

Housing
Management
and Community
Cohesion



CHARTERED INSTITUTE
OF HOUSING



building
together



involvement

Creating communities that last, where people want to live and where they feel safe and at home is an objective to unite everyone involved in housing and housing services.

The foundations of community cohesion rest on values about equal opportunities irrespective of ethnic background, respect for diversity, freedom of choice devoid of fear and intimidation and the freedom to feel a sense of belonging.

There are strong moral and business reasons why all those involved in housing should participate in seeking good relations between people and between communities.

Community cohesion is about finding ways to support and motivate individuals to contribute to the future of their communities and breaking down barriers that might exist between different groups – especially those from different ethnic backgrounds.

The principles apply:

- ▶ Within local neighbourhoods
- ▶ Between different neighbourhoods across a town or city

- ▶ Between different groups such as ethnic communities
- ▶ Between older people and younger people
- ▶ Between newcomers and established residents.

What works has to be decided locally because community cohesion will have different meanings to different groups. For example, local priorities may be concerned with fostering greater understanding between older, white residents and newly-arrived people from an unfamiliar ethnic background or may concern the links – or lack of them – between an inner-city area and outer suburbs.

Community cohesion is more than equal opportunities because it takes in improving relationships between people, communities and agencies on all levels and across all services.

The challenge facing the social housing sector is to examine what contribution it can make across the full range of activities. The community cohesion

agenda raises questions about the location and design of new housing, the way that existing housing is promoted, let, sold and managed and the ways in which racial harassment and all other kinds of anti-social behaviour should be tackled. It also requires new ways of thinking about how to build relations within and between communities – something that housing professionals may not have given priority to in the past.

Social landlords need to think more widely about the way they can work with other neighbourhood service providers – for example schools, health services and the police – to promote cohesion. Above all, they must unlock the potential to contribute in every meaningful way possible to the creation of neighbourhoods and communities that work well together yet respect individual difference.



mutual support

Serious disturbances in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham during the summer of 2001 drew national attention to the dangers of domestic, social and economic segregation in different communities.

An enquiry chaired by Ted Cattle, former chief executive of Nottingham City Council, produced an influential Home Office report on community cohesion in December 2001. The Cattle report sought to spark a national debate on community cohesion promoting cross cultural contact and the involvement of young people together with the preparation of community cohesion plans for individual areas.

The Government made a further contribution through publication of the Denham Report – Building Cohesive Communities.

The following year, the Local Government Association, in partnership with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Home Office, the Commission for Racial Equality and the Inter Faith Network, published community cohesion guidance for local authorities and their partners.

The Community Cohesion Unit, based in the Home Office, has the dual tasks of leading the review of government policy and developing on-the-ground examples of good practice through the Community Cohesion Pathfinder Programme in 14 pilot areas.

Although promoting community cohesion is a work in progress, it is clear that the social housing sector has yet to become fully engaged. Community cohesion is not a high priority for social landlords. Even within the Community Cohesion Pathfinder areas, there is evidence that non-housing organisations have failed to recognise the full potential of harnessing housing's involvement as a means to achieve greater harmony.

The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) would like to see housing management making a more significant contribution to community cohesion and believes it has the potential to do so.

A research report, commissioned by the CIH and funded by the Housing Corporation, has now been published. The researchers from the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University have looked at:

- ▶ Good practice examples of places where social landlords are promoting community cohesion

- ▶ Case studies of four local authority areas – Bradford, Brent, Leicester and Rochdale – including the views and opinions of staff members from local councils and social landlords
- ▶ On the ground analysis of initiatives in five local neighbourhoods – including the views and opinions of front line housing officers, partner agencies, residents and focus groups.

The results are in the report *How Housing Management can Contribute to Community Cohesion*, just published.

In addition, CIH has published a good practice guide seeking to:

- ▶ Interpret current official guidance from a housing perspective
- ▶ Provide new guidance on a range of housing issues
- ▶ Give details of early specific examples of good practice.



Understanding Community Cohesion

Different organisations and individuals have different understanding about what community cohesion means.

The research team identified the following key findings:

- ▶ Local challenges and priorities influence local interpretation of community cohesion helping to make it relevant in towns, cities and rural areas across England.
- ▶ Different understanding of community cohesion is producing different opinions about objectives and the way they might be pursued. Many people believe community cohesion mainly concerns race and ethnicity while others believe it is about cohesion between communities defined by age, health, employment or economic status. Community cohesion can be relevant both within and between local neighbourhoods.
- ▶ Community cohesion is concerned with opportunities and relationships within and between different groups who may or may not reside in the same neighbourhood.

Cohesion

Housing and Community Cohesion

Social landlords can play a significant role in promoting community cohesion but much of that potential is yet to be unlocked.

