

Annual Report: Community and Safer City Scrutiny Committee 2011/12

It gives me great pleasure to present the annual report of the Community and Safer City Scrutiny Committee. Once again it has proved to be a busy year for the Committee and one in which we have looked to build upon the work and progress made in previous years.

For our policy review, the Committee agreed to focus on the development of community cohesion in the city. 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.

In the course of the review, the Committee consulted with a broad range of partners and viewed at first hand some of the initiatives being developed throughout the city. I think it is fair to say that we were all most impressed by the enthusiasm and commitment of everyone we spoke to and the very real impact their work is having. Our particular thanks to all of the officers of the Council and the LSP who supported us during the review and also representatives from Show Racism the Red Card and Wear Out who provided invaluable us with invaluable support and guidance.

I feel that the report has generated a number of far reaching recommendations that together can make a significant improvement to the development of community cohesion in the city.

Most importantly, we believe that community cohesion should be seen in its broadest context - not simply as an issue of race. The issues and challenges facing particular areas of our city are often varied and therefore require different approaches and solutions. We have therefore recommended 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.

Also, in view of the broad range of factors influencing community cohesion, we feel that if we are to make a real impact, it is important to align and integrate cohesion with other Council strategies and plans including the emerging Community Resilience Strategy, Equalities Scheme Area Plans and wider partnership documents.

Based on our discussions, the Committee feel that one of the key factors in community cohesion revolves around the issues of deprivation and unemployment. We feel that action tackling poverty and unemployment are a major part to securing stable and cohesive communities. We therefore feel that it is important to closely monitor the implications of the Government's Welfare Reforms in order to understand and mitigate the potential effects on community cohesion in the city.

Furthermore, in order to help shape and inform our response to equalities issues, we feel that staff and Members should have an awareness of community cohesion issues and equalities legislation, particularly a knowledge and understanding of the challenges faced by people who suffer from discrimination.

Finally, as the Committee review was nearing completion, the Government announcement further details of its forthcoming Integration Strategy. As this will have significant impact on the future development of community cohesion policies, the Committee will continue to monitor and assess the implications to the city.

As well as our work on the development of community cohesion, the Committee has also closely monitored the progress of the Police and Reform Act and the implications for the city and its residents. With the elections for the new Police Commissioners scheduled for 23 November 2012 and

organisational changes to be in place in even earlier we feel that it is extremely important for members to closely monitor the situation in the year ahead.

In conclusion, I would like to thank my colleagues on the Committee for all their support and assistance during the year and also thank those officers and partners who have assisted the Committee in its work. I feel that a great deal has been achieved during the year and that this will place us in a strong position to face the challenges of the year ahead.

Cllr Thomas Martin
Vice Chair of the Community and Safer City Scrutiny Committee