

COMMUNITY COHESION

1. Executive Summary

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Cabinet with an overview of what is required by the Council to meet its strategic responsibilities for further improving community cohesion across Wirral, i.e. What is community cohesion? What is the Council's strategic responsibility for community cohesion? How will Corporate Services take this work forward?

2. Background – What is Community Cohesion?

2.1 Community Cohesion is what must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well and live together. For this to happen, people need to have:

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

2.2 Cohesion is not about trying to make everyone the same; it is about giving people the skills to respect difference, to cope with change and welcome new residents. Alongside these skills there needs to be a shared sense of mutual respect for each other.

2.3 Central and local government's approach to community cohesion developed in response to disturbances in three northern towns in 2001, but with a focus only on crime and disorder associated with race and faith issues. This led to a preventing violent extremism programme of work known as 'Prevent'

2.4 Following the London bombings in 2005, the Commission on Integration and Cohesion was set up to look at practical ways to build community cohesion, and not just the 'Prevent' agenda. By 2008, 57 recommendations had been made by the Commission to the Government.

2.5 Central government has since committed to cohesion being covered by two public service agreements (PSA) – **PSA21** to build cohesive, empowered and active communities. This is measured against three national indicators (NI):

- NI1 - % of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area
- NI2 - % of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood
- NI4 - % of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality

2.6 **PSA26** to reduce the risk to the UK, and its interests overseas, from international terrorism is also measured by three national indicators:

NI35 – building resilience to violent extremism

NI36 – protection against terrorist attack (crowded places)

NI37 – public awareness of civil contingency measures

2.7 Members should be reminded that The Health, Safety & Resilience Operations Manager has responsibility within the Council for NI36 & NI37. He is a member of the Community Cohesion Strategy Group to ensure that the different strands of the Prevent programme are linked

3. The Council's Response to Further Improving Community Cohesion

- 3.1 Equality, community cohesion and preventing violent extremism (Prevent) are different, but if done effectively, will support one another. Hence in central, regional and local government the same person or group of people is often responsible for all three.
- 3.2 Equality is about providing equality of opportunity for all and eliminating discrimination. It focuses on narrowing gaps in outcomes for different people. This helps to promote cohesion and tackle extremism but it is not enough on its own.
- 3.3 Building community cohesion is about building better relationships between people from different backgrounds. Experience in some areas has shown that violent extremism can emerge from even the most cohesive communities, but that extremist messages are less likely to find support in this environment. So work to build cohesion can help prevent violent extremism but will not be enough on its own.
- 3.4 To prevent violent extremism a targeted approach is often needed which deals with a specific threat and builds resilience to extremist messages at a community level. A community in which extremism is minimised is likely to be one where people have more confidence to build relationships with one another and so increase community cohesion and equality
- 3.5 During the last two years the Corporate Services Department has established a robust corporate infrastructure and governance arrangements for the equality agenda, as part of its commitment to reaching the different levels of the Equality Standard for Local Government. During the last year the Corporate Services Department, with Merseyside Police, has developed a 'Prevent' action plan. However there is also a need to drive forward the building community cohesion agenda.
- 3.6 Equality, community cohesion and the 'Prevent' agenda will now be led by the Corporate Equality and Cohesion Manager within Corporate Services, with the support of existing Officers and a fixed term contracted Co-ordinator for two years funded via an agreed Area Based Grant specifically allocated for cohesion work. The Co-ordinator will implement a two year Cohesion action plan (which will be developed during November 2009) including scoping existing cohesion activities, developing new activities where there are gaps and ensuring a partnership approach to all cohesion work across Wirral.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 The Area Based Grant allocation is for £75,000 for 2009/10 and a provisional sum of £75,000 for 2010/11.
- 4.2 The funding will be used to meet direct staffing costs, including a full time Co-ordinator for a two year fixed term period, a series of activities to build community cohesion, and the implementation of a two year Cohesion action plan (to be developed during November 2009).

5. Staffing implications

- 5.1 A full time Co-ordinator will be recruited for a two year fixed term period.

6. Equal Opportunities implications

- 6.1 The Council will meet its legal duties to promote equality of opportunity, to eliminate any unlawful discrimination or harassment, to promote good relations and positive attitudes, and to promote involvement.

7. Community Safety implications

- 7.1 There are no community safety implications arising from this report.

8. Local Agenda 21

- 8.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

9. Planning implications

- 9.1 There are no planning implications arising from this report.

10. Anti-poverty implications

- 10.1 There are no anti-poverty implications arising from this report

11. Social inclusion implications

- 11.1 There are no negative implications that will potentially exclude individuals or groups from accessing services arising from this report.

12. Local Member Support implications

- 12.1 There are no issues mentioned in the report that are particularly relevant to a ward or small number of wards. However, equality and cohesion are borough wide issues to be addressed by all members.

13. Recommendations

- 13.1 Cabinet endorses the suggested approach to further improving community cohesion.

13.2 Cabinet agrees to receive Community Cohesion progress reports on an annual basis.

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