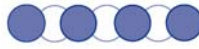


CLES Bulletin is a topical summary of an issue which has recently emerged. Its aim is to provide a pithy précis of the issue, thus creating a quick and easy to read document which directs to more detailed material, if required.

**CLES Bulletin No.27
Housing & Community Cohesion**

CLES BULLETIN





Introduction

This CLES Bulletin looks at the impact housing policy can have on community cohesion. In 2001 disturbances in areas like Bradford, Oldham and Burnley highlighted the extent of the underlying tensions in some of our urban areas. Since 2001 the promotion of "community cohesion" has been identified as a long-term response to addressing these underlying tensions.

Housing recognised as an influencing factor on the shape of communities has until recently had little input into the community cohesion agenda. This bulletin addresses the government's current thinking on delivering housing solutions that promote community cohesion.

What is 'Community Cohesion'?

Communities are made up of diverse groupings of people, creating a cohesive community is about making all sections of that community feel that they belong. This includes people from different ethnic backgrounds, people with disabilities, people of all age groups and people from the lesbian/gay and transgender communities. The Government's aim in relation to cohesive communities is to build a successful integrated society that recognises and celebrates the strength of its diversity.

A cohesive community is one where:

- there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all
- the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances is 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.¹

Housing and community cohesion

Housing is a major factor in the shaping of communities and the relationships between different races and cultures. The Cantle report² investigated the causes of the disturbances in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham during 2001, and it outlined the key themes

¹ <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/comrace/cohesion/> This definition is taken from "Guidance on Community Cohesion" - December 2002

² Cantle Report, Community Cohesion: A Report of the independent Review team 2001, <http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Guardian/documents/2001/12/11/communitycohesionreport.pdf>

needed to promote community cohesion, such as education, employment and policing. However, the report noted (p42)

'The impact of housing policies on community cohesion seems to have escaped serious consideration to date'.

The Cantle report recommended that housing agencies should ensure there is more contact between different and diverse communities in an effort to reduce all types of tensions (racial in the case of the 2001 disturbances). For this to be achieved housing strategies, policies, and procedures need to have a sense of community cohesion at their centre.

*'It is essential that more ambitious and creative strategies are developed to provide more mixed housing areas, with supportive mechanisms for minorities facing intimidation and harassment'.*³

While the report reached a consensus that segregated housing is likely to encourage or exacerbate tensions between communities, resulting in disturbances like those seen in 2001, it admitted that much more work needed to be done to identify the most effective means of promoting cohesion within the housing sector.

Nearly 70 recommendations came out of the Cantle report, examining the local issues that ignited the violence. At central government level, the Home Secretary established a ministerial group to consider how national policies and practices might shape a new model of community cohesion.

One of the major outputs from the Cantle report has been the Community Cohesion Pathfinders that commenced in April 2003, and are due to end in November 2004. There are fourteen Pathfinder partnerships⁴ being jointly funded by the Home Office and the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit.

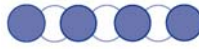
Community Cohesion Pathfinders

The Pathfinder programmes are geared to change perceptions within their area, by tackling prejudices and creating a more positive perception of the changing nature of British society.

By involving the local housing authority and other housing providers in the programme the aim of the Pathfinders is to deliver a wide range of programmes comprising projects and initiatives that are designed to promote community cohesion.

³ Cantle Report, (p44)

⁴ For details of pathfinder areas see <http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/activecommunities53.htm>



The Pathfinders are examining the causes of conflict and the barriers to cohesion, with the aim of identifying ways to overcome these problems. The outputs from these Pathfinders will inform the development of a more strategic approach to housing and community cohesion in the future. In the first six months many Pathfinders have given high priority to finding ways of defining community cohesion that will engage local people. The Pathfinders have been using a range of approaches to establish community support.

Each pathfinder must learn to establish engagement with local political leaders, using a staged engagement strategy starting with voluntary and community sector before engaging with public bodies and established politicians. *Community Cohesion Pathfinders: The First 6 Months*² outlines the key findings so far.

- Strong voluntary sector involvement is a key factor of the likelihood of pathfinder success. Alongside this is the requirement of a general recognition of overlaps between local authority and voluntary sector programmes.
- Some pathfinders have been concentrating, with some success, upon community strategies that target voluntary sectors and communities as whole, rather than individuals. Strategies might include events, public information, and work with the press and local media.

Mainstreaming Community Cohesion in Housing⁶

Housing is key to the Government's programme for increased community cohesion and local authorities housing departments and housing associations have been charged with a statutory duty to help mainstream community cohesion into all housing plans.

In a recent speech (14 October 2004) Keith Hill⁵, Minister for Housing and Planning, at an event entitled Mainstreaming Community Cohesion in Housing⁶ outlined the responsibilities of social landlords in promoting community cohesion.

⁴ Community Cohesion Pathfinders: The First 6 Months, Oct 2003

<http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/activecommunities53.htm>

⁵ For event details and to order papers see <http://www.neilstewartassociates.com/se160/>

⁶ For full speech transcript see http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_about/documents/page/odpm_about_032194.hcsp

⁷ For event details and to order papers see <http://www.neilstewartassociates.com/se160/>

Keith Hill said social landlords should review their existing housing strategies to assess the impact they have on community cohesion and decide if there are changes in practice or policy that could be made to improve community relations in their area.

It is recognised that tenant and community participation in housing are key to building community cohesion. In a number of areas tenants and residents are helping to develop innovative approaches to community cohesion, all housing agencies need to work more closely with their tenants to help improve community relations. Housing providers need to be much more aware of their wider role in creating communities.

It is important to note that different groups are affected in different ways and housing providers need to understand and respond to those differences.

However, in general terms, across many areas, ethnic minority groups are over-represented in social housing, are subject to poorer quality private rented housing and are less likely to be owner-occupiers.

Building Community Cohesion into Regeneration

The community cohesion agenda is cross cutting, as regeneration projects impact all areas of social, economic and political activity, they are the key to bringing a plethora of initiatives together for ongoing community development.

Regeneration partnerships and agencies have a clear role to play in influencing the development of community cohesion through their funding strategies. There is a need to focus on projects that stimulate and supporting inter-community communication and co-operation and housing providers need to play a more central role than they have done in the past.

The Home Office and the ODPM have recently (October 2004) launched a guide for residents and practitioners entitled Building Community Cohesion into Area Based Initiatives (ABIs)⁸, it is intended for those responsible for designing, developing and delivering ABIs or other regeneration projects and for those involved in implementing and monitoring them.

It promotes a more comprehensive set of objectives and a higher profile for regeneration-led community cohesion initiatives. These initiatives need to relate to long-term, holistic social outcomes: employment, skills development, increased up take of education activities

⁸ Building Community Cohesion into Area Based Initiatives, a guide for residents and practitioners <http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/publicationsdetail.asp?id=793>



to name but a few. Throughout the country, local planning, education, housing and funding policies can be used collectively to build, mixed communities, tolerant communities and new resources.⁷

Conclusion

The Guide to Building Community Cohesion demonstrates how the Government's area based initiatives, including Community Cohesion Pathfinders, New Deal for Communities and Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders, can and should promote and sustain cohesive communities.

Achieving the goal of cohesive communities will be missed unless housing providers and regeneration programmes reflect the needs of all communities fairly. The Community Cohesion Pathfinders are starting to address cohesion issues with housing agencies playing a key role. People on the ground need to work with local people from all backgrounds, the diversity of the community needs to be reflected in the pathfinders work.

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⁹Atul Patel. Regeneration & Renewal, 20/08/04
http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/race_equality/race-articles_no1.asp