Community Cohesion within Hillingdon – First Major Review 2012/13

Contact Officer: Fiona Gibbs
Telephone: 01895 277035

REASON FOR ITEM

To enable the Committee to agree a scope for their review on aspects of Community Cohesion.

OPTIONS OPEN TO THE COMMITTEE

1. To consider the information provided on the presentation given by officers on Community Cohesion and request clarification if necessary.
2. To consider from the information received the scope of the review which the Committee wish to undertake
3. To ask officers to present a scoping report to the next meeting of the Committee.

INFORMATION

1) Purpose of this report

This Committee at its last meeting held on 13 June 2012 discussed possible topics for its major reviews for the forthcoming Municipal Year. One of the topics identified for a potential review was community cohesion.

The purpose of this report, therefore, is to provide guidance as to what community cohesion means within Hillingdon, to explore what is being done and what might be able to be done, to sustain and develop it, thereby supporting the POC in framing its review.

2) What is community cohesion?

Community cohesion is not a precise term and can be interpreted in many ways. Broadly speaking it is about a creating a sense of belonging, valuing diversity, tackling inequalities and promoting interaction to develop positive relationships within a community.

The Institute of Community Cohesion uses the definition:
"community cohesion is widely used to describe a state of harmony or tolerance between people from different backgrounds living within a community. Linked to the concept of social capital and the idea that if we know our neighbours and contribute to community activity then we are more likely to look out for each other, increase cohesion and minimise cost of dependency on institutional care"

(Institute of Community Cohesion).

In addition community cohesion is about relationships within communities, and about addressing differences between people, that may sometimes cause division, misunderstanding or tensions that, in turn, affect the way that communities interact with one another and see themselves. This is not exclusive to ethnic or faith groups but can also include, for example, the perceptions of young people and anti-social behaviour or socio-economic differences and how they can influence social interactions and involvement in community life.

Therefore, some of the challenges (or risk factors) to community cohesion include:

- Rapidly changing demographics and diversity within localities.
- The perception of the fairness of allocation of resources and provision of services to meet the needs of the whole community.
- Socio-economic pressures on individuals, families and localities
- Inequality of opportunity for individuals to achieve in education and employment.
- Perceptions of crime and anti social behaviour within communities
- The influence of extremist groups within communities that can promote tensions and influence individual's perceptions of fairness and inequalities in communities.

Conversely, positive factors can build and strengthen community cohesion:

- Knowing and understanding who makes up our community and what their needs and concerns are.
- Positive engagement through social, sport and cultural activities
- Ensuring local people have a voice and a say in how services are delivered.
- Ensuring fair access to services.
- Open and transparent decision-making.
- Designing services that enable individuals to take responsibility for their own well-being.

3) Policy context
The Government has recently published its integration strategy: *"Creating the conditions for integration"*

This strategy outlines the Government's aim in promoting an integrated society, where everyone can play a full part in local and national life. Where people from different backgrounds treat each other with respect and contribute together. *: "integration is achieved when neighbourhoods, families and individuals come together on issues which matter to them"*

The strategy has outlined the key factors for integration as:

Common Ground : a clear sense of shared aspirations and values which focus on what we have in common rather than our difference.

Responsibility: a strong sense of our mutual commitments and obligations, which bring personal and social responsibility

Social mobility: people able to realise their potential to get on in life

Participation and empowerment: people of all backgrounds have the opportunities to take part, be heard and take decisions in local and national life

Tackling intolerance and extremism: a robust response to threats, whether discrimination, extremism or disorder that deepen division and increase tensions.

The Government highlight the link between community cohesion and integration, but issues relating to inequality and individuals experience are also important in enabling positive interaction and relationships in communities.

Hillingdon context
Hillingdon has become more diverse with many areas seeing the proportion of white and ethnic minority communities more evenly spread. At the same time the borough is experiencing increases in the number of young people and a growing older population.

The 2011 Census will provide a more detailed breakdown of our population.

The impact of the economic downturn inevitably places a strain on families and communities as resources are reduced and opportunities for employment and prosperity reduce. Threats from extremism and terrorism are still real and can cause conflict, tensions, prejudice and misunderstanding within communities.

Our approach, therefore, has been to understand what our community cohesion challenges are in Hillingdon and where in the borough, risks to community cohesion are greatest.

Equally important is to recognise where the positive contributions to community cohesion are taking place and promote greater opportunities for building on those positives and underpin the resilience within communities. Improving our knowledge of what works and what helps will reduce the risk.

