

Joint Consultative Committee with Ethnic Minorities	Date: 23 September 2015
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SUBJECT: Update on Merton Partnership Community Cohesion Strategy 2012 - 2015

LEAD CONTACT: Evereth Willis

POSITION: Interim Head of Policy, Strategy and Partnerships

ORGANISATION: London Borough of Merton

OFFICER CONTACT: Joseph Dance (joseph.dance@merton.gov.uk)

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Joint Consultative Committee:

- A. Notes the timeline set out at 3.2 for the development of a revised Merton Community Cohesion Strategy 2016–2018.
- B. Review the existing Community Cohesion Strategy 'Key Priorities' (Appendix A) and 'Local Issues' (Appendix B).

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. To update the Joint Consultative Committee on the refresh of the Merton Partnership Community Cohesion Strategy and Action Plan 2016-19.

2. Merton's Community Cohesion Strategy 2016-19

2.1. At its meeting in March 2015, the Merton Partnership Executive Board confirmed its commitment to refreshing Merton's Community Cohesion Strategy for a further three years.

2.2. Merton's current Community Cohesion Strategy 2012-15 came to an end this year. JCC members received a report in July 2015 on the successful delivery of the priorities in the current Strategy and Action Plan and an indicative timeline for the development of a refreshed Strategy for 2016-19.

2.3. Since then a working group of stakeholders including representatives from Merton Centre for Independent Living, Merton Council, Merton Voluntary Service Council, Merton Police and Circle Housing Merton Priory has met to review the current strategy and update its evidence base and list of key priorities.

2.4. The existing priorities of the strategy are outlined below:

- Improving engagement with minority and new communities
- Supporting and engaging with the Voluntary and Community Sector
- Supporting employment and economic development opportunities
- Engaging and supporting children, young people and families
- Continuing interfaith dialogue
- Improving health outcomes

- Monitoring community tensions and maintaining community cohesion

2.5 Appendix A provides the list of key priorities at a greater level of detail. Appendix B details the 'local issues' which form the evidence base underpinning these priorities. Members of the JCC are asked to review both the local issues and key priorities and provide feedback on the following questions:

- Are the local issues still pertinent? Are there any other issues/themes that underpin Merton's cohesion agenda?
- Are our Key Priorities still fit for purpose?

3. NEXT STEPS

3.1 It is envisaged that following a period of consultation and engagement with stakeholders, Merton's revised Community Cohesion Strategy will be endorsed by the Merton Partnership Executive Board in February 2016. The Policy, Strategy and Partnerships Team will co-ordinate development of the new revised Strategy.

3.2 Please see below for an indicative time table for the development of the revised Strategy.

Date	Activity
March 2015	Monitoring report to Merton Partnership Executive Board.
July 2015	Update to JCC
August 2015 – January 2016	Develop draft Strategy and Action Plan with key stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thematic Partnerships • Safer Stronger Group / Executive Board • JCC and Faith and Belief Forum • Merton Partnership Executive Board
February 2016	Merton Partnership Executive Board to endorse the revised Strategy.

4. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The strategy is being delivered within existing resources.

5. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Section 26 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 places a duty on local authorities in the exercise of their functions, to have "due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism". The community cohesion strategy will present opportunities to deliver partnership activity that will promote inclusion and support local people to get involved in their local community and to continue to build good relations in the borough.

6. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

6.1.1 The borough faces future challenges as the community continues to change and become increasingly diverse. The community cohesion strategy supports Merton to focus promoting inclusion, fairness and cohesion and diminishing potential conflict.

7. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The strategy identifies potential risks and suggests actions that can be delivered across the Partnership to prevent or reduce possible community tensions.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None.

9. APPENDICES

9.1 Merton Partnership Community Cohesion Strategy Action Plan

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 The Merton Partnership Community Cohesion Strategy

http://www.merton.gov.uk/community-living/equality-diversity/120612_community_cohesion_strategy_v13.pdf

12.2 Community Cohesion Charter: http://www.merton.gov.uk/community-living/equality-diversity/cohesion_cohesion_charter.pdf

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APPENDIX A – KEY PRIORITIES

We have identified seven key priorities for Merton’s Community Cohesion Strategy, listed below, along with the main approaches that can be taken to tackle them.

