Report of the Scrutiny Community Cohesion and Safety Task Group (Cohesion Strategy)

August 2008

INTRODUCTION

The Scrutiny Community Cohesion and Safety Task Group was established in late 2007 for the purpose of examining and celebrating the success of the Community Cohesion Strategy and noting areas for its development and improvement. It commenced its review in January 2008. This report contains a brief overview of the Task Group's work and highlights from the findings of its investigation and including its recommendations for improvement.

Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference for the investigation was agreed at the second meeting of the Task Group on 27 February 2008. The aim was:

To review and celebrate the successes of the Community Cohesion Strategy at its mid term and note areas for development and improvement:
Objectives:

- *to develop and agree a range of measurements that will evaluate the successes to date*
- *to note any areas for development*
- *to consider the opinions of key stakeholders*
- *to assess the effectiveness of the Community Cohesion Fund*
- *to make recommendations to the appropriate parties.*

As the Task Group's investigation progressed then five aspects of the investigation became apparent:

- origins of community cohesion in Leicester
- development of the Community Cohesion Strategy
- community cohesion funding
- local communities and community cohesion
- mainstreaming community cohesion through core services.

Methodology

The Task Group wished their investigation to be as interactive as possible. This entailed a programme focus groups and workshops as well as talking to key stakeholders in local communities.

At the same time the Task Group also wished to work alongside officers involved in community cohesion and those responsible for community cohesion in service areas.

Meetings and Events

The Task Group met on seven occasions:

17 January	27 May (Netherhall)
25 February (Highfields)	10 June
18 March	7 July
21 April	

Development of community cohesion in Leicester

Members of the Task Group received presentations on the origins and development of community cohesion in Leicester, the organisation of community cohesion in the Leicester City Council and Leicester Partnership, the role and make up of the Community Cohesion Project Team and the following Community Cohesion Executive Board and Community Cohesion Forum, the consultation process behind the development of the Community Cohesion Strategy, and an analysis of the scope and philosophical approach of the Strategy and the uniqueness of the Strategy in relation to Leicester and other local authority cohesion strategies. For more information see Minutes of the Community Cohesion and Safety Task Group (Cohesion Strategy) of 17/1/08, 25/1/08, 18/3/08, 21/4/08, 10/6/08 and 7/7/08.

Community cohesion funding

A focus group on community cohesion funding was held at the Highfields Community Centre on the morning of 25 February where six members of the public attended.

The purpose of the focus group was to examine past experiences of those community groups and organisations that primarily had received funding under the 2004-2006 Community Cohesion Fund, and learn from their experiences. The morning explored what was good and not so good about the 2004-2006 Fund, what worked well in terms of administration and the application process, reporting procedures and evaluation requirements. The morning also explored the impact money from that Fund had had on local community organisations. Of particular interest to the Task Group was what learning could be taken forward to influence the way community groups and organisations could access money for community cohesion initiatives in the future. A summary of the findings is attached as Appendix 1.

Local communities and community cohesion

A workshop entitled "'One Leicester' What's in it for You?: Different communities living together in Leicester" was held on the 27 May at the Netherhall Neighbourhood Centre where 25 members of the public attended. These attendees had been specifically invited, or nominated, by their own ward councillors.

The purpose of this event was to engage with local people in an attempt to identify what community cohesion means to them, to find out how best the Council and councillors should work with them and their community, as well as providing an opportunity for community groups and organisations to their share ideas and experiences with one another.

The morning session was taken up with workshops while in the afternoon the councillors hosted a 'studio debate' and responded to questions from the floor. The final part of the day was given to Councillor Osman, Cabinet Lead for Community Cohesion. A summary of the findings is attached as Appendix 2.

Community cohesion and core services

At the meetings of the Task Group on 21 April, 10 June and 7 July officers from 14 service areas came to speak on how community cohesion is put into practice in their services. They also brought with them an accompanying fact sheet of their issues and

work around community cohesion. A summary of this information is included as Appendix 3.

