university, to find a suitable apprenticeship must provide suitable opportunities in every community. The most effective way to do that is to make sure that communities have the opportunity to influence and shape the way that policies are developed, and to question and challenge the way things are run. Without a proper discussion about national policy and local services, there is a real danger that the wrong priorities are set, and fail to address the issues that matter most to local people. Second, government must remember that what makes sense when thinking about national priorities may not always feel comfortable at a local level. For example, while migration has undoubtedly been good for the UK as a whole, some communities – such as those relying on semi-skilled construction work – have seen their wages fall and their job prospects decline. And third, government has to think about how its policies are perceived in these communities – whether good policies are having unintended consequences. For example, the Labour government had rightly invested in promoting the leadership potential and capacity of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups in an effort to overcome the domination of local and national groups by White people. But the growing self-confidence of these minority communities – though clearly very positive nationally – can actually be seen as a threat to communities feeling under pressure. Of course, that doesn't mean that a government should step back on its action to tackle racism, address discrimination or promote equality. But it does mean that a government has to acknowledge the ongoing importance of class in this debate, recognise how a government's efforts may be perceived, and ensure that it is taking action to promote fairness for all.

So there are a variety of issues at play in these communities, creating a much more sophisticated challenge than governments have dealt with before. This cannot simply be addressed through traditional approaches to regeneration or cohesion. The question, then, is to how to build strong and cohesive communities in areas facing these multiple, complex issues; communities which are confident that they can succeed in a changing world and that they will gain fairly from recovery and rising prosperity.

Connecting Communities has been designed to address that challenge. More than 100 neighbourhoods across 76 local authorities are now involved in this programme, helping to make sure that their community is well placed to emerge from the recession stronger, more cohesive, and able to share in future prosperity. It is not a traditional approach to community cohesion – an extra programme which is tacked on at the end to pick up the pieces when everything else has fallen apart. Rather, it is a package of intensive support which enables local people to influence, shape and change policies on the issues which really matter in their community – whether that's anti-social behaviour, housing, or jobs. It helps both to bust the myths and to address the real problems. And it will help ensure that all communities feel they are being treated fairly – so rather than threatened by change, they can feel part of and confident about that change.

Connecting Communities has received wide support from local authorities led by all the major political parties. These are challenges for democratic politics as a whole – not just for one party. It is not an effort made by a government to combat the BNP. That is for political parties, not the state. But it is about addressing the legitimate fears and concerns which could, if left neglected, prove fertile territory for extremists. It is a recognition that a government can undercut that space by refusing to sweep issues under the carpet, giving space the express their concerns out in the open, and have the power to put things right, with a real say over how resources are allocated and challenges addressed.

Because the local issues vary so greatly, each area involved in Connecting Communities has been developing its own action plan. But there are three strands which are common to all the plans.

The first is a strong emphasis on investing in leadership: because the complex challenges involved require exceptional leaders to address them. So the Labour government has invested in councillors, front line staff and community activists to develop their confidence and skills. For people to feel they are being heard there is a need for honest and open debate to explain how decisions are made. Where decisions are contentious, leaders need to be able to challenge misconceptions and respond with action where needed. Leaders should be visible and effective in their communities, listening and addressing issues head on.

The second is making sure that people have a voice, a chance to express their worries and know that someone will act on their behalf. The idea is to have a much more honest and open debate about what the challenges really are in these areas – even if this raises difficult and uncomfortable issues. If a government is afraid to have those discussions on the doorstep, people will have them all the same – but in the pub, or at the school gate: where there is no opportunity to refute the myths and get the facts on the table. The Labour government has invested in this programme which will encourage people to act as community champions. This will help build up the confidence and self-esteem of residents so that they feel that they can regain control over their estates, their lives and their futures.

And finally, Connecting Communities is about raising awareness of the opportunities already available in the area. Connecting Communities is a £12 million pound investment – and that alone, of course, is not enough to solve some of the very real problems faced in these communities. But the huge resources being invested through the Real Help Now programme – a billion pounds through the Future Jobs Fund, £1.5 billion in housing, other investment in apprenticeships and anti-social behaviour – offers huge potential to make a big difference in these areas. But if that money is invisible to local people or if the way that money is spent causes resentment and is perceived as being unfair, that may do more harm than good. So Connecting Communities is helping to give people a say over the way this money is spent, making sure that it responds to local priorities.

