



making connections

Report on the voluntary
sector's contribution to
Birmingham's Community
Cohesion Strategy

bvsc
the centre for voluntary action

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executive summary

This report sets out the contribution of the voluntary sector in helping deliver outcomes against Birmingham's Community Cohesion Strategy

This report is based on a programme of action research commissioned by BVSC with funding from Be Birmingham and undertaken by Local Economy Solutions Ltd and MEL research.

This report is intended to provide a valuable resource for voluntary sector organisations and residents seeking to improve community cohesion in their own localities. In particular, it provides an extensive range of case studies on how voluntary and community organisations have sought to tackle different issues, thereby providing a basis for learning from others as to what has worked well.

The action research study was based on the following headings, which are derived from the Birmingham Community Cohesion strategy:

- Building relationships
- Community engagement
- Encouraging active citizenship
- Neighbourhood management and services
- Tackling structural disadvantages
- Tackling crime and disorder
- Developing leadership and building capacity

The research findings clearly indicate that the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) is making a significant contribution in helping deliver outcomes against Birmingham's Community Cohesion Strategy across all main areas of relevant and appropriate activity.

The main aspects of community cohesion that VCS organisations were seeking to improve were 'building good relations/encouraging interaction' which accounted for 22% of all organisations and 'engaging the community' (19%).

Building relationships

The single most important issue as far as the VCS in Birmingham is concerned revolves around the poor relationships between different cultural, ethnic and religious groups. The reasons for these poor relationships between different groups can be complex and multi-layered, but usually involve either a lack of understanding and tolerance of different community groups or that groups are not willing or able to interact with other sections of the community.

If the goal is to create more cohesive communities then clearly there must be concerted and continuing efforts to break down the barriers that have resulted in what many VCS organisations perceive as being segregated communities in Birmingham. Increased levels of interaction appear to be fundamental to this process.

The report provides a range of examples of a number of approaches to improving relationships and breaking down barriers between different communities and groups that have worked well. The key success factors of these different approaches appear to revolve around projects that bring different groups together, build trust, build up relationships and friendships and compliment communication with others.

Community engagement

VCS organisations appear to place engagement at the heart of their activities and effective community engagement is identified as an essential prerequisite for tackling underlying community cohesion problems. Creating dialogue and providing opportunities for people to come together appear to be central to all successful engagement activities. Engagement activities have worked well where support has been built up over a long time led by organisations with a strong local presence and where activities are fun and interesting, affordable, accessible and well publicised.

Active citizenship

There is some considerable evidence from the research that active citizenship in Birmingham has been, at least initially, issue led and that very often it is only when local people are faced with a problem or issue that they become more active citizens.

Although respondents to the research didn't draw a specific correlation between active citizenship and community cohesion it is clear that many activities and developments that contribute to community cohesion have been organised and undertaken entirely on a voluntary basis. For many residents there is no core funding and a lot of voluntary time and resource is spent raising funding on a project by project basis.

Neighbourhood management

There are a wide range of successful models of community and voluntary sector organisations managing vital local services and in some cases filling a void left by inadequate statutory provision, such as the provision of Food Banks.

There are also a number of successful examples of forums that have been established to provide an effective voice for local residents to lobby for action to tackle particular concerns. A number of factors appear to be important to the success of such local forums including effective local leadership, sound methods of engaging local people, active citizenship within the local area and a threat or issue around which people in the local area can rally.

Tackling structural disadvantages

Worklessness and deprivation were the most frequently cited 'structural disadvantages'. There is a reasonably strong correlation between the geographical focus of VCS activity and the wards with the highest levels of unemployment and deprivation. However, it is perhaps not surprising that VCS activity is targeted at some of the most deprived and mixed communities in Birmingham (e.g. Nechells, Ladywood, Aston and Washwood Heath) as these tend to be the areas where funding for such activities is most likely to be available.

Tackling crime and disorder

About 14% of VCS organisations surveyed (39 organisations) specifically referred to different aspects of crime and disorder as a major community cohesion issue. Although a number of issues were referred to such as crime, anti-social behaviour, race discrimination/racial hatred, drugs and drug dealing and the activities of gangs, there was no single aspect or geography of crime and disorder that particularly stood out.

Developing leadership and building capacity

Although this was not raised as an issue, it is clear from the research that the VCS in Birmingham is contributing to the development of leadership skills amongst different groups of residents in order that they can make a more effective contribution to the work of voluntary sector organisations and community groups and by strengthening the capacity of local voluntary and community sector organisations to support residents.

Gaps

While specific gaps in activities were cited in different localities these reflected common concerns across wide areas of Birmingham, most notably:

- The need for activities that build relations between different communities, was the most commonly cited 'gap'. Many respondents felt that different groups often live very 'segregated' lives, with few activities that bring different communities together in ways that promote greater understanding and sharing of ideas;
- Appropriate support and activities for young people. Activities for young people are considered to be particularly important in engendering community cohesion. It is felt that young people need to have somewhere to go and have something to do. Several organisations also referred to difficulties with young people not in education, employment or training (NEET); and
- Lack of funding.



Funding

It is clear that cut backs in funding will have a fundamental impact on the capacity of local organisations to respond to critical community cohesion challenges. A high proportion of the examples of what has worked well set out in this report were dependent upon central government, local authority, other statutory sector, BIG Lottery or other funding pots. Any notion that some of the challenges facing different neighbourhoods can be effectively tackled without significant resources is simply not realistic.

However, it should be noted that many of the neighbourhood organisations that contributed to the research project are entirely voluntary organisations that have been very effective in either tackling specific issues or influencing public spending in line with the priorities of their areas.

Since financial resources will be tight, it will be particularly important that strong relationships are built and nurtured between community activists, grassroots groups, and community development practitioners from the public and voluntary sectors, in order that “in kind” support can be identified and developed.

Recommendations

- BVSC, on behalf of the wider partnerships, should continue to build up a databank of examples of activities/approaches that work well in addressing specific aspects of community cohesion, building on the work undertaken through this research.

- Consideration should be given to how community-level VCS organisations, groups, and active citizens are linked together, capitalising on i-volunteer¹ and the use of social networking to enable networking, communication, and sharing of good practice. This initiative could particularly target the many ‘below the radar’ organisations and groups that don’t feature on listings of VCS organisations, and would go some way towards linking them into mainstream resources such as the Volunteer Centre and its network of volunteer organisers (BRAVO).
- Funding criteria should be changed to ensure active steps are taken to encourage greater inter-group, ethnic or faith working. This could mean ensuring that funding made available for this work is done so under the condition that the activities undertaken actively include diverse groups, and encourage them to work together in supportive ways. It is important to take steps to genuinely involve the community in community development and fundamentally this means providing more opportunities to work together than has been the case in the past.
- Steps should be put in place to encourage the replication of successful models and approaches across different areas of Birmingham.

Next steps

It is proposed that BVSC discuss these findings with Be Birmingham, Birmingham City Council, the Community Cohesion Forum and members of the voluntary and community sector in Birmingham in order to put in place a plan of action which positively responds to the findings.

¹ i-volunteer was established in December 2009 by Red Foundation as a bespoke website exclusively for those interested in volunteering.

introduction

This report is based on a programme of action research commissioned by BVSC with funding from Be Birmingham and undertaken by Local Economy Solutions Ltd and MEL research.

The purpose of this programme of action research was to capture the contribution of the voluntary sector in helping deliver outcomes against Birmingham's Community Cohesion Strategy.

This report is intended to provide a valuable resource for voluntary sector organisations and residents seeking to improve community cohesion in their own localities. In particular, it provides an extensive range of case studies on how voluntary and community organisations have sought to tackle different issues, thereby providing a basis for learning from others as to what has worked well.

The first stage of the research involved a combined telephone and e-survey of people representing different voluntary and community sector organisations based in Birmingham. The survey was based on contacts contained on the BVSC Third Sector database and leads from neighbourhood managers, members of the Birmingham Community Cohesion Forum and elsewhere. This first stage survey sought views on:

- The main community cohesion issues faced in particular neighbourhoods or localities within Birmingham;
- The main aspects of community cohesion each organisation is seeking to address;

- What aspects of work being undertaken to improve community cohesion have worked well and why; and
- Gaps in current activities to address community cohesion issues.

Through this process, views relating to 195 different voluntary and community organisations based in Birmingham were captured².

This process, together with interviews with a number of neighbourhood managers and contact with others, provided a mechanism for identifying potential case studies of 'what has worked well' for more in depth qualitative research.

A total of 125 examples of approaches that have worked well in tackling particular aspects of community cohesion within Birmingham have been developed through a programme of case study interviews with 90 different voluntary and community sector organisations in Birmingham.

These case study interviews sought views on:

- Specific approaches taken to community cohesion activities;
- Evidence of outcomes together with perceptions of outcomes;
- Why particular approaches have worked well and other approaches not so well;
- Specific evidence of good practice;
- Lessons learnt;
- Critical success factors;
- Perceptions of strengths and weaknesses in relation to local community cohesion activity; and
- How such activities can be improved in the future.

² Significantly more responses were received than this, with more than one person representing particular organisations responding in some cases

Based on this work 23 case studies have been included in this report in order to highlight different approaches that have worked well in relation to tackling different community cohesion issues in different parts of Birmingham and in the context of different circumstances. These case studies are set out in sections 3 to 10 of this report under the following headings, which are derived from the Birmingham Community Cohesion strategy:

- Removing structural disadvantage
 - Worklessness
 - Housing
 - Environment
 - Social care
 - Education
 - Health
 - Deprivation
- Community Engagement
- Encouraging Active Citizenship
- Building Relationships
- Managing Neighbourhoods and Services
- Developing Leadership and Building Capacity
- Tackling Crime and Disorder.

The above research was supplemented with a programme of workshops and other information gathering activities with residents involved in community cohesion activity in order to evaluate the effectiveness and impacts of such activity. Specifically this involved:

- Two interactive workshops/focus groups; and
- Fifty 'case study' interviews with individuals involved in local community cohesion activity using a combination of face to face and telephone interviews.

The results of this research are set out in section 11 of this report.

key outcomes from Stage One survey

Profile of respondents

Views from respondents representing 195 different voluntary and community sector organisations within Birmingham were gathered through the combined Birmingham Community Cohesion telephone and e-survey.

These respondents represented voluntary and community sector organisations of all sizes, but mainly very small organisations in terms of numbers of paid staff - more than 70% had less than 10 paid staff, with 29% having no paid staff.

Table 2.1: Number of employees

| Size category | Number | % |
|---------------|------------|-------------|
| None | 57 | 29% |
| 1-4 | 45 | 23% |
| 5-9 | 36 | 18% |
| 10-24 | 29 | 15% |
| 25-49 | 8 | 4% |
| 50-249 | 15 | 8% |
| 250+ | 3 | 2% |
| Not known | 4 | 2% |
| Total | 195 | 100% |

In terms of numbers of volunteers, again respondents represented voluntary and community sector organisations of all sizes. One third (33%) of organisations had between one and nine volunteers. By contrast, more than half (55%) had more than 10 volunteers and 14%, 50 or more volunteers

Table 2.2: Number of volunteers

| Size category | Number | % |
|---------------|------------|-------------|
| None | 21 | 11% |
| 1-4 | 31 | 16% |
| 5-9 | 34 | 17% |
| 10-24 | 51 | 26% |
| 25-49 | 30 | 15% |
| 50-249 | 18 | 9% |
| 250+ | 9 | 5% |
| Not known | 1 | 1% |
| Total | 195 | 100% |



A wide range of different types of voluntary sector organisation were also evident in relation to survey responses as set out in Table 2.3

In relation to the ‘other’ category, the most frequent categories were faith based organisations and charities which were also companies limited by guarantee.

Table 2.3: Type of voluntary sector organisation

| Organisation type | Number | % |
|------------------------------|------------|-------------|
| Company limited by guarantee | 43 | 22% |
| Community interest company | 12 | 6% |
| Social enterprise | 9 | 5% |
| Industrial provident | 1 | 1% |
| Community group | 46 | 24% |
| Charity | 52 | 27% |
| Other | 32 | 16% |
| Total | 195 | 100% |

The most common categories identified as the main activities of those organisations included in the survey were:

- Health and social care (10%);
- Youth services (8%);
- Arts, culture and heritage (7%);
- Community development (infrastructure support) (7%);
- Education and research (7%);
- Counselling/advice work (6%); and
- Environment (5%).

Involvement of the voluntary and community sector in tackling community cohesion issues

Table 2.4 identifies the main aspects of community cohesion that survey respondents were seeking to improve from a pre-determined list.

Table 2.4 indicates that the most common responses to this question were ‘building good relations/encouraging interaction’ which accounted for 22% of all organisations and ‘engaging the community’ (19%).

This was followed by ‘education’ (6%), ‘encouraging active citizenship’ (4%), ‘training/development/capacity’ (4%), ‘communications: belonging/valuing diversity’ (3%) and ‘community safety’ (3%).



Table 2.4: Main aspect of community cohesion organisation is seeking to improve

| Main activity | Number | % |
|---|------------|-------------|
| Building good relations/encouraging interaction | 42 | 22% |
| Engaging the community | 38 | 19% |
| Education | 11 | 6% |
| Encouraging active citizenship (including volunteering) | 8 | 4% |
| Training/development/capacity | 8 | 4% |
| Tackling inequalities | 7 | 4% |
| Communications: belonging/valuing diversity | 6 | 3% |
| Community safety | 5 | 3% |
| Tackling worklessness/other labour market issues | 3 | 2% |
| Intercultural dialogue | 2 | 1% |
| Social capital/civil society | 2 | 1% |
| Challenging myths and prejudice, bullying, harassment and abuse | 1 | 1% |
| Community leadership and vision | 1 | 1% |
| Preventing extremism | 1 | 1% |
| Tension monitoring/community safety/conflict resolution | 1 | 1% |
| Workforce cohesion | 1 | 1% |
| Improving anti-social and intolerant behaviour | 1 | 1% |
| Other (please specify) | 52 | 27% |
| Don't know | 5 | 3% |
| Total | 195 | 100% |

A geographical analysis was also undertaken in relation to the two main aspects of community cohesion that VCS organisations in Birmingham were seeking to improve ('building good relations/encouraging interaction' and 'engaging the community').

Table 2.5 overleaf sets out the main geographical area of focus of those

organisations whose main type of activity is building good relationships. It is perhaps not surprising that activity is targeted at some of the most deprived and mixed communities in Birmingham (e.g. Nechells, Ladywood, Aston and Washwood Heath) as these tend to be the areas where funding for such activities is most likely to be available.

Table 2.5: Those organisations whose main type of activity is building good relationships by main geographical area of focus

| Area | Number | % |
|-----------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| Aston | 3 | 7% |
| Balsall Heath | 1 | 2% |
| Bournville | 1 | 2% |
| Edgbaston | 2 | 5% |
| Erdington | 3 | 7% |
| Kings Norton | 1 | 2% |
| Ladywood | 4 | 10% |
| Lee Bank | 1 | 2% |
| Lozells and East Handsworth | 1 | 2% |
| Nechells | 5 | 12% |
| Northfield | 1 | 2% |
| Perry Barr | 1 | 2% |
| Selly Oak | 1 | 2% |
| Sparkbrook | 2 | 5% |
| Stechford and Yardley North | 1 | 2% |
| Sutton New Hall | 1 | 2% |
| Ward End | 1 | 2% |
| Washwood Heath | 3 | 7% |
| Birmingham as a whole | 4 | 10% |
| Other (Please specify) | 5 | 12% |
| Total | 42 | 100% |

Table 2.6 sets out the main geographical area of focus of those organisations whose main type of activity is engaging the community.

