Community Cohesion, Neighbourhood Management and Local Civic Engagement

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Introduction

Community cohesion has long been an issue of interest to urban sociologists studying diverse neighbourhoods and to community activists living in them. The aim of this paper is to explore neighbourhood management in England as a new form of local governance and the ways in which local civil society engaged to produce outcomes in the implementation of community cohesion policy through frontline practice studied in a single case study.

Neighbourhood Management is an area based initiative in local governance, consisting of a variety of interventions, including thirty five Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders (NMPs) across England, funded by the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG). The NMPs are aimed primarily at co-ordinating statutory agencies active in deprived neighbourhoods to provide better local services, and secondarily to engage the local communities in providing the information from a grassroots perspective that is necessary for focused service delivery. The research for the national evaluation of the NMPs is conducted annually across the whole NMP Programme, and every year a topic is specified for a cross-cutting theme, with a sample of NMPs chosen as case studies. In 2007 the theme was community cohesion and six neighbourhoods were chosen as case studies. This paper is based on one of these case studies on community cohesion, in the Barton and Tredworth neighbourhood in Gloucester (which was conducted by the author, within the consortium contracted to do the evaluation). Data was collected through 14 interviews conducted with pathfinder staff, police, City and County Council staff, voluntary organizations and community representatives, as well as
reading organizational and programme documents. The final report to CLG was agreed with the Pathfinder. Adoption of a single case study methodology means that the paper at this stage explores an approach to community cohesion as a policy and practice in the context of neighbourhood management, but the publication of the community cohesion theme paper in the national evaluation report in July 2008 will allow for comparison.

The following sections review the emergence of community cohesion as a policy and the role of Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders in innovation in neighbourhood governance. The case study is then examined first in terms of the ethnic diversity and cohesion issues in the neighbourhood; the pathfinder’s aims and approach to community cohesion, including civic engagement and participation, and how these work out in specific examples, and concludes with key findings and lessons.

The Policy Context

Neighbourhood Management and civic engagement

Neighbourhood governance mobilizes definitions of neighbourhood along four dimensions – as a focus for urban development; as a site service delivery; as a scale of local democracy; and as a place of active citizenship and socialization (Sullivan and Taylor 2007). Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders focus on the neighbourhood as a site service delivery, but also neighbourhood as a place of active citizenship and socialization (which overlaps to an extent with innovation in local democracy). The roots of NMPs lie in the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR) as one of the mechanisms aimed at narrowing the gap in life chances between deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country (Sullivan and Taylor 2007). The NSNR described neighbourhood management as ‘a radical way of devolving power to neighbourhoods’ (Social Exclusion Unit 1998: 51, in Howard and Sweeting, 2007). Neighbourhood management’s place in the architecture of local governance was assured by being assigned a key role in delivery within the Local Area Agreements and in terms of a high profile in the Local Government White Paper (CLG 2006 in Howard and Sweeting 2007). NMPs
are also part of the wider New Labour policy agenda of breaking out of policy silos, where public sector organizations, or departments thereof pursue their own policies to form ‘joined up working’ across organizational and professional boundaries, often through partnerships. Thus NMPs were not intended to be new service delivery organizations; rather the emphasis is on co-ordinating existing statutory agencies active in deprived neighbourhoods, to develop a new strategic approach using the neighbourhood scale as a point of integration to provide better local services. Hence NMP budgets are relatively small providing for staffing a neighbourhood office and to provide leverage for funding by mainstream providers (Howard and Sweeting 2007). Pilot projects funded by the NMPs were to be mainstreamed – that is, the funding and delivery responsibilities were to be shouldered by existing public agencies.

Complementing this emphasis on the big service providers, the second part of the NMP brief is to encourage active citizenship at the neighbourhood level, to generate credible voices from the local communities in order to provide feedback from the consumers of local services that are necessary to provide improved and focused service delivery. The NMPs also have a ‘community chest’ budget dedicated to distributing small grants to build the capacity of local community groups to provide small scale services and promote active citizenship (Howard and Sweeting 2007).

