

STRONG AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Agenda Item No. 7
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Report of the Executive Director of Operations

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COMMUNITY COHESION STRATEGY AND DELIVERY

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The Committee is asked to scrutinise the impact of the implementation of the Community Cohesion Strategy and make any recommendations.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Committee notes the progress on delivery of the Cohesion Strategy, and provides a steer for future delivery.

3. LINKS TO THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 3.1 Community cohesion features as programme five of the Single Delivery Plan – Empowering People and Creating Cohesive Communities. Within the community cohesion action plan (attached), there are three underlying themes, namely; tackling hate crime, empowering the community to deliver services and reducing community tensions. These themes link strongly to the priorities identified throughout the Single Delivery Plan.

E.g.

- Improving educational attainment and parental engagement through an innovation programme of ESOL delivery (linkage with Priority 1: creating jobs through growth and improved skills and education);
- Targeted work to reduce hate crime (linkage with priority 6: reducing crime);
- Supporting the work of the Disability Forum to give disabled people a voice in the city (linkage with Priority 3: safeguarding adults and children);
- Providing opportunities for community to discuss community hot topics in an open and safe environment (linkage with Priority 5: empowering people and creating cohesive communities)
- Providing one to one support and group sessions for deprived community members (Linkage with Priority 2: supporting the most vulnerable families and tackling the causes of poverty)

Community cohesion directly delivers against (what used to be) National Indicator 1 – People from different backgrounds getting on well together.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Community cohesion is a term that is easily misunderstood. Many confuse community cohesion as another word for diversity or equality. Whilst cohesion does encompass these principles, it is a much broader term that describes how the impact of a range of social issues can affect both individuals and the wider community. Cohesive communities are ones that have a shared sense of togetherness and enjoy positive relationships between people from different backgrounds. Put simply, it is about people getting on well together irrespective of differences in age, gender, background, culture of belief.

Peterborough is a largely tolerant and peaceful city, which enjoys positive community relationships. However, tensions can rise quickly in any community and if left unchecked, can result in crime, or as we saw in the national disorders last summer, large scale public disorder.

Through the Greater Peterborough Partnership, a Community Cohesion Board (made up from representatives from the public sector and voluntary/community organisations) works to manage and reduce community tensions. The Board is supported by a Police led Tension Monitoring Group, which closely monitors issues that may affect community relations.

5. KEY ISSUES

5.1 The 2011/12 action plan has identified three broad themes (outlined in paragraph 3) where targeted actions are required in order to improve community cohesion.

Fifteen projects have been identified and are delivering through a variety of community and statutory partners. Delivery is scrutinised by Projects Review Group which includes representation from the Cabinet, Voluntary and Community Sector and Peterborough City Council. Outcome of the Project Review Group scrutiny is reported to Cohesion Board meetings. All projects are on track and no projects are rated as red risk.

Key projects from the action plan are as follows:

- **Building better mutual understanding between communities through ESOL and family learning** – this is the flagship project from this year’s delivery plan. Parental involvement is critical to the success of a child’s educational attainment. The programme aims to improve parents’ English skills, leading to a greater involvement and support with their child’s education. The programme will also promote community cohesion and help provide learners with the skills they need to improve their employability prospects.
- **Strengthening voices of disabled community and their interface with all partners** – through partnership working with DIAL Peterborough, the Disability Forum provides disabled people a voice via monthly workshops to engage with service providers on key issues. The work of the Forum brings disabled people from all backgrounds together and improves quality of life for all particularly through music and sport. The gym (co-funded between the Forum and YMCA) is very popular and recently two members have gained Level 2 Sports Instructor qualifications.
- **Improving mutual understanding among community groups and enhance pride in Peterborough through cultural activities** – a number of community groups have been supported to develop celebratory events that can bring different communities together. Funded activities included:
 - a “Question Time” event for young people to debate current issues of concern
 - providing taster cricket sessions using professional coaches
 - capturing residents experiences of living in Peterborough through a radio production
 - a community painting of a mural along a 25m stretch of fence in Victoria Park
 - hosting a Big Lunch event with homeless people trained and supervised to provide the food.

6. IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The wider economic climate in the country, can be a driver for decreased social mobility; one of the key components of a cohesive society. Immigration is seen by some as a barrier to employment opportunities, which can further lead to increased tensions between communities.

With rising unemployment especially amongst young people and incidents such as the national disorder which took place in August 2011, coupled with the growth of right wing extreme groups, the challenges to national and local cohesion are significant. A tolerant and cohesive society is essential to the growth and prosperity of the city and UK.

In the last few years, Community Cohesion has been coordinated by a discrete team within the City Council. This has provided the necessary focus and attention that community issues required at that time. However, given the current financial constraints within the Authority, the time is now right to look at alternative methods of delivery.

As highlighted above, community cohesion touches upon almost all areas of PCC business. It is right therefore, that cohesion issues are more effectively embedded into mainstream delivery in a similar way to equality issues.

We will continue to work with a wide range of partners to reduce community tensions on an issue based approach.

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Consultation about the Next Steps will be held with the Community Cohesion Board and other partners April/May. The Objectives of the consultation will include reviewing progress, preparing future action plan as well as commissioning delivery.

8. NEXT STEPS

- 8.1 We are currently in the early stages of planning future cohesion priorities. Key areas identified for 2012/13 are:
- developing a detailed understanding of issues within the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community.
 - Promoting a greater engagement between schools, students and parents with a view to improve educational attainment and enhance mutual understandings.
 - Providing opportunities for communities to come together and celebrate national events in 2012 (including the Diamond Jubilee and London Olympic and Paralympic games).

We would welcome the Committee's view on the above and a steer for future areas of engagement within the community cohesion agenda.

9. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

- 9.1 Community Cohesion Strategy 2012
Community Cohesion Action Plan 2011-12

10. APPENDICES

- 10.1 Community Cohesion Strategy 2012
Community Cohesion Action Plan 2011-12

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