



HILLINGDON
LONDON

External Services Scrutiny Committee

Report on Community Cohesion

May 2007

Members of the Committee:

Cllr Mary O'Connor (Chairman)
Cllr Shirley Harper-O'Neill
Cllr Phoday Jarjussey
Cllr Peter Kemp
Cllr Eddie Lavery



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www.hillingdon.gov.uk/central/democracy/scrutiny/index.php

Summary of Recommendations

1. That Cabinet notes the Government's recent call for the twinning of schools, which it hopes will promote understanding between pupils from different communities, and examines whether Hillingdon could take forward a scheme to promote understanding between pupils from different parts of Hillingdon and beyond.
2. That the Mayor of Hillingdon's vital role in promoting a cohesive and unified Hillingdon is emphasised. In particular, we ask that steps are taken to examine how the excellent work already undertaken by the Office of the Mayor to promote a civic identity, such as citizenship ceremonies, can be developed.
3. That Cabinet notes and welcomes the wide range of action undertaken by the Council's partners to promote a cohesive Hillingdon. In particular, we ask that Cabinet notes:
 - a) The excellent community engagement work undertaken by the Police through both 'Gold Groups' and Safer Neighbourhoods Teams.
 - b) That dialogue between faith and community groups is vital and fora such as Connecting Communities play an important role in facilitating this.
 - c) That the Hillingdon Inter Faith Network will hold its first meeting in July and endorses this initiative.
 - d) That the PCT has a central role in promoting community cohesion, but financial recovery has been the organisation's primary objective in the last year. The PCT's Interim Chief Executive states that the organisation will be able to participate more fully in partnerships once its financial position improves.
4. That Cabinet endorses the Committee's view that promoting community cohesion is central to the Council's community leadership role. We ask that Cabinet ensures the Council's partners are clear on which Council officer(s) is primarily responsible for 'joining up' initiatives to promote community cohesion, and we ask Cabinet to invite the LSP to formally adopt the Community Cohesion Framework.
5. That Cabinet ensures the Council continues to play a leading role in challenging myths and misinformation that may emerge about certain Hillingdon residents. In particular, we ask Cabinet to endorse our call for Councillors to be proactive in tackling inaccurate material that extremist parties may distribute while campaigning for the 2008 Greater London Assembly elections.
6. That Cabinet asks the Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement to ensure that the Council is proactive in tackling negative perceptions surrounding Hayes, and ensures the Council proactively 'sells' the town to both residents and potential investors. We suggest that Cabinet and the Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement may wish to examine whether the concerns that led to the Community Partnerships and Economic Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee review on this issue have now been allayed.
7. That Cabinet endorses our view that the Council and partners cannot be complacent in terms of community cohesion and asks officers to ensure a system is in place to monitor

any increase in community tensions. We ask that Cabinet ensures action is swiftly undertaken to address any tensions or potential problems at an early stage.

8. That the Committee re-examines community cohesion in the 2007/8 Council year, in particular to consider the implications of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion's recommendations and we invite the Corporate Services & Partnerships Policy Overview Committee to examine the work of the Council on this topic.

External Services Scrutiny Committee: Community Cohesion

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Chairman's Foreword



Hillingdon is a diverse Borough, and the challenge for the Council and our partners is to ensure that this diversity is a source of strength for the Borough and not potential fracture. It was excellent to hear about the wide range of work undertaken by the Council and our partners to promote a cohesive Hillingdon, and I was delighted to hear senior officers from the Police and NHS strongly commit to their role in promoting community cohesion. However, we must not be complacent and we must continue to all ensure Hillingdon is resilient to potential division and disharmony.

We make a series of recommendations, which we believe will build on the positive work underway. We heard that the Council's partners are delivering a wide range of projects on this issue, and I feel that we – the Council – owe these organisations strong support in line with our community leadership role. Our partners must understand who at the Council is the lead contact for community cohesion.