*Community Cohesion as Policy*

Neighbourhoods are among other things a physical and policy space in which diversity is managed (Madanipour 2005). Building up trust diverse communities in a neighbourhood requires neutral civic spaces in which social interaction is possible for civil society to flourish (Allen and Cars 2001). Community leaders may be important in reaching out from, for example, faith communities (Furbey et al 2006), but they can also act as gate keepers and slow down the development of bridging capital (Harrison et al 1995). There is relatively little research on the experiences of new migrants Britain in (usually deprived) neighbourhoods, but it is clear that managing tensions between established communities and new arrivals can be a challenge (Robinson and
Reeve 2006). Building trust can be a slow process and community facilities are often at the forefront of this work but sometimes sharing the space is as much as different groups want (Harrison et al 1995). Current policy, for example through Local Area Agreements, aims to make neighbourhood based organizations and activities respond to this diversity.

Much of the discussion around diversity in residential neighbourhoods has been concerned with ethnic difference (with upsurges of policy interest in the wake of conflicts). Indeed, the focusing of concerns around diversity into a community cohesion policy agenda emerged as a domain in its current form, in the UK, and in England in particular, from an influential Government Report on the inter-ethnic conflicts in northern English cities (Cantle 2001). Following the idea that a change in policy requiring windows of opportunity to coincide in three independent streams: policy solutions, problem definitions and political motivation / legitimacy (Kingdon 1984), it was riots in three towns in the North West of England that provided the social problem to be addressed. The Cantle Report provided a policy problem definition by finding a high level of social segregation in British Cities, with white and Asian communities ‘living parallel lives’ and little bridging social capital in the form of viable networks (Cantle 2001). While diversity, and therefore cohesion as a social issue, falls along a number of social cleavages – e.g. life course, disability, sexuality, class – it is race, ethnicity and faith which has been defined as the policy problem area. Critics argue that community cohesion as a policy attempting to respond to the parallel lives diagnosis has drifted into blaming the Asian communities for their lack of integration and consequently undermining community cohesion. The chairperson of the Commission for Racial Equality (now the Equality and Human Rights Commission) paraphrased the parallel lives argument as Britain ‘sleepwalking to segregation’ (Philips 2005).

Community cohesion was therefore put forward as a policy solution to the division of the nation into socially separate ethnic groups within the shared space of the neighbourhood. Detailed guidance on developing community cohesion at a local authority level and at neighbourhood level has been developed (Home Office 2003) setting out indicators to assess levels of
community cohesion and monitor progress, highlighting ways of developing bridging social capital by increasing social interaction across ethnic divides. However, in the wake of 9/11 and the 7/7 London bombing in 2005, both the problem definition and the political legitimation of community cohesion as a policy has moved away from neighbourhoods and towards global politics, focusing increasingly on the need to integration Muslim communities more fully into British life, as a way of combating Muslim extremism and hence terrorism (SQW 2007). Hence the problem for which community cohesion is thought to be the solution has changed, but the solution itself has remained broadly similar, only facing some fine tuning in implementation.

The Government has set up a Commission on Integration and Cohesion (CIC) within the Communities and Local Government Department. The CIC has raised a current issue in community cohesion debates - whether or not organizations drawn from a single socially excluded group (e.g. support groups) deserve financial support from the state as multiculturalism and routes to social inclusion and therefore to community cohesion (Niven 2008). The alternative view is that multiculturalism is a block to cohesion, which requires funding to be directed towards inter-cultural contact, where people from different backgrounds are brought together with the explicit aim of learning about each other and discussing hard issues that divide them. Specific funds have been made available to work on extremism, such as the PREVENT Programme.

The relationship between community cohesion and economic development also remains unresolved, but inequity in material resources are central to shaping differences to the experience of ethnic groups (Hudson, et al, 2007). A study of Community cohesion in London raises several dimensions of cohesions issues, including transitory population, new migrant communities, asylum seekers which are more extreme in the capital than elsewhere (Muir 2008). This could be seen as an attempt to broaden community cohesion to embrace wider range of social inequalities and exclusionary factors rather than a close focus of threat of terrorism.
Implementation studies adopt a bottom-up model in which implementation is the key phase of policy making, where decisions made on the ground in frontline services are important in shaping how policy is actually implemented in practice, resulting in a policy-action continuum (Lipsky 1980; Barrett and Fudge 1981; Barrett 2004). It is therefore noting that community cohesion is not an explicit policy aim of Neighbourhood Management and in the case study presented below community cohesion is embedded in a wider aim of promoting equalities along several dimensions.

