Everybody needs good neighbours?

A study of the link between public participation and community cohesion

Stella Creasy, Karin Gavelin and Dominic Potter

involve

Everybody needs good neighbours?

A study of the link between public participation and community cohesion

Stella Creasy, Karin Gavelin and Dominic Potter

Contents

Acknowledgements

About the Authors

Stella Creasy is head of research and development at Involve. She was previously a local councillor in East London, acting as Mayor and Chief Whip, and an adviser to Douglas Alexander MP. Her doctorate was called "Understanding the lifeworld of social exclusion"; she now specialises in the social psychology of public participation.

Karin Gavelin is a project manager and researcher at Involve. Her recent work includes coordinating a citizens' consultation in Jersey, researching attitudes to public engagement in the civil service for the Sustainable Development Commission and producing guidance on public engagement for Ofsted and the Food Standards Agency.

Dominic Potter is a researcher at Involve. He has previously worked for Demos, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the European Union and several MPs on a diverse range of social and public policy issues. He is interested in the engagement of individuals, groups and communities in governance and public services.

About Involve

Involve is a not-for-profit organisation specialising in understanding public engagement in all its forms. The organisation was set up by a number of leading practitioners and researchers in the public participation field and is chaired by Geoff Mulgan.

Involve provides advice, training, research, events and networking services to organisations and individuals interested in public participation. The organisation focuses on the practical reality of public participation and has four core activities:

• advocacy – building the case for genuine citizen empowerment
• new thinking – improving understanding of what works in public engagement
• better practice – supporting institutions and citizens to engage effectively
• networking – bringing people from the participation and empowerment field together.

Introduction

Over the course of the last decade there has been a growing public debate about the changing nature of Britain's social fabric. Media commentators, academic research and government reports all paint a picture of a society that is struggling to cope with a transient population and changing economic climate. The capacity of Britain's communities to adapt to economic and social change has become the subject of much concern, as some fear that the social ties and bonds that underpin national stability are becoming increasingly divided, disaffected and teeming with conflict. Tension, it appears, is everywhere: between different generations, immigrants and settled residents, Muslim and Christian populations. The effects of this perceived strain on our social fabric are not only manifested in corroding social relationships but are seen to be linked to any number of problems. Be it crime, voter apathy, school segregation or overcrowding, Britain is deemed to be fracturing into a nation of divided communities, loyalties and identities; ill at ease with itself.

Some blame these problems on a lack of shared values and sense of citizenship, some on the changing constitution of modern communities, which mean that people from all walks of life find themselves crossing paths with, but not necessarily getting on with, people from different backgrounds. Others yet see deprivation and inequality as the root of the problem, arguing that people who suffer sustained deprivation are likely to view with suspicion anyone who competes with them for jobs, housing and benefits. Although there may be disagreement about what causes these social divides, there is a general consensus that promoting cohesion and integration is of paramount importance if Britain's communities are to successfully face the challenges of the 21st century.

In these discussions, there is an emerging recognition of the role that public participation can play in promoting community cohesion. Whether participation is seen as a way of building trust and understanding between groups, or as a means of empowering people to take part in public life, there is a general consensus running through current policy and political debates that community relationships benefit from people taking part in public life within their local area. It is this assumption that is the focus of this report. However, after carrying out a literature review, research workshop and interviews with practitioners, academics and policy makers, the research team has found that the relationship between public participation and community cohesion is not quite as clear cut .

The report starts from the perspective that community cohesion is not an end state that manifests itself in a set list of outcomes or attributes, but instead an

ongoing process which looks different in different areas, and which may require continuous attention and reassessment to be maintained. The tools used for promoting cohesion, of which participation in public life can be one, depend on the character and needs of the locality in question. When carried out well, participation activities can be a useful way of developing and strengthening ties between individuals and groups, thus helping to build the shared social structures that are at the heart of community cohesion. However, to recognise how and why this can be achieved requires not simply a range of participative approaches but a deeper understanding of the complex ways in which individuals, groups and localities develop through human interaction.

How To Use This Report

In its approach and recommendations the research has set out to be as useful as possible to those public institutions and other bodies charged with delivering the government's cohesion agenda and generating positive change within Britain's communities. Details about the research methodology used can be found at the end of the report.

The report is divided into two parts. The first is a **practical framework** that provides guidance for local authorities and other bodies that seek to work with their local communities towards greater community cohesion. The framework acknowledges that although public participation forms only part of the answer to building cohesive communities, it can offer other benefits to local communities and public services that are of value in themselves. Hence, to ensure the best possible experiences for participants as well as maximum benefit for the wider community, the framework recommends that all forums for participation and empowerment use best practice methods.

The second part of the report is a **contextual framework** that looks at the concepts of community, cohesion, participation and empowerment, and the relationship that exists between them. It explores these issues by first addressing the concept of community cohesion itself, and then asking how participation can contribute to building cohesive communities. In doing so, this section also looks at the role that communities themselves play in driving change, and how public institutions can tap into the often informal ways in which communities function and develop.

Part One:
A Practical Framework

1. Working Together on Cohesion and Participation – a Practical Framework

The aim of this framework is to provide practical guidance for local authorities and other bodies that seek to work with their local communities towards creating greater community cohesion. It builds on the findings of Involve's research into the relationship between local-level public participation and community cohesion. The detailed findings and analysis from the study are presented in chapters 2–5 of this document.

This report recognises that public participation is only part of the answer to building and sustaining cohesive communities. Numerous different factors contribute to shaping social relationships, and the approaches used should always reflect the character and needs of the community in question. At the end of this chapter and at the end of the report are lists of further reading with details of publications that address the broader issues around community cohesion, including some that make practical recommendations for those working on this agenda. This report focuses primarily on the relationship between public participation and community cohesion and it is on this that the practical framework is focused.

The framework is built on the assumption that when public participation initiatives are carried out well they can offer many different kinds of benefits to individuals, local communities and public bodies, some of which are directly relevant to the community cohesion agenda. Hence, although no amount of good-quality public participation activities will guarantee the development of community cohesion, it is imperative that all forums for participation and empowerment seek to offer the best possible experiences for the participants as well as maximum benefit for the wider community.

This chapter sets out the practical lessons from this study, presented as principles of practice for community cohesion in the context of a local authority tasked with building a joint approach to public participation and community cohesion. At the core of these principles is the importance of keeping a flexible approach to community cohesion and public participation activities, in order to ensure that the methods used are suited to the local context.

The framework is divided into three sections:

- **Understanding and tapping into local communities**, which looks at the need for a flexible approach to community cohesion and public participation that takes into account the specific character and capacities of a local community.

- **Joining up strategy and delivery**, which looks at the need for practising a holistic approach to community cohesion, with strategic officers and service providers working together with third sector organisations and community members for best results.

- **Public participation for common cause – principles of practice**, which lists practical guidelines for those who deliver local level public participation activities.

Understanding and tapping into local communities

Understanding the local community

> *People working with communities really need to know them and understand them.*
>
> *Workshop participant*

Why it matters: Repeatedly participants in this research emphasised the need for those working to support community cohesion to understand the communities they are working with and ensure that the approaches they use are suitable to the context and the people involved. There is no "magic bullet" that can create or sustain community cohesion. A range of factors contribute to shaping social relationships, and what works in one place may not be suitable elsewhere. Hence in order to build strong communities it will always be necessary to adopt a flexible and multi-pronged approach, underpinned by an in-depth understanding of the characteristics and needs of the communities in question.

For more, see chapter 5 of this report.

What it means in practice:

- **Chart who lives in the area to ensure that no group is inadvertently excluded from the activities that are being planned.** Who takes part in public life locally? Who does not? Whose perspectives on life in the area are missing?

- **Build community feedback into policy cycles.** Create opportunities to consult on policy and enable the public to plan for their community. What do they like or dislike about the area in which they live? What would they like to change? What do they define as a strong community and what help do they need to get there?

- **Ensure that members from all levels of the local authority, both elected representatives and officers, are directly involved in discussions and activities with the local communities for which they are responsible**

Tapping into existing networks

> *Fitting people into an abstract formal framework does not work.*
> *Workshop participant*

Why it matters: Formal opportunities for public participation are only part of the story in nurturing community cohesion. Often, it is the informal relationships and networks within a local area that determine how residents feel about their community and their neighbours. Therefore, rather than adding additional layers of participation or interaction processes into local civic life, local authorities should seek to map and work with these existing social networks, as well as to provide links, forums and support to those who do not belong to any such informal networks.

For more, see chapter 5 of this report.

What it means in practice:

- **Map the informal and formal networks** that exist in the area, such as faith groups, parent groups, sports clubs, community activists or residents' and tenants' associations. Who are involved in these groups and networks? Who is not involved? Are there overlaps and interactions between them? What can be done to support more interactions between different groups and networks?

- **Map the informal and formal activities** in the area. What initiatives are already taking place to bring about positive change in the locality? Can the local authority work with and support these in any way?

- **Identify the community catalysts.** Who is instrumental in bringing people together? How can the experiences, knowledge and networks of those individuals be tapped into? This might simply be a case of spending time talking to individuals in the area and finding out who they think plays such a role in their communities.

- **Go to where people are rather than expect people to come to you.** Identify where in the community people are already interacting with each other. Whether in cafés, the post office, schools, faith centres or the barber shop, consider how those social hubs can be used as points of contact for public bodies seeking to work with local residents, or as venues to bring people in the community together. Consider what support these public spaces may benefit from to be of better use to the local community.

Learning from informal relationships

> *You just have to build relationships over time with the community – the mechanisms aren't actually that important.*
>
> *Workshop participant*

Why it matters: Participants in this research highlighted the importance of spontaneous and relaxed interaction in shaping social relationships. They contrasted the relaxed feel of informal social interactions with the more formal and time-restricted nature of local authority initiatives. It was repeatedly argued that public agencies should consider what it is that motivates people to get involved and stay involved in informal community activities, and seek to bring those factors into their own community cohesion work.

For more, see chapter 5 of this report.

What it means in practice:

- **Bring people together around a common cause** is more likely to generate enthusiasm and engagement than initiatives centred around issues identified as a priority by the local authority, or abstract debates to identify shared values and visions. Find out what people care about or want to change in their local community and use that as a starting point for shared activities.

- **Provide time for relationships to develop**; understanding and trust do not emerge overnight. Remember that the type and purpose of interactions between people is often of less importance than the time they spend together. Providing opportunities for sustained and meaningful interactions between people is therefore key to promoting more positive relationships in local communities.

- **Recognise that bringing an element of fun into cohesion-building activities can make a real difference.** Encouraging people to come together around food, games, sport and celebrations can help build bridges between groups, create a sense of unity in the local area and help overcome prejudice and tension in the community. Building public participation exercises into such activities can provide access to people who would not attend formal council activities.

Targeted approaches

Why it matters: Both within and between communities, inequalities exist. Whether they take a structural or material form, in terms of income, housing and quality of public services, or whether they relate to differences in skills, knowledge or levels of empowerment, there is no doubt that social inequalities are at the root of many of the divisions and much of the tension that underlie Britain's splintered communities. Targeted approaches seek to develop the confidence, skills and awareness of particular groups to participate in public life, to enable them to overcome the barriers to involvement that can perpetuate inequalities.

For more, see chapter 4 of this report.

What it means in practice:

- **Recognise those groups whose voices are not currently being heard** in decision making and actively seek to support their involvement. Young people, new arrivals and even commuters unable to attend events during the day are just a few examples of those who may be at risk from exclusion.