A further aspect of this community leadership role is the promotion of Hillingdon and the value of all those who live here. I strongly feel that the Council – and we as Councillors – must take a leading role in tackling those who seek to spread negative and often false information about members of our community.

Finally, as ever, I would like to thank all those who attended our meeting without whose information and support this report what not have been possible.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Mary O'Connor', written in a cursive style.

Cllr Mary O'Connor

INTRODUCTION

1. In June 2006 Council passed a motion asking the External Services Scrutiny Committee to examine community cohesion in Hillingdon. A cohesive Borough is vital to the quality of all residents' life and we used our meeting on 24th April 2007 to explore this issue.
2. The Committee heard from the following witnesses:
 - Chief Supt. Carl Bussey: Hillingdon Borough Commander, Metropolitan Police
 - Chief Inspector Maurice Hartnett: Metropolitan Police
 - Yi-Mien Koh: Interim Chief Executive, Hillingdon PCT
 - Chris Commerford: Chief Executive, Age Concern
 - Obaid Siddiqui: Chair of Connecting Communities Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Forum
 - Duncan Struthers: Chair of Hillingdon Interfaith Network
 - Andrew Knight: Healthy Hillingdon
 - Priscilla Simpson: HOPE Project
3. We also heard from the following Council officers:
 - David Brough: Head of Democratic Services
 - Ian Edwards: Head of Partnerships & Community Engagement
 - Sonia Gandhi: Principal Officer, Equality & Diversity
 - Fiona Gibbs: Principal Officer, Connecting Communities

BACKGROUND

What is community cohesion?

4. Community cohesion became a high profile issue during the summer of 2001 when there were disturbances in several towns in north England. There has also been a growth in support for parties with extreme views, with perhaps the most notable result being the election of 11 BNP Councillors to Barking & Dagenham Council in May 2006.
5. A widely accepted definition of a 'cohesive community' is one where:
 - there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities;
 - the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued;
 - those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; and

- strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.
6. Alternatively, a more simple definition of a cohesive community is one in which 'everybody feels at home' and 'sticks together' regardless of economic, ethnic, social, faith, political or other differences.¹
 7. Community cohesion often focuses on how communities from different ethnic groups can live together and prosper. However, it is also important to note that other factors such as age and class differences may spark conflicts that impact on the cohesiveness of a community.
 8. Changes to society could be increasing the challenge of maintaining a cohesive community. Recent years have seen rapid changes to the UK labour market and workforce, in particular a large influx of young workers from Eastern Europe. This increase is also coupled to – but not necessarily the cause of – increased public concern around immigration. In May 2006 a regular MORI poll found for the first time that 'race relations/immigration/immigrants' was named as the main issue facing Britain today. This was the first time the issue had overtaken crime in the survey.²
 9. In addition, the September 11th terrorist attacks in New York and the July 2005 London bombings have also threatened to undermine cohesive communities. In particular, specific groups in society feel these events have led to increased scrutiny on themselves, with much of the public debate on cohesion focusing on how Muslim communities integrate with the rest of society.
 10. Tensions can also arise as groups in society 'compete' for resources in a given area; e.g. education, jobs, housing, or grants. White or long established communities may have a perception that newer communities may get preferential treatment.

Commission on Integration and Cohesion

11. In June 2006 Ruth Kelly, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, launched the Commission on Integration and Cohesion. The Commission, a fixed term advisory body, is considering how local areas can make the most of the benefits delivered by increasing diversity. It will also consider how local areas can respond to the tensions diversity can sometimes cause. It will develop practical approaches that build communities' own capacity to prevent problems, including those caused by segregation and the dissemination of extremist ideologies.
12. A coordinated response from Hillingdon was sent to the Commission. This collated witness statements from faith communities, Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME)

¹ 'Our Interim Statement' - Commission on Integration & Cohesion, 2007, p12
www.integrationandcohesion.org.uk

² 'Our Interim Statement' - Commission on Integration & Cohesion, 2007, p9
www.integrationandcohesion.org.uk

communities as well as key service areas from the Council – Democratic Services, planning, housing, education, community resources and social services.

