

COMMUNITY COHESION

OUR RESPONSIBILITY



COMMISSION FOR
RACIAL EQUALITY



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Introduction

Community cohesion is currently high on the political agenda, in large part, because of the violent community disorders in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham last summer. The official reports¹ that followed these disturbances described fragmented and polarised communities lacking a strong sense of civic identity and social values.

This briefing paper summarises some of the recent initiatives implemented to help build cohesive communities. In particular, it looks at what various stakeholders, including the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (NACAB) and the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), are doing to foster a multicultural society in which each person enjoys equal rights while also sharing the responsibility for strengthening communities.

What is community cohesion?

In a recent report by the CRE, community cohesion is set against the following background:

Britain today has 56 million people, speaking over 300 different languages, and practising at least 14 different faiths. It could be a richly diverse and stable society. However, the disturbances in summer 2001 suggest that diversity is dividing communities in some places, that people from different ethnic groups have little to do with each other, and that attitudes towards people from different ethnic groups are hardening.²

It has been suggested that a cohesive community³ is one where:

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

Government initiatives

Since last summer the government has set up an inter-departmental ministerial group on public order and community cohesion. Within the Home Office the Community Cohesion Unit oversees initiatives on building community cohesion. In addition to the ministerial group, there are several advisory groups and taskforces such as the Community Cohesion Review Team.

In responding to the challenge facing us, the government has focused its attentions on regenerating communities, improving public services and raising school standards.

- An extra £7million was made available by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) and the Home Office to help groups and individuals run additional summer activities.
- Regional coordinators have been appointed in the nine Government Office regions in England. In turn, they have deployed community facilitators to foster dialogue within and between communities in areas which are experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing, community conflict.
- At a national level the government will assess the impact of proposed policies on community cohesion.
- Through its comprehensive spending review, the government has reaffirmed its commitment to delivering high quality public services for all, particularly with regard to education. Education achievement is particularly low in the areas affected by last year's riots.
- Proposals outlined in this year's Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill initiated a nationwide debate about citizenship, civic identity, shared values, rights and responsibilities.
- The Local Government Association (LGA), together with the CRE and the Home Office, issued draft guidance to local authorities on mainstreaming and promoting community cohesion within their functions and as part of their community development plans in future. The final paper will be published shortly.

NACAB Initiatives

The Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) service has a major part to play in bringing about better relations between individuals and between different communities. The aim is to help people – no matter who they are – to exercise their rights and to obtain fair treatment under the law, thereby improving their lives. NACAB act as a voice for those clients whose experience of harassment and discrimination is hidden or denied.

In March 2002 NACAB produced *Bridging communities – a race equality action guide for Citizens Advice Bureaux*. The guide is part of a programme of initiatives across the CAB service to develop its racial equality work. The guide contains very practical suggestions for how citizens advice bureaux can become more actively involved in local partnerships that promote community cohesion, as well as gathering hard evidence of the effects of racism within their communities. The guide provides a variety of resources including template advice columns for use in local newspapers dealing with discrimination problems, and a summary of current race relations legislation.

Later this year, *Advice Guide*, the CAB information website, will be translated into a range of community languages (www.adviceguide.org.uk). Citizens advice bureaux across the UK have also received 'Report Racism – CAB can help' posters. The multilingual posters in 11 different languages are a clear statement that the CAB service is serious about tackling racism. Many CABx are already active members of multi-agency reporting schemes for racist incidents, and more are joining as a result of the 'Bridging Communities' initiative. Below are some of the recent CAB initiatives to support communities bridging divisions.

- Staffordshire CAB has joined with a number of local organisations in a third party reporting scheme for victims of hate crime. Forms are available at 40 venues including the bureaux. These are then forwarded to the minorities liaison officer in Staffordshire Police.
- Brent CAB was awarded a grant by the local Health Action Zone, to enhance services for local community groups . This

has led to the introduction of advice and information sessions at four local refugee and Muslim community groups whose members have suffered the escalation of harassment and expressions of religious hatred. These sessions are conducted in a variety of languages including Arabic, Tamil and Somali. To give these initiatives further support, a dedicated advice line is operating Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

- Radnor CAB wrote to all the Asian take-aways in its area last year following 11 September, giving information about the CAB, and reassuring people of the help and support the CAB could provide. Many months later a Bengali man came to the CAB, having kept this letter, and had a long discussion with the manager about the harassment he had experienced. He said that he had not talked so fully or in such a way to anyone since he arrived in the UK.
- Stoke-on-Trent CAB has seen the arrival of asylum seekers for more than two years, and more are expected to continue to be dispersed in this area. Significant proportions of those asylum seekers are receiving positive decisions on their applications and are choosing to settle in Stoke. With funding from the West Midlands Crime Reduction and Social Inclusion Unit, Stoke-on-Trent CAB convened a conference to generate city-wide strategic planning for service provision for refugees. The conference identified gaps in service provision and produced a report for the Local Strategic Partnership to form part of its community cohesion agenda.
- Leigh CAB reported a case of an asylum seeker whose daughter was threatened at knifepoint due to her race on the way home from school. NASS initially refused to consider moving the woman and her family without a lot of paperwork being completed. Following CAB intervention NASS agreed to move the woman, but asked the CAB to coordinate a temporary emergency move. The CAB approached Refugee Action for help with finding accommodation but faced further delays as Refugee Action thought NASS should handle the issue via the accommodation provider.