Table 2.6: Those organisations whose main type of activity is engaging the community by main geographical area of focus

| Area | Number | % |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Bordesley Green | 1 | 3% |
| Bournville | 1 | 3% |
| Edgbaston | 1 | 3% |
| Hall Green | 1 | 3% |
| Handsworth Wood | 1 | 3% |
| Kings Norton | 2 | 5% |
| Moseley and Kings Heath | 2 | 5% |
| Northfield | 2 | 5% |
| Perry Barr | 2 | 5% |
| Quinton | 1 | 3% |
| Selly Oak | 1 | 3% |
| Sheldon | 2 | 5% |
| Sparkbrook | 2 | 5% |
| Stechford and Yardley North | 1 | 3% |
| Sutton New Hall | 1 | 3% |
| Tyburn | 1 | 3% |
| Washwood Heath | 1 | 3% |
| Weoley | 1 | 3% |
| Birmingham as a whole | 5 | 13% |
| Other (Please specify) | 9 | 24% |
| Total | 38 | 100% |

Main groups

When asked to identify the main groups organisations involved in their work the most frequently cited groups were young people, those with disabilities and older people. Table 2.7 sets this analysis out (based on 139 organisations) in more detail.

Table 2.7: Main groups organisation is trying to involve

| Groups | Number | % |
|---|--------|-----|
| Asylum seekers/refugees | 13 | 9% |
| Carers | 10 | 7% |
| Disability | 17 | 12% |
| Faith groups | 8 | 6% |
| Gender | 9 | 6% |
| Gender reassignment groups | 7 | 5% |
| Gypsies and travellers | 7 | 5% |
| Migrants | 9 | 6% |
| Those not in education, employment or training (NEET) | 11 | 8% |
| Specific ethnic groups | 4 | 3% |
| Older people | 15 | 11% |
| Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people | 8 | 6% |
| Young people | 37 | 27% |
| Local communities | 39 | 28% |
| Other | 16 | 12% |
| All of the above | 45 | 32% |

Issues

Respondents to the Birmingham Community Cohesion telephone and e-survey were asked to identify key community cohesion issues locally. There were a total of 286 responses identifying at least one such issue.

A number of responses cut across different response categories, but in order to get a sense of the key issues identified, responses have been categorised according to what appears to be the main focus of comments. These results are set out in Table 2.8.

The most common type of issue related to the structural disadvantages of worklessness, housing, the environment, health, social care, education or more broadly, deprivation. A total of 89 responses (31%) related to these 'structural disadvantages'. Within this, the most frequently cited issues were worklessness (34 responses) and deprivation (28 responses).

Clearly worklessness is fundamental to the community cohesion strategy and the identified need to increase the proportion of people in the city with sustainable jobs by improving access to job opportunities, training and support in employment. In relation to deprivation, most organisations simply referred to poverty, social exclusion and social inequality. Clearly underpinning a number of concerns was lack of income.

Sixty-two responses (22%) identified that the main issue in relation to community cohesion revolved around the poor relationships between different cultural, ethnic and religious groups. This is the single most important community cohesion issue as far as the VCS in Birmingham is concerned.

The reasons for these poor relationships between different groups can be complex and multi-layered. However, the organisations responding tended to define these poor relationships in the following ways³:

- Lack of understanding and tolerance of different community groups;
- Isolation - groups not willing or able to interact with other sections of the community;
- Tensions between cultural, ethnic and religious groups;
- Lack of opportunity to mix; and
- Lack of a common sense of community.



³ It is acknowledged that these cannot be discrete categorisations, but serve to provide a basis for explaining the views of different organisations in relation to poor community relations.

Table 2.8: Main community cohesion issues locally

| Category of response | Number of responses | % of responses |
|---|---------------------|----------------|
| Removing structural disadvantage | 89 | 31% |
| Worklessness | 34 | |
| Housing | 8 | |
| Environment | 9 | |
| Social care | 5 | |
| Education | 4 | |
| Health | 1 | |
| Deprivation | 28 | |
| Community Engagement | 12 | 4% |
| Encouraging Active Citizenship | 7 | 2% |
| Building Relationships | 62 | 22% |
| Lack of understanding and tolerance of different groups | 21 | |
| Isolation | 21 | |
| Tensions between cultures, ethnic and religious groups | 13 | |
| Lack of opportunity to mix | 4 | |
| Lack of common sense of community | 3 | |
| Managing Neighbourhoods and Services | 17 | 6% |
| Developing Leadership and Building Capacity | 1 | 0% |
| Tackling Crime and Disorder | 39 | 14% |
| Other | 59 | 21% |
| Funding and resources | 12 | |
| Young people | 21 | |
| Generation Gap | 7 | |
| Language difficulties | 6 | |
| Other | 13 | |
| Total | 286 | 100% |

Gaps

Respondents were asked to comment on current gaps in activities to address key community cohesion issues locally. There were a total of 167 responses identifying at least one such gap or weakness.

A number of responses cut across different response categories, but in order to get a sense of the key gaps identified, responses have been categorised according to what appears to be the main focus of comments. These results are set out in Table 2.9 overleaf.

By far the most common responses (37 or 22%) related to perceived gaps or weaknesses in activities to improve relationships between residents and in particular between different ethnic and faith communities and between different age groups, with many respondents feeling that different groups often live very 'segregated' lives, with few activities that bring different communities together in ways that promote greater understanding and sharing of ideas.

Twenty-eight responses related to gaps in services for specific groups. Of particular note was the fact that 19 of these responses (11% of all survey respondents) related to the need for services or activities for young people. A further 24 responses related to gaps in activities to tackle structural disadvantages faced by particular groups or local communities.

Table 2.10 outlines the main areas of focus of organisations identifying gaps in community cohesion activities (where areas have been mentioned on more than one occasion).

Awareness of the Birmingham Community Cohesion Strategy

Awareness of the Birmingham Community Cohesion Strategy amongst those voluntary and community organisations interviewed was low, with only 65, or 33% indicating they were aware of the strategy.



Table 2.9: Gaps in activities to address key community cohesion issues locally

| Category of response | Number of responses | % of responses |
|---|---------------------|----------------|
| Tackling structural disadvantages: | | |
| ■ Educational activities | 8 | 5% |
| ■ Environmental activities | 2 | 1% |
| ■ Health and social care | 5 | 3% |
| ■ Unemployment | 3 | 2% |
| ■ Debt/welfare advice | 2 | 1% |
| ■ Housing | 4 | 2% |
| Engaging the community | 11 | 7% |
| Encouraging active citizenship | 12 | 7% |
| Building relationships | 37 | 22% |
| Lack of a local hub | 5 | 3% |
| Services or activities for specific groups: | | |
| ■ Young people | 19 | 11% |
| ■ Older people | 3 | 2% |
| ■ Women | 3 | 2% |
| ■ People with disabilities | 2 | 1% |
| ■ Refugees and Asylum seekers | 1 | 1% |
| Leadership and capacity building | 8 | 5% |
| Lack of strategic approach | 3 | 2% |
| Tackling crime and disorder | 3 | 2% |
| Lack of funding | 14 | 8% |
| Other | 22 | 13% |
| Total | 167 | 100% |

Table 2.10: Number of organisations identifying gaps in community cohesion activities by main area of focus

| Main area of focus | Number | % |
|-----------------------------|------------|-------------|
| Aston | 5 | 4% |
| Bournville | 2 | 2% |
| Bordesley Green | 2 | 2% |
| Edgbaston | 3 | 3% |
| Erdington | 5 | 4% |
| Hall Green | 4 | 3% |
| Kings Norton | 2 | 2% |
| Ladywood | 8 | 7% |
| Lozells and East Handsworth | 6 | 5% |
| Moseley and Kings Heath | 4 | 3% |
| Nechells | 4 | 3% |
| Northfield | 2 | 2% |
| Perry Barr/Soho | 2 | 2% |
| Selly Oak | 5 | 4% |
| Sparkbrook | 4 | 3% |
| Stechford and Yardley North | 5 | 4% |
| Washwood Heath | 6 | 5% |
| City centre/Digbeth | 2 | 2% |
| Birmingham as a whole | 19 | 16% |
| Other (Please specify) | 16 | 14% |
| Total | 118 | 100% |

removing structural barriers and disadvantage

The removal of structural disadvantage is one of the core policies of the Birmingham Community Cohesion Strategy.

The strategy seeks to address the causes of disadvantage, particularly economic disadvantage that creates potential disaffection and disharmony. The strategy seeks to ensure that a person's heritage, gender, location, age and disability do not restrict their life opportunities.

This section of the report details what Birmingham's voluntary and community sector organisations see as the main issues facing the City in relation to structural barriers and disadvantage and also provides examples of how a range of organisations have sought to tackle some of the causes and symptoms of such disadvantage. It also highlights what voluntary and community organisations in Birmingham see as the main gaps and weaknesses in current provision.

Issues arising from the survey

Worklessness

Unemployment is considered to be a key community cohesion issue by about 34 organisations surveyed and it tends to be an issue mentioned in a large number of wards across the city from Acocks Green to Washwood Heath as well as by organisations that have a Birmingham wide remit. Aston, Ladywood, Lozells and East Handsworth, Nechells, Sparkbrook and Washwood Heath are particularly highlighted in the context of

worklessness. These six wards correspond with six of the seven Birmingham wards with the highest levels of unemployment⁴. One organisation commented that:

“The forthcoming decimation of the public sector and the potential huge redundancies will have a major impact on all communities.”

Clearly worklessness is fundamental to the Community Cohesion Strategy and the identified need to increase the proportion of people in the City with sustainable jobs by improving access to job opportunities, training and support in employment. A number of organisations referred to the barriers for access of BME communities, especially women.

Housing

Housing was mentioned by relatively few organisations (8) as an issue in relation to community cohesion.

In a number of areas (e.g. Edgbaston, Ladywood and Selly Oak) a concern was expressed in relation to the increase in number of houses that are bought to let. It is felt that this has led to a transient population.

Others pointed to the need for access to housing for vulnerable young homeless people.

Some felt that a lack of connectivity between different groups and isolation of different communities was exacerbated by housing. One organisation in Longbridge felt that there was a need for more mixed housing tenures, so that there would not be isolated council housing estates. This idea of physical

⁴ Based on May 2010 ward unemployment data produced by Birmingham City Council 100021326 (2010)

“(We have a) fairly high turnover of residents, including students and a lot of houses on rent and these people don’t have much commitment to the area.”

separation was also referred to by another organisation that commented:

“People tend to live with people like them (either by choice or necessity), in terms of both income/wealth and ethnicity. Of these, I think the physical income/wealth divide is more of an issue - partly caused by a lack of social housing in wealthy areas.”

Housing need was also mentioned as an issue in areas such as Ladywood and Small Heath.

Environmental issues

A total of nine organisations referred to the environment as a community cohesion issue across different parts of Birmingham. Three organisations specifically mentioned litter and other organisations mentioned a range of different environmental issues such as graffiti and fly-tipping. One organisation based in Digbeth referred to the “amount of disused buildings, dark places in the area and derelict wasteland that has been there for six years or so (which) all contribute to a lack of cohesion.”

Social care

Five organisations referred to the care and support needed for older people and housebound. One organisation based in Washwood Heath commented that “older people haven’t got anywhere to go or anywhere to socialise.” Isolation for older people is regarded as an important community cohesion issue by four organisations that responded to the survey.

Education

Four organisations referred to poor educational achievement and standards and lack of parental support. In addition one organisation in Kingstanding commented:

“As a result of parental choice with regards to schools, children in particular catchment areas no longer all attend the same school as would once have been the case. We feel this leads to children within a small community not getting to know their peers as well as they once would.”

Health

Only one organisation (in Small Heath) referred to health as a community cohesion issue.

Deprivation (poverty, social exclusion and social inequality)

Twenty-eight organisations across Birmingham referred to deprivation as a community cohesion issue. Organisations that specifically mentioned deprivation tended to be based within the most deprived wards in Birmingham⁵ including:

- Aston
- Bordesley Green
- Kingstanding
- Ladywood
- Lozells and East Handsworth
- Nechells
- Shard End
- Soho
- Sparkbrook
- Washwood Heath

Most organisations simply referred to poverty, social exclusion and social inequality. Clearly underpinning a number of concerns was lack of income. One organisation in Washwood Heath commented: “The main problem is that this is a poor area so everybody is struggling to make ends meet.”

It was felt to be particularly important that those groups that are at risk of social exclusion such as refugees, disabled people, homeless people, offenders, drug users, and particularly BME groups are integrated within the general community.

Ward End Asian Elders Welfare Association

Ward End Asian Elders Welfare Association is a charitable organisation that provides community and social welfare support for the Asian community in the parliamentary constituencies of Hodge Hill, Yardley and Small Heath and Sparkbrook.

The association provides a range of facilities for local community members and users. This includes a gym (originally for people that were aged 50+), which has now been opened up to anyone aged 35+ for a 50p charge. This was felt to be a good thing to do for the community even though the facility does not make any money out of this approach. On average the gym attracts 30-60 people every day.

The facility also has a large hall that can accommodate up to 70 people. This provides both a drop-in centre and respite/day care facility for elders in the local community where people can also socialise. This is very well patronised and people come from several miles away. Refreshments are also provided and subsidised lunches are available. The facility is also used for birthday parties and celebrations. Trips are also organised on behalf of local residents. In relation to the role of the Welfare Association it was commented:

“It provides for those people that are most isolated in the community...who are just sitting and vegetating. They come here and get to know other people. It actually provides a community atmosphere, a community of users.”

⁵ Index of Deprivation 2007 - an analysis of Birmingham local statistics, Birmingham City Council

TUC Centre for the Unemployed

The TUC Centre for the Unemployed is an independent voluntary sector organisation that has been based in Sparkhill for over 20 years. Three types of free advice are provided: employment advice (aimed at helping people into jobs, training and education), welfare benefits advice and employment rights advice.

The Centre is Matrix accredited and also holds the Community Legal Services Charter Mark for General Help.

Centre staff can speak a range of languages including Bengali, Farsi, French, Kurdish, Mirpuri, Punjabi, Pushto, Somali, Swahili and Urdu. The Centre also calls on the services of an Arabic volunteer when required.

Services are provided free and are targeted at the low waged and disadvantaged.

The Centre has a specialist team working to help refugees and members of Birmingham's new communities to find work and training. The centre is also currently running a project providing advice to the Polish community in addition to more traditional work with the residents of Sparkbrook and Sparkhill.

The Polish Club was set up by people who settled in Britain after the War, but was finding it difficult to cope with increased numbers of Polish people arriving at the club seeking accommodation and other support.

The Polish Club got in touch with the regional TUC which got in touch with the Centre for the Unemployed which has been providing support at the Polish Club for four years now.

Advice needs are wide ranging, with a relatively high percentage of employment law cases relating to non-payment of wages,

together with issues relating to the Worker Registration Scheme, people not being given holiday pay, told they have to work without pay, working for less than the minimum wage, poor working conditions, loss of ID cards and benefits enquiries.