13. The Commission, chaired by Darra Singh, Chief Executive of Ealing Council, issued an interim statement in February 2007. The Commission is due to publish a final report later in 2007. The interim statement indicates that the final report is likely to cover the following issues:³
 - That the inability to speak English is a significant barrier to integration and cohesion;
 - That integration and cohesion are not just about visible difference or cultural difference, but also tensions arising from competition for resources;
 - That interaction between groups is vital; not just in education and employment but also sports and social clubs;
 - Shared values, expressed at a local level through civic pride, can act as a framework for national identity and cohesion.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The local picture

14. It is vital to acknowledge that community cohesion is not simply about racial divisions. Hillingdon has much diversity within it in terms of age, gender, culture, faith, disability, sexual orientation and wealth. Work to ensure a cohesive Borough must take account of all of these potential divisions and also the fact that people often have multiple identities that may change over time.
15. The Greater London Assembly (GLA) predict that Hillingdon's population could rise by up to 10,000 people by 2026. It is expected that this increase will come from many different groups and there may be a large number of people who are new to the area.
16. A recurring theme in our evidence was that there is a clear north-south divide in Hillingdon, with many residents having never travelled to other parts of the Borough. Poor north-south transport connections further reinforce this lack of movement in the Borough, with the A40 seemingly acting as a 'barrier'. This will be of no surprise to most Hillingdon Councillors, however we feel that it is vital to acknowledge this division when discussing community cohesion in Hillingdon.
17. The north of the Borough is often seen as 'leafy' with higher levels of affluence than the more ethnically diverse south of the Borough. However, such broad characterisations are unhelpful and often inaccurate. For example, our witnesses highlighted pockets of deprivation in the 'wealthy' north of the Borough. It is vital the Council and partners take account of this diversity when planning and delivering services for Hillingdon.

³ 'Our Interim Statement' - Commission on Integration & Cohesion, 2007, p4
www.integrationandcohesion.org.uk

18. The lack of movement across the Borough is worrying for it is a clear challenge to creating a cohesive Hillingdon. We were interested to hear the recent comments of the Schools Minister Jim Knight who called for ‘twinning’ between schools to promote understanding between different groups in society. If undertaken in the right way, we suggest that links between schools could be positive and would build on the excellent work undertaken in Hillingdon when pupils from Guru Nanak School in Hayes visited the Northwood and Pinner Synagogue as part of Holocaust Memorial Day. Young people are central to promoting community cohesion, for they are the communities of the future. As such, it is vital to ensure young people understand different communities and the value of respecting these communities.

Recommendation 1:

That Cabinet notes the Government’s recent call for the twinning of schools, which it hopes will promote understanding between pupils from different communities, and examines whether Hillingdon could take forward a scheme to promote understanding between pupils from different parts of Hillingdon and beyond.

Creating a civic identity

19. Given this lack of movement across the Borough by sections of the community, it was perhaps not surprising to hear that there is a lack of civic identity in Hillingdon. The Borough of Hillingdon is an artificial creation dating back to the creation of the Council in 1965. Witnesses told us that residents of the Borough of Hillingdon feel they belong to areas such as Ruislip, Hayes, or Uxbridge rather than Hillingdon. We suspect that Hillingdon is not unique amongst London Boroughs in this respect. However, this could represent a further challenge to creating a cohesive Hillingdon. We believe it suggests that a shared identity must be based on civic values rather than geographical identity.
20. The Mayor of Hillingdon is the ‘first citizen of Hillingdon’ and represents the Council at many functions and events. The Mayor can be a unifying figure and source of pride for the diverse Borough.
21. We were struck to hear from Andrew Knight about the significant contribution made by the 2006/7 Mayor, Cllr David Routledge, to the Expressions project. We heard that the Mayor’s attendance in his robes attracted much attention and his interaction with the local community helped stimulate interest. The Mayor already plays a central role in promoting a cohesive Borough through the popular citizenship ceremonies, and we believe that this role of the Mayor in promoting a civic identity is vital.