- **Connect these activities with other policy concerns to ensure best use of resources.** Targeted approaches can be particularly helpful for addressing anti-social behaviour, inter-group tension and political disengagement.

- **Chart a clear relationship between targeted activities for under-represented groups and universal and open activities** which all residents can access, in order to not exacerbate existing divides and tensions.

- **Ensure all residents are told about the activities that are taking place** and their purpose, to ensure that the institution in charge is perceived to be acting fairly.

Joining up strategy and delivery

Strategic and delivery officials working together

> *Community cohesion is something that every single service in the council needs to think about: "How can we promote cohesion in what we're doing, what contribution can we make, how can we join up to make even greater contributions?"*
>
> *Interviewee*

Why it matters: This research identified a gap between the rhetoric that surrounds community cohesion strategies and the working reality of those who deliver these policies on the ground. Often, those who are charged with supporting community cohesion are not the same people who deliver services or public participation activities, and no connection is made between the different strands of work. Many participants saw these divisions between rhetoric, practice and service delivery as stumbling blocks to progress. There were repeated calls for a more joined-up approach to community cohesion, with cohesion objectives running as a cross-cutting theme through the work of local authorities.

For more, see chapter 5 of this report.

What it means in practice:

- **Build a common understanding of what community cohesion means** that is shared across all stakeholders. Involve the local community and local third sector organisations, as well as those responsible in senior and frontline governance positions, in creating a user-friendly definition of what a strong community means to them and how they think it should be achieved.

- **Create locally specific community cohesion indicators around this shared definition.** In essence, consider how to assess progress in the local context objectively.

- **Build community cohesion objectives into equality impact assessment frameworks**, to ensure that all local authority activities are measured in terms of their impact on community cohesion. Make use of Communities and Local Government's (CLG's) *Community cohesion impact assessment and community conflict tool* and the forthcoming *Cohesion Delivery Framework.*[2]

Taking an action-focused approach

> *More time has been spent talking about what needs to be done than actually doing it, or figuring out what works.*
>
> *Workshop participant*

Why it matters: Participants in the research were clear that enough time has been spent researching and building the rhetoric around community cohesion without really finding out what is happening on the ground. There were repeated calls for local authorities to spend less time building their community cohesion strategies and instead to put more effort into their actual work in communities, building a practical knowledge base and sharing their experiences with other areas.

For more, see chapter 4 of this report.

What it means in practice: The balance of strategic vs hands-on work will differ between localities, as will the nature of the practical work that takes place. Among the suggestions identified in this research were:

- **Involve service providers, public participation practitioners and community development workers in devising a community cohesion strategy with a practical focus**. Ensure that every element of the strategy has a practical application, and that those who will be delivering it are clear about what is being asked of them.

- **Recognise that the most comprehensive answers to the questions and problems in community cohesion and beyond, will use the collective wisdom and experiences of everyone involved** – both deliverers of services and users of services.

- **Consider the impact that local public services have on community cohesion** and the potential for user and resident participation to make local services more responsive to local needs. Remember that public participation in service delivery can also help the local community better understand how services are prioritised and distributed, thus improving perceptions of fairness and improving trust in local authorities.

- **Encourage innovation** when trying new approaches to public participation and community cohesion. Examples of innovative, hands-on approaches that have had success locally include the neighbourhood management scheme

in Barking and Dagenham[3] and elsewhere, the Represent inclusion project run by Birmingham Museum Service,[4] and the Blueprint project run by the charity Voice, which focuses on the lives of looked after children in England.[5]

Maintaining a long-term perspective

> *We did some fantastic work after the 2001 riots... money got thrown at [the towns] but it was all short term. Actually, those cities and towns needed not three year funding, but five or ten year funding*
>   Interviewee

Why it matters: Community cohesion is an ongoing process, not an outcome that can be achieved overnight. As such it does not fit neatly within the policy cycles and time-bound funding streams of local and national government. This is the source of much frustration among people working directly with communities, who often see funding cut short just as they are beginning to see the results. As a consequence, participants in this study repeatedly called for a more long-term perspective on community cohesion by funders and policy makers.

For more, see chapter 5 of this report.

What it means in practice:

- **Recognise that community cohesion and integration are not short-term targets but ongoing processes** that will need to form an integral part of the long-term work of local authorities.

- **Ensure that this long-term perspective is reflected in how funding is distributed.** Short-term funding that ends just as it begins to make a difference risks doing more harm than good, by causing disillusionment among the very people upon whose enthusiasm and hard work the community cohesion agenda relies.

- **Consider options such as interim reviews for all funding**. For example, undertaking a four-year project, with two years funding followed by a comprehensive review and then another two years of funding. At the end of the project there will be a significant amount of learning that can be rolled out to other projects and areas.

Public participation for common cause – practical principles

The method is only part of the story

> *You can't impose a solution to community cohesion to local communities. It's got to be about using a range of tools and techniques that allows the answer to emerge, and for local people to be engaged in that process.*
>
> *Interviewee*

Why it matters: As public participation is becoming an increasingly common feature of local decision making and service design, officials often find themselves under pressure to engage with local residents within tight timeframes and limited budgets. It is not uncommon for tried and tested methods of participation to be recycled repeatedly, without consideration of how they suit the situation or the local circumstances. However, it is important to remember that the participation method is only part of the story. If a public participation activity does not have a clear purpose or is done badly, it is likely to be a waste of time for both the institution and the participants involved. Likewise, activities carried out without commitment to take the findings on board are meaningless, as are activities that are geared towards a predetermined outcome.

What it means in practice: The following formula summarises the key considerations that need to be taken into account when planning a public participation activity:[6]

purpose + context + people + method = outcome

- **purpose** – being clear about what the public participation activity seeks to achieve
- **context** – paying attention to the needs and character of the community in question
- **people** – considering who should be involved, what their needs are, and what support or incentives may help them take part
- **method** – choosing a method of participation that fits the purpose, context and people.

Purpose – setting clear objectives

Why it matters: Those organising public participation activities must have clear objectives, which will help ensure that the activities stay focused and that the expectations of those involved are managed. Being clear about the objectives at the outset also makes it easier to evaluate the impact of the exercise once it is finished.

Failing to set clear objectives risks causing misunderstandings and tension among those involved, can lead to time and resources being wasted, and may cause a loss of credibility if the participation activity is seen as flawed or not delivering.

What it means in practice: Setting clear objectives means finding agreement on:

- **the desired outcomes** – the results or impacts of the participation exercise, how it is going to make a difference (e.g. inform a decision, change how a public service is run, or improve relations between participants)

- **what the outputs will be** – the activities and items that make the outcome happen (e.g. meetings, workshops, information posters, reports).

It is also useful to make a distinction between the primary objective (the reason the activity is happening in the first place) and any additional objectives (added bonuses). For example, the primary objective of involving residents in the regeneration of their housing estate may be to ensure that the plans put in place are informed by residents' needs, although the secondary objective may be to improve relations between residents. Separating primary from secondary objectives helps keep the participation process focused and also makes it easier to foresee and justify any trade-offs that need to be made between objectives.

There are good and bad objectives. A **good objective** is focused, with clearly defined outputs and outcomes. It is achievable within the budget, timeframe and other resources available. A **bad objective** is poorly defined, unrealistic given the resources available, or open to conflicting interpretations.[7]

Bring people together around issues that connect them

> *What's in it for them to come to a talking shop and listen to what we're doing in community cohesion?*
>
> > *Interviewee*

Why it matters: although many official documents on community cohesion have recommended that local communities should come together to debate their shared values and visions for the future, this research revealed little support for such approaches. Research participants argued, in tune with other studies on the subject,[8] that a more effective way of building understanding and positive social relationships is to bring people together to work on issues that affect their day-to-day lives.

For more, see chapter 4 of this report.

What it means in practice:

- **Talk to people in the community** to find out what their priorities and concerns are, and arrange participation activities around issues that people feel motivated by. This can be done through surveys, citizens' panels, prioritisation exercises at community events, speaking to tenants' and residents' organisations or by using resources such as fixmystreet.com.[9]

- **Agree clear and tangible targets with the community**, in order to promote a common understanding of what is going to happen next and a shared sense of responsibility towards the issue at hand. This also helps demonstrate willingness and openness on the part of the local authority, and ensures that the community can hold the authority accountable for what happens next.

Context – adapting to local circumstances

Why it matters: Each community is different, and what works in one place will be inappropriate elsewhere. Hence, when considering what participation approach to use or which residents to involve, it is important to understand the needs of the community in question, but also to be aware of the social, organisational and political context.

What it means in practice: Consider the following three factors:

- **Audience** – who will be affected by the outcomes of the participation activity? This could be the residents, the service provider, service users or other stakeholders. What are the interests and commitments of those people in relation to the project? How will their needs be met?

- **History** – what is the history of the area, the service or the issue that is being addressed? Has either of these been the subject of debate, tension or controversy in the community? If so, how might this affect people's attitudes to any proposed public participation activity? How will negative attitudes be mitigated?

- **Other activities** – what other initiatives, formal or informal, have addressed the same issues, locality or service? What can be learnt from them? Who knows about them? What will be done to ensure that efforts are not duplicated?

- Also see the section above on **understanding the local community**.

Listen and learn

If participation has no influence, then not participating is entirely rational.

Steering group member

Why it matters: There is no point in running a public participation activity if the institution in charge is not genuinely prepared to learn from the findings of the activity. There was widespread agreement among the participants of this research that public participation activities are most likely to have a positive impact on relationships between participants and between participants and public bodies if the institution running the exercise is genuinely open to listen to and learn from the public participants. Being willing to listen and learn matters because it:

- ensures that the institution learns from the experience of those who are affected by its decisions and services
- shows that the participants' time and views are valued
- improves credibility of the participation activity and of the organisation running the activity
- helps build trust in public institutions.

What it means in practice:

- **Give honest responses to participants' views and queries.**

- **Take on board any criticisms that arise, and be seen to do so.**

- **Do not allow preconceptions about certain individuals or groups to influence how to respond to their contribution.**

- **Ensure that the outcomes *are visible*,** in other words, that participants and the wider community are informed of how the participation activity has made a difference.

Good communications and visible results

> *You need to manage people's expectation – what level of control are they actually getting?*
>
> *Workshop participant*

Why it matters: Good communications are a vital part of any public participation exercise. Keeping participants informed about the purpose and timeframes of the activity, and giving them feedback after it is finished, is necessary to ensure that:

- expectations are managed: participants and partners are aware of the objectives and what is expected of them
- participants feel that their contribution is valued
- participants and the wider community know how their input has made a difference and understand why certain things have or have not been taken forward.

What it means in practice:

- **Inform participants and, if relevant, the wider community about what is going to happen,** what the objectives are, and any changes in plans.

- **Be open about what is and is not possible to achieve**, and give a full explanation when an idea cannot be taken forward.

- **Keep websites and other information sources up to date.**

- **Give participants the opportunity to read and comment on project reports and evaluation reports, if appropriate.**

- **Provide translated and accessible materials** where necessary and possible.

- **Give feedback to participants, partners and the wider community about what happens after the activity is finished.** Although it is not always possible to give direct feedback to all participants, there are always ways to make the information available to those who want it, for example by updating a web page, sending a mass email or posting information in public places.