This provision is identified by the Centre as a gap in provision across the Midlands. It was pointed out that in addition to those living in Birmingham:

“At one point I was getting people from as far away as Telford and Kettering. There are always quite a lot from the Black Country.”

A lack of Citizens Advice interpreters is identified as one problem, but it was also pointed out that the City Council provision is also poor, with one Polish person based in Erdington. It was commented:

“It is the case that quite a lot of the Polish community have integrated quite well. But there are also quite a lot who don't. While some people do speak English this is not the case with all Polish people in Birmingham.”



South Birmingham Young Homeless Project

The South Birmingham Young Homeless Project is a one stop shop advice, information and resource centre that has been running since 1991. The community that is served by the project are young people and families that are homeless or in some kind of housing need (the main client group is 16-25 year olds). The project provides quality marked advice services, but also offers a number of other services including:

- A drop-in facility at the centre in Longbridge, so that young people can use the facility whenever they want to;
- Healthy lifestyles, including health and fitness;
- Welfare, debt and money, health, and housing advice;
- Promoting cohesion between individuals and families within the community. The project offers a facility where people that face similar difficulties can come together.

The project sees about 350 new service users every year in what is considered to be a very accessible facility in south west Birmingham. It does not signpost but works closely with other services such as solicitors, health providers etc. It is also considered that because the facility is open to service users they feel very comfortable using the building and other agencies use the facility to meet up with young people that are difficult to engage with (for example, drug outreach services, employment and health visitors). In terms of daytime access there are usually between 15-30 people that access the service every day.

Activities for young people are considered to be particularly important in engendering community cohesion. A previous tenant support worker got young tenants involved in playing football. The project managed to get free use of an all-weather pitch from leisure services. When the worker left, one of the young people took over the organisation and other young people and older people started joining the group as something to do together. It is felt that people cannot generally afford to access leisure activities.

It is felt to be particularly important to create the right type of environment for young people and one that they feel comfortable accessing.

“We couldn’t provide this service if we were estate based because other young people wouldn’t use it. They wouldn’t come onto the estate...In terms of community cohesion sometimes you need to be off the actual estate and off (young) people’s bits of territory if you are going to bring them together in a building.”

A disproportionately high number of people are seen from minority ethnic groups (who make up about 7% of the local population, but who make up between 20-30% of service users).

It is felt that accessibility to services is becoming an increasingly important issue with the increasing centralisation of services such as housing advice and appointments only.

Family Action

Family Action North Birmingham is based in Erdington and works with children and families living in north Birmingham. There is also Family Action East Birmingham, which is based in Acock's Green, and works in the east of the city. Family Action North works with families where there are children up to 12 years old, but will work with older children if they are part of the household, although they cannot be the main focus of the referral. Family Action has found that if carers are struggling to manage the behaviour of 15-16 years olds, then the focus of the work will have to be on the young people themselves rather than the parenting.

All referrals to Family Action come from Children's Services, which can include families in quite complex situations. The majority of referrals are concentrated in the Erdington, Kingstanding, Castle Vale, and certain areas of Sutton Coldfield. Children could be subjects of Child Protection Plans; some children have been rehabilitated back home, after a period of being in foster care; some carers are supported to enable their child's or children's return home; some children are subjects of Child in Need plans.

Much of the work undertaken by Family Action focuses on parenting capacity. This combined with the behaviour of young people can have quite a dramatic impact on local communities.

“They are safe, they are not roaming the streets, they are well behaved at school and they are well behaved when they are out and about.”

The work undertaken by Family Action could potentially have a huge impact on anti-social behaviour.

“Some of the problems are that if children tend to misbehave within the home and have no boundaries, they tend to be the same outside of the home, at school and in the community.”

“We try and work with parents and children whilst they are quite young to get parents to put in strategies, because by the time they get to 15 a lot of times it is actually too late.”

Problems in households can include historical or current domestic abuse, and the impact this has on the children and parenting; carers may not have been parented appropriately themselves, and thus have not learnt how to parent their own children appropriately; parents may have abused substances or alcohol; children are neglected emotionally or physically. Family Action tries to break this cycle by offering carers alternative strategies for meeting their children's needs, wherever possible building on the strengths within each household and the community. As well as working directly with families, we also signpost them to community resources.

Outcomes are measured in relation to 'Every Child Matters' and encouragement is given to interaction with the wider community (for example after school activities), and also to link in with community facilities.

Common Unity - The Barbershop

Common Unity was established as a social enterprise and focuses on tackling mental health and well being. Most of the Common Unity trustees work in the health and social care field.

The Barbershop Birmingham Programme is a ground-breaking approach that engages African-Caribbean and Asian men across Birmingham on the subject of mental health in its widest possible sense.

The Barbershop is a community magazine aimed at promoting dialogue on issues related to mental health that is specifically targeted at young BME men in areas of high deprivation. In particular, it targets those men who are least likely to engage with health, social care and mental health promoting therapeutic opportunities. Namely, BME men who are caught up in the criminal justice system, or are drug users, gang members, not in employment, not in further education, not engaging with society and not having an awareness of how to best engage with their mental health. It has a multi-cultural focus addressing issues of faith, culture and race in mental health and promotes an understanding and co-operation between communities.

The publication to date has received plaudits from a range of stakeholder organisations and the general public across Birmingham. It was commented that:

“It has definitely raised awareness around mental health. You are not on your own. People have realised they have issues similar to other people.”

The concept came from a Birmingham resident sitting in a barber shop who realised there was a captive audience of people that could be reached in an unconventional setting. Although it is hard to make men discuss things to do with health, one place these things are discussed was identified as the barbers.

The Barbershop magazine is produced by the community with people contributing with their own ‘personal journeys’ in relation to their health and wellbeing and mental health.

The magazine is then distributed around different barber shops within the City. There are a wide range of distribution points for barber shops throughout Birmingham, but Common Unity is looking to broaden this to other outlets including gyms and health centres.

At the moment the Barbershop is funded by Common Unity, but the plan is that the Barbershop will be a self sustaining stand alone community led social enterprise. A two year business plan for the Barbershop is currently being finalised, with a clear development path to achieve a stand-alone social enterprise.

There is now also a version targeted at women called the Beauty Shop. This was based on a consultation exercise with the public. One of the findings was the need for a female version of the Barbershop. This came online in September 2010.

Narthex

Narthex was established about 15 years ago and has been a registered charity since 2003. It is based in St John's Church in Sparkhill.

The mandate of Narthex is to work with destitute, low income families, refugees, asylum seekers, local residents - people of all communities and faiths.

“Encouraging cohesion through education, social action, children, families and young people's work.”

Most work undertaken by Narthex is with people of other faiths. The area in which Narthex is based is estimated to be about 80% Muslim.

Narthex receives a small grant from Birmingham City Council for a Senior Citizens Lunch Club. Other than that income is raised by Narthex.

The organisation has 42 volunteers and six paid staff (two currently funded via Future Jobs Fund). A wide range of support is provided to local residents by Narthex.

On a regular basis across all projects, an average of 120 to 135 individuals or families a week use Narthex, predominantly from the Sparkhill, Sparkbrook and Springfield areas.

Narthex also runs a Food Bank. Funding is obtained through the Church Urban Fund Mustard Seed Project. Food is donated to the project by churches, schools and local people.

Last November 12 tonnes of food was delivered. By Christmas Eve this had all gone. It was pointed out that this highlights the level of need for this service locally.

Narthex is seeking to expand the project and has recently acquired funding from Lloyds TSB to employ a refugee support worker.

The project is currently managed on a voluntary basis, with support from paid staff as and when needed.

Over time the profile of those using the Food Bank has changed, with demand extending well beyond groups such as refugees and asylum seekers. It was commented:

“We are now dealing more with economic migrants who have lost their jobs and are now starting to get a lot of residents in dire need for food and other things.”



Gaps

When respondents to the community cohesion telephone survey and e-survey were asked to comment on current gaps in activities to address key community cohesion issues locally, a total of 24 responses (14%) related to gaps in activities to tackle structural disadvantages faced by particular groups or local communities. These comprised:

- Eight responses related to educational activities, with the most commonly identified issue being the need for more support for language classes/tuition. One respondent commented:

“ESOL classes in the heart of the community are few and far between and lack funding.”

- Other comments included the need for more out of school holiday provision (Kings Norton) and more learning opportunities to help address key issues such as unemployment and environmental concerns (Aston)
- Two respondents raised the need for more activities to tackle environmental concerns, both highlighting more activities to address problems relating to litter

“(There is a need for) litter picking on every street.” (Sparkbrook)

- Five respondents raised health and social care issues including the need for more provision to support those with alcohol and drug abuse problems

“There are no services for substance abuse that you can refer homeless people to late at night when they are out on the streets.”

(Digbeth)

- The need for more support for parents and children who experience, or have experienced domestic abuse was also raised. (Erdington)
- Three respondents raised issues relating to the need for more provision to address unemployment with two other respondents highlighting the need for more advice provision including debt and welfare advice.
- The need for additional housing related provision was identified by four respondents, including the need for more affordable or social housing and changes to existing housing policy. One respondent commented:

“Housing supply segregates people into areas according to their social class and background. There are too few areas of genuinely mixed housing, where people of different backgrounds get to meet each other on a regular basis.”

community engagement

A further core policy of the Birmingham Community Cohesion Strategy was to build wider engagement activities with the population as a whole and within different communities of interest within the city.

This activity included ensuring that the concerns of young people are heard and responded to.

It is clear from the research undertaken that the voluntary and community sector is very effective in different types of engagement activity, thereby bringing a unique perspective to the issues and challenges faced by different communities and groups across the city.

This section of the report outlines the key issues underpinning the need for more effective community engagement, examples of different approaches adopted by the voluntary and community sector in Birmingham that have secured the effective engagement of local communities and what are perceived to be gaps in current arrangements.

Issues arising from the survey

Twelve organisations referred to a lack of community engagement as a main issue in relation to community cohesion. One organisation in Highgate commented that:

“We're not in touch with the community.”

Others referred to a lack of funding and resources to work with communities:

“Cuts in funding that helps us work with our local communities.”

“Lack of funding and resources for community groups.”

One organisation in Quinton talked about a lack of resource to organise local events.

Another organisation referred to the lack of resources and special infrastructure support for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community.

Other organisations referred to a lack of consultation or communication. An organisation in Stechford and Yardley North commented on:

“(The) lack of proper consultation before things happen rather than when it has already been agreed, (people feeling being done to rather than involved and being part of it).”

Another organisation referred to:

“(The) inequality of consultation and distribution of funds for various groups and their communities.”

Friction Arts

Friction Arts has worked from a base in Digbeth since 1994 on 'art where you live' projects across local areas within Birmingham and elsewhere. There is no set art form and the company always undertakes context specific work, usually in conjunction with the people in the area an art project is taking place. It could be a film, performance, publication, etc depending on the people and the place. Friction Arts always seeks to get very involved with the local community and seeks to establish long term relationships and legacies for the work undertaken. It does not undertake what the company call 'drive by art' (where artists come into an area, do something and leave straightway).

As part of the work undertaken Friction Arts also tries to provide advice and guidance on further education and training and signposting to other organisations, so there is also a legacy which results from their contact with people in the community.

Friction Arts took over an empty shop within a (now boarded up) shopping centre that was semi derelict, but which previously served a 'hidden' community behind Broad Street called the Red Brick Estate colloquially. A drop-in arts centre was created for this estate and a range of projects were developed for young people, adults and children. About 30 projects were undertaken over a three year period that the project was running.

“One of the mums was dropping one of her kids off to a Saturday drama session that we were doing. And she started hanging around and then she started to volunteer.

“We then helped her to get onto a college course and she is now qualified as a dance teacher and we are now giving her work.”

In relation to impact it is felt that many of the benefits of the work undertaken do not happen immediately. Towards the end of the project, which was brought about by redevelopment of the Five Ways site, Friction Arts organised a huge final event on the estate. This involved 300 singers, singing back the stories of the estate that were collected over the three year project. This involved a much wider audience of about 2,000 people coming onto the estate.

Friction Arts won the Edgbaston Community Foundation Award for the work that they had undertaken on the Red Brick Estate

An evaluation was undertaken with people on the estate and the outcomes indicated that the project had very positively changed the estate.

“People were saying things like ‘it has changed the area’, ‘I now know loads of people who I have lived next to for years and never spoken to’, ‘people feel safer walking around at night because they are looking out for each other’.”

The project was therefore successful in bringing people together.

“We talk about creating dialogue through our art, so we create opportunities for people to come together, to talk and have conversations.”

Ladywood Project

The Ladywood Project is a small community project which has been going for 25 years, and is located within the Ladywood Community and Health Centre in the centre of Ladywood. Although core funded by Birmingham City Council the project also raises a lot of money for activities through its Advisory Committee and for two staff - the money advisor and the children's worker.

The work of the Ladywood Project assists in bringing about better community cohesion by enabling people to relate better to each other and generally get on better with each other. The project is a place where people come and get mutual support from each other as well as the project. Community cohesion in central Ladywood is considered to be quite good, which reflects a strong local community.

“People do help each other. I have seen people with problems come into the drop-in and be supported really well by other people within the drop-in.”

Nearly all the work undertaken by the Ladywood Project is subsidised because the people that use the project “are nearly all hard up”. The project therefore raises money so that local people have access to services. For example, coach trips organised by the project for the local community are very cheap. Another initiative involves the subsidised purchase of secondary school uniforms.

One of things that are felt to work particularly well is the strong relationship that has been built up between staff and residents in the area, particularly in terms of thinking about priorities for the area.

Listening to the needs of an area is felt to be particularly important. It is felt that there is a need to go beyond surveys and more formal mechanisms for community consultation and allow issues or concerns to be raised through normal dialogue.

“You're not saying to somebody 'what do you think are the problems?' it's through discussions really that you realise something is missing.”

In terms of community cohesion, on a small scale it is felt that as people get more confidence and start to trust the project, then people can begin to be more active. The initial engagement might entail someone coming into the project for a cup of coffee, or in relation to a particular problem. If they continue to come through mutual support they may have decided to be more active within the project by becoming involved in the advisory group or helping out with fundraising.

“Certainly a number of people have gone on to be Credit Union volunteers. People have gone on to work. There are a variety of ways that people move out of the project and into better model citizens.”



St Margaret's Community Trust MAD Project

After a community needs consultation and analysis of police statistics, a priority for the local neighbourhood was providing young people with somewhere to go and something to do, particularly on the Overpool Estate in Ward End. It was commented:

“The youngsters would fall out of the play service at the age of 12 and there would be nothing for anybody aged 12 and above.”

St Margaret's Community Trust recognised there was a need for youth community provision in Ward End but also that it was not the trust's area of specialism. The trust therefore sought funding for youth engagement and commissioned Worth Unltd to address the need for local youth provision.

However, it was not felt to be appropriate to 'parachute' youth workers into an estate, because young people would not relate to them. With the funding obtained by the trust Worth Unltd was commissioned to mentor young people locally through the MAD (Make a Difference) Youth Project and pay the salary of two local youth workers. One of the youth workers is a resident on the Overpool Estate who has grown up there. Now 25, he knows all the young people across the age range and has good relationships with them. It was commented: “We are investing in him as a home grown worker.”

