

Cohesion Delivery Framework Guidance on meaningful interaction Guidance on building a local sense of belonging

Communities and Local Government

A briefing paper from the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS)

January 2009

1. Introduction

In January 2009, Communities and Local Government (CLG) published a series of papers around community cohesion:

- *Cohesion Delivery Framework Overview January 2009: Our national understanding of community cohesion; A local understanding of community cohesion; Deciding on a local set of actions*¹;
- *Guidance on meaningful interaction: How encouraging positive relationships between people can help build community cohesion*²; and
- *Guidance on building a sense of belonging*³.

The documents provide an update on Government's thinking around community cohesion, guidance for local authorities (LAs) and other local stakeholders on developing community cohesion and case studies of good practice. The case studies are from both statutory and voluntary and community projects, giving examples of how stakeholders within the community have worked together to build community cohesion in their areas.

¹ CLG (2009) *Cohesion Delivery Framework Overview January 2009* is available via: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/cohesiondeliveryrevised>

² CLG and the National Community Forum (2009) *Guidance on meaningful interaction* is available via:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/meaningfulinteraction>

³ CLG (2009) *Guidance on building a sense of belonging* is available via:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/senseofbelonging>

2. Potential issues for the voluntary and community youth sector (VCYS)

The community cohesion documents address all sectors and the VCYS can use them as a lever to get involved with local policymaking and planning with LAs and other local partners. The importance of the VCYS in developing community cohesion is recognised by CLG and the sector's place in the local planning partnerships is essential to ensure that children and young people are considered and/or involved in planning processes.

In the *Cohesion Delivery Framework Overview*, volunteering is recognised as a key contributor to developing community cohesion. This again demonstrates the importance of VCYS organisations, many of which rely on volunteers to operate.

Although CLG is not running a formal consultation on the documents, it is inviting comments on both the Guidance documents. This gives the VCYS the opportunity to feed-in its thoughts and offer further examples of good practice.

3. Legal and regulatory background

Schools can be a key stakeholder in developing community cohesion. From September 2007, all schools have a duty to promote community cohesion. CLG and the Department for Children, Schools and Families jointly published Guidance on the duty⁴ which explains what is meant by community cohesion and describes how a school can contribute to community cohesion, recognising the good work that schools already do to promote community cohesion.

It is important that VCYS organisations are aware of the duty and hold schools to account if necessary. This may be linked to the extended schools agenda⁵ which recognises that schools are a central part of the community and offers the VCYS an opportunity to engage with schools in providing services for children and young people.

4. Cohesion Delivery Framework Overview January 2009

This publication supersedes the previous Cohesion Delivery Framework of July 2008. The Overview includes updated information on guidance and refers to the Institute for Community Cohesion's good practice web portal⁶ which can be used as a resource for finding examples of good practice around community cohesion from all sectors. The document is about national and local government's commitment to build cohesion under Public Service Agreement 21⁷ (cohesive, empowered and active communities).

⁴ DCSF and CLG (2007) *Guidance on the duty to promote community cohesion* is available via: <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DCSF-00598-2007&>

⁵ Further information about extended schools is available via: <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/ete/extendedschools/>

⁶ The Institute for Community Cohesion's web portal is available via: www.cohesioninstitute.org.uk/search/Pages/GoodPractice.aspx

⁷ Further information on CLG's Public Service Agreements is available via: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/about/howwework/publicserviceagreements/>

The Overview gives a definition of community cohesion:

Community cohesion is what must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well together. A key contributor to community cohesion is integration which is what must happen to enable new residents and existing residents to adjust to one another.

The Overview sets out eight key principles on cohesion:

- cohesion is relevant to all parts of the country;
- building cohesion has wider benefits to individuals, groups and communities;
- solutions are local and one size does not fit all;
- cohesion is about all parts of the community, not just race and faith issues;
- improving cohesion is about multiple actions tackling a range of causal factors;
- improving cohesion is about both targeted action and taking account of cohesion in the delivery of other services;
- good practice in one place may not be transferable to another – but it may inspire an action that will work in another place; and
- delivery is about common sense solutions that will help people get along better.

The Overview then suggests a number of ways in which local work to build cohesion can reflect these principles:

- undertaking an exercise to identify the key issues for cohesion;
- deciding on a set of actions depending on the local issues faced, and some pitfalls to avoid;
- making use of current guidance and good practice; and
- planning for delivery plan through local partnership working.

Nationally, CLG plans to continue to work with partners to improve the guidance and good practice available, consulting local areas about what they need.

The Overview recognises the importance of effective partnership working at a local level, including through the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). The Framework highlights the importance of widening the membership of the LSP to include groups such as faith communities and voluntary and community groups in order to help make the LSP more representative of the community it serves.

Volunteering is identified by CLG research as a key area for building community cohesion. Individuals who engage with formal volunteering are highlighted as being more positive about cohesion (although informal and employer-supported volunteering has no effect). The research found that people who participate in formal volunteering are likely to feel more empowered, have more interaction and form networks with individuals in their communities that they may not be in contact with otherwise.

