

Agenda item:

Cabinet 22 January 2008

Report Title: **Community Cohesion**

Forward Plan reference number (if applicable): **[add reference]**

Report of: **Sharon Kemp, Assistant Chief Executive, PPP&C**

Wards(s) affected: **All**

Report for: **Non-Key Decision**

1. Purpose (That is, the decision required)

- 1.1 To lay-out the Council's approach to community cohesion
- 1.2 To provide information on the establishment of a community cohesion forum

2. Introduction by Cabinet Member (if necessary)

- 2.1 Maintaining and developing strong community cohesion is a priority for our borough but is not something that can be successfully achieved by the Council working on its own.
- 2.2 The Forum will provide a structure for bringing the Council and a wide range of local community organisations, faith groups and partners together, recognising Community Cohesion as a shared responsibility.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That Cabinet endorse the Council's approach to Community Cohesion as laid out here
- 3.2 That Cabinet endorse the establishment of a Community Cohesion Forum

Report Authorised by: **Sharon Kemp**

Contact Officer: **Ben Rogers, Head of Policy, X2509**

4. Chief Financial Officer Comments

4.1 N/A
5. Head of Legal Services Comments N/A
6. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 6.1 N/A

Building on Haringey's Approach to Community Cohesion

1. Introduction

Haringey is one of the most diverse areas in Britain and Haringey's residents are proud of their diversity. The borough's many communities generally get on well together and there is a widespread commitment to principles of fair treatment and equality of opportunity.

The Council recognises, however, that we can't take 'community cohesion' for granted. On the contrary, in so far as people get on well together in the borough, this is in large part because the Council and other public services, and community, voluntary and faith groups have worked hard to promote good community relations. We also know that tensions remain. Indeed, with higher levels of migration in and out of the borough, and ever-growing diversity, the challenge of sustaining good inter-group relations remains a very real one.

For these reasons, community cohesion remains a priority for the Council. The Council fully endorses the Haringey Strategic Partnership's over-riding vision for the borough: '*A place of diverse communities that people are proud to belong to*'. Several of the Council's own priorities, like 'Creating a Better Haringey: cleaner, greener and safer' and 'Encouraging lifetime well-being at home, work, play and learning', can only be realised if we can build on the good inter-group relations that already exist and make Haringey a still more cohesive place.

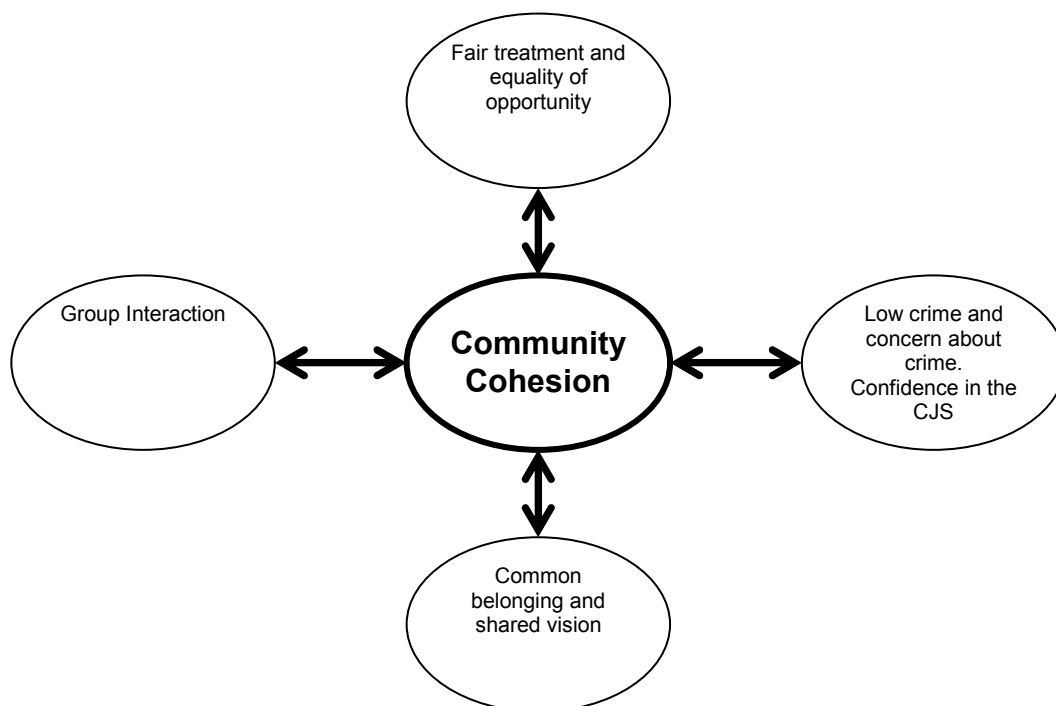
2. Mainstreaming Community Cohesion

Because community cohesion is so important to the Council, we do not have a dedicated 'community cohesion' service. Instead we 'mainstream' cohesion into all of our work, aiming to promote good relations in everything we do. For example, the Council assesses all strategies and policies to make sure their adoption would not unfairly disadvantage one community while benefiting others. In the same way, we aim wherever possible to encourage interaction between different groups. And we regularly review services to ensure that they are reaching all groups who need them. The Council also regularly reviews its approach to community cohesion, to ensure that its work is properly co-ordinated, addresses new issues, and meets best practice standards.