Recommendation 2:

That the Mayor of Hillingdon’s vital role in promoting a cohesive and unified Hillingdon is emphasised. In particular, we ask that steps are taken to examine

how the excellent work already undertaken by the Office of the Mayor to promote a civic identity, such as citizenship ceremonies, can be developed.

Work of partners to promote community cohesion

22. We were delighted to hear about just some of the work undertaken by the Council's partners to promote community cohesion in Hillingdon.

The Metropolitan Police

23. We firmly agree with the Borough Commander that the Police can only effectively serve the community if it has the trust and confidence of all those living in Hillingdon. The terrorism threat of recent years, and the Police response to this, increases the challenge of maintaining support for the Police amongst Muslim groups. We were therefore extremely pleased to hear Obaid Siddiqui's view that the Police are very supportive of Hillingdon's Muslim community.
24. A key method of community engagement by the Police is the use of 'Gold Groups' which bring together a range of stakeholders to identify solutions to particular local issues. We feel that the involvement of those affected by issues 'on the ground' and the willingness of the Police to share information is central to the success of these groups. We suggest that the Council may be able to develop aspects of this method of community engagement for its own use, in particular the involvement of local communities in problem solving.
25. Safer Neighbourhoods Teams (SNTs) are a further excellent example of how the Police are engaging with diverse populations and thereby helping to promote community cohesion. Our last report highlighted the successes of this initiative and in our recommendations to that report we suggested that SNTs, and in particular Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), can play a central role in community development. It was pleasing to hear that in contrast to many uniformed Police response officers, PCSOs often work in areas in which they have lived for many years. In addition, the Borough Commander told us that PCSOs are increasingly representative of the Hillingdon population with 30% coming from BAME groups. Furthermore, SNT ward panels are a key mechanism for bringing diverse sections of the community together. We were therefore pleased to hear Chief Inspector Hartnett's reassurance that efforts will continue to ensure that panels represent the diversity of the local community.

The role of faith and community groups in facilitating dialogue between diverse Hillingdon residents

26. Hillingdon is a diverse Borough with many active religious and community groups; it is vital to ensure that this diversity is a source of strength rather than potential fracture and division. As such, we believe that an ongoing dialogue between different groups is vital for it will ensure that myths can be challenged at an early stage. It will also ensure that representatives can speak together in response to difficult events, such as the 9/11 and 7/7 terrorist attacks in New York and London.

27. It is also important that service providers have an ongoing dialogue with diverse faith and community groups. We were pleased to hear about the Connecting Communities BAME Forum that brings diverse groups and service providers together to address issues of common concern. We feel that such networks must be transparent and open to the wide range of groups in Hillingdon.
28. It was pleasing to hear from the Chairman of the newly created Hillingdon Inter Faith Network. The Network will hold its first meeting in July and can play a key role in promoting dialogue between the diverse faiths in Hillingdon. Dialogue is central to ensuring diversity does not lead to fracture and division, and as such we support the Network.

Health services and community cohesion

29. Health services have a vital role to play in promoting community cohesion, and Hillingdon Primary Care Trust (PCT) must ensure that all Hillingdon residents are able to access health services. We heard that the PCT regularly assesses the needs of the local population, and should use the Public Health Director's Annual Public Health Report to inform its commissioning proposals. It was also interesting to hear the PCT's Interim Chief Executive's view that the Urgent Care Centre will aid community cohesion by offering treatment to those who are not registered with a GP.
30. The last few years have undoubtedly been tough for the PCT, and the primary focus of the organisation has been financial turnaround. As such, the PCT has been unable to fully invest in public health initiatives that would promote community cohesion, and also participate as fully in partnerships as its partners would like. The PCT's Interim Chief Executive told us that the situation should soon improve, and that the organisation will be able to become an 'excellent partner' once it has its own 'house in order'.

