

## **COMMUNITY AND SAFER CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 3 APRIL 2012**

### **DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY COHESION – DRAFT FINAL REPORT**

**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: SP5: Attractive and Inclusive City**

**CORPORATE PRIORITIES: CIO1: Delivering Customer Focused Services, CIO4: Improving Partnership Working to Deliver ‘One City’.**

#### **1 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To receive the draft final report of the Committee’s policy review into the development of Community Cohesion in Sunderland.

#### **2 Introduction**

- 2.1 On 7 June 2012, the Committee agreed to undertake a policy review into the development of community cohesion in Sunderland. The Committee felt that it was important to look at this issue in view of the importance of community cohesion to the stability and sustainability of our local communities.

- 2.2 This report sets out the draft findings and recommendations of the Committee. The report is submitted to this Committee for comment prior to its submission to the Cabinet in June 2012.

#### **3 Terms of Reference**

- 3.1 The Committee agreed the following terms of reference for the policy review:-

- (i) To consider the background and policy context for the development of community cohesion at a national and local level;
- (ii) To consider the policies and programmes of the Council, its partners and local voluntary and community sector organisations that can help bring people together across the city and build bridges between communities;
- (iii) To look at the range of interventions being taken to tackle tensions in the city;
- (iv) To consider the priorities for a future refresh of the Sunderland Partnership Community Cohesion Strategy;

#### **4 Membership of the Committee**

- 4.1 The membership of the Community and Safer City Scrutiny

Committee consisted of Councillors Florence Anderson, Thomas Martin, Rosalind Copeland, Barry Curran, Alan Emerson, Michael Essl, Margaret Forbes, Bernard Scaplehorn, George Thompson, Dorothy Trueman, John Wiper.

## **5 Methods of Investigation**

5.1 The following methods of investigation were used for the review:

- (i) Evidence from relevant Council officers and our partner organisations;
- (ii) Visits to view at first hand individual projects.

## **6 Development of Community Cohesion – National Context**

### *Background*

- 6.1 As a starting point for the review, the Committee examined the origins and development of community cohesion at a national level before going on to look at how this came to be translated into the Sunderland context. In doing so, the Committee was assisted and advised by representatives of the Council's Strategy, Policy and Performance Management function and officers from the Sunderland Partnership.
- 6.2 Community cohesion is term which first came into use as a reaction to the disturbances in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley in 2001.
- 6.3 Indeed, it was in response to these disturbances, that the previous Government commissioned the Cattle report which was to prove the foundation stone of current thinking on community cohesion. In his report, Ted Cattle focused on the importance of developing a dialogue and understanding between members of different racial, cultural and religious communities and ensuring an open debate about issues such as identity, shared values and citizenship.
- 6.4 In response to the report, the Institute of Community Cohesion was established in 2005 to drive forward policy in this area and provide advice and guidance at a local level.

### *What Do we Mean by the Term "Community Cohesion"*

- 6.5 In many ways, the meaning of the term community cohesion can be a difficult one to grasp and in the period following the riots of 2001, it was very much associated with the issue of race and race relations. However, there has been a growing acceptance that community cohesion in fact encompasses a much broader range of issues than purely ethnicity and faith, including the tackling of poverty and inequalities and developing people's understanding and tolerance of others. This in many ways reflected not only a growing recognition of

the complexity of the issue but also the fact that there is no one size fits all solution to the problems faced at a regional or local level.

6.6 More recently, the Institute for Community Cohesion has provided quite a broad definition of an integrated and cohesive community as one where:

- there is a clearly defined and widely shared sense of the contribution of different individuals and different communities to a future vision for a neighbourhood, city, region or country;
- there is a strong sense of an individual's rights and responsibilities – people know what everyone expects of them and what they can expect in turn;
- those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities, access to services and treatment;
- there is a strong sense of trust in institutions locally to act fairly in arbitrating between different interests;
- there is a strong recognition of the contribution of both those who have newly arrived and those who already have deep attachments to a particular place;
- there are strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds

6.7 In summary, community cohesion is essentially about how well people in different neighbourhoods and across the city get on together, how well they support one another and how much they feel that they share an interest in what happens in the city.

6.8 The Committee recommends that community cohesion should be seen in its broadest context - not simply as an issue of race – hence it is important that action is taken to undertake a sophisticated analysis of local and area needs and align and integrate cohesion with other Council strategies and plans including the emerging Community Resilience Strategy, Equality Scheme Area Plans and wider partnership documents.