He is mentored by Worth Unltd and delivers three youth sessions a week with a colleague. The junior MAD club runs on a Tuesday and Senior MAD club (16-24) runs on a Friday. On a Saturday afternoon there is a mixed session

involving all age ranges. The funding provides hands on delivery but also accreditation for the youth worker at Level 1 and 2, which opens up his employment and career prospects in the youth field. It was pointed out that having someone living on the estate undertaking youth work has been 'integral' to the success of the project, although it was also pointed out that adopting this approach is not without risks:

“It is a risk, because Dale is 25, he knows all the young lads, in part they are friends. His challenge is; where are the professional boundaries and friendships? Through being mentored by the experienced workers from Worth Unltd and undertaking the youth work course he is learning those boundaries, but that is not to say it is not tricky for him.”

Overall, the approach is perceived as very successful. It was commented:

“It really has made a difference - 18 months ago the Overpool Estate was scoring on the police statistics and registering red as an anti-social behaviour hot spot for call outs. Eighteen months later the estate is no longer on the police radar in the same way and the neighbourhood is now described as a cold spot.

“Before the MAD Youth Project started, older residents were intimidated by groups of youths on the street, there were intergenerational tensions. With the help of the MAD project and investing in Dale, now the young people have somewhere to go and something positive to engage in and relationships between the older residents and the younger residents have got better.”

Gaps

Eleven respondents to the Community Cohesion telephone survey and e-survey (7% of responses) highlighted the need for more activities to engage the community more effectively. These comments included the need for (or improved):

- Information about services provided within neighbourhoods:

“Information isn't clearly passed down to the communities, mechanisms need to be improved.”

(Stechford and Yardley North)

- Advertising of events/activities to all areas within particular communities:

“All community groups should be invited and views gathered.” (Oscott)

- Opportunities for different groups to share views or venues, or community activities to bring people together:

“Because of the dispersion of the community it's very difficult for the people to come together.”

(Sutton Coldfield)

“Opportunities to share with local people the things which make us similar and different.” (Bordesley Green)

“Apart from a church and a residents bi-monthly meeting there is no pub or other community activities to bring people together.” (Edgbaston)

- Effective strategies to engage the community:

“[We need] coherent strategy and better joint working.” (Northfield)



encouraging active citizenship

The Birmingham Community Cohesion Strategy referred to increasing levels of democratic involvement, volunteering and respect by acting as a catalyst for new excitement in civic mechanisms; finding new ways of holding public agencies to account and bringing the views of the population to bear on the Council's priorities.

The voluntary and community sector in Birmingham has been demonstrating for many years how innovative volunteering projects can be used to tackle issues within different communities, hold public sector service providers to account and provide excellent forums or mechanisms for properly reflecting the views of local residents.

Issues arising from the survey

Seven organisations indicated that participation or active citizenship was a main issue in relation to community cohesion. Five organisations referred to people's lack of interest or apathy in getting involved in tackling community cohesion. One organisation referred to the "most needy sections of society feeling disenfranchised and having no stake in today's world," whilst others simply referred to apathy or lack of interest in getting involved.

"People's lack of interest in community cohesion. Only when they are faced with problems that affect them do people actually turn up to the meetings. They only come for help and if it's about anything else they don't bother. Most people come to us with issues about the hospital, or parking issues with the hospital staff. There is vandalism and high crime in the area. The last meeting we had 30-40 people turned when we distributed 2,500 leaflets."

Another organisation commented on:

"(The) apathy of local people in this area of Birmingham. Poor motivation to do much else than live off the State and to blame everyone other than themselves for their own plight."

One organisation commented that:

"People are too busy with their careers to consider living as a community."

Compact Time bank

Compact is a community organisation in Ward End established about five years ago. The focus of its work is mainly in the Hodge Hill area, but it does undertake some work in other areas. It has had funding from a number of sources including current funding from the Future Jobs Fund (25 paid workers are associated with this funding at present).

The Compact Timebank Volunteers project is based in Ward End in Hodge Hill and is funded through the Working Neighbourhoods Fund.

The project encourages local people to volunteer, but bank the number of hours of voluntary work undertaken in order to benefit from services provided by other registered volunteers, by 'cashing in' banked hours.

At the moment 102 active volunteers from Hodge Hill are registered on the database. The focus of the project is on getting people in the community to put something back into the community and providing employment skills.

The volunteer base is quite diverse. It was commented:

“We have all sorts of people from different walks of life who come and register, different ethnic minorities and English heritage people.”

Volunteers undertake a wide range of activities. This includes work with local community organisations, neighbours helping one another and activities such as gardening and cleaning cars. There is also a link up with a local older people's home which has proved particularly successful. Residents predominantly comprise white older people.

Timebank volunteers undertake a range of activities within the home. This has included a day when young Asian volunteers cooked a meal for the older people.

It is perceived that Timebank has been particularly useful in terms of tackling prejudices people may have of young Asian residents. In this respect it was commented:

“I guess there is a big stigma attached to Muslim people at the moment. (Volunteering) throws a different light on the actuality of what they represent, rather than the general picture you get from the media, which are all against Islam.”

“These young people feel disenfranchised, not just from services that are available, but within the community itself and the way the media portrays things. It gives them an opportunity to say this is what we actually represent, rather than what the media portrays - vice versa, people who are not from that background get to see they are normal people.”



Balsall Heath Neighbourhood Forum

Until the 1960s Balsall Heath was a white working class neighbourhood close to the centre of Birmingham. Its residents lived in back to back terraced houses. But it was a cohesive and strong community.

Then 30% of the houses were knocked down, and replaced by high rise blocks and the old community was broken up. Many residents moved to outer ring council estates, leaving space for newcomers from the West Indies, Africa and the Indian sub-continent.

The newcomers had problems of isolation. Crime and prostitution spread until by 1980 over 450 prostitutes and 30 pimps dominated the street corners.

Balsall Heath's name became associated with blight, decay and depression. It took a long time with the help of residents to define the boundaries as people did not wish to be associated with the area.

In 1985 a few people formed a 'Building a Better Balsall Heath' campaign. Together, they made progress in changing the image of the area, forming and representing the local voice to 'the powers that be', helping organise a mid-summer carnival, starting and contributing to a community newspaper. They achieved a number of successes and decided to become a company limited by guarantee and to be called the Balsall Heath Neighbourhood Forum.

In 1992 the first elections to the Forum's executive were held. Today, out of a population of 15,000 with 9,000 of voting age, some 1,000 are members and 600 take part in the vote. There are 12 resident elected members, six residents who represent voluntary and faith organisations and four who are co-opted.

In 1992, there were no employees. All the efforts of the Forum were voluntary. But, as so much needed to be done, it was decided to raise the funds to recruit and manage staff. Today, the voluntary elected committee employs 20 people.

Over 25 years a new community has been built in Balsall Heath comprising 20% white, 20% black and 60% Asian residents. Prostitution has been eradicated and the community is once more strong and cohesive. Residents want to stay in the area. The Forum's website <http://www.balsallheathforum.org.uk> is an inspiring journey through this transformation and the many projects that continue to improve the lives of residents.

In a recent survey undertaken by Be Birmingham residents of 30 neighbourhoods were asked if they felt safe, if they were proud of their area, if they felt able to influence events in their area and if they trusted people. Balsall Heath came top on each issue.

'So the benefit is that the place is just a better... safer place to live.'

Residents of Balsall Heath Forum now act in an advisory capacity to inspire other areas offering advice on how to transform their neighbourhoods with the DIY Neighbourhood Renewal Kit, visits and telephone support.

Friends of Cotteridge Park

The group was established in 1997 in response to a threat to have the park keeper services removed.

“A threat is always very handy at the beginning. It’s really quite evil, but they did us a huge favour, because the group would never have started without it, or it certainly would have been much harder.”

The threat to the Park was subsequently removed, but the volunteers decided to carry on and develop further activities.

It was commented:

“All these neighbours who had never really spoken to each other before and all these parents on the playground who had never really spoken to each other before all got together said ‘now what?’.”

Although Cotteridge is a transport hub with lots of trains, buses and cars going through it, it does not have a library, youth club, sports centre or a community centre (only church halls).

Because of this lack of community facilities the park has been increasingly used as the venue for activities that normally took place in community buildings. Over time Friends of Cotteridge Park has run sports groups, play schemes, toy libraries, walking groups, arts activities, social events and youth groups. Each activity has been in response to ideas and suggestions from the local community. For example, play schemes were started because a number of parents had small children with nowhere to go.

The park has therefore become a focus for community activity and brings together small groups (for example, there are two or three volunteers that undertake a daily litter pick) and large groups (about 3,000 people for a summer festival) for a wide range of activities. The Friends of Cotteridge Park also purchased an additional area of land next to the park, and gave it back to the park, which has turned it into a community orchard that is now a learning space that hosts school and youth groups. Regular visits have been undertaken to the park from year nine students on community outreach days over the past three years.

“What this has created for us is a cohort of 14, 15 and 16 year old girls who now feel that the park belongs to them. And they’re the best police force we have ever had in terms of making young people belong and making it (the park) belong to them.”

All these activities and developments have been organised and undertaken on a voluntary basis. There is no core funding and a lot of voluntary time and resources are spent raising funding on a project by project basis. Key ingredients of success are considered to be an unstructured, non-hierarchical approach, with all contributions being valued.

“A park is the ultimate place in which we all have to tolerate each other’s behaviour.”

Gaps

Twelve respondents to the community cohesion telephone survey and e-survey (7% of responses) identified the need for more activities to engage residents in decision making and activities to improve their own communities.

One respondent commented that what is needed is:

“Empowerment of local residents to express their concerns and issues.”

One issue raised was the particular need to involve less established communities in decision making and the need for:

“(More) consideration for the new communities and giving them the opportunity to represent their communities.” (Sparkbrook)

The need for closer links with statutory agencies in order that local residents can have more of a say in local decision making was also identified. It was commented that there is a need for:

“Better relationships between statutory and voluntary sector organisations working together delivering activities as ONE.”

One respondent further underlined this point commenting:

“We are a Neighbourhood Forum that represents over 4,000 households in our area and we are never told by the police or the councillors or the City council what is going to be happening in our area. We only find out if someone else informs us, then we call a public meeting.”

The need to actively encourage more involvement of different groups in volunteering was also highlighted, with a need for:

“More volunteering across diverse communities, activities for offenders and people with alcohol/drug problems; this is genuine civic engagement.” (Nechells)

However, it was also pointed out that while local communities might want more of a voice in relation to how decisions are made, there is a limit to the extent to which many residents wish to spend their time in this way. One respondent commented that there needs to be:

“An understanding that communities don’t function a certain way because ‘officers’ (elected or otherwise) wish them to. Most individuals have their own issues to address, and at the end of a long day - health and home comes way above anything else.” (Brandwood)

building relationships

One of the key issues identified by the Birmingham Cohesion Strategy relates to inter-group tensions: the real or perceived differences between groups - from the clearly visible (skin colour, age, and dress) to the fundamental (religion, attitudes to gender, commercial outlook) - which may create, or be used to create, anger, distance and conflict.

It is clear from the research undertaken as part of this report that different groups and communities are frequently living quite segregated lives, with the need for activities that encourage a much greater understanding of different cultures and participation of different groups and communities in activities together.

This section of the report identifies the key issues underpinning the need for improved community relationships, perceived gaps and weaknesses in services and activities to help build such relationships together, with examples of different approaches that have worked well in practice within Birmingham.

Issues arising from the survey

Sixty-two organisations indicated that the main issue in relation to community cohesion revolved around the poor relationships between different cultural, ethnic and religious groups. The reasons for these poor relationships between different groups can be complex and multi-layered. However, the organisations responding tended to define these poor relationships in the following ways⁶:

- Lack of understanding and tolerance of different community groups
- Isolation - groups not willing or able to interact with other sections of the community
- Tensions between cultural, ethnic and religious groups
- Lack of opportunity to mix
- Lack of a common sense of community

Lack of understanding and tolerance of different community groups

Twenty-one organisations felt that there was a lack of understanding and tolerance of different community groups. Many of the organisations who commented along these lines were Birmingham-wide, or did not specify a specific geography.

“We work across the city - the needs vary from area to area but in general relate to a lack of awareness and understanding of others and access to opportunity e.g. employment, training, housing, health, support.”

⁶ It is acknowledged that these cannot be discrete categorisations, but serve to provide a basis for explaining the views of different organisations in relation to poor community relations.

One organisation in Quinton indicated that the main issue in relation to community cohesion was:

“Misunderstanding between people - communities not understanding each other.”

Some organisations also felt that there was a racialisation of certain sections of the population and also that, as a consequence of this lack of understanding, people were scared of differences within the community. Clearly this lack of awareness and knowledge is key to more effective community cohesion.

“I feel that there should be more done around community integration and more inter-generational projects. One to allow a better understanding of cultural differences, especially with the new arriving communities, and the other to pass on knowledge and wisdom to the next generation.”

A number of organisations commented that the indigenous population felt that they were being ignored and new communities being looked after at their expense.

Another organisation felt that there was a:

“Lack of cultural awareness from different communities especially [towards] newly arrived communities, who seem to be scapegoated for social issues that are happening in the area.”

The lack of understanding was also expressed in relation to faith by several organisations.

Isolation - groups not willing or able to interact with other sections of the community

Twenty-one organisations also indicated that the isolation of groups that were not willing or able to interact with other sections of the community is a main issue in relation to community cohesion. Organisations spoke of a lack of connectivity, isolation and few opportunities for 'coming together' or communication, and also about people staying in their own community and not integrating with other community members.

One organisation which works across Birmingham commented:

“With the current project we went into the Lozells and Nechells area, where there is a high mixture of cultures and an influx of new communities. However, the host community and the new communities do not seem to interact that much. From the comments participants made at our project, they feel as if the residents from the new communities do not want to integrate and keep themselves isolated. However, as an organisation having contact with individuals from new communities we know that there are various barriers these individuals face, such as language and the ability to communicate well and knowing about the availabilities of services present in their immediate area. For participants from new communities in areas such as Kingstanding or Northfield, individuals feel even more isolated and have difficulties in accessing services.”

Another organisation based in Newtown indicated that the main issue was the isolation of social/ethnic groups because of:

“Families who have lived with deprivation for generations are hostile towards others whom they see receiving support, especially when resources are dwindling and funding is reduced

“Ethnic groups are suspicious of those who do not share their culture and religious beliefs and therefore conduct their affairs with those whom they trust within their communities

“New arrivals and many from the settled communities do not understand (or are unwilling to co-operate) with what it means to be a UK citizen

“The above is often hampered by not being able to communicate adequately in English; this applies especially to women.”

Quite a number of organisations that responded indicated that they did not think that all groups/communities actually wanted to be cohesive.

“I don't think every community wants to actually be cohesive. I think they like to stick to their groups so that they feel strong together. It's quite understandable if you have come from another country.”

“I have been the leader of a residents group since 1994 and watched members/neighbours come and go. In that time I have noticed that Asian people who I have a great deal of regard for, tend not to join our group which is such a shame. I see that they and other culture

related groups stay very much to themselves, but I don't see these kind of boundaries between people who live so close to one another and want a full and proper mixing to help bring about constructive and meaningful community action and neighbourliness. I want this but I fear it will never happen perhaps due to religious beliefs - I really don't know. My wish is for people to accept neighbours and greet them and welcome them on every possible opportunity, but I am often met with steely cold expressions and sometimes downright unfriendliness. Not all are the same it is true, but not enough want cohesion, I feel as though they get all they want by being close to one another. As a white person I often feel an unwanted stranger in my street. This is the very opposite of what I have worked for since being chairperson.”

