

CABINET

18 September 2012

Title: Together: A Community Cohesion Strategy for Barking and Dagenham 2012-16	
Report of the Cabinet Member for Crime, Justice and Communities	
Open Report	For Decision
Wards Affected: All	Key Decision: Yes
Report Author: Karen Ahmed, Divisional Director, Adult Commissioning	Contact Details: Tel: 020 227 2331 E-mail: karen.ahmed@lbbd.gov.uk
Accountable Divisional Director: Karen Ahmed, Divisional Director, Adult Commissioning	
Accountable Director: Anne Bristow, Corporate Director, Adult and Community Services	
Summary: <p>“Together” is the first community cohesion strategy for Barking and Dagenham which has been developed by local partners and will be delivered by local organisations working together. “Together” has been formed based on extensive consultation carried out this year, which built on the research carried out by the Campaign Company in 2007.</p> <p>The Council’s previous Cohesion Strategy was launched in 2007 and ended in 2010. The six priorities identified in the 2007 strategy have been wrapped into three themes: neighbourliness, talking and listening, and bringing people together. An action plan is included, which emphasises actions to be taken within existing resources by all partners.</p> <p>The strategy has been agreed by the Community Safety Partnership; Cabinet is being asked to endorse the strategy.</p>	
Recommendation(s) <p>The Cabinet is asked to consider, comment and endorse the “Together: A Community Cohesion Strategy for Barking and Dagenham 2012-16” as set out at Appendix A to the report.</p>	
Reason(s) <p>To assist the Council in achieving its key objective of “Building Together”.</p>	

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 *Together* is the first community cohesion strategy for Barking and Dagenham which has been developed by local partners and will be delivered by local organisations working together. *Together* has been formed based on extensive consultation carried out this year, which built on the research carried out by the Campaign Company in 2007. This is the borough's first partnership cohesion strategy. Both the previous strategies have focused on the role of the Council in leading cohesion rather than developing a partnership approach.
- 1.2 In 2008 the Government defined community cohesion as "*What must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well together.*"
- 1.3 Work to promote community cohesion also directly supports the requirement of the Equality Act 2010 to "*Foster good relations between people who share an equalities characteristic and those who don't.*"
- 1.4 The Coalition Government (2012) has focused on developing integration, which is defined as: "creating the conditions for everyone to play a full part in national and local life". This will occur when, "...each of us, whatever our background, has a chance to contribute. ... Integration is achieved when neighbourhoods, families and individuals come together on issues which matter to them"
- 1.5 There have been two previous community cohesion strategies in Barking and Dagenham. The first strategy, 'One Community', being adopted in 2004 and the second, 'Building our future together' was developed in 2007 following research and recommendations made by the Campaign Company. The 2007 strategy was based there were six priorities identified by residents to help cohesion in the borough. These were:
- A safe place to live
 - Fair access to services
 - A place where people respect each other.
 - Improvements to the local environment
 - More opportunities for young people
 - Create opportunities for the community to come together
- 1.6 The 2007 strategy ended in 2010. The Local Strategic Partnership remains committed to developing community cohesion; a new three year strategy has therefore been prepared for the borough. The new strategy has three focus areas, which are based on the previous six priorities: neighbourliness, talking and listening, and bringing people together.

2. Proposal and Issues

- 2.1 There have been examples of community tensions in the borough in recent years which imply a risk of future disturbances. Demonstrations by the English Defence League in the area and ongoing activity by far right organisations have drawn some media coverage, and pose a risk to future cohesion.
- 2.2 The disturbances in August 2011 affected Barking and Dagenham but the response by local people was more significant. The day after the disturbance, nearly 50

community leaders came together and signed a joint statement which was circulated in the borough and replicated in other parts of London. Young people in particular helped to arrange clear up days. A peace wall was signed by many residents and local organisations.