## **7 Development of Community Cohesion in Sunderland**

### *Background*

7.1 Over the course of the past decade, the Council has been working with the Sunderland Partnership has sought to develop and refine the city's approach to community cohesion in order to reflect the particular needs and circumstances of the city. A central theme of this has been the importance of viewing community cohesion in its broadest context to respond to issues that are pertinent to each locality, impact on the delivery of all Council services and integrated with other Council policies and objectives.

- 7.2 In many ways, it is the Sunderland Strategy that sets out the foundation of Council and LSP policy on community cohesion. In the Strategy, community cohesion is seen as a crucial aspect of the delivery of all the strategic priorities. A cross cutting Creating Inclusive Communities theme was also developed in order to ensure that key issues were addressed and progress monitored.
- 7.3 Aim 3 of the Sunderland Strategy has as its objective “to make Sunderland a place where everyone feels welcome and can be part of a safe and inclusive community, where people will feel secure and can enjoy life without worrying about becoming a victim of crime”.
- 7.4 While Aim 4 aims “to create a place with a thriving learning culture where everyone can be involved in learning in a cohesive and inclusive city that is committed to social justice, equality and prosperity; where creativity flourishes and where individuals can have all they need to thrive in the global economy”.

*Institute of Community Cohesion Review 2007*

- 7.5 It was in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the issues facing Sunderland that the Institute of Community Cohesion were invited to undertake a review of community cohesion in the city during 2007.
- 7.6 The review noted that while Sunderland had not experienced the kind of instability that had occurred in other cities, there were a number of features and priority areas for the Council to address:-
- 7.7 Tackling Deprivation: the Institute contended that available evidence pointed to community cohesion being lower in areas experiencing higher levels of poverty, deprivation and a lack of opportunities. With Sunderland comprising a number of areas in the top 10% most deprived in the country, it was considered important that initiatives were developed to help tackle deprivation.
- 7.8 Strength of belonging: the Institute found that within particular neighbourhoods there was a strong sense of community and community pride. However, it was argued that there was the potential for such communities to become insular and reluctant to work with other communities. It was therefore important to work to build on these strengths whilst also building local confidence for people to reach out to other parts of the city.
- 7.9 Intergenerational tensions: it was felt that there were some areas in the city where the relationship between people of different ages was a problem. The Institute suggested that initiatives needed to be developed which encouraged people of different age groups to work together.

- 7.10 Valuing diversity: the Institute noted that Sunderland was a city built by people from many different backgrounds and histories and its prosperity would depend on a diverse population working together for a shared future.

*Sunderland Partnership Community Cohesion Strategy 2008-15*

- 7.11 The Sunderland Partnership and the Council developed the Community Cohesion Strategy 2008-2015 in order to help address the issues highlighted in the report.
- 7.12 The Strategy approached community cohesion as being about how well people in different neighbourhoods and across the city get on together, how well they support one another and how much they feel they share an interest in what happens in the city. It also saw community cohesion as being about reducing inequalities, crime and levels of deprivation, increasing community engagement and promoting interaction between people.
- 7.13 The Strategy also sought to reflect and incorporate the range of legislation around community cohesion and equalities issues. The Disability Discrimination (Amendment) Act 2005, the Equality Act 2006, Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 and the Equality Framework 2009 have all placed duties on local authorities to promote equality which have been reflected in the Community Cohesion Strategy. Although this legislation has now been superseded by the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty, the focus on Community Cohesion remains through a duty to foster good relations between those who have a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 7.14 The Community Cohesion Strategy also reflected the importance of community development and engagement and ensuring that local residents were able to get involved in a wide range of activities, from information provision to consultation to direct participation in decision making. It would help local people to become more confident that they could influence what happens in their lives.

*Measures of Community Cohesion in Sunderland*

- 7.15 The Committee heard that from the emergence of community cohesion as a national issue, the Council had recognised the importance of obtaining a clearer picture of how cohesive communities were in Sunderland and whether they were becoming more or less cohesive as time went on.
- 7.16 While community cohesion can at first sight seem a difficult concept to measure, a number of techniques have been used to some effect. For example, the previous government introduced a number of indicators as part of the National Outcome and Indicator Set. These included:-

- how far people agree or disagree that in their local area people from different backgrounds get on well together;
- how far people feel that they belong to their neighbourhood;
- civic participation in the local area;
- how far people agree or disagree that they can, through their own actions, influence decisions in their local area;

