Employment Learning & Skills PPB

Final Report of the Community Cohesion Topic Group

September 2007

FOREWORD

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

This report provides the final summary of the Topic Group's work on how best Halton should discharge its duties with regard to Community Cohesion. The report is structured to provide a thoroughgoing review of all aspects of cohesion in Halton, reflects on national policy developments, and based on evidence gathered during the review develops a number of key recommendations for the Executive. These are embedded in the report itself and are summarised for ease of reference below:

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 from 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.**

INTRODUCTION

The scrutiny function within Local Government gives non-executive members a lead in examining executive decisions and a role reviewing and making recommendations to improve areas of policy and service provision by the Council, which affect local residents. It is part of the wider community leadership role of Councillors with a mandate to examine local services and well-being. Examination of community cohesion issues is now widely considered as essential for carrying out this responsibility. Community cohesion touches on key aspects of people's engagement in their communities, their access to opportunities, and their ability to live rich and fulfilling lives.

In January 2005, the Government published its strategy for increasing racial equality and community cohesion - *Improving opportunity, strengthening society.* Local Authorities were asked to assess their vision, strategy and actions against the targets set by Central Government within this document. Halton's scrutiny process offers a ready framework for this task.

Cohesion is an over-arching goal that should inform all actions taken by a Council. Ensuring fairness in resource allocation, mutual understanding and openness between communities, along with equality and opportunity for individuals are all brought together under the "Community Cohesion" Agenda. Home Office pilot programmes have demonstrated good practice and are experimenting with new ways of bringing people together. The guidance on community cohesion (2002) published by the Local Government Association provides the commonly adopted working definition. A cohesive community is one where:

- There is common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities.
- The diversity of people's different background and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued.
- Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities.
- Strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.

Hence, community cohesion is present when different groups interact peacefully and constructively in every day life - different age groups, people from different housing estates, different ethnic groups, groups from different faith backgrounds and so on. For communities to thrive people need to feel that the local environment provides safety, opportunity and belonging. The term community cohesion is used by Government to encapsulate these and other qualities of a good and local environment.

BACKGROUND

Building and strengthening a cohesive community contributes to our vision to make Halton a place where people choose to live and work. It will improve awareness and understanding of the different communities living in the borough amongst partners, general public, and the local people. We would hope to strengthen relations amongst different communities and community groups living and working in the borough by understanding and taking positive action to tackling barriers to integration. The geography, history, location and demography of Halton mean that in absolute terms we do not have the quantum of cohesion challenges of others. However, we take the issue seriously and want to re-engineer service delivery to ensure that existing largely good relations between communities are nurtured.

The background to the topic commenced in June 2006 with the presentation of a scoping report to the PPB. In summary, the scoping paper, had the following central tenets:

- ➢ Halton used the same definition of community cohesion as used by central government as its starting point
- ➢ Halton took a holistic approach to community cohesion and believed a good deal of best practice already existed
- ➢ A recognition that without equality and diversity, and a degree of respect for difference, that there can be no cohesion
- ➢ Recognised the relevance of a complex set of issues such as race, place, class, age, sexual orientation, faith and gender in addressing issues around community cohesion
- ➢ That there was a need to address poverty, health inequalities, public space and street scene issues, housing and crime and anti-social behaviour issues
- ➢ The Council viewed community cohesion as being key to achieving its Vision and therefore community cohesion was prioritised in the Community Strategy and Corporate Plan in the adoption of sustainability principles.

Community cohesion is a complex issue which touches on a range of inter related matters e.g. how cohesion impacts on community safety, educational standards, health improvement, community engagement in priority setting etc. It is acknowledged that there are no quick fixes.

Following the 2001 riots in Bradford & Oldham, community cohesion was coined as a term reacting to suggestions that a lack of interaction between individuals from different cultures, religions, and racial backgrounds contributed to the disorder. The aim of community cohesion is to promote greater contact, knowledge, and respect between

people from different backgrounds, and to establish a greater sense of citizenship and civic pride.

From the outset it was important to recognise that community cohesion works differently from established equality policies, which focus on tackling discrimination and providing equal access regardless of a person's background. Rather it is about examining the full range of issues which communities perceive to make life worth living in Halton. In a council context, there is particular emphasis on community development and the role and function of community centres as underpinning infrastructure for cohesion.

An additional key consideration is the national context around choice available within many aspects of public service provision such as schools, housing, transport, and health care provision in light of whether certain groups benefit more than others. If true at a local level of implementation does choice hinder or promote community cohesion?

AIMS OF THE SCRUTINY TOPIC

At the outset it was agreed that the remit of the Topic Group would be to examine a series of key questions, as follows:

> ➢ Can we define the challenge of cohesion in the Halton context and its overall scope?
>
> ➢ *Can we make a clear statement of vision and values in this area and how we will take it forward?*
>
> ➢ *Does the Council's current strategic framework adequately cover cohesion or is there a need to develop a bespoke strategy or action plan?*
>
> ➢ *Does the council's community infrastructure (development function and centres) work to properly promote cohesion in the borough?*
>
> ➢ *Can we agree data sets that help to conceptualise and measure the issue which both define the scale of the challenge and against which progress can be monitored?*
>
> ➢ *Can we map the web of relationships (with RSLs, police, health etc), which will help to tackle cohesion issues, and how they will be managed?*
>
> ➢ *How can we build cohesion into the council's decision-making processes?*
>
> ➢ *How can we mainstream cohesion into service delivery?*
>
> ➢ *What is the overlap between cohesion and equality and diversity, civic pride, reputation management and community development and engagement?*

The full terms of reference of the Topic Group are attached at Annex 1.

The Topic Group was made up of the following members of the Employment Learning and Skills PPB:

- Cllr Eddie Jones
- Cllr Mike Hodgkinson
- Cllr Susan Edge
- Cllr Margaret Ratcliffe
- Cllr Harry Howard
- Cllr David Lewis

The following council officers provided support for the Working Party:

Ian Grady   Policy & Partnerships Manager
Nicki Goodwin   Community Development Manager

The Working Party also worked closely and took evidence from a range of partners. They are detailed in the feedback report at Annexe 4.

METHODOLOGY & WORK PROGRAMME

The Topic Group began its work in September 2006. Its methodology had the following components:

- Initial scoping and feasibility report had been presented to the PPB in June 2006.
- Collection of Government reports and strategies.
- Collection of materials from other local authorities considered exemplars in the field.
- Best practice study visit to Sefton.
- Focus groups with migrants and the voluntary and community sector.
- Data gathering on cohesion indicators and migrant workers.
- A review of data and public consultation exercises to establish what people in Halton feel about the community and their part in it.
- Evidence from front-of-house service around accessibility to services, and how queries are processed and staff knowledge and understanding of different communities they serve.
- Evidence about the function, location and utility of community centres across the borough.
- Evidence from community development practitioners about its practice around the borough and its impact on cohesion issues.
- Evidence from Children's services and schools as to what initiatives are in place to promote community cohesion, and other relevant service areas across the council.
- Evidence from staff from Registered Social Landlords.
- Evidence from police and fire service on their experiences in the borough and initiatives they use to serve local people fairly and equitably.
- Evidence from the voluntary and community sector, especially for tenants and residents groups about their perceptions of cohesion issues in Halton.
- Evidence from Health & Community on the local response to the needs of older people and inter-generational issues.

- Case studies of particular exemplars of good practice that already exist in the borough, identified by stakeholders.
- Best practice research from other local authorities to see how they may have used tools such as a 'citizens code', civic pride initiatives or monitoring systems to help to foster a cohesive community.