The presentations stimulated considerable discussion with Task Group members. Those service areas covered included:

- Culture and cohesion
- Housing and cohesion
- Community cohesion and schools
- Library services and cohesion
- The youth service and cohesion
- Regeneration and cohesion
- The environment and cohesion
- Community safety and cohesion

- Adult social care and cohesion
- Older people and cohesion
- Neighbourhood management and community cohesion
- Community cohesion and communications
- New arrival communities and cohesion
- Equalities and cohesion

FINDINGS

1. Community cohesion in Leicester
In the series of presentations and discussions around community cohesion in Leicester the following issues were highlighted:

- the origin of community cohesion in Leicester was based on the 2001 riots in the northern cities, and on the threat of civil disturbances in Leicester.
- the lesson from these experiences was that community cohesion could no longer be taken for granted – it had to be actively worked at- doing nothing was not an option – communities getting on well together did not happen by chance and there had to be active intervention to make it happen
- the significant role that the Leicester City Council and the Leicester Partnership played in recognising the important of community cohesion to the city and the urgency of addressing the issues in Leicester
- the research commissioned by the IDeA into race, faith and ethnicity and the findings of that research – good relationships across faith boundaries and positive recognition of cultural festivals and events. However not so good were parallel lives, the sense of dislocation of some young people, competition for resources between different ethnic groups, the alienation of the outer estates and poor access to or channels of information and communication.
- a more extensive consultation programme with all communities in Leicester highlighted other issues that, in turn and with the above, formed the foundation of the Community Cohesion Strategy : that communities are brought together by good networks of friends, families and neighbours and shared interests and activities; that fear of young people and intergenerational issues often blight communities; that some tensions do exist between different communities in the city; that the city is good at celebrating the significant festivals and events of its many different citizens; and finally that access to and channels of communication are not as good as they could be.
- the community Cohesion Project Team carried this work forward in the early days, chaired by the Chief Executive. This has now been replaced by

the Community Cohesion Executive Group, chaired by the Cabinet Lead for Community Cohesion, and a Community Cohesion Forum with wide access and involvement from voluntary and community groups within the city.

2. The philosophical approach of the Community Cohesion Strategy

- Leicester has one of the few Community Cohesion Strategies amongst local authorities and it has been widely recognised both nationally and internationally
- that the Strategy's focus is on relationships – building relationships across communities and sub-communities in the city - (in the jargon), inter-cultural - bringing different people and communities together to build a better future (i.e. in the jargon) – building social capital
- that the city as a whole is very positive about its ethnic diversity – this is seen as an asset and positive feature not a negative one – (the evidence from the consultation process suggested that race was not significant in the city)
- the community cohesion strategy was for everyone in the city – the ethnic minority communities as well as the white communities – (this is a unique feature of Leicester's approach compared to many other cities' approaches – i.e. often concentrating on only their ethnic minorities)
- that all communities shared common concerns- about poverty and deprivation, litter, gangs, crime and fear of crime, poor housing and poor educational aspirations for example. These socio-economic issues were the responsibilities of the various services of the Council and not specifically the Community Cohesion Strategy
- the focus of a community cohesion strategy would be on building relationships across boundaries of ethnicity, faith, age, gender, sexuality and disability as well as location – the inner city and the outer estates. Community cohesion in Leicester is not just about ethnicity.

3. Community cohesion funding

The workshop on community cohesion funding highlighted both positive and negative aspects of the Council's approach and experience to community cohesion funding. There was support for the process of the 2004-2006 Fund and its administration but some criticism of the 2007-2008 process.

Positive aspects included allowing events to go ahead, meeting community objectives and the boost to local participation and involvement. Negative aspects were around access, administration and evaluation issues: knowledge about the fund appeared not to be widely known about; the need for clear criteria to reduce potential competition between groups; and the need for a clear decision making process and final evaluation.

The Task Group's conclusions reached from the investigation into funding was that although the 2004-2006 Community Cohesion Fund was successful it was unlikely that such substantial amounts would be forthcoming for community cohesion in the future.

It was recognised that groups and organisations were appreciative of money being available for community cohesion events and activities and it was accepted that without such funding the range of community events and programmes would not go ahead.

The Task Group noted that there was a considerable body of local opinion that was critical of the lack of awareness and apparent arbitrary nature of the 2007-2008 moneys available for community cohesion.

There was general acceptance that the process for the 2008-2009 year needs to be open and transparent, well advertised, and that the criteria and decision making process clearly established. Without this myths and mis-information may spread, groups may compete against each other and this may in turn become counter-productive to community cohesion in the city.

