

COMMUNITY COHESION SEMINAR

SUMMARY REPORT

**16 OCTOBER 2006
POLICE HEADQUARTERS
Martlesham**

Hosted by Suffolk County Council and Suffolk
Constabulary

PRODUCED BY SOCIAL INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY, SUFFOLK COUNTY
COUNCIL

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Introduction

On 11 July 2006, the Suffolk Strategic Partnership's Development Group expressed its wish for a far greater understanding and sharing of ideas on what community cohesion means for Suffolk amongst the Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), and the wider voluntary and statutory sector. Consequently, on 16 October 2006, Suffolk County Council and Suffolk Constabulary hosted a half-day seminar aimed at raising LSP awareness of the both the national and the local context in which community cohesion is being developed.

Aims of the Seminar

The main objectives of the seminar were to:

- Define community cohesion and its various strands;
- Explain how working towards more cohesive communities adds value to and complements the work of the Local Strategic Partnerships;
- Explore how Local Strategic Partnerships can help shape and influence community cohesion work in Suffolk;
- Explore the implications to community cohesion created by the impact of new arrivals in Suffolk;
- Identify existing good practice, and what we can learn from each other.

The event was tailored to be the first opportunity for policy makers to explore how they may already be contributing to community cohesion initiatives through their community strategies, as well as identifying what may need to be developed in the future, to accommodate the changing needs of Suffolk's different communities.

Background Information: National and Local Perspectives

Community cohesion describes the ability of communities to function and grow in harmony, rather than in conflict. It has strong links to concepts of equality and diversity, since community cohesion can only grow when society as a whole recognises that individuals have the right to equality, and when it respects and appreciates the diverse nature of our communities.

Community cohesion goes beyond the issues of tackling race, faith and identity; it is about all kinds of relationships within communities, and closing the divides between them. Thus, community cohesion refers to a much wider set of concerns in relation to communities as a whole, including issues relating to income inequalities; employment opportunities for children, young and older people; the commonalities and differences between urban and rural service provision; as well as valuing diverse groups from all backgrounds, regardless of where they live or are from.

The Local Government Association defined a cohesive community as one where:

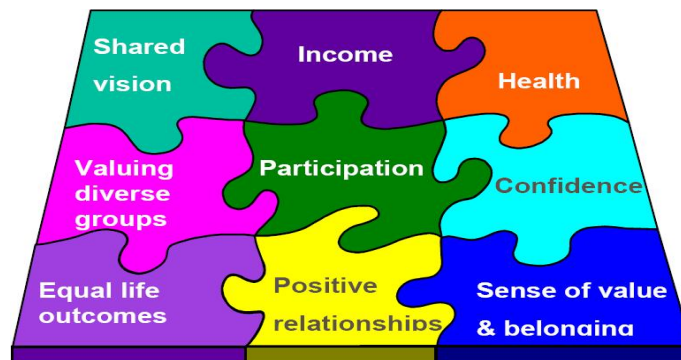
- There is a common vision and sense of belonging for all communities;
- The diversity of people's backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and positively valued;
- Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; and
- Strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds and circumstances in the workplace, in schools and in neighbourhoods.

Community cohesion means different things in different parts of the country, as communities and their demographic make-up are never the same in two places. There are, however, similar components at an individual level that define a community as cohesive, no matter where it is. Community cohesion is difficult to measure. The diagrams below and overleaf are taken from Bracknell Forest Borough Council's Community Cohesion Strategy, and help in understanding the different aspects of community cohesion.

The recent Government White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' emphasises the importance of community cohesion. As a result of this document, local partner organisations will be exploring how we can engage and work with all our communities.

Diagram 1, below, shows the components required for **an individual** to be part of cohesive community.

Diagram 1



The Social Inclusion and Diversity team at Suffolk County Council, alongside Suffolk Constabulary, have been scoping a number of areas over recent months, with the aim of providing a snapshot of how cohesive Suffolk is. Following a report to the Development Group of the Suffolk Strategic Partnership in July 2006, it was agreed to further explore the issues of community cohesion in Suffolk.

