

**The Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames**

# **Community Cohesion Strategy**

**2008 - 2011**

**Respecting Differences**

**Challenging Discrimination**

**Communities Together**



This is Kingston Council's first community cohesion strategy. The purpose of the strategy is to demonstrate our commitment to build a more cohesive and equitable community. We want Kingston to be a place where people of all ages and backgrounds can thrive together, respecting diversity and with a common sense of belonging.

The strategy will be used to coordinate a range of current and planned activities within the council in relation to community cohesion and equalities. Structures will be put in place to better manage and monitor the impact of the activity. Our ongoing commitment to partnership working will play a major role in the success of this strategy.

### **What is Community Cohesion?**

The concept of community cohesion was developed by the government in consultation with other organisations including London Councils. The initial working definition is of a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities, where the diversity of different people's backgrounds are valued and appreciated, people from diverse backgrounds have similar life opportunities and strong and positive relationships are developed between people from different backgrounds.

In the recent report "Our Shared Future" by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, this definition was extended based on their research and findings nationally. We have adopted these definitions in our strategy.

An integrated and cohesive community is one where:

- There is a clearly defined and widely shared sense of the contribution of different individuals and different communities to a future vision for Kingston.
- There is a strong sense of an individual's rights and responsibilities when living in Kingston and people know what everyone expects of them and what they can expect in turn.
- Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities, access to services and treatment.
- There is a strong sense of trust in institutions in Kingston to act fairly in arbitrating between different interests and for their role and justifications to be subject to public scrutiny.
- There is a strong recognition of the contribution of both those who have newly arrived and those who already have deep attachments to Kingston, with a focus on what they have in common.
- There are strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and other institutions within Kingston

### **Our Vision - Our Values**

In order to build a cohesive community we must build on the aspirations and values that are already here in Kingston's communities whilst working to ensure that each individual has an opportunity to realise them. It is about promoting interaction between different communities and individuals from all walks of life whilst confronting the fears and prejudices within society. We will build on the confidence that people have in institutions and break down barriers. We must learn to respect the differences that exist and see the richness that diversity brings.

The concept of community cohesion has strong links to the Equality and Diversity agenda but goes beyond this and looks at the community as a whole. It takes into account what makes people different or disadvantaged within communities, for example, economic prosperity, employment status and those living on the edge of society such as former prisoners, new migrants and substance misusers. Integration and cohesion must address inequality and discrimination in any form.

We do not underestimate the challenges that lie ahead for us as a Council to ensure that we continue deliver our services in a fair, consistent, transparent and equitable way. We will need to find effective ways to get a meaningful message across to the community, to use the media in a positive way to explain what we are doing and promote the ethos of community cohesion.

### **Kingston's Resident Profile**

The following data is from the 2001 Census. At this time Kingston's population was 147, 273. This was made up of 84.5% White ethnic groups and the Black Minority Ethnic group was 15.5%.

According to the Greater London Authority "Round Interim Ethnic Group projections for Kingston" there will be a decline in the White ethnic group to 73% by 2025 and an increase to 27% of the Black Minority Ethnic groups.

The gender breakdown in Kingston is 51% women and 49% men.

13% of the population have a "limiting long term illness". However, the definition of 'limiting long term illness' as used in the 2001 Census is different from the definition of disability used in the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). Current estimates suggest that 20% of the UK population is disabled, according to the DDA definition, and there is no evidence to suggest that the percentage in Kingston is significantly different.

In Kingston there are a variety of faith communities, which comprise of Christian at 65%, people who do not subscribe to any religion or beliefs 18%, those who preferred not to state were 7%, followed by Muslims at 3.9%, Hindus at 3.6%. Buddhists, Jewish people, Sikhs and people who were practising other religions were each below 1%.

The data on same sex couples was aggregated by The Office of National Statistics and these figures indicate that there are 312 people in same sex relationships in Kingston. However the population in this group will become clearer because of the introduction of civil partnership registrations. There have been 98 registrations in Kingston since services commenced from December 2005 whilst 228 individuals have given notice of intent to form a civil partnership.

The age profile of Kingston residents under 14 is 17%, followed by 15 to 64 at 69%, those who are 65 to 84 are 12% and those over 85 make up 2%.

From the census data we need to recognise that whilst we have a basic demographic profile of Kingston - for the purposes of developing community cohesion many aspects of our diverse community remain hidden from the national as well as local data.

For example, accurate data on disability and existence of other particular groups like travellers or the new migrant communities will not be identifiable from the census data.

### **What does Community Cohesion mean for Kingston?**

Here in Kingston we can be proud of what we have achieved so far and be even more ambitious in our goals of working towards a more cohesive society. One of the key factors in achieving our objective "The Best Place to Live" is to ensure that community cohesion is embedded in existing strategies and plans and that they are reviewed on an ongoing basis. Our vision for the future should always include building a cohesive community.

In order to approach Community Cohesion effectively we need more information. We need a better understanding and analysis of the needs of our residents both permanent and short term. This includes the large student population, children, older people, visitors and people who work in Kingston. We need to be pragmatic and mindful of the challenges that exist, both internally within communities as well as challenges from outside.