4. Local communities and community cohesion

The findings from the Netherhall discussions with local representatives touched on a range of community and neighbourhood issues. Included in the issues raised were the impact of transport – roads and bus services – and how they can negatively affect people's lives; the isolation of communities where significant language barriers exist; the need for culturally appropriate communication channels; the need of communities to be feel they have been listened to; and the local effort required to put on activities that can help bring people together.

A range of further issues were raised during the member's question and answer session including funding for community cohesion, the skill and expertise required to fill out applications; the feelings of isolation felt on the outer estates as attention appeared to focus on the inner city, and the lack of funding for faith organisations.

Councillor Osman concluded the day by addressing the issue of funding and the £200,000 available for community cohesion in the 2008-2009 financial year.

The Task Group's conclusions reached from this aspect of the investigation include:

- a large number of Council activities and services have an impact on the quality of people's lives and their ability to inter-act with others from different communities or groups in the city
- poor English language skills are a barrier community cohesion
- not always do individuals, groups and communities know about what is going on and what is available – even it their local area. Better channels of communication and information at a local level are needed
- it is important that communities feel safe in their neighbourhoods
- transport facilities, or the lack of them, have a major impact on the quality of people's lives.

5. Community cohesion and core services

Mainstreaming community cohesion across many service areas is progressing well and all major service areas appear to be able to indicate how their services are responding to community cohesion issues within their areas of responsibility.

Mainstreaming community cohesion is important as a number of core services directly impact on the ability or otherwise of communities to feel cohesive or not. In this respect the feeling of safety is significant - communities are unlikely to feel cohesive if they feel unsafe in their own neighbourhoods. Other important areas also include the work of neighbourhood management services; the quality and provision of housing and the support given to new tenants; the ability of schools to provide safe community spaces and raise the educational aspirations and achievements of their pupils; the work undertaken by the youth service to provide young people with activities and 'things to do'; the range of culturally sensitive services for vulnerable or older people; and the range of cultural, sporting and library services and activities that provide people with culturally sensitive sporting and creative activities and occasions to celebrate.

A number of other Council services are also important as they impinge indirectly on the quality of people's lives. As mentioned above in the local workshops, transport is a significant factor in providing people with the means of access to a whole range of services whether they be health services, schools, employment, shopping or leisure facilities. Similarly the economic regeneration of the city is important to provide people with jobs while the quality of their physical environment is known to be a significant factor in the sense of well being of people and the communities in which they live. In studies, a poor quality physical environment often correlates with a low sense of cohesiveness.

Several corporate policy areas are also significant for cohesion. The policies and practices around corporate communications is important to engender a spirit of cohesion within the city. However, while it is acknowledged that this is not the role nor the responsibility of the corporate communications unit, local community groups and organisations want to know what is going on in their neighbourhood. The need for information, and community cohesion information specifically, to be out in the community has been a theme that has recurred throughout this investigation.

Other policy areas include the work around new arrivals to the city and the work of the equalities section. Both areas directly impinge on community cohesion – new arrivals in helping them integrate as well as possible into the city, and equalities in the sense that it is difficult to promote community cohesion at a community level if privately individuals feel that they have been treated unfairly by the Council – for example either in their dealings with them through a recruitment process or in an application for benefits or a complaint about a service.

In conclusion the Task Group finds that there is a commendable degree of evidence of the community cohesion dimension of many core Council services that should be recognised and noted as examples of excellent practice. However more still needs to be done and there needs to be continued vigilance around the cohesion implication of transport and environmental services, schools, housing and communication activities.

TASK GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Community cohesion in Leicester

1. That the Cabinet and Council continue to give priority to community cohesion in Leicester

2. That much greater attention be given to communicating the importance of community cohesion across the city

3. that all members be offered training on community cohesion.

These recommendations reflect the Task Group's concern that community cohesion, because of its importance to the welfare and wellbeing of the city, should continue to be given significant attention by the Council and communicated more robustly at a local level. Sometimes members, as well as the public, have difficulty understanding what is mean by community cohesion and why it is important to the city. Member training specifically on cohesion may go some way to address this problem.

B. Community Cohesion Strategy

4. That the Community Cohesion Strategy be re-drafted in plain English

5. That concrete examples of good practice in community cohesion be included in the re-drafted Community Cohesion Action Plan that will accompany the redrafted Strategy

6. That the links between community cohesion and equality be made clearer.

These recommendations reflect the Task Group's concern that community cohesion is sometimes hard to identify and hard to explain to constituents. Community cohesion is not an easy word to describe and a range of examples would be helpful.