Supporting participants to take part

Why it matters: Motivating and enabling people in the local community to get involved and stay involved in participation activities can be a challenge. Some people are simply not interested in taking part. Some are prevented from doing so because they cannot access the activities or through lack of time. Others may not feel confident about their ability to contribute, due to a perceived lack of knowledge about the issue at hand, or because they lack the necessary literacy, language or other skills to take part. It is therefore imperative that the team in charge of running the participation activity offers support to help the participants to access and fully engage with the exercise.

What it means in practice: There are three types of support that need to be considered:

- **support to help people engage in the participation activity on an equal footing** (e.g. information about the subject, skills training, targeted approaches and empowerment training)

- **logistical support to help people who want to take part do so** (e.g. travel expenses, translators, income remuneration, childcare provision)

- **incentives to encourage people to take part** (e.g. food, games, financial incentives, vouchers).[10]

These five questions can help identify the type of support that participants may require:

- **Are there gaps in knowledge, skill or experience between the different participants?** If so, how will the different groups be supported to ensure that their voices are heard on an equal footing?

- **Are there cultural factors that should be taken into account?** For instance, should there be separate meetings for men and women? Will different groups have conflicting expectations of why the activity is happening and how it should be run?

- **Are there language barriers or access barriers?**

- **What's in it for the participants?** Is it realistic to expect people to just show up? What is being done to make people understand that taking part in the activity is worthwhile? And what is done to make it engaging for them to do so?

- **Is it appropriate to incentivise people to take part,** such as by building food, games, sport or festivities into the process, or offering money or vouchers (e.g. mobile phone top-up, cinema vouchers, vouchers from a shop chain)?

Ensuring diversity of voices

Participation must not occur in an exclusive bubble.
Workshop participant

Why it matters: Public participation is becoming an increasingly important element of local government decision making and service provision. As individual service users and residents are called on to help make decisions that affect the wider community, it is becoming more and more important to ensure that the processes by which they are involved are built on principles of equality, inclusion and accountability, to make sure that no individual or group are excluded on the basis of their ethnicity, religion, gender, disability or age. This is also a legal requirement, as set out in the government's equality and discrimination acts[11].

This does not mean that all participation activities should be statistically representative. In local government public participation, participants are often recruited on the basis of their interest or stake in an issue or service. And, in the context of promoting integration and cohesion, it may be necessary to target specific groups rather than seek a cross-representation of the local community. The important thing is therefore not to seek statistical representation at all costs, but rather to be able to justify how participants have been selected and to ensure that no individual or group is excluded on unwarranted grounds.[12]

What it means in practice:

- **Ensure equal access by providing logistical support** (e.g. translators/ translated versions of information materials, disability access, separate meetings for men and women, childcare, income remuneration).

- **Strive to include a representative cross-section of the local population or the relevant user group when possible and appropriate,** and justify the recruitment criteria when the sample excludes certain groups or is not representative of the local population or user group.

- **Identify which groups or individuals are less able or likely to take part,** and make special efforts to include those people.

Capturing and sharing learning to improve practice

> *Why aren't the good examples replicated? We need more sharing and learning between local authorities.*
>
> *Steering group member*

Why it matters: There are numerous interesting and promising participation activities taking place both by local authorities and in the community and voluntary sector, many of which are explicitly linked to the cohesion agenda. The problem, therefore, is not a lack of activities or examples to learn from, but rather a lack of access to those examples and a lack of opportunities to share experiences.

In the end, the ability of a public participation activity to have an impact beyond the individuals involved depends on effective dissemination of the findings and other learning. **Each participation process involves two kinds of learning that could benefit from wider dissemination:**

- **learning about participants' views and how they have made a difference** – to be disseminated to participants, the wider community, service providers, strategic officials, stakeholder groups and other interested parties as appropriate
- **learning to improve future public participation or community cohesion work** – to be disseminated to other teams within the local authority, other organisations in the area, and other local authorities.

What it means in practice: Capturing and sharing learning involves three steps:

• **Analyse audiences to determine who will be or ought to be interested in, or affected by, the findings and outcomes of the participation activity.** This may include:

  • the participants who took part in the activity
  • the wider community
  • service providers
  • other departments and service providers within the local authority
  • local community and voluntary organisations
  • local businesses
  • other local or national stakeholders.

• **Evaluate the participation activity.** This is important for two reasons:[13]

  • First, to measure what has been achieved, by answering questions such as:

    – Have we done what we set out to do? (e.g. did we meet targets and fulfil objectives? Were there any other achievements?)
    – What impact has the project had? (e.g. on service provision, on community relations, on individual participants, on local policy?)
    – Did we involve the right people?

  • Second, to help improve future participation activities, by answering questions such as:

    – What worked or didn't work?
    – Did we set ourselves the right objectives?
    – What should we do differently in the future?

• **Disseminate learning and outcomes to as many audience groups as is appropriate and possible.** Dissemination avenues can include:

  • websites, including that of the organisation running the activity, or national websites such as the case study libraries on the Institute for Community Cohesion[14] website or the People & Participation[15] website
  • mailouts to participants and service providers
  • local authority intranets

- newsletters and email distribution lists
- presentations and networking at workshops and conferences
- press releases.

1   Communities and Local Government (2007) *What works in community cohesion? Research study conducted by Ipsos-MORI for the department of Communities and Local Government and the Commission on Integration and Cohesion.* London: CLG.
2   Communities and Local Government (2008) *Community cohesion impact assessment and community conflict tool.* London: CLG; Communities and Local Government (forthcoming) *Cohesion Delivery Framework.*
3   www.barking-dagenham.gov.uk/nm/index.html
4   www.katepontin.co.uk/REPBRUM.pdf
5   www.voiceyp.org/ngen_public/default.asp?id=36
6   Adapted from Involve (2005) *People & participation: how to put citizens at the heart of decision-making*. London: Involve.
7   Ibid.
8   Communities and Local Government (2007) *What works in community cohesion*; Hudson, M., Phillips, J., Ray, K. and Barnes, H. (2007) *Social cohesion in diverse communities.* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
9   www.fixmystreet.com
10 For a practical discussion of how to motivate and sustain community volunteers, see Richardson, L. (2008) *DIY community action: neighbourhood problems and community self-help.* Bristol: Policy Press, pp.121–30.
11 HM Government (2005). *Disability Discrimination Act 2005*. London: The Stationary Office Ltd; HM Government (2000). *Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000*. London: The Stationary Office Ltd; HM Government The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (Amendment) Regulations 2003. London: The Stationary Office Ltd
12 Gavelin, K. and Wilson, R. with Doubleday, R. (2007) *Democratic technologies?* London: Involve.
13 Adapted from Warburton, D. with Wilson, R. and Rainbow, E. (2007) *Making a difference: a guide to evaluating public participation in central government.* London: Involve and Department for Constitutional Affairs. For detailed guidance on how to evaluate public participation activities, see Involve's online guide to evaluation: www.involve.org.uk/evaluation
14 www.coventry.ac.uk/researchnet/icoco/good-practice
15 People & Participation is a webportal to information about public participation. See www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/CaseStudies

Further reading for practitioners

Publications

Blake, G., Diamond, J., Foot, J., Gidley, B., Mayo, M., Shukra, K. and Yarnit, M. (forthcoming) *Governance and diversity: fluid communities, solid structures.* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) *Our shared future.* London: Commission on Integration and Cohesion.

Communities and Local Government (2007) *What works in community cohesion, research study conducted for Communities and Local Government and the Commission on Integration and Cohesion.* London: CLG.

Communities and Local Government (2008) *Community cohesion impact assessment and community conflict tool.* London: CLG.

Communities and Local Government and Local Government Association (2007) *An action plan for community empowerment.* Wetherby: CLG.

Home Office and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005) *Community cohesion: seven steps – a practitioner's toolkit.* London: Home Office.

Hudson, M., Phillips, J., Ray, K. and Barnes, H. (2007) *Social cohesion in diverse communities.* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Involve (2005) *People & participation: how to put citizens at the heart of decision-making.* London: Involve.

Local Government Association (2004) *Community cohesion – an action guide.* London: LGA.

Richardson, L. (2008) *DIY community action: neighbourhood problems and community self-help.* Bristol: Policy Press.

Warburton, D. with Wilson, R. and Rainbow, E. (2007) *Making a difference: a guide to evaluating public participation in central government.* London: Involve and Department for Constitutional Affairs.

Websites

www.peopleandparticipation.net

www.involve.org.uk/evaluation

www.coventry.ac.uk/researchnet/icoco/good-practice

Part Two:
A Contextual Framework

2. Background: The Public Policy Context

The notion of a cohesive community is a contested concept. For some it can be characterised as simply a **contented community**, where the absence of social tension and anti-social behaviour reflects a society in which people live side by side in peace. In this vision cohesion is defined by a lack of social ills, as individuals and groups reside contentedly in their own privacy. At other times, it is depicted as an **ideal community**, one in which people actively choose to spend time together and engage with public life. In this idealised world, cohesion takes the form of frequent and positive interactions between people – not just with each other but also with public institutions.

Both visions have been encouraged and pursued by public bodies across Britain. However, both are difficult to match to the complex contradictions of the reality on the ground. Indeed, these different visions highlight the struggle in local and national government to devise a community cohesion agenda that works at both the strategic and practical level, and that is relevant to Britain's many and diverse communities.

As part of these ongoing debates there is an emerging recognition of the role that participation in public life can play in promoting community cohesion. Lessons from the fields of community development, conflict resolution and grass-roots campaigning have shown that one of the most effective ways of building positive relationships between people is to motivate and enable them to come together to address shared problems and build on what they have in common.[16] Consequently, although there is disagreement about the type of public participation sought, there is a general presumption running through current policy and political debates that community relations benefit from people being encouraged to take part in public life within their local area.

This view is now widely shared across government. Promoting public participation as a remedy for tension and division in communities has been a central theme in a number of recent policy documents. The 2007 Lyons Inquiry into local government claimed that effective civic engagement creates trust and eases social tensions by:

engendering public debate on issues in a way that improves understanding, promotes cohesion rather than division and makes people feel positive about getting involved.[17]

In a similar vein, the 2006 white paper concerning the future of local government called for more participation to "help build cohesive and self confident communities";[18] and the Commission on Integration and Cohesion stated in its final report that active citizenship demands that citizens:

> engage with one another to tackle the issues which face [them] at local level, including building cohesion and integration in [their] local communities.[19]

These policies have posed a series of new challenges for everyone working with and within communities. Local authorities are now being explicitly charged with the task of realising the government's vision for a cohesive and empowered society.[20] The CLG's response to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion states that all local authorities will be required to report performance against the government's indicators for cohesion and empowerment.[21] In practice, this means that local authorities are required to ensure that their work within communities is not only reactive to social discord but also proactive, building confidence and a sense of belonging among citizens to minimise the risk of tensions emerging in the future. Thus, the government is clear that community cohesion should not be seen as a separate agenda but one which must run through all other strategic objectives at the local level. This was set out in the CLG's response to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion report, which stated:

> We know that cohesion is not just built by specifically aimed policies, but also by ensuring that other polices take account of the impact they can have on cohesion.[22]

This also means that local authorities must reassess how their public participation work fits within this agenda. In the Local Government Association (LGA) and the CLG's recent action plan for community empowerment, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government Hazel Blears stated:

> Genuine empowerment can bring positive change and build the resilience necessary to prevent problems such as anti-social behaviour, which left unchallenged will blight communities.[23]

Consequently, there have been moves to improve the quality of local authority public participation, to ensure that the activities put in place not only meet basic requirements around public engagement and so "tick the consultation box" but also contribute to building positive social relationships between participants and in

the wider community. This can be seen in the government's PSA Delivery Agreement 21, which calls for local authorities to join forces with third sector organisations to create more opportunities for public participation and other forms of active citizenship in the pursuit of "cohesive, empowered and active communities".[24] Specifically this means that local authorities are required to offer more participation in local decision making, to provide more support to help citizens take part in civic life, and to make more effort to promote a culture of engagement and volunteering in culture and sport as a means for supporting cohesion in their community.

