

REQUEST FROM COUNCIL: *PROMOTING STRONGER COMMUNITIES AND EQUALITY IN HILLINGDON - OUR APPROACH*

Cabinet Member(s)	Councillor Douglas Mills
Cabinet Portfolio(s)	Community, Commerce and Regeneration
Officer Contact(s)	Fiona Gibbs, Chief Executive's Office Vicky Trott, Chief Executive's Office
Papers with report	None

HEADLINES

Summary	As part of a regular policy review of stronger communities and equality, this report outlines how the Council is delivering against the relevant legal and policy framework and presents a revised policy statement. This follows a motion by full Council in 2019.
Putting our Residents First	This report supports the following Council objectives of: <i>Our People; Our Heritage and Civic Pride</i>
Financial Cost	There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.
Relevant Policy Overview Committee	Corporate Services, Commerce & Communities Policy Overview Committee
Relevant Ward(s)	All

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Cabinet:

1. Notes the legal, national and local context to stronger communities and equality in Hillingdon;
2. Notes the good work and approach taken across the Borough, to support stronger communities and equality in Hillingdon and;
3. Adopts the revised policy statement for stronger communities and equality for the London Borough of Hillingdon as presented in section 4.

Reasons for recommendation

The approach provides Cabinet with assurance that the Council is delivering against the relevant legislation and duties for cohesion, preventing violent extremism, equality and harassment.

Alternative options considered / risk management

That no update is provided to the Cabinet. This would not assure Cabinet that the legal and statutory duties around equality and cohesion are being met.

Policy Overview Committee comments

The Chairman of the Corporate Services, Commerce & Communities Policy Overview Committee has requested annual updates on work related to promoting community cohesion and building stronger communities. The most recent update was presented to the Committee in November 2019 and included consideration of what the Council does to reach out to all communities and how Council and community events are promoted. The Committee noted the approach to cohesion as outlined in the report.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

A motion was brought to full Council on the 4 July 2019 *'That this Council expresses alarm at the rise in Islamophobia in recent years across the UK. This includes incidents where Muslim men and women have been physically assaulted, Mosques have been set on fire and Muslim figures have faced disproportionate online abuse.'*

Council notes the robust equalities policies that Hillingdon has in place to ensure fair and equitable treatment for all of our residents.

Council asks Cabinet to consider the recommendations of the APPG on British Muslims and Islamophobia as part of its regular reviewing and updating of these policies.'

As part of a regular policy review, this report outlines the current approach to stronger communities and equality in Hillingdon and provides Cabinet with assurance that the Council is delivering against the relevant legislation and duties for cohesion, preventing violent extremism, equality and harassment.

Officers have reviewed the legislative and statutory duties to ensure our policies are up to date. As part of this review, we have now brought together cohesion, preventing violent extremism, equality and harassment to ensure that we are taking a holistic and joined up approach across the organisation.

The report is set out in 4 sections: the national and local context to all aspects of stronger communities; our approach to community cohesion, preventing violent extremism, equality and harassment; governance arrangements; and a revised policy statement.

1. Context

The following sections outline the national and local context to all aspects of stronger communities.

1.1 National context

1.1.1 Cohesion and integration

Promoting integrated communities, countering hate crime and preventing violent extremism are key objectives of the Government.

In March 2018, the Government published the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper. The Green Paper set out the Government's vision for building integrated communities where people – whatever their background – live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities.

It is the Government's commitment to building a fairer society, where everyone can progress and a reflection of their belief that there is strength in diversity. No community should feel excluded, and everyone should understand and embrace the benefits and opportunities of a diverse society.

The Integrated Communities Action Plan aims to drive forward work across Government to create socially and economically stronger, more confident and integrated communities. It complements the wider work that Government is taking to address barriers that can limit opportunity and undermine integration.

The plan complements the Civil Society Strategy that sets out Government's vision for how Government will work with and support civil society to create thriving communities and realise social value, enriched lives and a fairer society for all.

1.1.2 Commission for Countering Extremism

The recent reported rise in hate crime, including islamophobic, antisemitic and homophobic; and the increased activity of extremist groups, whose aim is to incite hatred and promote division and fear, has become a priority for the Government to address.

The Commission for Countering Extremism has outlined a vision where: "together we uphold our democratic way of life in a peaceful, plural and inclusive society that opposes intolerance; where people exercise individual liberty and take personal responsibility for promoting equal citizenship, recognising the harm extremist behaviours cause to everyone; and where our communities and institutions robustly challenge and resist extremism and support those affected by it."

