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Leeds
CITY COUNCIL

Report of :   **Director of Neighbourhoods and Housing**

Meeting: **Neighbourhoods and Housing Scrutiny Board**

Date: **7th February 2007**

Subject: **Demos Report on Bringing it Home – Community Based Approaches to Counter-Terrorism**

Electoral Wards Affected: All	**Specific Implications For:**	
	Equality and Diversity	√
	Community Cohesion	√
	Narrowing the Gap	√

1.0   Purpose of the Report

1.1   This report provides an overview of a research report published by Demos in December 2006 entitled Bringing it Home – Community Based Approaches to counter-terrorism.

1.2   The report also summarises recent cohesion developments, work being undertaken across the authority and outlines some of the challenges ahead for Leeds City Council to progress the cohesion agenda and the issues raised in the Demos Report.

2.0   Background

2.1   In December 2006 a report was published by Demos which was the outcome of a year long research project into the government's response to terrorism and in particular the London bombings on 7th July 2005.

2.2   This research project was supported by financial contributions from the Cohesion and Faiths Unit at the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Economic and Social Research and the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

2.3   Demos describe themselves as the think tank for local democracy and they analyse social and political change.

3.0   Report Findings

3.1   Bringing it Home outlines what Demos think are the problems with the official response so far and the causes of grievance and mobilisation. The views outlined below are direct quotes from the research

3.2 Bringing it Home states that 'Our Muslim communities suffer some of the worst indicators of deprivation, discrimination and social exclusion, and many are deeply unhappy about aspects of the government's foreign policy towards the Islamic world, which they feel constitutes a 'war on Islam'.

3.3 Bringing it Home states that 'the government's response to terrorism is alienating the very communities it needs to engage, and that their growing sense of grievance, anger and injustice inadvertently legitimises the terrorists' aims, with or without their active consent.'

3.4 The research reported that 'the London bombings highlighted the importance of community engagement and the government responded accordingly. Less than two weeks after the attack, the Prime Minister had gathered Muslim leaders into Downing Street, and soon after the Home Office had launched its Preventing Extremism Together (PET) initiative to work with the community on ways to combat extremism and its causes.'

3.5 The government's attempts to engage Muslims in the policy-making process have been criticised as being rushed, conducted on the government's terms, failing to break away from the usual suspects, and with little follow through. The government has also been highly reluctant to engage with the many reasonable grievances of the community - from Iraq to social justice – in the fear that any kind of acknowledgement could suggest that the terrorists have just cause or that the government is somehow complicit.

3.6 This has made honest conversation difficult, as too many vital subjects remain out of bounds.'

3.7 Bringing it Home recommends a community – based approach to counter-terrorism must be underpinned by four principles:

- It must be locally based and recognise and respond to the differences within the Muslim community, which is far from homogenous.
- It needs to be rooted in an understanding of faith, without which it is easy for government and security forces to misread the signs within the community.
- The government must make the policy-making process as transparent and accountable as possible, opening up decision –making processes and engaging on issues where there is political discontent. Only then will trust be forged between the government and Muslin communities.
- The government must get over its hang-ups about responding to the grievances of the Muslim community. In many instances, they are well founded and deserve to be recognised, but in others the government must be more confident about taking the debate out to the communities, rather than sulking in Whitehall.

3.8 Bringing it Home sets out a six-pronged strategy for a community-based approach to counter-terrorism, which spans social justice, community cohesion and counter-terrorism. The breadth of the strategy is important in reducing the inconsistencies between different approaches across government and security forces. The conclusion provides greater detail, but in short, the strategy aims to:

- enhance the lives of Muslims by tackling poverty, low attainment and discrimination.
- strengthen community infrastructure
- improve leadership, both by the government and within the Muslim community
- open up the foreign policy-making process to greater scrutiny and provide opportunity for input from all parts of British communities
- divert youth from extremism
- put communities at the heart of counter-terrorist intervention and policing, as an integrated part rather then an add-on or an afterthought

4.0   Leeds Context

4.1   Community Cohesion is seen as a key policy driver for the organisation. Cohesion is a priority for the Council and the Leeds Initiative. It is an integral part of the Council Plan and the Vision for Leeds.

