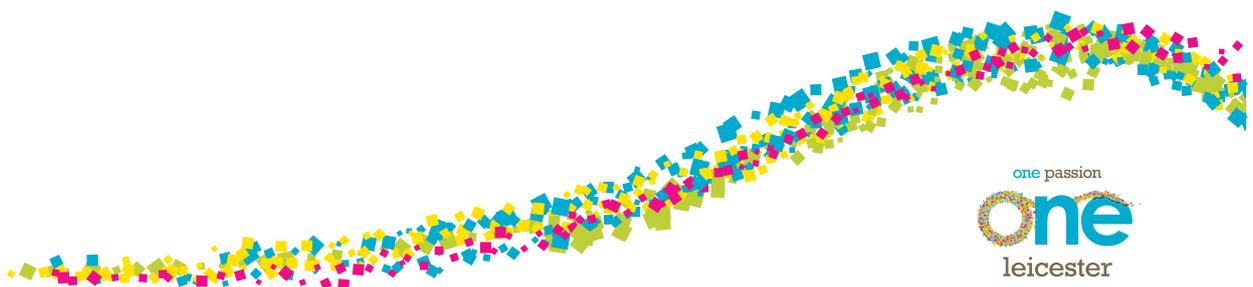


# Explaining Community Cohesion in Leicester



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## What is community cohesion?

Good community relations don't just happen and can't be taken for granted. Instead they must be worked at and actively encouraged. This activity has become known as 'community cohesion'.

It's really about communities getting on well together.

'Integration' is about communities – both white and ethnic minority communities – adapting to each other. This usually happens after a long period of time.

Community cohesion differs from 'equalities'. Equalities is about treating individuals fairly and with respect, and includes the legal duty on the Council and government bodies to eliminate discrimination on the grounds of gender, race, disability, age, sexuality and belief.

Equalities and community cohesion are linked in that if an individual experiences lack of respect, unfairness or discrimination at a personal level, then they are more likely to see these same issues at a community level as well.

## The approach to community cohesion in Leicester

- community cohesion is about building relationships across different communities in our city
- community cohesion is a priority for the city because of the diversity of Leicester's population
- community cohesion involves both our white community and the ethnic minority communities
- it also includes women, disabled people, and gay, lesbian and bisexual people plus asylum seekers and refugees and new economic migrants
- Leicester's approach to community cohesion is based on the social-capital model, i.e. it's about improving relationships across different communities, in the belief that this will build understanding and, eventually, acceptance
- Leicester's approach also recognises that many communities share common concerns around poverty and deprivation. These issues are the responsibility of city's Sustainable Community Strategy
- Community cohesion relies on influencing all council and government organisations in Leicester to consider how their services may impact on those from different backgrounds or from different communities
  - For example the needs of a person living in the inner city who has recently arrived from another country and has limited English may be very different from someone living on the largely white outer estates with a background of long term unemployment, few skills and poor health. All the same, both people need to be treated with respect and understanding. They need to have somewhere to live where they feel safe and 'at home', they need to find a job and be able to get there, to get their children into school, and to have their health needs met.

## Background research on community cohesion in Leicester 2002-2004

After 2001 the Leicester City Council commissioned the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) to report on community relations in the city.

The IDeA's Report praised the city for the richness and depth of its festivals and cultural activities and the role played by its faith communities. However it warned of problems arising from parallel lives, often caused by patterns of housing, unemployment or poverty; a sense of neglect on the outer estates; competition between groups for resources; and an inner city identified by different ethnicities, cultures and faiths.

Following this research a Community Cohesion Project Team was set up which consulted the people of Leicester on the wider meaning of community cohesion in a series of community workshops.

This consultation found that the glue that kept the city together was around strong and positive relationships, whether they were based on family, friends or neighbours; local, community or faith activities; or within clubs and organisations. It also found that the diversity of Leicester's population was seen as the city's strength and defining characteristic.

However not all relationships in the city were so positive. Tensions were played out between communities in relation to the many common issues facing the city – economic and social disadvantage, crime and anti-social behaviour, low educational achievement, inadequate housing, poor health and unemployment.

There was a desire to see these issues improved along with more joined-up working between agencies and inequalities and discrimination, and inter-generational issues addressed.