A number of studies and toolkits have been produced to support authorities in delivering this agenda, many of which are included in the list of further reading at the end of chapter 1. Most recently, the CLG has launched a community cohesion impact assessment tool to help local authorities test their planned activities to predict their impact on community cohesion and community conflict.[25] And in addition to these already published documents, a Cohesion Delivery Framework is due to be launched by the CLG and the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) in summer 2008, which will provide further practical guidance to local authorities.[26]

These developments reflect a clear vision on the part of government that public participation should be an integral part of the drive towards building fair, cohesive and empowered communities. However, when taking a closer look at the arguments on which this belief is built, it becomes clear that the evidence to back them up is contested and often patchy. Although it is widely acknowledged that public participation activities can have a transformative impact on individuals and communities, the evidence to support such claims is overwhelmingly anecdotal, based on a small number of case studies, and with little systematic analysis to compare the approaches used and the circumstances to which they were applied.

This raises a number of practical issues for those charged with promoting community cohesion at the local level. For example, it is not clear whether community cohesion and empowerment are likely outcomes of any participative activity in itself, or only of those activities that have the explicit aim of improving community relations or empowering people. Neither is it clear whether participative initiatives set up and directly run by public sector organisations are more or less likely to foster community cohesion and empowerment than those initiated from the grass roots, by individuals or community organisations. Finally, little guidance is offered about how to overcome historical or cultural barriers to participation.

These uncertainties are exacerbated by the confusion about the meaning of the key concepts involved. Despite numerous attempts to clarify the definition of the term "community cohesion", it continues to mean different things to different people. The same is true for "empowerment" and "public participation", two equally broad and indistinct terms. This lack of clarity can be seen to hinder progress at both local and national level, at times resulting in different outcomes being sought and a lack of coordinated vision between strategic officials and those charged with delivering objectives on the ground. Indeed, difference in the policy language and the everyday phrases used by ordinary people highlights a disjuncture between the aims of local authorities and the practical realities of delivering these aims. Or as one workshop participant said

The language that is being used is in the context of bureaucracy.
Workshop participant

This does not mean that the claims that link public participation to empowerment and community cohesion are false. It does reflect, however, that there is little practical guidance available for local authorities and other institutions charged with delivering the government's cohesion agenda. Without guidance on what forms of participation are linked to these positive social outcomes, there is a risk that any participative activity is seen as a social good in its own right, without sufficient understanding of what it is likely to achieve, or what risks are involved. This in turn carries the danger that any joint strategies for participation, cohesion and empowerment become tokenistic and ultimately ineffective. Thus, for the benefit of both communities and local authorities, it is vital that that those promoting initiatives to generate community cohesion through public participation steer clear of these potential pitfalls and learn from the emerging examples of good practice to make the most of the opportunities that good public participation can offer.

Structure of the contextual framework

The next chapter looks at what community means to people, and what makes a community cohesive. In doing so, it asks what the government's efforts to promote community cohesion are actually seeking to achieve. Reviewing the existing literature and the outcomes of this study, the chapter sets out the difficulties facing those who work within local government in shaping a common vision of what community is, what cohesion means for the area, and how to support and sustain activities that can achieve these outcomes.

Following on from this, chapter 4 considers how and when public participation activities can add value to the mission to promote community cohesion. It sets out how different understandings of the role that public participation can play have influenced policy, and considers the evidence to support or refute these ideas. In doing so, the chapter shows why understanding not only the processes associated with public participation but also its purpose is key to successful activities that can support community cohesion and effective local public-service decision making.

Chapter 5 then considers the often complex reality of working with citizens and the social bonds and networks that exist within a locality. Contrasting the organic and often informal way in which individuals and groups organise themselves with the frameworks of public participation imposed by public authorities, it looks at how public institutions can work with the grain of community to increase and sustain formal and informal interactions within a local area. It also looks at the difficulties created by the gap between strategic visions for community cohesion, and the working reality and sometimes conflicting priorities of those charged with delivering community services on the ground.

Finally, chapter 6 contains the conclusion and recommended areas for further research.

16 Begum, H. (2003) *Social capital in action: adding up local connections and networks.* London: National Council for Voluntary Organisations, pp.7, 20–25; Communities and Local Government (2008) *Predictors of community cohesion: multi-level modelling of the 2005 Citizenship Survey.* London: CLG; Creasy, S., Fisher, H., Gavelin, K., Holmes, L. and Desai, M. (2007) *Engage for change: the role of public engagement in climate change policy*, research for the Sustainable Development Commission. London: Involve; Gilchrist, A. (2004) *Community cohesion and community development: bridges or barricades?* London: Community Development Foundation and Runnymede Trust, pp.18–23.
17 Lyons Inquiry into Local Government (2007) *Place-shaping: a shared ambition for the future of local government.* London: The Stationery Office.
18 Communities and Local Government (2006) *Strong and prosperous communities: the local government white paper*, London: CLG.
19 Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) *Our shared future.* Wetherby: Commission on Integration and Cohesion.
20 Communities and Local Government (2008) *The government response to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion.* London: CLG; HM Government (2007) *PSA Delivery Agreement 21: build more cohesive, empowered and active communities.* London: HM Government.
21 CLG (2008) *The government response to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion.*
22 Ibid., p.17
23 Communities and Local Government and Local Government Association (2007) *An action plan for community empowerment: building on success.* London: CLG, p.3.
24 HM Government (2007) *PSA Delivery Agreement 21.*
25 CLG (2008) *Community cohesion impact assessment and community conflict prevention tool.*
26 CLG (2008) *The government response to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion.*

3. Why Does Community Cohesion Matter?

There are extensive debates around the meanings and definition of the words at the heart of this debate: community, cohesion, empowerment and participation. To give full justice to their complexity and nuances is beyond the remit of this research. Therefore, to give focus to the report and ensure that it is useful to those working within public agencies, this study has looked at communities and the relationships that exist within them in a very particular context: the government's agenda for community cohesion and empowerment. Consequently the research team has used definitions that are as useful as possible to the target audience: public institutions and other bodies working at the local level to deliver the government's cohesion agenda and generate positive change within Britain's communities.

Defining community

Defining what constitutes community is difficult.[27] As one commentator has reflected on both the academic and public policy debates, "Community can mean everything or nothing."[28] This reflects the contentiousness of trying to set out what does, and does not, define community, including the behaviours, power relationships, cultural values and economic and social structures which may or may not be present among a group of people. Indeed, this complexity was echoed by a participant in the workshop who argued:

> *If you don't want to make a judgement, then there needs to be a lot of conceptual confusion – a definition can't mean all things to all people.*
>
> *Workshop participant*

For many commentators, the danger in specifying what community is comes from leaving out something else. The American author Amitai Etzioni describes social theorists as "groping for an image" to properly capture the tensions between the similarities and differences that underpin human relationships. In his work Etzioni defines community as like a "mosaic":

> *The mosaic is enriched by a variety of elements of different shapes and colours, but it is held together by a frame and glue. The mosaic depicts a society in which various communities maintain their religious, culinary, and cultural particularities, proud and*

*knowledgeable about their specific traditions – while recognizing
that they are integral parts of a more encompassing whole. The
communities are, and see themselves as, constitutive elements of a
more encompassing community of communities, a society of which
they are parts. Moreover, they have a firm commitment to the
shared framework. "We came on different ships, but now we are all
in the same boat", to draw on a popular saying.[29]*

In this report, the research team has drawn on a simpler and less prosaic definition, put forward by Richardson and Mumford. They argued that community at a local level can be used to refer to the "social infrastructure" that "makes neighbourhoods into social systems".[30] In this definition they encompass both the shared consumption of services and facilities which are often provided on a geographical basis, and the social networks and social customs which are part of the social organisation in a location.

The primary focus of this study has been influenced by this description and centres around the social relationships between people who live in the same locality, and the remit of local authorities tasked with delivering community cohesion in their defined area. Hence, unless otherwise stated, the term community here refers to people living within the same area, irrespective of what other points of contact, commonality or difference exists between them. Communities founded on shared interests, background, ethnicity or religion are recognised as overlapping with and existing within such geographically defined communities, but are not the primary focus of this study.[31]

Understanding community cohesion: static and active interpretations

The concept of community cohesion is also widely contested. Virtually every policy paper or piece of academic research on the subject offers a new definition of the term. In these debates community cohesion tends to be seen as a function of community membership, whether that community is defined through a social category such as ethnicity or in geographic terms as the population of a particular locality. It is important to note that none of the definitions included here cover only relations between people from different ethnic or religious backgrounds; instead they include relations between people of different ages, genders, social classes and any other categories that may divide or unite people.

In this report, a distinction is drawn between two types of definition of community cohesion: static and active interpretations. Static definitions of community cohesion are rooted in a belief that communities which function well do not exhibit tension or anti-social behaviour; in other words, they are communities in which people are able to live peacefully side by side. Thus such definitions are "static" because they explain the contemporary status of relationships between people within a community.[32] In these definitions it is not the existence of strong relationships or interactions between individuals and groups that define cohesion, but the absence of tension. In other words, community cohesion at its most basic is manifested through the effective management of the pressures of modern life so that they do not interfere with the ability of individuals to co-exist. This interpretation was supported by an interviewee in this research who argued:

> *Saying that everyone must have a shared understanding of what the community is like, and they must have a sense of belonging and like their neighbours – I think that's quite far removed from reality. I think in the short term it's [better to aim for] a community where people aren't violent towards each other, where they aren't distrustful of each other, rather than a community where everybody likes each other.*
>
> *Interviewee*

The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham's community cohesion strategy also reflects this recognition. The Borough's definition of cohesion is the outcome of a wide-reaching dialogue and consultation process with local residents to find out what they see as the key elements of a strong, cohesive community. This definition emphasises safety, fairness and having opportunities to mix, rather than the strength and frequency of those interactions. Barking and Dagenham defines a cohesive community as:

- "A strong community that will get fair access to services
- A place where people respect one another and enjoy safe and peaceful lives; and
- [A place where there are] opportunities to meet together and look forward to the future."[33]

Another example is Leicester City Council, where community cohesion is defined as "learning to live together". Here, the emphasis is on managing and valuing ethnic diversity by supporting integration, working with young people from different backgrounds, and building confidence and a sense of belonging among residents,

all with the aim of overcoming prejudice and preventing social tension. Although Leicester's community cohesion strategy acknowledges the role of intergroup interactions in achieving these objectives, its aim is not so much to develop strong relationships between groups as to create a "better understanding of our neighbours and communities [to help] lessen the tensions that ignorance brings so that we can all live with a feeling of safety and security".[34]

In contrast to these static depictions of community cohesion, active definitions place greater emphasis on the behaviours and interactions within a community. These definitions are active because they are centred on the activities that are seen to enable cohesion. They interpret the concept in terms of the nature and strength of the relationships and interactions between people in a locality, and the perceptions they have of each other and the local area as a result of those relationships and interactions. One research participant commented:

> *The way I like to think about whether there is cohesion in a community is whether there is a lot of noise, because people are trying to communicate with each other.*
>
> *Interviewee*

Active interpretations of community cohesion often refer to explicit and sustained relationships between people, which are manifested in frequent interactions, participation in shared activities, mutual trust and a shared sense of belonging to the locality. They also often explicitly reference the social infrastructure that makes such relationships possible, identifying the importance of social justice and equal opportunities alongside everyday interactions. For example, the LGA defines community cohesion as communities where:

> *There is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities; the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and positively valued; those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; and strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds and circumstances in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.[35]*

Community cohesion: a catch all term?