**The neighbourhood and cohesion issues**

*The neighbourhood*

The Gloucester Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder (called Community Counts) is located immediately to the East of Gloucester city centre. The Community Counts area includes Barton and Tredworth, two adjacent and highly ethnically mixed neighbourhoods, as well as White City and the ex-council Parry Estate, which are separated by a railway line, and are predominantly white working class, forming a separate community from Barton and Tredworth. Barton and Tredworth consist of narrow streets of terraced houses, many privately owned, whereas the Parry Estate has the layout of a low rise (double storey) council estate, lacking local resources such as a GP surgery or primary school. The re-opening of a community centre for White City is seen locally as one of the highlights of Community Counts achievements in the last year.

According to the 2001 census, the population of the Barton and Tredworth ward (most of the neighbourhood pathfinder area) was 10,327, including 7,251 White (70.2%), 1,852 Asian or Asian British (17.9%), 733 Black or Black British (7.1%), 434 mixed heritage (4.2%) and 57 Chinese or other Ethnic Group (0.6%) which gives a total BME population of 3,076 (29.8%). The current population of the whole pathfinder area is estimated at 15,700 (Delivery Plan 2004-5). There are five primary schools in the pathfinder area, but no secondary school, as secondary schools are located on the periphery of Gloucester. Barton and Tredworth are the classic inner city neighbourhoods
of Gloucester, with a history of poverty and high crime rates (three times as much recorded crime as in the neighbouring area at the beginning of the pathfinder), with drug dealing as a local problem.

The Pathfinder was set up with a local community organization, as the lead organization and providing the chair of the board and Gloucester City Council as the accountable body. This meant that the Pathfinder was more oriented towards the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in the early period and less able to engage mainstream agencies. It was felt that the Pathfinder was slow to start on service delivery, but also initially made little impact in terms of becoming a visible presence in the community. Community Counts was re-organized in 2004, with Gloucestershire County Council as lead and accountable body. A new neighbourhood manager was appointed and Community Counts was under pressure to get on with service delivery. This has been followed by a later emphasis on resident involvement and a late rise in the recognition rate of Community Counts among local residents from 6 % in 2003 to 19% in 2006 and 28% in 2007.

Chairing the board has fallen to the public sector, with first the Learning and Skills Council, then the Primary Care Trust followed by Gloucester City Council, with a resident vice-chair, who is about to take over as chairperson. The board consists of a majority of community elected resident representatives, and includes representatives of major local agencies, such as Gloucestershire County Council, Gloucester City Council, Gloucestershire Constabulary, Gloucestershire Primary Care Trust, as well as the Voluntary and Community Sector.

The overall approach of the pathfinder is to engage local residents in providing local knowledge and setting priorities for the universal services and using the mainstream agencies to deliver services shaped to these priorities or to take over pilots funded through Community Counts and absorb them into reshaped mainstream provision. The Safer Communities Team set up as a Neighbourhood Management pilot within the Police force is the ‘jewel in the crown’ of Community Counts and the local street care team is the second
major intervention to be mainstreamed, as are the neighbourhood partnerships, which, though very lightly funded, aim to roll out lessons from the Neighbourhood Management approach across the city. Some differences in perception of the Community Counts remain, with elements in the VCS believing that its purpose should be to fund the VCS to deliver services in the neighbourhood, including promoting community cohesion, whereas in the statutory sector, the purpose is conceived as a strategic intervention in the way mainstream agencies work in the neighbourhood, to engage the community in improving services by following a local agenda.

*Ethnicity and the neighbourhood*

Barton and Tredworth occupy a unique position within Gloucester as the most (and only significantly) ethnically mixed areas in the city and even more so in a largely affluent, white, rural county. Barton and Tredworth include Asian (mainly Muslim) and African-Caribbean communities as well as being to main home to refuges and asylum seekers in the city and county. Neighbouring White City by contrast is mainly white working class, with a significant number of people of dual heritage.