The importance of the link between equality and community cohesion should be made more explicit as there is often confusion between the two.

C. Community cohesion and ward community meetings

7. That community cohesion be an integral part of ward community meetings

8. That each ward community meeting set aside at least one meeting per year to consider what community cohesion means in their local community

9. That information on community cohesion be specifically prepared for use in ward community meetings

10. That participation and engagement of local communities be encouraged in all areas, but particularly in those where few activities and events take place.

Similar to the above, community cohesion is not well understood at a local level and therefore the Task Group believes that each ward community meeting needs to undertake its own learning about community cohesion. This will enable each ward community meeting to own cohesion in its area and, ideally, host a cohesion event. This should also address the issue of lack of local information. The sense of neglect in those areas of the city where 'nothing much happens' also needs to be addressed with capacity building and engagement programmes.

D. The Community Cohesion Fund

> *11. That there are clear criteria and an open and transparent decision making process for the Community Cohesion Fund*

> *12. That all projects and programmes supported by the Community Cohesion Fund be regularly monitored throughout their progress and evaluated at the completion, and that this is an integral and accepted part of the funding process.*

The Task Group is concerned that the criteria for funding and the process involved is not clear, open nor transparent at present. This is of great concern as it creates division and tension within communities and is counter productive to cohesion.

E. Community cohesion and core services

> *13. That Cabinet consider introducing Cohesion Impact Assessments, alongside, or similar to, the current Equality Impact Assessments, with all reports going to Cabinet and Council.*

This recommendation is made in the belief that community cohesion within the Council should have a higher profile – and this will to ensure that the community cohesion implications of all new policies are considered.

> *14. That continued efforts to mainstream community cohesion be undertaken within core services – particularly community safety, neighbourhood management, the youth services, communications, new arrivals, housing, education and transport.*

This recommendation supports the efforts of core services to take account of community cohesion in their service delivery and planning. However, while many of the services are addressing community cohesion issues, during the evidence collected by the Task Group several appear to need more attention.

F. Measuring Community Cohesion

> *15. That continued efforts be made to develop reliable monitoring and measuring of community cohesion in Leicester.*

This recommendation is made following the presentation to the Task Group of the Community Cohesion Assessment Instrument and their identification of concerns

arising from attitudes to community cohesion in 'average' Super Output Areas. These communities – neither the poorest nor the wealthiest - appeared, on several scores, to have lower cohesion than other areas in Leicester. This is a concern and needs to be monitored and addressed.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion the Task Group has been impressed by the development, scope and impact of community cohesion in Leicester. The diversity of the city of Leicester means that community cohesion is not an added extra for the city but a very important and integral part of it. The origins of community cohesion in the near disturbances within the city during the summer of 2001 means that the ability of the city to live together with those of different ethnicities, different faiths and different socio-economic status is as important now as it was then.

Community cohesion cannot be taken for granted and despite national and international recognition the city must not become complacent. The focus of the Community Cohesion Strategy on all who live in Leicester – both white and non-white - remains its defining feature and must be further developed. The Task Group also support the continued wide emphasis within the Strategy on addressing those issues associated with age and inter-generational issues, gender, disability, the role of women, of people with differing sexualities, and the particular factors facing those who have newly arrived in the city.

However, with time, priorities change and the apparent neglect of the outer estates must be redressed. More effort and attention needs to be given to those who struggle to live worthwhile and fulfilling lives on our largely white outer estates – not at the expense of those in the inner city, but alongside those in the inner city. Interaction between those who live in these distinct geographical areas must be encouraged.

In addition, the availability of small amounts of money for community events, activities and celebrations is important for all communities but it has become apparent that some groups and organisations miss out on these opportunities because they lack to capacity to organise them themselves or have limited access to information. Building up the capacity of such communities needs to become a priority so that the sense of missing out, and of others getting more than they, can be dispelled. Similarly more attention to suitable and reliable channels of local information and advice needs to be given more attention along with an open and transparent process of distributing money in the community cohesion budget.

It is with these factors in mind that they Task Group has made it recommendations: community cohesion is important to the city and must remain so in the future.