Another organisation working in Sparkhill and Aston commented on the “parallel lives lived by Muslims (women in particular) and the rest of the community” and ignorance of each other's way of life and beliefs between different faith communities.

An organisation in Lozells and East Handsworth commented:

“Community cohesion is such a vague and technical term for us - if it means communities living and working together more closely, then language is a problem in our area and some religious groups seem to foster a very 'closed' community ethos.”

Tensions between cultural, ethnic and religious groups

Thirteen organisations identified tensions between cultural, ethnic and religious groups as a main issue in relation to community cohesion. This can be based on mistrust between different communities, racial factors, or more extreme reactions to different religions (e.g. Islamophobia).

“Birmingham is a city enriched with different cultures and religions. However, at times there have been tensions between the various cultural and religious groups in certain wards. Currently, one could say that individuals from a Muslim faith are stigmatised through the media. In addition, there is a limited understanding of the practices and beliefs of faith groups and cultures, and this lack of understanding and appreciation can cause tension and conflict and/or result in segregated communities.”

Several organisations referred to new arrivals and people from different ethnic backgrounds moving into the local community as underpinning cohesion issues. In this regard one organisation commented:

“The difficulty in Birmingham is the diversity; we need to crack the differences between all ethnic and white people in order to move forward.

“The strategy for community cohesion is robust and has a strong emphasis on communication and understanding and a framework to implement a series of initiatives to bring communities and cultures together. Unfortunately the process is hijacked by key stakeholders with limited understanding of the inherent problems justifying they have a solution to tackle the problems of social unrest. This has led to tokenistic activity within Birmingham City Council to demonstrate success on paper. There are significant problems on community cohesion, especially based upon ethnicity, race, religion and even social class. The solution devised is very secular, whereas the problem is rooted on faith and perception. I personally feel that there will be community tensions leading to social unrest and will likely be instigated within the inner city most probably between Pakistani and Somali [communities].”

Lack of opportunity to mix

Four other organisations chose to emphasise the lack of opportunity to mix and “different cultures not having a common place to mix.” One organisation based in Shenley commented:

“Cohesion comes about through people interacting in a meaningful way. There are not enough opportunities to bring people together, collectively to try to address problems and issues they may be facing. There are few opportunities to draw upon the collective wisdom of the community that may exist and agree on the action that can be taken.”

Three organisations identified a lack of common sense of community as a main issue in relation to community cohesion. An organisation in Selly Oak commented in this regard that:

“The main problem in the area is the fact that there are ethnic minority groups that are growing, the area is BNP dominated, there's no sense of community.”

A wide range of approaches have been taken to try and build relationships between different ethnic, faith, age and other groups within Birmingham, including different events that bring people together in a way that enables sharing of experiences and greater dialogue, and different activities such as sport, music, theatre and art, that help build relationships through recognition of shared interests and active participation and collaboration.



The Feast: Building relationships between young Christians and Muslims

The Feast is a new Christian charity based in Sparkhill which aims to promote community cohesion between Christian and Muslim young people. The vision of the Feast is to see Christian and Muslim young people coming together to form real friendships that move them to be peace-makers amongst their peers and in the world. It was commented that:

“The focus is to build trust. The message to mosques and Christian groups is that it is important they equip their young people to know how to engage [with each other] appropriately.”

Groups of young Christians and Muslims are encouraged to meet in a fun environment, build up relationships and talk about the similarities and differences in their faith. It was commented:

“In the midst of an environment of that level of honesty and vulnerability, we are working very hard to help young people to agree to disagree and then still be friends.”

The strategy is to build up relationships amongst a cross section of mainly Muslim students. There is also engagement with local mosques. In order to achieve this The Feast has two paid school workers in three secondary schools serving the Sparkhill area (Moseley and Golden Hillock) and also Broadway school in Aston.

Each school worker undertakes 12 events a year where groups of between 10 to 25 young Christian and Muslim students are brought together. The Feast indicates the events work better if they are kept quite small. The most recent event for example only had 11 attending (six Christians and five Muslims)

The activities undertaken include getting participants to write a question that they have had burning on their mind that they would like to ask a Muslim or a Christian. It was pointed out that usually these questions are based on stereotypes or myths that they have heard. These questions are then read out and young people either Christian or Muslim, as appropriate, are asked to answer the question (rather than adults talking about their faiths). It was commented:

“We really want the young people to wrestle with what they believe and what they hear.”

It was pointed out that this approach has been very successful in terms of relationship building between young Christians and Muslims. As a result of these activities, many participants from diverse communities have formed friendships, get together on Facebook, meet up and shop, or undertake other social activities. It was commented:

“We are giving them skills and the resources to justify what they do..... Young people are really drawn to it.”

Sport 4 Life - Improving community cohesion through encouraging more active lives

Sport 4 Life undertakes a wide range of activities to encourage more active lives, including football and cricket, sports coaching, multi-skills for children, aerobics classes for women and street dance classes for young women, with everything themed around getting people active and doing physical activity.

Sports 4 Life doesn't have its own sports centre, so generally works either in open public spaces such as parks, but often partners with other organisations. Often projects use school venues, school playgrounds, school halls, together with other venues such as Sure Start centres and community centres. Although community cohesion is not a primary objective of Sport 4 Life - the primary objective is getting people to be more active and healthy, it is clear that many community cohesion benefits are derived as a result of one of the organisation's key aims, which is to help people improve and develop themselves through sport.

“Using sport to achieve something greater than just physical activity or access to sport. This is where we link into community cohesion - that can be about social benefits of sport, bringing people together, maybe they feel less isolated, they have made some more friends, or they have something to look forward to in the week. We might bring different people from different parts of communities together and play in the same team, which can build relationships.”

A number of recent examples illustrate the contribution of these activities to improving community cohesion across Birmingham:

- All Nations Football is an initiative that is developing opportunities in football for disadvantaged men in Birmingham, including refugees, asylum seekers and recovering drug users. The project uses football as a tool to better lives, and is attended by men from all over the world - Sudan, Iran, Afghanistan, Togo, Ivory Coast, Congo, Ethiopia, and Kuwait, to name but a few - giving rise to the name 'All Nations Football'.
- In June 2010, 420 children from inner city Birmingham took part in two massive sports days - the Soho Games and the Ladywood Games - organised by Sport 4 Life. The tournaments enabled underprivileged children to experience top quality competitive activities, including football, athletics, uni-hockey and handball, and were attended by 14 primary schools in total.
- Two street dance crews - set up and run by Sport 4 Life - performed at a local community event in Birmingham in July 2010 to much acclaim. Showcasing their talents at the Stockfield Fun Day 2010, the 'Acocks Dance Group' delivered an up-beat routine of hip-hop and street dance moves and their skills were praised by the crowd and local community alike. The all-girl group, which consists of an under-12s crew and an under-16s crew, has been set up to enable underprivileged children and young people from an east Birmingham estate to improve their physical fitness, to build a sense of community spirit and identity, and to have fun! The project has been supported by the Stockfield Community Association.

Banner Theatre - breaking down prejudices of asylum seekers and refugees

Banner Theatre is one of Britain's longest established community theatre companies, with over 35 year's experience of working with trade unions and marginalised and disadvantaged communities. It is a registered charity and not for profit company limited by guarantee.

Using a combination of theatre, music and song, digital imagery and "actuality" (recorded voices captured by video or audio), the company creates dynamic, thought-provoking, issue-led productions based on people's real-life experiences and in support of disenfranchised sections of society.

In spring 2009 and spring 2010 Banner Theatre used theatre, music and video-based activities in two separate projects to engage Year 11 pupils at St John Wall School, Handsworth Wood in issues connected with migration and asylum, leading to the production of a CD recording of songs developed by the pupils with support from Banner personnel. Banner spent a period of about 10 weeks working with the school.

The idea of the project was to increase understanding and toleration of refugees and economic migrants, by presenting real-life experiences of refugees and asylum seekers, reasons why such groups come to this country and issues relating to asylum and migration, at the same time as providing a workshop to teach participants about song writing, lyric writing and rhythm.

Banner did similar work in the North East of England which worked really well and this acted as a pilot for the project within Birmingham.

Banner had connections with St John Wall School before and approached it directly. The school thought it was a good idea and the project is perceived to have been very successful. This is evidenced by feedback from both staff and pupils. Among other things, the project has:

- Provided the opportunity for the students to hear a refugee tell his story directly to them
- Used music and song writing involving the students, enabling them to create their own songs about refugee experiences.

It was commented by teaching staff that a number of pupils not known for their contributions became engaged in the projects.

It was also commented that through the project many of the students gained self-confidence, through things like making and performing their own songs to other students in school assemblies.

The project was part funded by Birmingham City Council and partly by the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development.

Gaps

By far the most common responses (37 or 22%) to the community cohesion telephone survey and e-survey related to perceived gaps or weaknesses in activities to improve relationships between residents and in particular, between different ethnic and faith communities and between different age groups.

Many respondents clearly feel that while many of the neighbourhoods they live or work in are highly diverse communities. Different groups often live very 'segregated' lives, with few activities that bring different communities together in ways that promote greater understanding and sharing of ideas. It was commented:

“[There is a] lack of willingness to really engage communities from diverse backgrounds to come together to learn and share ideas, and address common concerns.” (Stechford and Yardley North)

“There are not enough activities that bring people from different communities together to address some of the common issues that affect many people, regardless of their background or ethnic group. [Such activities] will stop the segregation and focus on the real issues.” (Birmingham wide)

It was pointed out that often activities are geared towards specific groups, or give this impression, rather than focus on activities that bring different groups together:

“Often activities give the impression that they are being held for a specific community, which often isn't the case; we need to be reaching out to everyone, rather than focusing in on a select few residents.” (Lozells and East Handsworth)

“There should be a greater focus on events that promote inter-culturality. Birmingham is a diverse city, but the provisions are quite specific and geared towards particular groups and there are areas of clear segregation between communities. There should also be more awareness raising events that demystify multiculturalism and emphasise the humanitarian aspects and the benefits of living in such a society.” (Birmingham wide)

One respondent commented:

“Where do people from different communities come together - other than children who attend the very few schools that are truly multi-ethnic?”

Respondents identified a range of different approaches that should be put in place to help improve relationships between different communities. In this respect it was commented:

“Projects that build trust and compliment communication with others; fitness and health related projects; most of all summer schemes and facilities for families and the youth.” (Washwood Heath)

It was stressed by one respondent that these activities need to be developed by residents themselves rather than imposed:

“[There is a need for] more community events where people can get to know one another and build trust - but these need to come from within the community, from groups who are on the ground and not be imposed by the council or government.”

(Lozells and East Handsworth)

A number of respondents stressed the need for more interfaith activity:

“There is little joint activity and often, although happily living side by side, I feel there is still segregation between myself and my Muslim neighbours. More joint working on community projects [is needed]; fun events, school activity and also community tidy up projects.”

(Sparkhill and Aston)

“Few activities involve people across faith boundaries.” (Sparkhill and Aston)

One comment was made of the need not to:

Marginalise young Muslim people from mainstream society and “educate them of the need to be part of mainstream society.”

The establishment of neighbourhood forums as a mechanism for bringing the local community together was stressed by one respondent:

“Neighbourhood forums could provide a meeting point for local people representing different social/ethnic groups to deal with their issues together. Local voluntary groups and faith communities could be encouraged to work together to provide initiatives where

local people can do something positive for themselves and their communities.”

(Newtown)

A number of respondents stressed the value of using art and sport and leisure activities, as a way of breaking down barriers between different groups:

“More cross curricular projects between arts venues and schools [are needed] that involve young people from a variety of different schools over a long period of time.” (Ladywood)

“[There is a need to] deliver artwork in the area which is popular; it helps integrate communities, brings them together and makes communities have fun with each other.” (Balsall Heath)

“There should be a far greater emphasis on getting people to interact with each other, for example via sport and leisure activities as the ice breaker which can lead to more formal engagement and support/understanding.” (Birmingham wide)

The need for more intergenerational activities was also stressed:

“Intergenerational projects will give even older members in the community the chance to interact with each other. It is quite evident that young people through schools and colleges interact with different cultures on a daily basis; however adults do not always have the chance to find out more about their neighbours from a different country in a non threatening environment.”

managing neighbourhoods and services

The Birmingham Community Cohesion Strategy identifies the importance of increasing statutory agency accountability and local decision making through district and neighbourhood structures and processes and ensuring that genuine and sustained community engagement is developed and maintained by public sector agencies.

It is clear from the research undertaken as part of this report that the voluntary and community sector is already playing a vital role managing specific neighbourhood services, and in some cases becoming the driving force in relation to overall neighbourhood management.

This section of the report identifies the key issues in relation to the provision of services at a neighbourhood level and in particular gaps in centres or venues that can act as a community hub, together with gaps in services for particular groups.

Issues arising from the survey

Seventeen organisations referred to an absence or limited provision of services as a main issue in relation to community cohesion. One organisation in Ladywood commented that:

“[There is an] absence of services, which makes things harder.”

Across the city other organisations referred to a limited provision of services (Bournville), or limited access to services (Sutton Coldfield). Several organisations, including one at Bordesley Green, commented that there were:

“Not too many initiatives/activities going on in the area to increase community cohesion.”

Another organisation in the city centre commented that there was a:

“Lack of services, particularly community services that bring people together.”

Several other organisations in different parts of the city, including Washwood Heath, referred to a lack of community facilities for communities. There is:

“No community centre for families and young people.”

Six organisations referred to different types of difficulty in relation to local government services from:

“Lack of easily accessed help from local council strategic departments” to

“Lack of information/understanding of Local Government policy”.

Others referred to a:

“Lack of awareness about what activities and resources are on offer.”

A number of organisations referred to impending cuts in services and to such things as the closing of the courts.

The voluntary and community sector in Birmingham is contributing to the management of neighbourhoods and local services in Birmingham in a number of different ways. These include the direct management and running of a whole range of neighbourhood services and community centres; the establishment of community councils, residents associations and other groups, which act as a voice for local residents of particular neighbourhoods; and the establishment of neighbourhood boards that act as a strategic body to coordinate voluntary and statutory sector activities within particular neighbourhoods.

Shenley Community Council

The establishment of the Community Council was one of the objectives agreed with Bournville Village Trust (BVT). This was helped by a new community manager being appointed by BVT, who was keen on the establishment of a Community Council for Shenley Green.

There are a number of voluntary and community organisations working in the area (church, scouts, etc) and it was felt that there was a need for these organisations to come together on a regular basis and in a non-threatening way for other organisations.

The Community Council covers about 2,500 properties in the area (a population of about 8,000 people). The area covers a mixture of tenures, including rented accommodation and owner occupation. Representatives from both groups wanted to work together for the benefit of the area as a whole.

It is considered that the task of the Community Council is to represent and be a voice for the whole community. It also aims to be the body that Birmingham City Council and other bodies liaise with in relation to the needs of the area, planning issues, etc. This was the vision and was sold quite easily to other people. However, it is recognised that it will take time for the Community Council to be seen as the body in the community that residents can go to with concerns. The first newsletter is about to go out, although other information has been sent to residents prior to the establishment of the Council.



Ian McArdle was a leading force in the establishment of the Community Council and chaired a strategy group that gave birth to the Council. An interim body was in place in November 2009, the elections took place in May 2010 and the Council was formally constituted.