The largest BME group in the pathfinder area are Asian Muslims, which are a well organised and articulate community, centred around two mosques situated in Barton, but also sustain other voluntary sector organizations – focusing on youth and the Asian elders groups. The main body of this community are a more established Gujarati population settled in the 1960s with a smaller, more recent group from Bangladesh. External observers see the religious Muslim community as fairly conservative, or fundamentalist, with Imams coming from Bangladesh and unable to communicate in English with younger members of the community (interviews).

The most established and second largest BME group in the area is the African-Caribbean community, who, though less well organised and more fragmented by generational splits, is nevertheless well established in Gloucester and have a number of community organizations including Black churches, and groups catering for African-Caribbean elders and children and
a music radio station, which plays Asian and African music as well as Africa-Caribbean and Black British urban music (interviews). The City councillors representing the area are all Labour, two of whom are Asian and one is African-Caribbean.

More recently arrived ethnic minorities consist of economic migrants on the one hand and asylum seekers and refugees on the other. The largest group of migrants are Polish, with their own community organization. Smaller numbers come from other East European countries, particularly the Czech Republic and reference is also made to some from Russia or Ukraine. Portuguese speakers (from Brazil and Angola as well as Portugal) form a second new economic migrant community. Many of the Polish migrants are young single male workers, but half of those interviewed in a recent survey commissioned by Community Counts expect to be joined by partners and/or children (interviews and Community Counts report).

A separate strand of new migration consists of asylum seekers and refugees from a number of countries (a local voluntary agency has advised nationals of 75 countries seeking asylum in Gloucester). A substantial number of the asylum seekers and refugees are African including significant groups from Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea and Ethiopia and also Somalis and Sudanese, have mainly settled in Barton where housing is provided for asylum seekers by two Home Office approved agencies. Kurds from Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Iran form another significant group. A small Czech Roma community arrived as asylum seekers, and have now been re-classified as EU migrants (interviews and NMP annual report).
# Figure 1: Pathfinder area cohesion data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change Indicators</th>
<th>Source of data</th>
<th>NM Pathfinder area</th>
<th>Local authority area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Baseline 2003</td>
<td>2nd wave 2006</td>
<td>Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social background</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% BME population</td>
<td>NM household survey</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% BME population</td>
<td>Census 2001</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian / Asian British</td>
<td>Census 2001</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black / Black British</td>
<td>Census 2001</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Heritage</td>
<td>Census 2001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese and other</td>
<td>Census 2001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of residents who have lived in the area a) for less than 1 year?</td>
<td>NM household survey</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of residents who have lived in the area b) for more than 10 years?</td>
<td></td>
<td>38</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of residents who define their ‘quality of life’ as fairly good or very good?</td>
<td>NM household survey</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social bonds/bridges within the neighbourhood</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of residents who say they know most or many of the people in their neighbourhood? (and BME if possible)</td>
<td>NM household survey</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of residents who say that this neighbourhood is a place where neighbours look out for each other? (and BME if possible)</td>
<td>NM household survey</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement with local bodies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of residents who feel that they can influence decisions by local organisations that affect their area?</td>
<td>NM household survey</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Neighbourhood cohesion issues

Relations between ethnic groups are not considered locally to be tense, though there is (in one view) a feeling that groups ‘live parallel lives’ facilitated by a general tolerance. Some conflict has occurred between Black Afro-Caribbean, Asian and white working class young men around the local drugs trade. Black Afro-Caribbean men from Birmingham have recently made an impact on the local drugs scene. Gangs are not considered to exist, as such, locally, although there is a ‘gangster mentality’ among some local young men. Post 2001 9/11 and 7/7 fears of a terrorist threat were exacerbated by the arrest in 2003 and conviction of a local man, Sadjid Badat (the first British born Muslim to be convicted of a terrorist offence). The arrest of Sadjid Badat, who was living in a local mosque, was handled by the Metropolitan Police (from London) in a more aggressive manner, which threatened to undo years of patient community liaison by the local police. A high level intervention from the Home Secretary was part of a restorative programme.

The floods in July and August 2007, which left the neighbourhood without water supplies for 19 days, had both negative and positive effects. The Muslim community responded through their religious and family networks to the need to collect and distribute water, some of which was supplied by other Asian communities elsewhere in the country. This was negatively portrayed in the press and the police received complaints. The local police, however, started working with the Asian community to distribute the water. The net effect is considered by various stakeholders to have been a positive building of trust between the police and the Asian community (as well as the community more generally), since the police were encountered outside of traumatic situations of arrest.