Diagram 2

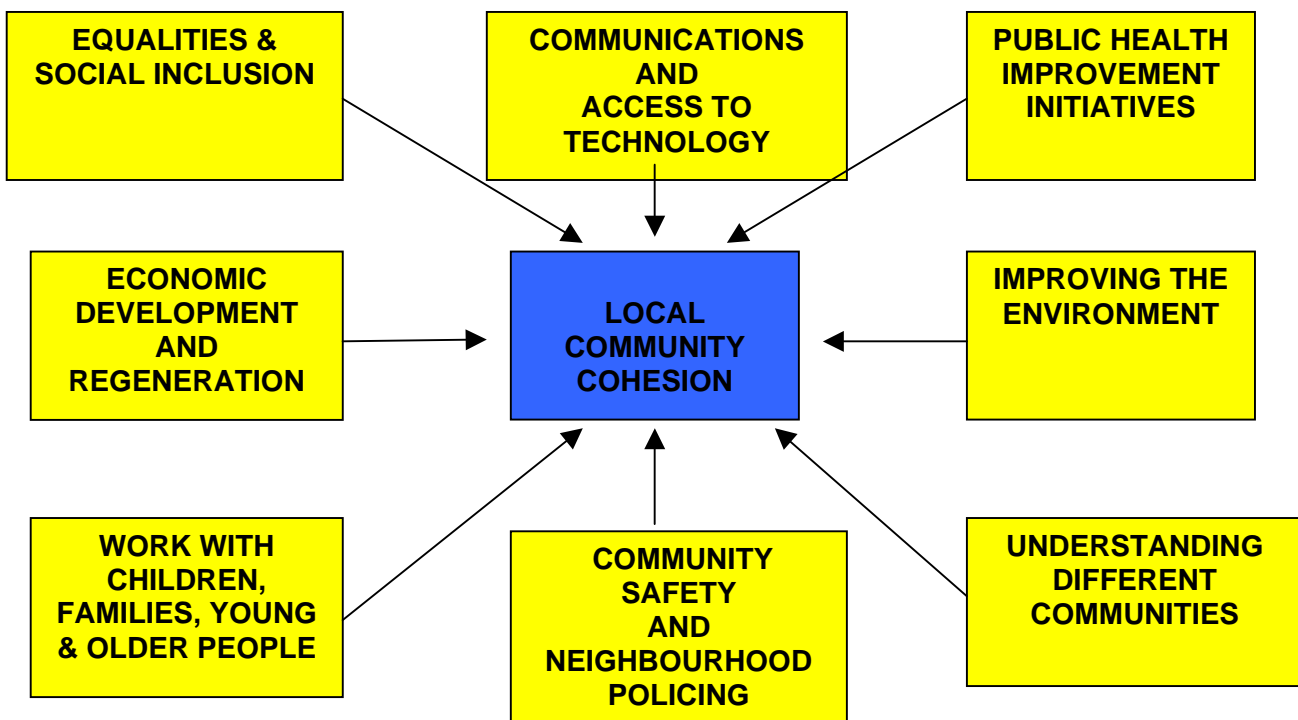


Diagram 2, above, illustrates the **broader components** of a cohesive community. The development of community cohesion will often be determined by local circumstances. For example, areas where there is a disproportionate level of crime coupled with a lack of regeneration are less likely to enjoy the benefits of a cohesive community.

A Diverse Suffolk – Some Facts and Figures

Suffolk is the eighth largest county in England, with a population estimated at around 678,100; 42% of its population live in rural communities. Often communities are strongest within rural areas, this is for many reasons including their isolation from mainstream services, and also their more homogenous demographics.

Within the county there are pockets of significant deprivation. Of the 2225 people unemployed in Ipswich as of March 2006, 225 (10%) have been unemployed for between 12 and 24 months. The average wage in Suffolk (£443 per week) is below the national average (£519), as is the overall skill profile of the adult population.

Suffolk's changing minority ethnic demography can be seen clearly in its schools, where the range of native languages spoken in schools has increased from 35 to 68 in the last five years. The percentage of pupils from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds in Suffolk has risen from 6.95% to 8.35% between 2003 and 2006.

There is an increasing variety of minority ethnic communities within Suffolk. As well as the established African Caribbean, Chinese, Indian, Bangladeshi, and Gypsy and Traveller communities, new arrivals, such as the Polish and Portuguese, are showing signs of settling permanently in Suffolk. Whilst at present most of the various communities or groups tend to reside in urban areas, there is every chance that they may desire the quieter and safer environment that rural areas offer. As well as the increasing number of minority ethnic communities, the proportion of people aged over 60 is rapidly increasing, as Suffolk is perceived as an ideal place to retire to. Details from the 2001 census indicated that 24% of Suffolk's population is aged 60 or above.

