

Commission on
Integration & Cohesion

**Your chance to tell us
what you think**



This is your chance to tell us what you think.

The Commission on Integration and Cohesion is an independent advisory body that has been set up to explore how different communities and places in England are getting along, and what more might be done to bring people together – respecting differences, but developing a shared sense of belonging and purpose.

Our starting point is that there are many positive aspects to having communities that include a wide mix of people, and that diversity brings much benefit to the UK.

But we know that there are concerns about how to respond to the rapid demographic changes happening in some parts of the country. And that in some places there is friction between different groups, or anxiety about some groups living separate lives from others.

The time is now right to talk about cohesion and integration – these issues have never been higher up the public agenda and they are inspiring real debate. There have been previous studies and reviews about aspects of community cohesion, and we will build on these. But new circumstances call for fresh insights and strategies.

So we are starting a process of consultation, to find out what you think the issues are and what needs to be done at a local level to address any tensions. This is your chance to tell us what you think both about what cohesion and integration mean to you and what practical steps you think that we can take to make our communities more cohesive and integrated places to live.

What is the Commission?

We are an independent advisory body chaired by Darra Singh, Chief Executive of Ealing Council. The Chair and 13 Commissioners have been appointed on a personal basis, based on their knowledge and experience in particular fields related to community relations and integration. We are supported by a small secretariat within the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Our report is due to be published in June 2007. It will identify local good practice and recommend it for wider use. It will also offer practical recommendations to central and local government to promote integration and cohesion. You can find out more on our website www.communities.gov.uk/coic

We would like to ask you to help in this important task and in particular to ensure our report is targeted and practical. This document represents the start of our consultation process, during which we will be:

Learning from you: We are calling for views and suggestions from people around the country: national organisations, local organisations and individuals. This paper has seven key questions for each group. We are also happy to receive additional thoughts on other issues you think we should be considering.

Visiting local projects: Our visits will be to regions in England, and we will see projects that bring communities together; activities that help new communities contribute to wider society; and techniques for avoiding tensions and managing conflicts across different groups. If you have projects that you would like to suggest, we want to hear from you. We are very interested in projects which work with women or young people.

Undertaking wider fact finding: The Commission will have its own programme of research, ranging from review of existing material to newly commissioned work. If you have relevant research papers or material, we would be glad to receive copies via the Secretariat. We will make an announcement shortly on how organisations can make submissions to or write ‘thinkpieces’ for the Commission.

Developing our ideas: Based on the consultation process outlined above, we will be holding meetings of the Commission on a monthly basis to discuss work in progress and key themes. These are being held in different Regions of England, and will tie in with our local visits.

How we plan to use your contribution

We will be working through the coming months to feed in points from your responses to assist our ongoing work and also to the final report and recommendations. We will also be sharing the outcomes of our visits and meetings.

Responses to this consultation along with the Commission’s initial visits and discussions, will inform an Interim event organised by the Commission early next year, which will show how our thinking has developed and that we have understood what we have heard so far.

Giving your input to the Commission

To let us know what you think:

- You can email the Commission Secretariat at coic@communities.gsi.gov.uk (please ensure you give us your name and full address)

- You can write to the Commission Secretariat at:

The Commission on Integration and Cohesion,
Seventh Floor,
Eland House,
Bressenden Place,
London, SW1E 5DU

- You can use the form on the Commission website www.communities.gov.uk/coic

Closing date

The closing date for responses is **Monday 19th January 2007**.

The questions on the following three pages are your chance to tell us what you think – first national organisations, second local organisations and third individuals.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION

Seven key questions for national bodies

- 1.** What does ‘cohesion’ mean to you? What does ‘integration’ mean to you? What might a community which is both integrated and cohesive look like?
- 2.** What do you think are the main tensions between different groups in our communities? What factors do you think contribute to these and what are your thoughts about how to tackle them? What role can local leaders play in tackling them?
- 3.** What things do you think help people from different backgrounds feel like they belong? Do you think there are particular values or ‘ground rules’ for shared life, which are or should be at the heart of society in the UK? What do you think they are?
- 4.** Why do you think people from different backgrounds may live parallel or separate lives? Is this negative or positive?
- 5.** What role in contributing to community cohesion and integration do you see for organisations and institutions such as: local authorities, the police, the health service, schools, youth organisations, faith groups, inter faith and race equality bodies, housing associations, private sector bodies, voluntary organisations, theatres, art centres, sports associations, and the media? (Please comment on as few or many as you wish).
- 6.** What help do new people to a community need when they arrive? What help do existing residents need to cope with change in their community?
- 7.** What do you see as effective ways to counteract people’s negative perceptions of and attitudes to people from different backgrounds?

Seven key questions for local bodies

- 1.** What does ‘cohesion’ mean to you? What does ‘integration’ mean to you? What might a community which is both integrated and cohesive look like?
- 2.** What, if any, are the tensions between different groups in your local area? What do you think tends to cause these and what are your thoughts about how to resolve them? What role can local leaders play in tackling them? What are the organisations in your community which would help when an incident is leading to tensions or when conflict resolution is needed?
- 3.** What activities help bring people together, build friendships and get a better understanding of people from a different background? Where do these activities take place – at school or college, socially, at work or in the neighbourhood? What are the shared spaces in your community where people can come together? What celebrations are there of local traditions in your area?
- 4.** What schemes in your community build a sense of belonging to your neighbourhood or community? What schemes in your community try to build or teach a set of values or ‘ground rules’ about how to live together? What schemes to address poverty, crime and anti social behaviour in your local area have improved how people feel about one another?
- 5.** What schemes in your community help new people when they arrive? What schemes in your community aim to counteract people’s negative perceptions of and attitudes to people from different backgrounds? In what ways can communities steer people away from extremism?

- 6.** What schemes in your area aim to get people involved in local decision making? What role do representative organisations for communities have in building communities in your area? How are you encouraging the formation of such organisations? How are people encouraged to get involved in your local community to make a difference?
- 7.** What role do local schools, workplaces and faith groups have in building communities in your area? What role do local authorities, public services and charities (e.g. the Police, Hospitals, Housing Associations) have in building communities in your area? How can the media help to build communities?

Seven key questions for individuals

- 1.** What does ‘cohesion’ mean to you? What does ‘integration’ mean to you? When would you talk about them? What issues do you think they are the answer to?
- 2.** What positive experiences have you had of living in a community with a mix of people from different backgrounds?
- 3.** What, if any, are the tensions between different groups in your local area? What do you think tends to cause these and do you have any thoughts about how to resolve them? Is there anything else you would like to say about how people of different backgrounds in the UK and in your area get on and how this could be improved?
- 4.** What things do you think help people from different backgrounds feel like they belong? Do you think there are particular values or ‘ground rules’ for shared life, which are or should be at the heart of society in the UK? What do you think they are?
- 5.** Do people of different backgrounds mix in your area? Do you think they should mix more? Why do you think people might choose not to mix?
- 6.** Do you think the make up of your local community is changing? Do you feel you have enough information about any changes and what they might mean for your life? Have you been able to air any concerns or anxieties you may have about change? Do you feel your needs have been taken into account? What sources of information about your community do you trust?
- 7.** How can people’s negative perceptions of and attitudes to people from different backgrounds be counteracted?

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