

**REPORT TO:** Employment, Learning and Skills Policy and Performance Board

**DATE:** 10th September 2007

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director of Corporate & Policy

**SUBJECT:** Community Cohesion in Halton

**WARD(S):** Borough-wide

### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

Community cohesion is a complex issue which touches on a range of inter related matters. Community cohesion was identified as a scrutiny topic for the Employment Learning and Skills PPB for its 2006/07 programme. The Board set up a Community Cohesion Working Party to consider the issue and how it might be taken forward to fulfil the Council's responsibilities. This topic seeks to examine and define the concept in the Halton context and consider how Cohesion can best be mainstreamed or exemplified in service delivery.

The purpose of this report is to provide the final report of the Working Party, which includes a series of recommendations to Executive Board.

### **2. RECOMMENDED:**

**That the Policy and Performance Board (PPB) welcome the report and findings of its Community Cohesion Topic Group and make the following recommendations to Executive Board:**

- 1. It is recommended that the "Vision story" developed during the scrutiny process be adopted as the community cohesion statement for Halton, and form part of the overall corporate equalities statement used in service planning**
- 2. It is recommended that Equality Impact Assessments be extended in scope, in line with LGA guidance, to cover the potential community cohesion impacts of all council policies and programmes. This should be carried out as part of the established service planning process.**
- 3. It is recommended that an Officer Working Group be established, as a sub-group of the Corporate Equalities Group, to specifically look at the needs of new migrants in the borough and to monitor the joint delivery of services to them.**
- 4. It is recommended that the cohesion implications of council activities are monitored and reported to the various Policy and Performance Boards as part of the normal service planning monitoring process. In addition, a data**

**set of cohesion indicators should be set up and populated. These should form an annual progress report on cohesion, which will be monitored by the Employment Learning and Skills PPB**

- 5. It is recommended that the Corporate Services PPB be alerted to emerging concerns about perceived barriers to accessing services. These include opening hours, disabled access, transport, difficult locations, information and communication, bureaucracy, quality of response and perceived attitudes to certain client group. Corporate Services PPB may wish to consider whether it is worthy of further investigation or scrutiny.**
- 6. It is recommended that the council and its partners be informed of the results of this scrutiny topic and recognise that anti-social behaviour has profound implications for cohesion in Halton. It is one of its defining issues. The anti-social behaviour scrutiny topic team and Haltons Community safety Team should take note of the impact of their work on community cohesion and be aware that this will form part of the cohesion monitoring system in Halton.**
- 7. Inter-generational myths and conflicts were identified as a key defining feature of cohesion in Halton. It is recommended that the appropriate teams within the Children's Services and Health and Communities Directorates collaborate on joining up activity to specifically address inter-generational issues within Halton.**

### **3. SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

The Topic Group has been in operation since last summer. Its methodology has encompassed the following components:

- a) Initial scoping and feasibility report presented to the PPB in June 2006.
- b) Collection of Government reports and strategies.
- c) Collection of materials from other local authorities considered exemplars in the field
- d) Best practice study visit to Sefton.
- e) Evidence gathering sessions with a number of agencies and witnesses
- f) Focus groups with recent migrants and with the voluntary and community sector
- g) Data gathering on cohesion indicators and migrant workers

All of this background material was placed on a CD-Rom for the convenience of members and distributed at a previous meeting. The Topic Group has now produced its final report. This is attached for information, along with an Executive Summary report.

### **4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

Community cohesion is now an established part of the policy framework underpinning the work of local government and its partners. Cohesion forms a key element of the Local Government Bill now before Parliament.

## **5. RISK ANALYSIS**

The true risks associated with cohesion are around actions, or the failure to take appropriate actions, that undermine the cohesion of communities and impact on the quality of life of local people. There is a dedicated section on risk management in the final report.

## **6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

There are no direct financial implications arising out of this report. A number of actions are suggested which should form part of the normal service delivery programmes of Council Directorates. As such these will be funded through mainstream budgets and will not need dedicated resources.

## **7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct financial implications arising out of this report. A number of actions are suggested which should form part of the normal service delivery programmes of Council Directorates. As such these will be funded through mainstream budgets and will not need dedicated resources.