The foundations have been laid through our Community Plan, Local Area Agreement, Children and Young People's Plan, Housing Strategy, Crime Reduction Strategy and various other strategies and policies which put us in a good position to work towards our objective of Community Cohesion. The process of devolution and the creation of Neighbourhoods to deal with local area issues, our consultation strategy and user surveys all give us a clear vision to build on.

However, whilst there are many local and government indicators that put Kingston in the top quartiles of assessment we do have some real challenges within certain areas in Kingston where there is economic deprivation, social exclusion and unemployment amongst some residents. This can result in feelings of isolation and exclusion and contributes to the social breakdown of communities.

## Key Issues

One of the themes that needs to be addressed is people's perceptions of activities undertaken to promote cohesion.

### People's Perception of Community Cohesion

It is important to recognise that people's perception of community cohesion is very much influenced by a number of personal factors. The report identifies three main factors:

**Personal characteristics** such as age, qualifications or occupation. These vary by ethnic group.

**Attitudes** such as satisfaction with local services, feeling of being able to influence local decisions and fear of racist attacks.

**Type of community** an individual lives in. For example, living in deprived areas and those with high crime rates were particular negative influences. Key positive factors include living in areas that have a broad mix of different ethnic groups.

Key messages to be taken from the above are:

- How cohesive an area is, will depend upon a series of interacting factors about that area and the people who live there, so that the story of cohesion in each local area will be different. In some cases the differences will be subtle – in others they will be large.
- Improving cohesion is about addressing multiple issues at the same time - taking action on a single issue will only make a small difference, so there need to be both mainstreaming work and targeted policy interventions.
- If cohesion is going to improve, local actions need to be taken to improve individual personal circumstances, to change individual perceptions and to address area wide issues.
- Taken together, this means no simple statements can be made about integration and cohesion.

The report "Our Shared Future" by Darra Singh also identifies five key factors that are linked to integration and cohesion and a further two new areas of concern have been identified that need to be looked into.

1. The link with **deprivation** is fundamental to cohesion; deprivation remains a key influencer of cohesion. Local initiatives and actions can be undertaken to minimise its effects.
2. There is a link with **discrimination** experienced by some groups within our society. If it continues, we will not be able to achieve the goals we set out for building integration and cohesion.

The Equalities Review Report, a government commissioned report, entitled “Fairness and Freedom” indicates some of the challenges that lie ahead for the nation. The report agrees that tackling poverty is important but so too is closing the gap between the best off and the worst off in a variety of areas. The report lays bare the reality of our society in an informative way describing the journey we have taken and the estimated time of arrival. If we progress at the current rate we will:

Close the gender pay gap by	2085
Close the ethnic employment gap	2105
End the 50+ employment penalty	Not in this lifetime
Close the disability employment gap	Probably never
Close the ethnic qualification gap	Definitely never

3. The authors of the report could not come to a clear conclusion of precisely how **crime and anti social behaviour** impacts on community cohesion. The council needs to be aware of this when collating and analysing data on crime in Kingston.
4. The link with **diversity** is difficult to ascertain since the analysis of the 2005 Citizenship survey found that there was no relationship between the proportion of ethnic minority households in an area and perceptions of cohesion or respect for ethnic differences. Diversity can have a negative impact on cohesion, but only in particular local circumstances when there is a lack of experience of diversity and when diversity is linked to deprivation.
5. The link with **immigration**: although as a nation we can see benefits of immigration, some people are concerned about its impacts in their local area and are unsettled by diversity. This is an important area for consideration as the projected figures show an increase in BME communities settling in Kingston.

The two new areas of concern have been identified as:

**Fair allocation of public services** – some settled communities are worried about the fair allocation of public services – with some believing that immigrants and minorities are getting special treatment.

And finally - the **global is now local**; therefore globalisation adds another layer of complexity to the picture.

When we are developing strategies and plans to deliver services it is crucial that all these factors are taken into consideration at the beginning.

### **Governance Arrangements**

The Council, in its Community Leadership role, will seek the support of all its partners in promoting Community Cohesion and will oversee this through the Community Leadership Strategy Group. For its part the Executive will expect

the Corporate Development Team to oversee the implementation of the Community Cohesion Strategy. Neighbourhood Committees will also have a key role in promoting community cohesion within their areas.

The Equal Opportunities Forum will play a central role on behalf of the Corporate Development Team in coordinating activity and promoting Community Cohesion. This will be facilitated by the Equality Standard Steering Group. The make up of the group will be reviewed to ensure the inclusion of appropriate stakeholders to take forward the extended remit.

The remit will include:

- Ensuring that the current strategic policies are reviewed to identify where action is already being undertaken and how it impacts on Community Cohesion.
- Setting an agenda to identify any gaps that require action.
- Identifying appropriate resources to manage and deliver the Community Cohesion Strategy.
- Develop an action plan for implementing Community Cohesion.
- Coordinating and managing action where appropriate to maximise its impact.
- Embedding community cohesion in the agenda with our local stakeholders in the statutory, voluntary, interfaith and business sectors.
- Sharing information on successful practice.

