



About Community Cohesion

Delegate Information
3 November 2010

*Are people a part of the
community or apart from the
community?*

Stolen with pride



Background to community cohesion

Community cohesion is not new, in the “Our shared future” report of 2007, we are reminded that British society has for centuries experienced social change and welcomed migrants who have strengthened our economy:

'but since the end of the second world war we have seen the kind of social change that can prompt significant challenges to our models of fairness and equality'.

In the 1930's Oswald Mosley and the British Union of Fascists attempted to march on the streets of a predominately Jewish area in East London called Cable Street. They were stopped from doing so by both Jewish and non-Jewish residents preventing them access. It is an early example of a community bonding together to address a common threat, in this case the far right.

In 2010 the issues are very similar. The activities of groups such as the EDL (English Defence League) and the BNP hold the same resonance today, dividing communities, as Mosley's activities attempted in the 30's.

Following the Oldham, Burnley and Bradford riots in May 2001, central and local government departments were forced to reconsider their

policy approach to social and economic issues such as race, faith, and community. Later that year Ted Cante outlined the current state of the nation in his report *Community Cohesion - A Report of the Independent Review Team* (2001:40). Cante suggested that some individuals were living “parallel lives”; his research identified that, for many different reasons some had not assimilated themselves into mainstream British society and culture. This was the first time that the term had been used in social policy, and the report went on to make 67 recommendations for improvements in addressing inequalities and promoting diversity.

To achieve community cohesion it is necessary to consider a broad range of issues including access to education, employment, poverty, social inequalities, social and cultural diversity, and even access to communication and information technologies.

Cohesive communities can be viewed as having three main characteristics:

- Individual commitments to common norms and values
- Interdependence arising from shared interests
- Individual identification with the group



Definitions of community cohesion

At present there are three definitions of community cohesion. They come from the Local Government Association (2002), the Commission on Integration & Cohesion (CIC, 2007) and Communities & Local Government (2008). They all take the lead from the Cattle report (2001) and have a strong bias towards people from different backgrounds getting on well together.

In 2007, the CIC was asked to develop practical approaches to building a community's own capacity to prevent and manage tensions. The resulting definition of community cohesion (see panel opposite) recognises that cohesion is principally the process that must happen to ensure that different groups get on well together and that there must be some individual responsibility.

In Herefordshire we believe strongly in individual responsibility, but that the cohesion agenda has a “whole community” focus - however a community is defined. Our chosen definition is taken from the LGA 2002:

“A cohesive community is a community that is in a state of ‘wellbeing, harmony and stability’. Local authorities have an important role in facilitating community cohesion by listening to communities, engaging residents and assisting interaction between communities.”

An integrated and cohesive community is one where:

- There is a clearly defined and widely shared sense of the contribution of different individuals and different communities to a future vision for a neighbourhood, city, region or country
- There is a strong sense of an individual's rights and responsibilities when living in a particular place – people know what everyone expects of them, and what they can expect in turn
- Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities, access to services and treatment
- There is a strong sense of trust in institutions locally to act fairly in arbitrating between different interests and for their role and justifications to be subject to public scrutiny
- There is a strong recognition of the contribution of both those who have newly arrived and those who already have deep attachments to a particular place, with a focus on what they have in common
- There are strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and other institutions within neighbourhoods.



Why promote community cohesion in Herefordshire?

All statutory organisations have a legal duty to foster good relations between people as part of 2010 equality legislation. Although nationally issues of race and faith have a high community cohesion focus in Herefordshire, the issues have always been far wider. These include intergenerational issues, relations between Travellers, new and established generational communities, and the sense of isolation felt by some, including disabled people, those in rural areas and the economically disenfranchised.



Evidence has shown that, over the last few years, a sense of mistrust of different groups has developed, particularly those new to the local community. This is fuelled in no small part by the perception that local authorities are giving new groups special treatment. These misperceptions as much as anything are barriers in our efforts to build community cohesion in Herefordshire.

The Local Government White paper, 'Strong and Prosperous Communities', published in October 2007 reinforces local authorities' community leadership role in promoting community cohesion. The paper highlights some guiding principles of community cohesion the most relevant of which are:

- Strong leadership and engagement with an agreed local vision
- Developing shared values
- Good information, mapping communities and understanding the different traditions and ethnicities
- Visible work to tackle inequalities
- Involving young people
- Working with partners such as local third sector organisations to create the opportunities for people of different backgrounds to work together for shared goals



Social cohesion vs community cohesion

Social and community cohesion, as terms, are used interchangeably. Here is our interpretation of these terms:

Social cohesion is the “macro-social integration”, what the sociologist Mark Granovetter calls the “weak ties” that aid integration. This is social interaction which takes place in the wider sense of community life. It occurs while shopping, working and socialising. These are the activities that can “tie” the county’s different strong bonded communities together because people are sharing a common space in a productive way; in a small way breaking down barriers.