The first wave of participants in Connecting Communities have now had several months to get their programmes and running. Speke, in Liverpool, has been responding to concerns that local people are not benefiting from new jobs. They have been working with young people and single parents to make sure they can benefit from the opportunities being created. Stanney, in Ellesmere Port, has set up its first ever community group through Connecting Communities, giving residents the chance to work with the council and other agencies in tackling local problems. And in New Parks, Leicester, the main problem identified has been a lack of engagement with young people. Through Connecting Communities, they are setting up a Youth Action Group to ensure that young people can air their views on local issues, and are specifically targeting young people who are not in education, employment or training to help them gain the skills and confidence for work through volunteering, gardening and first aid.

The over-riding principle of Connecting Communities is fairness – giving people a fair say, have a fair share of government investment, and receive a fair deal from government policy. Connecting Communities is about making sure that people know that government is on their side, wherever they live. No favours. No privileges. No special interest groups. Just fairness



Integration and cohesion

Paul Goodman, former Shadow Communities and Local Government Minister; Conservative party.

In this article, which was written prior to the 2010 general election, Goodman presents the journey of community cohesion in the UK so far and puts forward the Conservative perspective on the future of this agenda for UK communities.

I was drawn naturally and gradually into community cohesion - and the spectrum of issues joined to it, such as equalities, integration and extremism - because of the nature of my Wycombe constituency.

Since 2001, I've represented the largest number of Muslim constituents of any Conservative MP. If I write that I hope that this soon changes, that shouldn't be read in any way as an expression of dissatisfaction. Rather, I'm hoping and expecting, regardless of who forms the next government, that my party will represent a far more diverse range of seats in the post-election House of Commons.

Together, my Muslim and non-Muslim constituents and I have lived together through 9/11, the continuing bloody conflict in Afghanistan, the Iraq war, 7/7, the aircraft liquid explosives plot (in which five of my constituents were held, three charged and eventually sentenced, and two released), the deterioration of stability in Pakistan, and Israel's incursion last winter into Gaza.

So although I'm leaving the Commons at the next election – for reasons unconnected with any of the above – and thus won't be the Community Cohesion minister in the event of a Cameron government, it's fair to say that I've developed a real interest in many of the issues described earlier. This is presumably why David Cameron gave me cohesion responsibilities in his shadow team in the first place.

None the less, what I've written above is a warning as well as an explanation. It's easy to believe, given the pace of events since 9/11 or the Oldham riots, that community cohesion is a fancy term for relations with Islam. It isn't: there are cohesion issues that have nothing to do with Islam specifically or even religion and ethnicity generally. For example, a shortage of housing for young people in rural areas, which in turn leads to working villages becoming retirement havens, is a cohesion issue.

Similarly, there's a tendency to believe that integration and cohesion issues are the same. They aren't, though they certainly overlap. Cohesion is essentially local; integration basically national. So if different ethnically or religiously-based communities are found to be living "parallel lives" in a particular place (and unlike some I believe that people can to some degree be described by their membership of such communities), cohesion and integration solutions will differ, though they should certainly march in step.

Thus the allocation of council housing, for example, is a cohesion issue: local government and communities should be in the lead. But the teaching of British history in schools - again for example - is an integration issue: national government is responsible for ensuring that it happens. So cohesion challenges in South Dorset and Oldham, for example, will be very different. However, integration problems in those places will be less so.

At this point, I want to step back from these definitions and qualifications, because although they're important, it's obviously vital to see the wood for the trees. The big picture on cohesion and integration, I believe, looks roughly as follows. First, Britain is a less integrated and cohesive country than when Labour took office in 1997, despite some progress. Second, although not everything that ministers have done is bad, they've lacked in particular any coherent policy on integration. Third, the Conservative party has changed out of all recognition on race and ethnicity issues, and in office would deliver the integration drive that Britain badly needs - at ease both with our own one nation traditions and modern multi-ethnic Britain.