Two points have been made by respondents: first that the competition for a scarce resource stripped away the long established culture of tolerance by the white community towards BME communities, and revealed an underlying racism; second that community leaders within the Asian community were sensitive to the response of the white community and public agencies responded quickly, working together to turn the crisis into a cohesion building
experience. However, it also revealed that community cohesion is not well enough established at the county level to be integrated into crisis response in order to be able to foresee the potential problems generated by different readings of crisis intervention by white and BME groups. (For example, where streets in Barton make it difficult to locate bowsers this was seen as discriminating against Asian and Black people.)

Although community cohesion is not seen locally as a problem by any of the stakeholders, in the sense that there is a shared perception of little explicit ethnic conflict, there are marked differences in experience and life chances in different communities highlighted by the interviews.

- Low educational attainment and high level of unemployment for some young African-Caribbean males, low self-esteem can spill over into other areas
- Asians not having the confidence to use mainstream services (e.g. youth work)
- Newly arrived migrants experiencing exploitation at work and sometimes through poor quality housing linked to employment
- Asylum seekers have often suffered severe trauma and may suffer from serious health problems (including HIV) and higher levels of disability. The transition from Asylum seeker (housed by state sponsored providers) to refugee status is a difficult one especially from single young refugees.

One of the issues identified by established residents has been the variety of new languages now spoken on the street. There is a wide consensus among service providers that provision of English language to newly arrived migrants is an important cohesion priority in order to overcome disadvantage.

Pathfinder aims and approach to community cohesion
Community Counts does not have community cohesion as an explicit aim. Rather the team attempt to ‘embed equalities in all aspects of our work’. This is particularly obvious in the resident engagement and participation work. One emphasis is that improving universal services (e.g. policing, street care)
is a mechanism for engaging diverse communities about issues that are common to them all, providing both a common purpose and a range of meeting points. Building an infrastructure for community engagement to give voice to a range of communities within the neighbourhood, it is argued, builds stronger communities, which are able to be more cohesive.

While the Pathfinder is located in a multi-cultural neighbourhood, and to a lesser extent a multi-cultural city, the wider context is one of a wealthy, conservative rural county. Community cohesion is not an explicit strategy at the city, county or the (countywide) Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) level. However, a cohesion ‘proofing tool’ checklist was developed for the LSP. A small amount of money from the PREVENT Programme has been accessed by Gloucester City Council to spend on community cohesion preventing ‘extremism’ by promoting progressive ‘radical middle way’ within Muslim youth in response to the perceived gulf between fundamentalist theology and secular modernity. This was done in response to concerns from within the Muslim community and by working with Bristol City Council.

In general, Community Counts seeks to influence and change mainstream provision by using community information and engagement to shape local priorities for mainstream services, working in particular with the police, City Council and PCT. However, they also engage with key community and voluntary sector service providers and at an immediate level, Community Counts supports smaller community organizations directly through its Community Chest funding. They avoid duplicating services that are already working well.

Community Cohesion Strategies
The interventions Community Counts makes in community cohesion policy and practice can be broken down into three broad approaches.

- First is an equal opportunities and democracy approach - recognising and representing a full range of local minority ethnic groups within neighbourhood structures as an integral part of their broader civic engagement and participation strategy and practice.
• The second is a multicultural / bonding capital approach, supporting the social and economic wellbeing of different groups by providing specialist services and / or refocusing service provision to include excluded groups.

• The third approach involves promoting inter-cultural dialogue and fostering bridging capital and consists of specific attempts to bring people from different ethnic backgrounds together to increase mutual understanding.

The first theme of cohesion work through civic engagement and participatory democracy undertaken by Community Counts is core to its role as a pathfinder as such. In order to feed community views into mainstream services it is necessary to be able to access a diverse range of the local population. This has occurred at three levels: membership of the board; neighbourhood panels advising each of the major service providers – police and street care; and representation of active citizenship within the community more generally, as displayed in newsletters, in the consultative fun days in open spaces, the multi-cultural Barton Fayre and in the Community Awards ceremony. Bringing people from one neighbourhood to another within the pathfinder area also involves individuals in overcoming (to some degree) widely held local prejudices about moving in and out of each others territory (i.e. between the much whiter White City / Parry Estate and the more mixed Barton and Tredworth).