1.1.3 Hate Crime

A hate incident is generally seen as any incident which the victim, or anyone else, thinks is based on someone's prejudice towards them due to their race, religion, sexual orientation, disability or because they are transgender.

Not all hate incidents will amount to criminal offences, but those that do become hate crimes. The Association of Chief Police Officers and the CPS have agreed a common definition of hate crime: *"Any criminal offence which is perceived by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice based on a person's race or perceived race; religion or perceived religion; sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation; disability or perceived disability and any crime motivated by hostility or prejudice against a person who is transgender or perceived to be transgender."*

Hate crime undermines the vision of an integrated community, spreading fear and stopping people from playing a full part in their communities.

The Government is determined to tackle hate crime given its impact on victims, their families, communities and wider society.

The Hate Crime Action Plan, published in 2016, set out a comprehensive four year programme, which focused on five themes:

- preventing hate crime by challenging beliefs and attitudes;
- responding to hate crime within our communities;
- increasing the reporting of hate crime;
- improving support for victims of hate crime;
- and building our understanding of hate crime.

Nationally there has been an increase in reporting, reflecting improved identification of hate crime by the police, willingness of victims to come forward and an overall improvement in how police now record crime.

However, this increase in reporting, is also thought to reflect a genuine rise in hate crime around specific events such as the Westminster Bridge terrorist attack. There continues to be a gap between the occurrence of, and reporting of, hate crime. Almost half of the hate crimes identified in the Crime Survey for England and Wales were race related.

Higher rates of victimisation were also found among people who were younger (particularly men) and non-white. Third parties have identified differences in the gender of victims reporting to them. One identified a greater proportion of anti-Muslim reports with female victims, and another found more antisemitic reports relating to men. There is a range of perpetrator motivations for hate crime, which need to be addressed; as well as evidence on the importance of locations (physical and online) and the impact of hate crime spreading far beyond the immediate victim.

On 27th November 2018, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims published a report titled *Islamophobia Defined: the inquiry into a working definition of Islamophobia*. It contained the following definition: "Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness."

This definition has not been adopted by Government and it is the view of officers to wait and see whether it is adopted more widely before adopting it locally. It is recognised, however, that Islamophobia is a national concern and something that the Council will address locally as part of its wider cohesion and equalities work, as well as all other forms of hate crime and extremism.

1.1.4 Counter Terrorism and Preventing Violent Extremism

The threat from terrorism, globally and in the UK, remains significant.

The UK is facing a number of different and enduring terrorist threats. The increased threat has mainly been caused by the rise of Daesh and the creation of its cult-like “Caliphate”, combined with the persistent threat from Al Qa’ida.

The white supremacist ideology of extreme right-wing groups has also provided both the inspiration and justification for people who have committed extreme right-wing terrorist acts. The Government’s response to counter-terrorism is built on an approach that unites the public and private sectors, communities, citizens and overseas partners around the single purpose to leave no safe space for terrorists to recruit or act. The CONTEST strategy, aims to reduce the risk to the UK and its citizens and interests overseas from terrorism, so that our people can go about their lives freely and with confidence.

1.2 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 impact of government policies and wider politico/socio/economic factors, experienced at a local level, can place a strain on families and communities, as resources become stretched and the access to support and services may become limited or are perceived to be unfairly allocated. Threats from extremism and terrorism have increased and can cause conflict, tensions, prejudice and misunderstanding within communities.

Hillingdon’s approach has been and remains, not only to understand what our community cohesion challenges are, and where in the Borough risks to community cohesion are greatest; but that it is also equally important to recognise where the positive contributions to community cohesion are taking place. With this understanding, we can work together to promote greater opportunities for building on those positives and underpin the resilience within communities.

Improving our knowledge of what works and what helps can 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

2. Approach

The following sections outline the Council's approach to community cohesion, preventing violent extremism, equality, diversity and inclusion, and harassment.

2.1 Community cohesion

Community cohesion is not a precise term and can be interpreted in many ways. Broadly speaking it is about 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”.

Achieving community cohesion is dependent upon a complex set of factors, which can affect how individuals and communities interact with one another. These factors include:

- Establishing a sense of belonging and pride of place
- Developing aspiration and sense of ability to achieve
- Promoting a sense of fair treatment and equality of opportunity: in work, in education and quality of life

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.

Hillingdon's approach reflects this complexity and draws together Council services, other local statutory partners, voluntary sector and local communities to promote engagement, education, empowerment and active involvement that is based upon shared knowledge of our local communities, shared priorities and shared solutions.