- 2.3 In contrast to the current Government's policy on integration, Barking and Dagenham is choosing to focus on talking about doing things together, bringing people together and building a shared sense of pride in our borough.
- 2.4 The overarching outcome of the work will be to ensure that the borough will increasingly be a place where people get on well together and support one another.
- 2.5 As a result of the consultation process partners named the strategy to reflect the local perspective as the *Together* Strategy. The vision for the *Together* Strategy is to make Barking and Dagenham:

"A place where people of all ages respect one another and enjoy safe and peaceful lives; where there are opportunities to meet together and look forward to the future, and to be a united community who will get fair access to services."

- 2.6 In order to fulfil the vision the strategy will aim to achieve the following by 2016:
 - Everyone owns and drives a shared set of principles which positively and actively promote community cohesion in Barking and Dagenham.
 - An increase in the number and range of conversations where people comment on and suggest solutions to local issues.
 - An increase in the level of engagement opportunities with Children and Young people around cohesion issues using debate and themed events and for younger children through play.
 - An increase in people feeling that people from different backgrounds get on well together
 - An increase in the number of events which bring people from different backgrounds together in Barking and Dagenham
 - An increase in the number of people who feel that they belong to their local neighbourhood.
 - A reputation as a borough where people look out for each other and get involved in their communities through voluntary work, or as carers, learners and/or neighbours
- 2.7 In order to achieve this the *Together* Strategy has three key outcomes:
 - Neighbourliness
 - Talking and listening
 - Bringing people together
- 2.8 Each of these three areas have their own action plans outlining what partners have said are the most important areas to focus on in the coming years.
- 2.9 It is the culmination of these actions plans that will enable partners to add value by working together to improve community cohesion within the borough.

- 2.10 It is intended that all partners adopt the principles of the strategy throughout their work. All partners currently promote community cohesion in a range of ways as part of their ongoing work. This strategy highlights positive activity, as well as identifying new shared initiatives.
- 2.11 The action plan has been developed in agreement with partners to include actions which can be carried out within current budgets.
- 2.12 It is intended that the strategy will be suitable for partners to use as part of the evidence base for future bids for additional funding

3. Principles the strategy is based upon

- 3.1 As the strategy has been developed partners have undertaken to uphold following principles throughout their work:
- Effective partnership working is fundamental to the development of community cohesion in the Borough.
 - Evaluation and monitoring against objectives are key elements of all initiatives, and of the overall strategy.
 - Opportunities for the community to come together should be built into all partner programmes wherever possible.
 - That there is effective consultation with individuals, groups, and the wider population in the development of programmes and initiatives designed to tackle anti-social behaviour in the Borough.
 - Key decisions and strategies should be considered in the light of their impact on community cohesion.
 - The use of social media to promote positive, consistent messages about the community is the responsibility of all partners.
 - The voice of children and young people will be sought and they will be fed back as to what can and can't be done

4. Actions and monitoring

- 4.1 The strategy has been developed with a working action plan which will be reviewed and updated through the life of the strategy. It will be delivered and monitored through the Barking and Dagenham Community Safety Partnership, which brings together Council, police, health sector, fire service, probation and a wide range of local third sector and business interests to work on what matters most to residents.

5. Options Appraisal

- 5.1 The background to this report lays out the previous approach that has been taken to the ownership of cohesion strategies in Barking and Dagenham. It is recommended that the Together Strategy is owned as a Partnership document. The options available are described below:

5.2 **Option1: Not endorsing the Together Strategy**

Barking and Dagenham is a rapidly changing borough. If the Council chose not to endorse the strategy it would face a reputational risk of being seen not to be concerned with issues of supporting new and established communities to get on well together. The Council would also risk legal challenge by potentially failing to meet the requirement of the Equality Duty to 'foster good relations' between different groups in the borough. The risk of community tensions would increase. Finally not agreeing to the action plan would mean that work to bring neighbours together in the borough would be diminished, resulting in less positive feeling between neighbours.

