

# **COMMUNITY COHESION PARTNERSHIP**

## **CONFERENCE REPORT 2009**

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Purpose**

The report provides a summary of findings from the evaluation forms, group work sessions, speeches and presentations from the Community Cohesion Partnership conference held on 17 November 2009.

#### **1.2 Summary**

On 17 November 2009, the Community Cohesion Partnership hosted its second annual conference. Over 200 people, representing statutory bodies, voluntary and community groups, faith organisations and business, attended the conference. Whilst the majority were from within the borough, some regional and local partner organisations were also in attendance. The theme of the conference was 'developing stronger neighbourhoods.' Delegates helped to identify priorities and activities relating to equality, cohesion and social inclusion, during group consultation sessions.

### **2 CONFERENCE PROGRAMME**

Delegates participated in a programme that involved speeches and presentations from; Councillor Gavin Barwell, Cabinet Member for Safety and Cohesion, Croydon Council, Nero Ughwujabo, Chief Executive, Croydon Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Forum, Councillor Anjana Patel, Lead Member for Equalities and Chair of the Equalities Forum, London Councils, and the keynote speech was provided by Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, Journalist and Broadcaster. After which followed a question and answer session, then group work to help to shape the future activity of the partnership.

### **3 EVALUATION**

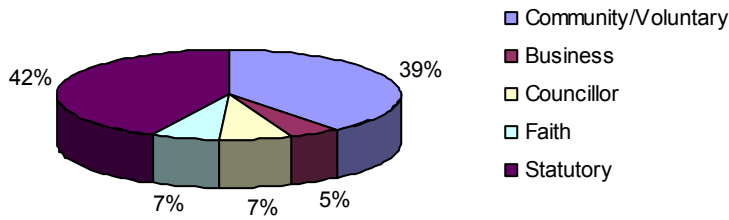
#### **3.1 Breakdown of delegates**

Delegates from a range of statutory, community and voluntary sector organisations attended the conference. These were mainly from within the borough although a small number were invited from regional and national partner organisations.

- 46% of attendees represented third sector (community / voluntary organisations, faith communities).
- 43% were from statutory organisations. Councillors represented 7% of those in attendance.

The business sector was represented, but to a much lesser extent. Although invited, no young people attended the event.

### Attendee 'Sector' Breakdown

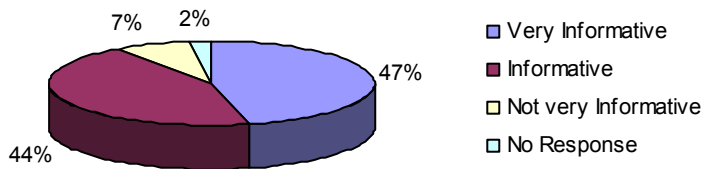


Of the 75 delegates who completed and returned evaluation forms, 49% rated the event as 'good', whilst 31% considered it 'excellent'.

### **3.2 Presentations**

91% of respondents felt that the speakers were informative or very informative.

### To what extent did you find the presentations useful?



Delegates however would have liked presentations to focus in more detail on a broader range of socially excluded groups, in particular disabled people and young people.

“Appreciated the call for honest dialogue”

## **4 SUMMARY OF SPEECHES AND PRESENTATIONS**

Speeches were given by:

- Councillor Gavin Barwell, Cabinet Member for Safety and Cohesion, Croydon Council
- Nero Ughwujabo, Chief Executive, Croydon BME Forum.

Their speeches addressed key local issues around cohesion and the role of the third sector in making communities cohesive.

### **Councillor Anjana Patel, Lead Member for Equalities and Chair of the Equalities Forum, London Councils**

Councillor Patel gave an overview of the London Council's regional perspective. Her speech urged, that for community cohesion to be successful, it is necessary for local community leaders to not only hold representative roles, but that they must be encouraged to foster links between one another. Her speech projected the view that 'proactive prevention and not reactive remedies' are central to the long term infrastructure and success of cohesion. Also mentioned was for community leaders' to face up to the challenges of leading and sharing information on their communities, by acting as 'gateways and not gatekeepers'. Councillor Patel finished by outlining the work of the London Councils Equalities Forum and examples of community cohesion from around London.