3. Community Cohesion in Haringey – Four Drivers

The Council's approach to community cohesion is based on the four main drivers that we have identified as affecting community cohesion.

Chart 1
Haringey's Approach to Community Cohesion
The Four Drivers of Cohesion



Driver 1: Fair treatment and equality of opportunity

People are much more likely to develop positive relations with other groups and contribute to society more generally when they feel that they and the groups to which they belong are fairly treated. For this reason, social justice and equality of opportunity have a vital role to play in promoting cohesion and integration. Fair treatment has many aspects to it. It involves for instance ensuring that:

- People of different backgrounds have broadly the same life chances
- No one is condemned to poverty, and everyone, irrespective of background or group membership, has a chance to make a positive contribution
- No-one is subject to harassment or violence because of their background or group membership

- Citizens are treated equally – by employers, public services, private businesses - regardless of their background
- People have opportunities throughout their lives to education and training
- Groups facing particular disadvantage – e.g., poor language or literacy skills, high levels of victimisation, poverty of aspiration, or disability – are given special help in addressing these.
- All groups are involved, on equal terms, in making decisions and shaping services.

Driver 2: Low levels of crime and concern about crime and confidence in the criminal justice system

As crime and concern about crime and anti-social behaviour increase, so cohesion tends to decline. Concern about crime, in turn, tends to be high where people feel less confident in the police and criminal justice system. So work to drive down crime and anti-social behaviour, promote a sense of safety and increase the profile and responsiveness of community safety services all have important roles to play in fostering cohesion.

Haringey's Community Safety Team leads the Council's work to prevent crime and anti-social behaviour, prosecute offenders, support victims and promote confidence in the criminal justice system (CJS). But other services and council partners also make important contributions to these objectives.

Driver 3: Group interaction

Many studies have shown that inter-group exchange is a very effective way of combating prejudice – and not just ethnic or racial prejudice but prejudice, for instance, against disabled people, sexual minorities and those with mental illnesses. Contact is a particularly effective way of building cohesion where it is sustained and meaningful, and involves people coming together not as 'identityless' individuals but as representative of their group. Many Council services have a role in promoting contact including planning and urban design, housing, schools, and culture and recreational services. We also strongly encourage voluntary and community groups to open up their facilities to other groups, and work together to achieve common ends wherever possible.

Driver 4: A Sense of common belonging and shared vision

Finally, people who differ from each other in certain important respects – race, religion, sexual orientation, etc - are much more likely to get on together and support each other where they share a sense of common 'civic' identity and are united by a common vision. A shared civic identity will to some extent follow naturally, where people are treated fairly and interact. But there are also more direct ways that we can promote a shared identity. These include helping non-English speakers with English; promoting shared values; creating and keeping-up shared civic spaces and buildings; encouraging shared sporting allegiances; involving people in civic ceremonies; and sponsoring inclusive festivals, celebrations, and commemorations. Similarly the Council and its partners have a leading role to play in developing, articulating and communicating a shared vision.

4. Haringey's Community Cohesion Forum

Building on this approach to Community Cohesion, the Council now intends to establish a Haringey-wide Community Cohesion Forum. This will build on the work the Council already does in supporting various committees and networks which bring together Community Groups with a commonality of interest.

5. Purpose of the Forum

The purpose of the Forum will be to:

- foster positive relations between Haringey's many communities, encourage group interaction and promote a sense of common belonging.
- engage with all of Haringey's many groups in developing a shared vision of cohesion, and work to communicate this vision throughout the borough
- encourage communities to share facilities and develop joint initiatives that promote cohesion.
- consider proposals put to it by the Council and its partners and advise on measures for improvements on community cohesion.
- assist the Council in assessing and addressing inter-communal tensions and taking steps to diffuse such tensions where they occur.
- assist the Council in responding to emergencies that have the potential to create inter-communal tension
- assist the Council to develop local solutions to refugee integration and issues relating to communities new to Haringey.
- Prevent and challenge extremism, hate and division where they occur in Haringey.
- assist the Council to communicate positively about the benefits of diversity and the values of cohesion

6. Membership

Membership of the Forum will be open to individuals from group representing one or more of Haringey's many communities and willing to endorse the Forum's vision and contribute to its objectives as laid out above. The Forum and the Council will actively work to ensure

that groups representing Haringey's many communities – including groups representing the 6 equalities strands - join and are fully engaged in the work of the forum.

7. Administrative Support

Administrative support for the Forum will be provided by the Council's Equalities & Diversity Team.

This would involve:

- Convening and organising meetings of the Forum;
- Organising and administrating Communications, web-site, virtual networks required by the Forum
- Providing clerking and administration services for the Forum, including drafting and dispatching minutes of meetings;

This is can be accommodated within existing resources.

8. Structure and Decision Making

It will be up to the Forum itself to determine its decision making structure, working methods and frequency of meetings. But it is envisaged that the Forum will be chaired by the Leader of the Council, in his/her role as Community Leader, with a Vice-Chairperson to deputise in his or her absence.

9. Timetable

The first meeting of the Forum will be held in March 2008.

10. On-Going Activity

The Council will continue to build upon its approach to community cohesion and work through its services, the Forum and the Haringey Strategic Partnership, to further strengthen community cohesion.

End