Appendix 1.
Workshop Findings: Community cohesion funding,
Highfields 25 February 2008

In the focus group discussions at Highfields, participants responded to the following questions on funding for community cohesion :

a. What's good about the Community Cohesion Fund? –
➢ allows events to go ahead
➢ having the money
➢ meets community objectives
➢ allows people to take part and become aware that they are supporting cohesion

b. Administration of the Fund
2004-06 Fund – rigorous application process, good because required to articulate the impact on community cohesion, some flaws re access issues
➢ clear criteria – reduced potential conflicts between groups, reduced negativity
➢ 2007-08 Fund – no application process, no overview, no clear process
➢ lack of marketing – perception of a 'closed shop', open to abuse
➢ needs to be open and transparent with a clear and simple form to complete, and help to complete form if necessary, plus clear timescales and possibility for appeal

c. What changes would you make?
➢ Clear criteria with concise information and requirements, checklist on 'does your project meet the criteria?'
➢ Once funding stopped – then work stops – mostly not sustainable
➢ Evaluation needs to be incorporated from start to finish – not just at the end.

Appendix 2.

**One Leicester: What's in it for You? Different communities
living together in Leicester,
Netherhall, 27 May 2008**

At the Netherhall community cohesion workshop with local people, participants listed the following issues of concern:

Obstacles in the way of cohesion and cohesion projects:
➢ lack of affordable and accessible transport
➢ language barriers
➢ poor communication
➢ not knowing what is available
➢ physical barriers e.g. major roads and passes cutting through areas
➢ lack of social opportunities reduces achievement at school
➢ communication needs to be culturally appropriate
➢ people need to feel they are having their say
➢ safe environment
➢ effort made to have activities and events in all communities

The studio debate raised the following questions to which members' responded:
➢ does the Council fund for integration or segregation?
➢ there is a feeling in the outer areas of an 'us and them' – How are you going to level this out?
➢ applying for funds has become so complicated that professional bid writers are needed – this does not empower people. What will you do about this?
➢ when contacting people – are surveys impartial?
➢ could Leicester City Council recognise the work of faith organisations and recognise them financially or otherwise?

The final address Cllr Osman, the Cabinet lead for Community Cohesion, indicated that there would be a considerable amount of more money available for community cohesion in the current budget – this now amounts to £200,000

Appendix 3.

**Community Cohesion and Core Services: Evidence from Senior Officers to the
Community Cohesion and Safety Task Group**

Community safety and cohesion
Community safety issues and community cohesion are closely linked. All the evidence suggests that a community must feel safe and secure before it can develop a sense of cohesion or, expressed in another way, without a sense of safety and security then community cohesion is unlikely to exist. In Leicester the sense of safety and security are important issues in both the outer estates and in the inner city.

However, community safety cannot be undertaken alone – it is a partnership activity with the police, the City Council and various other bodies such as the Anti Social Behaviour Unit and also involving local housing associations and youth projects and programmes. In Leicester community safety is the responsibility of the Safer Leicester Partnership under their Stronger Neighbourhood section. Local delivery is dependent on the interaction of ward community meetings, neighbourhood management, neighbourhood policing, youth services, community justice and several other bodies.

Housing and community cohesion
Social housing in Leicester is in high demand and that demand cannot be met in terms of people's preferred areas and property type. The Council's estates have clustered communities – historically the outer estates have been predominantly white while the city centre has attracted ethnic minority communities. Within the ethnic minority areas there are smaller clustered communities.

There is a mis-match in the location of the housing stock - ethnic minority applicants want larger type of family accommodation but this tends to located in the outer estates with smaller accommodation in the city centre.

In the last 12 months 51% of Council property lets were to people with an ethnic minority background but only a small percentage of these were in the city centre areas. However more ethnic minority applicants are prepared to more onto the outer estates. There are procedures and mechanisms in place to deal with both the tensions that arise as a result of these shifts as well as to support new communities who move into these areas. The 'Welcome to Northfields' approach from the Tenants and Residents Association has been recognised both regionally and nationally as good practice in this area.

Culture and community cohesion
The Leicester City Council's cultural services aims to widen access and participation in cultural services to make the city a more attractive place, improve health and promote community cohesion. Taking part encourages inclusion, understanding of difference, civic pride and volunteering. Research shows that people taking part in cultural activities are 20% more likely to know 'many people in their neighbourhood' and 60% more likely to think that 'many of their neighbours can be trusted' – both significant indicators of community cohesion.