The Stronger Communities Partnership (SCP), under the auspices of the Local Strategic Partnership, acts as the vehicle for delivering these objectives. The SCP brings together the Council and its partners with the aim of promoting a strong and resilient community in Hillingdon, and to counter extremism and bring communities together to promote cohesion and integration.

In order to do this, the partnership has identified key areas of focus which include: Working with faith communities, women, children and young people; and tackling hate and extremism.

2.2 Prevent Duty

CONTEST is the Government's counter terrorism strategy. Its aim is to reduce the risk to the UK and its interests overseas from terrorism.

PREVENT is a key part of the CONTEST strategy. Its aim is to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. Early intervention is at the heart of "Prevent" in diverting people away from being drawn into terrorist activity. "Prevent" happens before any criminal activity takes place. It is about recognising, supporting and protecting people who might be susceptible to radicalisation.

As part of the Governments refresh of CONTEST, published in June 2018, the Prevent Strategy objectives are to:

- Tackle the causes of radicalisation and respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism,
- Safeguard and support those most at risk of radicalisation through early intervention, identifying them and offering support,
- Enable those who have already engaged in terrorism to disengage and rehabilitate.

2.2.1 Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015

Section 26 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (the Act) places a duty on certain bodies ("specified authorities" listed in Schedule 6 to the Act), in the exercise of their functions, to have "due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism" (Prevent Duty Guidance for England and Wales 2015).

2.2.2 Role of the Local Authority and Partnership working

The Local Authority has a role in providing leadership within their area.

To establish a local plan based upon agreed risk and co-ordinate Prevent activity that is proportionate and informed through partnership working with multi agency and community involvement.

Hillingdon Council is committed to ensuring that vulnerable individuals are safeguarded from being radicalised into violent extremism and supporting or becoming terrorists themselves as part of the Home office Counter Terrorism strategy (CONTEST). Working with partners, we aim to tackle hate and extremism in all its forms and build a stronger, more resilient and cohesive borough.

The duty expects authorities and partners to ensure that the following are in place:

2.2.3 Safeguarding procedures and referral pathways

The “Channel” process is established in Hillingdon, which consists of a referral process and multi-agency input in order to respond to identified risk and need, and in providing appropriate support for vulnerable individuals.

2.2.4 Training for staff

A programme of Training for staff and other stakeholders in relation to Prevent is available and is vital in ensuring that agencies are meeting their expectations in relation to safeguarding under the duty.

2.2.5 Risk assessment

Working with local partners in order to understand the picture in relation to radicalisation and the potential risks or concerns that might impact the community, informs our local plan and is vital to ensure that we can respond effectively and proportionately.

2.2.6 Partnership working

There is a local Prevent Partnership group that has been in place since 2008 and works together to develop and implement an annual and local Prevent plan for Hillingdon.

As part of governance and oversight, the Local Strategic Partnership and the Safer Hillingdon Partnership regularly review actions/ performance in delivering the Prevent duty and other work undertaken to tackle hate and extremism.

2.2.7 Building resilience

Through the Stronger Communities Partnership, a broader approach has been established to promote community involvement, integration and inclusion, that underpins the building of stronger and more resilient communities.

Working with schools, further and higher education, adult learning and community groups we aim to enable and engage local people in dialogue around tackling hate and extremism and build resilience to those whose aim is to promote hate, divide our communities and radicalise vulnerable individuals.

2.3 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

2.3.1 Legal context

The context for the Council's approach to equality is provided by the Equality Act 2010 which legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and wider society.

It replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act, making the law easier to understand and strengthening protection in some situations. It sets out the different ways in which it's unlawful to treat someone.

The protected characteristics under the Act are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

2.3.2 Equality in service delivery

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) establishes both a general and specific duties for public bodies such as the Council. In summary, those subject to the equality duty must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act,
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not,
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

In order to demonstrate this due regard, officers consider equalities as part of key decision making processes and where appropriate, will complete an Equality Impact Assessment which is shared with decision makers so they can make informed decisions.

Managers are provided with advice and support on how to complete these assessments as well as more wider training on the subject.

In line with the specific duties of the PSED, evidence of how the Council is meeting the duty is published annually, examples of which recently include:

- The Hillingdon Dementia Resource Centre which is supporting residents with dementia and their carers.
- The Shared Lives Scheme which provides accommodation, care and support to vulnerable adults in a safe and appropriate manner within a family setting.
- The Welfare Reform and Tenancy Support Team that provides timely and effective case work interventions which prevent high cost crisis intervention, homelessness and recurring homelessness by sustaining tenancies at risk due to underlying social and medical vulnerabilities.
- A Dad's Stay and Play group where new dads are able to provide support to each other with ideas like how to manage family time, and share their own experiences, whilst also having quality time to try new play experiences with their children.