- 7.17 In addition, the Council has also used its Annual Residents Survey and Government Citizenship surveys in order to gather more detailed and qualitative data.
- 7.18 Overall, these surveys have found that the majority of people in Sunderland remain positive about community relations in their local area. More and more residents are saying that people of different backgrounds get on well together in their neighbourhood – only one in five – disagree, which indicates the high level of social capital in our communities.
- 7.19 However, the surveys have also indicated that there exist different experiences and different concerns between the various areas that make up Sunderland. For example, in the East area, where most of our minority ethnic communities are concentrated, there are most concerns about race relations and inter-racial tension. In the North area concerns expressed have more to do with deprivation and a feeling of being marginalised, of others getting a better deal. On the other hand, in the Coalfields area there are more concerns expressed about the pressures that come from rapidly changing communities and the break down of older ways of life.
- 7.20 Taken together, these indicators and measures have helped the Council to better understand how cohesive our communities actually feel and to identify community concerns. However, such questions often tell an incomplete picture of what is actually happening in communities and neighbourhoods. There still exists a need for more intelligence and information.
- 7.21 The Committee therefore recommends that the Council should investigate the ways in which we measure community cohesion at a more localised level in order to improve on the existing national indicators and to better reflect the fact that different areas of the city face different community cohesion challenges.

## **8 Delivery of Community Cohesion Work in Sunderland**

- 8.1 The Sunderland Partnership Community Cohesion Strategy sets out a structure for the delivery of community cohesion work across the city.
- 8.2 In order to achieve the aims of the strategy, delivery has been directed at two levels: firstly across the city as a whole and secondly in each

area of the city. This was to enable a more localised response to community cohesion issues where appropriate.

8.3 In order to obtain a better understanding of the delivery of community cohesion in the city, the Committee looked at the roles, responsibilities and actions of a number of the key delivery bodies including the Inclusive Communities Partnership, the Community Cohesion Networks and the Equality Forums (formerly the Independent Advisory Groups). The Committee then went on to look in greater detail at a number of the initiatives and interventions operating in the city including:-

- the ARCH hate reporting scheme
- the School Linking Network Programme
- youth provision and engagement
- Show Racism the Red Card
- Contribution of Gentoo

#### *Inclusive Communities Partnership*

8.3 The Inclusive Communities Thematic Group is charged with overseeing the implementation of the Creating Inclusive Communities cross-cutting theme within the Sunderland Strategy. This group comprises representatives of partner organisations and also representatives of the City's Equality Forums. The Group reports to the Sunderland Partnership Board and is chaired by the Sunderland Partnership Manager.

8.4 The Group provides direction and coordination to the delivery of community cohesion activities and interventions and is also responsible for monitoring progress.

#### *Community Cohesion Networks*

8.5 The Community Cohesion Networks were established to bring together representatives from local organisations, projects and groups to share information on cohesion concerns, possible tensions, inequalities and social welfare issues and to address the issues raised. The establishment of the area based networks reflect the very different community cohesion issues facing different communities.

8.6 The Community Cohesion Networks consist of a wide range of partners including police, housing, schools, youth providers, relevant Council services etc. The chair of each Cohesion Networks links with Local Agency Multi Agency Problem Solving Groups (LMAPS), Area Committee and the Area VCS Networks.

8.7 The Cohesion Networks aim to:-

- Increase opportunities for integration between people of different

ages, from different backgrounds, in different situations etc in order to build trust and understanding;

- Increase levels of engagement and involvement through the building of longer term positive relationships
- Increase opportunities to help vulnerable people to get the support, advice and information they may need to help improve their own lives
- Increase the flow of timely and useful information about threats to cohesion and the needs of communities
- Carry out this work in context with, and link to the needs and priorities of other area based groups i.e. Area Committee, Area Network, LMAP's.

8.8 Each of the Community Cohesion Networks feed into the Sunderland Partnership Structure via the Inclusive Communities Partnership. Issues are logged and progress monitored through the Inclusive Communities Partnership's Issues Log and when necessary taken through the wider partnership structures.

8.9 These Networks also link into the LMAPS which are locally based groups looking at issues and problems and deciding upon appropriate ways of tackling these. The LMAPS therefore provide a key part of the tension monitoring network across the city thereby ensuring that link into regional intelligence sharing networks and delivery of the national Preventing Violent Extremism agenda.