4.2   The first community cohesion action plan and annual report was approved by the Thriving Community Priority Board in March 2006. Within the Council Plan 2006 – 2007 there are commitments to review the community cohesion action plan and annual report and develop systems to monitor progress.

4.3   The community cohesion annual report also includes an overview of the impact of the London Bombings on Leeds.

4.4   Monitoring of the action plan at a departmental level is co-ordinated by the departmental Equality and Community Cohesion Champions. The corporate action plan is the responsibility of the Head of Equality.

4.5   Summarised below are the key community cohesion challenges ahead for Leeds. These have been discussed by CMT and LMT who support the proposals support to progress the next phase of the cohesion agenda. The outcomes of the Bringing it Home report will also be taken into account in any future action planning.

5.0   Community Cohesion Challenges

5.1   The creation of strong, vital and cohesive communities is one of the most important issues that we face. This is a critical factor in the quality of people's lives and for the harmony of the nation as a whole.

5.2   Community cohesion goes beyond the issues of tackling racial equality, discrimination and social exclusion. It is about all kinds of relationships within communities and closing the divides between them.

5.3   Cohesion includes a focus on breaking down tensions and building relationships within and between all communities: recognising that there can be tensions within and between communities of race, faith and national identities; between old and young; urban and rural; settled and traveling communities; host and new migrant and refugee communities. Acknowledging that lesbian and gay people, disabled people, people with mental health problems, people who are homeless and many others can become a focus of tensions.

5.4   Most of the debate about equality and more recently community cohesion has tended to revolve around ethnic and faith divisions. But it is a broader discussion than that and we must tackle the divisions within society where too many people are left disaffected and apart from the mainstream of life.

5.5   A divided neighbourhood with no sense of place or belonging in which one or more sections of the community are disaffected and constantly in dispute with each other is unlikely to attract people to live or work and still less to attract capital investment. Having to cope with tensions in the present takes attention away from the focus on improvements for the future.

5.6   Failure to address some of these issues could lead to increased tensions and divisions within communities and geographical locations and could increase further people's sense of geographical isolation.

5.7   Examples of how some of this disaffection can manifest itself could be pride in an area, levels of crime and grime, increased mistrust between communities, levels of anti-social behaviour, changes in patterns of voting etc.   This can then become the indicators that a community is under stress.

5.8   Councils need to know how the local community is changing, in particular:-

- Who is moving in and who is moving out
- Is one group harbouring a grievance against another
- Do some communities feel they are no longer getting a fair deal
- Do local people feel let down by statutory agencies

5.9   Local authorities should never forget that their principal role is to represent their community – and that depends upon them knowing what's going on.

5.10   It needs to be acknowledged that cohesion is about dealing with 'perceptions' not just facts; recognising that perceptions and myths fuel tensions between communities.

5.11   There are a number of factors identified in key service delivery areas that could be seen as barriers to achieving cohesion and these need to be addressed. These are:

- The concentration of particular groups of people in some residential areas can result in a lack of contact between communities, resulting in them leading parallel lives.
- If schools have an overwhelmingly majority of pupils from one particular background or varying outcomes in educational achievement between different groups tensions could increase between these communities.
- Postcode discrimination and the link between certain minority groups concentrated in certain jobs can lead to low expectations and aspirations.
- Opportunities to engage young people in cross-cultural activities could be limited by the poor state of facilities and under resourced projects, as well as a lack of a voice in local decision making
- The funding process for regeneration could be seen as a divisive force within communities creating barriers to integration and participation.

5.12   The changing demographics in Leeds and increasing numbers of people migrating to the City for employment means that we have an incomplete picture of who the communities of Leeds are and their impact on service delivery.

5.13   Leeds City Council will have to demonstrate they can comply with the following which is one of the Key Lines of Enquiry for the next Corporate Assessment Level 3 criteria for judgement:

'The council has developed an overarching, strategic vision and set of clear and challenging ambitions, aims and objectives for the community that promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area.