Recommendation 3:

That Cabinet notes and welcomes the wide range of action undertaken by the Council's partners to promote a cohesive Hillingdon. In particular, we ask that Cabinet notes:

- a) **The excellent community engagement work undertaken by the Police through both 'Gold Groups' and Safer Neighbourhoods Teams.**
- b) **That dialogue between faith and community groups is vital and fora such as Connecting Communities play an important role in facilitating this.**
- c) **That the Hillingdon Inter Faith Network will hold its first meeting in July and endorses this initiative.**
- d) **That the PCT has a central role in promoting community cohesion, but financial recovery has been the organisation's primary objective in the last year. The PCT's Interim Chief Executive states that the organisation will be**

able to participate more fully in partnerships once its financial position improves.

The coordinating role of the Council as a ‘place shaper’

31. A wide range of work is therefore currently underway to promote a cohesive Hillingdon. However, it is vital to ensure that these efforts are coordinated so that partners’ resources and efforts dedicated to this important task are maximised to their full potential. As the recent Lyons Report acknowledges, local government is much more than a provider of services. Councils are the only local directly elected organisations providing public services. As such, they have a key role to play in ‘shaping places’ and must help people live harmoniously together. The Council therefore has a leading role in ‘joining up’ the work of partners. Most, if not all, Council services have a role to play in promoting community cohesion, but we believe that our partners must be clear on who in the Council is responsible for joining up these initiatives. We therefore ask the Acting Chief Executive to ensure that there is a single accountable lead for community cohesion within the Council's officer structure.
32. Witnesses told us that they feel the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) is a central mechanism for coordinating initiatives to promote community cohesion. As such, the Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement will have a key role to play, along with other senior officers. We welcome that Cabinet is being asked to formally endorse the Community Cohesion Framework. Given that witnesses said that the LSP is a key method for promoting community cohesion, we hope that the Partnership can make a formal commitment to this framework.

Recommendation 4:

That Cabinet endorses the Committee’s view that promoting community cohesion is central to the Council’s community leadership role. We ask that Cabinet ensures the Council’s partners are clear on which Council officer(s) is primarily responsible for ‘joining up’ initiatives to promote community cohesion, and we ask Cabinet to invite the LSP to formally adopt the Community Cohesion Framework.

The importance of positive information and ‘myth busting’

33. We heard that community cohesion in Hillingdon can be susceptible to myths or misinformation that may spread about particular Hillingdon residents. We firmly believe that the Council’s proactive community leadership role must include tackling myths such as those that led many businesses in the south of the Borough to close on the day of a recent traveller funeral. The media may often gain more interest through a ‘scare story’ than a positive report of cooperation and community cohesion. As such, the Council must take a leading role in promoting ‘good news’ about community cohesion, through press releases and *Hillingdon People*.

34. As highlighted earlier, locally elected Councillors are community representatives and champions. Residents have entrusted Councillors with an important position, and we suggest that Councillors can use this position to ensure that misinformation and myths are not able to play on fears and misunderstandings. The Council motion leading to this meeting noted that the May 2006 elections did not see an upsurge in support for extremist parties. This is pleasing; however Hillingdon must not be complacent.
35. May 2008 will see the elections for the London Mayor and Greater London Assembly (GLA). Significantly, GLA elections take place under a form of proportional representation which means that only 5% of the London vote is required to return an Assembly Member. We heard that the British National Party (BNP) failed by less than 10,000 votes to return an Assembly Member in 2004 and will therefore be campaigning hard in the coming year. Although Hillingdon Councillors are not standing for re-election, no doubt many of us will be out campaigning on behalf of our colleagues standing in these elections. The Committee suggests that we (Hillingdon Councillors) must all use our position in the local community to challenge myths and misinformation that may be spread by extremist groups campaigning for votes. In particular, Hillingdon Councillors may wish to endorse the work of campaigns such as 'hope not hate' that seek to promote respect of all people in society.⁴

Recommendation 5:

That Cabinet ensures the Council continues to play a leading role in challenging myths and misinformation that may emerge about certain Hillingdon residents. In particular, we ask Cabinet to endorse our call for Councillors to be proactive in tackling inaccurate material that extremist parties may distribute while campaigning for the 2008 Greater London Assembly elections.