Let's look at these three aspects of the picture, starting with Labour's failures - a core one of which is having a policy of uncontrolled immigration. Controlled immigration is of course a good thing, bringing new skills, talents gifts and experiences to Britain. All in all, I prefer living in today's diverse, varied, multi-ethnic Britain to the day before yesterday's more monochrome one.

Uncontrolled immigration, however, is a bad thing. It places pressures on public services - schools, hospitals, housing, road and rail - that may be unsustainable. And although it doesn't invariably cause ethnic tensions, it can spur legitimate concerns about the pace of change. We now know that Labour deliberately allowed uncontrolled immigration in order to speed up social transformation. This deliberately risked such change being unmanageable - and was utterly irresponsible.

Not every present-day negative indicator is a consequence of Labour waving aside responsible border control. But there are often connections, as there are, admittedly, to wider social, technological and cultural change. One in seven primary school pupils speak English as a second language. DCLG surveys find worryingly large proportions of people claiming that racial or religious harassment is a problem in their area. The Commission for Racial Equality's final report warned of growing segregation. These concerns were echoed by the CLG Select Committee, which warned that the pressure on resources as a result of immigration "increases the risk of community tensions escalating".

Against this background, ethnic differences in enjoying life chances are bound to be a source of grievance: by and large, children from Chinese, Indian and white backgrounds are doing better at school or college or in the labour market than those from Pakistani, Bangladeshi, African-Caribbean or mixed race backgrounds. Anxieties about religion, too, can be acute. The threat of violent extremism from Al Qaeda remains. It's made a major contribution to a wider climate of unease about religion in the public square, exhibited in tensions over faith schools, calls for the disestablishment of the Church of England and controversies over what, say, a Christian adult can wear at work or a Sikh pupil at school.

Questions about free speech - which have surfaced from the Rushdie Affair to the Behzti controversy - haven't gone away. Neither have differences over the right approach to equalities, shown most acutely in clashes between what could be labelled the gay and faith lobbies - over Section 28, gay adoption, and civil partnerships. Nor are events in Afghanistan or Iraq the only ones abroad to have an impact at home. Israel's incursion into Gaza was followed by an spike of attacks on synagogues and Jews. These are complimented by a sometimes Islamophobic media climate, assaults on mosques and Muslims, and openly anti-Islamic campaigning by the BNP.

As I wrote earlier, cohesion is essentially local, integration basically national. It follows that the cohesion response to these challenges, usually led by local authorities, has been variable: good in places, not so good in others, often bedevilled by confused and contradictory signals from central government. Local authorities have run shared futures campaigns, funded interfaith networks, published citizenship guides. I've seen at first hand some of the enterprising and innovative work that Conservative and other councils have done – in Westminster, Bradford, Barnet, Hounslow, by our own local authority in Wycombe, and elsewhere.



It also follows that if cohesion is local and integration national, then central government must be primarily responsible for drawing up and driving through an integration strategy – controlling borders, funding ESOL, curbing unnecessary translation, ensuring that the narrative sweep of British history is taught in schools, tackling unacceptable cultural practices, taking a lead in promoting national citizenship service and – slightly at one remove – running the Prevent arm of Contest effectively.

This isn't the place for an essay on Prevent. Suffice it to say that the programme – hindered rather than helped by the identity cards and 42 days debacles - has not yet been proved to work, and requires independent review. More widely, it can surely be agreed that, given the scale of the challenges that I've tried to describe, the need for such an integration strategy is immediate. The kindest observation I can make is that under Labour it's almost entirely absent. I've already written about a lack of border control. Elsewhere, ESOL funding has been cut, fewer than one in three children now take history at GCSE, translation costs hit 100 million in 2006, the Government's forced marriage unit handles only 400 cases a year, and there remains no national citizenship programme framework. This lack of focus is the more extraordinary given Gordon Brown's brooding over Britishness during his pre-Prime Ministerial period. Flying a few Union flags over Whitehall isn't an integration policy.