Key points:

- Mediating conflicts
- Actively promoting mutual respect and understanding between different communities
- Promoting Community Cohesion and good race relations in schools
- Community Cohesion needs to be integrated into the mainstream areas such as education, community safety, housing and neighbourhood renewal
- In-depth knowledge of local communities
- Securing commitment to, and ownership of the community cohesion agenda
- London examples: LB Hounslow – West Area Study, LB Harrow – Under One Sky.

### **Yasmin Alibhai- Brown, Journalist / Broadcaster**

Yasmin in her speech explored the potential reasons why Britain at present feels fragmented and divided. She questioned whether some citizens and residents are put under greater pressure on cohesion than others and if we should be thinking more about a national generation project that all citizens need to buy into. She suggested that there could be no neighbourliness without equality, fairness, justice and common human rights. Examples of de facto cohesion are all around us and we can learn from them.

Key points:

- Most tensions occur at a local level
- Trust in each other and in institutions at a local level is really important
- Celebrations/street parties/lunches are good for bringing people together in their locality, but don't avoid the difficult/honest conversations. Inequality and discrimination still exist and need to be talked about.
- People are living separate lives and there is a need for shared community spaces where we can have more honest conversations
- Local pride is very important; this should not be built on partial histories
- Learning of English is important
- Children need to be connected across all boundaries.

## **5 GROUP DISCUSSIONS**

### **5.1 Evaluation Form Results**

The group discussions were generally well received. There were encouraging comments about the opportunities for inclusion.

“Really good ideas about how to address the challenges. Agreed that the 'unheard' need a voice”

In contrast, respondents also indicated that there was too little time for group discussions and that some participants dominated the discussions. A question was also raised about how the discussions would be progressed and delegates kept informed.

“I am not clear how our comments will be used to improve cohesion. Will there be an action plan”

A number of comments were made about the need to involve young people in future discussions around community cohesion. This could be addressed through holding a separate youth cohesion conference. Other attendees appreciated the cultural diversity around their tables, and the desire to work together to address the issues under discussion.

### **5.2 Future topics for Discussion**

Delegates were offered the opportunity to identify future topics for discussion and key suggestions included:

- Disability and mental health issues
- The role of business in local issues
- Housing and its role in cohesion
- Choices in education
- migration
- Engaging young people and the capacity of schools to address this
- Unemployment and poverty

- Forced marriages
- Joint working between public authorities
- Role of Neighbourhood Partnerships in strategy development.

## 6 GROUP DISCUSSION RECOMMENDATIONS

The key priorities that emerged from group discussions were:

- Better use of public and/or community facilities and spaces, to enable communities to come together;
- Improving access to English language learning in schools and the wider community;
- Promoting inter-generational relationships and greater understanding between different age groups through joint activities;
- Encouraging and promoting community activity e.g. community days, volunteering and mentoring;
- Promoting opportunities for community leadership and wider engagement with public services;
- Improving communications and enabling honest and open dialogue around issues of concern to build trust in local areas;
- Encouraging participation of young people in local democracy and activities and recognising their contribution;
- Understanding and addressing the needs of vulnerable and isolated groups;
- Increasing the capacity of the Third Sector to deliver services.

The following information provides a more detailed summary of individual group discussions.

### 6.1 What can be done to encourage local people from different backgrounds to get on well together?

**Key Issues:** Socio-economic class, ethnicity, the local north/south divide and educational attainment were all identified as issues seen to divide the community into sub-groups and that affect cohesion.

**Top outcomes/priorities:** Croydon Celebrates Black History started from combating negative perceptions, this model could be used to build bridges. Using a central venue such as the Whitgift Centre or Fairfield Halls would allow space for communities to share the crossroads in their lives, creating a common sense and feel good factor.

**Top activities:** Debating clubs, celebrations where groups nominate people to speak on their behalf, school/college based activities, 'Community Voice' panels.

**Responsible persons:** The commercial sector, voluntary organisations, faith communities, community leaders and skilled facilitators, with a designated project leader to capture the community needs.