In taking forward its work programme the Topic Group chose to focus on areas of the subject specifically, as follows:

o What are the views of Young People aged 12 – 19 years old around levels of integration within schools, what the school's role is in promoting the breadth of cultural knowledge about different traditions and customs of people from different communities, does local policing improve or affect cohesion?

o What are the views of Older People around choice and access to housing options and local services? Does this result in segregation of communities within housing complexes? Does perception impact on behaviours and relationships between different communities, public bodies and general public?

o What level of cultural and religious understanding is there of different communities living and working in the borough amongst children and adults? Where do they learn this? Are there stereotypes of individual communities, which need to be broken down? Is there guidance and support for people who are victims of unlawful discrimination?

o Do we have high levels of unemployment? Is there evidence of discrimination in recruitment and retention in the local employment market? How are local training needs addressed? What initiatives tackle gaps in training and education? What range of employment opportunities are there which cater for the different needs of the local workforce? Is this causing segregation? Are local bidding processes causing tensions?

o What is the role of our local media in influencing public opinion? Are they biased? What is the relationship between the police and local people?

o How does the council communicate with its different communities? Do we get key messages across to communities and how do we know this? How do our stakeholders communicate their plans, aspirations and services? What methods are used to get messages across effectively (written/verbal/stalls/ events?)

o How does the council provide community development services in a fair, equitable and accessible manner?

o Do housing policies contribute to promoting community cohesion or hindering it? Do the local housing agents play a role in separating communities?

o Is the changing demographic of the borough, and in particular the recent inflow of migrants from abroad, impacting upon cohesion in the borough?

A summary of the main evidence gathering day is attached at Annex 4.

NATIONAL POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

The Government's key cohesion outcome is to encourage "widespread social participation and a valuing of all local cultures". The Government's intention is to give a greater emphasis to promoting a sense of common belonging and cohesion among all groups. The recent Local Government White Paper refers to Community Cohesion as being about recognising change and responding to it. It refers to eight guiding principles to cohesion as follows:

- ➢ Strong leadership and engagement
- ➢ Developing shared values
- ➢ Preventing the problems of tomorrow
- ➢ Good information
- ➢ Visible work to tackle inequalities
- ➢ Involving young people
- ➢ Interfaith work
- ➢ Involving partners such as local third sector organisation.

Central government has adopted the definition of community cohesion agreed by the Office of Deputy prime Minister (ODPM), Home Office, Local Government Association (LGA), Improvement Development Agency (IdeA), Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), the Interfaith Network and the Audit Commission in 2002 where a cohesive community was one where 'there is a sense of belonging for all communities; diversity is appreciated and valued; people from different backgrounds have similar opportunities; and strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds'. This is the working definition we have used for the purposes of this scrutiny topic.

Following further findings from subsequent research, central government have added that 'people feel they can trust local politicians and councillors and feel that their views are being represented'

Central Government understanding was that poor community cohesion may be present where communities were polarised and lived in fear and ignorance of each other; residents had a lack of identity with the area; local people were disengaged from local decision-making; and there was weakness in political and community leadership. This was based on findings by the Ministerial Group on Public Order and Community Cohesion, which was set up following the 2001 disturbances in Bradford and Oldham. Central government measures community cohesion using a range of indicators that were linked to the understanding of community cohesion as outlined above (and which we have echoed in the data analysis for this review).

The key cohesion indicator used, and which was applied in the Home Office Citizenship Survey became a mandatory question in the Best Value performance Indicator (BVPI) General Household Survey was: 'The percentage of people who feel that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together'. The halton figure is 56%, which compares to a national rate of 49%

The other nationally comparable statistical indicators remain:

- Percentage of respondents who felt that they belong to their neighbourhood/town/county/England/Wales/Britain (common vision and sense of belonging)
- Key priorities for improving the area (common vision and sense of belonging)
- Percentage of adults who felt that they could influence decisions affecting their local area (common vision and sense of belonging)
- Percentage of people who felt that local ethnic differences were respected (diversity of people's background is valued)
- Number of racial incidents recorded by police authorities per 100,000 (diversity of people's background is valued)
- Local concentration of deprivation (those from different backgrounds have similar opportunities)
- Percentage of pupils achieving 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*-C or equivalent (similar opportunities)
- Percentage of unemployed people claiming benefits who have been out of work for more than a year (similar opportunities)
- Percentage of people from different backgrounds who mixed with other people from different backgrounds in everyday situations (positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds)

The Halton data for these indicators is given at Annex 6.

The Government is reporting statistical links between the key cohesion indicator and a range of factors and believe that focusing on these factors may improve community cohesion. These factors include: people willing to help neighbours, people pulling together to improve the area, fear of crime, how people feel they treated by the local housing department or housing association, having a mix of people made the local area a more enjoyable place to live, and perceptions of discrimination. There are a range of drivers of cohesion, some playing a stronger roles e.g. enjoying living in one's neighbourhood and feeling like one belongs to Britain were much stronger drivers than visiting friends/going out at least monthly and feeling a sense of belonging to one's neighbourhood, which were both much lower down on the scale

Central government's strategy for working on community cohesion, *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society* (January 2005) focused on young people from different backgrounds growing up with a sense of belonging; new immigrants being integrated; ensuring racism was unacceptable; creating opportunities for a greater understanding of different cultures and marginalising extremists. Last years Local Government White Paper, *Strong and prosperous communities*, stated that cohesion outcomes would be secured through the new local government performance framework and new Overview and Scrutiny guidance would be issued looking at how local authorities could take cohesion into account. The White Paper also made a commitment to support areas experiencing difficulties and work with local government to spread good practice

The Cohesion and Faiths Unit are undertaking this work. It includes:

- direct support for local areas
- mainstreaming in policy and practice
- extremism and hate crime

- ➢ area-based initiatives
- ➢ monitoring community tensions; and
- ➢ contingency planning

Work has been carried out by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion to investigate issues negatively impacting on community cohesion, the role of local community and political leadership, empowering local communities and developing approaches that build local areas' own capacity to prevent/recover from problems. A major consultation exercise was launched – to which Halton responded robustly (copy at Annex 9) The Commission on Integration and Cohesion made the following recommendations in June 2007:

- 'Shared futures' – focusing on what we have in common while valuing our diverse histories
- A focus on 'local distinctiveness' and local approaches
- This focus to be balanced by a shared national vision, with clear leadership from central government and recommendations for national policy initiatives
- A strong focus on migration, both in terms of integration and in the context of 'settled communities'
- A shift of focus away from 'extremism' and a conscious shifting of the spotlight from Muslim communities
- The development of five 'typologies' of authorities, based on the three factors found to have the most influence on cohesion – level of deprivation, rate of change, and rural/urban

In Halton we may have some concerns around the conflation of race, faith and cohesion given our history and demographics. It is perhaps an over-simplified conceptualisation on the part of Government; implying community cohesion is driven by faith and race alone. Poverty, class, location, inter-generational issues may be larger factors damaging cohesion in Halton. We have concluded that a more sophisticated approach is required to address these issues. It is all too easy to give too much focus on general perceptions of communities and not enough on the real barriers to community cohesion experienced by individuals and communities. Community cohesion is about any fractures e.g. sexuality, urban versus rural, haves-versus-have-nots, young versus old. Whilst the community cohesion agenda that came out of the 2001 disorders was at the time racial, now it is being thought of more in terms of faith and extremism. However, background circumstances and other equality factors are now being recognised as relevant.

The Government is probably less certain about its model of community cohesion now than it was three years ago, when Community Cohesion strategies were de-rigueur. In taking the issue forward the Topic Group were very aware of the more nuanced approach of Government.

COUNCIL ROLE

Developing and maintaining community cohesion is a major community leadership responsibility. The policies and actions of the Council play a key part, but cohesion needs to be a priority for the community at large. It was felt that conducting this scrutiny of cohesion could make a significant contribution to better define this community

leadership role. It could help to assess the way the Council addresses the resilience and cohesion of Halton by:

- Members addressing cohesion issues and bringing their perspective to bear on executive decisions.
- Contributing to the mainstreaming of cohesion as a part of the strategic components of Council governance.
- Considering the impact of policy proposals and service issues through the conduct of cohesion based assessments.
- Contributing to the development of Council policies and the recommendations that are based on broadly based evidence from the locality.
- Helping to identify any threats to cohesion, which immediately become known to members who can then address them.
- Influencing non-Council bodies especially through the local strategic partnership, to address cohesion issues.
- Helping Councillors to keep in touch with the views of people in the communities they represent and the diverse range of opinion within them.

Cohesion issues are frequently sensitive. Within the community there may be different views and prejudices about different groups and their impact on cohesion. There can be a great deal of misinformation, for example about the allocation of public funding. Because of the sensitivity of the issues examined it was essential that the scrutiny enquiry have broad base from within the Council.