Cameron's Conservatives are in a stronger position than their predecessors to lead the integration drive which Britain leads. This isn't simply because some of the arguments made by previous Conservative leaders about controlled immigration are now part of the consensus, or even because 'race' and immigration are no longer usually identifiable, given that much recent immigration into Britain has been white and some of those affected black and brown. More tellingly, the Party has changed, in terms of candidates, membership, attitudes and generational outlook. For example, the party that gave Britain its first Jewish and female Prime Ministers recently gave the country its first woman Muslim Shadow Cabinet member - my colleague Sayeeda Warsi.

This helps to explain why we will have the self-confidence to overhaul Prevent - independently reviewing the programme; targeting not simply violent acts but extremist ideology more broadly; giving local authorities more autonomy in their approved Prevent activities, searching out more private, voluntary and independent sector support for capacity-building, and concentrating resources on those at real risk. At a national level, we'll set out clear and consistent criteria in relation to which individuals and groups central government will meet, share platforms with, and fund: common values are indispensable in this respect. At a local level, councils will benefit in their cohesion activities from our localisation agenda, although we will strongly encourage local authorities to junk Labour's failed policy of state multiculturalism, and make funding on the basis of deprivation and need - rather than on the basis of ethnicity - the norm.

Above all, a Conservative government will put in place a proper integration strategy - redirecting resources from translation into additional English classes, ensuring that schools teach a proper narrative of British history, tackling unacceptable cultural practices such as forced marriage, classifying khat as an illegal drug and, of course, controlling immigration. We will also examine closely whether it's possible to include current programmes in a universal national citizen service for all school leavers - to help young people make the transition to adulthood with a sense of purpose, optimism and belonging, instilling the values of self-respect and social responsibility. Although I won't be a member of any Cameron government, I believe that our integration and cohesion approach is in good shape and hands.

Cllr Paul Scriven, Liberal Democrat Leader, Sheffield City Council

In this interview Cllr Paul Scriven, provides a more local perspective, from a Liberal Democrat point of view.

iCoCo: What do you see as the key cohesion issues facing Sheffield?

Paul Scriven (PS): I believe that Sheffield, on the whole, is a place in which people from different backgrounds live happily side by side. We compare extremely well with other major cities. That said, there are still some community cohesion issues of quite a different nature which we need to keep working on.

For example there is a level of unease in parts of our Asian community, which reflects international affairs much more than local concerns. This has forced some to question what their place is in British society, where and how they belong. This is an issue which we have to try and understand and deal with at a local level, even though the primary responsibility has been at the national level.

In addition, intergenerational tensions can be an issue and, in some cases, this does amount to young and older people living 'parallel lives'. Similarly, there are some economic divides which means we have to try and ensure that we enable affluent and poorer sections of the Sheffield community to share space and be able to mix together. This also reflects a wider concern with 'geography' in Sheffield, often reinforced by where people live.

Another potential issue for us is between permanent residents and temporary residents. This includes migrants who have come from other parts of the EU and students – in its own way this is a cohesion issue for us.

It perhaps all comes down to how people identify themselves with Sheffield - what makes us all 'Sheffielders'. How can we build an identity for our City which people can share across divides and how can we enable people to share space which brings them together.



Photograph by Andy Barker, courtesy of Sheffield City Council

iCoCo: Is there a distinctive Lib Dem approach to Cohesion?

PS: Yes, it is distinctive in a number of ways. We recognise that cohesion can pose a number of practical issues that have to be addressed alongside the potential cultural divides. The bottom line is that we want to ensure that there is equality of opportunity for all, which has to be addressed at a strategic level.

So this is also about leadership and that is why I took responsibility as Leader across the strands across all policy areas, rather than leaving it to one cabinet member. We do have to join up these strategic issues with cohesion, for example in terms of planning or education policy to create shared spaces.

For us, it is also much more of a bottom-up approach and this has meant breaking down the centralised agenda. We need to be able to really empower communities to run their own lives, be prepared to devolve decision making down to them and to be put in a position where they can make informed decisions.

iCoCo: Is the concept of a Big Society therefore something which you as a Liberal Democrat can embrace?