Annex B of the Overview lays out a local cohesion mapping exercise which suggests how local areas might be able to gather data on the influences on cohesion identified by CLG research. This considers community characteristics, including young people and suggests that a key issue

for young people is territorialism. The Guidance suggests that practitioners may want to engage with young people or youth workers to identify where they feel unsafe or where they feel the borders or flashpoints are for further action.

Annex D addresses the issues identified by the mapping exercise, including low levels of volunteering, low levels of empowerment and isolation caused by physical barriers, such as large roads in urban areas.

5. Guidance on meaningful interaction

The *Guidance on meaningful interaction* is a joint publication between CLG and the National Community Forum. It is CLG's first attempt to set out what it knows about meaningful interaction, based on research findings and the views of expert practitioners. The Guidance is aimed at local cohesion practitioners and policy planners and includes some good practice⁸.

Key points from the Guidance include:

- meaningful interaction between people from different backgrounds has been shown to break down stereotypes and reduce prejudice;
- meaningful interaction is good for individuals, so encouraging interaction more generally will have a positive impact on cohesion;
- for interaction to be meaningful it needs to go beyond a superficial level and be sustained;
- interaction can take on a number of forms – all of which are positive for building community cohesion;
- CLG recommends that local areas aim to encourage more interaction between people from different backgrounds; and
- encouraging interaction is about making it easier for people to do things they would do naturally, but feel unable to – whether that is about the design of public space, supporting volunteering and clubs, or supporting people who bring others together.

CLG plans to revise the Guidance on the basis of local experience and, although not carrying out a formal consultation, is inviting comments on the publication⁹.

6. Guidance on building a local sense of belonging

In 2008, CLG worked with the Citizenship Foundation to publish the *Citizens' Day Framework*¹⁰. This guidance is the next step and suggests ways in which councils, voluntary groups and other organisations can encourage a sense of belonging. It is aimed at local cohesion practitioners and will be particularly relevant where they are working in areas where building a sense of belonging is a key priority, or where it supports the delivering of improved community cohesion in other areas.

Key points from the Guidance include:

- people have multiple parts to their identities, this means that building up the part of the identity which is a local sense of belonging will not be at the expense of other parts of identity;
- people want to belong and can change elements of their identity more easily than in the past, providing the opportunity to increase local sense of belonging;

⁸ Further examples of good practice on encouraging interaction are available via:

www.cohesioninstitute.org.uk/search/Pages/GoodPractice.aspx

⁹ Comments on the Guidance should be sent to cohesion.guidance@communities.gov.gsi.uk No deadline is given.

¹⁰ CLG and Citizenship Foundation (2008) *Citizens' Day Framework* is available via:

<http://www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/main/resource.php?s367>

- building a local sense of belonging needs to focus on the things that people have in common;
- local areas may wish to develop a local vision following consultation with the public and other key stakeholders; and
- local areas may wish to undertake specific initiatives including:
 - communicating the vision;
 - using activities and shared interests – arts, culture and sport; and
 - using activities to promote empowerment.

When talking about communicating messages to the community, the Guidance encourages practitioners to make connections with local organisations from the voluntary and community sector and faith sectors and encourage them to make a public commitment to the vision.

The Guidance gives case studies of examples of good practice in developing a local sense of belonging. VCS organisations can learn from examples such as LA community strategies, local campaigns based on civic pride and community celebration events. The case studies also demonstrate partnership working between statutory and voluntary sectors, for example the Charlton Athletic Race Equality (CARE) Partnership which is led by Greenwich Council and Charlton Athletic Football Club, and involves a range of partnerships including organisations from the voluntary and community sector.

As with the *Guidance on meaningful interaction*, CLG plans to revise the *Guidance on building a local sense of belonging* on the basis of local experience and is inviting comments on the document¹¹.

7. Conclusion

Community cohesion is an on-going and developing policy priority for government. It offers the VCYS opportunities to influence decision-making in this area and lead the way in good practice around developing community cohesion and tackling social exclusion.

NCVYS continues to represent the VCYS and influence Government policymaking around community cohesion. Various NCVYS responses, informed by the NCVYS membership, have been submitted to Government consultations, including strategies around CLG's Communities in Control agenda¹².

The joint NCVYS and Children England Speaking Out project has produced several briefing papers around community cohesion, the latest one focuses on CLG's *Communities in Control: Real people, real power* document¹³.

For more information on any element of this paper, please contact NCVYS's Policy Officer, Hannah Dobbin, email hannah@ncvys.org.uk or on 020 7278 1041.

¹¹ Comments on the Guidance should be sent to cohesion.guidance@communities.gov.gsi.uk No deadline is given.

¹² NCVYS consultation responses are available via: <http://www.ncvys.org.uk/index.php?page=273>

¹³ Speaking Out briefing papers are available to via: <http://www.ncvys.org.uk/index.php?page=551>