*Delivery at City Wide and Area Level*

8.10 As mentioned previously, delivery of the community cohesion agenda is directed at two levels - firstly across the city as a whole and secondly in each area of the city. The Committee was provided with examples of the work of the Community Cohesion Networks across both levels.

8.11 At a city wide level issues and activities include schemes such as the School Linking Network (SLN), work on financial inclusion and community philosophy. The work of the SLN will be considered in greater detail later in the report.

8.12 The Committee also heard about the different background and approaches being taken at the local level – in particular the experiences of the East Area Community Cohesion Network and the Coalfield Community Cohesion Network.

8.13 In terms of the East area, it was noted that this had been initially established in response to escalating racial tensions with young people. However, the scope had been widened and membership increased to represent the wider East area and other cohesion concerns for example; eg family tensions and Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) issues.



- 8.14 Examples of the kind of work underway in the East area included the Hendon Youth Initiative at Thornhill School. This was an innovative project designed to take youth work into the school environment.
- 8.15 The East and West Community Cohesion Networks have also developed a collaborative project to challenge community tension in the Eden Vale and Millfield areas.
- 8.16 In terms of the Coalfield Area Community Cohesion Network, the Coalfields area contains a relatively small Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) population. There was also a demand for youth provision and to combat this, the XL Youth Villages had been brought to the area. The ARCH scheme was also supporting work to raise awareness among young people on how to report a hate crime. Initiatives had also been undertaken to encourage discussions and interactions between people of different generations. In Peat Carr and Moorsley the Network in partnership with Groundwork North East is delivering a Neighbourhood Challenge project which aims to stimulate community activity; using innovative methods such as Challenge Prizes.

#### *Equality Forums*

- 8.17 The Equality Forums grew out of the Independent Advisory Groups which were established in 2006 in partnership with Northumbria Police. based on the legal strands of BME, Disability, Gender, Faith, Sexuality and Age.
- 8.18 The Independent Advisory Groups were set up initially to provide a single point of contact for engaging with groups who may have previously found it difficult to make their voices heard. It also provided a forum to raise issues that can be taken to the Sunderland Partnership through the Inclusive Communities Partnership.
- 8.19 The refreshed Equality Forums provide a vehicle for gathering intelligence on some of the short, medium and long term threats to equality and cohesion in Sunderland and have represented themselves on a number of issues to generate change. However enabling these groups to become independent of Partnership Team support has raised more challenging issues in terms of the confidence and capacity of some of the groups. In addition, there is a need to develop a common understanding of purpose and reassuring that the Forums were not intended to replace existing groups or organisations in the city.
- 8.20 Nevertheless, the Forums have proved useful in building up trust and working relationships between residents and the council and its partners. This was helped by some successes of the group as a vehicle for change and some commitment from the council and partnership to the work. For example, the Council joining Stonewall, the appointment of a dedicated co-ordinator to support development of

the groups and the willingness from key individuals to give their time and energy to progress groups.

8.21 As the Forums have progressed there have also been a number of innovations to promote their effectiveness. These include the establishment of an Issues Log to track progress of issues raised by the groups, regular progress reports to the Sunderland Partnership, the development of a wider range of methods for people to get involved or informed, i.e. web pages, social networking sites, newsletters and the development of an extensive contact database, building a network of links to other relevant social or interest groups across the city. Each Forum has also actively reviewed its membership and made changes to broaden this where necessary.

8.22 In terms of progress, the Committee was informed that some of the Forums had developed at a faster pace than others and some were at different stages of development. This is summarised below:-

- Gender – this was the first group to try a more informal approach, utilising different methods to identify topics of interest for women and men and then to come together and plan a response in relation to those topics;
- BME – this group decided to split the face to face group into two elements, one for practitioners and organisations with a particular interest in BME equality and one for members of the public only;
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) – Due to the difficulty of establishing a group for LGBT people, a group was established for organisations with an interest in LGBT equality. Led by Wear Out and fostering strong links with Sunderland Pride, the group continues to build links with LGBT people. An electronic network remains for residents;
- Faith – this group has gone through a period of review and is taking a new approach being led by people of faith and based on the interests of people of faith. The Group beginning to attract new members from people of different faiths in the city and engaging successfully for the first time with the Sikh and Muslim communities;
- Disability – the existing group to continue more formal face to face meetings, also new more informal ‘drop in’ group has been established initially from adult social care service users;
- Younger People – has made much of utilising on-line methods in particular to provide a regular communication route for young people, perhaps those not engaged through mainstream youth provision and work involving Sunderland’s Youth Parliament.
- Older People – a specific group has not been established due to existing network of 50+ Forums, led by Age UK. However links to this network are being strengthened.