Last year over 5.6million people took part in cultural activities provided or supported by the Council: just under 40% were from ethnic minority communities and 37% were on low incomes.

In the run up to Special Olympics 2009 and London 2012 the city has a unique opportunity to further develop cohesion by building participation in sport and culture.

Libraries and cohesion
In 2008 there are expected to be 2.2 million visitors to the 18 library services sites in Leicester. Libraries bring people together by being friendly and neutral spaces where people feel safe and where they receive services that help them in their daily lives.

The library services specifically assist new arrivals, refugees and asylum seekers and economic migrants through a 'Welcome to Your Library Project' which uses volunteering to help newcomers find their feet, learn relevant skills for employment, help their community and learn conversational English.

The library service also has established classes to assist newcomers to pass their citizenship test and a scheme whereby young people excluded from school can continue their education. Other initiatives also include support for young people in some outer estates; support for older people lacking in confidence or new to computers; as well as assisting in adult and family learning such as in reading together, family history or informal fun activities.

Community Cohesion in Education
There is national guidance on a variety of aspects that relate to community cohesion including in information on learning to live in a diverse society, about ensuring the inclusion and achievement of all pupils, and on schools as a community hub for parents and communities. Specific programmes include the duty to promote race equality, citizenship, and the 'who do we think we are' week. There is now a specific duty to promote community cohesion in schools introduced in September 2007.

In Leicester, Learning Services and Schools Development and Support Agency (SDSA) have supported the Pathfinder/NRF project on Mighty Zulu Nation theatre group, the Creative Partnerships projects involving 50 schools, and the Moat Community College and St Paul's Catholic School and English Martyrs in a twinning relationship. There is also a range of advice and guidance available to schools including that on racist incidents, the Young, Gifted and Equal programme, faith in education, community cohesion and governor training.

Ideas in planning are for curriculum development in areas of white working class history and culture and for training for schools on community cohesion.

Youth services and community cohesion
There is, and has been held, a wide range of specific events, projects and programmes for young people in the city enabling young people to get to know others from different areas or different ethnicities or different lifestyles. Some of this work is done with other organisations.

City wide events such as the Awards evening involve every area of the city although most youth services are conducted on a more local scale. Projects and programmes include a variety of sports activities or projects (football and basketball) have been held in Highfields, St Matthews and Northfields and a specific sports worker is now developing cross-area activities between Saffron and Highfields; a number of holiday clubs have also been held to occupy young people during school holidays; several community arts projects; a volunteer and leadership development programme specifically to work with new arrivals; an exchange trip to Holland in 2006 with a Muslim and Christian group of young people; and a project working with young parents.

Neighbourhood management and community cohesion
Neighbourhood management is about everyone working together with residents in the neighbourhood to improve the quality of life for people living there. In this way neighbourhood management has huge potential to improve community cohesion by creating stronger communities. In weak communities people can feel isolated from each other, may rely heavily on the welfare state to fulfil their needs, and this may be divisive by creating 'have' and 'have not' groups. Neighbourhood management strives to build strong communities where people pull together, helping themselves and each other. This happens in geographical areas – as well as between young and old, established residents and newcomers, and between neighbours themselves and those of different ethnicities.

There are four neighbourhood management schemes in Leicester. All schemes require active and involved residents, a Neighbourhood Manager, a local Board, and political leadership and commitment. The schemes are Braunstone, New Parks, Saffron and St Matthews/St Marks. Neighbourhood management in New Parks appears to be working well in developing neighbourhood activities and in bringing geographical communities together as well as those from different age groups and ethnic backgrounds.

Adult social care and cohesion
Social care is governed by national eligibility criteria which provides services based on the assessment of need, however alongside this new initiatives are allowing services to be tailored to individual needs and giving individuals choices to enable them to live as part of their local communities. This now applies to those with disabilities, of different ages, ethnicities, sexual orientations and religion and beliefs.

In Leicester there is a high take-up of individual budgets (45%) from those within minority communities. This enables support to be provided in a flexible and person-centred way, including support for within communities.

Older people and cohesion
Services to older people is based on the eligibility criteria mentioned above however there are now schemes to ensure that the most vulnerable older people and their carers are supported in ways that promote their independence and enable them to remain in their own homes and communities. This is turn means that older people will be able to remain in their own homes longer and continue to play and active role in their communities.