The distinctions between these definitions can be seen to be of nuance rather than intent. It can be argued that active definitions of community cohesion build on the static definition by emphasising the activities that have shown to help communities achieve cohesion, rather than describing the state in itself. Hence, although static understandings of community cohesion may be sufficient for describing the status of cohesion at its most basic, active interpretations, with their recognition of how social relationships develop and impact on our experiences and perceptions, offer a more constructive understanding of how community cohesion is built. Consequently, active interpretations of community cohesion are also clearer about the role that participation in public life can play in fostering community cohesion, and are therefore more directly relevant to this research.

Some active definitions of community cohesion place importance not only on the role of relationships between individuals but also on people's relationships with public institutions and their interpretation of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. An example is the most recent government interpretation of community cohesion, in which the CLG sets out a vision of cohesive and integrated communities that is based on three foundations:

- "People from different backgrounds having similar life opportunities
- People knowing their rights and responsibilities
- People trusting one another and trusting local institutions to act fairly"

and three ways of living together:

- "A shared future vision and sense of belonging
- A focus on what new and existing communities have in common, alongside a recognition of the value of diversity
- Strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds."[36]

This attempt to include both a concern for the status of relationships and the practices which engender interaction reflects another problem, which adds to the conceptual difficulties of defining community cohesion. It can be argued that the CLG's broad take on cohesion and integration illustrates the challenge of summarising in a few words a concept that has so many different meanings to different people. As discussed in the previous chapter, this can lead to the

definitions of cohesive community becoming descriptions of an ideal community, incorporating a wide range of factors that could be improved in British communities rather than being clear about what cohesion is and why it matters.

These difficulties were the source of heated discussions in our workshop and interviews. Many research participants reacted against the inclusion of "people knowing their rights and responsibilities" and "trusting local institutions to act fairly" in the CLG's three foundations of community cohesion. These are two comments from participants:

> *Trust in local institutions to act fairly is irrelevant to people and to how people engage with each other.*
>
> *Workshop participant*

> *I don't think [the government definition] is very helpful, in the sense that it goes off into trust in institutions and citizenship… Because the public don't understand that sort of language… I cannot use the definition with communities. I cannot walk around talking about trust in institutions.*
>
> *Interviewee*

Some participants argued that although good relations between citizens and local institutions may be recognised as potential drivers of community cohesion, they should not be included in a definition of the term. This is because participants felt that strong communities can form independently of people's trust in local institutions to act fairly. Indeed, some argued that social bonds may form precisely because local institutions are perceived to act unfairly, causing people to join together in protest. This reflects some of the difficulties with active definitions of community cohesion that can be overly prescriptive about the activities that are seen to reflect cohesion[37] or the motivations behind them. As the research participants argued, it can be misguided to consider trust in institutions, or indeed active citizenship, as prerequisites of community cohesion. One participant stated:

> *A lack of engagement can make people come together – it can lead to cohesion among those who campaign or protest against what the authorities are doing.*
>
> *Interviewee*

Another issue of contention regarding definitions was the notion that the cohesiveness of a community can be determined by the strength and intensity of

the social relationships within it. One participant commented:

> *The term community cohesion often implies that when people don't*
> *want to mix, there is a problem.*
>
>   *Steering group member*

Instead, participants pointed out that the level at which people connect with others in their local area depends on a number of factors, such as their age, whether they have children, whether they commute to work, whether they own or rent their accommodation, whether they grew up in the area, and so on. Therefore if people are not physically mixing it does not necessarily indicate that there is social tension or mistrust; it could simply be a reflection of the lifestyles or demographic profile of that particular population. As one participant argued:

> *It's not about people having to behave in a way that shows how much*
> *they like each other, which I think is often how local authorities can*
> *misconstrue what cohesion is. I don't think it is about that. I mean, I*
> *don't have to talk to my neighbours. You know, I can have a smile at*
> *them or say good morning, if I'm feeling good that morning, if my*
> *coffee wasn't cold. And then if I'm grumpy then I don't. I think that's*
> *it, it's not about utopia.*
>
>   *Interviewee*

Hence, many participants in the research were adamant that whether a community is cohesive or not may be determined less by the strength of the ties that bind people together than by the perceptions they have of each other and of the area in which they live. Those perceptions may benefit from strong and explicit bonds between people of different backgrounds and generations, but they do not necessarily rely on them. Implicit ties can be sufficient to create a sense of trust and belonging. Simply being aware that there are informal and formal networks, such as parent groups, neighbourhood forums or sports clubs to which one could belong if one wished, can have a similar effect. This notion evokes Stanley Milgram's research on "familiar strangers"[38]. Familiar strangers are the people whom we regularly encounter, for example on our way to the shop, when walking the dog or travelling to work, but whom we do not know or interact with. The familiar stranger status, Milgram writes "is not the absence of a relationship, but a special form of relationship, that has properties and consequences of their own". For example, although familiar strangers may never acknowledge each others' existence in their normal day-to-day life, in extraordinary circumstances, such as a flood, they

are more likely to come to each other's assistance. Moreover, for those living busy lives in densely populated areas, regularly seeing the same familiar faces, strangers or not, can help people feel connected to the area in which they live.

As these discussions illustrate, there are numerous different ways of approaching the concept of community cohesion. This diversity reflects the range of ways in which community itself is understood. It also reflects the diversity of British communities, with their varied characters, lifestyles and consequently different needs. These differences raise a central concern for any initiative designed to support community cohesion, namely that there is a need to recognise the limitations of definitions and a need to be flexible about what community cohesion may look like in any local area. As one participant commented:

> *Community cohesion is a very local concept and I think that's how it should be presented. It could be anything depending on the issue and the area.*
>
> <div align="right">*Interviewee*</div>

The debates around definitions and the distinctions between static and active descriptions reflect the difficulties in identifying how to recognise cohesion and how to interpret other cultural, social and political factors at stake within a community, such as the relationships between individuals and public institutions. Concerns that static definitions fail to capture the importance of human interactions should be considered against the way in which active definitions can be overly deterministic about which activities represent cohesion, such as participation in sport and culture,[39] which may be more or less relevant as indicators depending on the area.

The fact that community cohesion continues to be redefined to suit particular contexts should therefore not be seen in a negative light; rather this may be necessary to ensure that the concept serves a practical purpose for local authorities when thinking about how best to support their local communities. This recognition has been at the core of several recent policy recommendations for community cohesion. Research carried out for the CLG highlighted "the value of definitions of cohesion being fluid and flexible so that they can be tailored for different situations",[40] and the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, building on this, recommended that "local areas should be encouraged to develop their own local indicators of integration and cohesion".[41] The recommendations in the practical framework include making provision to work at a local level with key stakeholders, including local residents, to develop a working definition of what

community cohesion means so that it is relevant and applicable to the locality in which it is used.

The underlying factors: inequality matters

Although this report focuses on how to support communities through public participation, it is important not to overlook the role of social and economic circumstances in shaping social relationships. The CLG's recent research into predictors of community cohesion found a strong relationship between the dimensions of disadvantage and perceptions of cohesion, with "higher levels of qualifications, higher occupational status and home ownership" all being positively associated with cohesion.[42] These findings are consistent with other studies that have found a correlation between different forms of inequality, including material, procedural and status-related inequalities, and community cohesion.[43]

Although this does not mean that all deprived areas have low cohesion, or that all wealthy areas are cohesive, the CLG report states that "irrespective of the level of ethnic diversity in a community, disadvantage consistently undermines perceptions of cohesion".[44] This was widely acknowledged among research participants, many of whom recounted tales of how deprivation, inequality and discrimination breed tension and social division in Britain's communities:

> *It's that parallel lives scenario, which I think we still see. When there isn't much contact between people, or the only contact there is is negative, in the sense that there is violence, abuse, lack of trust. All of that is prevalent still, and I think in some places it's becoming more entrenched. Deprivation and inequality is a real problem.*
>
> *Interviewee*

> *Community cohesion is basically about inequality in your council area.*
> *Interviewee*

> *Economic disparities are a crucial factor in these debates – including things such as access to the labour market.*
> *Interviewee*

In critiquing the official response to the community cohesion debates, some researchers have been concerned that focusing on cultural values and perceptions of citizenship has been a way of excusing a lack of action to address inequality

and discrimination as contributors to social unrest.[45] Bauder has argued that underlying many of the discussions around "neighbourhood effects" and the social networks within poorer communities is the belief that many of the indicators associated with low community cohesion, such as crime and anti-social behaviour, are "inherently pathological and indicate social dysfunction".[46] Thus they blame the poor behaviour of those who live in deprived neighbourhoods, but fail to address the underlying causes of those behaviours. Commenting on the government's early work on cohesion, Alison Gilchrist writes:

> *Unfortunately, the government's initial community facilitation and Pathfinders programmes tended to be more superficial, drawing on psychological rather than political theories of how to improve inter-community relations.[47]*

Some of the recent community cohesion literature has sought to redress the balance by placing greater emphasis on the socio-economic drivers of social relationships, and in particular on the role that disadvantage, inequality and discrimination play in creating divisions and tension within communities.[48] It has been argued that a lot of conflict and tension in communities are rooted in competition for resources, both perceived and actual. When there is a perception that certain ethnic groups are benefiting more than others in terms of public services, employment or housing, this can result in any resulting tensions becoming linked to race as well.[49] It is not only material inequality that plays a part here: inequality in terms of access to public services and power structures or status-related inequalities manifested through discrimination can all have detrimental effects on community relations. As one interviewee commented:

> *The more equal we are, the more cohesive we are.*
>
> *Interviewee*

In the context of participation, it is also important to highlight how social and economic disparities affect the ability of individuals and groups to participate in public life. This is particularly important in relation to any definitions of community cohesion that risk being interpreted in a deterministic way. For example, the government's PSA Delivery Agreement 21 lists participation in culture and sport as one of six indicators to be used by local and national government to measure cohesion in communities.[50] When considering this indicator it is vital to take into account also the potential barriers to such activities, be they economic, social or

cultural, and to recognise that a lack of participation may reflect a lack of facilities or access as well as a lack of cohesion. Applying the indicators without this recognition would be to imply that the British public all have access to a certain standard of public facilities, which in many cases simply is not the case.

The emphasis of this study has been on how participation processes can assist in building community cohesion. Hence the focus of the research has been on this question, to the exclusion of considering other factors that may be of equal or more importance to shaping community relations, such as integration or socio-economic inequalities. It is therefore important to note that the research team does not believe that the public participation approach to building community cohesion can be prioritised over addressing these other factors, but that it can nonetheless be recognised as a valuable tool in the ongoing process of supporting community cohesion.

