

**REPORT TO: STOCKPORT PARTNERSHIP BOARD**

**REPORT OF: COMMUNITY COHESION WORKING GROUP**

**REPORT ON: 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2008**

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Community cohesion is a dynamic policy agenda which is becoming an increasingly important issue for all agencies whether public, private or voluntary sector.
- 1.2 Policy guidance bestows responsibility for leading community cohesion at the local level on LSPs, with an emphasis on the development of an intelligence lead approach to enable the identification of local need and to pre-empt threats to community cohesion. This approach requires strong leadership; however, it leaves space for a flexible approach so that LSPs can concentrate on the issues that really matter, reducing community tensions, improving life opportunities and reducing inequalities for all members of the community.

## **2.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 2.1 To brief board members on recent developments with regards to the community cohesion agenda;
- 2.2 To update board members on the purpose of the Community Cohesion Working Group and projected project outputs; and
- 2.3 To provide an overview of the potential impact of these developments upon the Local Strategic Partnership.

## **3.0 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Commissioned by the Home Office in the wake of the 2001 race riots in Oldham, Bradford and Burnley, the Cantle Report introduced community cohesion to the fairness agenda. The report highlighted polarised, and deprived communities segregated upon racial and religious lines, with further disorder as a real threat. Subsequently, community cohesion has traditionally been viewed as an enforcement and race relations agenda.
- 3.2 The Commission on Integration and Cohesion was a fixed-term advisory body tasked with developing local and practical solutions to building community cohesion at a local level. Between August 2006 and June 2007, the Commission embarked on a significant programme of regional visits with the aim of assessing progress since the Cantle report of 2001.

- 3.3 The Commission's report 'Our Shared Future' was published in June 2007 and set out specific recommendations and practical proposals for local cohesion work.
- 3.4 In February the Government via the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published its response to 'Our Shared Future'. The response clarifies the meaning of the term community cohesion and identifies linkages between the white paper vision of LSPs as 'place shapers' and the community cohesion agenda:

'Community Cohesion is what must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well together. A key contributor to community cohesion is integration which is what must happen to enable new residents and existing residents to adjust to one another.

Our vision of an integrated and cohesive community is based on three foundations:

- People from different backgrounds having similar life opportunities;
- People knowing their rights and responsibilities; and
- People trusting one another and trusting local institutions to act fairly.

And three key ways of living together:

- A shared future vision and sense of belonging;
- A focus on what new and existing communities have in common, alongside a recognition and value of diversity; and
- Strong and positive relationship between people from different backgrounds.'

- 3.5 The new definition of community cohesion invites LSPs to take ownership for shaping the community cohesion agenda in their localities; moving away from an agenda of enforcement towards addressing key priorities including: developing a shared vision of place, ensuring the equitable provision of services and fostering a sense of pride in belonging to the community. Achievement of these ambitious objectives demands the buy in of all local partners, public, private and voluntary sector.
- 3.6 Stockport has a history of addressing community cohesion through partnership working. The 2003-13 Community Strategy attests to the Partnership's commitment to the agenda and their foresight in looking beyond inter racial conflicts to the challenges caused by inequalities (actual or perceived) for all groups.

## **4.0 IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 In the short term, community cohesion in Stockport will be assessed during the forthcoming Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) pilot, which seeks to establish how well local people are being served by public services and the prospects for future improvement. A self-assessment document has already been submitted to the inspection team.
- 4.2 To complement the government's response to 'Our Shared Future' a number of specific guidance documents have been issued, or are pending; of most relevance to the partnership is the forthcoming (summer 2008) Cohesion Delivery Framework (CDF), which will pull together a single framework which partnerships will be able to use to analyse the issues for cohesion in their area and develop an appropriate action plan.
- 4.3 Supplementary guidance from the I&DeA emphasises that in order to prepare effectively for using the CDF, LSPs should concentrate on two key starting points. Firstly, the development of a consensus on what community cohesion looks like for their area and secondly, the development of a solid, shared evidence base.
- 4.4 The Community Cohesion Working Group, which is a council led working party is currently undertaking some of this background work and will produce a report before the next partnership board meeting including the following information:
- A draft vision of community cohesion in Stockport;
  - A ward based map of Stockport's communities;
  - An overview of existing community cohesion activities undertaken by partners;
  - Proposed national indicators to monitor community cohesion; and
  - A gap analysis of remaining challenges.

Although Council led, contributions from key partners have been vital to the preparation of this evidence base.

- 4.5 Currently, there is no home for community cohesion within the Stockport Partnership or Thematic Partnerships, however, due to the pace and importance of the agenda, there is a need for community cohesion to be given more prominence within the LSP and for a 'home' to be identified. One option that is currently being looked at is for the Stronger Communities Partnership to take the lead.

## **5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 5.1
  - Board members are invited to comment on the report.
  - Further written comments are also welcomed by Louise Richardson who is leading the Community Cohesion Working Group at [louise.richardson@stockport.gov.uk](mailto:louise.richardson@stockport.gov.uk)

## **6.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 6.1
  - The Government's Response to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, DCLG, February 2008
  - 'Thinking Local', Local Government Chronicle Community Cohesion Supplement, May 2008

## **7.0 CONTACT OFFICERS**

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