36. Positive information must relate to both Hillingdon people and also our towns and communities. We were concerned to hear from our witnesses that many Hayes residents have a highly negative perception of the town. We heard that people often do not appreciate many of the town's attractions and amenities, such as the green spaces, large employers, and transport links to central London. The visit of the Queen in May 2006 demonstrates the town's vibrancy with many residents lining the streets to welcome Her Majesty. We believe the Council must be proactive in tackling negative perceptions as part of its community leadership role.
37. We note that the Community Partnerships and Economic Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee highlighted this as an issue in their 2005/6 review of town centre partnerships. The review took evidence from a wide range of stakeholders and found that the area would benefit from initiatives to improve people's perception of Hayes. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee raised a series of concerns about the Hayes town centre partnership. Given the scope of our review we do not attempt to return to these concerns. However, the evidence given at our meeting suggests that further work could be undertaken in respect of Hayes' image.

⁴ Further information on the campaign is available at <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/>

Recommendation 6:

That Cabinet asks the Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement to ensure that the Council is proactive in tackling negative perceptions surrounding Hayes, and ensures the Council proactively ‘sells’ the town to both residents and potential investors. We suggest that Cabinet and the Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement may wish to examine whether the concerns that led to the Community Partnerships and Economic Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee review on this issue have now been allayed.

Tension monitoring

38. As highlighted earlier, Hillingdon did not experience a significant upsurge in support for extremist parties at the 2006 elections. This is good news, however we cannot be complacent. The 2001 riots in north England rapidly escalated from local disputes and we must ensure events do not spiral out of control in Hillingdon. It is vital to ensure that the Council and partners are proactive in monitoring community cohesion in Hillingdon and instigate appropriate action as/when necessary. We were pleased to hear that Council officers are developing indicators to monitor community tensions and are planning how to respond to a race riot. We hope that both of these initiatives can be successfully implemented.

Recommendation 7:

That Cabinet endorses our view that the Council and partners cannot be complacent in terms of community cohesion and asks officers to ensure a system is in place to monitor any increase in community tensions. We ask that Cabinet ensures action is swiftly undertaken to address any tensions or potential problems at an early stage.

CLOSING WORD

39. Our meeting was highly informative and it was pleasing to hear about the wide range of initiatives underway to promote community cohesion in Hillingdon. In our recommendations we call on Cabinet to endorse this work underway. In addition, we make recommendations to Cabinet about the Council’s role in coordinating the work of our partners. We firmly believe that the Council must use its community leadership role to ensure efforts of partners fit together and maximise the value of resources committed to this initiative.
40. We feel it is important that the work of the Council and partners to promote community cohesion strikes an effective balance between strategy and action. It is essential to have strategies in place to plan for future challenges, however this must not be at the

expense of action. Community cohesion is not simply about having a strategy. In the words of the Borough Commander, we must not become 'strategy rich but implementation poor'.

41. A single meeting cannot address the whole range of issues surrounding community cohesion in Hillingdon, and we therefore suggest that the Committee return to this issue in the 2007/8 Council year, in particular to examine the recommendations that the Commission on Integration and Cohesion will make. As the External Services Scrutiny Committee, we have not fully examined the role of the Council in promoting community cohesion, and therefore suggest that the next examination of this topic adopts a wider focus.

Recommendation 8:

That the Committee re-examines community cohesion in the 2007/8 Council year, in particular to consider the implications of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion's recommendations and we invite the Corporate Services & Partnerships Policy Overview Committee to examine the work of the Council on this topic.

APPENDIX: GLOSSARY

BAME – Black and Minority Ethnic

BNP – British National Party

GLA – Greater London Assembly

LSP – Local Strategic Partnership

PCSO – Police Community Support Officer

PCT – Primary Care Trust

SNT – Safer Neighbourhoods Team