In examining the value of the housing sector to the community cohesion agenda, the research team identified that:

- ▶ Social landlords can contribute through the delivery of core management tasks. These include the provision of new housing and re-modelling of existing stock to meet community and individual aspiration, freedom of choice in allocation and lettings, tenant engagement and involvement, tenancy support and culturally sensitive service delivery.
- ▶ Social landlords have yet to develop specific policy and practice to promote community cohesion – even within Community Cohesion Pathfinder areas. Neither have they reviewed and revised existing practices to ensure that community cohesion objectives are not damaged.
- ▶ Non-housing organisations rarely see the full potential of the housing sector to deliver community cohesion. There is a widespread lack of understanding of the closeness of social landlords to the neighbourhoods they serve and the range of intervention powers they can use.

Collaboration

Delivering Community Cohesion through Housing Management

Good business reasons drive the need for social landlords to become involved in the delivery of community cohesion.

The research team identified the following key findings:

- ▶ Front line housing officers drawn from and representative of local communities have the experience and depth of knowledge to develop practice, deliver service and achieve goals that match all aspects of community cohesion.
- ▶ An appreciation of local sensitivity and aspiration is vital to the success of building cohesive communities. Failure to find a balance between resource allocation across community groups causes resentment and disunity.
- ▶ Collaborative working is necessary across all providers of neighbourhood services. At the very least, cooperation is required to ensure that gains made in one area are not negated by insensitivity in another.

- ▶ Breakdowns in community cohesion damage stability and sustainability. Getting rid of barriers that have blocked access to historically disadvantaged groups can open significant new markets.

“ We need to sit down in each area and put together the jigsaw of what services are doing in the area to further community cohesion, what everyone's role is and how they can link together. ”

Community development officer,
White-led housing association.

es

participation

The Bradford Experience

National housing provider William Sutton Trust and Bradford-based Manningham Housing Association launched a joint community initiative to boost multi-cultural understanding in the Tyersal area of Bradford.

A partnership between the two housing associations allows William Sutton to tap into the local knowledge and networks of BME-led Manningham. In return, William Sutton's experiences support Manningham's development of tenant involvement strategies.

The joint initiative, which seeks to develop racial and cultural awareness and help to boost choice in re-housing, was named Best Partnership Project in an annual awards event organised by the Federation of Black Housing Organisations.

William Sutton and Manningham jointly employed Soyful Islam as Community Initiatives Officer to the project. His role has involved organising cultural activities including dance and cookery classes, holding meetings and training sessions for tenants of both associations as well as leading development work on issues of racial and cultural awareness.

Soyful said: "A lot of our early work has been to dispel myths and challenge people's preconceptions about racial and ethnic identity. We are trying to find the best way of delivering community cohesion through activities which people can enjoy as well as learn from.

"Both William Sutton and Manningham are very committed to developing understanding between communities and we are now starting to look at how housing management practices can make a positive contribution."



Rochdale Community Induction Project

Social landlords operating in the Newbold area of Rochdale are working together to promote the neighbourhood as a safe and desirable place, breaking down historic barriers to particular ethnic groups.

The initiative was launched to tackle three challenges:

- ▶ Limited housing opportunities and poor living conditions experienced by the South Asian population
- ▶ Limited interaction and integration between three different ethnic groups
- ▶ Sustainability of local estates and the wider community.
- ▶ Six project workers are managed by a steering group of landlord representatives.

Early achievements include:

- ▶ A program of events and day-trips to draw residents together
- ▶ Boosting the housing choice for South Asian families by opening up what had previously been "no-go" areas
- ▶ Underpinning sustainability – landlords how report live waiting lists for local housing.

Lessons learned through Rochdale CIP include the importance of landlords working together to achieve common goals and the importance of core management tasks to support community cohesion.

Significant gains can be made by actively engaging with housing applicants about what is or is not available, talking through their options and explaining the consequences of holding out for a popular area. However, gains can only be sustained through continued attention which points to the importance of on-going funding and mainstreaming community cohesion principles within core management tasks.



achievement

The report 'How Housing Management can Contribute to Community Cohesion' makes a series of recommendations to support social landlords' participation in the community cohesion agenda.

The recommendations include:

- ▶ Social landlords need to review current practices to consider whether housing management activities are undercutting as well as contributing towards community cohesion.
- ▶ The pursuit of community cohesion objectives must be integrated into the delivery of core housing management tasks.
- ▶ Social landlords should ensure that their staff members reflect the diversity of the communities they serve.
- ▶ Making the most of the potential of the social rented sector to further community cohesion needs active partnership between landlords and other service providers at the neighbourhood level.
- ▶ The Housing Corporation and Audit Commission should champion and test social landlords' contribution to achieving community cohesion.
- ▶ Social landlords need to educate local authorities, local strategic partnerships and other agencies engaged in neighbourhood regeneration about their potential to serve the community cohesion agenda.

Full copies of the report and good practice guide are available from:
Publications Team, Chartered Institute of Housing.

Community Cohesion and Housing: A Good Practice Guide. ISBN 1903208661 £20.00

How Housing Management can Contribute to Community Cohesion. ISBN 19320867X £15.00

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