Shortly, Suffolk will be home to its own university. An increase in younger people may create a number of challenges in respect of how we work with young people and the settled communities.

With regards to Gypsies and Travellers, community tension is at its highest where unauthorised encampments and developments exist. The need to provide more authorised sites across Suffolk will be made clearer as local authorities fulfil their statutory requirements to undertake accommodation needs assessments into the needs of these communities.

Whilst there are many things we know in relation to the changes within Suffolk there are also gaps in our knowledge. Two examples of this are:

- We are unclear how a lack of affordable housing will impact on young people in rural areas.
- We are unclear as to the exact number of migrant workers within the county, and the number who plan to stay here long term, rather than on a temporary basis. This kind of data could be provided by detailed mapping of groups, on a localised level.

The Morning Presentations: Key Points

The following are summarised versions of the presentations. For the full versions, please use the web links at the end of this document.

A) Opening remarks by the Chair, Joanna Spicer, Portfolio Holder for Public Protection, Suffolk County Council

Joanna Spicer introduced the definition of community cohesion. It was emphasised that it is vitally important for delegates to think about community cohesion from a Suffolk perspective. So, for example, where there are new arrivals, policy makers and practitioners should think about how they integrate communities within Suffolk's already established and settled communities.

It is vital that the LSPs, in their 'community leadership' role, are able to bring different communities together in order to learn about the commonalities we all possess, rather than the differences that, at times, can divide communities of different backgrounds. However, understanding and respecting differences is paramount in order for communities to maintain their identities.

It is also important to recognise that cohesion goes beyond differences that are visible or spoken. For example, there are issues around the divisions between older people and young people; those caught in the poverty trap versus those who have more economic choice; etc. It is essential to think innovatively about how we deliver services to urban and rural settlements, especially how to ensure equal opportunities in access to services. A cohesive community is one where access to services is *not* determined by income, the ability to communicate effectively, or the area in which a person lives.

There is already an enormous amount of work in Suffolk to develop positive relationships from, within and between communities across the county.

The role of LSPs is crucial to the development of this area of work.

B) Leonie McCarthy, Commissioner on Integration and Cohesion, Department for Communities and Local Government

Leonie McCarthy, who manages the New Link Centre in Peterborough, provided an overview of her work with the new Commission on Integration and Cohesion. She stated that the main aim of the Commission would be to examine issues that raise tensions between various groups in different areas, and that lead to segregation, conflict and a lack of cohesion at a local level. She said that the Commission would explore how local community and political leadership could push through and against perceived barriers to cohesion and integration. In respect of localising cohesion initiatives, the speaker emphasised that the Commission's work will be supported by an outreach and engagement programme, which will visit local areas to identify areas of good practice.

The speaker talked about the challenges in Peterborough, and how funding from the government's 'Invest to Save' grant supported the development of the New Links Centre. This centre encourages a multi-focussed approach to tackling the barriers faced mainly by new arrivals, such as migrant workers, asylum seekers and

refugees. The New Links Centre acts as a “one-stop shop”, providing services to a diverse range of communities. The centre has been commended nationally for the design and delivery of front-line services, as well as for reducing long-term costs, such as interpreting and translating. Some of this good practice could be used in Suffolk to promote and develop community cohesion.

C) Julia Stephens-Row, Assistant Director, Social Inclusion and Diversity, Suffolk County Council

Julia Stephens-Row outlined how some detailed scoping work that has been undertaken with Suffolk Constabulary about demographic changes in Suffolk has highlighted some practical challenges to shaping policy and service delivery.

Julia described some local issues that may contribute to, or hamper, community cohesion in Suffolk. For example, there are issues of separateness between younger and older people in Suffolk. Pockets of multiple deprivation constitute a small but significant area of concern. For example, Suffolk has a significant minority of people who have been in long-term unemployment. Additionally, there are concentrations of minority ethnic communities in certain parts of Suffolk, which can cause rural isolation for those in other parts, and can lead to a separation of communities. It has been noted that there is a lack of understanding of transient groups.

