

# One London?

## Change and cohesion in three London boroughs

An ippr report for the Government Office for London

by Rick Muir

March 2008

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This paper was first published in March 2008. © ippr 2008

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## Acknowledgements

This report was commissioned by the Government Office for London as part of ippr's programme of research into identity, citizenship and community cohesion. The author would like to thank all those who contributed comments during the course of the research. In particular thanks go to Philip Colligan, Madeline Green, Ian Kearns, Sabin Malik, Carey Oppenheim, Hyacinth Parsons, Ben Rogers, Howard Simmons, Robin Tuddenham, Heather Wills and Munir Zamir.

## Executive summary

London is one of the most diverse and dynamic cities in the world. It is a place of extraordinary cultural diversity and economic opportunity, attracting investment, tourism and migration from across the globe. While most Londoners welcome the opportunities this brings, change can also lead to insecurity and anxiety. When combined with inequalities in access to limited resources, these changes can breathe new life into all-too-familiar tensions and prejudices.

This short paper, commissioned by the Government Office for London, explores the nature of the contemporary challenges to community cohesion in London and sets out how local actors have responded to them. Local authorities in particular have a vital role to play in supporting communities, equipping citizens so that they can benefit from the opportunities globalisation brings and ensuring that change and diversity are underpinned by strong social networks and positive relationships between people from different walks of life.

The paper is based on research undertaken in three London boroughs that differ from one another in important respects: **Barking and Dagenham**, **Hounslow** and **Southwark**.

### The community cohesion challenge

In response to a number of recent events such as the urban disturbances of 2001 and the 7/7 bombings, as well as more long-standing social trends, a new national agenda has emerged to promote community cohesion. London faces its own very particular community cohesion challenges: high rates of population change, a scarcity of material resources such as housing, lower levels of social capital than other parts of Britain, high levels of child poverty and inter-generational tensions, in particular triggered by concern about youth crime and anti-social behaviour. Just as the challenges vary, so too do the solutions. These solutions, proposed by local and national government, can broadly be distinguished between economic approaches that seek to remedy material injustices and more cultural approaches that operate at the level of relationships, values and identity.

### Community cohesion in three London boroughs

The report, which is based on interviews with public sector staff, finds that there are some common challenges across the case study boroughs:

- Rapid population change which has major implications for public services and the development of resilient social networks;
- Inter-generational tensions, particularly those connected to concerns around crime and anti-social behaviour
- Growing levels of income polarisation.

There are also differences across the boroughs in terms of:

- The kind of resource pressures they experience (which vary between jobs and housing for example)
- The forms of political extremism they have to face (whether these be from the far right or from extreme jihadist groups)
- The degree of residential mixing or segregation in their neighbourhoods.

Local authorities and their partners are responding to these challenges in a variety of different ways and this report seeks to describe these different approaches and highlight interventions that are seen locally as most effective.

These approaches include:

- In Barking and Dagenham: an innovative public engagement exercise to find out which issues are concerning local people, alongside efforts to devolve greater control of local services to the neighbourhood level.

- In Hounslow: pioneering work with the local press to ensure that the way immigration is reported does not inflame community tensions, and outreach work which has significantly reduced anti-social behaviour.
- In Southwark: an approach to community cohesion that goes well beyond issues of race and faith, and a focused effort to promote active citizenship.

## Recommendations

On the basis of this comparative analysis, the report sets out a Community Cohesion Policy Framework for Local Authorities. This framework includes the following elements:

- **Leadership:** Local authorities should provide clear local leadership not necessarily through a dedicated cohesion strategy, but by mainstreaming cohesion throughout their work.
- **Tackling relative deprivation:** Local agencies need to deal with the material injustices (perceived and real) that are the root cause of many community tensions.
- **Tension monitoring and readiness:** Local authorities and the police should put in place consultative mechanisms and communications systems such that they are ready to respond when events trigger an outbreak of tension.
- **Communicating shared values:** Local councils have a responsibility to give leadership around the kinds of behaviours that are acceptable or unacceptable in their communities.
- **Establishing a framework for social capital:** Interaction between residents from different backgrounds must be encouraged. This can be done by promoting active citizenship, devolving power to local neighbourhoods and through cultural and sporting initiatives that bring people together around shared interests.
- **Promoting a shared sense of belonging:** The local authority's 'public voice' and its neighbourhood structures should be used to foster shared local identities that are inclusive and build a shared sense of civic pride.
- **Supporting young people:** Young people are particularly vulnerable and are often on the frontline when cohesion breaks down. Agencies need to make sure they have supportive structures in place to help London's youth navigate a changing city.

# 1. Introduction

London is one of the most diverse and dynamic cities in the world. It is a place of extraordinary cultural diversity and economic opportunity, attracting investment, tourism and migration from across the globe. While most Londoners welcome the opportunities this brings, change can also lead to insecurity and anxiety. When combined with inequalities in access to limited resources, these changes can breathe new life into all-too-familiar tensions and prejudices.

This short paper, commissioned by the Government Office for London (GOL), explores the nature of the contemporary challenges to community cohesion in London and sets out how local actors have responded to them. Local authorities in particular have a vital role to play in supporting communities, equipping citizens so that they can benefit from the opportunities globalisation brings and ensuring that change and diversity are underpinned by strong social networks and positive relationships between people from different walks of life.

## Research methodology

The paper is based on research undertaken in three London boroughs: **Barking and Dagenham**, **Hounslow** and **Southwark**. In each case the author undertook interviews with public service professionals working in cohesion-related services. On the basis of these interviews and analysis of secondary data and literature, the project sought to establish the nature of the main cohesion challenges in each borough and identify how local agencies have responded to them.

## Different boroughs, common challenges

The three boroughs are very different from one another.

Southwark, is an inner-London borough which has long been highly ethnically and culturally diverse, but which like many inner-London boroughs is home to very stark inequalities of wealth and income.

Barking and Dagenham is an outer-London borough, a former industrial area that for decades was relatively homogenous in ethnic terms, but which in recent years has experienced unprecedented levels of population change. When combined with high levels of housing need and limited access to social housing, these changes have fed into community tensions.

Hounslow is a West London borough which is home to a very diverse range of communities, but in which different ethnic groups have tended to be concentrated in different areas. This, we shall see, poses its own challenges.

In spite of their differences, these boroughs are all part of London's contemporary experience – and as such face common challenges. In particular they are all experiencing relatively high rates of economic, cultural and demographic change. However, they have each taken their own distinctive approach to guiding their communities through that change, and this research sought to tease out the lessons from this varied local response.

## Structure of the paper

Section 2 offers a brief review of the contested national discourse and policy framework around 'community cohesion'. Section 3 turns to our three case studies, describing the nature of the cohesion challenges they face and how in each case they have sought to meet them. Finally, section 4 concludes by drawing out the lessons that policymakers at local and national level can learn from these different experiences.

## 2. The community cohesion challenge

'Community cohesion' is now a major priority across government departments and for local authorities all around the country. But why is it so important? What does it mean and how would we know if we had succeeded in building it? And if it is so desirable, how can it best be realised?

This section:

Sets out why this agenda is now so central to British public policy and what politicians and policymakers mean when they talk about 'community cohesion'

- Explores the nature of the particular community cohesion challenges facing London, which is in many ways a very distinctive case.
- Sets out some of the emerging policy thinking in this area, exploring the various ways academics and policymakers believe community cohesion can best be fostered and sustained.

### The national picture

While government had previously been concerned about 'social cohesion', with reference in particular to urban regeneration and neighbourhood renewal, 'community cohesion' emerged as a concept in British public policy discourse following the disturbances in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in the summer of 2001. From the start the community cohesion agenda was stamped by a concern with relations between different ethnic and racial groups. Of the investigations commissioned by the Government into those events in the North West, it was the Cantle report that placed the concept of community cohesion centre stage. The report argued that in some parts of the country educational and residential segregation meant that different communities were in effect living 'parallel lives' (Cantle *et al* 2001: 9).

Events since then have only reinforced the Government's commitment to making community cohesion a major public policy objective. Surveys of public opinion have repeatedly shown that as issues like unemployment, health and education have decreased in political salience over the last 10 years, immigration has risen up the political agenda. Whereas in the 1990s immigration was named by less than 5 per cent of people as one of the most significant issues facing the country, this had increased to over 40 per cent by 2006 (MORI 2006).

In addition, the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the London bombings of 7 July 2005, have placed Britain's Muslim communities under intense media and political scrutiny. The Government has been walking a difficult line in seeking to respond effectively to the threat of terrorism, while not making community relations worse through intrusive security measures. Following those events there has been worrying evidence of rising levels of Islamophobia and around a third of British Muslims say that they have felt under suspicion or treated with hostility because of their religion (Mirza *et al* 2007).

Britain has also seen a growing vote for political parties of the far right in recent years, especially the British National Party (BNP). The BNP's vote reached 4.9 per cent in the 2004 European elections, up 4 percentage points on the same elections in 1999. In the 2005 general election it won 4.3 per cent of the vote across 166 constituencies and in three constituencies it gained more than 10 per cent of the vote, reaching almost 17 per cent in the London constituency of Barking. It now has, at 53, its highest ever number of elected local councillors (John *et al* 2006).

While there has been a decline in the number of people who admit to being racially prejudiced, in 2004 28 per cent of people still admitted to being 'very' or 'a little' racially prejudiced. Given the social stigma attached to racism, levels of actual prejudice are likely to be higher (Stone and Muir 2007).

Taken together these trends have triggered widespread soul searching about the state of community relations in modern Britain. Politicians have become increasingly critical of 'multi-culturalism', or of some perceived versions of it, which the former Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality Trevor Phillips argued has left us 'sleepwalking into segregation' (Phillips 2005).

These discussions about ‘multi-culturalism’ have sparked off a related debate about ‘Britishness’ (Rogers and Muir 2007). A number of politicians, most prominently the Prime Minister Gordon Brown, have argued that a democratic state must provide its citizens with some common civic reference points, around which a shared sense of identity and belonging can develop. While conservative commentators have typically argued that a shared sense of national identity needs to be underpinned by common customs and traditions, Brown and other social democrats have argued that British national identity should be civic in nature, based on a set of shared values, which are at one level universal but which also have a distinctive resonance through Britain’s history (Brown 2006). Alongside this debate, the Government has sought to make ‘community cohesion’ a major objective of public policy, both nationally and for local authorities.

### **What is community cohesion?**

As we shall see when looking at varying local interpretations across London, the concept of community cohesion is a contested one, raising a number of significant questions:

- What counts as a community?
- Are there more or less desirable forms or degrees of cohesion?
- While strong communities can be good things, might they also under some circumstances be exclusive or oppressive?  
(Wetherell *et al* 2007).

The most widely disseminated ‘official’ definition of community cohesion is of a community where:

- There is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities;
- The diversity of people’s different 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 within neighbourhoods.  
(LGA 2004: 7)

It is important to note that on this definition community cohesion is a holistic concept. Despite this, much of the national debate on these questions has focused narrowly on issues of race and faith: the rise of extreme forms of identity politics, such as the BNP and radical versions of political Islamism, questions around immigration, the disturbances in the North West, and so forth. In light of these developments national strategies and funding streams have tended to focus on ethnic and religious social divisions.

And yet implicit in this ‘official’ definition of community cohesion is the idea that we should not neglect other social tensions: for instance, along lines of class, age, gender and lifestyle choice. As we shall see, in some parts of London the main cohesion challenges are not only (or not even) along ethnic or religious lines, but result from other forms of social division such as those between people of different ages and classes.

### **The Government’s response**

Alongside this national debate and based on this formal understanding of the concept, the Government has sought to mainstream community cohesion into the work of public agencies. In 2005 it launched its national strategy for community cohesion, *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society* (Home Office 2005). Local authorities are now assessed on their efforts to promote more cohesive communities as part of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) process. Cohesion is also being incorporated into the Local Area Agreements (LAAs) which set out agreed policy objectives and funding streams between the centre and local authorities.

National policymakers have sought to find new and practical ways of fostering community cohesion on the ground. This has been an experimental process, with new approaches being tried out around



the country, but also with much best practice out there already, from which policymakers and practitioners have sought to learn.

The first wave of funding deliberately aimed at innovating in this area was the 2003 to 2005 Community Cohesion Pathfinder Programme. Through this programme the Government provided £6 million for 14 areas (including two of the cases discussed here, Hounslow and Southwark) to pioneer new local approaches to community cohesion and establish best practice that could be shared throughout the country (see Home Office 2005 for the results).

In 2006 the Government established the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, headed by the London Borough of Ealing's Chief Executive Darra Singh. This explored local practice from around the country and made a number of recommendations for national and local strategy, to which the government has recently responded (COIC 2007). Finally, the Government is now providing new funding for a range of local projects aimed at 'preventing violent political extremism'.

### London's challenge

London is widely regarded as one of the most socially dynamic and culturally diverse cities in the world (Parker and Goodhart 2007). The last decade has seen London's economy boom: it is now perhaps the largest financial services centre in the world, has a quickly expanding creative sector, contributes up to £20 billion a year to the UK economy and acts as the international gateway to the rest of the UK (Cabinet Office 2004).

Partly as a consequence of that strong economy, London's population (while actually smaller today than it was in the middle of the 20th century) grew steadily during the 1990s due to inward migration from both the rest of the world and other parts of the UK (Travers *et al* 2007). Very many people want to live and work in London because of its economic opportunities, its extraordinary cultural diversity, its 'bridging' location between Europe and North America, its rich historical and cultural assets and the universality of the English language.

One consequence of this growth is that London has become one of the most culturally diverse places on earth. In London only 59.7 per cent of the population in the 2001 census said they were 'white British', compared with 86.9 per cent of the UK population as a whole. In some boroughs, such as Newham, the black and minority ethnic (BME) population make up the majority of the residential population, so in these places there is no longer an 'ethnic majority' with all groups, including white British, instead being ethnic minorities. There are 34 communities of foreign nationals living in London with populations of over 10,000 and over 300 languages are spoken in the capital's schools.

This growing cultural diversity has been accompanied by a strong tradition of pluralism and cosmopolitanism. For example, only 5 per cent of Londoners disagree with the idea that it is a good thing that Britain is a multi-racial society. Moreover, London scores the highest of any region in terms of those believing that people of all cultures and backgrounds get on well together in the local area (Cabinet Office 2004).

London does, however, face a number of specific challenges that are significant for community cohesion. First, levels of what Robert Putnam has described as 'social capital' (the social networks, shared norms and cooperative relationships that help us get along together as a society) are on the standard measures weaker in London than elsewhere in Britain. For example, only 37 per cent of Londoners feel that 'generally speaking, most people can be trusted', compared with a national average of 44 per cent. Moreover, London has the lowest percentage of people of any British region agreeing that 'this is a place where neighbours look out for each other' (*ibid*).

There are likely to be a number of factors accounting for those perceived lower levels of neighbourliness and trust. One is the relatively high number of single-person households in the capital. Another is the higher rates of violent crime compared with other UK cities (*ibid*). London also has relatively high rates of residential mobility (that is, people move addresses a lot). In addition to higher levels of international migration, London has the highest rate of inter-regional residential mobility in the UK: in 2004 155,000 people moved into London from the rest of Britain, while

260,000 moved out to other parts of the UK. 15 per cent of London's population have lived in their present location for less than a year, which compares to a national average of 11 per cent. In 2004/05 this amounted to a total of 474,000 people moving households in the capital (Travers *et al* 2007).

A further cohesion-related challenge comes from London's relatively high poverty rates. London continues to have the highest rate of child poverty in the UK. Four out of ten children in London are living in income poverty, rising to more than half of children in Inner London (London Child Poverty Commission 2007).

These high poverty levels are linked to relatively high numbers of children in workless households in the capital. Outside of London, the percentage of children in workless households decreased from 18 to 15 per cent between 1996/97 and 2005/06. In London, by contrast, the percentage of children in workless households has remained high, only showing a marginal decline over the period from 27 to 26 per cent. London has one of the lowest employment rates in the UK, at 74 per cent excluding full-time students, and resident employment in London has remained persistently below the national average since the early 1990s despite relatively high growth in the number of jobs in the capital. Inequalities within London are stark – for instance the proportion of workless households with children varies from 47 per cent in East India and Lansbury ward in Tower Hamlets to just 4 per cent in Nonsuch ward in Sutton (*ibid*).

Poverty puts a strain on social cohesion because material scarcity can lead to tensions between different social groups. This has been most forcefully demonstrated on questions of housing supply in the capital, although as we shall see below other resource issues such as competition for jobs also have the potential to divide communities. For London's poorest residents demand for social housing far outstrips supply, with people waiting much longer for a council home than in other parts of the country. Over 50,000 homeless households in London are housed in temporary accommodation as a result (Cabinet Office 2004). As we shall see below, this shortage of affordable housing has fed directly into community tensions, with the far right in particular spreading myths about who is eligible for social housing and blaming the shortage on asylum seekers and other new arrivals.

London does not just experience relatively high rates of poverty, but also suffers from high levels of income polarisation. London has a higher percentage of both lower and higher income groups than the rest of the country, a fact that is strongly linked to the high cost of housing (*ibid*). Middle income groups are unable to afford home ownership in the city, while also being unable to access social housing. MORI found in 2001 that housing was the most given reason people gave for wanting to leave London, followed by the quality of the environment and fear of crime (*ibid*).

Inequality has a number of consequences for social cohesion. Wealthier and poorer families, even when they live in close proximity, may interact infrequently with one another, sending their children to different schools, working and socialising in different places. Inequality has been shown internationally to be linked to lower levels of social trust, higher rates of violent crime, higher levels of homicide and lower levels of participation in community affairs (Wilkinson 2005). Given this international evidence, the degree of inequality that currently exists in our capital city cannot be thought to bode well for good community relations.

Finally, London's growth and overall prosperity brings with it a number of challenges for the quality of people's lives, which can lead to frustration and feed into community tensions. The quality of the urban environment is poor in many parts of the capital, as a result of ever more intensive development of space, pollution and anti-social behaviour. While the congestion charge has successfully reduced road congestion in central London, there remains a great deal of pressure on the city's transport system. In addition residential mobility can affect the quality of public services, through additional costs for local authorities in registering, processing and meeting the needs of their populations, for example. Mobility also means that there are high rates of staff turnover in public services, that many people are not registered with a local GP and that children change school more often than in other parts of the country, which has been shown to have a corresponding impact on attainment levels (*ibid*).

Despite these challenges it should be reiterated that London enjoys the highest levels of support for cultural diversity in Britain and that many people come to live in London precisely because a cosmopolitan and multicultural way of life are central to the city's identity. Moreover, Londoners welcome the employment and financial opportunities that come with a growing economy. Change will always bring challenges with it, but in these crucial respects London remains well placed to meet them.

### **Building community cohesion**

We have set out in very general terms what community cohesion is and the particular challenges to cohesion in London – but what can local and national government do in this complicated area? We can distinguish between two general approaches to fostering community cohesion:

- First, there are broadly 'economic' approaches, aimed at combating material deprivation
- Second, there are broadly cultural approaches, aimed more directly at shaping attitudes and inter-personal relationships.

We elaborate on these approaches below.

#### **Economic approaches**

One school of thought argues that the best way of building social solidarity and generating relations of respect and reciprocity across society is to ensure that all groups are treated fairly in the distribution of material resources. Ethnic and racial tensions, political extremism, and political disengagement or cynicism all tend, the argument goes, to be traceable to economic injustice of one sort or another. It follows if that if we concentrate on combating discrimination and social exclusion, solidarity and citizenship can be left to look after themselves.

There is no question that distributional fairness is a necessary condition for social cohesion. Injustice, perceived or real, is bound to foster feelings of resentment and animosity. It is hugely implausible to expect any group to develop a sense of belonging where they are badly treated. By contrast, where people are fairly treated they tend naturally to develop sense of reciprocity and citizenship. This is why it is those countries with the highest levels of distributive equality and the fairest institutions that also have the highest levels of inter-personal trust (You 2005, Pearce 2007).

Hence the importance of legislation outlawing discrimination in the work place, housing and other areas of life; and the importance of economic and social policies aimed at helping disadvantaged groups and reducing inequality. As will become clear in the case studies below, community cohesion is undermined in an environment in which low income households are forced to compete for scarce resources, such as jobs, childcare and affordable housing. Research has shown that issues of material scarcity, and perceptions of unfairness in how such scarce goods are distributed, play an important role in generating hostility towards asylum seekers and migrants more generally (Lewis 2005). Tackling material deprivation is therefore a fundamental driver of community cohesion.

However, while fairness in the distribution of material resources is a necessary condition for cohesion, it is not on its own sufficient. There are a number of reasons for this. First, justice is not just a matter of the fair distribution of jobs or housing – but also of sources of identity. Resentment and anger are generated not only by economic disadvantage but also from a sense that one's identity is not getting the recognition to which it is entitled (Taylor 1994). It follows, however, that the hope that problems of citizenship and community cohesion can be addressed through economic policy alone is misplaced. Issues of culture and recognition quickly intrude.

Second, the politics of correcting material injustice requires cultural change. People need to be won over to a politics of social justice and redistribution if any government is to be able to deliver it. Despite high levels of wealth and income inequality, the British public generally tends to underestimate the degree of income inequality between lower and higher earners. Although just under half of people believe that the Government should act to reduce inequalities, only a third of people believe that the state should directly redistribute income from rich to poor through the tax system. Moreover, people generally tend not to see poverty reduction as a major political priority, when compared with other issues such as the quality of the health service, their child's education, or crime (Greenberg and Lewis 2007).

Many authors have argued that if we are to change these attitudes and create a climate of opinion in which wealthier citizens are willing to forgo more of their income (or prospective income) to improve the lives of the disadvantaged, we need to develop a culture of common citizenship and mutual obligation (Rogers and Muir 2007). That, in turn, requires policies that work more directly to shape people attitudes and encourage norms of sociability and citizenship.

Even in a society fairer than ours, however, it would be naive to assume that social relations and civic virtues can be left to look after themselves. To take Northern Ireland as an example, it does not seem plausible to argue that economic growth alone, even if fairly spread, would be enough to break down animosity between Protestants and Catholics. Prejudices that set these groups apart need to be tackled head on. Indeed many of the forces that social analysts have argued threaten community cohesion and a sense of shared citizenship – from suburbanisation and high-rise living to TV watching and hyper-mobility – are found in more egalitarian societies, as well as in unequal ones. We need to tackle material injustice – but we need to do much more besides.

### Cultural approaches

In addition to tackling material deprivation, therefore, there is a need to work more directly to change attitudes and affect inter-personal relationships. Below are three examples of how this might be done.

#### Fostering social capital

Robert Putnam defines social capital as:

‘...features of social life – networks, norms and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives...Social capital, in short, refers to social connections and the attendant norms and trust.’ (Putnam 2000: 664-5)

Social capital is essentially the glue that helps hold individuals together as a community: our networks of friends, family and acquaintances, the norms of behaviour that facilitate cooperation between us, and the degree of trust we have in others.

However, there are broadly two different forms of social capital which have different implications for community cohesion. First, there is what Putnam describes as ‘bonding’ capital, which tends to be inward-looking and promotes strong but potentially exclusive group identities. This can provide group members with a range of benefits, such as access to material goods (jobs, housing) and supportive networks that can help with day-to-day problems like childcare or financial pressures. A strongly bonded community may also become empowered by being able to organise effectively in relation to authority. However this form of bonding can also insulate a group from ‘outsiders’ and help generate community tensions between different groups. In other words while some bonding capital may help bind a group together, too much may actually inhibit community cohesion by isolating groups from one another.

Second, there is ‘bridging social capital’, which refers to more impersonal relationships that are outward-looking and encompass people from a broader range of backgrounds. This form of capital can bring people together across ethnic or religious lines, in light of their shared fate as citizens of the same territorial community. This form of social capital is a key building block of community cohesion.

Bridging capital can be promoted by fostering greater contact and interaction between citizens from different backgrounds. Based on the pioneering work of Gordon Allport, ‘contact theory’ posits that under certain facilitating conditions inter-group contact is the best means of reducing prejudice (see Box 2.1). Contact is thought to promote positive attitudes to members of other social groups by reducing inter-personal anxiety and introducing people to the variability within other social groups, made up as they are of very different individuals (Allport 1954).

Contact, however, does not always reduce prejudice; for example, it can be too short-lived to change attitudes. Social psychologists have also found that in situations of anxiety or threat, contact may be likely to reinforce stereotypes. Moreover, contact may fail to affect someone’s attitude to a whole group, such as where disconfirming contact with just one individual is seen as exceptional. For contact to work, therefore, there are a number of facilitating conditions, which are set out in Box 2.1.

**Box 2.1. Contact theory: main findings**

- Intergroup contact is the best way of reducing prejudice under certain facilitating conditions.
- This will be the case in a situation where there is:
  - Equal stress
  - A scenario likely to disconfirm stereotypes
  - Inter-group cooperation
  - The chance for participants to get to know each other properly
  - Broader social norms stressing equality
- Contact counters prejudice by reducing anxiety, promoting positive 'out-group' attitudes, increasing the perceived variability or internal diversity of the 'out-group', increasing inter-group trust, allowing participants to generalise from inter-personal relations to inter-group attitudes and generating affective ties. (Source: Hewstone 2003.)

Interaction and bridging social capital can be fostered through a variety of different means. Urban planning, for instance, plays a significant role, with the evidence showing that a vibrant street life can help bring people regularly into contact with one another, as opposed to wide open spaces, which tend to make contact more costly and less frequent (Jacobs 2000). In addition, mixed schools can encourage children from different cultural backgrounds to interact and form friendships. The Cantle report recommended that faith schools, for example, should take up to 25 per cent of their children from a different faith group (Cantle *et al* 2001). There should at the very least be twinning arrangements between schools to encourage children to mix across ethnic and religious boundaries in at least some classes.

Promoting more active citizenship is another way of fostering stronger citizen-to-citizen relationships. By getting organised in their communities to solve shared problems, people can very often encounter and mix with people from different backgrounds to their own. Moreover, activity in the public realm, at a public meeting or through a local neighbourhood-based organisation, focuses attention on what we have in common based on our shared fate as residents of the same place.

There is also space for smaller scale targeted interventions, in the form of interaction-based projects, focused on particularly vulnerable groups and especially young people, whose socialisation is crucial. Contact theory has provided intellectual support for a vast range of interaction-orientated initiatives that have been launched around Britain with the explicit aim of fostering greater community cohesion. Many of these initiatives encourage mixing through participation in sport and cultural activities in which people have a shared interest, whatever their different background.

For instance, the 'Beyond the Boundary' project has brought together largely Asian cricket teams from inner-city Bradford to play largely white teams from the Yorkshire Dales. Another example would be the numerous mixed football tournaments developed by local authorities across the country, such as the Community Cup in Southwark or the Unity Cup in Camden. In Oldham, the Unity Sports Programme is an after-school initiative that for 15 weeks a year transports primary school children to sports venues where they can play sports with children from different backgrounds (LB Southwark 2005, Oldham Metropolitan Borough 2004).

Others have put on cultural activities with the explicit aim of enabling interactions across different communities to take place. The 'Moving Minds' project has brought community groups into museums and galleries in Manchester, Leeds and Bradford, using the collections to stimulate discussion about people's lives today and in the past. In Oldham, the Council sponsored a Party in the Park to celebrate the re-opening of Alexandra Park, the site of disturbances in 2001, bringing together 30,000 people from all backgrounds with a diverse range of music. Projects exploring the diversity of local heritage have also played a role in encouraging interaction. In Oldham, children from a predominantly Bangladeshi school have been paired with children from a predominantly white school in researching the history of their diverse community (DCMS 2004, Oldham Metropolitan Borough 2004).

### Promoting shared values

In addition to promoting contact between people from different walks of life, many thinkers have argued that promoting a set of shared values can provide a basic common ground that can help communities live together (see Rogers and Muir 2007). The basic set of liberal and democratic values that underpin our society are often pointed to as setting out the 'rule of the game', which we can all sign up to, and within which we can thrash out our various differences peaceably.

Indeed, it is sometimes said that if people are attracted to illiberal ideologies, it is because they believe that liberals stand for nothing. Much opposition to immigration is motivated by a belief that that 'anything goes' – that there are no rules. The same is arguably true of illiberal, punitive attitudes with regard to criminal justice policy. Polls repeatedly show that one of the main drivers behind concern about crime and anti-social behaviour is a worry that young people are allowed to do whatever they like, that there are no rules they have to follow (Margo and Dixon 2006). People worry that there are no rules and that liberalism is simply a licence for disorder.

Yet liberal democracies like ours do have rules. At their centre is a charter of rights that leave us free to live our own lives, free from arbitrary intervention by public authorities. However, in order for such a system of rights to function properly and be sustained in the long term, there are some rules we must follow and certain basic social norms and civic virtues that it is desirable that citizens uphold: we should seek to settle disputes peacefully, tolerate disagreement, obey the law, treat fellow citizens with respect, participate in public affairs in some minimal way, and so forth.

If people think that these basic rules and virtues are being flouted, the state and other social actors need to do more to communicate and promote them. Communicating these core liberal values more effectively is also important so that people subject to prejudice should know that this is unacceptable and that the state will stand up to those responsible.

Being clear about the principles on which most of us can agree is also important in guiding the public response to the thorny issue of political extremism. It is important that when political leaders talk of extremism they are clear about the basis on which they are making their judgments: that there are certain activities that in an open and liberal society are intolerable – for example, the stirring up of racial hatred or the use of violence and intimidation for political ends. Once the essential shared values have been set out, this provides a clear basis for taking on such extremism.

So, being more explicit about the values that most of us share clearly has its place. In practical terms, there is a role for citizenship education in familiarising children with key liberal values – and of course encouraging them to debate the degree to which they underpin our political system in practice. The Government has floated the idea of producing a written statement of values that would set out in a more explicit way the basis on which we are governed. Local authorities also have an important role to play as 'community leaders', in using their public voice to communicate a shared vision for the future of their area.

Nevertheless there are clearly limits to what this sort of approach can deliver on the ground. Abstract values and universal principles are useful for guiding and justifying public policies, but because they are so abstract they are a likely to be weak as a motivating factor for changing interpersonal relationships.

### A shared identity and sense of belonging

A further approach to fostering positive inter-group relations aims to promote a shared sense of identity and belonging. Essentially, shared identity brings two important attributes to the table: affective attachments and imagined solidarities that are possible to generalise between large numbers of people.

First, identity offers a particularly powerful source of solidarity. Identification is in many ways an emotional matter: in identifying with someone one feels a sense of solidarity with them. One of the great criticisms of the values-based approach to cohesion is that values are simply too thin and abstract to foster the allegiance of citizens. Sharing attitudes of fairness, civility and tolerance have not historically been a sufficient basis for national unity. For example, despite sharing the same set of

liberal values as the rest of Canada, the Quebecois continue to desire their own system of self-government. Most citizens of the European Union share the same liberal democratic principles, but continue to prefer to live under sovereign nation states. In addition to common values, therefore, citizens must also share a sense of belonging to the community in which they live.

The second contribution that identity might make is that it involves the imaginative leap of bringing large numbers of people together under one symbolic roof and because of this allows us to generalise from individual encounters to a sense of solidarity with the broader community. Processes of identification do this through the exercise of the imagination and symbolic construction. Take, for example, one's identification with one's class or country. One can never actually see one's class or the population of one's country – rather, one has to imagine groups such as class and nation through symbolically creating an image of those groups in one's mind (Jenkins 1996).

Contact is one alternative to identity as a means of fostering good relations – yet it is inevitably limited in its reach. Of course, direct contact not only changes the attitudes of those directly engaged. It can also change the attitudes of those at one or two removes from it. Where we have friends or relatives who are friendly with 'outgroup' members, we are more likely to take a positive attitude to them ourselves. Nevertheless, there are clearly limits to contact's capacity to combat prejudice and engender solidarity. Putting in it economic terms, shared identities offer a resource-efficient approach to solidarity generation.

Promoting a shared identity should not be at the expense of other approaches to community cohesion, but is, rather, complimentary to them. So for example any shared identity in a liberal society will have a basis in a set of values such as democracy or fairness, with which people can collectively identify. Moreover, interactivity and meaningful encounters at the individual level are likely to provide the basis for the development of shared civic identities. But it is clear that fostering a civic identity has a distinctive contribution to make to community cohesion.

## Summary

This section has, first, scoped out what policymakers generally understand by community cohesion and why it has become such a major issue for national and local government in recent times. Importantly, and despite much of the media and political focus, community cohesion is not uniquely about relations between people of different faiths or ethnic backgrounds, but is also about inter-generational, gender and socio-economic relationships.

Second, the section set out London's particular cohesion-related challenges. London is very different from most parts of Britain, having long been home to waves of inward and outward migration going back over centuries. It is one of the most culturally diverse places on earth and its population overwhelmingly values that diversity, which has become a central part of the city's very identity. However, London does face a number of specific community cohesion challenges, which will be elaborated in the case studies that follow: lower levels of social capital than the rest of Britain, high levels of poverty and income polarisation, a rapid pace of population change and pressures on resources and the quality of public services.

Finally, this section has described some important aspects of any strategy to foster greater community cohesion: the righting of basic economic injustices, alongside approaches to foster greater contact between people from different backgrounds, and to promote a civic culture underpinned by a shared understanding of common values and a shared sense of belonging.

### 3. Community cohesion in three London boroughs

This section explores the kinds of cohesion-related challenges and responses to them by local agencies in three very different London boroughs: Barking and Dagenham, Hounslow and Southwark. These three boroughs were selected because they were expected to demonstrate a broad range of different cohesion challenges, while sharing in common experience of significant recent population change.

**Southwark** is a highly culturally diverse inner-London borough, but one which faces particular challenges around inter-generational conflict and stark economic inequalities.

**Hounslow** is also a highly diverse borough in ethnic and cultural terms, but one in which different ethnic groups tend to be concentrated in particular areas. There has also been evidence of extreme political groups of varying kinds operating in the borough.

**Barking and Dagenham** has historically been less culturally diverse than the other two boroughs, but has become much more so over time, having experienced relatively rapid rates of population change in the last two decades. There is evidence of a rise in political extremism in the borough, as seen in the election of 12 BNP councillors in May 2006.

The research in each case involved a review of the relevant local literature on community cohesion (for example, local authority policy papers, strategy documents and demographic data), followed up by interviews with public sector professionals working in cohesion-related policy areas.

These interviews were semi-structured in that they were intended to cover a similar set of general themes, but needed to be open enough to illicit from the interviewees the issues they thought most significant. The names and roles of the interviewees are listed in Appendix 1 to this report.

Of course, there are limitations to the extent to which we can make conclusions from this research. This is first of all because local authorities have only recently started to measure community cohesion, according to a relatively small basket of indicators. This means that there are only very limited benchmarks by which we can judge whether or not communities are becoming more cohesive over time. Second, in the absence of independent evaluations of most of the projects described below, this research relied on the perceptions of local practitioners themselves. Therefore, 'best practice' in the context of this report is understood to be what local practitioners perceived to work best in their areas. Further research is of course required, exploring which local interventions work best over time in different contexts, which would require more in-depth research in particular communities.

What is provided here, however, is an initial survey of professional opinion, in order to discern the contours of a holistic approach to fostering cohesion at the local level.

#### **Barking and Dagenham**

##### **Geography and economy**

Barking and Dagenham is a borough in outer East London on the north bank of the River Thames. It is based around two principal town centres (Barking and Dagenham), brought together for municipal purposes in the local government reorganisation of 1965.

For most of the 20th century the area's economy was based around heavy industry which located there in the inter-war period to make use of the local docks. This included major chemical and motor industries, most significantly the Ford plant at Dagenham which by the 1950s was employing over 40,000 people. The industrial and working class history of the borough means that, in the words of Billy Bragg, one of its most famous sons, its experience 'mirrored that found in the mining, ship-building and steel towns of the North' with levels of manufacturing employment that 'puts the borough on a par with cities like Sheffield, Newcastle and Middlesbrough' (Bragg 2006: 40).

Alongside industrialisation the area saw major residential settlement as the East End slums were cleared and the London County Council built substantial amounts of council housing, including the Becontree estate, which with 27,000 homes was the largest public housing development in the world.



Today, following the introduction of Right to Buy, 56 per cent of the borough's population own their own homes, while 34 per cent are social housing tenants.

Heavy industry has now declined, with new employment coming largely from the services sector. Barking and Dagenham has a relatively high economic inactivity rate of 28.8 per cent, compared with a Greater London average of 25.4 per cent and a national average of 21 per cent (Annual Population Survey 2004, ONS 2007). Almost a quarter of the borough's working-age population lack formal educational qualifications (24 per cent), compared to 14 per cent for London as a whole. As a result of these and other factors Barking and Dagenham is a relatively deprived borough, being the ninth most deprived in London and the 21st most deprived in the country (Barking and Dagenham 2007a).

### Ethnic profile

In ethnic terms the borough contains a proportionally larger white British population than London as a whole, with 75 per cent of Barking and Dagenham's population belonging to that group in 2004 compared with around 60 per cent for London as a whole in the 2001 census (see Table 3.1). However, these figures are changing quickly and the local authority believes that the borough is currently much more diverse than it was even four years ago.

**Table 3.1. Ethnic profile of Barking and Dagenham, 2004**

Percentage of people in ethnic groups, mid-2004

White:	79.7%
<i>British</i>	74.7%
<i>Irish</i>	1.5%
<i>Other</i>	3.5%
Mixed:	2.3%
<i>White and Black Caribbean</i>	0.9%
<i>White and Black African</i>	0.5%
<i>White and Asian</i>	0.4%
<i>Other mixed</i>	0.5%
Asian or Asian British:	6.6%
<i>Indian</i>	2.7%
<i>Pakistani</i>	2.1%
<i>Bangladeshi</i>	1.0%
<i>Other Asian</i>	0.9%
Black or Black British:	9.8%
<i>Caribbean</i>	2.3%
<i>African</i>	6.9%
<i>Other black</i>	0.9%
Chinese or 'other' ethnic group	1.6%
<i>Chinese</i>	0.8%
<i>Other</i>	0.7%

Source: ONS Experimental Ethnic Estimates released 2006

### The main challenges for community cohesion in Barking and Dagenham

Community cohesion has come under pressure in Barking and Dagenham in recent years due to a combination of population changes, resource pressures and the growing political presence of the far right. These pressures culminated in the election of 12 BNP councillors in the May 2006 local elections, a result that sent shockwaves around the country.

The borough scores the lowest among our three case studies on the main social cohesion indicator

used by local government: only 48 per cent of local residents said in 2005/06 that 'this local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together' (Barking and Dagenham Partnership 2006). This contrasts markedly with the national average of 80 per cent and higher than average figures of 84 per cent for Hounslow in 2004 and 86 per cent for Southwark in 2006. On the basis of the standard national indicator, therefore, community cohesion appears to be very low in Barking and Dagenham.

This reflects a number of challenges facing the borough.

First, there has been significant population change in the borough over the course of the last decade. The borough's population grew by 10 per cent between 1991 and 2001 and is set to grow by a further 14 per cent between 2001 and 2021. This is partly because Barking and Dagenham has the lowest average house prices in the whole of London (£174,000 in 2006 compared to a London average of £318,000), which has led many first-time buyers to move into the area (Barking and Dagenham 2007a).

The Commission for Racial Equality (now part of the Equality and Human Rights Commission) noted that the southern part of Barking saw the largest rise in the percentage of foreign-born residents in the whole of England, rising from 3.5 per cent in 1991 to 13.4 per cent in 2001 (CRE 2007). The ethnic minority percentage of the population is set to grow from 16 per cent to around 25 per cent over the next 20 years.

Second, this population change has been accompanied by growing housing need in the area. In 2002 there was an estimated backlog of 1,258 people needing housing, with an additional 1,790 people in housing need being added every year. The council estimated in 2002 that 14.6 per cent of residents were living in housing unsuited to their needs. At the same time the council has lost significant amounts of its social housing stock as a result of the introduction of Right To Buy in the 1980s (Barking and Dagenham 2003).

The combination of increased ethnic diversity and a shortage of social housing has led many people to believe that new migrants are being given preferential treatment for social housing. These views emerged time and again in focus groups conducted by ippr in summer 2006. The following are a typical set of statements by white residents in manual working class occupations (C2DE):

'They think it's great, they love it, they get off a lorry and are given everything... money, a house, payouts.' White male C2DE, Barking and Dagenham

'When it comes down to the money, you see them and you're not going to get money or a house. It puts me back one more step. I'm prejudiced before I even know their story.' White female C2DE, Barking and Dagenham.

(ippr focus group, Barking and Dagenham, July 2006)

In fact, as council officers explained to the author, many of the new residents who are perceived to be in receipt of social housing are home buyers, buying private houses that were previously council houses but sold under Right To Buy.

Third, concerns about the quality of the physical environment and shared spaces, along with crime and anti-social behaviour, have also fuelled community tensions. Newcomers have been blamed for problems that relate to the quality of public services in terms of cleaning, housing repairs, rubbish collection and so forth. In our focus groups residents connected a perceived rise in crime and anti-social behaviour with immigration into the area. Basic issues of service provision therefore need to be addressed as part of the community cohesion agenda.

Fourth, there are concerns around a perceived decline in social capital and the loss of older community networks in the area. Concerns were raised by residents about a loss of neighbourliness during ippr focus groups held in Barking and Dagenham in July 2006:

‘People don’t talk to each other anymore’

‘You don’t really know your neighbours anymore’

‘When we were growing up it was different’

Like much of London greater residential mobility may well have a cost in terms of weakening social networks and in an area like Barking and Dagenham, with relatively stable settlement patterns in the past and with a large local employer providing a common local focus to work, such changes can be unsettling. Some of this basic loss of social capital independent of recent migration patterns can then get mixed up with anxiety over immigration.

As the council notes in its submission to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion: ‘As Barking and Dagenham had been a very stable community in comparison with the rest of London, this recent change has been a concern to some members of the well established population’ (Barking and Dagenham 2007b: 17). One interviewee described the community as ‘being in a state of bereavement’ for an older pattern of community life that has now gone.

All of these issues have been exploited for political ends by the far right, leading to the election of 12 BNP councillors in the 2006 council elections. This is the largest far-right council group in Britain and although Labour still holds a majority on the council, the BNP won all but one seat it contested in direct competition with Labour, previously the only real political force in the area. In the 2005 election, as we have seen, the BNP had its best result in the country in the Barking constituency, securing 17 per cent of the vote.

### Council responses in Barking and Dagenham

In its first community cohesion strategy, which ran from 2004 to 2007 the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) in Barking and Dagenham formally adopted the national definition of cohesion as set out above (Barking and Dagenham 2004). However, the council has since then decided that the national concept of cohesion needs to be reviewed to match local people’s aspirations for the area.

Between 2005 and 2006 the council embarked on a major public engagement exercise to seek to identify the common values and priorities that might generate a shared vision for the future. As part of this exercise the council employed a series of innovative engagement techniques reaching people in public places, such as shopping centres, markets and working men’s clubs. For example, they set up a ‘Big Brother’ style video cube and a ‘graffiti’ wall through which people could record their views. They also did a great deal of ‘door knocking’ in an attempt to reach people who do not normally attend public meetings or have not been reached by previous consultation exercises.

As part of this process, the council has tested a new local definition of cohesion, which aspires towards creating a:

- ‘Strong community which can expect equal and **fair** access to customer focused services; and
- A place where people, who through mutual **respect** can **together** enjoy **safe** and peaceful lives and look forward to the future.’ (Barking and Dagenham 2007b, emphasis in original)

Council officers felt that this definition was one that would have more traction with residents because it was based on a set of principles (in bold) that local people emphasised during the consultation: fairness, respect, togetherness and safety.

In terms of prioritisation the LSP has made community cohesion a key component of its overall vision for the borough. This is manifested in its community cohesion strategy but perhaps more importantly the Council has given responsibility for implementation and oversight to the Leader of the Council.

As we have seen, tackling the underlying causes of community tension is critical. In Barking and Dagenham these include housing shortages, for which there are plans in place to build an extra 20,000 new homes as part of the London Riverside development within the Thames Gateway. Officers also highlighted the need to tackle concerns around the quality of public services especially within the ‘cleaner, safer, greener’ agenda, which it was felt was a leading cause of resident dissatisfaction with the council.

In terms of communicating shared values, the council has sought to challenge myths around asylum. For example, it published an article in the March 2005 edition of the *Citizen* (the council's magazine, distributed to every household) entitled 'The facts about the asylum myths'. In September 2006 a similar article was produced entitled 'Who gets housed first'. In wards where the BNP had been campaigning on these issues, the council distributed its own leaflets to individual homes to take on myths about housing allocations. The authority and the local newspaper cooperated to produce an article on the same subject on polling day 2006.

Of course, given the election result these efforts cannot be said to have been successful. This is not necessarily a criticism of the local authority as these kind of 'myth-busting' exercises are following the grain of national best practice, but it does raise general questions about how communications in this area are best delivered. ippr research has found that in general terms people find 'myth busting' patronising because it implies that 'we know best and you don't'. Also, by making statements (that they then clarify by refuting) along the lines of 'many people believe that asylum seekers are given priority for social housing', authorities may unintentionally legitimise that view in the eyes of residents rather than challenge it (Lewis and Newman 2007).

Neighbourhood devolution is seen by the council as a way of helping to foster greater community cohesion within particular areas of the borough. The basic intuition behind this model is threefold:

- First, devolving power to local people to make decisions in their areas or at least hold service providers to account locally should give people greater control and reduce frustration with decisions 'taken elsewhere'.
- Second, it should improve service delivery, by focusing local services more effectively around local needs.
- Finally, it might also be able to foster an inclusive sense of local belonging and higher local civic pride by bringing residents together in neighbourhood-based activities to solve local problems.

In Barking and Dagenham the authority is currently rolling out a comparatively ambitious new Neighbourhood Management Model, following two successful pilots in the Abbey, Gascoigne and Thames, and Marks Gate areas. The council is rolling out neighbourhood management across the whole borough, although with most resources targeted at the areas of greatest need. The plans include neighbourhood management teams operating to consult local residents and coordinate services in particular wards, drawing up an action plan for the area that will be agreed and monitored by a local neighbourhood partnership. In those areas of greatest need budgets of £20,000 will be made available to help deliver 'quick wins' and set up new projects. These will sit alongside the council's Community Housing Partnerships, which have significant delegated powers over housing policy and devolved budgets to spend on area improvements.

This is a relatively ambitious neighbourhood management scheme compared with models tried elsewhere and as such it represents a significant policy departure for Barking and Dagenham. We should note of course that it is only currently being implemented in the borough, but reports from the pilot areas were positive. An independent evaluation of the Marks Gate pilot found that it 'seems to have played a pivotal role in the transforming of Marks Gate and improving the reputation of the area, among residents, service providers and "outsiders"' (B&D 2007c: 3-4).

Finally, the council has sought to use cultural events to foster interaction between people from different backgrounds. For example, every October the housing department of the council puts on Resident's Unity Week, which involves workshops, sport, cultural activities and a carnival. This was felt by housing officers to be successful as a particularly mixed event, bringing residents together who would otherwise not meet.

The council also hosts the Molten Diversity Arts Festival, which draws together and showcases artistic activities, such as dance, drama, photography and music from across the borough. The council faced some criticism that the event was not adequately catering for the white British community and so following a review in 2006 put on a VE Jive Concert and Cockney Sing-a-long event, attracting nearly

100 people. The council has recognised that it needs to push its cohesion message through existing popular events, such as at the Dagenham Town Show which attracts 80,000 people over two days.

## Hounslow

### Geography and economy

Hounslow is an outer West London borough, made up of a number of discrete population centres, each with its own distinct character. Its economy has changed significantly over time, with a decline in the local manufacturing industry that grew up around the Brentford docks. Employment has correspondingly grown in the services sector and the local economy has become increasingly dominated by the expansion of Heathrow Airport. Heathrow is now the source of 69,000 jobs in the sub-region of West London, with 10,000 of Hounslow's residents employed directly on the airport site in 2001. However the local authority estimates that, accounting for supply industries, between a fifth and a quarter of the borough's population depends on the airport for employment (Hounslow 2006).

### Ethnic profile

The borough is one of the most culturally diverse in London, with an ethnic minority population of around 35 per cent in 2001, which is expected to grow to 50 per cent by 2010. The biggest ethnic minority population in Hounslow is Indian or British Indian (17 per cent), with other Asian groups making up 7 per cent. Hounslow has the third largest Sikh community and the tenth largest Hindu community in Britain, as well as a significant Muslim community. Other important local minority ethnic populations include many refugee and asylum-seeking communities (around 3-4 per cent of the population in 2001), including a significant Somali community. Altogether, there are 140 languages spoken in Hounslow's schools (ibid).

**Table 3.2. Ethnic profile of Hounslow, 2001**

Percentage of people in ethnic groups, 2001

White:	64.8%
<i>British</i>	55.7 %
<i>Irish</i>	2.91%
<i>Other</i>	6.18%
Mixed:	3.03%
<i>White and Black Caribbean</i>	0.65%
<i>White and Black African</i>	0.39%
<i>White and Asian</i>	1.13%
<i>Other mixed</i>	0.85%
Asian or Asian British:	24.7%
<i>Indian</i>	17.3%
<i>Pakistani</i>	4.29%
<i>Bangladeshi</i>	0.53%
<i>Other Asian</i>	2.56%
Black or Black British:	4.35%
<i>Caribbean</i>	1.33%
<i>African</i>	2.69%
<i>Other black</i>	0.32%
Chinese or other ethnic group	3%
<i>Chinese</i>	0.86%
<i>Other</i>	2.14%

Source: CRE Ethnicity Profile Hounslow from ONS Census 2001.

Previously at [www.cre.gov.uk](http://www.cre.gov.uk) (website no longer exists)

### Challenges to cohesion in Hounslow

As one interviewee told this report's author: 'Change is the key to understanding what is happening in Hounslow.' Hounslow lies at the centre of a major national transport hub, home to Heathrow airport and acting as a major throughput area for cars, trains and planes entering and leaving the country or travelling on elsewhere in the UK.

As such, Hounslow has been home to waves of migrants throughout the last hundred years. Chiswick, in the East, has a long-standing Eastern European population, particularly from Poland, as well as a small Jewish community. The central part of Hounslow has become home to large South Asian Sikh and Muslim communities. More recently the borough has seen the arrival of a growing Somali community, currently of around 7,000 residents. And the expansion of Heathrow Airport has brought many new Eastern European migrants into the area to work.

Change has accelerated in recent years, making the borough ever more diverse. The borough's population rose by 4 per cent (8400 people) between the 1991 and 2001 censuses (although the borough believes that data from the Office for National Statistics underestimates the scale of its population growth and is in dispute over figures). The non-white population makes up 35 per cent of the borough's residents, which is higher than the London average of 29 per cent, and up from an estimated 25 per cent in 1991. The council calculates that between 2001 and 2006 the BME population rose by a further 7,000 and is set to become over 50 per cent of the population of the borough by 2010.

Like most of London, Hounslow benefits from strong local support for cultural diversity: 84 per cent of residents asked in 2004 agreed that it was an area in which people from different backgrounds get along well with one another (compared to just 48 per cent in Barking and Dagenham) (BMG 2004).

The borough does, however, face a number of cohesion-related challenges. First, economic change inevitably has its winners and losers. Hounslow has very low unemployment (2.4 per cent claimant count compared with 3.4 per cent for London as a whole) and an economic inactivity rate that is below the London average (23.2 per cent compared with 25.4 per cent). However, it also has relatively low paid employment for local people, having the third largest proportion of low paid workers in London. This is partly because while Heathrow's expansion has brought new jobs and economic growth, very many of the jobs it has generated for local people are low skilled and low paid. Additionally, there is a real problem for some local people not having the skills to take advantage of the opportunities expansion has brought. As workers from the A8 countries have filled the higher skilled jobs on site, this has generated frustration among local youth, especially in the western part of the borough, where the airport accounts for one in every three available jobs (Hounslow 2005b).

A further cohesion challenge facing the borough is residential segregation, not a serious problem in either of the other two cases analysed here. Hounslow can be divided roughly into three main areas. The eastern-most part (Chiswick and surroundings) and the western area (Feltham and Bedfont) are largely ethnically white areas. These have non-white populations of just 13 per cent and 17 per cent respectively, well below the London average. Central Hounslow, by contrast, has a significant BME population, with some wards having a BME population of over 60 per cent (Hounslow 2006).

The clustering of ethnic populations in different residential areas is known under certain conditions to pose challenges to community cohesion. In the case of Hounslow, these fears receive some support from evidence that in the overwhelmingly white western area, where there is a small but growing ethnic minority population, racist crime is disproportionately high. Between April and September 2006 90 incidents of racial harassment were reported to the West Area Anti-Social Behaviour team, compared with just four in the central area and 16 in the eastern area (Hounslow 2006).

Hounslow faces a further challenge of tackling the rise of political extremism, of varying kinds. In the western area the far right British National Party has been openly recruiting among disenfranchised white youths. The National Front gained around 1000 votes in the 2006 local elections and one report noted the presence of BNP posters and leaflets in Feltham in the same year (Hounslow Homes 2006).

The police have also provided the council with intelligence that extreme political organisations have

been recruiting among young Muslims in Hounslow. Indeed the young man who became Britain's first suicide bomber in an attack in Israel in 2003 was from Hounslow. Two other young men were questioned as part of the investigation into a foiled 'terror plot' in 2006.

Finally, Hounslow is experiencing a related challenge around youth exclusion and disaffection. Youth nuisance was the commonest complaint made to the council's Neighbourhood Wardens between 2005 and 2007. In many areas the council perceives there to be a problem with disenfranchised youngsters getting involved in anti-social behaviour and crime.

### **Council responses in Hounslow**

Cohesion has taken a very prominent role in Hounslow's local strategic framework. The council has made community cohesion a key plank of its community strategy, with its new Community Plan in 2007 carrying the strap line 'Building a Stronger, Vibrant and United Community'. The council has a Community Cohesion Strategy Group which is currently developing a basket of performance indicators to monitor progress, which includes actual and perceived levels of tension, relevant Best Value performance indicators, resident views and indicators monitoring extremism.

Hounslow has also played a leading role in the West London Community Cohesion Partnership, which includes the boroughs of Hounslow, Ealing, Harrow, Hillingdon, Hammersmith and Fulham and Brent, plus representatives from the corporate and voluntary sectors, West London Housing, the police and local media representatives. The partnership allows different authorities to try out new initiatives and share learning, as well as enabling sub-regional coordination of policy interventions.

For example, the partnership has led on sub-regional approaches to communications. It has worked closely with the Trinity Mirror Group to ensure that editors and journalists are aware of the impact stories can have on community relations. Hounslow claims that there has been a change in the way the papers report issues affecting the borough's diverse communities as a result, and Trinity Mirror has set up a bursary scheme in an effort to recruit journalists from a more diverse range of backgrounds.

Hounslow has focused on engaging particularly vulnerable young people through its Detached Outreach Teams. These five full-time teams (each including one youth worker and two part-time workers) have been working since 2004 in the five Area Committees in the borough. They work with particularly vulnerable youths who are referred to them by the local Youth Inclusion and Support Panels (YISPs). They also engage in harm-reduction activity targeted at particular behaviours, including knife crime. There is a community development aspect to their work, which has involved putting on events to try to encourage older and younger people to interact. Remarkably, in the areas where they have worked, there have been very significant reductions in youth crime and anti-social behaviour. In some areas these have fallen by almost half.

Following police intelligence that shows extremist political groups have been recruiting in the area (among both white and Muslim youths), the council commissioned the Institute of Community Cohesion to review the borough's approach to youth disengagement and political extremism. The resulting report *A Window on Extremism* sets out a number of recommendations for local policymakers, in the areas of communications, youth engagement and leadership, to help tackle this problem. Hounslow is now also managing a £600,000 sub-regional 'Pathfinder Programme to Prevent Violent Extremism', through which it should be able to implement many of those recommendations.

As was set out above, there are particular challenges in the western area of the borough, where racial incidents are much higher than elsewhere. The council commissioned a West Area Study which reported in June 2005, focusing on the social problems the area faced and possible solutions (Hounslow 2005b). This is a relatively stable community with a higher proportion of long-standing residents than elsewhere in the borough, one which has a lower BME population than the London average, but a BME population that is growing in size. The area also had the lowest proportion of residents agreeing that the area 'is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together'. There is anecdotal evidence of parents from ethnic minority backgrounds worrying about sending their children to local schools for fear of racist bullying. The BNP and the National Front have both been active in this part of Hounslow.

This study has provided a valuable base of data and makes a number of recommendations. These include trying to attract a more diverse range of employers (in particular in office-based sectors) and small business start-ups to the area, which suffers from a predominance of low-skilled and low-paid work. The area also needs significant investment in raising skills levels, and the council is seeking employer support to increase training opportunities for local young people. A recognised lack of investment in youth facilities also needs to be looked at, given the area's high rates of youth crime. As in Barking and Dagenham the council identified problems with the quality of open spaces and the physical environment, which fed into residents' general sense of dissatisfaction with the area. It has put in place a Decent Estates Plan, but recognises there is 'some way to go' (Hounslow 2005b).

One final area worth highlighting is the protocols that Hounslow's different agencies have put in place to deal with outbreaks of tension as and when they occur. The local police believe these helped ensure that following the 7 July 2005 bombings, whereas there was an increase in Islamophobic incidents across London as a whole, in Hounslow there were not any significant additional problems.

Measures in place in Hounslow include an advisory group of representatives from the different places of worship, a mobile CCTV service to protect places of worship at times of tension, a 'ringmaster' system which means people can sign up for text messages to keep key people informed, and an active media strategy which after 7 July meant a letter was sent immediately to the local paper, emphasising unity. The Community Cohesion Strategy Group also acts as a partnership body of public authorities, faith leaders and community groups, meeting to share intelligence on community tensions and discuss sensitive issues

## **Southwark**

### **Geography and economy**

Southwark is an inner-London borough, south of the River Thames. One of the oldest parts of London, historic Southwark has been a settlement since Roman times and by the 17th century was one of the largest urban settlements in the country. Its economy grew because of its riverside location, with manufacturing industry developing around the docks during the industrial revolution.

Today it is a borough of contrasting communities. To the north along the river lies the Borough, Bermondsey and Rotherhithe areas, dominated by the docks and related industry until their closure in the 1980s. This part of the borough has since seen economic regeneration, with the development of a significant business district around London Bridge, home to financial institutions, service companies and a growing creative industry. The Bankside area has seen a growth in cultural amenities, including the hugely successful Tate Modern, restaurants and bars.

Further south are Peckham and Camberwell, highly diverse residential areas home to communities that have their origins in Bangladesh, the Caribbean, China, Cyprus, India, Ireland, Nigeria, Pakistan, Turkey and Vietnam. Further south still there is Dulwich, one of Southwark's more affluent residential areas.

Overall, Southwark ranks as the 17th most deprived borough in Britain and the sixth most deprived in London. Its economic inactivity rate is higher than the London average at 27.1 per cent (compared with 25.4 per cent) (Annual Population Survey 2004).

### **Ethnic profile**

Like most of inner London, Southwark is highly culturally diverse. The white British population makes up 52 per cent of the borough's population, while black or black British make up 25.9 per cent. (See table 3.3, next page.)

### **Challenges to cohesion in Southwark**

Taking the standard national indicators, Southwark appears to be a relatively cohesive borough and, furthermore, cohesion has increased in recent years: in 2006 86 per cent of Southwark residents felt that 'this local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together'. This is above the national average in 2005 of 80 per cent. It is also a significant increase on the 2004 result of 74 per cent. Southwark is in line with the national average in terms of the percentage of people



**Table 3.3. Ethnic profile of Southwark, 2001**

Percentage of people in ethnic groups, 2001	
White:	63%
<i>British</i>	52.2%
<i>Irish</i>	3.1%
<i>Other</i>	7.7%
Mixed:	3.7%
<i>White and Black Caribbean</i>	1.4%
<i>White and Black African</i>	0.8%
<i>White and Asian</i>	0.6%
<i>Other mixed</i>	1.0%
Asian or Asian British:	4.1%
<i>Indian</i>	1.5%
<i>Pakistani</i>	0.5%
<i>Bangladeshi</i>	1.5%
<i>Other Asian</i>	0.6%
Black or Black British:	25.9%
<i>Caribbean</i>	8.0%
<i>African</i>	16.1%
<i>Other black</i>	1.8%
Chinese or 'other' ethnic group	3.3%
<i>Chinese</i>	1.8%
<i>Other</i>	1.5%

Source: Southwark Vital Statistics 2006 from 2001 Census.  
[www.southwarkalliance.org.uk](http://www.southwarkalliance.org.uk)

saying that 'this local area is a place where residents respect ethnic differences between people' (83 per cent), up from 71 per cent in 2004.

On the face of it, therefore, Southwark appears to be doing well, particularly in the areas of race, faith and cultural difference. However, there were a number of cohesion-related challenges highlighted in the course of this research. The first, as with both Hounslow and Barking and Dagenham, is the challenge of population change from immigration and London's relatively high rates of residential mobility. This poses a challenge to local authorities whose funding is set according to relatively old data and means that there are not necessarily the resources to meet changing needs. This is a challenge common to local authorities across London.

One of the biggest problems highlighted to the author in Southwark was to do with inter-generational conflict. In particular this manifests itself in fears among older generations about crime and community safety, and among younger generations a sense that they are being held under suspicion, often for doing little more than 'hanging around'. ippr research shows that fear of young people gathering in public spaces is one of the key factors around the country leading people to perceive there is much more crime than there actually is (Dixon and Margo 2006). According to Southwark Council's residents' surveys, street crime and youth crime are the two highest areas of community concern. There is also evidence of youth gang activity in the borough, which can lead to violent conflict between young people from different neighbourhoods.

Southwark is also a borough in which wealth and poverty live cheek by jowl, as they do in much of inner London. As we have seen, inequality has been found internationally to be a major cause of high levels of crime and low levels of social trust (Wilkinson 2005). Council officers in Southwark pointed

out that there are not just inequalities between relatively poor and relatively wealthy areas, but also within quite small geographical areas, 'leading to the existence of parallel lives in the same street and neighbourhood'. Gated developments and separate educational arrangements can mean that neighbourhoods develop in which there is a lack of neighbourliness or shared experiences.

Finally, Southwark has a much higher proportion of residents experiencing mental health problems than in England as a whole: the Primary Care Trust estimated in 2004 that the borough was 17.5 per cent above the national average according to the Mental Illness Needs Index (Southwark Health and Social Care 2004). This is likely to be because Southwark is home to the Maudsley Hospital base for the South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM), which is the largest and oldest mental health trust in Europe and provides a range of highly specialised services for people with mental health problems. Relations between those suffering from mental health problems and the wider community are therefore also seen as a major cohesion challenge in the borough.

### **Council responses in Southwark**

Southwark was one of the 2003 Community Cohesion Pathfinders and as such has long taken issues of cohesion seriously and experimented in practical ways of promoting it on the ground. As one officer commented to ippr, 'practice guides our thinking on cohesion'.

According to Southwark Council's submission to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, cohesion is interpreted locally as:

'Working towards a set of social relationships where:

- There is an absence of tensions and harassment between people of different cultures, races, ages, faiths and lifestyles
  - There is mutual understanding and respect between people of different cultures, races, ages, faiths and lifestyles
  - There is positive inter-personal contact and engagement within daily life between different groups
  - While respecting diversity, there are some shared values between different groups about acceptable/unacceptable behaviours and attitudes'.
- (Southwark 2007: 2)

Whereas the national definition of cohesion is holistic, but prioritisation and funding have tended to focus on issues of race and faith, it is notable how Southwark takes the holistic nature of cohesion through into its strategic priorities, moving well beyond the traditional community cohesion paradigm. As one council officer commented to ippr, 'Focusing on race and faith may in itself be divisive.' Indeed, the four key cohesion challenges highlighted by Southwark in its submission to the Commission are along inter-generational; inter-ethnic, faith and cultural; inter-ability; and inter-income divides.

Policy officers stressed to the author that Southwark's themes emerged 'from below', through processes of long-standing community engagement, in particular the borough's community development work coordinated through its Community Involvement and Development Unit (CIDU).

Unlike Barking and Dagenham and Hounslow, the Council does not have a community cohesion strategy as such, but it does employ a Community Cohesion Coordinator at a senior level and mainstreams work in this area largely through its existing Community Development and Involvement Unit. Through interviews with council officers and partner agencies, it became clear that awareness was high of how different aspects of policy relate to cohesion. This shows that a separate strategy is not necessarily needed in order to work towards a strategic objective. One officer commented that distinctive strategies can run the danger of compartmentalising a stream of work, rather than mainstreaming it.

One of the most notable aspects of Southwark's approach to cohesion is that it flows through the Local Strategic Partnership's existing work on community development, led by the CIDU. First, Southwark sees promoting active citizenship as being a key driver of cohesion. The borough is host to

an Active Citizens Hub, based at the Volunteer Centre Southwark, which aims to promote community activism. It does this by providing training and support: running training courses on how to become a magistrate or a school governor, on myths around issues like asylum and immigration and on the volunteering opportunities available in the borough.

The Hub puts on a 'Be up, Speak out' day which provides training on public speaking, helping to raise people's confidence. There is tailored training for particular communities of interest, such as faith groups and the LGBT community. The Hub also acts as a place that signposts local people to different events and activities, and plays a role influencing strategy at the Local Strategic Partnership level, to make sure active citizenship is taken into account in mainstream decision-making.

Another aspect to the community development approach in Southwark is its neighbourhoods agenda, which is based around its eight Community Councils. These are made up of local residents, stakeholders and councillors, although only councillors have the power to vote. They have executive powers over £3 million of funding for liveability issues such as community safety, traffic management and environmental improvements. Council officers estimate that some attract around 80 to 100 residents and they have drawn up action plans on liveability issues in their areas. These forums are backed up by area managers who coordinate services in each area, supported by community development workers.

There is a more intensive neighbourhood partnership in South Bermondsey, which is made up of a board of residents and others, along with themed sub-groups to focus on specific questions. This has as one of its objectives to make South Bermondsey 'a place where people of all ages and cultures can live and get on well with each other' and it has put on a range of cultural initiatives to try to foster cross-generational and cross-cultural contact. These have included a St George's Day festival, local history tours (including a black history tour) and history clubs in local schools.

Interestingly, Southwark has addressed head-on the difficult subject of national identity and how this relates to the challenge of fostering a shared sense of belonging. Its approach to these questions is set out in its submission to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, in which it says:

'Integration is about people having a sense of belonging. This does not mean buying into an unchanging historical identity. Rather the people of Southwark have described 'Englishness' as being about tolerance and a sense of humour, about respecting difference, about absorbing and celebrating the best of all cultures, about the ability to embrace and adapt to change. This is a complex position and one which straddles the single/multi culture debate.' (Southwark 2007: 2)

The council's focus on these questions came after it received complaints that it was not doing anything to celebrate St George's Day, which one councillor claimed had been captured by the far right. In response the council ran a consultation process, engaging residents in a discussion about what Englishness meant to them and whether and how it could be celebrated. The council produced a booklet 'A Sense of Belonging' which set out residents' different views. This was intended to be thought-provoking and through dissemination it was hoped it would start a mature discussion around issues of identity. Reflecting on the process, the authors say:

'When we started we did not know where the conversation would take us. Everyone who took part has offered serious reflections about the world we live in and their hopes for the future. At times it has been scary, touching on sensitivities that mostly remain unsaid. At others it has been exhilarating and liberating, offering visions for a future that thrives on diversity and change.' (Southwark Alliance 2005: 28)

As we have seen, youth crime and disengagement is viewed in Southwark as a major challenge. Some of the work being done on this is preventative and diversionary: for instance, the Nunhead and Peckham anti-gang scheme has supported young people to research gang culture and other local community issues. The project aimed to bring younger people into contact with older people in the

community and provide a diversionary activity.

There are other projects that aim to provide intensive support and intervention with individual young people. 'From Boyhood to Manhood' is a youth project of national prominence, based in Southwark, which seeks to tackle low self-esteem among young boys and provide them with stable positive role models. It takes boys excluded from school, referred by local authorities, youth offending teams and social services and provides a comprehensive regime of day-time education.

By highlighting issues of mental health Southwark has taken its holistic understanding of community cohesion into territory that does not typically get discussed under the banner of 'cohesion'. SLaM NHS Foundation Trust has a strategic aim to 'go beyond the limits of health services to promote mental well-being in communities' (SLaM 2007).

There are two strands to this work, both of which relate to local work on cohesion: first, it involves helping people with mental health problems, combating the stigma attached to them and promoting inclusion. This includes working with identified pupils, training teachers and frontline staff in mental health awareness and providing parenting skills support. Second there is a broader agenda about promoting mental well-being, which is in itself part of the product of living in safe and cohesive communities. As one interviewee who works for the Trust told the author: 'It is important to understand that mental well-being is not something you have or you don't, we're all to degrees well and unwell at different times'. Strong social networks and a sense of belonging are seen as being one of the key drivers of mental well-being.

### Summary

London is a city of great contrasts and we have seen that each borough faces different cohesion-related challenges. Working-class, post-industrial Barking and Dagenham is different from mixed inner-city Southwark, which in turn faces different challenges to an outer-London borough like Hounslow. However, it is possible within that diversity to identify some common cross-London challenges to community cohesion and highlight the kind of policy interventions that local agencies have found to be particularly effective on the ground.

All three boroughs are dealing with the consequences of the major social changes that have resulted from London's prosperous economy and ever more diverse population. Economic growth has brought jobs, rising incomes and regeneration to London, while increased cultural diversity is one of the things that residents repeatedly say they like most about living in the capital (Cabinet Office 2004). However, rapid change also poses challenges, which local agencies have to respond to.

In the least diverse deprived communities, such as the extent of Barking and Dagenham and in the western area of Hounslow, demographic change has fed into rising community tensions. This is because change has also been accompanied by pressures on resources, including a shortage of social housing and a lack of access to skilled work. These tensions have created a market for extremist politics, seen in the election of 12 BNP councillors in Barking and Dagenham and a growing vote for the National Front in Hounslow. In the western area of Hounslow this has led to a shocking number of racist incidents, largely by white people on members of the area's growing BME community.

High levels of residential mobility, concern about crime and anti-social behaviour and the growth of

#### Box 3.1 The cohesion challenges facing London

- High rates of population change, due to a dynamic and successful economy
- Scarcity of material resources such as housing, skills and well-paid employment, which can result in rapid population change fuelling community tensions, especially in previously less diverse areas
- Lower levels of social capital (networks, norms and trust) than other parts of Britain
- High levels of child poverty and income inequality
- Inter-generational tensions, in particular triggered by concern about youth crime and anti-social behaviour.

single living have also meant that London boroughs have had to work extra hard to foster the kind of social networks and strong community relationships that develop more easily in more stable communities. In Barking and Dagenham focus group respondents were concerned about a perceived decline in people knowing their neighbours and a rise in crime.

The rate of change poses further challenges to local authorities in terms of meeting fast evolving needs: most of the population data on which government grants are determined is woefully out of date, staff and pupil turnover in schools are higher than elsewhere in the country, fewer people are enrolled with their local GP than in the rest of Britain.

Economic growth has been an unequal process in London: we have seen a gradual process of income polarisation, whereby ever more affluent areas pull away from the rest. We know that high levels of inequality tend to lead to more crime, less civic participation and lower levels of social capital. Moreover, material deprivation can intensify conflicts over shared goods, such as social housing, childcare and employment.

Inter-generational tensions are also a significant problem for cohesion across the capital. Older people are concerned about younger people hanging around in groups on street corners. Youth crime and anti-social behaviour repeatedly came across as a major issue among residents in all three boroughs. Disenfranchised young people are also vulnerable in some communities to being recruited by political extremists, in particular from the far right and from radical religious groups. Supporting London's young people to negotiate the capital's changing economy and society is a key community cohesion challenge for policymakers.

This section has also set out how these boroughs have sought to tackle these various challenges, such as by mainstreaming community cohesion through their work, by developing a clear vision for their areas based around shared values, by improving basic service quality and seeking to improve access to scarce resources, by devolving more powers to local neighbourhoods, by facilitating cross-community contact or by delivering focused support for vulnerable young people. The next section draws on these lessons from each of our case studies to develop a holistic framework for fostering community cohesion at the local level.

## 4. Recommendations for fostering cohesion in London

There is no single magic bullet for good community relations. Social cohesion requires a sustained effort to resolve poor access to and intense competition for scarce resources, such as good jobs and social housing. Resolving or lessening material injustices, however, will not on its own be sufficient. There is also a need to work more directly at the level of attitudes and relationships.

### Lessons from our case studies

#### 1. Leadership

Local authorities have always, across the range of their policies, affected community cohesion. Sometimes this has been in a negative way, often through ignorance rather than intent. For example, the slum clearances of the post-war period were held to have weakened older social networks. The high-rise developments that replaced them are widely believed to have isolated families and affected trust and neighbourliness. However, beyond these incidental effects, local authorities have also attempted to deliberately foster cohesive communities: public spaces have been designed to encourage people to interact, and anti-racism strategies have provided leadership to challenge prejudice in the community and drive out discriminatory practices. Before the phrase 'community cohesion' came into national public policy parlance, therefore, local agencies had long been working in this space.

However, given the nature of the challenges that both London and the UK as a whole now face, the time has come for authorities to think more carefully, strategically and systematically about how to promote good relations between people from different walks of life.

Prioritisation can be put into practice in a range of different ways. As the case of Southwark shows, it is not always necessary to have a separate and distinct 'community cohesion strategy'. What is more important is that there is clear political and managerial leadership on the issue such that cohesion issues are mainstreamed into the work of all departments and local bodies. One way of providing this leadership is by making cohesion a prominent component of the local Community Strategy, which is adopted by all members of the Local Strategic Partnership. In doing this, however, it is important to focus on how success will be measured and to have clear expectations of all the agencies involved.

Prioritisation can also be achieved by employing senior officers whose role it is to coordinate and monitor work on cohesion and think strategically about how local agencies are affecting it.

Finally, as in Barking and Dagenham, putting cohesion under the remit of the Leader of the Council sends an important signal about how seriously the local political leadership takes the issue, a message that should filter down through the staff structure.

#### 2. Tackling material deprivation and improving basic services

Community tensions emerge very often because of real or perceived inequalities in the distribution of scarce resources, and because of frustration with the quality of local services. As we saw in Barking and Dagenham, the lack of affordable housing in London is one crucial driver of this and resolving the capital's housing shortage will be essential in reducing these tensions over time. Council leadership and communications strategies can only do so much: if families are on a housing waiting list or a transfer list, living in overcrowded conditions or in temporary accommodation, they will be understandably frustrated and are likely to become resentful of others who they perceive to be doing better than they are. Explaining how the allocation system works, whatever its merits in principle, is unlikely to really address these frustrations and the sense of disempowerment that comes with them.

Frustrations with so-called 'crime and grime' issues can also heighten community tensions, as we found in Barking and Dagenham. The poor quality of the physical environment and a perceived rise in anti-social behaviour in some areas were believed to be a major factor in voters turning to the BNP. If the council is to prevent extremism of that kind, it will need to get those important

‘cleaner, safer, greener’ issues right.

Local authorities typically do not see their economic development role as linked to their community cohesion objectives, but they should. This is because ensuring that local residents can benefit from economic growth, in terms of good jobs and incomes, is likely to reduce community tensions that might otherwise exist when people are forced to compete for scarce opportunities and resources. But it is also because tackling London’s high levels of economic inactivity will bring more people into the workplace, which is an important site of shared contact between people from different backgrounds.

### **3. Tension-monitoring and ability to react**

Local agencies need to be ready for ‘trigger’ issues that might lead to underlying tensions coming out into the open. They need to get their intelligence right: if people are concerned about issues like immigration or housing, agencies need to know about it in advance; if local youths are being recruited to extreme political organisations, they need to be aware of it. This means ensuring that the council’s community engagement infrastructure is robust and that it is connected to the right people, in faith groups, across the generations and in every neighbourhood. Too often agencies have been ‘taken by surprise’ by events, such as a local election fought on immigration lines or the arrest of local youths on terrorism charges. As one officer said, councils need to be careful of a ‘veneer of cohesion’ and must not become complacent; instead they must get below the surface to understand what is concerning people.

Readiness also means having a robust system in place to communicate with key people as and when things happen. The local police have an important role here, especially with the ongoing counter-terrorism operations in the capital making it likely that further arrests will happen, which by their very nature will take local communities by surprise. There are innovative ways of keeping people informed and explaining what is happening, such as having a text messaging network in place, as in Hounslow. Wider communication during such events is also very important and in particular local figures representing the diversity of the area should be ready to provide a lead and express the need for unity and tolerance.

### **4. Promoting shared values**

Being clear about the shared values most of us share can give communities some reference points around which they can find vital common ground. Processes of engaging communities in discussions around the values that should underpin local decision-making is unlikely to yield many surprises. Most of us believe in democracy, free speech, the rule of law, religious freedom and so forth. However, the process itself might aid community cohesion by demonstrating how much, for all our differences, most people agree on the basics of how we should all live together. Moreover, as in Barking and Dagenham, such a process can help local authorities understand which values people prioritise and the kind of language they express them in.

Being explicit about the basic principles underpinning the way we live can help to set parameters around the activities and attitudes that are desirable and those that are intolerable. This is particularly important in dealing with the controversial issue of political extremism. In order to understand what is extreme, we need to know what is not extreme and what it is that most of us from all backgrounds value about our community.

Once these values are set out, they can help to orientate the local authority’s response to different events. For example, there were calls in Southwark to celebrate St George’s Day. The council acceded to this, but wanted to avoid these events being captured by the far right and used for political ends. It helped facilitate the event but also provided guidance and responsible leadership in seeking to guide debate in the borough about what ‘Englishness’ meant. It did this, often touching on sensitive issues, through cultural activities and a broader consultation and dissemination exercise.

There is also a role for local authorities in communicating these shared values, in particular in combating extremism and prejudice. The role of the local media is particularly important here. Research has shown that adverse media headlines around issues like terrorism, asylum and immigration can very quickly spread myths and inflame community tensions (Lewis 2005). Establishing an ongoing conversation with local news editors was shown in Hounslow to have significantly changed the nature of reports appearing in the local press. There will always be a healthy tension between a free press and local politicians, but it is important that everyone understands the effect of their actions on wider community tensions and that they do not inadvertently stir up problems through sensationalist headlines.

### **5. Establishing a framework for social capital**

Fostering interaction and 'bridging' social capital between different groups is one of the key drivers of community cohesion. There are a number of ways in which the case study boroughs approached this, but one that showed particularly great promise was the promotion of active citizenship. By providing information, training and material resources like rooms and stationery, the Active Citizens Hub in Southwark is providing a basic infrastructure that should increase the number of residents becoming actively involved in their communities, as school governors, as magistrates, as formal or informal volunteers. This should mean that more people are able to interact and have contact with people from different backgrounds to their own.

Another key method of promoting social capital is through area devolution and neighbourhood management. Every borough was experimenting in different ways of doing this, but there are some clear keys to success:

- Areas should reflect local communities and existing local territorial identities. People have to recognise and identify with the area if an area-based structure is to get more people engaged in local affairs.
- Most of the boroughs found that a focus on the 'cleaner, safer, greener' agenda, such as by providing funds to deal with problems of crime, traffic and rubbish, was the best way to get 'quick wins' and engage local residents.
- All local partners should be brought together, through a form of neighbourhood-level strategic partnership. People want to be able to turn up and discuss whatever issue concerns them most and do not want to be told they need to go through a different local structure to get answers or action.

One final way of fostering interaction is through cultural and sporting events that genuinely bring people together. It is crucial that councils continue to support events that celebrate different group identities, but it is also vital that these are open to and communicated to everyone. Moreover local authorities should look to existing popular events, such as the Dagenham Town Show, as opportunities to promote shared experiences.

### **6. Promoting a shared sense of belonging**

As we have seen, creating a framework through which people can identify with one another as residents of a common place and in which each can feel they belong, is an important way of promoting social cohesion.

In practical terms this involves two strands of work.

First, as with shared values, a local authority should use its public voice to articulate an inclusive understanding of its area's identity. In other words, this is an area that is home to many different people, but they can all feel that it is home. This can be done through campaigns to raise participation in local activities by appealing to a sense of local pride. Important and distinctive local landmarks or iconic buildings that are valued by people from all different backgrounds can be used to symbolise that inclusive local identity.

Of course, in London this is made especially complex by the fact that boroughs are political units



within a large city, and may their existing geographical identities may not resonate with residents. For this reason, the Mayor of London's recent campaign '7 Million Londoners, 1 London' was a welcome attempt to emphasise and promote a cosmopolitan, city-wide identity. However, boroughs can also appeal to more localised, neighbourhood-based identities as a way of promoting a shared sense of belonging.

Second, shared identity formation requires a basic structural framework in place, which returns to the earlier point about social capital formation. Shared identities will not develop if people do not mix in their local schools, neighbourhoods, public spaces and workplaces. Shared action and shared identity feed off one another in a mutually supportive way.

### **7. Supporting young people**

Over the course of this research what came across repeatedly was the importance of London's young people to the cohesion of its communities. Disenfranchised youth, living in neighbourhoods with poor youth facilities and nothing to do, tend to hang around the streets, causing anxiety for others even if they are not actually doing anything harmful. Moreover, young people who are denied opportunities for housing or better paid work in a city that is by and large doing very well are likely to become vulnerable to involvement in crime or anti-social behaviour and, in a small minority of cases, receptive to the messages of extreme political groups.

In response, local authorities need to do the following:

- First, they need to turn to root causes and do what they can to help young people have access to decent jobs, skills and training.
- Second, they need to make sure that there is a good framework of youth facilities and educational opportunities in place to give young people positive things to do and also to provide them with positive role models and pathways through which to gain status and self-esteem. By having insufficient youth facilities, we risk storing up difficulty for the future.
- Finally, they need to have systems in place to intervene when things go wrong. There are some young people who will need intensive support if they are to avoid a life of crime or trouble. These youngsters are generally known to authorities including youth offending teams, social services, and the police. They need to be referred to supportive programmes that can help get them back on track and equip them for moving ahead in life. The model of detached outreach as used in Hounslow has been shown to be very effective in working with particular individuals and in reducing youth crime rates in targeted neighbourhoods.

Bearing all of the above lessons in mind, in the box on the following page we suggest a policy framework for local authorities.

## A Community cohesion policy framework for local authorities

- *Leadership.* Community cohesion should be mainstreamed throughout the work of Local Strategic Partnerships by ensuring high-level responsibility for delivery and awareness throughout partner organisations of how their work affects community cohesion.
- *Tackling material deprivation and improving basic services.* Cohesion depends on improving the fairness of the distribution of material resources, including jobs and houses. Local agencies should also focus on delivering good quality public services: issues such as crime and the quality of the local environment really matter and feed into community tensions. While resolving these questions is far beyond the capacity of local agencies alone, they should play their part.
- *Tension monitoring and ability to react.* Local agencies need to be ready for 'trigger' issues that might lead to underlying tensions coming out into the open. They need to get their intelligence right: if people are concerned about issues like immigration and housing, agencies need to know about it in advance. This means ensuring that the council's community engagement infrastructure is robust and that they are connected to the right people, in faith groups, across the generations and in every neighbourhood. They also need to be ready to communicate with key community stakeholders quickly should an event pose a challenge to community relations.
- *Promoting shared values.* Being clear about shared values can give communities reference points around which they can find vital common ground. Local authorities should consult residents about the values they believe are important. Once those values are clear, they need to orientate local action and be communicated in language that resonates with local people. Local authorities should develop partnerships with local media institutions so that they are aware of the impact they have on community relations.
- *Establishing a framework for social capital.* Fostering interaction between different groups and individuals is one of the key drivers of community cohesion. Local authorities can do this in three main ways:
  - i. *Active citizenship:* increasing the number of residents becoming actively involved in their communities, as school governors, as magistrates, as formal or informal volunteers. This should mean that more people are able to interact and have contact with people from different backgrounds to their own.
  - ii. *Neighbourhood devolution:* devolving more powers to the local neighbourhood level to make decision-making more transparent and to ensure that services are designed around communities' needs. They should bring together all local agencies in local neighbourhood partnerships.
  - iii. *Culture and sport:* fostering interaction through cultural and sporting events that genuinely bring people together.
- *Promoting a shared sense of belonging.* Creating a framework through which people can identify with one another as residents of a common place, in which each can feel they belong, is an important way of promoting social cohesion. A local authority should also use its public voice to articulate an inclusive understanding of the area's local identity, such as through campaigns to raise civic participation.
- *Supporting young people.* Local agencies need to continue to engage with and support young people, and be ready to intervene proactively when things go wrong. They need to ensure that young people have access to decent jobs and opportunities. A good framework of youth facilities must be in place to provide young people with positive leisure activities. And finally, supportive programmes are needed to which young people can be referred when things go wrong for them.

## Conclusion

London is very different from the rest of Britain in a number of respects: it is much more culturally diverse, its population is far more dynamic and mobile, and it is much more polarised by wealth. As such, the capital faces its own very particular challenges to community cohesion, including lower levels of neighbourliness and inter-personal trust, families in the same street living on very different incomes and lacking shared experiences, and a very rapidly changing demographic make-up in a context of growing pressures on basic resources, especially housing.

This report has sought to map out these challenges, as well as pointing out the diversity of experiences in different boroughs. We have seen how in some parts of London the principal resource challenge is around jobs and skills, while in others it is access to social housing. We have seen that while some parts of the capital are highly diverse and mixed, others (until recently) have been relatively homogenous. While in some parts of London political extremism is manifesting itself in the form of the far right, in other parts it comes in the form of extreme political Islamism. In some areas the most pressing cohesion challenges are around migration and ethnic difference, in others they are around inter-generational mistrust.

The report has highlighted a number of elements of best practice from inner and outer London. It has found that strong leadership is important in both mainstreaming cohesion throughout the local public sector and in articulating a clear set of shared values that define the kind of communities local leaders and residents want to build. In addition, promoting active citizenship and interaction in the public realm can help break down barriers between people from different backgrounds and help them identify with one another as sharing the same fate as local residents.

We have also seen the importance of continuing to work away at the root causes of community tension: prejudicial attitudes, inequalities and intense competition for scarce resources. And the report has emphasised the importance of giving London's young people a better start in life and supporting them as they navigate a changing and ever more complex city.

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## Appendix 1. List of interviewees

### **Southwark**

Madeline Green, Community Cohesion Coordinator, LB Southwark

Eamon Lally, Corporate Policy Executive, LB Southwark

Tony Coggins, South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust

Jason Nuttall, Deputy Manager, Active Citizens' Hub

Nuala Conlon, Service Manager, Community Improvement and Development Unit, LB Southwark

Laura Zauli, Youth Cohesion Worker, LB Southwark

### **Barking and Dagenham**

Heather Wills, Head of Community Services, Libraries and Heritage, LB Barking and Dagenham

Wendy Ahmun, Group Manager, Performance, Policy and Programmes, LB Barking and Dagenham

Laura Jones, Participation Manager, Housing Customer Services, LB Barking and Dagenham

Mark Tyson, Community Safety Group Manager, LB Barking and Dagenham

### **Hounslow**

Sabin Malik, Community Cohesion Coordinator, LB Hounslow

Howard Simmons, Assistant Chief Executive, LB Hounslow

Mick Brent, Manager of Detached Outreach Teams, Youth Service, LB Hounslow

Inspector Adrian Baxter, Metropolitan Police