- 8.23 In order to learn more about the experiences of the people involved in the Groups, the Committee met with Mr Kris Heskett of the Wear Out project.
- 8.24 Mr Heskett noted that research had shown that in Sunderland there were 17,250 people who were LGBT. It had been found that a lot of LGBT people in Sunderland were likely to leave the city for places such as Newcastle or Manchester as these cities provided for the community more than Sunderland.
- 8.25 Mr Heskett advised that there was a gay night in the city centre pubs and clubs on a Tuesday night, however there was only a small proportion of the community who made use of this night. He felt that there was a need for more people to be open about their needs and the visibility of the LGBT community needed to be increased.
- 8.26 Mr Heskett felt that there was a need for people to try to better understand the needs of the different people who made up the city and to engage with the different communities within the city.
- 8.27 In terms of the overall progress of the Forums as a whole there had been a number of achievements:-
- the Sit And Knit a Bit event which was used as a method of attracting women to learn about and get involved in International Women's Day, leading to over a hundred women and men willing to get involved in the future;
  - supporting the development of a Family Friendly Venues leaflet for Sunderland;
  - development of LGBT services flyer for Sunderland produced and distributed at Sunderland Pride
  - the bringing together of Muslim and Christian women for shared prayer - something never done before in the North East.
  - Annual State of the City Debate will have a live sign language interpreter included in the event from 2012 due to interventions of the disability group
  - considerably more BME people completed the 2011 Census after the involvement and support of the BME group.
  - a number of groups were involved in the development of equality aspects of the Sunderland Compact

#### *ARCH Hate Reporting System*

- 8.28 ARCH is part of a Tyne and Wear network, with all 5 local authorities using the ARCH system to monitor hate incidents and community tensions in their local areas. Over 20 partner agencies from across the statutory, voluntary and community sector were now part of the ARCH Partnership. These agencies act as reporting centres, referral agencies or both.

- 8.29 The Committee heard that the ARCH hate incident reporting system had been operating in Sunderland since November 2007. The system allowed members of the public to report hate incidents through the internet or over the phone. Victims are offered support and action taken against perpetrators. ARCH also allows the spread of racially motivated incidents across the city to be monitored. Where instances of community tension are present there is an opportunity for Police and partners to intervene.
- 8.30 The Committee heard that there had been 971 hate incidents reported to ARCH from November 2007 – August 2011. Around 75% of incidents reported involved verbal abuse and 38% threatening behaviour. These include the types of incidents reported by shopkeepers or takeaway workers who are often verbally abused by customers; people being verbally abused or feeling threatened in the street or at/outside their on home. Attack on person (17%) and attack on property (11%) together make up nearly a third of incidents reported. These range from unprovoked attacks in the street to repeated damage to homes or businesses.
- 8.31 The Committee also heard that while there had been increase in reporting year on year, there was anecdotal evidence to suggest that many incidents still go unreported, particularly by people experiencing hate incidents on a daily basis. ARCH intends to put more work into encouraging victims and witnesses to report hate incidents in order to build up a better picture of what is happening in local areas. There are a number of reasons why people do not report harassment, including not knowing what a hate incident is, what happens once it is reported or what support is available.
- 8.32 The recent Equality and Human Rights Commission's (EHRC) inquiry into disability-related harassment suggested that disabled people were disproportionately affected by antisocial behaviour and were more likely to be harmed by it.
- 8.33 The evidence suggests that young people who are victims of hate incidents are also particularly under represented in the statistics.
- 8.34 A number of key actions had been identified for the future. These included:-
- Work with communities and vulnerable groups around their understanding of what a hate incident is; what happens once it is reported; what support is available to victims of harassment and the importance of reporting for intelligence information;.
  - Increase reports made by witnesses of hate incidents;
  - Increase reports of disability hate incidents (launched Nov 2011);
  - Roll out ARCH into schools and youth projects.
  - building upon partnership working success by involving more

organisations in the reporting, recording and challenging of hate based harassment, including the private sector.

- 8.35 Members of the Committee felt that it was shocking to hear that there were hate incidents against people with disabilities. The Committee felt that everyone had a responsibility to report any hate incidents they were victims of or witness to. It is vitally important that people are encouraged and aware of how to record an incident of hate and crime and an understanding of equalities legislation.
- 8.36 The Committee recommends that the Council ensures its staff and Members have an awareness of the equalities legislation, including the challenges faced by people who may be discriminated against and enhance their understanding of issues that effect community cohesion.