A number of future anticipated changes were highlighted. For example, the arrival of University Suffolk will increase the number of young people in Suffolk. The number of people aged over 60 amounts to 25% of the total population of Suffolk, and is growing. Changes such as these will need to be taken into account when planning future service provision.

There is a wealth of good practice in Suffolk that can be built upon, which is already contributing towards community cohesion. For example, community mediation is being delivered across Suffolk, with the aim of reducing conflict between immediate neighbours, and developing strong relationships between people in those neighbourhoods.

There is support for a growing number of cultural and community events each year, from farmers’ markets to Black History Month – all of which are crucial to build and sustain positive relationships amongst communities in Suffolk. The speaker concluded by underlining the importance of working in partnership with existing forums, under the banner of Suffolk Strategic Partnership.

D) Paul Marshall, Head of Corporate Development, Suffolk Constabulary

Paul Marshall looked at the background to the community cohesion agenda, which came into being after the riots in 2001 in places such as Bradford and Oldham. He looked at the devastating effect on the communities caused by these riots, including 300 members of the public and 320 police officers being injured, 240 criminal convictions, and a total cost of £11 million. He emphasised that Suffolk is not free from violent disorder and racial tensions, citing 6 serious examples that have occurred in Suffolk in the last 3 years.

Paul suggested some initial actions that can help to prevent such occurrences, and promote community cohesion. These were: mapping the different communities

present in Suffolk; supporting community events; supporting retail venues whose staff are more likely to suffer racial harassment (for example, kebab shop owners, or staff in Indian and Chinese restaurants); and implementing the Community Cohesion Strategy that has been drawn up.

Additionally, he described how the new Safer Neighbourhoods Teams will be able to identify and help to solve issues at a local level, targeting resources as needed in different areas. These teams will be successful through joint action by the police, partner agencies and members of the public.

E) Cathy Craig, Head of Adult Services and Older People, Suffolk County Council and Chair of Waveney Community Cohesion Partnership and Martin Burnside, Community Development Manager, Waveney District Council

The speakers talked about the experience of community cohesion in the Waveney district, which has some of the most deprived wards. There has been progress made in this area, however, including the formation of the Waveney Community Cohesion Partnership in early 2005. Many different agencies – public, private and voluntary – have been included in this partnership, and of ensuring their continued engagement with the issues by attempting to address their needs and priorities.

The early findings of this group have been quite revealing. On the one hand, it has been noted that there has been an attitude-change in staff, which is promising. On the other hand, agencies within the partnership have noted that they have not as yet sufficiently adapted to the changing populations within Lowestoft, in order to be able to meet their needs.

A conference was held in Waveney in May 2006 to ascertain the views and experiences of different groups. Some outcomes of this conference were: a better understanding of how agencies can meet the changing needs of communities; an opportunity to make links between partner agencies, such as the local authority and the FE College; and an exploration of ways in which Lowestoft can be made a safer place for everyone.

Waveney District Council sits on the partnership, and also has its own new Community Cohesion Team and draft strategy. It has begun scoping what is happening locally, is involving communities by creating greener spaces and is improving its staff skills, particularly in the area of equalities training.

Some challenges to the work that were identified are: how to sustain momentum with limited resources; how to use the information gathered to inform policy; building links with the LSP; and deciding whether the group should lead or enable action. The lessons learnt can be replicated as good practice across the county.

Question and Answer Session

A range of questions were put to the panel following their presentations:

QUESTION: Would the new Commission on Integration and Cohesion take into consideration that defining cohesion could be more complex in rural areas than in urban areas?

ANSWER: The panel stated that this was a very important point, which would be taken back to the Commission (a fixed term advisory body on how cohesion can be developed and enhanced across the UK). It would be useful when the Commission reports to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in July 2007 with their findings.

QUESTION: Pendle and Burnley, where there have been disturbances within the community, are not too dissimilar to Suffolk. How do we go about promoting inter-faith relationships as a preventative tool?

ANSWER: Faith communities are a key part of the voluntary and community sector, and can be important contributors to community cohesion. This can be through participation in particular projects, for example, faith information events. Or it can be through the wide range of services that they offer from their centres or places of worship, not only to their own communities, but also to others. Informally, faith communities can represent a valuable form of community self-help through work with the young, older people, lunch clubs or advice centres. This would be a good starting place. Providing resources and support to faith communities can increase their involvement.

QUESTION: How would the integration of Black and Minority Ethnic people be encouraged, as this is difficult?

ANSWER: By identifying community representatives who want to participate in community development initiatives, and by developing positive media messages through the development of a coherent strategy.

**GENERAL
POINT:**

A general point was raised that we have a responsibility in tackling economic deprivation for *all* communities, which includes long-established communities that are disadvantaged.

The Outcomes from the LSP-Themed Discussions

The delegates had LSP-themed discussions, in which they explored the following questions:

1. What are the issues and/ or barriers to achieving the 4 strands of community cohesion (as outlined below) within your LSP area, e.g., how do we engage and understand transient groups? Please refer to the 4 strands in giving your answers.
2. What examples can you give of work already taking place within your LSP area that supports the development of community cohesion?
3. What further areas of work need to be developed at an LSP level to embrace community cohesion, and what areas need to be developed at a county level?
4. In order to understand the needs of people from different backgrounds and make improvements to their quality of life, who else do we need to involve at a local and county level?

The Local Government Association defined a cohesive community as one where:

- There is a common vision and sense of belonging for all communities;
- The diversity of people's backgrounds and circumstances is 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 and circumstances in the workplace, in schools and in neighbourhoods.

There was a general agreement amongst the delegates about the principles of community cohesion, and enthusiasm about recognising the impact of change and responding to it. It was clear from the discussions that a number of existing areas of work are already contributing towards community cohesion, some of which cut across the different LSP areas. Further examples are the "*Let's Talk*" forums that promote participation for asylum seekers and refugees, and the rural mobile services that bring services to people in rural areas. Some examples of district-specific good practice are Mid-Suffolk's project to make school links for older adult needs, and the plans in Babergh for parishes to engage with the community.

Although a range of good practice was identified, there was overall agreement that a coordinated response is needed to embed those principles across the LSP and wider areas, throughout Suffolk. The LSPs raised a number of common issues that they felt needed to be developed in the future.

There was a consensus amongst the LSPs that, in order to recognise and respond to Suffolk's changing demography, more localised data regarding the different groups in Suffolk is a prerequisite. There was concern about how this data would be obtained, and who would coordinate this sharing of information, including the identification of necessary resources for this purpose. There was also a concern about how to identify "leaders" within a community – would they be truly representative of all sections of their community? This led to the suggestion of using multiple points of communication wherever possible, and also using the term 'community representative', rather than 'community leader'.

Other common themes raised by the LSPs were: ensuring that the needs of long-established residents, in both urban and rural areas, are not missed in developing the agenda; ensuring the role of schools in promoting cohesion; encouraging representation from different communities on the LSPs; and ensuring that effective mechanisms are put in place to provide Suffolk's communities with factual information about the diverse groups in Suffolk, with an element of myth-busting.

Areas that the LSPs felt needed to be developed further included:

- work between younger and older people;
- involving young people in decision-making processes;
- identifying the gaps in relation to community transport;
- aiming to reduce tensions between established and new communities;
- ensuring communications are accessible, e.g. by using plain English or translation;
- encouraging interfaith dialogue;
- programmes for re-training migrant workers, to recognise and make use of their foreign qualifications;
- involving the media in promoting positive images of diversity;
- cultural initiatives (sport, arts and music) to celebrate diversity;
- identifying the providers of different services, for better signposting within organisations;
- ensuring that all Town and Parish Councils are involved in promoting community cohesion.

The Way Forward

Julia Stephens-Row stated that the challenge for public services and the wider community is how to promote and support ways of bringing together people from different backgrounds in a way that increases understanding, respect and participation. The community cohesion seminar had been a useful starting place for all those present to be informed of the good work already taking place across Suffolk to promote community cohesion. The LSPs would receive a summary report that outlines the key issues arising from the day in due course.

The SSP Development Group would be updated with the key outcomes from the seminar. The common themes arising across LSP areas would be taken forward in the short term, with the LSPs being updated and consulted on ongoing developments. Finally, it was recommended that in order to go further, a follow-up seminar take place which reports on the key areas of achievement, towards the middle of 2007.

Contacts and Web Links

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