Such as:
- Strong local leadership (political, community etc)
- Strong communication activity/strategy to engage with local communities
- Visible local initiatives
- Developing a local sense of civic pride
- Uniting local people on issues affecting the borough
- Strong partnership approach to local solutions
- Capacity building and sustainable approach to community engagement and community development which is inclusive and embraces the diversity of the borough

An earlier (2007) External Services Scrutiny Committee review of community cohesion made a number of recommendations including the importance of the council in taking a leadership role in promoting community cohesion in the borough with the involvement of local partners. Community cohesion has remained an annual agenda item for the committee since then.

In April 2009, the Strong and Active Communities Partnership was established as a theme group of the Local Strategic partnership –Hillingdon Partners, responsible for delivering upon the key priorities around strong and active communities, setting out a vision for Hillingdon to be:
"A borough where communities are strong and cohesive and local people have a real opportunity to take an active part in local life, leisure and culture."
This was also linked to the then LAA.

The partnership has established strong working relationships between the Council and its partners in responding to local community cohesion issues and developing pro-active and positive models of community development activities and engagement.

The lead for facilitating the work of the partnership sits within the Partnerships Team in Central Services and the work very much relies upon the relationships established with local communities, voluntary sector and other statutory partners as well as other departments within the council to deliver this agenda.

The Strong and Active Partnership's priority areas of work include:

i) Targeted local area partnership working
Themes:
- Participatory approaches to partnership working including identifying synergies with other theme group priorities e.g. reducing health inequalities and promoting health equalities, tackling crime and anti-social behaviour, improving outcomes for young people and economic development

- Bringing local agencies and organisations together to work in partnership for benefit of the local community
- Working with faith communities through Hillingdon Inter Faith network to build relationships and promote understanding
- Work with schools to promote involvement of young people and families

Targeted areas include: Yeading, Hayes, West Drayton, Yiewsley and Heathrow Villages. The priority areas were identified through a "community cohesion customer segmentation project" which took into account the demographic data of an area with shared partnership intelligence and included information on a variety of factors including anti-social behaviour, racist incidents, diverse communities, rapid change in communities, sports, leisure and community facilities, local knowledge and intelligence.

ii) To promote and increase residents involvement in leisure and cultural activities across the borough.
Themes:
Sports & Leisure : e.g Olympics
Culture & Arts : e.g Jubilee Celebrations, Hayes Carnival, Arts Week
Learning & Development : e.g Adult Learning, ESOL provision

iii) Monitoring of community tensions and local issues, working with partners to respond accordingly and appropriately and inform future priorities
Themes:
Preventing violent extremism
Monitoring Tensions : this work is required by the Home Office and CLG. The council and police share data and information and work together on tensions that impact on cohesion.

Examples of work in Hillingdon

Some examples of the positive work that is being undertaken in Hillingdon include:
- Hillingdon Improvement Programme workstreams in relation to Civic Pride and the borough's Heritage
- Supporting local groups:
  - Voluntary sector support including core grants
  - Support for the Hillingdon Inter Faith Network.
  - Women in the Community Network
- Local Community Engagement including through Health Promotion
- Community engagement, Pride of Place and Town centres programmes
- Work with schools and the development of the Schools Community Cohesion Partnership.
- Libraries – community engagement activities

- Sport and Leisure programmes
- Adult Education – community adult learning and ESOL provisions
- Customer Engagement activities

Conclusion

Achieving community cohesion is dependent upon a complex set of factors that impact upon individuals and community interactions. These factors include: establishing a sense of belonging, pride and aspiration, and identity with their local area and promoting a sense of fair treatment and equality of opportunity to achieve, in education and employment and wellbeing in life. Therefore, achieving community cohesion outcomes relies upon a joined up and co-ordinated approach across all aspects of the council's services as well as with other local partners and local communities.

Hillingdon's approach reflects that complexity and draws together council services, other local statutory partners, voluntary sector and local communities with a shared set of actions based upon a core focus around promoting engagement, education, empowerment and active involvement.

Possible areas for the Committee to look at as part of their review

The Committee may wish to consider:

- Exploring how services are working in order to mitigate community cohesion risk factors and build upon the positives that underpin resilience in communities e.g ensuring local services meet local needs, understanding equality impacts etc
- Reviewing evidence that supports current activities
- Hearing from local organisations and community leaders and other Partners as to their perceptions and views.
- How, in times of austerity, can the Council best direct its effort to maximise impact in terms of community cohesion.

The Committee may wish to consider inviting as witnesses:
- Carole Jones, Chair of the Strong and Active Communities Partnership and local Head Teacher with relevance to the wider partnership work and also work with schools and families.
- Duncan Struthers as the Chair of Hillingdon Inter Faith Network with regards how we are working with and improving relations between local faith communities.
- The Council's Stronger Communities Officer, who leads in this area of work.
- Representatives from community services e.g libraries, adult education, leisure, health promotion, arts and culture etc.