## **6.2 How can we improve people's ability to influence and hear back from public services?**

**Key Issues:** A lack of engagement with groups such as Neighbourhood Partnerships, limited awareness and capacity of the Local Involvement Network. Language barriers could be a constraining factor.

**Top outcomes/priorities:** Greater flexibility of engagement with community and other groups. ESOL awareness should be raised via schools and community groups. Focus resources and apply for additional funding to widen the local engagement structure, through either a District Centre Manager or Local Area Manager.

**Top activities:** Champions to carry the engagement message to the Local Involvement Network. This would be through more flexible engagement groups meeting at weekends or times appropriate to improve involvement. Refresh the place-shaping agenda by undertaking a review of neighbourhood partnerships.

## **6.3 How can we work together to make communities more resilient to those who threaten the harmony of local areas?**

**Key Issues:** Extremist political activity, a need to identify with and encourage communities, and housing<sup>1</sup>.

**Top outcomes/priorities:** Drive and encourage social inclusion in; housing, increasing capacity and on appropriate sites; and in education, through methods such as removing language barriers. Need for longer term planning and funding for community initiatives. There is a requirement for improved access to information: showing the accountability of local politicians.

**Top activities:** Devolution of power and budgetary control to a sub-ward level. Partnerships should research and provide information on local trends, and as a part of this, the decision making process must extend to young people, e.g. a 'Young Mayor Scheme' with a designated budget.

**Responsible persons:** Local statutory bodies, both national and local politicians, Neighbourhood Partnerships, resident associations, youth groups, tenant associations, disability groups. Need to go beyond already established groups to encourage new ideas.

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<sup>1</sup> Specifically, private sector landlords working with housing associations, housing migrants in particular areas, that housing issues should drive cohesion and finally the need to assess the sustainability of communities.

#### **6.4 What can we do to encourage a sense of belonging in local neighbourhoods?**

**Key Issues:** A trend of deterioration of community, with poor communication, unemployment, fear of change, cynicism and negative press coverage fuelling it.

**Top outcomes/priorities:** Increased community activity for all groups, focused on wider engagement and improved accessibility. Local press should be encouraged to report more positively or at the very least less negatively, and contribute to the intellectual debate. Also a network of shared resources would help to encourage communication between groups.

**Top activities:** Debating sessions, events similar to the Big Lunch to push cohesion, volunteering to teach English and help break down language barriers or help raise awareness on disability. Youth Services to investigate holding a conversation with gang members.

**Responsible persons:** Community and faith leaders, Neighbourhood Partnerships, the local press, schools and volunteers.

#### **6.5 How can we improve the integration of new communities arriving in Croydon and manage the impact on settled communities, particularly in deprived areas of the borough?**

**Key Issues:** Communication and language barriers, how the issues were reported in the local news and other media. People feel threatened by the changes, whether it be through perceived increased competition for jobs or access to housing, or simply that they find it hard to understand new cultures.

**Top outcomes/priorities:** A shared responsibility between new and settled communities should be achieved. Promote an understanding of why people have chosen to live in Croydon/UK and the benefits of valuing diversity.

**Top activities:** An information pack for newcomers as well as a mentoring system. Neighbourhood groups, events such as street parties and positive (or at least not negative) press coverage would all help to improve integration.

**Responsible persons:** The council and other statutory agencies, voluntary/faith/community groups and the local press.

#### **6.6 How can we increase the participation of young people in local democracy?**

**Key Issues:** Young people see politics as divisive and uninspiring. Local democratic structures are unfriendly and young people do not have the time or capacity to engage.

**Top outcomes/priorities:** Need to strengthen the infrastructure that exists and build on good practice. Young people shouldn't be categorised, the

process of engagement must be sensitive to vulnerable groups, respect diversity and be wholly inclusive. Parents are often separated from their children, be it in a physical or literal sense, there is a need to re-establish communications between the two.

**Top activities:** Organise democratic debates on issues such as community perspectives and party affiliations. Encourage young people to lead these activities, with the expectation that mentoring activities will be provided which may include occasional support from local MPs and councillors.