2.3.3 Equality in employment

The Council's statement of equality in employment outlines that as an employer, we will:

- Provide equality, fairness and respect for all staff regardless of employment status.
- Create a working environment free of bullying, harassment and victimisation.
- Recruit the most suitable person for the job through a fair selection process.
- Not unlawfully discriminate on the grounds of a protected characteristic as outlined in the Equality Act 2010 in areas including:
 - pay and benefits

- terms and conditions of employment
 - dealing with grievances and disciplinary
 - dismissal
 - redundancy
 - leave for parents
 - requests for flexible working
 - promotion, training or other developmental opportunities
- Collect and monitor employee and applicant equality data and publish an annual report in line with our statutory responsibilities.
 - Be a Disability Confident Leader. Make reasonable adjustments and remove barriers that may prevent people with disabilities from applying for a job or remaining in work.
 - Be a member of the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme to support and encourage defence and the armed forces community into the workplace.

Examples of how the Council are delivering equality in employment include:

- Equality training and awareness for staff and managers where the principles of the legislation and our public duty are explained.
- An all-age apprenticeship programme, where apprentices help deliver our vision of 'putting our residents first' while gaining essential vocational skills and qualifications
- Work experience and placements for adults with disabilities
- An inclusive recruitment process that makes reasonable adjustments where required
- A programme of Mental Health First Aid training so that staff can better support residents and colleagues
- The Hillingdon Academy that develops officers who have leadership and management aspirations, including those who are not in management presently.
- An ethnicity pay gap analysis, ahead of any legal requirements, as another way of demonstrating our commitment to the principle of equal pay and transparency and to inform our Workforce Strategy.

2.4 Harassment

Every person regardless of their background has the right to live in the London Borough of Hillingdon without fear of harassment. Incidents of harassment and discrimination often have a long lasting effect and can create a climate of fear and intimidation. The Council is committed to doing everything possible to tackle the causes of harassment and discrimination and providing support to communities throughout the Borough.

The Council will proactively encourage people to report incidents of harassment, use its powers to tackle such abuse and provide advice and support to people and communities. It is the responsibility of all officers to be aware of the Council's approach to dealing with and eliminating harassment, either in the workplace or in the community. The Council's Harassment Policy Statement sets out a common understanding of harassment and how incidents, reported by residents, service users and visitors to the Borough, should be dealt with.

3. Governance

The Chief Executive and Corporate Management Team are provided with regular updates on emerging cohesion, prevent and equality issues, as well as how the Council is complying with its statutory duties including details of training provided to managers and staff.

On equality, advice and support is provided to managers from both an employment and service delivery perspective which includes the completion of equality impact assessments.

Cohesion, prevent and equality all feature on the Corporate Risk Register with actions in place to mitigate against those risks.

Top level governance is provided via Cllr D. Mills, the Cabinet Member lead for Equality and the Local Strategic Partnership and its sub groups; the Stronger Communities and Safer Hillingdon Partnerships.

Overview & Scrutiny is provided on cohesion and prevent via the Corporate Services, Commerce & Communities Policy Overview Committee.

4. Revised policy statement

As part of this review, it is therefore proposed that the Cabinet approves a new policy statement, “Promoting stronger communities and equality in Hillingdon”, which brings together our commitment to equality, cohesion and stronger communities in one place for the first time.

Promoting stronger communities and equality in Hillingdon

Hillingdon Council is committed to promoting equality of opportunity, celebrating and valuing diversity, eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and promoting good relations.

Our policies and procedures are intended to ensure fairness and inclusion for all and reinforce our commitment to delivering accessible and relevant services, and equality in employment.

The Council, along with its partners, aims to create a strong and resilient community in Hillingdon, to counter extremism and hate in all its forms and bring communities together to promote cohesion and integration.

We also want to build a strong sense of belonging and pride where all people feel valued and included, whether living, working within, or visiting the Borough.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report.

RESIDENT BENEFIT & CONSULTATION

The recommendations in this report support the Council's vision of 'Putting our residents first' by delivering fair, accessible and relevant services, and equality in employment.

The Council, along with its partners, aims to promote a strong and resilient community in Hillingdon, to counter extremism and hate in all its forms and bring communities together to promote cohesion and integration.

Consultation carried out or required

No consultation was required in preparing this report.

CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance has reviewed this report and concurs that there are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations contained within.

Legal

The Borough Solicitor confirms that the legal implications are included in the body of the report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL