

Harrow Strategic Partnership Executive

19th March 2009



Community Cohesion in Harrow

The HSP Executive is asked to:

1. To comment on the feedback from the research into community cohesion.
2. To consider how community cohesion can be promoted across the partnership to develop as true ambassadors for community cohesion.
3. To endorse and support the Community Cohesion Marketing Campaign.

Background

Recent MORI surveys have suggested that cohesion in Harrow is eroding, whilst the borough is improving on many other indicators.

To better understand the issues 'Ignite' consultants were commissioned to research the underlying factors affecting the perceptions of community cohesion in Harrow. Ignite's findings have been summarised within this paper.

Additionally, the paper sets out the planned Community Cohesion Marketing Campaign.

Summary of the issues

In October 2008 Ignite undertook workshop 'planning' sessions and worked with the Council's Corporate Leadership Group, some councillors, community representatives and key partners. These sessions helped plan how the subsequent staff, community and young persons workshops would be delivered.

The purpose of the workshops was to gain a better insight and understanding of the underlying issues affecting the perception of community cohesion in Harrow.

In Ignite's concluding report it found that Harrow is a community in a state of flux, accommodating some of the social and economic changes affecting UK society as a whole. They also identified issues which seemed more specific to Harrow, its history and context.

Strengths:

Ignite found that the significant number of different faiths in the borough was rarely mentioned as an issue that in itself causes tension in the community. Indeed tolerance of different faiths and ethnic groups was often cited as strength. This indicates that our efforts to raise awareness of faith diversity are working, and that the issues that do cause tension tend to override any specific faith issues.

Ignite's research identified that the following are working well in Harrow:

- **Schools** – people are proud of the diversity of Harrow schools, and particularly how they act as a model of social cohesion.

- **Community safety** – Harrow’s relatively low crime rate helps people feel safe, which in turn helps a more positive feeling about their community.
- **Under One Sky** – was cited as a powerful cohesion building initiative.
- **Street parties** (and other council-supported neighbourhood initiatives, such as Community Connects) - for many people this was a good example of local communities working together.

Issues:

The following 10 areas of ‘concern’ emerged from the workshop sessions:

1. A general sense of ‘**disequilibrium**’, a feeling among some that a ‘golden age’ of community stability has passed, and that the Harrow community as a whole is being buffeted by significant social, economic and political change that is playing out locally.
2. Concerns about **new migrant integration**, particularly from Eastern Europe and Somalia.
3. The role of **language** is critical to successful integration.
4. A perception that **age** is a factor.
5. Concerns that new in migration may be masking some **existing racial tension**, fuelled by the rise of a strong Asian middle class in the borough.
6. Underlying issues of **deprivation**, concentrated in particular parts of the borough.
7. A perception that there is little opportunity/incentive to **connect** outside existing communities of place, faith and age, in places that the community shares.
8. A belief that the **voluntary and community sector** in Harrow could play a more central role in addressing this agenda.
9. Need to build on the success of **children and schools** (whether as physical, social or learning spaces) in building community cohesion.
10. **The role of the Council** - as a community leader and enabler.

There are many Council and partnership activities underway helping to address these challenges. We now propose to add these by leading a high profile borough-wide Community Cohesion Marketing Campaign to:

- reinforce and promote positive messages and images about the vibrant and diverse people who live and work in Harrow
- promote opportunities for people from different backgrounds to come together, for example via activities organised under the Cultural Calendar and Community Connects programme, as well as events such as Under One Sky
- breakdown common myths, for example about the allocation of resources, as mis-information can influence perceptions around community cohesion.

Javed Khan
Director of Community & Cultural Services

Andrew Hadfield
Head of Communications