“If new bodies are addressing a single issue they get a lot of support easily, but the concept of a council takes time to be digested and to be found useful.”

It is felt that it will take several years before the Council will be properly established in the community's mind. Although there are a lot of issues for the Council to address such as anti-social behaviour, problems of refuse collection, graffiti, etc the Council wants to take a different approach:

“We want to get away from just being problem centred; we want to involve the community in community development... there is already a certain amount of pride about the area in which the residents live (Shenley Green)... but we want to provide them with opportunities to work together more than they have done in the past.”

It is felt that the most important first step is to actually develop ways in which the community can become involved in different activities and then look to tackle issues.

“Because there has not been any body that can bring the whole community together to try to work together, people have not been accustomed to dealing with their own problems and issues [within the community].”



Allens Cross Community Centre

Allens Cross Community Association is an independent charity with all profits reinvested to improve its facilities. It is based at Allens Cross Community Centre.

The Centre, which is 10 minutes walk from Northfield shopping centre, was opened in 1931 as the first of its kind in Birmingham, in order to provide a community facility for the residents of Allens Cross and surrounding areas. The Centre includes two halls, both with disabled access, extensive grounds and a large car park.

Users of the Centre live on Allens Cross estate, the rest of Northfield, but also Weoley Castle, Bartley Green and Longbridge.

The Centre is open to all and users of the Centre include all age groups. The Centre has four part time paid staff with about 12 volunteers, involved in a range of activities including the day centre, events and other activities.

One of the activities at Allens Cross Community Centre is a regular mother and toddler group

The trick to successful engagement of mums in the area is considered to be to keep the costs to a minimum.

It costs £1 per child to attend the mother and toddler group for two hours. This includes toast and tea and coffee for mums and juice for children, together with a range of other activities as well as play. It was commented that:

“There are lots of mums who otherwise would not go to a mother and toddler group, but they can afford to come along to this one”.

It was commented that there is a lot of unemployment locally:

“Mostly only one member of the family is working, often neither are working any more. So they need activities they can afford to go to.”

Various organisations such as the police and fire service have visited the Group, with a range of activities undertaken, including gardening.

It is felt that the Group provides a chance to come together, have a chat and meet more friends which helps to tackle the isolation felt by many mums in the area.

“There are a lot of mums that were feeling isolated before, and have come along and said how much they enjoy it.”

“It is about offering each other a bit of support, particularly with new mums. They can talk to others about a few of the problems they have had.”

PN7 - Priority Neighbourhood Board

PN7 (which stands for Priority Neighbourhood 7) was established in July 2009 and covers Stetchford, Yardley North and Sheldon. Partners include the Primary Care Trust, police, fire service, Youth Service, schools, Traders Forum and Birmingham City Council.

“So it is all the key players covering the area.”

The Chair of PN7 set out the rationale for establishing the Priority Neighbourhood Board as follows:

“Funding for Priority Neighbourhoods and associated managers finishes in March 2011... I saw the writing on the wall and we decided - if we don't do something, come March 2011 when everything goes, we are just going to be left with this gap. So we set up as a constituted social enterprise that can be turned into a Community Interest Company (CIC) and then started to run a community type neighbourhood board. And that is what we have done.”

The Board is made up of 80% residents and 20% service providers. A memorandum of understanding for all service providers who work in the area has been established which sets out what the service provider is going to bring into the area, both in terms of financial and other resources, support for the aims and objectives of PN7, and agreement that any resources they bring into the area will be used to benefit residents. It was commented:

“So anything that comes into the area has to really come to us.”

Partnership meetings with all partners that work in the area are held every other month in addition to management committee meetings. Successfully establishing the Board is identified as a major achievement. It was commented:

“Actually taking it over and running it ourselves, if you look at some of the other areas, they have still got neighbourhood managers telling residents this is what I think you should be doing. Now we are telling the neighbourhood manager - this is what we think you should be doing.”

The major advantage of this approach is seen as putting residents back in control, or residents making decisions about what should be happening in their area. It was commented:

“We have been changing how some of the services have been delivered.”

“Once we know about the Comprehensive Spending Review and what the local authority is going to do, with all the cuts and changes in services, we are going to be looking at going down the procurement route, or even putting expressions of interest in for either managing or delivering some of the services.”

Gaps

Five responses (3%) to the community cohesion telephone survey and e-survey related to the lack of focal points to encourage improved community cohesion. Comments were as follows:

“We have never had a community centre in the area so we can’t meet up in a mutual place.” (Perry Barr)

“There is little for people living in the city centre, with most activities addressing the needs of people living in other areas.” (City Centre)

“No sports centre, no community centre, no youth club and no library.” (Bournville)

Services or activities for specific groups

In total 28 responses to the community cohesion e-survey and telephone survey identified gaps or weaknesses in relation to services or facilities for specific groups. The most frequent of these responses related to gaps or weaknesses relating to provision for young people (19 responses), particularly youth centres and youth work provision. This included responses relating to Washwood Heath (three responses), Nechells (two responses), Kings Norton, Lickey, Handsworth Wood, Hall Green, Bournville, Ward End, Shard End, Perry Barr/Soho, Northfield, Ladywood and Aston, together with four responses not focusing on a specific area of Birmingham. Typical comments were as follows:

“There’s a lack of youth centres and facilities that the youth can get involved in, there’s no awareness of what people need in the area.” (Washwood Heath)

“[There is] not an awful lot for young people to do in the area and at present not much hope for employment.” (Kings Norton)

“[There are] gaps in youth provision; there should be more youth workers, outreach workers, youth clubs.” (Handsworth Wood)

“[There is a need for] more and better access to funding for local youth groups and community centres on the ground.” (Shard End)

One respondent identified the specific need for provision for young Asian women:

“As a charity we have supported the establishment of youth facilities in the area. We have engaged young Asian men aged 16-25. We have identified a gap of any work with young Asian women and are working to find resources to plug this gap.” (Ward End)

Other respondents identified the need for services or activities focusing on:

- Older people (three responses);
- Women (three responses);
- People with disabilities (two responses); and
- Refugees and asylum seekers.

developing leadership and building capacity

The Birmingham Community Cohesion Strategy identifies the importance of ensuring that key individuals such as cabinet members and local councillors are equipped with the appropriate leadership and communication skills to be able to diffuse tensions through local engagement and visible confidence building.

It is equally important that residents integrally involved in improving community cohesion within their own communities are supported to develop appropriate leadership skills and that the local voluntary and community sector within each neighbourhood is supported in order that it is capable of responding to local community cohesion challenges.

A number of gaps or weaknesses in relation to support for strengthening community leadership and capacity building were identified by those responding to the Birmingham Community Cohesion survey undertaken as part of this research, although this was not an issue that was commented upon as frequently as many other aspects of community cohesion.

This section of the report identifies comments made in relation to gaps or weaknesses relating to support in strengthening community leadership and voluntary and community sector capacity.

Issues arising from the survey

The only issue specifically raised in relation to leadership and building capacity was from one person that commented on:

“The lack of organisational community groups to bring local communities together and lead community cohesion such as fundraisers and things like that.”

How voluntary and community sector organisations have sought to tackle the issues

The voluntary and community sector in Birmingham is contributing to the development of leadership skills and local community capacity building in order to improve community cohesion in a number of ways, including through increasing education and cultural awareness of different cultures, beliefs and faiths; developing leadership skills amongst different groups of residents in order that they can make a more effective contribution to the work of voluntary sector organisations and community groups; and by strengthening the capacity of local voluntary and community sector organisations to support residents.

Westfield Area Residents' Association

Westfield Area Residents' Association was established in the wake of a series of anti-social behaviour problems and arson attacks within Kings Heath in April 2010. Over six weeks there were four different cars set on fire with resulting damage to about 15 cars which became frightening to members of the community, particularly in relation to what happened next.

“I didn't mean to start a group, but lots of people were very worried and I became a mouthpiece for talking to the police and councillors, so I set up a series of community meetings and briefings.”

Two of the meetings were larger scale community meetings, each attended by about 100 people. Walkabouts on the estate were organised and involved councillors, police, environmental health and tenancy teams in order to highlight the problems and issues.

From this activity a number of other issues came to light that were of concern to different members of the community (e.g. environmental issues, rubbish collection, etc). About 600 people live in the area covered by the Residents' Association. About 50% of these residents are from BME communities and the vast majority of these are Muslim. Some of the concerns expressed by residents related to these groups and included parking at the local Mosque, the state of the houses, rubbish and the general environment in which the BME groups were living. This bad feeling within the local community had not surfaced before the arson attacks.

Fortuitously work had already commenced on the 'Big Lunch', which is a nationwide programme with the idea that those involved organise a street party and have lunch together. At the Kings Heath Big Lunch in July 2010 about 400 people came along.

“That single event has done more for our street than anything as a community cohesion exercise...there was a feeling that we all had to pull together as a community and make our street better.”

Whilst it is felt that 'ignition' relies on the leadership of a committed and capable individual, the long running success of a community organisation cannot rely on one person, but the wider community.

“In a community when someone is willing to do something that rubs off on other people.”

As an exercise in community cohesion it was felt to be really positive and a really good catalyst for further community based activities and action.

“Since the Big Lunch we are just one big happy community. At Eid recently everybody got cakes and food delivered to their house. Everybody got involved a little bit more, everybody now knows everybody else, has feelings for everybody else and everyone wants to look after each other.”

Many of the issues raised by the community are now being tackled and a 'Green and Tidy' project is aiming to improve the appearance of the area before the next 'Big Lunch'.

Changemakers

The Foundation, which was founded in 1994, exists to discover, inspire and develop young people to lead positive change in their world. The organisation is a registered charity, a limited company and operates as a social enterprise.

The Birmingham office is based in Newtown where community cohesion issues facing young people are centred around postcode wars and young people being unable to cross postcode boundaries. This has posed a real barrier for young people in accessing opportunities as well as personal safety. The organisation has also done a lot of work in Asian communities looking at issues of integration.

Changemakers has been running an advocacy stream for 15 years - a project promoting youth participation in organisations. The community stream has been running for about two years. Funding is mainly from government and grants.

The community stream identifies young leaders in the community and places them into community based organisations. They are then tasked to conduct a project engaging young people in that local community to tackle an issue.

The project is currently working with 13 young people across Birmingham over a six month period. The young people get paid for 10 days worth of work within that time, so it constitutes a paid opportunity for the young person where they conduct almost a consultancy role for the organisation they are placed with.

Community organisations have a young person working with them for six months on a project which can be used as part of that organisation's youth participation strategy into the future.

Projects range from gun and gang awareness events to healthy living projects and a lot of sports projects. For example, some young people have identified, particularly in the Asian community, that girls are not getting the same kind of access to sports provision as boys, so they have created specific girls sporting events which have proved very effective.

The model of identifying young people in the community to make a change in their community is seen as solid. However there are variables such as understanding 'where that young person is at' and 'their ability to conduct that project'. Another factor is the organisations themselves, some buying into the whole idea of working for the community, whereas others try to press their own agendas which can be a complication.

A baseline target is set for each project leader to affect 10 of their peers through design of the project or involvement in project activities. More often than not the young people surpass that target significantly, some having upwards of 100 young people attending or being involved in their event. But there is also a focus on the individual young leader and an understanding that if they can be inspired to be community leaders "it is a massive legacy that they can leave behind." In this way the community stream is creating young role models in the community.

Al-Mahdi Institute - Islamic awareness

The Al-Mahdi Institute is a research and teaching institution and multi-cultural centre facilitating the pursuit of academic excellence in Islamic studies, both locally and internationally.

In February 2010, Shazim Husayn, the Principal at the Al-Mahdi Institute, started undertaking Islamic awareness courses from a cultural and community cohesion perspective. These courses have now been provided to the West Midlands Fire Service, police service, Jobcentre Plus and quite a number of other public organisations. The courses have been undertaken frequently, usually once a month with different organisations. A total of 10 classes have now been undertaken and an average of about seven people have attended each course.

The course started from a request from the fire service and since then requests have 'snowballed'.

No charges are made for the course as it is felt to be more beneficial to have people attending. It is also felt that if a charge was made people may feel that Islamic awareness was not something that they would want to pay for.

Very positive feedback has been received on the course, which has been refined over time to introduce more variety, etc. Now the course can be tailored to the particular needs of different organisations.

Shazim feels that it is encouraging that there is an increased demand for the Islamic awareness courses and this is felt to be a reflection of successful impact.

The Islamic awareness courses are part of the Al-Mahdi Institute's 'Culture, Inter-faith and Communities' agenda which seeks to engage with the wider community through different project work.

Gaps

Eight responses (5%) to the community cohesion telephone survey and e-survey identified gaps or weaknesses in relation to support for strengthening community leadership and capacity building to underpin voluntary and community sector activities in order to improve community cohesion. This included gaps or weaknesses in specialist infrastructure support, networking and advice for smaller voluntary and community sector organisations.

Three responses (2%) related to the lack of a strategic approach towards activities designed to improve community cohesion:

“[There is a need for] a combination of different activities rather than just single projects.” (Stechford and Yardley North)

“A more integrated and multi agency response is required using a bottom up approach.” (Lozells and East Handsworth)

tackling crime and disorder and preventing conflict

An important element of the Birmingham Community Cohesion Strategy relates to the need to tackle crime and disorder effectively and help prevent conflict.

This section of the report identifies comments made in relation to particular crime and disorder issues and perceived gaps in current support and provision to tackle these issues, together with examples of particular approaches to tackling crime and disorder that have worked well.

Issues arising from the survey

Thirty-nine organisations specifically referred to different aspects of crime and disorder as a major community cohesion issue. Of these organisations about 15 specifically referred to crime, nine to anti-social behaviour, five organisations referred to race discrimination/racial hatred, four to drugs and drug dealing and four to the activities of gangs (particularly in the evenings). Many of these different aspects of crime and disorder were stated by organisations across Birmingham, but there were notable concentrations in the city centre and to a lesser extent Kings Norton. One organisation in Aston commented:

“As we have been working closely with other community groups there is a need to address different issues in the area such as racial hatred, suspicion and non-tolerance to other cultural aspects.”

Other respondents referred to a lack of policing in the area, vandalism, security and graffiti.

Gaps

Three responses (2%) to the community cohesion telephone survey and e-survey identified gaps or weaknesses in relation to activities to tackle crime and disorder.

How voluntary and community sector organisations have sought to tackle the issues

It is clear from this research that the voluntary and community sector has been at the forefront of tackling crime and disorder within local communities in a range of different ways, including spearheading campaigns to ensure appropriate action is taken in relation to specific local crime and disorder issues, working in partnership with the police, city council and other bodies to develop appropriate responses to local crime and disorder issues and ensuring the concerns and experiences of local residents in relation to crime and disorder issues are voiced. Two examples are included as case studies in this report:



Birmingham South West Group

Birmingham South West Group was established about 15 years ago to try and tackle problems associated with drug taking and prostitution on the Waterworks estate. The area was known as the red light district of Birmingham.

“Everywhere you went you were either accosted by a pimp or one of the girls.”

The area became a ‘no-go’ zone for local people at night, particularly older and younger people. However, the South West Group was keen to avoid the vigilante approach to prostitution. Instead the Group got in touch with the police, council, and housing and health providers, etc.

“We brought in an anti-social behaviour officer [a housing officer]. Without his help and the help of the police we couldn’t have done what we have done. It’s been a brilliant partnership.”

