

CABINET MEETING – 20 JUNE 2012

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY SHEET – PART I

Title of Report:

COMMUNITY AND SAFER CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY COHESION IN SUNDERLAND – POLICY REVIEW FINAL REPORT

Author(s):

Community and Safer City Scrutiny Committee and Chief Executive

Purpose of Report:

To set out the recommendations of the Community and Safer City Scrutiny Committee following the Committee's review into Community Cohesion in Sunderland.

Description of Decision:

The Cabinet is requested to consider the Community and Safer City Scrutiny Committee's Policy Review Final Report, attached as Appendix A, and approve the recommendations contained within the report.

To assist the Cabinet in its determination of either approving or rejecting the proposed recommendations of the Community and Safer City Scrutiny Committee, attached as Appendix B is the proposed Action Plan for the implementation of these recommendations which has been prepared in consultation with the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s).

Is the decision consistent with the Budget/Policy Framework? Yes

If not, Council approval is required to change the Budget/Policy Framework

Suggested reason(s) for Decision:

The recommendations and comments of the Community and Safer City Scrutiny Committee reflect the findings of a detailed review of the service area.

Alternative options to be considered and recommended to be rejected:

There are no alternative options recommended.

Impact analysed:

Equality
 Privacy
 Sustainability
 Crime & Disorder

Is this a "Key Decision" as defined in the Constitution? Yes

Scrutiny Committee

Is it included in the Forward Plan? Yes

Scrutiny Lead Member for Responsive Services and Customer Care

**COMMUNITY AND SAFER CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: DEVELOPMENT OF
COMMUNITY COHESION IN SUNDERLAND – POLICY REVIEW FINAL REPORT**

**REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY AND SAFER CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND
CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To advise Cabinet of the recommendations arising from the Community and Safer City Scrutiny Committee's review into Community Cohesion in Sunderland.

2. Description of Decision (Recommendation)

- 2.1 The findings and recommendations of the Community and Safer City Scrutiny Committee be accepted. However, where there are any recommendations which have financial implications, these will be outlined in the Service Directorate's response.

3 Background

- 3.1 The Community and Safer City Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting on 8 June 2011, agreed that a policy review be undertaken into the development of Community Cohesion in Sunderland.
- 3.2 The Committee chose to look at this issue in view of the importance of community cohesion to the stability and sustainability of our local communities.
- 3.3 In the course of the review, the Committee consulted with a broad range of partners and viewed at first hand some of the initiatives in place across the city.

4 Key Points Arising from the Review

- 4.1 Several themes emerged during the evidence gathering for the policy review and the Committee was able to draw several conclusions from this;
- Sunderland is a city of diverse and distinct communities, with their own history and identities. This means that support and interventions need to be tailored to individual communities – there is no one size fits all approach. Therefore we need to combine a clear national agenda and central support with very specific and local approaches;
 - Community cohesion does not just happen; it is the result of a continuous process of listening to communities, responding to their needs and supporting them in problem solving. While much progress has been made over the last decade there is still progress to be made, particularly in reducing the number of incidents of hate crime and areas of disadvantage;

- Community cohesion has typically been associated with issues of race, however, work has been progressing in Sunderland to try and ensure that cohesion is seen in its broadest sense, i.e. the division between those who have a stake in society and those who feel they do not, e.g. this may be seen in tensions between generations or economic groups. This understanding of cohesion should be further propagated and understood across the city, both by officers and members of the public;
- In order to further address community cohesion issues we need to develop a more sophisticated method of measuring cohesion issues based on local intelligence (both qualitative and quantitative). This will include understanding the quality of life and service provision in a local area and identify the strengths, vulnerabilities and priorities of different communities, i.e. how resilient our individual communities are.
- In Sunderland there are a variety of ways for individuals to get involved in influencing local decision making, e.g. through the Area Voluntary and Community Sector Networks, the Equality Forums or the Cohesion Networks, however, it can sometimes be unclear as to the most appropriate route for individuals and communities to participate in. It is important to ensure that individuals and communities are able to participate at the point which is appropriate to them.
- Sunderland faces difficulties both in terms of the recession and the welfare reforms. Although steps have been taken to mitigate against the current economic circumstances, Unemployment remains relatively high and the number of people claiming out of work benefits is increasing. We consider that employment and economic well-being are key factors in ensuring a cohesive community. Employment is a way out of poverty and access to job opportunities provides people with a chance to participate in and contribute to their local communities. 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.
- It is important to bear in mind that periods of economic turmoil have the potential to divide communities. History has shown that during difficult periods people often look 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;
- However, it is equally important to bear in mind that community cohesion in the city remains strong. The majority residents are positive about community relations in their local area and 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.

5. Response of the Directorate

- 5.1 To assist the Cabinet in its determination of either approving or rejecting the proposed recommendations of the Community and Safer City Scrutiny Committee, attached as Appendix B is the proposed Action Plan for the implementation of these recommendations which has been prepared in consultation with the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s).
- 5.2 The Directorate welcomed the Scrutiny Committee's decision to focus its policy review on community cohesion in Sunderland. The review findings and the recommendations provide a basis for improving how as a city we deliver the strategic and operational approaches to tackling these issues.

6. Reasons for Decision

- 6.1 The recommendations are intended to develop community cohesion in the city.

7. Alternative Options

- 7.1 The recommendations will explore a range of potential options with the aim of ensuring a safe city centre for the residents of Sunderland.

8. Impact Analysis

8.1 Equalities

The proposals are designed to support improved service delivery for the residents of Sunderland. Equality issues were addressed during the evidence gathering process and this is reflected in the focused recommendations.

8.2 Privacy Impact Assessment

The proposals have no immediate additional implications for the protection of privacy of the public. Any privacy issues which arise will be addressed through the delivery of the action planning process.

8.3 Sustainability

The proposals have no immediate implications for sustainability. Sustainability issues will be considered and addressed as part of the delivery of the action plan by Members and officers.

8.4 Reduction of Crime & Disorder – Community Cohesion / Social Inclusion

Impact on community cohesion was considered during this review. The method of measuring cohesion issues based on local intelligence (both qualitative and quantitative) was investigated. More robust evidence in this area will include understanding the quality of life and service provision in each area and identifying the strengths, vulnerabilities and priorities of different communities, i.e. how resilient our individual communities are. The impact of participatory forums was investigated to ensure that individuals and communities are able to participate at the point which is appropriate to them. All of these issues will be addressed as part of the delivery of the action plan by Members and officers.

9. Consultation

- 9.1 The findings in the report are the result of consultation and evidence gathering by the Scrutiny Committee. Consultation has been carried out with officers and partner organisations.

10. Background Papers

- 10.1 The following background papers were consulted or referred to in the preparation of the report:
- Community and Safer City Scrutiny Committee Policy Review 2011/12: Development of Community Cohesion in Sunderland