Steps have been taken to understand the scale of the social, economic and environmental challenges and opportunities it faces in the area including those related to diversity, race equality and deprivation. It makes decisions based on the information produced through research on local needs and engagement with local citizens, communities and partners.

As a result, the council understands its communities and uses this knowledge to determine how its own services and activities, and those of partners and stakeholders, can contribute, and has shaped its forward planning accordingly.'

6.0   The White Paper

6.1   In November 2006 the Local Government White Paper – Strong and Prosperous Communities was published.

6.2   The White Paper proposes a new approach to local partnership to give local authorities more opportunity to lead their area, work with other services and better meet the public's needs. It is also pushing very strongly for the need for local authorities to have a systematic approach to intelligence on local people's needs and wants.

6.3   There is a specific section on Community Cohesion and the role of local government and the white paper outlines eight guiding principles:

- Strong leadership and engagement
- Developing shared values
- Preventing the problems of tomorrow
- Good information
- Visible work to tackle inequalities
- Involving young people
- Interfaith work
- Partners such as local third sector organisations

6.4   The White Paper states that community cohesion is not an add on or an optional extra to the overall local government reform agenda.

6.5   The impact of these proposals is currently being analysed for further consideration as part of the Council's improvement agenda.

7.0   Commission for Integration and Cohesion

7.1   In September 2006 the Commission for Integration and Cohesion was launched. It is a fixed term advisory body which will consider how local areas can make the most of the benefits delivered by increasing diversity.

7.2   The Commission will consider how local areas themselves can play a role in forging cohesive and resilient communities by:

- Examining the issues that raise tensions between different groups in different areas, and that lead to segregation and conflict
- Suggesting how local community and political leadership can push further against perceived barriers to cohesion and integration
- Looking at how local communities themselves can be empowered to tackle extremist ideologies
- Developing approaches that build local areas' own capacity to prevent problems, and ensure they have the structures in place to recover from periods of tension

7.3   The Commission will deliver its findings in June 2007. The work of the Commission may impact on the proposals being developed by Leeds and linkages are being made with the Cohesion and Faith Unit at the Department for Communities and Local Government to try and establish how the work in Leeds can support this national initiative.

8.0   Preventing Extremism

8.1   On 16th October a meeting was hosted by Ruth Kelly and Joe Montgomery to discuss the role of local government and preventing extremism.   Attendees included Local Authority Chief Executive's, Police and Government Office staff from across the country. This included representatives from West Yorkshire.

8.2   Since then the Association of West Yorkshire Authorities (AWYA) have met with Police colleagues to agree a West Yorkshire response.

8.3   The key focus of the discussions has been about creating good community relations, promoting community cohesion, working with young people and building shared intelligence across the region and agencies.

8.4   One of the key issues raised is the need to have a complete picture of who our communities are and up to date community intelligence.

8.5   Further meetings have been held at a national level to identify practical steps to help Local Authorities, Police and partners tackle extremism.

8.6   The Government are due to announce details of a funding package to support local authorities helping to tackle violent extremism. The funding will support local authorities to make the step change necessary to tackle violent extremism in local communities, helping local authorities to understand their local areas better and have the skills and structures in place to address any threat of violent extremism.

9.0   Way Forward

9.1   There are a number of initiatives that could be considered to try and address the issues identified above.

9.2   Key policy and service delivery areas that could impact on cohesion and people's civic identity and sense of belonging could be reviewed. In addition decisions taken by the Council should be cohesion proofed and consideration given to their impact on all sections of the community. For example, an explicit statement in the LAA refresh outlining the commitment to community cohesion.

9.3   One of the five critical factors for improving equality and diversity identified by the Audit Commission is leadership.

9.4   In addition both the Equality Standard and the Comprehensive Performance Assessment identify leadership as a major contributor to improving performance including in the areas of equality, diversity and community cohesion.