Information gathering lies at the heart of all scrutiny. Not only is the role to uncover information and interpret it in a critical manner, information gathering is also the shared foundation on which members can form their analysis and opinions. Comparative data will be helpful in placing Halton issues in perspective. This refers not just to statistics, but also to examples of best practice from other authorities and organisations that can be used to benchmark Halton's position and progress. In particular the aim has to be to use the scrutiny function to anticipate events. For example, this can be done by examining the impact of community cohesion on any major future decisions and plans – e.g. the Mersey Gateway Scheme, Local Transport Plan, Corporate Plan etc. It has also formed part of the wider strategy for Risk Management within the Council.   Under this the Council will try to identify cohesion risks – clarifying the information that needs to be routinely collected and how it would be collected – so that Councillors are made aware of any potential impacts that Council decisions might have on the cohesion agenda.

It was identified in the scrutiny process that it was important to have a system to identify potential cohesion impacts arising out of council policies or programmes. The Council has successfully instigated a system of equality impact assessments (EIAs) for equality and diversity issues*.* The good practice guide from the LGA recognises the overlaps between cohesion and equalities issues. Therefore, as part of its advice on standard setting it recommends using impact assessments that cover the widest possible range of issues. ***Hence, it is recommended that EIAs 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.***

Defining the Scope of Cohesion

Since each Local Authority is unique in its demographic and social makeup, the meaning of community cohesion in any area needs to reflect an understanding of local circumstances. Promoting community cohesion involves addressing fractures, removing barriers and encouraging positive interaction between groups. Community cohesion aims to build communities where people feel confident that they belong and are comfortable mixing and interacting with others. Whatever the local circumstances, building cohesion between communities is a necessary step towards improving people's quality of life and their opportunity to achieve their potential. Viewed from outside, a cohesive community is one in which people will want to live and invest. This ethos is the same as that which underpins the visions and values statement set out in Halton's new Corporate Plan.

An effective community cohesion strategy underpinned by a shared vision is vital for every area. The Council in its community leadership role is best placed to begin the process in developing this and to ensure that with their partners this takes shape. It should inform all key policy areas of the Council and the activities of all local stakeholders. To be effective the vision will have to be developed with local people and partnerships and be rooted in the ideas and values, which local people understand and support. People should be encouraged to share a sense of responsibility, for themselves, their family, friends and neighbourhoods and take pride in being residents of Halton. Some of the key questions asked as part of the evidence gathering process included:

- What makes for a cohesive community?
- How can we develop pride in Halton?
- What are the values, which we believe should underpin our vision for a cohesive Halton?
- How can we work together to address common concerns?
- How can we welcome new families into the Borough and help them to adjust?
- How can we combat discrimination on any basis?
- How can we promote the mixing and contact between members of our communities?

Out of the evidence gathering arose a conviction that cohesion in Halton needed a clear visionary statement as its backbone. However, this could not take the form of an anodyne vision statement. What was needed was a compelling vision story that could paint a picture of the cohesive Halton we wish to create. From this could flow a number of firm commitments on cohesion which mirror the values of the council and its partners. From this debate has arisen the following vision story:

Community Cohesion – Vision Story

The long-term vision for Halton seeks to imagine an idealised Halton in 2015. It is based around building communities that are more prosperous, healthier, cohesive and diverse. Communities that draw strength from their distinctive identity and contribution to life in Halton. Places that have a common sense of ownership and pride. Places where people feel connected to Halton because of its distinctive history and heritage and because it is a place whose future they are helping to shape.

Halton will have a thriving local economy, good transport links, access to culture and sport, an attractive and sustainable local environment, free from crime and fear of crime, where people benefit from education for all ages and enjoy healthy fulfilling lives. A place where people respect and care for each other and share a sense of responsibility and pride. Statistics are not the only measure of success. What is important is that local people experience their lives and neighbourhoods as better than they are now.

Good public services are the bedrock of life in the borough. Every year they improve in quality and responsiveness, are tailored more closely to users' needs and provide choice where appropriate. They are more joined up and easier for people to access. Users are involved in the design and delivery of services, and better communication mean people are well informed about what is going on.

The established vision statement for Halton is:

Halton will be a thriving and vibrant borough where people can learn and develop their skills, enjoy a good quality of life with good health; a high quality, modern urban environment; the opportunity for all to fulfil their potential; greater wealth and equality; sustained by a thriving business community; and within safer, stronger and more attractive neighbourhood.

This is a pledge to secure a better future for the people of Halton. It is about everyone having the opportunity to fulfil their potential and pursue the sort of life that suits them. It is about equal access to opportunities and facilities, and helping ensure that no one is left behind but can access the opportunities and progress being made in Halton. This means positively targeting activity at the most deprived neighbourhoods or particular groups of people in greatest need.

Part of Halton's success has been its ability to change and evolve, and its resilience in the face of adversity. This resilience is the key to the future. The vision for the future is of a Halton that has sustained itself. A place where people want to live and work. It is somewhere that provides a high quality living environment, sensitive to a range of needs, and recognises the diversity of its residents. A place where people have opportunities and choice. People have high aspirations and increasing abilities so they can exercise greater control and choice in their lives. Halton is a place that provides the quality of life and opportunities that people choose to live and work here.

In short, Halton is a place that meets current expectations, prepares for future needs' and respects the diversity of the place and people. A place that is at ease with itself and the outside world. There is the confidence and capability of taking on future challenges and opportunities. A place that is inclusive, and we make sure that no one gets left behind. *In working towards this, we believe that*

- ➢ Everyone should feel they have a sense of belonging and pride in Halton
- ➢ Every person feels valued equally, and can play their own part in shaping Halton;
- ➢ Everyone understands that there are standards and expectations of behaviour, and will work together to enforce these collectively.
- ➢ Everyone has a right to enjoy a good quality of life;

> - Everyone can play an active part in the community; it is safe and its sound, and their actions do not inconvenience others.
> - Everyone should be able to participate fully in the social, economic and cultural life of the Borough, and be able to contribute their views as part of democratic decision-making processes;
> - All agencies recognise they have a collective duty of care for the area
> - Making the Borough a safe and pleasant place to live is vitally important, and this environment also needs to be protected and preserved for future generations;
> - We should work towards a just society, in which there is understanding and tolerance between and within communities, so that people feel they have a voice and a stake in their community;
> - The Borough can be a multi-faith, multi-cultural and multi-racial society, where this diversity is an asset not a problem;
> - We will oppose prejudice and discrimination.
> - There should be a sense of identity based on acceptance, not stereotypes; and, shaped less by how people see themselves as individuals with rights and expectations, but rather as part of groups and as part of communities.
> - Everyone has a right to do things for themselves, to maximise their independence, while agencies ensure they have the necessary levels of support.
> - Everyone has fair and easy access to services they need and barriers to participation are removed; and,
> - No one is stigmatised because of who they are, or perceived to be, or because of their circumstances or poor choices in their lives.

It is recommended that this be adopted as the community cohesion statement for Halton, and form part of the overall corporate equalities statement used in service planning.

Measuring Cohesion

Measuring community cohesion is not easy. However, a detailed understanding of the communities of Halton is essential to planning service delivery and monitoring progress towards more cohesive communities. We already collect and analyse a whole series of data on conditions in our communities. At Annexe 2 is a compilation of key facts and data that give a picture of cohesion in Halton. These give a starting point on which we can interpret the local context and use them to build an understanding of cohesion within in Halton. It provides a platform for discussion. There is no single measure of community cohesion and we must think carefully about developing key indicators that give a clear understand of the challenges and progress that we make. As the Annexe shows we have produced a basket of indicators, which reflect different aspects of cohesion. In building up this profile of community cohesion in Halton we have tried to look at performance across a whole range of policy areas. This has allowed us to build a cohesion map of Halton. Looking over a whole series of themes this allows us to map cohesion issues across the geography of Halton. This is attached at Annex 3.

KEY COMPONENTS

From the evidence collected locally it is possible to state a number elements that are crucial in building and maintain cohesion in Halton.