## Community Cohesion Strategy

The findings of the IDeA's research along with that of the Community and Sector Consultation led to the development of Leicester's first Community Cohesion Strategy 2004-2009. In 2008 a range of community cohesion events, meetings and a community cohesion conference fed into a review of the Strategy and it is now being updated for 2009-2014.

There are five themes to Leicester's Community Cohesion Strategy based around the idea of 'learning to live together':

- Living with others
- Living with children and young people
- Living in Leicester
- Living without tensions
- Living with good information.

## Implementing the Strategy 2004-2009

There are three strands to the activities surrounding community cohesion in Leicester:

1. The continuing and important work of voluntary, community and faith groups and organisations within the city in supporting people and communities in need.
  - Examples of this work are Refugee Action in supporting asylum seekers and refugees, or Age Concern or Red Cross in providing services and activities to more vulnerable people and communities in the city.
2. The on-going work of the City Council, government and public sector agencies that provide services to people in the city. It involves an awareness of how services reach and or are delivered to different communities or individuals in the city.
  - Examples include the support given to celebrating the different faith festivals in the city, the support given to ethnic minority people when settling into housing estates, or the tendency of people from an ethnic minority background to opt for independent budgets when provided with care services. It also includes support for learning English, and putting on activities for children and young people during school holidays.
3. The specific work of the City Council in supporting community cohesion in the city. There have been several significant programmes and projects over recent years:
  - a Pathfinder Project in 2003-2004 which supported young people in the city in developing cultural awareness and conflict resolution skills
  - the City Council's Community Cohesion Fund 2004-2006 which supported 20 major projects aimed at bringing people from different communities together including luncheon clubs from different areas in the city, school twinning programmes, street sports, establishing inter-faith relationships between young people, and a 'good neighbour' project in the outer estates.
  - The Creative Partnerships programme 2005-2006 which supported young from different backgrounds in theatre, the arts, and street based sporting activities.

## **Community Cohesion Executive Group and Community Cohesion Forum**

A Community Cohesion Executive Group is responsible for the oversight of community cohesion policy in Leicester while a larger Community Cohesion Forum promotes community cohesion across the city. They both report to the Leicester Partnership via the Stronger Communities Partnership.

Members of the Executive Group come from the voluntary, community and faiths sectors, from the police and health services, as well as from the Council. The City Council's Cabinet Lead for Community Cohesion chairs the Group. The Forum is open to all interested organisations within the city.

## **Community Cohesion and Leicester City Council**

Community cohesion has neither a council department nor any significant budget. The administrative arrangements and policy support are located in the Chief Executive's Office. However because of its importance to the city, the City Council has:

- made community cohesion a priority within the Council's corporate plans since 2003
- made it a cross-cutting theme in Leicester's Community Strategy 2006-2009 and made it a theme in 'One Leicester' (2008) - the 25 year vision for the city.
- made it a priority in the Local Area Agreement 2006-2008 and 2008-2011.

The Council was nationally recognised for community cohesion through two local government Beacon Awards – one for Community Cohesion (2003-2004) and the other for Culture and Sport for Hard to Reach Groups (2006-2007). In 2005 the City Council became a foundation member of the Institute for Community Cohesion and in 2007 it established a Cabinet portfolio for community cohesion.

## **Community Cohesion work 2008 onwards**

Much of the work on community cohesion in Leicester is about encouraging and supporting the implementation of the Strategy mentioned above. This includes

- the work of the voluntary, community and faith organisations
- mainstreaming of community cohesion within service areas
- supporting the direct community cohesion work of the City Council including its strategic, policy and research objectives. Priorities for 2008-2009 include:
  - funding specific small-scale projects and programmes. Priority is given to young people, to those people living on the outer estates and to community cohesion activities at ward level
  - communicating the community cohesion message across the city.

## **Conclusion: community cohesion in Leicester**

The vision of community cohesion in Leicester is to ensure the city is a place which is positive about diversity and where harmonious relationships are built between and within all communities. This means that we try to tackle social tensions; support both younger and older people; address poverty and deprivation; and the diversity of people's backgrounds is celebrated as part of the quality and richness of life.

It is a complex and challenging, but ultimately rewarding, task to make sure the city lives out the aims and ambitions of the people as expressed in the One Leicester vision for Leicester. It is part of a process of learning to live together.

Prepared by Trish Roberts-Thomson  
Lead Officer for Community Cohesion  
Chief Executive's Office  
Leicester City Council  
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