PS: In some ways it is, but I see the Big Society as something which is much more. We need to really be able to give people their voice, and to place real emphasis on creating a just and equal society. That means that at a state level there does need to be a level of intervention to support those aims. This depends upon a more personalised approach with much smarter interventions.



Photograph by Andy Barker, courtesy of Sheffield City Council

iCoCo: Are the ideas of integration and segregation relevant to you?

PS: I don't believe in indulging in social engineering, but I do think that we can develop smart policies which can help break down barriers and make it easier for people to integrate. We can use planning policy to create mixed tenures and to develop space in a way that it is then accessible by different groups. Similarly, we can help to improve other facilities to ensure that they are accessible to all. This is something we are trying to do in Sheffield by re-locating the market and changing the look and feel of it so that it can become a place where people do share and interact.

This is all about everyday life: it is about making it easier for people to come into contact with each other through everyday activities, rather than trying to establish a centralised plan to enforce contact in any way.

iCoCo: How far do you think these issues are about 'race'? Or are they about class?

PS: When I became Leader I was shocked that the whole policy was about ethnicity. Actually, I think other issues like intergenerational divides are just as important. Let me illustrate this with an example. I visited a couple of projects which happened to be in the same building. One was a mothers and toddlers group, who were concerned about the lack of role models and the lack of support; and the other project, which was literally on the other side of a wall in this same building, was an older persons group who felt that their skills were not being utilised and valued. The only thing I could say is 'why don't we take down this wall!' This has now been translated into a policy for all funding and we will now condition funding on each project being able to show how they will bridge divides and develop relationships with others who are different from themselves.

We need to constantly think about how we bring people together, for example we have older people providing a reading club in schools, but we do not yet have younger people going into to elder persons groups

iCoCo: What is your position on Prevent and extremism generally?

PS: We have taken a very strong position on this and right from the outset refused to have anything to do with Prevent – despite a lot of pressure from Government in the form it suggested. It is just not possible to separate groups and identify them with terrorism and you would actually undermine what you are trying to achieve. We have developed a Sheffield model which depends upon approaching this through a wider community cohesion strategy. This is about tackling any type of threat to cohesion and the far right are just as important to deal with in Sheffield. We would like to see the Prevent agenda reviewed.

iCoCo: What do you want Government to do to help Sheffield meet its aspiration?

PS: For me I think there are two issues. First of all the government need to recognise that tackling community cohesion is not a one size fits all approach. They must allow each area to work out its own unique response to what is needed to tackle the local issues.

Also when addressing cohesion issues the government shouldn't just talk about race and religious divides. It has to be much broader and wider than that so that other issues like intergenerational divides are tackled.

Councillor Paul Scriven was elected as Leader of Sheffield City Council in 2008. He has represented Broomhill ward in the city since 2000, and was elected as leader of the group of Liberal Democrat councillors in 2002.

Paul's career began in the NHS. He was selected as one of only three people in the Yorkshire area to be fast-tracked to senior NHS management. After two years training at York District Hospital and Warwick Business School, he went on to become one of the youngest hospital managers in the UK, running a specialist hospital in the West Midlands. Paul then spent a number of years managing different NHS hospitals, community and doctors' services.

Outside of his political life, Paul set up and owns a business in the tourism industry. He was named as one of the top business people in Yorkshire under 42 in his first year in business.

Paul is Chair of the Sheffield First Partnership, a Director of Creative Sheffield Limited. Paul also sits on the Sheffield City Region Forum.

Reconnecting the political class

Professor Ted Cante CBE, Executive Chair, Institute of Community Cohesion

In this provocative piece, Ted Cante argues that our political class have become disconnected from the electorate to the extent that they are living in the sort of 'parallel lives' that he found in the review of community cohesion following the northern riots in 2001. The question is now 'how to re-connect them?'

Probably the kindest criticism that most voters would direct at their elected representatives is that they 'are on a different planet'. And even our parliamentarians accept that they are largely confined to the 'Westminster bubble' and spend most of their days closeted with their own kind, surrounded by advisors, media commentators and lobbyists. Politicians know that they now have to re-earn the trust of the people by exhibiting new behaviours, but all the time that they continue to live 'parallel lives', they are in danger of slipping back into their own self-confirming universe.