27 Mumford K. and Power A. (2003) *East Enders: family and community in East London.* Bristol: Policy; Richardson, L. and Mumford, K. (2002) "Community, neighbourhood and social infrastructure", in Hills, J., Le Grand, J. and Piachaud, D., *Understanding social exclusion.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.202–25.
28 Walker, D. (2005) "View from the top", *Guardian*, 27 July.
29 Etzioni, A. (1995) *The community of communities: a communitarian position paper,* available at www.gwu.edu/~ccps/Comofcom.html.
30 Richardson and Mumford (2002) "Community, neighbourhood and social infrastructure", p.203.
31 For a further discussion on community, particularly in relation to public policy, see Taylor, M. (2003) *Public policy in the community.* Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke: pp.34–8.
32 Halpern, D. (2005) *Social capital.* Cambridge: Polity Press.
33 www.barking-dagenham.gov.uk/9-council/comm-cohesion/part-5.html
34 www.leicester.gov.uk/index.asp?pgid=7292
35 Local Government Association (2004) *Community cohesion – an action guide.* London: LGA.
36 CLG (2008) *The government response to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion.*
37 CLG (2008) *Predictors of community cohesion*
38 Milgram, S. (1977) *The individual in a social world.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
39 See for example the government's PSA Delivery Agreement 21, which lists participation in culture and sport as an indicator of community cohesion: HM Government (2007) *PSA Delivery Agreement 21.*
40 CLG (2007) *What works in community cohesion.*
41 Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) *Our shared future.*
42 CLG (2008) *Predictors of community cohesion.*
43 Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) *Our shared future*; CLG (2007) *What works in community cohesion*; Gilchrist (2004) *Community cohesion and community development*; Hudson et al. (2007) *Social cohesion in diverse communities.*
44 CLG (2008) *Predictors of community cohesion.*
45 Gilchrist (2004) *Community cohesion and community development*, pp.12–14; Hudson et al. (2007) Social cohesion in diverse communities, pp.2, 33–43. See also chapter 4 for a discussion about the role of shared values in promoting community cohesion.
46 Bauder, H. (2002) "Neighbourhood effects and cultural exclusion", *Urban Studies*, Vol. 39, No, 1, pp.85–93.
47 Gilchrist (2004) *Community cohesion and community development*, p.14.
48 See for example: Gilchrist, A. (2004) *Community cohesion and community development*; Hudson et al. (2007) *Social cohesion in diverse communities*; Jayaweera, H. and Choudhury, T. (2008) *Immigration, faith and cohesion: evidence from local areas with significant Muslim populations.* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation; Maxwell, R. (2006) "Muslims, South Asians and the British mainstream: a national identity crisis?", *West European Politics*, Vol. 29, No. 4.
49 Hudson et al. (2007) *Social cohesion in diverse communities*, p.111.
50 HM Government (2007) *PSA Delivery Agreement 21.*

4. How Can Public Participation Make a Difference?

As the previous chapter discussed, the drivers for community cohesion are widely debated and these debates are closely linked to discussions about what the concept means. This indicates that there is no "magic bullet" that can create or sustain community cohesion. A range of factors shape social relationships, so building strong communities will always require a multi-pronged approach.

The aim of this report has been to explore how and when public participation activities can contribute to building strong communities. The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government Hazel Blears recently commented:

> There isn't a single service or development in Britain which hasn't been improved by actively involving local people.[51]

This remark reflects the growing commitment in government to supporting public participation in all its forms. Yet, like community cohesion, the term "public participation" has many different meanings. It can be used to refer to a wide range of activities; from citizens' juries, service user forums and committee meetings to neighbourhood meetings and tenants' and residents' associations. To add to the confusion, it is often used interchangeably with "engagement" and "involvement". Some use these labels to describe activities designed to improve accountability in decision making or service delivery[52] although others focus on participation as a means for improving services[53] or empowering individuals and groups to take part in the democratic process.[54]

Involve argues that public participation can be all of these things. It includes everything that enables people to influence the decisions and get involved in the actions that affect their lives.[55] This can take the form of formal political activities, such as voting, or the opportunities for citizen involvement that public bodies offer on top of and to complement formal political structures, such as area forums, participatory budgeting, public consultations and citizen panels.

This report focuses primarily on local manifestations of this latter form of public participation. In other words, it looks specifically at participative initiatives run by public and voluntary sector organisations that involve local communities in decision

making, problem solving or planning in relation to local issues. This definition of public participation excludes "civic participation",[56] which is used to describe engagement with or making representations through the formal structures of local or national governance, and "civil participation", which is used to describe activities within civil society including volunteering and informal community participation.[57] However, this distinction should not be read as a suggestion that these other forms of participation in public life are not important. On the contrary, this research has confirmed just how much value all different kinds of participation, whether public, civic or civil, can bring to communities and to the community cohesion agenda. Indeed, the need for local authorities to tap into and learn from the many different ways in which people in a community interact is a strong theme in the next chapter and in the practical framework.

However, the primary purpose of this research has been to explore the extent to which local authority public participation can contribute to building community cohesion, and the report and recommendations focus on public participation activities. Doing so, this chapter argues that, done well, public participation activities can not only enrich democracy by making public services more in tune with society's needs, but also encourage and empower citizens to work with the state and each other to meet the challenges of modern life, including building community cohesion.

Participation and empowerment: understanding the difference

When considering the role that public participation can play in securing objectives such as community cohesion or better public services, it is also important to recognise how such public participation activities are related to power within society and the capacity of individuals and groups themselves to achieve social change. Power can be exercised in many different forms, and it is important not to presume that public participation always leads to empowerment. This is a critical concern when thinking about community cohesion and working with those who may have less power within society, either perceived or actual. In understanding how

participation can lead to empowerment, it is useful to differentiate between three conceptions[58] of empowerment:

- **De jure empowerment** – the formal legal or judicial rights associated with citizenship, such as the right to vote or the community call for action. These opportunities and rights are primarily provided through law, contract or other official record. De jure empowerment does not need to be exercised to exist.

- **De facto empowerment** – control or influence (power) over an outcome or a decision. For example, when a citizens' ballot caps council tax levels it has de facto power because it has actually limited tax levels. Importantly, the presence or absence of de facto power is independent of perceptions – those who took part in the ballot on council tax will have exercised *de facto* power even though they may not be aware of this causal relationship.

- **Subjective empowerment** – the feeling, or perception, of being able to influence, control or affect a situation. Critically, subjective empowerment is a psychological state and does not need to be linked to actual power. A person or a group can have subjective power without de facto power if they feel that they have power over things that they cannot in fact influence. Similarly, subjective disempowerment can be defined as when individuals or groups believe themselves to be without power, whether or not this is actually the case.

This framework offers a way of understanding how different participation opportunities offered by public authorities can affect power relationships at a local level and how this may influence community cohesion. Of particular relevance to this report is the growing evidence that there is a strong correlation with community cohesion in those localities where residents report a higher level of "subjective empowerment". A recent study by CLG found a strong positive link between "feeling able to influence local decisions" and community cohesion.[59] This suggests that public participation can play a role in redressing the power imbalances and social inequalities that are the source of much social division and tension in British communities, by improving access to decision-making structures, making services more responsive to communities' needs and, crucially, increasing levels of subjective empowerment.

Public participation and community cohesion: how and why?

There are a range of positive individual, social and public policy outcomes to be gained from public participation in its many forms. Within the debates surrounding community cohesion, the attention given to the role that public participation activities can play has differed depending on whether the definition of community cohesion given is a static or an active interpretation (as outlined in the previous chapter). Active interpretations of the definition of community cohesion have placed greater emphasis on the rates of involvement in formal and informal types of participation in building community cohesion than those that have looked at the status of the relationships between different individuals and groups within a locality. Thus empowerment and active citizenship are key components of the official agenda for community cohesion for the government, which defines cohesion in terms of relationships between citizens and institutions as well as between people in the community.[60] Conversely, those who define community cohesion in terms of absence of anti-social behaviour place more emphasis on initiatives to address the socio-economic sources of social tension, rather than promoting public participation as a good in its own right.

Arguments about how and why different forms of public participation can assist community cohesion, and how local authorities can use these factors in their work, can be divided into two different, but overlapping, perspectives:

- **Contact-based approaches**, which build on the idea that public participation activities can help promote community cohesion by providing opportunities for interactions between individuals and groups, which help promote understanding, overcome negative stereotypes and make people aware of what they have in common. These approaches to community cohesion tend to fall into one of two categories:

  - *shared values approaches*, where public participation contributes to community cohesion by providing forums for members of a community to explore and identify their shared values and visions

  - *shared actions approaches*, where public participation contributes to community cohesion by empowering individuals and groups to come together to address local matters that affect them, thus fostering a sense of belonging and shared responsibility in communities.

- **Targeted approaches**, where public participation activities contribute to building community cohesion by addressing imbalances in participation and so ensuring that more voices are heard in local public life. These approaches often focus on developing the awareness and capacity of particular individuals or groups to participate in decision-making structures, rather than seeking interaction between those from different backgrounds *per se*.

Although these approaches differ in their objectives and often in their methodology, they are not mutually exclusive. Respondents in this study argued that contact-based and targeted approaches can both be valuable tools in building cohesion, but that neither are likely to provide a solution on their own. A recurring theme both in the literature and among the participants of this study was that building community cohesion always requires a range of approaches, the exact combination of which should be determined by the character and needs of the community in question.[61]

Contact-based approaches: why interaction matters

Much of the commitment to public participation within the community cohesion debate has been rooted in the belief the critical factor at stake is contact between individuals and groups.[62] This rhetoric builds on social contact theory. Social contact theory was originally developed by Allport[63] in the 1950s from the notion that interactions between people from different backgrounds help promote understanding, overcome negative stereotypes and make people aware of what they have in common. These benefits can occur in all forms of participation, whether in formal contexts such as neighbourhood forums, or in everyday life, such as through friends, families or neighbours as well as in schools, workplaces, sports clubs and community organisations. There is strong evidence that participation activities can aid interactivity and thus strengthen social ties and improve attitudes to people from diverse backgrounds. Hewstone[64] has shown that contact-based approaches can work in a number of contexts, for example in helping to improve participants' attitudes to people from other backgrounds or perceptions of people with disabilities or mental health problems. Thus, facilitating inter-group contact has long been considered an effective way of overcoming conflict in and between groups, and of building bridges between people who do not normally interact.[65]

Contact-based approaches to public participation have become prominent in recent policy recommendations on community cohesion. For example, the Commission on Integration and Cohesion's report *Our shared future* placed great emphasis on the need for public bodies to provide opportunities for there to be meaningful interactions between people: in schools, in the workplace, in sports and cultural institutions and in other communal spaces. The Commission also called for more research into what works in different communities, specifically building on contact theory.[66]

The evidence of there being a positive correlation between ethnic diversity and community cohesion has also been seen to support this theory.[67] Some researchers have argued that substantial ethnic diversity in itself increases the opportunities for inter-group contact and thus the likelihood of people from different backgrounds developing positive attitudes to each other.[68] However, other studies reveal a more complex relationship between diversity and cohesion. Some researchers have shown that some instances of ethnic diversity are more conducive to the forming of positive bonds and attitudes than others. In particular, differences have been noted between areas that have a diverse but relatively settled population, and those with a transient population and a higher proportion of first generation immigrants, which have been shown to have lower levels of cohesion.[69] This would suggest that in more stable communities any diversity that exists is less contentious simply because people are used to each other. In other words, interactions between groups are not sufficient on their own; they need to be sustained and repeated to engender positive bonds. Some researchers have therefore suggested that the impact of ethnic diversity on community cohesion depends on the stage of development of the community in question.[70] This is consistent with other research, which has found that stability in neighbourhood populations is important for those residents who experience a sense of community.[71]