Community cohesion is what happens between neighbours, in local shops, parks, schools and community centres and generally in the neighbourhood. This is the “micro integration” and is where the strong ties, the more intimate and strongly bonded relationships are developed and maintained. Where deep rooted prejudice is challenged and the process of accepting difference begins.

A cohesive community is where everyone is someone

The development of community cohesion in a modern Herefordshire is important to everyone.

It is about breaking down barriers by supporting all our different communities, old and new, to feel part of the whole community while maintaining their own identity.

A cohesive Herefordshire is important to everyone and so the responsibility of everyone. Success will benefit us all both in economic and social terms.



What explains how cohesive an area is?

The Our Shared future report also conducted analysis to see what influences people's perceptions of cohesion. It found that perceptions of cohesion are affected by:

- An individual's personal characteristics - such as age and ethnicity
- An individual's attitudes
- Feeling of personal power to effect change and immediate community concerns such as inequality, crime and deprivation

However, the CIC also found that the linkages between the factors that influence cohesion and levels of cohesion are complex:

- Although, deprivation remains a key influencer of cohesion, the fact that some areas have high deprivation and high cohesion shows that local action can build resilience to its effects. The links between deprivation and a lack of cohesion is less where there is a strong local identity.
- Diversity seems to have a negative impact on cohesion in particular local circumstances largely when there is a lack of experience of diversity or when diversity is linked to deprivation.

- Public perception is split about whether immigration is good for the economy with 1 in 5 Britons believing that immigration is the biggest issue facing Britain today. The Commission suggests more and better information is needed about immigration and its impact.
- Perceptions of the fair allocation of public services are a key influencer of cohesion and one that needs to be addressed locally as well as nationally.
- The discrimination experienced by some groups and fear of hate crime are key influencers of poor cohesion. They prevent people from engaging with people from different groups, and can reduce confidence in engaging with public bodies or aspirations in the job market.
- The nature of diversity in the UK and therefore in Herefordshire has and continues to become more complex. Immigration is changing residential patterns of communities, and increasingly people are moving away from single identities based on race and faith, to multiple identities. Taken together the changes mean that equalities and cohesion policies now need to cater for this greater complexity. Also, that policies need to recognise the effect of global affairs on local communities.



The CIC concludes that:

- How cohesive an area is will depend upon a series of interacting factors about the area and the people who live there in terms of their personal characteristics and their attitudes.
- The complexity of influences on cohesion means that improving cohesion is about addressing multiple issues at the same time. Multiple actions should include work to improve individuals' personal circumstances, to change individuals' perceptions and to address area-wide issues.
- Improving cohesion is also about finding local solutions to local circumstances and challenges.

'We live in a time of rapid change generated by globalisation, demography and technology. Britain, despite its status as one of the world's richest economies and one of the most diverse societies is still a place of inequality, exclusion and isolation. Segregation between communities seems to be growing in some parts of the country, extremism, both political and religious, is on the rise as people become more disillusioned and discontented'.

Smith Institute (2008)

Promoting community cohesion - national

The CIC proposes that there should be two sorts of work to move toward improved community cohesion:

- Mainstreaming activities - for instance ensuring that physical regeneration schemes take account of the need to build social integration and cohesion
- Targeted interventions - for instance conflict resolution work

It sets out recommendations for work under four principles as follows:

- Developing shared futures to bind communities together whatever their histories
- Strengthening rights and responsibilities through a concept of citizenship that is understood as an acknowledgment that we all belong to the same society and are jointly responsible for its future
- Building mutual respect and civility, which recognises that cohesion is about how all individuals and communities contribute and participate, and that to build cohesion there needs to be a wider commitment to civil society and respect for others
- Making social justice visible, which means a commitment to equal and fair treatment combined with a transparency and fairness to all communities

Promoting community cohesion in Herefordshire

In our county we are committed to the promotion and continued development of social and community cohesion with a whole county approach. Herefordshire's Equality & Human Rights Charter will be flexible enough to respond to the needs of all of Herefordshire's established and developing communities.

We are determined that in Herefordshire no communities, however those communities are defined, will find they are living parallel lives. The community and social cohesion work is supported in a number of different ways:

- **Equality schemes:** We currently have single-focus schemes – and will continue to have single-focus action plans. The targeted consultation carried out to produce these documents enables more voices to be heard. This in turn gives greater credibility to our overarching equality policy, the Herefordshire Equality & Human Rights Charter.

- **Social marketing campaigns:** For example *No Prejudice in HERefordshire*, **STOP** bullying in HERefordshire and *Baywatch*.
- **Annual events:** For example *Out in The Sticks*, *Black History Month*, *International Day for Women*, *International day for Disabled People*, *Holocaust Memorial Day*.



It is community division - in essence a sense of powerlessness - that is the driver for Herefordshire to engage in honest community dialogue and sustained community investment. We will be failing if we do not invest in activities that bridge communities. Social capital is as important as financial capital.

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