*School Linking Programme (SLN)*

- 8.37 In 2010, the Council secured national funding to develop a SLN in Sunderland. The aim of the SLN was to develop links between schools in order to work to improve relations. The programme also seeks to develop the confidence and self esteem of young people and identify leadership and interpersonal qualities that the schools can focus on and develop. Other aims include raising awareness of:-
- the increasing multi cultural nature of the city;
  - the similarities between the schools;
  - how difficult some young people find mixing with others;
  - how easily some people can make friends;
  - how much work needs to be done on raising cultural awareness;
  - how keen some young people are to participate in community issues.
- 8.38 The work of the programme has been directed at secondary school level. To date nine secondary schools have been involved including Academy 360, Farringdon Community Sports College, Hetton School, Houghton Kepier Sports College Monkwearmouth School, Sandhill View School, Thornhill School, Venerable Bede and Washington School
- 8.39 In July 2011, "Ambassadors" from eight of the secondary's came together at the Stadium of Light. Activities included:-
- Sharing their research findings and considering common aspirations
  - Workshops looking at living in Sunderland now and a vision of the city in 2012
  - Sunderland Youth Parliament, Interact, Young Asian Voices and the Children's University were involved and the Mayor and other local dignitaries were presented with feedback from the young people.

8. 40 It is considered that the SLN programme has been successful during its first year and there were plans to expand the network to include links to the college and university and to include young people who were at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).
- 8.41 The Committee was most impressed by the work being undertaken by the School Linking Programme and looked forward to its development into the future.

#### *Show Racism the Red Card*

- 8.42 Show Racism the Red Card is an educational charity established in 1996 which aims to combat racism through role models, who are predominately but not exclusively footballers, to present an anti-racist message to young people and others.
- 8.43 The organisation works with schools throughout the North East and East and South East of England to deliver anti-racism workshops to more than 10,000 young people every year. The aim is to:-
- educate young people about the causes and consequences of racism and to explore the various forms racism can take.
  - empower young people to challenge racism in the communities in which they live, providing them with relevant knowledge and information to enable them to do this.
  - help young people prepare to play an active role as citizens in an increasingly multi-cultural society.
  - enable young people to develop good relationships and respect the differences between people, regardless of their ethnicity, faith, culture or nationality.
- 8.44 As part of our review, the Committee visited one of their educational sessions for school children from the city. The Committee also invited Craig Bankhead to speak to the Committee about their work.
- 8.45 As a Committee we were most impressed by the work of Show Racism the Red Card and the drive and enthusiasm of staff delivering the programmes. We feel that Show Racism the Red Card represents an excellent way of raising awareness of racism and equality issue with young people.

#### *Youth Work and Engagement*

8.46 The Committee also received information on the work going on to engage with young people within our local communities.

8.47 The Committee heard that within the Council there exists a commitment to provide all children, young people and their families every opportunity to engage in decisions that affect them by the development of the participation and engagement framework. This builds on the existing Children and Young People's Participation Strategy 2008- 2013.

8.48 Examples include:-

- A strong and established Youth Parliament which is locally and nationally recognised
- A democratic election process for the Youth Council that runs bi-annually
- Young People's Annual State of the City Event which is seen as revolutionary on a European level
- Young people are involved in the evaluation and consultation on the development of the annual Sunderland Young Achievers Awards
- Children and Young People fully participate and enjoy National Takeover Day annually.
- City wide parent forums held in each locality area giving parent/carers the opportunity to have their say and influence decisions
- Use of Viewpoint electronic questionnaires
- An annual parent/carer event for parent/carer of family members of disabled children.
- The development and creation of a DVD about the XL Youth Villages by young people.

8.49 In terms of developing their work into the future, the Committee is encouraged to learn that future plans include;

- re- establishing the Children's Trust shadow board of children and young people from across the city.
- establishing 'service user commissioning groups' of children, young people and parent/carers as in Sunderland we understand the vital role they can play at every stage of the commissioning process including reviewing and inspecting services
- Creating a XL forum of young people who attend the XL Youth Villages to formally get involved in the decision making processes of the villages.