5.3 **Option2: The Council owning the Together Strategy without partners**

This approach would potentially ignore the valuable contributions to cohesion from the range of statutory, business and voluntary partners in the borough and lose the opportunity for mainstreaming community cohesion as a partnership approach within the borough. The action plan contains many actions by partners; failing to promote these would result in additional expectation on the Council to independently promote cohesion.

5.4 **Option 3: Endorse the Together Strategy**

The strategy enables partners to agree a shared understanding of and vision for cohesion in the borough for the next four years. It enables the Council to be a key partner in leading on cohesion, whilst providing actions that will be met within existing budgets. The strategy will help mitigate the risk of community tensions in the borough.

6. **Financial Implications**

Implications completed by: Dawn Calvert, Finance Group Manager

- 6.1 There is no financial impact due to the adoption of the Together; A Community Cohesion Strategy for Barking and Dagenham 2012-16. If there are any additional costs these will have to be managed within the Council's budgets.

7. **Legal Implications**

Implications completed by: Fiona Taylor, Legal Group Manager

- 7.1 Cabinet is recommended to endorse the community strategy for the period 2012-2016 which is in compliance with our public sector responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and specifically our general duty under section 149 of the Act and the duty to have 'due regard' to the need to (i) eliminate discrimination, (ii) advance equality of opportunity and (iii) foster good relations between people. Compliance with the general equality duty is a legal obligation and the community strategy assists the authority with our general obligations.

8. **Other Implications**

- 8.1 **Risk Management** - The Strategy supports the Council's work to mitigate corporate risk 24: "Failure to adequately monitor tension risks and to be seen to address concerns and grievances leads to community tensions, personal safety risks for minority populations, and reputational damage for the Council."

- 8.2 **Customer Impact** - The Strategy supports the Council's work to meet the requirement of the Equality Act 2010 for the Council to "foster good relations between people who share an equalities characteristic and those who don't". By developing neighbourliness, strong communications and local events, the strategy will enable all communities to build trust and understanding in the borough. The Council's actions within the strategy will form part of the Council's Single Equalities Scheme Action Plan.
- 8.3 **Safeguarding Children** - The strategy supports the aims and objectives of the Children's Act 1989 and the Barking and Dagenham Children and Young People's plan in relation to safeguarding children and young people. Children and Young people have a key role to play in cohesion locally and should be encouraged to live, work and play together. Both the Children's Trust and the Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children's board support the strategy and will continue to champion equalities and cohesion in all the services it commissions and supports. Both boards endorse the vision for the partnership and endorse the 3 key outcomes of neighbourliness, talking and listening and bringing people together. We will encourage all our providers including schools and children's centres to promote cohesion in all they do and ensure the activities in the action plan relating to children and young people are carried out.
- 8.4 **Health Issues** - Health and community cohesion are inextricably linked. Health tends to decline (with premature mortality and increased morbidity, particularly in stress related conditions) in communities where levels of interaction are low and where people feel insecure. In more cohesive communities the reverse is true and it is much easier for public services to develop a dialogue with local people and to be sure that services are meeting local needs
- The Strategy is underpinned by the Joint Strategic Needs assessment and supports the draft Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy currently out for public consultation.
- 8.5 **Crime and Disorder Issues** - Activities relating to crime reduction and reducing fear of crime have been incorporated into the strategy's action plan. The strategy supports activity aimed at reducing tension and supporting communities to identify and resolve local issues, which may otherwise lead to community safety issues. The commitment and activities to promote neighbourliness and working together will promote trust and engagement, which will enhance community safety in the borough.

Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:

1. Creating the conditions for integration: DCLG February 2012
2. Realising Community Wealth – Local Government and the Big Society: NLGN Report November 2011
3. Building our future together; Community Cohesion Strategy for Barking and Dagenham 2007 - 2010

List of appendices:

Appendix A - Barking and Dagenham Cohesion Strategy 2012-2016