9.5   The development of a leadership challenge could assist with driving this agenda forward. The leadership challenge could primarily be developed as a programme of activities for all leaders (political and officer level) to take forward in order to develop the equality, diversity and community cohesion agenda. Although it would be developed as an activity programme it would in effect be a change programme which, through transformational leadership, would need to engage all members, managers, staff and partners and embed the agendas at cultural, behavioural and competency levels.

9.6   It would need to be firmly routed in achieving specific objectives around both leadership itself and equality, diversity and community cohesion. The challenge could:

• build on LLP1,
• provide leaders, both elected members and senior managers with a mechanism for undertaking learning (likely to be through specific coaching activities),
• result in real tangible outcomes for communities,
• involve staff and partners,
• ensure that outcomes and methods of involvement/engagement will be formally assessed, and be fully and formally recognised by both Leeds City Council, and other local authorities.

9.7   This challenge could raise the profile of the key roles and responsibilities for all elected members and officers. These include:

• reaching out to all community leaders and community representatives
• strengthening and developing key policies, strategies and programmes
• rebutting or challenging contentious and negative views about sections of the community
• championing a cross-party consensus on community matters
• developing a programme of positive statements in the local media

- challenging some of the narrow – and often populist sentiments – which threaten community harmony by unfairly isolating and targeting minority groups
- meaningful measurement of the impact of council activities on cohesion
- brokering practical solutions with other delivery agents
- ensuring that all staff are suitably trained and informed about the authority's cohesion vision

9.8 Recent Cohesion guidance states that all elected members have a leadership role in relation to their local communities. Whilst councilors are elected to represent their constituents, they must avoid simply representing sectional interests, which are likely to damage or disadvantage others with equally legitimate and evident needs.

9.9 This guidance also states that elected members also have a responsibility to promote wider community interests and to be fair minded when considering resource allocation. Elected members have a wealth of local expertise and knowledge that should be utilised.

9.10 Elected members should have an understanding of the needs of all groups, whether or not they are represented by their constituency interests. They should also be prepared to promote an interchange and dialogue between different groups and to promote tolerance and mutual respect.

9.11 Consideration could be given to the development of a cross-party and cross-agency protocol. The purpose of these would be to reassure local communities that no one individual or organisation will seek to heighten tensions or exploit divisions.

9.12 This should not inhibit free speech but will ensure that any debates are held within a responsible context.

9.13 In addition ward-level members are very well connected and are the first to recognise where tensions might arise. Keeping in touch with local people – through surgeries, meeting people in the neighbourhood, or any form of local meeting – is essential. This is also the case for a lot of front line staff, such as, street scene, youth workers etc.

9.14 All departments will also have a lot of local knowledge at their disposal, but they need to marshal it effectively.

9.15 A multi sector task group with responsibility for taking a city wide overview of cohesion related tension identification, risk assessment, avoidance and management across Leeds has been established.

9.16 The current tension tracking process could be extended to ensure that all elected members and front line staff are able to report any tensions and intelligence within their wards and areas of service. There are barriers to progression at the moment which include improving data and intelligence reporting and a lack of a dedicated analytical resource and collation of partnership activity.

9.17 Work needs to take place to track changes in communities in order that we are able to establish the 'bigger picture'. This will enable the Council to demonstrate that it understands its communities and uses this knowledge to determine how its own services and activities, and those of partners and stakeholders, can contribute, and has shaped its forward planning accordingly for CPA purposes.

9.18 Leeds borders several different local authority areas which can sometimes raise issues when considering initiatives and projects. The development of cross border work around creating cohesive communities could be considered to increase capacity in the event of any incidents occurring across geographical boundaries.

9.19 Working with and involving young people is crucial and is one of the guiding principles in the White Paper to achieving cohesive communities. This should include reaching out to

young Muslims and to wider communities. Work will continue on building community cohesion through the Change for Children programme and supporting key actions , for example, the development of a Community Cohesion Toolkit for working with young people.

10.0   Recommendations

10.1   Members are asked to note the information and make comments and recommendations as appropriate.