



Executive Summary of the UK Home Office *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team* Chaired by Ted Cattle.

Our Findings

Whilst the physical segregation of housing estates and inner city areas came as no surprise, the team was particularly struck by the depth of polarisation of our towns and cities. The extent to which these physical divisions were compounded by so many other aspects of our daily lives, was very evident. Separate educational arrangements, community and voluntary bodies, employment, places of worship, language, social and cultural networks, means that many communities operate on the basis of a series of parallel lives. These lives often do not seem to touch at any point, let alone overlap and promote any meaningful interchanges.

A Muslim of Pakistani origin summed this up:

*'When I leave this meeting with you
I will go home and not see another white face
until I come back here next week'*

A young man from a white council estate said:

*'I never met anyone on this estate who wasn't
like us from around here'*

There is little wonder that the ignorance about each others' communities can easily grow into fear; especially where this is exploited by extremist groups determined to undermine community harmony and foster divisions.

Some communities had responded to this challenge with vigour and determination, and had done so over a long period of time. This commitment was much less evident elsewhere, or was not shared by the principal agencies and community leaders. Indeed, some agencies were not used to working together, or had not even met together previously.

But meetings are one thing, an open and honest dialogue are quite another. We found little evidence of such a debate and rather, a reluctance to confront the issues and to find solutions. It was evident that this failure ran through most institutions, including the political parties and even voluntary organisations.

In such a climate, there has been little attempt to develop clear values which focus on what it means to be a citizen of a modern multi-racial Britain and many still look backwards to some supposedly halcyon days of a mono-cultural society, or alternatively look to their country of origin for some form of identity.

Unfortunately, the programmes devised to tackle the needs of many disadvantaged and disaffected groups, whilst being well intentioned and sometimes inspirational, often seemed to institutionalise the problems. The plethora of initiatives and programmes, with their baffling array of outcomes, boundaries, timescales and other conditions, seemed to ensure divisiveness and a perception of unfairness in virtually every section of the communities we visited.

We were inspired by the many young people we spoke to, but they seemed to be participating in regeneration and other programmes against the odds and with very limited and fragile resources. Many community based schemes – including those developed and run by statutory agencies – seemed to be clinging on to the margins of anything that resembled a longer term strategy.

Area based regeneration initiatives clearly have a role to play, but in many cases they again reinforced the separation of communities and we saw few attempts to tackle problems on a thematic basis, which could have served to unite different groups. The development of cross-cultural contact and the promotion of community

cohesion, was not valued as an end in itself. This also applied generally to the education sector and, whilst we witnessed some tremendous examples of crosscultural development in particular schools, this was often not supported by the wider community and schools simply had to accept the cards that parental choices had dealt for them.

We recognised that some communities felt particularly disadvantaged and that the lack of hope and the frustration borne out of the poverty and deprivation all around them, meant that disaffection would grow. Yet they were not always well targeted, nor even identified. For example, some black and ethnic minorities felt that they were always identified without sufficient differentiation and 'problematized' as a result. Similarly, some poorer white communities felt left out completely.

Opportunities are also far from equal, with many differences in real terms, in respect of housing, employment and education. Good practice could be found and obstacles were generally overcome where there was the will to do so. This was not always evident and the means to develop and spread good practice did not generally exist. The same observation can be made in respect of policing, where there was not only inconsistency in their approach but also in the extent to which they felt supported and part of a positive vision for the local area.

Southall

The Community Cohesion Review Team (CCRT) was set up to identify good practice, key policy issues and new and innovative thinking in the field of community cohesion. To this end, the team visited both areas that experienced disturbances such as Oldham, Burnley and Bradford and areas that didn't experience similar riots such as Southall, Birmingham and Leicester.

In Southall it was clear to us that there was a pride in their community and this was evident amongst many of the residents. It was also notable that diversity was seen as a positive thing and this was shown in schools where for instance pupils learnt about different religions and cultures and on the streets where festivals of all faiths were

celebrated. This positive approach to diversity was adopted by the political, civic and faith leaders who held regular meetings with each other to discuss issues affecting the community and this openness and honesty meant that rumours and misunderstandings were less likely to gain credence and ferment resentment or jealousy.

The police in Southall had also made great efforts to get to know their community with the emphasis very much on community or 'micro' beat officers. They also benefitted from a robust network of people they called 'interveners' who had the credibility in a diverse community at times of tension to be able to counter myth and replace rumour with fact.

One activity which sadly seems to be present within all the communities we visited was drug dealing. Drug dealing was also not confined to the poorer areas we visited. We were told that Southall, which is relatively prosperous compared to other places we saw, was the cheapest place in Britain to buy heroin.

We were told of the press publishing readers letters, usually unattributed, which were seen as racist in their content, or writing reports on crime which implied that black or ethnic minority people were responsible for the majority of all crime. Conversely in areas such as Southall the local press had a very responsible attitude to these issues and were seen to be helping to promote cohesion throughout the community.

Our Aim

We believe that there is an urgent need to promote community cohesion, based upon a greater knowledge of, contact between, and respect for, the various cultures that now make Great Britain such a rich and diverse nation.

It is also essential to establish a greater sense of citizenship, based on (a few) common principles which are shared and observed by all sections of the community. This concept of citizenship would also place a higher value on cultural differences.

Our strategy

In order to develop some shared principles of citizenship and ensure ownership across the

community, we propose that a well resourced national debate, heavily influenced by younger people, be conducted on an open and honest basis. This should also be used to develop a solid and permanent infrastructure to give younger people a bigger voice and stake in democratic activity.

The resulting principles of a new citizenship should be used to develop a more coherent approach to education, housing, regeneration, employment and other programmes.

In order to combat the fear and ignorance of different communities which stems from the lack of contact with each other we propose that each area should prepare a local community cohesion plan, as a significant component of its Community Strategy.

This should include the promotion of cross cultural contact between different communities at all levels, foster understanding and respect, and break down barriers. The opportunity should be taken to develop a programme of 'myth busting'.

We are aware that reports like ours can too easily gather dust on the shelves of our community leaders. This may be, in part, due to the resistance to change, but is also due to the lack of confidence that some people feel in tackling difficult issues like these. They may also be unaware of what can be done, or what has been done elsewhere. We therefore believe that

a new Community Cohesion Task Force should be established to oversee the development of local community cohesion strategies and the implementation of the proposals set out in this report. This is a very considerable agenda, cutting across a wide range of local and national agencies and the Task Force should be powerfully positioned, with the full weight of ministerial support behind it.

Our Proposals

Our proposals will help to ensure that structural reform takes place and 'mainstream' the process of community cohesion. These are mainly practical measures which can be put in place by a range of agencies. They are set out under the following headings:

- Peoples and Values
- Political and Community Leadership
- Political Organisations
- Strategic Partnerships
- Regeneration Programmes, Initiatives and Funding
- Integration and Segregation
- Younger People
- Education
- Community Organisations
- Disadvantaged and Disaffected Communities
- Policing
- Housing
- Employment
- The Press and Media