A much sited example of community cohesion work through engagement and participation is the Community Award Ceremony, which Community Counts has run for 2 years and aims to highlight and celebrate the contribution made by formal and informal volunteers in the community. The Awards ceremonies were commended by a wide variety of interviewees. The community are invited to nominate individuals and over 70 were nominated this year for awards in a series of categories, winners and runners-up in each category were then presented their awards in a high profile award ceremony. This ceremony made a big impression locally both for the diversity of the winners
and for the small ways in which Community Counts registered that fact they were taking the contributions of citizens to the neighbourhood seriously “It was the first time that people sat down together like this with real table cloths, and china, not paper plates” as well as entertainment. An Asian led community project felt that it gave them an opportunity to publicly thank their volunteers since “this place runs on volunteers”. The ethnic mix of the winners and the participants promotes a cohesive image, reflecting the contribution of all sections of the community. The Voluntary and Community Sector are keen to take over the awards to mainstream them after the end of the pathfinder funding.

The second multicultural / bonding capital approach of supporting the social and economic wellbeing of different groups by providing specialist services and / or refocusing service provision to include excluded groups. These projects are less aimed at immediate bridging activity, from within the community, but at changing how mainstream services work with BME groups.

Community Counts has pioneered initiatives working with BME elder groups to counter a high rate of diabetes and heart disease among both Asian and African –Caribbean elders (particularly women) and high rates of hospitalisation. The social aspects of these medical issues included a low level of English among many older Asian women, dietary advice that did not relate to Asian diet and lack of clarity about diagnosis and use of medication. Community Counts workers on both diabetes and health promotion were able to develop a team of peer educators from Asian and African Caribbean women and transform the way the service was presented by local GP surgeries. This project has been successfully mainstreamed with the Gloucestershire Primary Care Trust taking over the funding of the service.

Community Counts also supports the social and economic wellbeing of groups of new migrant communities. Welcoming new arrivals in the neighbourhood has been led by two local community organizations, with support from Community Counts. A Community Trust has set up a ‘citizenship’ course, which instead of working on a deficit model of new
arrivals needing to be inculcated with British values, has started with the immediate needs of the migrants. Each session focuses on a topic of interest – housing, employment rights and so on presented by relevant professionals – police, city council housing dept, etc and working with translators. They also run English classes as competency in English is widely regarded locally as a key element of citizenship. Indeed, English language is an important dimension cutting across a number of these fields of work with elements of the Asian community and new migrants and asylum seekers and refugees.

Another initiative part funded by Community Counts is a welcome pack produced by a Local voluntary organization aimed at asylum seekers and economic migrants. The pack covers a variety of practical and legal issues, including access to health care, employment, public transport and traffic regulations. The pack is now seen as being of general interest beyond the initial target audience of asylum seekers.

Community Counts also funded a survey of new communities in the pathfinder area in 2007. The successful bid was from a consortium led by the mainly white community organization, but included organizations from or working with African Caribbean people and asylum seekers, Polish and the Portuguese speaking migrants. Care was taken that each group was valued and properly paid for their contribution and the partnership itself became an effective cohesion project also using the local radio station to advertise it. 75 people were interviewed, including Polish, Portuguese and Eritrean / Ethiopian asylum seekers, but the Czech Roma community proved too hard to reach. An important by-product of this survey was that bringing these groups together strengthened their bridging networks and capacity to engage across a wider range.