Normally the anti-social behaviour officer would be within Birmingham City Council. An arrangement was made with the police and the housing officer moved into his own office within the Ladywood police station so that a joined up approach could be developed.

If a prostitute was arrested then that person was taken to a police station and all the different services were present in order to help to try and get the person away from prostitution. This approach is still going on today.

“It wasn’t let’s just get them off the street and forget them.”

The work of the South West Group, police, anti-social behaviour officer and others has resulted in the transformation of a local community within the inner city of Birmingham.

The group has also been involved in changing the law on street prostitution on three occasions and prostitution is now down to single figures. A total of about 40 crack cocaine houses/drug dens have been closed down.

“I think that every second day we were carrying out an eviction.”

The estate now has state of the art cameras and lighting and there are ornate railings all round the estate. There is now also an estate caretaker.

“There is now a huge feel good factor about the estate and a lot of work has gone on here.”

The founder of the Birmingham South West Group (Chris Hoare) won a government award, the “Taking a Stand” award. He was asked if he would like to be trained in Trafford Hall in Chester along with 11 other people and Chris became the first Home Office Community Crime Fighter in the country. Chris was also asked to name someone who had gone beyond the call of duty to help the situation on the Waterworks Estate and PC Tudor Roberts subsequently won the Community Crime Fighters award (the first award of its kind).

Wilkes Green Residents' Association

Sonia Hyman is the Chair of Wilkes Green Residents' Association, which covers about 1,000 households in Handsworth. The Association was started in 1987 in 'somebody's front room' by local residents. The tragic death of a local school child was the trigger for the establishment of the Association. The school did not have a proper crossing and a petition was mounted and action was subsequently taken to deal with the problems associated with traffic. The Association expanded and still performs a central role within the local community. The youngest member of the Association is eight years old.

A number of environmental issues face the area, including housing, crime, drugs, prostitution and anti-social behaviour, which the Association has been trying to address.

Successful actions include the removal of a brothel in the area in 2009. The police were involved and with the direct involvement of the Association sufficient evidence was obtained to enable a conviction. A record was taken by residents on what was happening and a number of members of the Association gave evidence in court.

"I thought no, we can't have this [prostitution] in our area where we live. Children are not supposed to be seeing these things. You have got to think about the young and the elderly. You've got to make a stand somewhere. I just get mad you know."

In order to address some of the problems of anti-social behaviour, a Wilkes Green Community Watch has been established by the Residents Association. Residents in the area go out on a monthly basis with the Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs).

Leaflets are delivered to residents in the Wilkes Green area to encourage a response from the wider community.

"What we found is that if you have a public meeting, residents or people who come to the meeting can be afraid to stand up and say something."

If the residents have a problem residents can then contact Sonia who acts as the liaison person with the police.

On each monthly walkabout a record is kept of any action needed in the area. Very often the PCSO's will knock on doors and seek views on any issues in the area. The police are both very supportive of the scheme and very responsive in dealing with any issues. Residents involved in the scheme have their own jackets marked 'Wilkes Green Community Watch', flashlights and leaflets.

"It does make a difference because the residents...some of them are elderly and vulnerable and they felt a lot safer. It's working well."

Residents in the area have come together and have been very supportive of the actions taken. Sonia believes the area has improved tremendously.

other responses

Issues arising from the survey

Young people

About 21 organisations referred to young people as one of the main community cohesion issues. However, opinion is sharply divided as to what the issues actually are in relation to young people.

Seven organisations felt that there was a need to provide young people with different types activities or facilities to engage young people. One organisation commented that “unsociable behaviour by youths was caused by a lack of activities to engage them”. Several organisations also referred to difficulties with young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), particularly on the outer ring estates. One organisation commented that there was:

“Not enough happening in the area for young people deemed as NEET.”

Other organisations referred to more specific issues such as young people not going to school, bullying, family issues, being a nuisance and integrating with each other. In this latter context a number of organisations specifically referred to issues and mistrust between Asian and African/Caribbean young people.

A number of organisations expressed concern over the way in which young people were viewed and often labelled as trouble-makers. This stereotyping of young people was felt to be a worrying trend.

Generation gap

Seven organisations specifically referred to cohesion issues that related to what they saw as the ‘generation gap’ and the lack of understanding between younger and older generations. One organisation in Lee Bank referred to:

“Differences between young and old, especially over behaviour and space. [Lee Bank is a] regenerated community in terms of housing, but community relations are very mixed.”

Funding and resources

Twelve organisations across Birmingham simply referred to a lack of funding, support and/ or spending cuts as the main community cohesion issue.

Language difficulties

Six organisations across Birmingham referred to language barriers as an issue in relation to community cohesion. It was commented by one organisation that:

“Too many people can’t speak or understand English.”

resident's views

Findings from discussions with local residents

For the interviews with residents we were largely dependent on voluntary sector organisations (some of which formed part of the case studies) to help signpost potential resident interviewees who were involved in community cohesion activity. To supplement the contacts that were available to us, further contact was made with an additional number of organisations, who subsequently agreed to put out a generic e-mail requesting that volunteers contact the research team if they were willing to be interviewed. This has led to what might be described as a 'gender imbalance' in that the sample of interviewees includes more women than men. This is further exacerbated by the fact that the two workshops that were held were populated entirely by women. It should be noted that a significant part of VCS activity is based on social care - working to support children and young people, older people or people with physical health problems or learning difficulties. Traditionally, these are areas of work (either paid or otherwise) that are undertaken by women, hence their dominance in this element of the study. Further, there would appear to be some evidence to suggest that women are more pro-actively involved in organising informally in Birmingham, via groups or networks, and often the capacity to participate is informed by other responsibilities such as family, study or employment.

We remind the reader that the sample for the resident interviews or for those participating in the workshops was not drawn to reflect the make-up of voluntary sector organisations in Birmingham, and findings should be digested with that note of caution in mind.

This element of the study then was qualitative, consisting of 50 one-to-one interviews with

residents involved in local community cohesion activity. Individuals were identified via community organisations and known voluntary sector contacts. The purpose of discussions was to explore in detail the nature of involvement in community cohesion activities; the impacts of involvement; triggers for becoming involved; barriers to involvement and how they can be overcome; particular approaches that have worked well in relation to encouraging greater involvement; improvements to current community cohesion activities; and perceptions of good practice. It should be noted that some names have been changed at the request of individuals.

Why do residents get involved in community cohesion activities?

Many that we spoke to talked about their belief in 'community activism', highlighting the need for residents to use their skills and knowledge to 'try and make a difference'. One said that the trigger for her to get more pro-actively involved in community cohesion was her sense of needing to break down some of the barriers - structural and otherwise - that were disempowering women. She said that it was important to break down the barriers and stigma attached to certain communities.

There were many commonalities amongst residents in terms of getting involved with community cohesion activities. 'Marcia' has been involved in women's education and domestic violence projects for a considerable time. She says she is driven by empowering women to take control over their lives and to support women to organise themselves to address poverty and disadvantage, crime and community safety.

'Ishreen' is part of an organisation called WEBB, bringing together women from different cultures to help enable women in Birmingham to understand difference, support each other and live together in a multi-cultural neighbourhood.

For some, community activism was triggered and informed by a change in personal circumstances. One woman who had previously been in an abusive relationship said that her relationship breakdown and her recognition that she needed to secure independence was instrumental in her becoming involved with community organisations. There were numerous examples of individual women engaging - but perhaps not acknowledging their input into community cohesion practice. One woman, for example, talked about the role she had acquired as a 'family mediator' working tirelessly where there had been family breakdown or incidents of domestic violence.

Some became involved as a result of a passionate belief in tackling inequalities. Lesley has spent the past ten years working in an individual capacity to tackle inequalities within the lesbian, gay men, bisexual and trans-gender community. It was suggested that there was a real gap in the community cohesion agenda in respect of LGBT groups and some faith networks, with work needing to be done to facilitate a 'dialogue' between the two to address the issue of hate crime.

Some people get involved because they feel passionately about a particular issue. Tom, who is retired, described being passionate about the arts and the therapeutic role that the arts could play in supporting people with learning difficulties. Tony, also retired, suggested that for him the issue was that, as a resident, he was very concerned about the increased volume in traffic - this was the spur to campaign aggressively via his local residents' association.

Others take a slightly different stance, becoming engaged in activities where they see a gap, such as David who undertook fundraising activities for a women's refuge.

The nature of involvement in community cohesion activities

Salwa works in Northfield and focuses on integration between newly-arrived communities and established communities. Outside of paid employment, she is involved with a women's group - NISWAN - (Northfield Integration Solidarity Women's Active Network - 'niswan' means 'women' in Arabic) which encourages women to become involved to work together on community cohesion activities. Keith, who managed to combine self-employment with being a Special Constable and being very pro-active in his local community association focusing on environmental issues, suggested:

"It wouldn't occur to me not to be involved in something - the council can't do everything."

There were numerous examples of local residents who were involved in groups and activities that can be described as 'off the radar'. For example, Angela worked in public health but devoted a lot of her spare time to supporting very small local health groups, working with them to develop their skills and to help them apply for mainstream funding to help deliver local health services.

What's the impact of involvement?

In a sense, this was a more difficult question to answer - people didn't necessarily reflect on possible personal change, but most found it

easier to identify family or community impacts. Some spoke openly about the impact of involvement in terms of community activities legitimising 'personal time' or 'time outside of the family'. Many suggested that their involvement had helped develop skills and confidence:

“There’s safety - and wider community approval - in doing things that are just for women. It’s a sensitive issue in our culture - even for younger women. It also helps that we can usually take children with us too.”

“Being involved informally - like getting information from Amina or the neighbourhood manager and passing it around - has meant that I’m better informed, have a better knowledge about what’s going on. It means that I can encourage other women to do the same. It means that my family treat me differently. It means that I develop new skills. It means that I can share stuff with the kids. It’s very positive.”

One male interviewee, who had learning difficulties, said that his role as a volunteer was important because of what he saw as gaps in services and:

“I’m a good role model - my third sector work is contributing to the community cohesion agenda.”

A number of the women talked freely in respect of being able to use their informal networks (the family, neighbours, parents at school) to resolve conflict. One said that efforts were recognised by local police professionals, who were quite happy to let situations be dealt with in a low-key way. Most of the women in the group described positive

and friendly relationships with local police and the neighbourhood manager.

What are the barriers in place that restrict involvement?

A number of people identified that a lack of financial resources, coupled with financial inequality, is restricting involvement, arguing that if funding was more readily available more ordinary people would be involved in community cohesion activity. One said:

“We could do a lot more but lack funding - this is a real barrier to helping women take a real part in tackling community cohesion.”

One male interviewee who had extensive experience of working with young men in deprived neighbourhoods suggested that one of the barriers was re-connecting with disenfranchised young men who were not accessing mainstream education, arguing:

“A real barrier is that gap in terms of lack of provision to help integrate new arrivals - and if they don’t know what the systems and structures are how can they be involved in helping create cohesive communities?”

What approaches have worked well?

For some, it is informality which results in success. ‘Amina’, which is a community-led women’s group, has worked to encourage women to become more active in their communities. This has been achieved through discussion groups and drop-in sessions, arts and crafts activities and health and fitness

sessions. The interviewee said the group has purposely left things to run informally:

“We didn’t want, for example, to go down the accreditation route with the sewing class and for things to be perceived as being too formal - it puts lots of women off.”

Good practice is also clearly achieved by individuals thinking creatively about their communities - analysing what worked for different segments, and thinking intelligently about gaps in services or provision. Examples of what worked well included sports activities.

Gaps

One interviewee talked of the difficulties regarding the pace of change in the neighbourhood, with new communities moving to particular areas. She suggested that, at least amongst some of the youths, there were tensions. She thought that one of the real gaps, and something that was vital for community cohesion, was services for young people - clubs and projects that bring young people from different cultures together.

Another gave examples of gaps in services for older LGBT people, those who were carers, and those experiencing bereavement. It was also suggested that there is a real gap in respect of LGBT groups and some faith networks, with work needing to be done to facilitate a ‘dialogue’ between the two to address the issue of hate crime.

Examples of good practice

There are many examples of good practice and a small sample of the type of community cohesion activity underway is included in this report. Charity shops can be low-key but pay dividends, working with residents on money advice to help reduce personal debt and helping facilitate resident involvement and engagement.

Groups seeking to encourage the development of traditional arts and crafts have established a cultural exchange between community arts-based organisations in Birmingham and cities in Spain, recognising that traditional arts and crafts are helping different communities acknowledge the diverse talents that can be found in particular neighbourhoods, and that support for traditional art activities can be a useful way of securing the engagement of people who ordinarily might not consider getting involved in community engagement.

One interviewee used her knowledge of social housing, combined with a personal desire to get fit, and contacted one of the local providers who specialised in housing for older people. Denise said that the manager of the housing project liked the idea of getting their residents involved in gentle physical activity, and thought that it would be good to help them socialise with others too. Weekly sessions took place in the ‘community TV lounge’. Only two women attended initially, but Denise says that the group now averages between six and eight, and includes a mix of black, white and Asian residents, many of whom are 60+. Denise says she’s feeling very good about herself and in supporting older people.

conclusions

The research findings clearly indicate that the voluntary and community sector (VCS) is making a significant contribution in helping deliver outcomes against Birmingham's Community Cohesion Strategy across all main areas of relevant and appropriate activity.

Profile of VCS involvement

The profile of VCS organisations involved in delivering the cohesion agenda reflects a number of important aspects of voluntary sector involvement in this area of activity:

- Most are relatively small organisations - more than 70% had less than 10 paid staff, with 29% having no paid staff;
- More than half (55%) had more than 10 volunteers and 14%, 50 or more volunteers. This serves to reflect the importance of volunteering in relation to community cohesion activity;
- A wide range of different types of VCS organisations were evident in relation to the survey, although approaching three-quarters of organisations were either charities (27%), community groups (24%) or companies limited by guarantee (22%);
- A broad range of activities were undertaken with no particular activity or sector dominating.

The two main aspects of community cohesion that surveyed organisations were seeking to improve were 'building good relations/encouraging interaction' (which accounted for 22% of all organisations) and 'engaging the community' (19%). The relationship between the main community cohesion issues identified by VCS organisations and the focus of their activity in tackling these issues is also significant. In particular:

- The need to build stronger community relationships came out very strongly as a community cohesion issue and the most frequent focus of community cohesion action;
- Community engagement did not come out as strongly as a key community cohesion issue to be addressed, but it was the second most frequently cited 'main aspect of community cohesion' that the VCS organisations were seeking to improve. This is probably explained by the fact that lack of adequate community engagement is not seen as a key community issue in its own right.
- When responses are grouped together, removing structural disadvantages is the most commonly cited community cohesion problem, but is not identified as frequently as the main focus of action. This is likely to be linked to a recognition of limitations in the capacity of VCS to tackle such fundamental structural problems and that the major thrust of such action needs to come through effective intervention by key statutory organisations in collaboration with local residents and VCS.

Engaging people

VCS organisations appear to place engagement at the heart of their activities and effective community engagement is identified as an essential pre requisite for tackling underlying community cohesion problems. This is perhaps one of the reasons why the VCS often does not see a lack of community engagement as a main issue in relation to community cohesion. Creating dialogue and providing opportunities for people to come together appear to be central to all successful engagement activities.