These are just some examples of the many ways in which the CAB service can act to promote social cohesion. CABx contribute to community cohesion by providing advice, social policy work and giving volunteers from ethnic minority backgrounds the chance to support their communities. 6.4% of volunteers are from ethnic minority communities. The CAB service works in partnership with public and voluntary bodies to promote the common good of the whole community. CAB evidence can help local and national policy makers see how their policies and services need to respond to the challenge.

CRE initiatives

The CRE also has an important role to play in the government's broad agenda on inclusion, equality and cohesion. Our four strategic priorities will lead our work for the next few years. These are to:

- enable delivery of the Statutory Code of Practice on the Duty to Promote Race Equality in the public sector;
- connect with all communities on racial equality issues;
- promote racial equality in the private sector by working in partnership with local communities; and
- modernise the CRE.

We will identify and work with key players nationally, regionally and locally to take forward the community cohesion agenda. We want to particularly focus on cross-community activities and models that will enable functional, cohesive communities across Britain.

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 provides an opportunity for public bodies to promote community cohesion, particularly in relation to the third aspect of the general duty: promoting good relations between different racial groups.

RACE RELATIONS (AMENDMENT) ACT 2000

Key aspects of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 came into force this year. Over 40,000 public authorities now have a

duty (known as the general duty) to tackle racial discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, and promote good relations between people from different racial groups. The third of these will be central to the work that local authorities do on community cohesion.

Many of these public bodies also have specific duties to produce race equality schemes or policies, and to monitor the main areas of their staff arrangements. This should improve the quality of all public services, a key part of the government's plan for building cohesive communities, and provide a huge opportunity to improve race relations throughout the public sector.

The CRE's promotional work is supported by a law enforcement role which gives it a regulatory framework to make sure that the duty is put into practice.

In working to remove barriers to good race relations and promote community cohesion, the CRE will:

- play a leading role and work in partnership with others in shaping policy and practice in the areas of community cohesion, regeneration and citizenship;
- reposition itself, and in its work with, and within, communities, to work towards the elimination of racial discrimination, and promote equal opportunities and good race relations. Importantly, we will refresh our relationships with ethnic minority communities to make sure that their concerns are properly heard across government, and to promote ethnic minority involvement with the national political culture as well as local civic culture;
- work to involve white communities (particularly in the most deprived areas of Britain) in discussions and cross-community action;
- modernise the partnership with our network of local racial equality councils, including an investment system which is focused on outcomes;
- aim to add value by funding innovative local and regional projects, including those that tackle the needs of young

people and women. Young people were prominent in the disturbances last summer, and their concerns must be at the heart of national and local policy solutions; and

- work to improve the representation of asylum seekers in the media, work through partner agencies to provide a support network for asylum seekers, and ensure that public duty principles are rooted in the policy framework for asylum seekers.

Joint Initiatives by NACAB and the CRE

RURAL RACISM

NACAB and the CRE have been working together to tackle various issues. One of the main areas is rural racism. While the community cohesion debate has centred primarily on urban areas, it is important to recognise the role played by rural racism in community tensions. It is now ten years since the CRE published Eric Jay's report⁴ on racism in rural areas which highlighted the hostility, discrimination and social isolation experienced by people from ethnic minority communities living in the rural South West. However, the 'no problem here' attitude remains entrenched.

A further research study is currently under way. Based on contact and consultations with over 250 organisations the report will map rural racism across the UK, and will highlight the failure of rural institutions to offer appropriate services to their ethnic minority residents. Examples of this include lack of access to information and advice, inappropriate and culturally insensitive services, lack of equal opportunities policies, communication and language barriers, and a general lack of flexibility in the delivery of services.

The report also will show that visible minorities are much more likely to be vulnerable to harassment and are less likely to take action against the perpetrators for fear of reprisals. Ethnic minority people are rarely represented on key local decision-making bodies, and governmental agencies have tended to perpetuate a mono-cultural view of rural areas.

Useful websites

Information about Citizens Advice Bureaux activities can be found at **www.nacab.org.uk**. *Bridging Communities – a race equality action guide for citizens advice bureaux* can be downloaded from the same website.

CRE activities can be found at **www.cre.org.uk**. If you would like to know more about what the CRE is doing in relation to community cohesion you can contact the Countries, Regions and Communities Directorate.

For general advice about racial harassment visit **www.adviceguide.org.uk**.

Activities concerning the Community Cohesion Unit and the Race Equality Unit can be found at **www.homeoffice.gov.uk**.

The government's vision for narrowing the gap between deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country can be found at **www.neighbourhood.gov.uk**.

For information on racial equality initiatives across the European Union visit the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia at **www.eumc.eu.int**.

NOTES

- 1 Burnley Task Force. *Burnley Speaks, Who Listens? Burnley Task Force Report* (2001)
Home Office. *Community Cohesion. A Report of the Independent Review Team, chaired by Ted Cantle*. London (2001)
– *Building Cohesive Communities: A Report of the Ministerial Group on Public Order and Community Cohesion*. London (2001)
Ritchie, D. *Oldham Independent Review: One Oldham, one future*. Government Office for the North West. London (2001)
- 2 CRE. *A Place for us all: Learning from Bradford, Oldham and Burnley*. (2002)
- 3 Local Government Association, Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, Home Office and Commission for Racial Equality. *Draft Guidance on Community Cohesion*. (2002)
- 4 Jay, E. *Keep Them in Birmingham: Challenging racism in South-West England*. CRE (1992)



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Racial Equality**

Published September 2002
ISBN 1 85442 467 X
Photo: Joanne O'Brien
Printed by Belmont Press