#### *Gentoo Group*

8.50 The Committee also heard from Ian Porter, Managing Director of gentoo group about their approach to promoting cohesion in the city. Lento manage 29,000 homes in Sunderland and have 70,000

customers. The properties are divided across 98 different neighbourhoods and it was recognised that each of these areas had different needs which needed to be carefully addressed. Therefore, each neighbourhood had its own Neighbourhood Plan which detailed the issues in the area and how they could be tackled.

- 8.51 Mr Porter confirmed that gentoo was an active participant on the Sunderland Partnership Inclusive Communities Group. It had also developed a comprehensive Equality and Diversity Strategy and Customer and Community Involvement Strategy which guided their approach.
- 8.52 There existed a broad range of schemes designed to help improve community cohesion which involved working with the different groups of people who were residents of the estates including young people; old people; the unemployed; and those with drug, alcohol or mental health issues.
- 8.53 Mr Porter advised that the main issue faced was engagement and that the majority of the work which was carried out was people related rather than buildings related.
- 8.53 After considering the range of activities going on in the city, the Committee recommends that the Council carry out a review of Council activities and structures that support the involvement of communities and VCSOs in identifying, shaping and delivering local priorities

## **9 Future Challenges**

- 9.1 The Committee also took the opportunity to highlight two issues that we feel will impact on community cohesion in the city during the years ahead – namely the implications of Welfare Reform legislation and the Government’s recently published Integration Strategy – “Creating the Conditions for Integration”.

### *Welfare Reform - Impact of Deprivation*

- 9.2 As mentioned earlier, the Institute of Community Cohesion report on Cohesion in Sunderland (2008) suggested that there exists a strong correlation between community cohesion and deprivation. In view of this and the potential impact of the Welfare Reform legislation, the Committee invited Fiona Brown, Head of Transactional Services, Commercial and Corporate Services to outline the nature of these changes and the potential implications for the city.
- 9.3 Clearly, the Government Welfare Reform legislation represents the biggest change in welfare system for 60 years and will have a considerable impact on the financial circumstances of many households in Sunderland. These include:-



- capping the total amount of benefits that can be claimed by a household at £26, 000;
- reassessing Incapacity Benefit claimants under Employment and Support Allowance rules, thereby increasing the number of claimants found fit for work;
- replacing the current Disability Living Allowance with Personal Independence Payments which will entail a new, more restrictive assessment process to reduce the number of claimants;
- cutting Housing Benefit for working age tenants who under occupy their homes;
- reducing the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate from the 50<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile of rent levels;
- extending the LHA Shared Room Rate restriction which applies to single claimants under 25 years of age to single claimants under 35 yrs of age;
- up rating benefits and Tax Credits by the Consumer Price Index instead of the Retail Price Index thereby reducing their value;
- freezing Child Benefit and reducing the percentage of childcare costs paid through Working Tax Credits.

9.4 With a quarter of households currently in receipt of Housing Benefit and a third of households receiving Council Tax Benefit, these changes will have a serious impact on the city as the shortfall in rent could increase rent arrears and lead to increased levels of eviction and homelessness.

9.5 The Committee was told of the actions being taken to respond to the changes with a Task Group being established comprising the council, stakeholders and partners. Impact assessments were being compiled for the range of potential vulnerable groups and the potential financial impact analysed. Work was also going on with Landlords via the Landlords Forum and preparations made with regard to Housing Options and Homelessness support.

9.6 The Committee was impressed with the thorough preparations and partnership working in evidence in the Council's response to the Welfare Reforms.

9.7 However, the Committee has concerns about the potential impact of the changes on the people of the city and the potential impact of the changes on community cohesion and stability. We therefore feel that it is important the Committee continues to closely monitor the impact and implications of the Welfare Reform legislation and the Council response to it.

*Integration Strategy – Creating the Conditions for Integration*

9.8 On 21 February 2012, the Government published the document "Creating the Conditions for Integration". This sets out the Government's strategy or approach for achieving a more integrated

society..

9.9 The Strategy sets out the Government's approach to addressing five key factors that contribute to integration and enable local response:

- reinforcing a sense of shared aspirations, core values and common ground;
- promoting a strong sense of personal and social responsibility;
- supporting social mobility and enabling people to realise their potential;
- empowering everyone to participate in local and national life;
- tackling intolerance and extremism.