An example of the third inter-cultural bridging intervention approach targeted on encouraging interaction between young people from diverse backgrounds and also myth busting by facilitating understanding between ethnic groups was a theatre project part funded by Community Counts. The project aimed “to equip young people and their teachers with the confidence and
understanding to mix with people outside their own ethnic and religious identity and to challenge prejudice”. The initial idea was that White and Muslim school children would work together exploring difficulties and similarities through developing a play on Islamophobia to perform in schools in the area. However, a respondent considered this to be more difficult than envisaged. The group of school students were recruited from across several schools, with a 50-50 split between whites and Muslims. However, difficulties were encountered in recruiting Muslim girls. The theatrical piece “Not on my Patch” was reshaped with a specialist Muslim theatre group as a traditional folk story celebrating Muslim culture, on the grounds that a focus on discrimination would create a negative impact. In the view of one of the mainstream funders this avoided facing up to the more difficult issues of contemporary multi-cultural life and the play was mostly performed outside of the city. The evaluation revealed an appreciation of the value of open dialogue by young (non-Muslim) people involved and that racist attitudes exist towards Muslims by both Muslim and non-Muslim young people. All the Muslim young people said they socialised with non-Muslims out of school. (However, the project was not neighbourhood based as such, as it brought together several secondary schools).

Another example of building intercultural dialogue was more focused on reducing tensions over specific events and encounters was mentioned by several interviewees as a model of a successful intervention. A fear of crime survey (GCDRP) had shown a crime and fear of crime hotspot around a small play park in the neighbourhood, with high level of fear of going out at night. A group of East European (mainly Czech / Czech Roma) young men spent their evenings talking drinking and playing music in the park or in cars, which some established inhabitants found intimidating. Community Counts organised a barbeque in the park and got both the East European families and the established local residents to attend, which broke down fear and mistrust. Though small in scale, it was an effective response to a relatively unusual case of explicit ethnic tension in the neighbourhood.
Impact of neighbourhood management on community cohesion

Community Counts is well-respected in Gloucester and is seen as piloting a series of initiatives in neighbourhood management, with either a direct or indirect impact on cohesion. In the clearest case a mainstream service of health provision (diabetes) has been more effectively targeted on a vulnerable BME population at high risk. Community Counts is recognised as an important source of learning supporting strong and cohesive communities to engage in decision making on services in their neighbourhood through neighbourhood panels (interviews with City Council). Evidence of individual residents indicates that participation has definitely changed attitudes towards other ethnic groups.

A number of the Community Counts initiatives are now being taken up as mainstream services – policing, street care, employment and health and the overall structure of citizen engagement in information flows and decision making over local priorities are to become part of a city wide pattern of neighbourhood partnerships. However, the four mainstream neighbourhoods which will cover the whole city are considerably bigger than the pathfinder area and lower levels of funding are available with some dilution of neighbourhood emphasis and it may as a result be more difficult to maintain the equalities and community cohesion dimension of neighbourhood governance central to the Community Counts model.

At a County level there is much less diversity and poverty. Consequently, much less interest is shown in the inner city milieu of Barton and Tredworth, and the Community Counts model of neighbourhood governance (interviews). However, in a specific case such as the appearance of East European migrants in market towns across the county, which have little experience of immigration and ethnic diversity, the work Community Counts has done to smooth relations is seen as an inspiration to follow (interview County Council).

Factors that have helped Community Counts to deliver on community cohesion include a clear focus on the concept of neighbourhood management
as centring on getting mainstream public agencies to work more effectively with each other and with the community. Linked to this is a clear commitment to put resident priorities at the centre of the neighbourhood agenda. However, little would have been possible without key players within the major agencies (police, city council and PCT) sharing this approach. Establishing good relations with the local VCS is also important (even if there are sometimes divergent views on neighbourhood management), since it is often VCS organizations who have mobilised BME groups and who focus of specialist service provision for those failing to access mainstream services. On community cohesion specifically a clear focus on equalities as a central part of all aspects of work, rather than an add-on, has been central to achievements in reflecting the diversity of the local community in neighbourhood structures and in the public representation of this diversity. As a central node for information flows in the neighbourhood, Community Counts has been able to pick up some points of potential conflict and respond quickly.

Factors hindering measurable impact on community cohesion from neighbourhood management include relation between local influences on public opinion and national factors, such as high profile crimes affecting fear of crime, which is only tenuously linked to actual safety in a neighbourhood (police interviews) or contingent factors, such as the recent floods and coverage of them in the media. The cohesion issues posed in a highly mixed inner city neighbourhood are quite unlike the social situation in most of the County and consequently it is easy for large mainstream agencies operating at county level to show relatively little interest in a neighbourhood such as Barton and Tredworth (as was shown to some extent in the emergency response to the recent flood in summer 2007). Some mainstream services are deemed to be poor to non-existent in the pathfinder area (youth services), and others are located elsewhere (secondary education).