The Role of the Local Strategic Partnership

In Halton the most significant partnership is the Halton Strategic Partnership. This brings together the key public sector bodies alongside the community, voluntary and business sectors. The Partnership exists to tackle issues that matter most to local people such as crime, jobs, education, health and housing. It has been given the task of developing and implementing the community strategy and is a key contributor to the development of community cohesion. Community strategies are key tools for showing a strategic commitment to community cohesion and demonstrating ownership of the subject. The Halton Strategy includes targets and commitments for cohesion that we expect to be reflected in the individual strategies of partners. The Halton Community Strategy has been constructed after extensive consultation and engagement with local people. This process has in itself helped to build cohesion by giving them an opportunity to get involved in the area, sign up to the local vision and bolster a sense of belonging and involvement in setting the aspirations for the area.

Successful community cohesion policies and programmes must ensure that they address the change in dynamics of race relations within local communities. This involves building positive relationships between different racial and ethnic communities. An essential part of this is to address the exclusion that many minority communities experience. Community cohesion requires local agencies to put in place appropriate packages of support and an engagement strategy to provide all communities with the skills, confidence and motivation to access programmes. Whilst BME communities and issues are on the margins within Halton it should be remembered that we host a sizeable gypsy and traveller community and there are increasing numbers of new families arriving from Eastern Europe. Both provide an ongoing challenge to the way Halton delivers services in a fair and equitable manner.

One of the key strengths of the Halton Strategic Partnership is the leading role played within it by the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). The VCS covers a wide spectrum of organisations, many of which can be key partners in building community cohesion. Organisations range in size and capacity, from highly professionalised national bodies with the capacity to act at this strategic level, to small informal associations at neighbourhood level. One of the strengths of the Halton approach is that a good many services are delivered by local small Voluntary and Community Sector organisations. This gives us the opportunity to build community cohesion from the bottom up, and help with the effective delivery of services. This can help to ensure that policies are based on the real live experiences of people in Halton. One of the great strengths of the VCS can be its sensitivity and responsiveness to local issues and culture. We may need to work with other public sector agencies and with the VCS to strategically assess and develop capacity building and infrastructure support that is sustainable, a high quality and accessible to a wide range of organisations.

Working with the VCS can provide excellent opportunities for understanding the views of local people and for involving people from groups who are often difficult to reach. Many parts of the VCS have experience of involving users and others in decision-making and

services for the community. Halton already has in place a protocol based on compact principles which governs the relationships between the public and Voluntary and Community Sectors in the Borough. This is now being implemented in a dispersed way through the local area agreement for Halton to better define expectations in terms of services delivered to local people.

To strengthen and exemplify the commitment to cohesion the Partnership has established BME and faith networks. These aim to provide a forum for these communities within Halton to have a voice and get it heard by the key strategic decision makers in the borough.

<u>The media</u>

Positive media relations can help in building community cohesion. The media can help frame the perceptions of local people both positively and negatively.   Good liaison between the media and community representatives is essential in helping to project clear messages to the whole community. We must ensure that information provided to the media is accurate, fair and responsible. This will be instrumental to building a coherent communication strategy. It is important to have a communication strategy to provide a comprehensive basis for working with the press and other media. It appears that relations with the editors of local papers in Halton are very good and they can be very fair and supportive on sensitive parts of the council's agenda. Evidence gathered during the process helped outline some key components that could form part of a specific communication strategy around cohesion. Working with the media will involve encouraging press to put across the importance of respect and tolerance for diversity and to educate people about the lives and conditions of others. It will also involve working with them to encourage balanced reporting when there are problems within Halton.

It has been agreed to explore better ways of raising the profile of cohesion issues, talking about them explicitly and plainly, and finding ways with the local, press to fix positive perceptions of the various communities and areas of Halton.

<u>Service Delivery</u>

Obviously community cohesion has a far-reaching agenda, which means it has to be mainstreamed within the delivery of all Council services. This demands that we consider the community cohesion consequences of all key decisions. We must also encourage partners to do the same. At a basic level community cohesion requires services that are sensitive to the needs of individual uses and accessible to everybody who wants to user them.   Discrimination can happen indirectly, for example when a particular facility is placed far from a community, which might want to use it, or is inappropriate for their use. So to contribute fully to cohesion relevant services should not just avoid discrimination, they should actively encourage interaction and provide opportunities for local people to meet others. Services can also provide an interface for us to reach out to hard to help communities. As a minimum, any public service should meet its duties under the full body of equalities legislation to assess and consult on the likely proposed policies on the equality of all social identity groups and have arrangements in place to monitor provision for adverse impact on different racial groups. But we can also ask the question whether our work force is representative of the community it serves, are services appropriate to users, are any groups indirectly discriminated against, are services being used to help

hard to reach groups and communicate our approach to community cohesion? In addition to these general principles there are a number of services, which have particular roles to play in cohesion – for example the Education Sector - in teaching people about the benefits of equality, diversity and mutual respect and understanding of others.

The Topic Group came to firm conclusion that cohesion must not become "ghettoised" within council services. Cohesion has to form part of the warp-and-weft of mainstream service delivery. An analysis was carried out of the council service plans. This demonstrated the range of activities being carried out already in support of the cohesion agenda. This is attached at Annex 5. This demonstrates that the Council is already committed to policies and activities in support of its corporate plan, which have cohesion at their core.

It is recommended that the cohesion implications of services are monitored and reported out 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. These are attached at Annex 6

Policing

Of particular note is that good and effective policing makes a vital contribution to cohesion and the Police Force is a key partner in delivery. Community cohesion is central to the work of the Police. Policing strategies and operations should be consistent with Halton policy on community cohesion. An important task of the Council is to know how best it can work with Cheshire Constabulary to best effect, to mutually support each other's work in Halton. Section 6 of the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act places a statutory obligation on Local Authorities and the Police to co-operate in the development and implementation of a strategy for tackling crime and disorder. Community cohesion is a key theme throughout crime reduction strategies and for Halton's Community Safety Team. This reflects the seriousness of the impact that crime and disorder and anti-social behaviour has on individuals. It also provides opportunities for working together to consider and address the impact of crime and community cohesion. Obvious work on removing graffiti, anti-social behaviour and implementing the Government's "Respect" agenda go hand in hand with raising awareness across communities and maintaining civic pride.

Effective policing requires meaningful community links. This not only helps with maintaining community relation but also is also vital in dealing with community tension and reassurance. In Halton the Police are working hard to develop and implement a neighbourhood response to policing. In the Blue Lamp Initiative dozens of Community Support Officers are complimenting mainstream police service delivery throughout Halton. The Police PAD/CAM meetings have been a mechanism for generating local intelligence and providing the direct response to community concerns. This helps the Police to prioritise their work.

Other emergency services, particularly the Fire Service, can also play an important role in promoting community cohesion. This is partly because they are not involved in law enforcement but have a strong presence within local communities. Fire Fighters are

widely seen as contributing much to a positive community ethos and can be seen as role models for young people. In Halton Fire Fighters have taken the lead in working with young people through a number of initiatives and outreach programmes, such as Kooldown, Home safety checks, cadets etc. They take fire safety lessons to schools and community groups. The Cheshire Fire Authority has a clearly set out strategy which aims to "secure a safe and cohesive society" based on a vision of total community protection. For example, at risk groups are normally characterised by other factors such as age, inequality, high crime, poor health and poor socio-economic conditions. By directing resources to these areas a big impact has been made on fire related issues and as a consequence has contributed to improving the quality of life and cohesion within Halton. Most recently the Fire service has taken a leading role in kick starting activities in the neighbourhood management areas.

Housing

Overcoming segregation in housing essential to building community cohesion. In certain areas, housing estates have become mono-cultural and different communities exist in parallel. Separation between groups living in different localities is not necessarily problematic, but compounded by deprivation and a lack of interaction; segregation can lead to fear and mistrust. This can be passed on through generations where residential segregation leads to segregated schooling and access to leisure and other facilities. Neighbourhoods may become unsustainable were housing cannot be accessed equally by all communities. This, combined with a lack of support networks, can give rise to tensions between individuals and groups, and between generations.

The Council and the Housing Associations within Halton need to address the conditions, practices and attitudes affecting public and private sector housing. A strategic approach to tackling community cohesion will ensure that housing operates alongside other services within the neighbourhood context to address community development and community safety issues. This must involve other partners such as the Police, Schools and Local Tenant Groups. Services need to be flexible and sensitive to local needs and especially to changing needs and aspirations of all groups. Halton is currently piloting Neighbourhood Management Initiatives in the 3 most deprived areas in the Borough. This partnership working on housing and regeneration issues makes a vital contribution to community cohesion and social exclusion agendas by generating learning that can be applied elsewhere in the Borough. In particular it offers the opportunity to establish resident led approaches to the way neighbourhoods are managed and services are delivered. For this to happen there is a need for Tenant Groups to be inclusive, properly representative and to recognise diversity.