### **Strategy Implementation, Monitoring & Evaluation**

The Chief Executive, Strategic and Service Directors, Heads of Service and Senior Managers will ensure the objectives of Community Cohesion are implemented at every level. This commitment includes effectively monitoring and regularly reporting against performance targets and continuously planning for improvement.

CDT and the Community Leadership Strategy Group will each receive an annual report from the Equal Opportunities Forum on progress in implementing the Strategy. Community Cohesion will also feature in Departmental Team Plans.

Currently there are a number of performance indicators that are linked to Community Cohesion. The audit commission is also developing a further framework to measure perceptions of quality of life (QOL) which will be incorporated into our strategy and action plans.

Results from the monitoring and review of existing strategies and plans along with all the services we provide will be analysed and fed into the Community Cohesion Strategy review process. This is to ensure that improvement can be measured and continuous planning takes place. The officer-level Everyone Counts Group will monitor progress.

## **Delivering the strategy**

Here in Kingston we decided to look at our existing strategies and plans and identify the work that is already being undertaken on community cohesion. This journey gives us an opportunity to build on existing frameworks and take us into the next phase with a clear objective and vision. Our work on cohesion is and will be delivered through a range of existing arrangements with our partners in statutory, voluntary, interfaith and business sectors.

## **OBJECTIVES for the Community Cohesion Strategy**

### **Objective 1 Rights and Responsibilities**

*Political commitment and Corporate leadership will be at the forefront*

Promotion of local decision making and governance mechanisms to encourage wider participation.

Support for elected members to reach out and effectively engage with the community.

Support /training for community advocates and local residents' groups to be inclusive.

Ensuring that individuals are aware of their civic and social responsibility as residents

### **Objective 2 Recognising the contribution of established and newly arrived members of the community**

*Knowing our community*

Through valuing diversity and celebrating differences the council should play a key role to facilitate more inclusive inter-cultural activities and community participation to take place, overcoming boundaries and barriers.

Identifying and celebrating the positive features of integration through working with new arrivals to assist integration with the established community and achieve higher levels of participation in activities and use of services.

Better promotion of the things that bring people together. Promoting the activities of community groups and partners

### **Objective 3 Different Backgrounds - Similar opportunities.**

*Equal life chances for all*

Identify the inequity that exists within the community in Kingston.

Close the attainment and achievement gap.

Train and make available opportunities for individuals to participate in governance e.g. health, education and housing.

Accessible & affordable learning opportunities and events that bring people together in their communities, eg Family Learning targeting under represented groups and venues

Support the voluntary sector to help share knowledge and resources.

Creation of community facilities and more effective access to and sharing of what's available.

Work to develop a workforce that reflects diversity in the community. ( not just using the existing monitoring of race, gender or disability)

Work with the schools on their duty to promote community cohesion – through extended schools and governance and citizenship education.

Work within the preventative strategies in Learning & Children's Services and Community Services.

**Objective 4 Security in your community.**

*A community where people feel safe. A sense of confidence and trust in institutions.*

Working in partnership with the law enforcement agencies - Police, probation, crown prosecution services, the courts, youth offending teams, youth services and housing section - to identify ways to prevent offending and re-offending. Identify and anticipate community tensions and religious tensions.

Supporting offenders and potential offenders to reduce re-offending rates.

Making a difference to the quality of life for all by reducing incidents of anti social behaviour.

Ensuring that Hate Crime is monitored effectively and working to reduce the number of incidents.

Monitoring of residents' feedback in a way that enables a better understanding of the impact of community cohesion.

**Objective 5 Good Community Cohesion**

Develop strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds through existing and new contacts.

Support all groups in a fair and equitable way.

Take a lead in active promotion of community cohesion through a format that

has a wide "readership"

Use a variety of media and partnerships to get the message across.

Create avenues for local people of all backgrounds and ages to have an opportunity to mix through community participation and engagement.

Establish mechanisms that will enable the council to better understand the needs of "hard to reach groups".

Promote citizenship and civic pride and foster a sense of belonging for all communities in Kingston.

Support organisations delivering integration & citizenship.

Create a cleaner environment through removal of graffiti, reduction of waste, and promotion of recycling & reuse

## **Conclusion**

Through preparing this strategy the council hopes to consider all its relevant activity to plan future work and measure progress. By adopting this approach, community cohesion, together with equality and diversity, will become the foundation of a safe and strong community. We will be contributing to the working definition of an equal society:

*"An equal society protects and promotes equal, real freedom and substantive opportunity to live in the ways people value and would choose, so that everyone can flourish.*

*"An equal society recognises people's different needs, situations and goals and removes the barriers that limit what people can do and can be."*

This definition, taken from "Fairness and Freedom", is not only about helping disadvantaged people achieve their goals but also about our shared responsibility for setting the conditions in which people in Kingston can improve their own life chances and making sure that they are treated with equal dignity and worth. It recognises different needs and identities and provides for equal participation in society.

**If you have difficulty reading this document because of a disability or because English is not your first language, we can help you. Please call our helpline on 020 8547 5757 or ask someone to call on your behalf.**

**Annex 1 Community Cohesion Strategy**