Engagement activities have worked well where:

- Support has been built up over a long time led by organisations with a strong local presence, involving local people and those that know the area well. Many organisations stressed that it has taken a number of years to develop effective 'buy in' locally and develop local trust. You can't 'parachute' support into neighbourhoods;
- Organisations that are not based in the area have delivered activities in conjunction with local organisations and key local people in order that local engagement is ensured;
- Activities are fun and interesting;
- Activities are affordable;
- Activities are accessible; and
- Activities are well publicised.

Building relationships

It is apparent that the single most important issue as far as the VCS in Birmingham is concerned revolves around the poor relationships between different cultural, ethnic and religious groups. The reasons for these poor relationships between different groups can be complex and multi-layered, but usually involve either a lack of understanding and tolerance of different community groups or that groups are not willing or able to interact with other sections of the community.

Organisations spoke of a lack of connectivity, isolation and few opportunities for 'coming together' or communication. They also commented on people staying in their own community and not integrating with other community members.

Birmingham is a very diverse city but a clear theme that emerged from consultations was that it is not an 'integrated' city. Although many diverse ethnic groups and cultures co-exist, VCS organisations consider that these different groups are often leading quite separate lives, rarely mixing.

A number of those consulted pointed out that many organisations, particularly in many of the more deprived neighbourhoods within Birmingham, are funded to focus on particular groups. While there may be positive benefits to this approach in terms of ensuring specialist support is provided and in attempting to tackle some of the underlying problems that disproportionately impact on different groups, it was also pointed out that this also acts to reinforce divisions between different groups.

If the goal is to create more cohesive communities then clearly there must be concerted and continuing efforts to break down the barriers that have resulted in what many VCS organisations perceive as being segregated communities in Birmingham. Increased levels of interaction appear to be fundamental to this process.

There are examples of a number of particular approaches to improving relationships and breaking down barriers between different communities and groups that have worked well:

- Bringing people together through shared interests;
- Bringing people together outside of their usual environment;
- Bringing people together through shared challenges that build bonds because people have to rely on each other to meet the challenges set;
- Using different media in innovative ways in order to challenge prejudices;
- Enabling the exploration of different beliefs in a non threatening environment;
- Enabling people who do not normally mix to do so in a 'safe' environment; and
- Using food as a way of enabling people to interact with different cultures and beliefs.

The key success factors of these different approaches appear to revolve around projects that bring different groups together, build trust, build up relationships and friendships and compliment communication with others.

Active citizenship

There is some considerable evidence from the research that active citizenship in Birmingham has been, at least initially, issue led and that very often it is only when local people are faced with a problem or issue that they become more active citizens. Westfield Area Residents Association, which was established in the wake of a series of anti-social behaviour problems and arson attacks in April 2010, provides a good example of active citizenship and leadership in response to a local issue.

Although respondents to the research didn't draw a specific correlation between active citizenship and community cohesion it is clear that many activities and developments that contribute to community cohesion have been organised and undertaken entirely on a voluntary basis. For many residents there is no core funding and a lot of voluntary time and resource is spent raising funding on a project by project basis.

Things that have worked well in encouraging active citizenship include:

- Recognising the contribution of volunteers;
- Ensuring volunteers benefit from the activities undertaken through improved skills, job prospects, meeting new friends, gaining qualifications, increased confidence and other things; and
- Using volunteering as a way of breaking down prejudices through practical action - 'showing by doing'.

Infrastructure and neighbourhood management

There are a wide range of successful models of community and voluntary sector organisations managing vital local services and in some cases filling a void left by inadequate statutory provision, such as the provision of Food Banks.

In some cases a model of income generation, achieved through purchase of services/goods by local residents has been used to subsidise other services that would not have been funded otherwise.

There are also a number of successful examples of forums that have been established to provide an effective voice for local residents to lobby for action to tackle particular concerns. A number of factors appear to be important to the success of such local forums including:

- Effective local leadership;
- Sound methods of engaging local people;
- Active citizenship within the local area; and
- A threat or issue around which people in the local area can rally; this has been particularly important in the formative stages of the development of local forums.

The impending cutbacks in neighbourhood management services through Birmingham City Council underline the importance of the development of effective community led structures to ensure appropriate co-ordination and prioritisation of service provision at a neighbourhood level.

There are practical examples where this has occurred at a neighbourhood level, most notably the example of PN7 which is made up of 80% residents and 20% service providers. A memorandum of understanding for all service

providers who work in the area has been established. This sets out what the service provider is going to bring into the area both in terms of financial and other resources, that they are supporting the aims and objectives of PN7 and that any resources they bring into the area will be used to benefit residents. It will be important that the lessons from this and other innovative approaches to neighbourhood management are shared across Birmingham.

Tackling structural disadvantages

Worklessness and deprivation were the most frequently cited 'structural disadvantages'. There is a reasonably strong correlation between the geographical focus of VCS activity and the wards with the highest levels of unemployment and deprivation. However, it is perhaps not surprising that VCS activity is targeted at some of the most deprived and mixed communities in Birmingham (e.g. Nechells, Ladywood, Aston and Washwood Heath) as these tend to be the areas where funding for such activities is most likely to be available.

Relatively few VCS organisations referred to housing in relation to community cohesion, but in a number of areas (e.g. Edgbaston, Ladywood and Selly Oak) a concern was expressed in relation to the increase in number of houses that are bought to let. It is felt that this has led to a transient population and issues surrounding the up-keep of properties.

It is clear that the level of on the ground partnership working between local VCS, statutory organisations and residents is very variable across Birmingham. There are examples where close and effective working relationships between different agencies on the ground appear to have been established.

In relation to those interviewed for this research Ward End and Quinton were highlighted in this respect in particular.

Effective on the ground partnership working relationships are clearly an essential pre requisite for tackling deep seated issues facing different neighbourhoods.

Crime and disorder

About 14% of VCS organisations surveyed (39 organisations) specifically referred to different aspects of crime and disorder as a major community cohesion issue. Although a number of issues were referred to, such as crime, anti-social behaviour, race discrimination/racial hatred, drugs and drug dealing and the activities of gangs, there was no single aspect or geography of crime and disorder that particularly stood out.

Developing leadership and building capacity

Although this was not raised as an issue, it is clear from the research that the VCS in Birmingham is contributing to the development of leadership skills amongst different groups of residents in order that they can make a more effective contribution to the work of voluntary sector organisations and community groups and by strengthening the capacity of local voluntary and community sector organisations to support residents. The work of Changemakers in developing young community leaders is a good example in this regard.

It is also important to point out that many organisations interviewed have a dynamic/charismatic/energetic/passionate person driving their organisation, who are leaders without necessarily acknowledging it.

Informal activity

There would appear to be many examples of communities working to tackle community cohesion in a very informal way. There were a number of examples of this approach which surfaced during the individual resident interviews, with groups sometimes coming together in response to a particular community issue and then disbanding. It is also evident that some groups 'operating under the radar' are choosing not to be part of formal VCS structures and are not willing to sacrifice their independence for a funding culture which demands compliance regarding outputs and outcomes.

Networks, communication and capacity

Analysis of volunteering activity suggests higher levels of activity in areas in Birmingham which have been, over the past 20 years, subject to regeneration programmes and other interventions seeking to reduce inequality and disadvantage (Aston, Handsworth, Balsall Heath, Sparkbrook/Sparkhill etc). This level of engagement may be informed by the structures in place for communicating with local residents with regard to community engagement and involvement. There is also evidence to indicate that faith groups and networks in the city have been very successful in responding to gaps in neighbourhood services (advice, youth groups etc) and that they are able to call on a sizable network of volunteers.

Gaps

While specific gaps in activities were cited in a number of different localities most reflected common concerns across wide areas of Birmingham, most notably:

- The need for activities that build relations between different communities was the most commonly cited ‘gap’. Many respondents felt that different groups often live very ‘segregated’ lives, with few activities that bring different communities together in ways that promote greater understanding and sharing of ideas;
- Appropriate support and activities for young people. Activities for young people are considered to be particularly important in engendering community cohesion. It is felt that young people need to have somewhere to go and have something to do. Several organisations also referred to difficulties with young people not in education, employment or training (NEET); and
- Lack of funding.

Funding

It is clear that cut backs in funding will have a fundamental impact on the capacity of local organisations to respond to critical community cohesion challenges. A high proportion of the examples of what has worked well set out in this report were dependent upon central government, local authority, other statutory sector, BIG Lottery or other funding pots. Cut backs in these funding sources will have a detrimental impact. Any notion that some of the challenges facing different neighbourhoods can be effectively tackled without significant resources is simply not realistic.

However, it should be noted that many of the neighbourhood organisations that contributed to the research project are entirely voluntary organisations that have been very effective in either tackling specific issues or influencing public spending in line with the priorities of their areas.

Since financial resources will be tight, it will be particularly important that strong relationships are built and nurtured between community activists, grassroots groups, and community development practitioners from the public and voluntary sectors, in order that “in kind” support can be identified and developed.

Recommendations

- BVSC, on behalf of the wider partnerships, should continue to build up a databank of examples of activities/approaches that work well in addressing specific aspects of community cohesion, building on the work undertaken through this research.
- Consideration should be given to how community-level VCS organisations, groups, and active citizens are linked together, capitalising on i-volunteer⁷ and the use of social networking to enable networking, communication, and sharing of good practice. This initiative could particularly target the many ‘below the radar’ organisations and groups that don’t feature on listings of VCS organisations, and would go some way towards linking them into mainstream resources such as the Volunteer Centre and its network of volunteer organisers (BRAVO).

⁷ i-volunteer was established by Red Foundation as a bespoke website exclusively for those interested in volunteering in December 2009.

- Funding criteria should be changed to ensure active steps are taken to encourage greater inter-group, ethnic or faith working. This could mean ensuring that funding made available for this work is done so under the condition that the activities undertaken actively include diverse groups, and encourage them to work together in supportive ways. It is important to take steps to genuinely involve the community in community development and fundamentally this means providing more opportunities to work together than has been the case in the past.

- Steps should be put in place to encourage the replication of successful models and approaches across different areas of Birmingham. Recent national research⁸ identified the following critical success factors in relation to the successful replication of voluntary and community led initiatives:

- Having a complete model in place that people can see works in practice;
- Documentation that is clear and accessible;
- Structured support mechanisms;
- Adequate funding;
- A flexible approach to replication and ability to adapt the model to local needs;
- A clear specification of the essential 'non-negotiable' elements of the model being replicated;

- A dedicated person in place within the recipient organisation to champion the process; and
- Buy in from staff in the recipient organisation.

Next Steps

It is proposed that BVSC discuss these findings with Be Birmingham, Birmingham City Council, the Community Cohesion Forum and members of the voluntary and community sector in Birmingham in order to put in place a plan of action which positively responds to the findings.



⁸ A guide to replication of good practice models involving volunteers; Goldstar Good Practice Dissemination Programme; Action research programme (2008/09); Local Economy Solutions Ltd

appendix

90 voluntary and community service organisations interviewed as part of the research programme

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| Advocacy Matters | Sutton Coldfield |
| Afro-British Support Services "Impact" | Ladywood |
| Aiming 2 Achieve | Quinton |
| All-4U Community Network | Washwood Heath |
| Allens Cross Community Association/Centre | Northfield |
| Al-Mahdi Institute | Balsall Heath |
| Asian Community Advisory Service | Bordesley Green |
| Balsall Heath Forum | Sparkbrook |
| Banner Theatre | Handsworth Wood |
| Banners Gate Community Association | Sutton Vesey |
| Bartley Green Housing Liaison Board | Edgbaston |
| Birmingham Buddhist Vihara Trust | Ladywood |
| Birmingham LGBT Community Trust | Birmingham wide |
| Birmingham Open Spaces Forum | Birmingham wide |
| Birmingham PlayCare Network | Perry Barr/Soho |
| Birmingham South West Group | Edgbaston |
| Birmingham Talking Newspaper Association | Birmingham wide |
| Birmingham TUC Centre for The Unemployed | Sparkhill |
| Bournville Village Council | Bournville |
| Castle Vale Environmental Trust | Erdington |
| Chamberlain Forum | Birmingham wide |
| Changemakers | Birmingham wide |
| Common-Unity Social Enterprise | Birmingham wide |
| Community Media Services | Edgbaston |
| Community Resource Information Service | Northfield |
| Compact | |
| Concorde Youth Centre | Sparkbrook |
| Cotts Meadow Estates | Washwood Heath |
| Craftspace | Birmingham wide |

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| CSV Environment | Washwood Heath |
| Digbeth Trust (Basis platform) | Nechells |
| East Yardley Neighbourhood Forum | East Yardley |
| Effington Residents' Association | Hodge Hill |
| Family Action North | Erdington |
| Frankley Neighbourhood Forum | Frankley |
| Frankley Police Liaison Committee | Frankley |
| Friction Arts | Highgate |
| Friends of Balaam's Wood | Rubery |
| Friends of Cotteridge Park | Bournville |
| Friends of Ward End Park | Washwood Heath |
| Games4All ltd | Washwood Heath |
| Growing Through | Erdington |
| Hodge Hill Elders Advice Centre | Hodge Hill |
| Home-Start Northfield | Northfield |
| Jericho Foundation | Edgbaston |
| Ladywood Project | Ladywood |
| Lift Community Trust | Quinton |
| Local Leagues | Balsall Heath |
| Lozells Neighbourhood Forum | Lozells |
| Malachi Community Trust | Northfield |
| Martineau Gardens | Edgbaston |
| Mashriq Challenge Resource Centre | Hockley |
| Moseley Forum | Moseley |
| Muslim Educational Consult Committee | Sparkbrook |
| Narthex Sparkhill and St John's Church Sparkhill | Sparkhill |
| North Summerfield Residents' Association | Ladywood |
| Olive Branch Community Centre | Soho/Ladywood |
| Overpool Neighbourhood Forum | Hodge Hill |
| Pioneers Leading the Way | Sparkbrook |
| Primrose Hill Community Project | Northfield |

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| Quinton Youth For Christ | Quinton |
| Resident University | Birmingham wide |
| Round Midnight | Balsall Heath |
| South Birmingham Community Radio | Longbridge |
| Second Thoughts Community Project | Sutton New Hall |
| Shenley Youth and Community Trust | Weoley |
| SIFA Fireside | Nechells |
| Sikh Nari Manch | Erdington/Sutton Coldfield |
| Somali Youth Development Organisation | Sparkbrook |
| Sound It Out Community Music | Birmingham wide |
| South Birmingham Young Homeless Project | Longbridge |
| Sparkbrook Caribbean and African Women's Development Initiative | Sparkbrook |
| Sport 4 Life UK | Edgbaston |
| St Margaret's Community Trust | Ward End |
| St Martin's Centre for Health & Healing | City centre |
| Stockfield Community Association | Acocks Green |
| Studio Select | No specific area specified |
| The Sufi Trust | Birmingham wide |
| Summerfield Residents' Association | Ladywood |
| Syconium | Birmingham wide |
| The Birmingham Pen Trade Heritage Association | Hockley |
| The Feast | Sparkhill and Aston |
| The Midlands International Buddhist Association in the UK | Aston |
| Ulfah Arts | Birmingham wide |
| Uplands Allotments | Handsworth Wood |
| Ward End Asian Elders Welfare Association | Washwood Heath |
| Wilkes Green Residents' Association | Lozells and East Handsworth |
| Windows on Sudan | Nechells |
| Westfield Area Residents' Association | Kings Heath |
| Yemini Community Association | Sandwell |