**Responsible persons:** Schools and parents should play a pivotal role, also the local and community representatives to be established in support/ mentoring roles.

### **6.7 How can we promote inter-generational relationships and greater understanding between different age groups?**

**Key Issues:** A lack of understanding and interaction between generations even within the home environment.

**Top outcomes/priorities:** Developing a cultural competence and making the community an 'extended family'.

**Top activities:** Utilise new centres for cross cultural and intergenerational festivals/activities. Increase volunteering capacity within the community to work with older and younger people.<sup>2</sup>

### **6.8 How can we encourage community leaders from both established and newly arrived communities?**

**Key Issues:** Segregation/integration of communities, communication barriers such as language and exclusion of young people.

**Top outcomes/priorities:** Encouraging new communities to become part of community groups, building confidence and trust by acting on suggestions. Communities should be encouraged to share their facilities, in order to help create a 'Croydon identity.'

**Top activities:** 'Difficult subject' slot at events, mentoring facilities, a welcome pack for new residents and more community events.

**Responsible persons:** Residents, community groups, the council and any interested parties.

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<sup>2</sup> Ideas mentioned included: 'Rent a grandma', 'Teach your Gran to text', 'faith speed dating' or 'intergenerational speed dating'.



## **6.9 How can we encourage people to take more of an active role in local decision-making?**

**Key Issues:** Being listened to and seeing proof the issues raised have been acted on, believing in the honesty of politicians and a two-way conversation.

**Top outcomes/priorities:** Improved accountability, empowerment of disabled people and ensuring access needs are met, to enable people to participate e.g. crèche facilities.

**Top activities:** A review of the formal structures to ensure grass roots are being reached, building the duty to involve into all job descriptions and more regular discussion groups.

**Responsible persons:** The Chief Executive supported by the management team, along with the local voluntary sector and faith organisations.

## **6.10 How can we encourage hard-to-reach groups, including young people to volunteer within their communities?**

**Key Issues:** Re-engage with groups such as youth offenders or gangs, and engagement with; BME boys, teenage girls at risk of pregnancy, youth offenders and gang members.

**Top outcomes/priorities:** Improve communication between partnerships, closer working with statutory organisations. Select the right people for strategic roles and engagement with families including the elderly.

**Top activities:** Compulsory volunteering 'National Service' for all children in high school, a database of volunteers to be created, increased engagement with schools by the third sector, and opportunities for the elderly to pass on their skills and knowledge.

**Responsible persons:** Everyone is responsible; the voluntary, community and statutory bodies would be most likely to lead.

## **6.11 How can we increase the role of the Third Sector in delivering public services?**

**Key Issues:** Provide additional resources, perceived and real barriers, the cost versus quality argument for service delivery, and capacity building, i.e. equipping groups with skills for bidding for grants.

**Top outcomes/priorities:** Working in partnership on both local and national issues, with the aim of preventing crises not reacting to them.

**Top activities:** Creating a ladder of accountability to provide openness, contacting residents, hearing their views and respecting them. A policy change should be pushed through to allow 10-15% of services to be delivered by Third Sector Organisations.

**Responsible persons:** Chief Executive of Croydon Council, councillors, Chairs of Third Sector Organisations and other interested parties.

#### **6.12 How can we provide opportunities for meaningful interaction between diverse groups?**

**Key Issues:** Although opportunities are provided, engagement is still not always happening.

**Top outcomes/priorities:** Improved social inclusion and engagement. Initial focus on why interaction does not always occur.

**Top activities:** A mobile unit to discuss ideas with communities and find out why interaction does not always occur, courses, workshops and neighbourhood events to increase interaction. Local schools and media could provide support with providing locations for events and promoting them.

**Responsible persons:** 'All of us', plus a central point of contact i.e. an information officer.

#### **6.13 How we build open and honest dialogue with local people around issues of concern?**

**Key Issues:** Listen to the views of people; trust the community view, providing a safe and neutral venue for sensitive discussions. Need for more monitoring of service providers and local consultation. The majority view is not always the correct view.