The idea of 'parallel lives' emerged in very different circumstances: white and BME communities in a number of towns and cities had become more and more estranged from each other, not simply living in different areas, but also having separate educational, social, cultural, faith and employment patterns. The point had been reached where they had little or no understanding and a low regard of the other and where that 'otherness' had become feared and demonised. So, is it a bit farfetched to put politicians in the same position?

The separation has been growing for some considerable time. The days are long gone when politicians – both local and national – were part timers, holding a job down at the same time as representing the people. Former expenses systems were predicated upon loss of earnings, with the assumption that the transition to politician was partial and short term, maintaining an occupation which kept them grounded – and served as insurance against losing office. Gone too, are the days when employers gave time off for public duty. Politics became professionalised and politicians created an ethos in which it became 'too difficult for mere amateurs'. Now, most MPs are recruited from within: notwithstanding the unprecedented level of turnover of MPs in 2010, the easiest way of becoming an MP is through being a former MP. Failing this, the most direct route is by way of an advisor or policy 'wink', possibly even a media commentator; or, perhaps graduating via a career in local politics. Once a member of the class, it is likely that you will remain so, with more than 80% of MPs in 2005 on two or multiple terms, with many stretching back over decades. We should apparently be concerned about the lack of social class mobility, but not it appears, about the mobility in and out of the political class.

If a parallel existence does seem farfetched we only need to remind ourselves that politicians had become so detached from our reality that they convinced themselves it was acceptable to construct an expenses system that allowed them to have a regular £200 cash allowance with no questions asked, to claim for duck houses and moats, to flip between houses improved at the taxpayers' expense and to fill their homes with goods from John Lewis. This was not the result of some wild excesses by a few errant MPs, the whole House connived in the implementation of a new expenses system which was designed to boost their pay in a way which they thought would escape public scrutiny. They felt it necessary to deceive the public because 'they don't understand us', 'they don't know what we do, how hard we work, what we go through' etc., – all classic signs of self-delusion and disconnection.

The reason for the scam was not so much a loss of a moral compass, as some MPs claimed, but rather the complete loss of connection with the electorate. MPs had convinced themselves that they were worth a salary that would run in to the hundreds of thousands of pounds, goaded on by consultants who had persuaded them that their decision-making responsibilities were equivalent to the boards of the major corporates. The electorate served by MPs were never a point of reference and the fact that their salaries were already well above the national average and that the system of expenses and allowances was completely unknown outside the 'Westminster bubble' did not deter them.



But the contempt of the public of course goes a lot deeper. Gordon Brown's 'bigoted woman' gaffe showed something much more significant; the views of ordinary people are to be listened to politely, but not taken too seriously, because they are not part of the informed political class. Gordon Brown was unlucky; most other politicians were reluctant to jeer and took the view that 'there for the grace of God go I'.

Many MPs regard their constituents – and even their local party colleagues – in a similar manner and as an unfortunate hurdle which occasionally has to be negotiated and handled with well-honed political skills. The perception of 'otherness' of the electorate is sometimes even more breath taking, for example the way in which the then MP Nicholas Winterton described people in standard class on trains as "totally different type of people... they are in a different walk of life", through to Alan Clark describing his Plymouth local party colleagues as "boring, petty, malign, clumsily conspiratorial, and parochial to a degree that cannot be surpassed in any part of the United Kingdom".

There are of course exceptions and most MPs are very genuinely interested in working for the greater good of their constituency and the wider world. Indeed, the vast majority at least commence their political careers with such noble objectives, but they have little chance of maintaining a real understanding and empathy all the time that they live, work and breathe in a separate and rarefied existence. If community cohesion has taught us anything, it is that the isolation and insularity of any community or group is dangerous. In Putnam's concept of social capital, even if bonding social capital (support networks amongst their own kind) may be very high, bridging social capital (links to other groups) can be much more limited. MPs will of course argue that their surgeries provide the bridging to bring them down to ground. Whilst there may be something in this, surgeries can also reinforce the views of 'otherness' in each other, as they are based upon an unequal and dependency relationship, in which people trot off to see the 'special one' who may solve their problems. Most MPs look forward to surgeries with a sense of dread and this procession of people with problems pouring through the door – hardly likely to portray them as vibrant citizens taking responsibility for the democratic process.