Within these discussions about the value of inter-group contact to community cohesion there have been calls for meaningful conversations, which can help express common values and objectives.[72] The Commission on Integration and Cohesion defines meaningful interactions as instances where:

> *... conversations go beyond surface friendliness; in which people exchange personal information or talk about each other's differences and identities; people share a common goal or share an interest; and they are sustained long-term (so one-off or chance meetings are unlikely to make much difference). Importantly, this theory suggests that keeping difference in the forefront of people's minds when they are interacting across groups helps them to generalise what they have experienced – so they will take from their encounter not just a revised view of an individual, but of a whole group.[73]*

In the aftermath of the disturbances in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in 2001, a common argument was that the disturbances were underpinned by an absence of shared values and a common sense of citizenship between residents from different ethnic backgrounds. Consequently, the ability of public agencies to help residents to come together to develop shared values became the subject of government attention. Ted Cantle's Community Cohesion Review Team called for national and local debates on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.[74] In its official response the government agreed that local and national government should provide forums that could help with "articulating a clear set of shared values around which people from diverse backgrounds, faiths and cultural traditions can unite".[75] Subsequently, similar sentiments have been reiterated elsewhere; most recently in the Goldsmith Review of British Citizens[76] and the CLG response to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion.[77]

However, this enthusiasm for participation exercises to build and promote shared values in themselves has been met with scepticism from community development practitioners and others who work directly with communities. The interviews and workshop discussions conducted in this research indicated that many see the pursuit of a shared idea of citizenship or a shared vision for a local area as idealistic and vague at best, and at worst an attempt to impose policy-makers' agendas on communities that may have very different priorities and aspirations. One participant noted:

> *Who creates the "common vision"? The whole idea sounds like an imposition.*
>
> *Workshop participant*

Furthermore, research participants argued that even if the process used to articulate a shared set of values were inclusive and open, using best practice participatory methods, the pursuit of such outcomes in themselves is contrived. Two interviewees expressed the sentiments felt by some of the participants:

> *I think finding the shared values is slightly idealistic… Because if people don't feel that their needs are being met, and perhaps that they have been systematically failed for decades, as is the case in certain parts of the country, then I think that asking them to share values and share ideals and visions is kind of pie in the sky really.*
>
> *Interviewee*

> *What's in it for them to come to a talking shop and listen to what we're doing in community cohesion? Community cohesion can be a lot of smoke and mirrors and it can be very much a case of "the emperor's got no clothes". It's a lot of words… but the reality often falls far short.*
>
> *Interviewee*

These sentiments are consistent with the results of two recent studies, which found little evidence for the notion that a lack of common values is the source of the social tensions at the core of the cohesion debates.[78] These discussions were also strongly linked to a concern raised elsewhere (see chapter 3) to recognise the importance of economic and social structures in determining life chances and so situate these issues within a wider socio-economic context. Several participants argued that a preoccupation with getting people to articulate common values is simply too far removed from the real-life problems and inequalities that cause genuine divisions in communities. As one interviewee commented:

> *Trying to achieve cohesion is a tall order when people are living in deprivation and perceive the authorities to treat them unfairly.*
>
> *Interviewee*

Hence, although value-building exercises may be worthwhile and stimulating for those who take part, it was argued that they are unlikely to have a lasting effect on social relations and perceptions in the wider community. This recognition has led to a more action-focused approach to community cohesion gaining favour. Rather than asking people to come together to articulate an abstract set of values and aspirations, it is now argued that a more effective way of building trust and understanding is to bring people together to address problems and issues that affect them all.[79] This was poignantly articulated by a participant in MORI's study

What works in community cohesion?, who stated that:

> *All activities that are carried out to bring about integration and cohesion will never work!… The things which bring about integration and cohesion are those things which bring people together with common cause.*[80]

In other words, a more effective way of building trust in communities is through action-based approaches that bring people together as equals to address a common cause – such as getting involved in a tenants' or residents' association, improving local parks, or working with service providers to improve local services. In a study of social cohesion in diverse communities, Hudson et al. found:

> *Respondents involved in participatory activities tended to have a strong sense of wanting to make their neighbourhoods a better place to live in. Undertaking formal community participation was one of the few contexts in which people identified with the neighbourhood as a community.*[81]

Local public agencies can then play a vital role in both providing the infrastructure for such interactions and communications to take place and helping build the capacity of all local individuals and groups to participate.

Targeted approaches: why capacity matters

In any definition or construction of community, one common theme is that both within and between communities, inequalities exist. Whether they take a structural or material form, in terms of income, housing and quality of public services, or whether they relate to differences in skills, knowledge or levels of empowerment, there is no doubt that social inequalities are at the root of much of the divisions and tension that underlie Britain's splintered communities.

The previous chapter outlined how these inequalities affect community cohesion. However, social inequalities also affect people's opportunities for participation in the community and in local decision making. Hence, within the context of public participation activities there is sometimes a need to address the barriers that create imbalances in participation, by targeting specific groups within a locality. At times, this is seen as necessary to counterbalance the disproportionate involvement of certain individuals or groups – the "usual suspects" – in order to get broad-based,

effective and meaningful engagement with the whole community. However, in the context of community cohesion, targeted approaches often have the additional aim of aiding the integration of particular groups, both with the local community and in society as a whole. Targeted approaches thus seek to develop the confidence, skills and awareness of certain sections in society, rather than to create parallel structures of representation. In a guide on building community cohesion into area-based initiatives, the Home Office writes:

> *Some groups may face particular difficulties in giving their views in consultation, for a number of reasons: language and communication difficulties; racism, cultural and religious intolerance and associated discrimination; and lack of physical, educational and organisational access. It is important to be aware of these issues, as they affect the ability of people to take part to their full capacity in local activities. Developing confidence and skills takes time and patience. Some groups may therefore need more help than others initially, but make sure that the capacity of each group is built into a separate institutional framework and that they share resources and advocacy arrangements as soon as possible.[82]*

Targeted approaches are directed at groups who are at risk of being excluded from existing structures of participation. These are sometimes referred to as "hard to reach" groups, but the concept "hard to reach" is best avoided as it shifts the focus of effort away from the organisation seeking to engage, defining the problem "as one within the group itself, not within [the organisation's] approach to them" and can be a stigmatising term.[83]

It is also important to avoid stereotyping when considering which groups may be excluded from participating in community activities, as this category will differ widely between localities and situations. Although some groups will fail to be involved in public participation activities because of language or cultural barriers, others will not take part in them simply because their work and family life leave no time for such activities. The measures needed to include the different groups will therefore be widely different. This need to tread carefully and consider the factors that influence participation between and within groups is emphasised in a study by Guijt and Shah, who state:

> *Each person experiences a unique combination of social, economic and physical constraints and opportunities that influence their willingness to and capacity to participate in development*

processes. Understanding how these circumstances affect people's
motivation to be involved in an externally initiated participatory
process needs far greater attention than it has been given to date.[84]

Using fixed categories to determine what sections of a community require a targeted approach can therefore be counterproductive – as Birmingham Race Action Partnership (b: RAP) argue:

We believe that people's opinions should be sought because of
what they know or what they do – the things they care about, the
things they have a legitimate interest in – rather than because they
are a particular "colour" or faith. In Birmingham, we have been there
and it doesn't work.[85]

Hence it is important for local authorities not to let their own presumptions about why particular groups are participating or not define what opportunities are supported. Chambers writes:

There are many biases to be recognised and offset. Attitudes and
behaviours which are dominating and discriminatory are common,
and the acts of recognising and offsetting these biases requires
sensitivity, patience and commitment on the part of those who are
outsiders to a community.[86]

In the context of promoting community cohesion, it is often necessary to identify not only those groups within a locality that are at risk of being excluded from participation activities, but also those who are especially vulnerable to anti-social behaviour and inter-group tension.[87] The cohesion literature emphasises two groups that are likely to benefit from special attention:

- **young people**, who "represent the future of communities, and include groups especially vulnerable to disengagement and anti-social behaviour"[88]

- **new arrivals**, whose "lack of knowledge of the country [or] local area means they are among the groups most at risk from social exclusion".[89] New immigrants are often also very visible within communities, so their arrival can become a source of tension for established communities[90].

When considering targeting specific groups within a locality, it is important to consider the possibility that other people in the community may see such initiatives

as unfairly allocating attention and resources to the targeted group. Thus, rather than relieving social divisions, targeted approaches can become a source of further tensions within communities. It is important therefore always to balance the needs of particular groups with the needs of the community as a whole. Related to this is the importance of maintaining good communications with all sections of the community when carrying out targeted initiatives, to ensure that the institution in charge is perceived to be acting fairly.[91]

For participants in this study, building community capacity was seen as starting with the needs of the community, encouraging community members to take steps towards engaging with their local authorities and services and equipping them to undertake these activities effectively. The main purpose of targeted approaches was thus seen to be about empowering disempowered sections of a community. One participant commented:

> *It is about community groups getting out of the "taking" mentality of "what can [public services] give us" – it's about groups being able to advocate for and look after their own interests.*
>
> *Interviewee*

Another participant confirmed this by stating:

> *If you are working for change and trying to empower people... then if you notice that you are starting to feel uncomfortable because the people who you are empowering are starting to make demands on you, then that is usually an indicator that you are doing really well.*
>
> *Interviewee*

Several participants pointed out that the empowerment work carried out by local authorities is supported by a rich vein of community development work that is taking place across the UK. At its best, community development work can help communities and community members to develop skills and confidence so that they can have a greater input into the issues that affect their lives. In other words, community development work builds the capacity of groups of people to identify, interpret and resolve issues and dilemmas themselves. However, participants in this research persistently stressed that whichever approach is used, working with communities is never about quick solutions:

> *You just have to build relationships over time with the community – the mechanisms aren't actually that important.*
>
> *Workshop participant*

Participation for a purpose: healthy democracy and its knock on effects

The evidence that it is easier to bring people together around shared activities and interests than around abstract debates about values makes a strong case for supporting the role that participation in local decision making can offer to community cohesion. This has been acknowledged in the Commission on Integration and Cohesion's report *Our shared future*, which calls for local authorities to involve communities directly in setting local agendas and priorities[92] and in Sir Michael Lyons' "place-shaping" recommendations,[93] among others. These recommendations are all built on the idea that citizen participation in local decision making plays a dual role: it generates a sense of belonging and promotes positive relationships between participants and institutions, while at the same time making public services better tuned to the needs of the communities they serve. As described in *Our shared future*, participation can be:

> a key way of building integration and cohesion – from ensuring people feel they have a stake in the community, to facilitating mixing and engendering a common sense of purpose through shared activities.[94]

Providing such forums should be part of a healthy local democratic culture, and although this report focuses on the relationship between civic participation and community cohesion, it is also important to acknowledge the value of these activities to other desirable objectives. There is much evidence that debate and dialogue with the public can reveal new knowledge about how policy created in town halls and Whitehall is working out on the ground. That kind of intelligence is vital to making sure that the policies put in place meet the needs of communities and that those services are delivered well. And in many cases, members of the public and policy makers who engage in such debates find the experience stimulating and informative, as Involve's research has consistently revealed.[95]

Yet a healthy democracy also requires processes for decision making that are not only accessible and transparent but also accountable. As the next chapter will show, often it is not the formal activities put in place by local authorities, but rather the informal everyday interactions between people that make a real difference to people's sense of community. As the discussion in the next chapter will reflect, this adds to the complexity of promoting community cohesion in formal settings. For, although social relations may thrive on contact activities and informal

interactions in public spaces, the difficulties of developing accountable methods for participation within these informal spaces are legion.