**Top outcomes/priorities:** Start with local issues, build trust within the community, link communities together and build a portfolio of best practise ideas.

**Top activities:** Linking community groups together to drive research into local issues, building on the capacity of the Third Sector to increase representation and learning from good practice elsewhere.

**Responsible persons:** The community and local services. The council might wish to act as a facilitator/observer in the discussions.

#### **6.14 What can be done to ensure every young person has the chance to succeed in school and beyond?**

**Key Issues:** The level of parental support, ensuring young people see the value of education, tackling gender issues, engaging the 'traveller/Gypsy' community, bullying – both physical and cyber, learning difficulties and geographic barriers.

**Top outcomes/priorities:** Increased numbers of children's centres, targeted support, and recognition of wider achievements not just academic.

**Top activities:** A review of the reception intake would allow for early identification of the needs of individuals and the schools in general. From this a system of targeted mentoring and reward/recognition for both academic and wider achievements can be arranged. Schools should also be encouraged to open up and invite more speakers to share their life stories.

**Responsible persons:** The group felt everyone has a responsibility.

### **6.15 How can we work together to address poverty?**

**Key Issues:** Literacy levels across the board and the necessity of joined up services.

**Top outcomes/priorities:** A joined up service between different agencies, and access for all to learning and training facilities.

**Top activities:** Encouraging personal empowerment and ownership for individual economic development, improvements to the council website on poverty issues, and for the council to provide access for all to learning and training.

### **6.16 How can we maximise opportunities for marginalised or otherwise vulnerable communities to stay fit and healthy and take a more active part in community activity?**

**Key Issues:** Understanding of; what or who are the marginalised groups? How do we find these groups? Do we understand what everyone is doing? How much of a barrier is language?

**Top outcomes/priorities:** More people participating in activities, leading to better networking and communications. These networks need to be strengthened. Areas that are working must be learned from and disseminated to a wider audience.

**Top activities:** Opening up schools facilities to marginalised and vulnerable groups, allowing localised centres to be available. Activities should be far ranging, such as allotments, cleaning the neighbourhood, or supporting the healthy living hub at the central library. A buddy/mentoring support system would help to improve the sustainability of projects.

**Responsible persons:** 'Everyone' as being equally responsible.

### **6.17 How can we ensure that the growing number of older people in Croydon maintain the best possible health?**

**Key Issues:** Social isolation, a need to get the message out, and that wellbeing must not just be seen as health.

**Top outcomes/priorities and activities:** Improved marketing of existing facilities and activities, a stronger link to Age Concern and neighbourhood partnerships, Croydon Voluntary Action (CVA) and health champions.

**Responsible persons:** Possible key partner: Healthy Croydon Partnership.

### **6.18 How can we practically support vulnerable people to lead fulfilling lives?**

**Key Issues:** People with mental health issues, the homeless, ex-offenders, substance mis-users, disabled and/or elderly people, excluded young people and victims of abuse and other groups may require support.

**Top outcomes/priorities and activities:** Reducing the difficulties surrounding multi-agency assistance, a one-stop shop to provide information, and a choice of personalised services. Also a conversation around what the changes in the population means for mainstream services.

### **6.19 How do we promote the contribution young people make to their community and wider society?**

**Key Issues:** Isolation of young people from the mainstream community, parental control, the need to 'listen' to their thoughts as well as to encourage.

**Top outcomes/priorities:** Young people should be encouraged to 'make the community for themselves.' Youth participation should be seen as a norm in all local activities and youth achievement and values should be recognised.

**Top activities:** Cultural and sports events, school based projects in partnership with community organisations, and to be given a direct voice within the media and local authority publications.

**Responsible persons:** 'We all are', was the aggregate view of the group.

## **7 Conclusion**

With 80% of delegates rating the event as excellent or good, the conference can be considered successful. The evaluation forms returned supported the speakers and the issues they covered, as outlined in section 3.2, although it should be noted that delegates recommended more time be made available for the group discussions. Feedback from the tables has highlighted some key local issues. Delegates requested that a clear action plan should be quickly formulated, and that the information should be communicated to the delegates and the organisations they represent.