Within this context a particular relevance is the tackling of anti-social behaviour. The Government has acted to increase the powers available to Local Authorities, the Police and other agencies to tackle this problem no matter where people live. There are also a number of powers available specifically to social Landlords to protect both their tenants and the wider community and these were broadened in 2004. The new Housing Bill provides powers to help Local Authorities tackle anti-social behaviour in the private rented sector. The current Government gave new impetus to this in 2006 with the launch of its Respect Agenda. RSLs in Halton are all committed to achieving the Respect Standard in housing management.

It was clear from the scrutiny study that anti-social behaviour is one of the key issues that agencies and communities identify as the cause of fractures amongst Halton communities. It was recognised that much work was being undertaken to address this. In fact a new anti-social behaviour strategy was recently launched and is the result of in-depth work by the Community Safety Team. **However, 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 Halton's Community safety Team should take note of the impact of their work on community cohesion and be aware that this will from part of the cohesion monitoring system in Halton.**

Arts, sport and other leisure services can be a powerful tool to engage all sections of the community and break down barriers between them. People take part in leisure and sport activities through choice. Marginalised groups are often more willing to engage with such activities. Physical activities and sport can be used as a means of bringing people together from different communities to share positive experiences and gain greater understanding of each other. This has been recognised in the broadening of the priorities within the new Halton Community Strategy to encompass art, sport and culture within the definition of health and well-being.

Children and Young People

Engaging with children and young people is essential to building cohesive communities because they are the future of a community. By encouraging in them a sense of belonging, ownership and responsibility for their locality we can make a sustainable investment in community cohesion. Young people can be powerful catalyst for change. In evidence gathering the Group came across numerous examples of the positive impacts young people have on life in Halton. However, if they are disenfranchised from society or disaffected this can re-enforce division and fragmentation between groups and areas. This can be manifested in anti-social behaviour and in conflict between young people and older people. Therefore, engaging with young people and giving them a chance to interact with others requires us to listen and respond to their needs and concerns. This is one of the key underpinnings of the new Children and Young People's plan for Halton. A key raft of activity in the future is the further developments of the Young Peoples Participation Group to give them a greater stake in local decision-making.

Underpinning this is the role that education has to play in building cohesion. Schools are an important part of the community and can play a critical role in promoting the values of equality, diversity and mutual respect and understanding between people.   The curriculum needs to promote shared values of respect for diversity. By targeting young people at an early stage schools can help communities develop a common sense of belonging. Schools are mixing bowls through which we can ensure that those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities. Young people should leave the education system with the skills they need to progress in life. It is critical to encourage young people from all backgrounds to reach their full potential and do as well as they can in school, further and higher education. Schools also provide a base for wider community participation and can be an important resource at the centre of communities. They have the potential to play a central role in providing opportunities for people to mix. All of these strands underpin the universal services delivery element in the Children and

Young Peoples Plan and the developing of ideas around developing extended schools within the Borough.

Older People

Older people have much to contribute and much to gain from community cohesion. As demographically the population ages there are increasing numbers of fit and active older people in communities and they bring significant resources in terms of knowledge, skills and experience. Increasingly older people want to take an active part in making choices about their own lives and the communities that they are part of. On the other hand, where communities are divided older people can suffer from fear, isolation and feelings of disempowerment. The Council needs to consider how to involve and support them.

Like many others, older people are not a homogeneous group and they are members of many different communities.   However, older people can face discrimination and exclusion not just on the grounds of age.   Therefore we must ensure we include a diverse range of older people. This may involve making special effort to involve them in consultations or considering accessibility problems they may have in using services. When planning service delivery we must look ahead at the way in which the population will age in the coming years and that there will be some services which older people use more than the rest of the population such as Health and Social Care Services.

Stereotypes abound about both older and younger people and it is very easy to stigmatise age groups. Older people are sometimes fearful of young people. Younger people may not always see what older people have to offer. Both have a lot to give and building community cohesion should take into account the need and benefits of bringing these groups together. Intergenerational work can be crucial in addressing the myths that proliferate about different age groups and can help foster mutual understanding and tolerance. In Halton there have been many successful projects that have allowed both older and younger people to share their experiences and develop new skills and ease the tension between age groups. A forthcoming, and fine, example is the collaborative work to renovate the moat in Palacefields between young and older people. 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.**

Gypsy and Travellers

As we know the terms Gypsy and Traveler describe many different and distinctive groups. Given Halton's history as part of the story of the Irish diaspora, and its location close to the ports of Holyhead, Mostyn and Liverpool, Halton has always been a favoured stopping point for gypsies and travelers. Since the 1970's there has been a well-established municipal gypsy site, which has been supplemented by two private sites in Halton. In more recent times the Council has established a temporary transit site for short term stays. It is also investing over £1M in refurbishing the Gypsy site, and looking to establish a further site in Runcorn.

The council has a dedicated Gypsies Officer who carries out sterling work in linking the community into services in the borough. In particular we have worked with the community to help resolve some of the inherent tensions within the community itself and

with indigenous and established population. Halton is held up as a model of good practice within Cheshire. Whilst tension remains, especially when major site incursions happen, the Council and its partners take a mature and pro-active approach in trying to manage the situation sensitively and to the mutual benefit of all.

These communities can often be isolated from mainstream service provision and viewed with suspicion in areas where they live. Whilst Halton has not suffered some of the high profile problems of other areas there are continuing tensions. We need to ensure that Travellers are appropriately advised and informed about involvement in local community life and that the rest of the local community respect their culture and traditions. We need to consider whether Gypsies and Travellers in Halton have similar life opportunities to members of other communities and full access to services that are appropriate to them.

The Gypsy Liaison Officer manages both Council sites with the support of an identified liaison person selected from the Gypsies and Travellers on each site. The Police and PCSOs have supported the Council and intervene where appropriate. This approach has seen a greater understanding develop between the local population and the Gypsy/Traveller community. It has also enabled the Council to offer schooling, and health & welfare to Gypsy/Traveller families. Our schools in particular have an expertise in children's services support Gypsy and Traveller children. The Police have also taken action on Domestic Violence, which is a major success.

New Migrants

In recent times the demographic make up of the borough has been altering, especially in regard to attracting new residents born overseas. The preliminary work of the Group shows that these come largely from 3 groups:

- ➢ Migrant workers from the EU Accession countries
- ➢ Foreign students studying at Riverside College
- ➢ Professional families from Asia/South Asia

There is an obvious economic driver underpinning these movements. Statistically the shifts are hard to pin down because of the lag in official data picking them up. However, evidence from the Workers Registration Scheme and presentations at school for children needing help with English gives an idea of the relative significant shift taking place. A research paper on migrant numbers was commissioned, which is attached at Annex 7.

Initial discussion groups with migrants demonstrated the high levels of skills, confidence and ambition they possessed. Their impressions of Halton were almost wholly favourable. Whilst the group was not homogenous some common concerns were difficulties with the language, the cost and quality of housing, trouble in accessing banking facilities, getting a dentist, the limiting nature of employment through agencies, cultural issues and trouble accessing some services. It should be noted that, language apart, a similar discussion group with indigenous residents could well have generated the same issues.

On the other side of the fence, discussions with service providers showed that they were concerned about the nature and scope of the challenges in meeting migrants needs; how to make their services fully accessible; planning for the future given the data vacuum that currently exists; and how to develop communication channels and positive

outreach work with new arrivals. Given this position, the question was raised about how the Council should address this challenge in the future. **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.**

MOVING FORWARD

So, community cohesion describes the ability of communities to function and grow in harmony together rather than in conflict. It has strong links to concepts of equality and diversity given that community cohesion can only grow when we recognise that individuals have the right of equality and respect and appreciate the diverse nature of our communities. The Home Office has published a practitioner's tool-kit on community cohesion. The tool-kit identifies 7 steps to developing community cohesion. These are:

- Leadership and commitment
- Developing a vision and values for community cohesion
- Programme planning and management
- Engaging communities
- Challenging and changing perceptions
- Community cohesion and specialist areas
- Ensuring sustainability of programmes

It is about inclusion and making the effort to treat each other with respect and build good relations between different parts of the community. It is not just about race, but equally about relationships between young and old, between residents of different estates or parts of estates and between the haves and have-nots within Halton. The Topic Group wholeheartedly endorse the toolkit and think it provides a valuable framework for embedding cohesion in the Council's own strategic planning and management structures.