Improving engagement with minority and new communities

- Developing and maintaining staff and Member awareness of the many different cultures and cultural sensitivities
- Supporting and integrating new communities
- Raising awareness and fostering understanding in and between minority communities
- Identifying tensions and differences within minority communities

Supporting and engaging with the Voluntary and Community Sector

- Promoting benefits of volunteering
- Supporting small and medium sized voluntary and community organisations through changes in the sector
- Sharing information between local government and the VCS

Supporting employment and economic development opportunities

- Encouraging skills development in disengaged areas of the community
- Encouraging communities to move away from self-contained trading practices
- Developing cross-community infrastructure and opportunities for minority groups.

Engaging and supporting children, young people and families

- Building on good practice, increase the ‘voice of young people’ to identify issues and develop services.
- Support schools, colleges and places where young people meet to address intolerance and bullying
- Improving support to vulnerable young people

Continuing interfaith dialogue

- Supporting interfaith activities and projects
- Improving understanding between faith groups
- Increasing the involvement of young people

Improving health outcomes

- Closing the gap in life expectancy between the east and west of the borough
- Improving engagement and access to services
- Improving Mental Health Service provision

Monitoring community tensions and maintaining community cohesion

- Adopting a robust approach to reporting hate crime

- Build upon work engaging the police with particular communities to increase dialogue and improve relations
- Increasing community involvement in monitoring community tension
- Ensuring that community cohesion is actively and effectively monitored

• APPENDIX B – LOCAL ISSUES

From our partnership work, community consultation and a range of reports and surveys commissioned by the council and partnership organisations, some key issues that affect cohesion in Merton have been identified:

Diversity

- The borough's growing diversity is complex and interesting but brings challenges because of the variety of people from different backgrounds. Issues of social class are also apparent and it is evident that there is affluence amongst some of the new migrant communities. The east of the borough has more diverse communities, some of which are still experiencing discrimination and tensions.
- There are new communities about whom little is known regarding cultural, social and health issues. These communities need to be supported to access services.
- There is some spatial segregation of BAME communities in Merton: 61.4% of the total Black or Black British population live in just five wards.
- Some new migrants and Muslim women need ESOL opportunities.
- Senior management positions across the borough are not representative of the borough's ethnic diversity.
- A large and diverse school population (55.8% of secondary and 60.1% of primary pupils are BAME) is moving into adulthood. The JSNA predicts even higher figures.
- Potential tension and exclusion exists between Merton's diverse religious groups and denominations. The tensions are polarised in the Elder community and the young people seem to have an evolving understanding, which is leading to improved relations between faiths.
- Merton's high level of cohesion must be maintained as diversity increases.
- Far Right extremism in some areas is potentially a threat to community cohesion.
- Within some communities there are changes, which bring their own challenges: this is particularly true where the young and older generations have different views.

VCS/funding

- Smaller VCS organisations, often those with specialised priorities, lack resources and support.

Deprivation

- Deprivation is considerably more prevalent in Black/Black British residents than Asian/Asian British residents in Merton.
- Merton's low-pay economy and London's porous economy mean skilled workers tend to find work outside Merton.
- Focusing on providing opportunities for residents of the east only in the east can increase a sense of segregation.
- Different minority groups have different skill levels and economic needs; tailored support is needed.
- Local job opportunities are declining and often poorly paid, making it difficult for local SMEs to compete against larger companies.
- Employers can be unaware of their staff's individual faith values and needs.
- BAME children show higher rates of exclusion and expulsion in schools, leading to a disproportionate lack of attainment.
- Young refugees and asylum seekers have poor access to employment, housing, education and services.

Awareness and communication

- Many new minority communities are unaware of the services that the council provides and are inactive in civic life.
- The Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) community frequently experiences discrimination and can be hard to reach through official channels.
- Engaging with the LGBT community in Merton, particularly those within other minority communities can be difficult.
- Some minority groups feel that consultation on previous initiatives was superficial and that their voices are continually ignored.
- The reporting rate of homophobic crime has decreased in the last two years, which may indicate a lack of general awareness of the systems in place for reporting such hate crimes.
- Young people report feeling safe in Merton and recognise the use of stop and search as a tactic. However, they report that the poor attitude and lack of information provided by some police officers, when conducting stop and search activity, is reinforcing negative attitude in BAME young people towards authority.
- Only 59% of residents feel the council treats them fairly, while 19% of black residents and 25% of Asian residents feel the council does not tackle racism.

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