The neighbourhood panel on street care was considered to be initially quite diverse, but was gradually becoming less so. While Community Counts exists this can be addressed, but a concern raised by interviewees is the capacity of successor organizations, such as neighbourhood partnerships, to provide the
kind of proactive community development work currently provided by Community Counts. This is crucial to support the engagement and participation of an ethnically diverse cross section of the community in advising mainstream service providers, who themselves lack the internal capacity to provide community development skills. This is perhaps even more serious where services are put out to tender to private companies (as in the case of street care).

Conclusions

In the ethnically diverse case study neighbourhood, community cohesion was not perceived by local stakeholders to be a problem, with little ethnic conflict and no gang culture. However, local people were still thought to live relatively ‘parallel lives’, with life chances unequal between the mainstream and ethnic minority communities. Inequalities included a lack of effective access to mainstream services in BME groups (e.g. Asian and Afro-Caribbean elders); language barriers and lack of legal rights for new migrants, with attendant problems of economic exploitation and poor housing provision; while Asylum seekers have to deal with traumatic past health and social support problems in settling into permanent status in the UK.

The approach to community cohesion adopted by the Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder in the case study area was to embed equalities in all their work, and to make sure a diverse range of the local community was engaged in local governance (as street representatives, neighbourhood panels and the management board) as well as organizing events in public spaces and community award ceremonies. Targeted services have been developed by the NMP in health care and mainstreamed, and some specific interventions were made in easing tensions between different ethnic groups.

The pathfinder has opened up opportunities for community cohesion through promoting civic engagement in a variety of local fora, initially directly connected to service provision and latterly in a fuller form of neighbourhood
governance. Individual representatives are now able to engage with finding
neighbourhood solutions, not only identifying problems. Key factors
influencing success have been a clear model of neighbourhood management
and the central role of equalities in governance as well as positive relations
with public agencies and the VCS. Limiting factors include the negative impact
of external or contingent factors. Community Counts has worked hard to find
succession strategies for their work; how they progress will depend on the
capacity of mainstream service providers to provide community development
support and their willingness to divert sufficient funds.

Six key lessons emerged from the case study for developing community
cohesion at a neighbourhood level. The first point to come out of the study is
that mobilising around common issues that concern people of different
communities (such as safer, cleaner and greener neighbourhoods) are a good
point from which to build mutual respect and civic engagement. Civil society is
thus not reducible to a set of mutually exclusive claims, but common or
overlapping experience provides a basis for both bridging capital within civil
society and participatory democratic engagement with the state. Following
from this the second point is about the possibility of facilitating the growth of
bridging capital through opening up interactive social spaces. Creating a
series of opportunities to participate in the neighbourhood gives more scope
for individuals to step out of their ‘parallel lives’ and encounter members of
other groups and cultures and act as boundary spanners. The third point is
the importance of grassroots leaders / activists / active citizens and their
symbolic significance in civil society. Giving public recognition to active
citizens across ethnic lines increases confidence in effectiveness of civil
society in producing a cohesive community. The fourth point is that social
inclusion is central to community cohesion and local governance. It is
important to be aware of who is not at the table – gaps in service provision
(e.g. BME elders) are an important starting point for addressing inequalities.
The final point is that strategies for community cohesion and social inclusion
still need to mobilize bonding social capital and build capacity among
marginalised groups (e.g. young unemployed African–Caribbean men) need
‘something for themselves’ to build self esteem rather than always being
pushed to work across groups. This self-esteem has later benefits in working across the neighbourhood. Thus multicultural approaches to supporting ‘single identity’ groups may have their limitations in terms of bridging and establishing wider identities, they still have a role in underpinning the more ambitious community cohesion practices. These conclusions are supported by an earlier study by the author of bottom-up community led interventions in community cohesion policy and practice (Purdue and Witherden 2007). Neighbourhood can be a suitable scale on which to make real progress on community cohesion, engaging with active forms of citizenship and democracy, although connections to higher levels of power and governance are ultimately crucial to success.

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