The distinctive nature of MPs' lifestyle, like most models of division, has structural roots which need to be dealt with. And in dealing with these, we may find much greater success in tackling the poor representation of women and minorities. No amount of women-only short lists or other positive action programmes will break through a political class system which has such rigid boundaries, reinforced by a lifestyle based upon separateness and distinct social and cultural norms.

Tackling the divide

David Cameron has already begun to recognise the problem in a small way, by downscaling what he sees as the overly divisive security cordon around ministers. But just how do we make the political class more permeable and representative – how do we regard them as ‘people like us’?

First and foremost, we have to firmly dispense with the notion that politics is a job for life. We need strict limits on length of tenure, roles need to be regularly rotated, sabbaticals must be introduced and new forms of recompense should be developed to encourage contributions for different periods of time and levels. Recruitment from without, not within, must become the norm.

We should also abandon any reform of the House of Lords which simply reinforces the present system and take the opportunity to develop an entirely new approach – in the form of a people’s electoral college, which could help to deal with the representation deficit at the same time.

And rather than less MPs we need more, to enable greater flexibility and permeability (reducing the number by 10% sounds very attractive at the moment, but the constituencies are too large to develop a meaningful relationship with constituents; and with a growing population we need to avoid an even greater estrangement). But rather than more full time politicians for over-extended periods, we should introduce a right for any employee to have time off for public service, with the employer compensated by the state on a loss of service basis, up to a maximum level, as an alternative to a fully salaried system. The same should apply to carers, students, or others, with compensation for the loss of their services. The normal rule should be for a maximum of 80% of their time, with a minimum of 20% of time to keep them connected to their community and their career. However, more flexible arrangements up to 80% would also be permissible and encouraged to bring in a wider group of people. All of this would encourage future MPs to maintain their careers and other links with work and outside activities.

In those cases where MPs do not have an occupation or outside interest, employers could be asked to offer placements on an intern basis, perhaps to help develop their careers, or just to engage with new groups and interests. Where the intake of MPs has a limited representation, perhaps from industry, or where major reforms are being contemplated, for example in health care or the post office, short term employment could be arranged to help build their first hand knowledge.

Sabbaticals should, in any event, be compulsory. If limits on political tenure are instituted in many different countries for prime ministers and presidents – and where long term power has been seen to corrupt where they haven’t – why should we not be the first country to apply this to all political office? Perhaps creating a minimum period of 12 months out of power, as a sabbatical, over a period of 10 years in office would be reasonable?

Just about every profession now accepts and encourages a higher degree of working from home. In this connected world, why should this not also apply to political representatives? Instead of expecting them to attend debates and committees in person, the online possibilities should be explored, again with a view to maximising the time spent in constituencies, working with local people. The local constituency arrangements, however, also need to be radically overhauled. Again, MPs tend to be surrounded by their own team of helpers and paid staff, generally drawn from family and friends (Sir Ian Kennedy, head of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, has not entirely ended these cosy arrangements, but they will be able to hire no more than one “connected party”, including a spouse, child, parent or financial partner).

A local MP's constituency presence is generally in a back street set of rooms in a fairly remote part of most towns. Why are they not visible on the high streets? Each MP needs to be accessible and to be provided with independent and professional support to help with constituency matters, publish voting records and details of expenses. These new civil service teams could of course be supplemented by a separate set of party workers paid from party funds, but MPs would no longer depend upon an allowance system – these teams would be directly funded and would support MPs as they change and rotate.

MPs need to be drawn from the widest possible backgrounds and experiences, rather than perpetuating the self-selection process from amongst the political class. This means a limited recruitment from the very many political advisers and policy officers who have never experienced life outside the 'Westminster bubble', but presently figure highly in any new intake.