1.   Leadership and Commitment

These are essential qualities of the development of community cohesion since somebody needs to take responsibility for managing and driving through the required changes. However, there is no single leadership model to achieve this. What is clear is that someone needs to exercise leadership and demonstrate commitment and often this will bring other partners on board.

The role of the Halton Strategic Partnership (LSP) is an obvious place to start with its responsibility for taking a strategic approach to community planning and links with our local partners. So getting the LSP on board is the first step to developing a community cohesion programme. This needs to involve the time and commitment of individual partners including the Police, health authorities and the voluntary and community sector. However, first amongst equals within any LSP is the role of the Local Authority. Members in particular have a very important role to play in championing community cohesion and demonstrating that this is part of how the Council goes about it's daily business. It may be a good idea for an Executive Board member to have responsibility

for championing community cohesion within the Authority. However, all members may need to be supported in order to fulfil all their roles as champions of this Agenda.

2.   Vision and Values

Developing a common vision is an essential first step in working towards a cohesive society. Community cohesion as a concept will mean different things to different people and consequently can become a misunderstood term. Uncertainty exists around subtle distinctions between cohesion and other terms or concepts such as diversity, equalities, equality of opportunity, sustainable communities, community development and civic renewal. The Council is best placed to define cohesion for the community of Halton around these distinctions and draw it into a coherent vision. This has been attempted in the "vision story" outlined above. Creating and then communicating the vision sends a clear message that cohesion is in the forefront of the Council's agenda.

The need to build and sustain cohesive communities is a key-underpinning principal of the vision set out in the new Halton Corporate Plan. That vision sets out a clear, bold, succinct statement of our aspirations for Halton. The vision is focused on achieving outcomes through a well-defined corporate agenda. The Corporate Plan itself mirrors the aspirations set out in the Community Strategy, which was developed with partners over the last 12 months. The commitment to community cohesion is equally large within the community strategy.

3.   Programme Planning and Management

Having established our vision and values the next focus for consideration is around ensuring we have a clear understanding of what the service delivery programmes in Halton looked like, and that these perhaps include for community cohesion audits. This is also about determining arrangements for management and accountability – who will play what role in driving forward the cohesion agenda. Underpinning this is the need to establish a base line and determine the relevant indicators that can demonstrate progress. There is also a need to establish mechanisms for monitoring and reviewing success.

In developing smart and relevant performance indicators and establishing a base line, we need to be aware of the factors that underpin our approach. These include:

- Building a sense of community i.e. having pride in Halton and our neighbourhoods and trusting in our neighbours;
- Providing similar life opportunities were people are treated equally by a range of organisations;
- Building a sense of belonging to a neighbourhood or local area and knowing others in that area;
- Normalising perceptions of diversity so that differences are respected and it is agreed that having a mix of different people makes an area a better place to live, and;
- Developing political trust so members represent the views of local people and now how much they are trusted.

4.   Engaging Communities

Promoting community cohesion involves addressing fractures, removing barriers and encouraging positive interaction between groups. It aims to build communities where people feel confident they belong and are comfortable mixing and interacting with others. Engaging and involving communities in this process can be very difficult but this is what it is all about – reaching out to different groups and communities and bringing them closer together. Over the past 12 months a wholly new approach to community engagement has been pioneered in Halton. A new community engagement strategy was adopted in October 2005 and a partnership stakeholder group is now helping to take forward the Strategy.

5.   Challenging and Changing Perceptions

People generally base what they believe in from what they have experienced or heard through hearsay or through the media. In this sense, perception quickly becomes reality and a basis for belief. When beliefs start to impact on or are divisive to individual or community relationships this causes a threat to cohesion. This is why it is fundamentally important to find ways to define, test and then change perceptions of individuals and groups where these perceptions are misplaced or misunderstood. Part of the Council's role is to find and provide gateways to enable people to make informed choices and decisions and not accept at face value whatever may have been portrayed by the media, pressure groups or even people in the community.

6.   Cohesion and Specialist Areas

There are clear links between community cohesion and other areas such as the local economy, health and housing. Poor planning of housing developments and decisions about the local economy can adversely affect community cohesion. Equally it is more difficult for people to get actively involved in their communities unless they have access to health and good quality housing and a degree of financial security within their family.

Encouraging local employers to think about recruiting people from the local area is an important aspect of community cohesion. Anecdotal evidence from within Halton suggests that people believe job applicants from certain areas or estates are stigmatised by local employers and denied job opportunities.

Community cohesion has a critical role to play in housing renewal programmes. New house building and the massive programme of modernisation proposed by RSLs within Halton should generate significant economic regeneration within these areas. It is also important that the bricks and mortar elements of the programme should take into account the impact on cohesion and settled communities. These programmes should be planned well because Halton badly needs housing investment in areas of entrenched poverty and deprivation and it gives a chance to overcome one aspect of parallel lives by creating new areas of integrated housing. However, there is a threat that these programmes could break up well established communities, or create tensions over who is seen to benefit and who is seen to lose out. The redevelopment of Castlefields would seem to provide a test-bed of how this can be done properly.

Community cohesion is also closely associated with the health of an area and inequalities in access to health. There are a number of established tools that can be

used to map the relationship between cohesion and health. These include health needs assessment, health impact assessment and integrated impact assessment. These all form part of the toolkit being used by the Halton Health Partnership to tackle health inequalities in Halton.

Community cohesion has strong links with community safety since much of the cohesion agenda is about defusing tension between groups and a perceived threat posed by others. The work of the Safer Halton Partnership focuses on this. The partnership has developed work around town centres and key estates reducing crime and fear of crime and in particular looking at the tensions that arise in the evening with hotspots of anti-social behaviour and alcohol fuelled nuisance in and around the town centres.

Anti-social behaviour has many forms. It can be noisy neighbours, graffiti, litter, abandoned cars or drunken disorder. Anti-social behaviour holds back the regeneration of disadvantaged areas and damages the quality of life. It also has a negative effect given that it can make people afraid to go out or visit others, can cause resentment and unhappiness, and can cause people to stigmatise and scapegoat others.

7.   Ensuring Sustainability

Sustainability is about linking cohesion into the mainstream of service delivery and ensuring that our vision can be delivered over time and in the face of conflicting demands and diminishing resources. Mainstreaming can be simply defined as the process of moving from time-bound, area based or ad hoc programmes to universal services, which are available to everyone and become part of the long-term landscape of service provision. It involves more than changing plans and policies as it involves changing hearts and minds. This is one of our greatest challenges and it may be many years before we evidence of this coming to fruition. What is important is that foundations are properly and securely laid at the outset for enabling any project or initiative to make an impact into the future.

There are a number of factors that can help to ensure that this takes place. Firstly is the buy-in from partners through the LSP, which widens the pool of resources and people who can carry projects and programmes forward. It is also essential that long-term planning policies and documents are cohesion proofed. Halton already carries out equality impact assessments of all policies and it is being recommended that these be extended to cover community cohesion as well. Community cohesion projects are more easily integrated into longer term programmes, such as neighbourhood management and community safety, and these are often underpinned by training and development of the people involved who can pick up community cohesion messages.

WHAT DOES COHESION MEAN FOR HALTON?

The national debate on community cohesion has evolved since the summer of 2001 and the Government recognises that the concept may be interpreted widely. What is important is that it is firmly rooted in the particular circumstances and characteristics of an area. It is clear that in Halton the definition of community cohesion is not based around issues of race, ethnicity and faith. The key issues appear to be around inter-generational conflict, perceived inequalities between areas and estates, and worries about unequal access to services, transport, jobs, retail and leisure facilities etc.