9.10 At the time of this review, the implications of the Strategy were not yet clear. However, the Strategy is seen as being consistent with the Government Localism agenda, with integration seen as a predominately local issue. The main themes include:-

- integration should be regarded as a local priority with actions focused at communities rather than individuals – place is a key factor;
- local leadership is of fundamental importance in shaping integration and local authorities well-placed to take a local lead, working through existing partnerships with the police, other agencies and the business and voluntary sectors;
- the emphasis is on things 'in common' rather than difference, enabling bridges across and between different groups and communities
- everyone, from individuals to organisations and across sectors, has a contribution to make;
- socio-economic factors are of crucial importance – creating barriers to integration and facilitating divisions capable of exploitation (by extremists in particular) – and, therefore, require address.

9.11 In view of the potential impact of the strategy on community cohesion work in Sunderland, it is recommended that the Committee continue to monitor and assess the implications of the Strategy for the city.

## **10 Conclusion**

- 10.1 Sunderland is a city of diverse and distinct communities, with their own history and identities. The unique nature of our communities mean that particular interventions will be appropriate for some neighbourhoods at particular times, while for other neighbourhoods different forms of support may be more appropriate. We need to recognise the distinct nature of each community and shape our response accordingly. Therefore we need to combine a clear national agenda and central support with very specific and local approaches.
- 10.2 Community cohesion does not just happen. We need to work at it continuously at a local level. While much progress has been made over the last decade we still have too many incidents of hate crime, some areas disadvantaged and some areas disengaged.
- 10.3 Community cohesion is not just about diversity – it is about the division between those who have a stake in society and those who feel they do not. This can express itself in a variety of ways – across all equality characteristics.
- 10.4 We need to deepen our understanding of the quality of life and service provision in a local area and identify the strengths, vulnerabilities and priorities of different communities. It is important to ensure that people are able to get involved at the level to which they choose to and to include those people who can often be marginalized or are vulnerable.
- 10.5 We need to ensure that we listen to, understand and respond to people's concerns as well as their hopes and ambitions, to make sure that those people who want to cause divisions and strife cannot make headway in the city. We need to seek to increase the number of people participating in their community, increase targeted interventions to promote a sense of place, develop opportunities for mutual aid, support good relations within and between communities.
- 10.6 Despite the creation of jobs in recent decades, unemployment remains high and the number of people claiming out of work benefits is increasing. The Committee felt that employment and economic well-being are key factors in securing a cohesive community. Employment is the way out of poverty and access to job opportunities provides people a chance to participate in and contribute. We need to support individuals into work as one way of reducing the number of children and families living in poverty and those children who could potentially move into poverty.
- 10.7 It is important to bear in mind that periods of economic turmoil have the potential to divide communities. History had shown that during difficult times people often looked for something or someone to blame as a way of relieving their frustrations. This frustration is likely to be

heightened during periods of very high youth unemployment when the opportunity to work is limited. It is therefore important that we continue to closely monitor any tensions that may potentially develop in the city.

- 10.8 Despite the need to mention potential future tensions, as mentioned above community cohesion in the city remains strong. The majority residents are positive about community relations in their local area and there feel that there is a strong sense of community. More and more residents are saying that people of different backgrounds get on well together in their neighbourhood, which indicates the high level of social capital in our communities.
- 10.9 Nevertheless we must not be complacent particularly at time of economic problems and the increasing strain experienced by many – particularly the most vulnerable in our local communities.

## 11 Recommendations

The Scrutiny Committee has taken evidence from a variety of sources to assist in the formulation of a balanced range of recommendations. The Committees key recommendations to the Cabinet are as outlined below:-

(1) that community cohesion should be seen in its broadest context - not simply as an issue of race – hence it is important that action is taken to undertake a sophisticated analysis of local and area needs and align and integrate cohesion with other Council strategies and plans including the emerging Community Resilience Strategy, Equality Scheme Area Plans and wider partnership documents;

(2) carry out a review of Council activities and structures that support the involvement of communities and VCSOs in identifying, shaping and delivering local priorities

(3) that the Council should consider the ways in which we measure community cohesion at a more localised level in order to improve on the existing national indicators and to better reflect the fact that different areas of the city face different community cohesion challenges

(4) that the Council ensures its staff and Members have an awareness of the equalities legislation, including the challenges faced by people who may be discriminated against and enhance their understanding of issues that effect cohesion;

(5) that the Committee continue to monitor the implications of the Government's Welfare Reforms in order to understand and mitigate the potential effects on community cohesion in the city;

(6) that the Committee continue to monitor and assess the implications to the city of the Government's recently launched Integration Strategy.