The incredulity with which the proposal to limit the use of second homes was greeted, so that those MPs with a constituency in a normal commuting distance of Westminster, does not bode well. But whilst this was introduced on the basis of reducing costs, it should also be seen as a means of increasing contact and 'normalising' lifestyles. For those MPs beyond the commuter belt, we need to ensure that they are less likely in future to get entirely sucked into the separate world of Westminster. This means more flexible working arrangements referred to above, and this means a much more fundamental change in working patterns.

Parliament simply needs to switch to a more normal working week. Like all other areas of work, there will of course be times when longer and unsocial hours are necessary, and some sort of degree of evening work. But the need for all-night sittings is grossly exaggerated and is simply a way of creating and maintaining a boarding school sanctified ethos and is exclusionary. If major corporations can manage to work on such a basis, so too can our politicians. This will of course enable more women and people from different backgrounds to take part. But it will do more than that. It will reconnect MPs with their communities, by ensuring that they can align their work and leisure time with others, be part of the ordinariness of daily life routines of commuting, preparing food, taking part in evening social activities – and taking part of the full range of 'banal' encounters with others.

Reconnecting the political elite

- More MPs not less, with rotation, maintaining career interests; part time work and sabbaticals
- Loss of earnings, rather than allowances, to maximise the connection with the world of work
- Time limit the period of work without a break
- Working from home, with flexible arrangements, to maintain more local connections
- Limit recruitment from policy advisors
- Allowance system related to actual and average earnings
- Civil servant support teams and offices in each constituency, rather than family and friends (party workers separate) to create more independence and visibility
- Electoral college for election or selection to second chamber, providing an entirely new basis of representation

The House of Lords – now for something very different

There are two other areas in which the opportunity to change both the structure and culture of the political class should be considered. One is electoral reform, which could present an opportunity to develop a new relationship between political parties and the electorate. But this in itself will not necessarily change the political culture. Indeed, MPs could relate still less to a particular place or constituency if simply part of a party list. The other opportunity is the reform of the House of Lords. At present, however, this debate is couched in very limited terms, essentially whether or not to make the Lords directly elected. Not surprisingly, the direct election proposal is gaining ground, at least amongst the political class, who naturally support what they know and they would dearly like to make Peers more like themselves. But this would simply reinforce their whole nature and culture of the political class, with the elections dominated by the same interests, based upon the same unrepresentative dimensions.

A more radical option is to develop an electoral college, dividing society into a series of interests, such as social class, age, faith, gender, geographical area, ethnicity and other characteristics – perhaps even a small percentage for our beleaguered aristocracy! Places could be filled by direct elections within the college, but the practicalities suggest that a commission-run system could provide a consensual selection, based upon soundings from a range of interests; from professions, trade unions, mothers' organisations, rural interests and many, many more. Again, online consultations could be arranged, with greater people participation. The choice of peers should rest more upon evidence of their good judgement, appreciation of constitutional and longer term considerations, as befits the House of Lords, rather than replicating the more narrow party interests in the Commons. Nevertheless, the appointment of peers might also be limited to a period of years to avoid them also becoming too embedded in the political class.

The House of Lords (renamed the House of Peers?) could become the most representative of all democratic institutions, with 50% women and every other demographic carefully crafted. The process of selection could itself help to galvanise interest and the ongoing work of peers could provide a very direct way of engaging interests in entirely new spheres. Again, peers could adopt new methods of working to bring them in line with the general population to ensure that, as a group, they do not have to de-camp to the 'Westminster bubble' and can stay engaged in their own communities of interest. Rather than replicate the Commons and reinforce the nature and culture of the political class it could help to improve their mobility and permeability.

Taken together with the other changes, we may begin to see politicians of all hues, much more engaged in their communities. As community cohesion has shown, meaningful interaction between people based upon difference does improve our sense of togetherness and commonality. This 'contact theory' demonstrates that even low level 'banal' encounters do actually change the way in which we see each other. We may begin to re-humanise MPs and they may even begin to see the electorate as 'people like them'!

We have rested on our laurels as the 'mother of parliaments' for too long, we now need a cultural change to re-connect our ailing political class.



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