The Topic Group did not feel it necessary to commission specific research around community cohesion in Halton. This was because in recent times a number of major studies have been undertaken to underpin the Crime and Community Safety Audit and Priorities Process that led to the development of the new Community Strategy, Corporate Plan and Local Area Agreement. In addition the Group held a number of workshops with local groups in Halton to ask specific questions around community cohesion. Therefore, It is possible to analyse the findings from these consultations and focus group work through the lens of community cohesion to come up with some tentative conclusions about what cohesion means for Halton. In summary there is probably a perception that Halton has a friendliness and warmth about it that people appreciate and value. This gives a basis for building confidence and a sense of belonging for everyone, which is at the heart of community cohesion. There is a history of a "live and let live" philosophy among people, which at an individual level is about respect and being accepted for who you are. It is possible to draw out the following most common issues which have been mentioned through this consultation process. These include the need to:

- tackle broad social problems such as anti-social behaviour, crime and the fear of crime, poverty, and the differences and tensions between generations;
- strengthen social networks such as families, friends, neighbours and also ensure that activities are based within defined neighbourhoods;
- get people together to tackle local issues and problems and share experiences;
- address the decline in the quality of life due to the impact of wider decisions around schools, housing and the unreliability of funding to many local projects; and
- encourage and foster the role of the voluntary and community sector in Halton.

One of the most telling qualities about Halton people that come out of these consultations is the strength of feeling that they have about their local area and about Halton. People have a definite view about how different communities get along, how tensions are managed and about how different communities can share issues and concerns – whether they are from different geographical areas or community groups or how young people are acknowledged and supported within the Borough. This points to the importance of existing channels of communication and information, which must be reviewed and improved. This is a prerequisite if misperceptions are to be replaced by more accurate information and a broader understanding of how others live their life in Halton.

The individual sense of belonging largely comes from the presence of family and friends, but other important community ties included work, sports groups, crèches and children's groups, and other social links. These lead to values, which include security, a sense of belonging, a sense of support, comfort, self esteem, recognition and particularly the strength of action that could be achieved as a group. People believe that they have good caring neighbours, the feeling of security, and a sense of community spirit, a similar social background, similar houses and similar living experiences. People reported that their area was often full of people of similar ages and professions born of growing up with each other and shops and schools and public places that were shared.

The negative issues include the fear of crime, the lack of spirit, feeling unsafe, the anti-social behaviour of young people, lack of respect across generations, unequal access to schools and health facilities, and a general feeling that society did not care about them. It is interesting to note that the ties that bind and the ties that divide are often the reverse sides of the same coin. On the whole there is a great deal of consensus amongst all people about the issues that drive communities apart and those that bring them together. Obviously, the importance of personal networks was consistently mentioned in sustaining good personal and community relationships. At a higher level there is widespread recognition that communities are often disconnected from the mainstream of life in Halton by social exclusion issues such as crime, disaffected youth, low standards of housing, high unemployment, poor education standards and degraded and unattractive environments. These contribute to a sense of poverty and deprivation that is difficult to address and in turn provide an environment where a sense of belonging would be hard to develop. The Community Strategy and Corporate Plan recognise the problems of crime and disorder, the lack of long term activities around community development and community engagement, problems of disaffected young people, lack of jobs and employment prospects, and indeed have long term plans in order to address them. Perhaps the greater difficulty is the perception of lack of trust and unkept promises by public agencies, the lack of understanding of others, ignorance, fear of isolation, the impact of drugs and alcohol and long term prejudice.

Certainly in the workshop sessions the core values at the heart of community cohesion were widely accepted by all people, i.e. the need for greater respect and tolerance, for mutual understanding and for greater fairness and equity in all that happens in Halton. In particular, it was recognised that communities need to integrate and collaborate more and especially that young people need support. Halton is a place undergoing rapid social change with greater social mobility, a faster turnover of population, and changing demographic make up with migrants from abroad joining our communities. It is perhaps an issue that the ingrained perceptions within Halton are not keeping speed with this agenda.

As part of the study the Topic Group mapped services and facilities across Halton – attached at Annex 8. In the evidence gathering it was clear that communities believed that across Halton there was a wide range of services and facilities on offer. However, given the geography and topography of Halton, low levels of car ownership, and poor public transport (especially after 6 pm) many people found it difficult to access the services available. In addition, the different lifestyles people now lead are sometimes out of kilter with the 9-5 availability of many services. It was also suggested that for some groups – especially the youth and the vulnerable – that there were a range of other barriers that prevented people accessing services. *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*.

Cohesion Strategy

Taking this agenda forward involves a huge range of inter-related activities. An analysis has taken place of the key areas of focus and proposed actions set out in the Halton Corporate Plan – attached at Annex 5. This shows that many facets of the community

cohesion task are already being directly addressed in the plans and strategies of the Council. To this can be added the broader approach that is being delivered through the Community Strategy under the auspices of the Halton Strategic Partnership. A key question the Topic Group considered is whether it is believed that the current approach will actually deliver a definitive improvement in cohesion or whether a specific community Cohesion Strategy would be appropriate.

The recent Local Government White Paper, Strong and prosperous communities, now being enacted as a Local government Bill, stated that cohesion outcomes would be secured through the new local government performance framework. New overview and scrutiny guidance will be issued looking at how local authorities could take cohesion into account. The White Paper also made a commitment to support areas experiencing difficulties and work with local government to spread good practice. The White paper reveals a focus by Government on issues of race, faith and extremism. However, it is probably less certain about its model of community cohesion now than it was three years ago, when Community Cohesion strategies were de-rigueur. In taking the issue forward the Topic Group was aware of the more nuanced approach of Government. Whilst government does not yet demand explicit community cohesion strategies, there is a clear feeling within those circles that some mechanism is needed to exemplify issues and make transparent the expected responses of local partners. On balance, the Group believe the current business-planning framework of the Council in pursuit of the Corporate Plan is sufficient. However, The Group wants the cohesion vision story (set out earlier) to be communicated through the service-planning element for equality, diversity and cohesion. In addition, there will be a bespoke annual performance monitoring system for cohesion (as set out earlier).

Managing Risks

Our main cohesion risks are around the potential failure to:

- Develop an understanding of what community cohesion means in Halton, all its various facets, and how the work of the Partnership can make a difference.

- Develop positive relationships and trust between partners to work collaboratively to improve cohesion in Halton.

- Embed cohesion into the warp-and-weft of how services are designed and delivered, so it is part of core, mainstream activity and not seen as an add-on.

- Develop a communication strategy to explain clearly what we mean, what we are doing, and how we can make a difference.

- Build bridges and understanding between our communities and the generations to get to the root of the myth building about others.

- Develop a set of measures/indicators so that we can baseline the Halton position; compare ourselves to others in an objective way, and track progress over time.

- Develop early interventions – especially in schools and through the youth service – to inculcate a sense of belonging and social responsibility.

- Target interventions properly so people get what they need, when they need, whilst maintaining equity in how services are delivered.

- Develop bespoke (and compulsory) training for all stakeholders on diversity and cohesion issues and approaches in Halton.

Halton uses a risk management model to assess and manage all aspects of its strategic activity. When Executive Board endorses the outcome of the scrutiny review in the autumn, the strategic risk register will be reviewed and amended to incorporate the cohesion risks identified, and to look at using them in the process to develop the new Local Area Agreement for Halton from 2008-11.

Social Capital

Using a broad analysis of cohesion and progress in recent years, it could be said that that overall social capital in Halton is improving. A sense of community is growing across the borough, which is a key element of people's quality of life. Factors such as trust between neighbours, relationships with local service providers and the extent to which people from different backgrounds get on well together all have an important relationship with people's health, perceptions of crime and even educational performance. For this reason, perhaps the concept of social capital has important implications for community cohesion policy and practice in Halton. Social capital, like cohesion, is difficult to define but it is multi-layered, but three common elements stand out:

- the social networks made through places such as work, school or place of worship,
- the norms that encourage co-operative behaviour,
- the trust that we have in other people.

Three forms of social capital are referenced extensively:

- Bonding social capital – the horizontal ties among people who are similar to each other in certain respects (age, ethnicity, social class etc.), which contribute to social support.
- Bridging social capital – the horizontal ties among people who are different from one another which contribute to cohesion and dialogue.
- Linking social capital – the vertical ties between communities and those in some form of authority, which give legitimacy to public institutions and nurture democratic life and responsive public services.