Leicester City Council is involved in several national pilots striving to provide person centred approaches and or independent living for older people.

The number of older people in the city has been growing as people are living longer. A flagship project working with older people is the Danbury Gardens project in Humberstone. Transport issues have caused concern and the group is working in collaboration with City Transport to address this issue.

Community cohesion and communications
Communication activity in the city Council is designed to cover all appropriate audiences and little is dedicated specifically to community cohesion.

Local and regional media is worked closely with on all aspects of the Council's activities through news releases, press briefing and photocalls etc. Recently a number of issues have reflected the diversity of the city – the Youth Parliament elections, older people and the grants that are available to them, people with disabilities and the Blue Badges available, and the exhibition on refugees and asylum seekers.

In terms of publications there are the Leicester Link and the A-Z service guide. Link adopts and integrated approach with news stories, features and listings that reflects the breadth of Leicester's communities. Photographically it aims to show a sample of the city's population. However, large areas of the city appear not to receive Link as distribution problems have hampered its delivery. This issue has already been referred to Cabinet.

Other communications activities included campaigns, projects and public relations, e-communications and marketing. All are designed to reflect the diversity of Leicester.

New Arrivals
New individuals and communities who choose to make Leicester their home include asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants.

Leicester's approach to assisting these individuals and communities to settle and integrate is found in the New Arrivals Strategy. The objectives of the Strategy are to ensure that integration is assisted through a favourable policy context; that services are co-ordinated between national, regional and local levels; that local services are responsive to the needs of newcomers; and that the city has a positive image of these individuals and communities.

Equalities and cohesion
Equalities and cohesion need to work hard in hand with each other in Leicester as they are both about dignity, fairness and respect – at an individual level or at the level of the community. Community cohesion is about all those factors which allow us to get on well with each other in the communities in which we live, equalities is about eliminating discrimination and promoting equality at an individual level.

Specifically equalities is a statutory duty of the Council – the Council in all of its policies and practices must do all it can to eliminate discrimination and promote equality of opportunity at an individual level – and this means in relation to gender,

race, disability, age, sexuality and faith or belief. This means that equal opportunities is about treating people differently to treat them fairly – it is about recognising difference and taking that into account to help all individuals to approach a position of 'a level playing field' – where all can participate equally with one another – as an employee of the Council for example.

Community Cohesion is about what goes on at the level of society, or more locally in communities – are some groups discriminated against or not able to participate because their playing field is not level? Do they have language difficulties, cannot speak good English, are not familiar with the way local government 'works', do their children need more help at school to 'catch-up' to those of their white peers, are their parents unemployed or on benefits? There are many different forms of disadvantage in communities and all of these can contribute to a lack of cohesion in communities if recognition and assistance is not available.
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Economic Regeneration
The role of the Economic Regeneration Group in community cohesion was significant from 1996 – March 2008 in that this Group was responsible for a series of seven area-based programmes in deprived areas of the city. These projects and programmes supported a wide range of capacity building and other cohesion supporting activities for local people. The Group also managed the first Community Cohesion Fund and the 20 projects and programmes undertaken under the Fund.

Since then the Group has been involved in employment and enterprise targets for the Local Area Agreement - concentrating on businesses in deprived areas. This will have an impact on employment opportunities and in this indirect and long-term manner economic regeneration will support community cohesion.

Currently efforts are being made to encourage residents from disadvantaged areas to get jobs in Highcross, the new shopping development for the city.

Community cohesion and transport
It is recognised that transport problems can be a significant barrier to community cohesion and social inclusion. The ability of people to access opportunities such as employment, learning, health care, food, local shops and leisure can significantly impact on their quality of life and life chances.

Leicester's Local Transport Plan aims to improve accessibility for everybody, and in particular groups likely to suffer from social exclusion. The report spent considerable time on measures to improve the accessibility and reliability of public transport, particularly bus information and bus stop improvements, along with walking and cycling initiatives. Equality impact assessments are conducted for new schemes and there is regular consultation with the public.

There is currently dialogue between the Council and the local transport companies to ensure that residents are able to access transport at all times. However recent price increases have impacted on many residents ability to travel at all, and/or to travel between different areas of the city. Particularly difficult times are in the evenings and at weekends and these services have decreased noticeably in recent years.

The environment and cohesion