The overall picture is therefore positive: social capital in Halton is probably improving, particularly the all-important 'bridging' social capital which contributes to community cohesion. The Council has a critical role in understanding and nurturing the conditions that will help social capital develop. To this end there are a number of policy implications for Halton:

1. To establish better conditions for social capital through the way in which the council performs its core service functions, for example, in making the street a more attractive place to spend time, encouraging communal gardens, through resident-officer 'walkabouts', residential courses for young people, and community fun days.

2. To nurture the Council's role as a community leader. Part of this involves moving beyond traditional methods of consultation and involvement to find activities that promote more interactivity and deliberation between citizens, particularly on some of the more profound challenges facing the local authority area, for example, the need for affordable housing; or the trade-off between economic development and preserving local heritage and business.

3. The need to measure and understand more about the factors driving social capital outcomes and where it is possible to attribute cause and effect, for example, the links between increased trust in the police and police visibility. In Halton we can identify the particular challenge there is in 'closing the gap' concerning social capital between areas of deprivation and those that are less deprived.

Developing a methodology for measuring cohesion/social capital is difficult, but could use four components as a basis for developing indicators for a quantitative questionnaire - participation, reciprocity (or altruism), trust, and sociability. These would need to recognise the dangers of 'bonding social capital' when used to exclude diversity: - some of the 'closest' neighbourhoods can also be those that try to exclude outsiders. We also need to resolve some of the 'real structural barriers', such as the configuration of social housing, which can prevent 'bridging social capital' from forming. We need to recognise the connections between building social capital and policies that promote equal opportunities and cohesion.

Social capital is clearly a significant factor in determining the quality of life for local residents. It has strong linkages with most aspects of service provision but has particularly important implications for the physical environment, health, community cohesion and tackling deprivation. The importance of mainstream activity which can have a direct bearing on levels of social capital cannot be overstated.

A Picture of Community Cohesion

As we have seen community cohesion is important to the success of strategies and initiatives which aim to improve the quality of life in Halton. To achieve and direct this it is important that we have a clear understanding of communities. The Home Office has suggested ten indicators that can be used to build a picture of community cohesion in any area. Whilst not mandatory it is fairly clear that in the future these ten indicators would provide a comparative picture nationally of the state of community cohesion in Britain, and are likely to be used by Government for this purpose.

There is a headline indicator – The proportion of people who feel that their local area is a place where people from *different backgrounds can get on well together (CC01).* This probably captures the main essence of community cohesion in a survey question. The other nine indicators are grouped under themes of the broad definition of community cohesion which was stated in the first section of this document. We know that measuring cohesion is not straightforward and that indicators used for this purpose will need to be interpreted in the light of local knowledge. In this sense they should be seen as a basis for discussion and not simply regarded as a measure of performance. However, we do

not need to be prescriptive about the ways in which cohesion should be measured. We should recognise that other data is available which helps to provide an overall picture of cohesion in Halton. Much of that data is already set out in Annexe 2. In addition Annexe 6 also shows a range of Best Value Performance Indicators which may be relevant in giving a picture of cohesion in Halton. The Annex lists the ten community cohesion indicators.

Halton Strategic Partnership Charter

The Halton Strategic Partnership has developed a policy on equality diversity and cohesion and supplemented this with a working protocol governing the relationships between partners in the Borough. This provides an example of how community cohesion can be presented in a user-friendly way that seems to address local issues. The protocol arose from subsidiary discussions from the debate around developing a community engagement strategy in Halton. The key element of the policy is that we want to create a Halton that is a place where:

- the diversity of people's backgrounds and life experience is appreciated and valued;
- there are positive relationships between individuals from different backgrounds in the partnership, in the workplace, in schools and in the community;
- every individual is treated equally and has the same life chances;
- working together we will move forward in ways that acknowledge difference but build on shared hopes and values.

This commitment will establish a strong and robust community based upon a common understanding of respect and we will strive to ensure that we:

- respect other people's freedoms within the law to express their beliefs and convictions;
- learn to understand what others believe and value and allow them to express this in their own terms;
- recognise that all of us at times fall short of our own ideals;
- work to prevent disagreement from leading to conflict;
- reflect the right of others to disagree with us.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this report has been to provide a summary of the work of the Topic Group and an overview of community cohesion issues in Halton. In particular the aim has been:

- to understand more about the factors that contribute to community cohesion and cohesion risk within Halton;
- to identify some of the key issues that the Council need to address within communities to help form the basis for future work programmes;
- to identify models of good practice including existing interventions that are examples of good practice;

- and to make recommendations for how the Council may want to carry forward its commitment to community cohesion through its activities.

In general we believe Halton to be a fairly cohesive place. Its history and demography give it certain challenges. Halton is not a "natural" district having been formed in 1974 as part of local government reorganisation. It has three main clearly identifiable communities – the historic towns of Widnes and Runcorn, and the New Town of Runcorn built in the late 1960's and 1970's to accommodate the Liverpool overspill. Many local people consider that the fact that these three distinct communities fit alongside each other and function as one district, with only minor jealousies, to be a huge success.

Overall satisfaction amongst local people is very good. The BVPI general needs survey conducted by Mori in Autumn 2006 shows that Halton people are fairly satisfied with life, and the satisfaction rate has improved over the years. Whilst there can be some element of insularity and low aspiration being at play, the core of cohesion is about people feeling a sense of belonging and contentment in their lives. Whilst difficult to measure the satisfaction survey, and the survey work carried out in Halton show this to be the case.

We can conclude that in Halton cohesion is about feeling comfortable and positive about living and working alongside your neighbours and taking a sense of pride in Halton and the belief that the future is positive. Therefore, it is about:

- building community links;
- bringing communities together;
- countering prejudice and misperceptions;
- combating prejudice and discrimination;
- providing and promoting opportunities for all;
- listening to all voices in the community;
- addressing community concerns and tensions;
- celebrating life in Halton in all its aspects;
- understanding, valuing and sharing community differences;
- giving young people a voice and choice in life in Halton.

So, it is about relationships and because of this we need to think about policies, actions and services in slightly different ways. Our approaches to policy and resources need to be seen to be fair and promote access for all. We need to support and promote contact between people and develop understanding, tolerance, and a greater sense of community pride. Emerging from this is that the two most important factors are equality and deprivation. These and other cohesion issues are already addressed in the many plans and strategies carried forward by the Council and its partners. We need to recognise that we are already doing a great deal to improve cohesion and that there are many examples of good practice. Therefore, we can perhaps divide future efforts into the following headings:

- Understanding the Local Context
- Brokering Debate in Local Communities
- Providing Community Leadership
- Focusing on Young People and Learning
- Providing Support for Individuals and Groups
- Intelligence Gathering

- Re-engineering Services to Deliver Accessibility for All
- Celebrating Success and Successful Communities
- Mainstreaming Cohesion in All That We Do

A key way for community cohesion to be understood and valued is to improve communications. We need to communicate to all the audiences within Halton the value of diversity and respect for different approaches to the way people live their lives. We need to challenge myths and to promote what is being done. We need to clarify the message, identify key themes, improve support processes, counter misinformation, and develop a communication strategy. At Annex B is an outline of an approach to communicating community cohesion that can be added to the corporate communications approach. The key theme is that all actions need to take place at a local level and that a process of monitoring and review is needed to ensure that the cohesion approaches remain fit for purpose.

As previously stated the Council can already point to a great deal of activity, which takes place to address cohesion in the borough and promote good community relations. This is demonstrated by the analysis of the current Corporate Plan. In order for local government to be effective and responsive to local demands it needs to have in place a robust strategic planning framework. This is especially true in the field of community cohesion, which cuts across so many service delivery boundaries.

The Council response to cohesion is already captured in its adopted strategies, and it is important that the actions to implement it are planned and documented in a robust way. The Council already has an established service planning system in place. This also encompasses processes for the monitoring and evaluation of activity. Therefore, it should be relatively straightforward to identify cohesion activities in service plans and operationalise them through normal service planning process. In turn this would allow those actions to be monitored so that the action plan progress can be assessed.

In completing its work the Topic Group has identified a number of key recommendations for note and action. These have been highlighted in bold in the body of this report, and summarised at the beginning.

Attachments

Annexes not included