The next chapter sets out how public participation can add value to community cohesion by tapping into the informal networks and activities that exist within communities and by forming part of a broad-based partnership approach to community cohesion that involves both strategic and delivery officials working alongside third sector organisations and members of the community. In doing so, the research team emphasises that the ability of any participation activity to contribute to these objectives relies on that activity having a clear purpose and being carried out well.

51 Blears H. (2007) "Foreword", in CLG and LGA, *An action plan for community empowerment.*
52 Interview with Gerry Stoker in Involve (2005) *Exploring public participation*, Involve Working Paper 1. London: Involve.
53 Parker, S. and Parker, S. (2007) *Unlocking innovation: why citizens hold the key to public service reform.* London: Demos; Leadbetter, C. (2005) The user innovation revolution. London: National Consumer Council.
54 Pearse, A. and Stiefel, M. (1979) *Inquiry into participation: a research approach.* Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (Unrisd).
55 Involve (2005) *People & participation.*
56 "Civic participation" – engagement with formal democratic processes by one of the following activities: "contacting a local councillor, Member of Parliament, member of the Greater London Assembly or National Assembly for Wales; contacting a public official working for a local council, central Government, Greater London Assembly or National Assembly for Wales; attending a public meeting or rally; taking part in a public demonstration or protest; and signing a petition", Communities and Local Government (2007) *Statistical Release Citizenship Survey: April–June 2007, England & Wales.* London: CLG.

57 "Informal community participation" – engagement in activities and social events within the community that are not linked to the decisions and services of public authorities.
58 Involve, ippr and MORI (2006) "User empowerment in local authority service delivery". London: ODPM (not published).
59 CLG (2008) *Predictors of community cohesion*
60 CLG (2008) *The government response to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion*; CLG and LGA (2007) *An action plan for community empowerment*; HM Government (2007) *PSA Delivery Agreement 21*
61 See for example CLG (2007) *What works in community cohesion.*
62 Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) *Our shared future*; CLG (2008) *Predictors of community cohesion*; CLG (2007) *What works in community cohesion*; Home Office (2001) Community cohesion: a report of the Independent Review Team. London: Home Office (the Cantle Report).
63 Allport, G.W. (1954) *The nature of prejudice.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
64 Hewstone, M. (2003) "Inter-group contact: panacea for prejudice?", *The Psychologist*, Vol. 16, No. 7.
65 CLG (2008) *Predictors of community cohesion*; Rogers, B. and Muir, R. (2008) The power of belonging. London: Institute for Public Policy Research.
66 Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) Our shared future, pp.110–14.
67 CLG (2008) *Predictors of community cohesion*, pp.12–13, 47.
68 For a discussions about this see CLG (2008) Predictors of community cohesion, pp.12–13, 47.
69 For a more in-depth and nuanced discussion about the impact of residential stability on community cohesion, see Hudson et al. (2007) *Social cohesion in diverse communities.*
70 CLG (2008) *Predictors of community cohesion.*
71 Hudson et al. (2007) *Social cohesion in diverse communities*, pp.52, 95, 111.
72 Rogers and Muir (2008) *The power of belonging*, p.52; Home Office (2001) *Community cohesion*; CLG (2007) *What works in community cohesion*, p.5.
73 Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) *Our shared future.*
74 Home Office (2001) *Community cohesion*, chapter 6.
75 Home Office (2001) *Building cohesive communities, report of the ministerial group on public order and community cohesion.* London: Home Office (the Denman Report).
76 The Goldsmith QC Citizenship Review (2008) *Citizenship: our common bond.* London: Ministry of Justice.
77 CLG (2008) *The government response to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion.*
78 CLG (2007) *What works in community cohesion*; Jayaweera and Choudhury (2008) *Immigration, faith and cohesion*, p.127.
79 Blake, G., Diamond, J., Foot, J., Gidley, B., Mayo, M., Shukra, K. and Yarnit, M. (forthcoming) *Governance and diversity: fluid communities, solid structures.* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation; CLG (2007) *What works in community cohesion*, pp.6, 85–8; Hudson et al. (2007) *Social cohesion in diverse communities.*
80 CLG (2007) *What works in community cohesion.*
81 Hudson et al. (2007) *Social cohesion in diverse communities*, p.89.
82 Home Office and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2004) *Building community cohesion into area based initiatives.* London: Home Office.
83 Involve (2007) "Better outcomes – Ofsted and user engagement". London: Involve (not published). See www.sisr.net/publications/0701brackertz.pdf for further reading around excluded groups.
84 Guijt, I. and Shah, M.K. (1998) *The myth of community: gender issues in participatory development.* London: Intermediate Technology Publications, p.1.
85 b: RAP "Community consultation: a guide", Briefing Paper No. 1, available at http://brap.moonfruit.com/#/brapbriefings/4515242356
86 Chambers, R. (1998) "Foreword", in Guijt and Shah, *The myth of community.*
87 CLG (2007) *What works in community cohesion.*
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 See also: Blake et al. (forthcoming) *Governance and diversity*; CLG (2008) *Predictors of community cohesion*; Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) *Our shared future*; Hudson et al. (2007) *Social cohesion in diverse communities.*
91 CLG (2007) *What works in community cohesion.*
92 Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) *Our shared future*, pp.45–59, 61.
93 Lyons Inquiry into Local Government (2007) *Place-shaping*.
94 Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) *Our shared future.*
95 Creasy et al. (2007) *Engage for change;* Gavelin and Wilson (2007) Democratic technologies.

5. The Untapped Community – Bridging the Practice Gap

The previous two chapters outlined the difficulties facing those seeking to encourage community cohesion through public participation, because of a lack of clarity over the meaning of the concept and what it entails in practice for local authorities. This chapter further explores participants' responses to the official rhetoric around community cohesion and participation, and what they identified as the key lessons for those delivering the government's agenda. First, the chapter sets out the under-explored and under-utilised potential of communities themselves in facing up to the challenges that community cohesion presents. Second, it highlights the disjuncture between local authority strategy and delivery, bringing into focus three fundamental issues: the competing objectives and demands within local authorities, the danger of too much hollow participation activity and the reality of politics taking precedence over people in local communities. In doing so, the chapter builds on the argument made in the introduction that community cohesion should be seen not as an outcome but an ongoing process. It also emphasises one of the key findings from the research, namely, as articulated by one participant:

> *People working with communities really need to know them and understand them.*
>
> *Workshop participant*

A key theme in this study has been the need to understand the range of informal social structures present within a locality, and the role they play in shaping people's relationships and perceptions of their community. Repeatedly, participants called for public participation activities to work with these informal structures, rather than merely adding new frameworks for participation and interaction. As one participant commented:

> *Fitting people into an abstract formal framework does not work.*
>
> *Workshop participant*

One of the principal challenges identified by research participants is for public bodies concerned with promoting community cohesion to understand the nature of the social fabric that connects people within a community. This can then enable them to tap sensitively into those networks in order to link people to public agencies and services, while also providing links and forums for those who do not belong to any such informal social networks. This section of the report explores how these informal social structures are characterised, what drives engagement and change in informal social networks, and the opportunities that exist for public authorities to tap into and build on these existing structures in their public participation work.

In among these discussions and debates, the concept of social capital was implicit rather than explicit. This is in part due to the contentious nature of the work of figures such as Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam, which has been critiqued by authors such as Field[96] and Creasy.[97] To explore the themes and connotations of this particular area of work would take this research onto a path that was not explicitly articulated by any of the steering group members, workshop participants or interviewees, which is why these debates are not included in this report.

Formal vs informal

This study has focused on understanding how and when public participation in the work of a local authority can contribute to building community cohesion. Yet in most localities, formal mechanisms for participation are only part of the story. Throughout the research, participants from different backgrounds stressed that to truly understand the dynamics of community and the drivers of community cohesion requires an understanding of the myriad of informal arenas in which people interact locally. They were clear that for many of the communities they work with, it is these informal points of contact between people that most clearly define residents' feelings about their locality, rather than any formal structure such as local public services.

> It's always been cohesive when you go to the post office, or the supermarket – people getting on really well.
>
> *Interviewee*

Most participants saw the bonds that generate community cohesion as rooted in informal relationships first and foremost, rather than created through formal mechanisms of participation. Overwhelmingly, participants were clear that such informal networks should be valued by public agencies, and that strategies to overcome social tension or build stronger relationships should work with such relationships rather than seek to bypass them. As one workshop participant stated:

> This is fundamentally about the importance of the informal.
>
> *Workshop participant*

Some also argued that tapping into existing informal networks is a more effective way of securing not only community cohesion but also social change:

> *People not going through political structures can have a greater impact – it offers greater value.*
>
> *Workshop participant*

Furthermore, there were participants who argued that discussion of community cohesion by government is actually counterproductive because by its very nature a formal institution cannot achieve an outcome which is essentially about the everyday social connections of individuals and groups. One participant went so far as to comment:

> *Change cannot happen in a formal context.*
>
> *Workshop participant*

This focus on informality in social relationships can at first glance seem to exclude the possibility of any action by public agencies supporting community cohesion. Yet to suggest this would be to misread the evidence available[98] and the points raised by participants in this research. Rather, the message that emerged is that local and indeed national government need to do more to understand how informal relationships shape communities at a local level, and then ask how participatory processes can be developed to work with and learn from these networks. As one participant commented:

> *I think there are two levels of public participation: public participation in local life, such as in the life of the community, in local forums, and so on, and public participation in formal processes. Participation is about linking people to public services and institutions. About people helping to shape services in their local area. I see community participation as being about participation in local events: do people interact with each other? Is there interaction between different family groups? And so on.*
>
> *Workshop participant*

Many participants argued that rather than seeking ways of bringing informal relationships into formal structures, the emphasis should be reversed. Local authorities should take the time to better understand the informal networks that exist in their localities and consider how they could tap into these to build effective

working relationships. Although a detailed and systematic examination of the range of ways in which social relationships are developed within a locality is beyond the scope of this particular research project, two strong themes emerged in the way in which participants discussed this topic. First, the role of casual everyday interactions in creating a sense of community and how these interactions are shaped by certain "life events" that open doors to different social networks. Second, the importance of particular individuals or community catalysts in bringing people together and generating social change.

Everyday interactions – how shared spaces influence communities

Many participants talked at length about the importance of spontaneous and relaxed interaction at a local level as the means by which social networks are shaped and cohesive communities formed. Whether around school gates, at local shops, in the post office or in local public spaces, the emphasis was on non-structured arenas in which residents regularly come together. This could be something as simple as being parents collecting children from schools, or as users of a public space such as a park. Comments included:

> *School is certainly a community – it's just that most of the people don't have a choice about going there.*
>
> *Interviewee*

In particular, participants highlighted socialising as a key ingredient of local communities, giving many examples of how people come together in social activities such as parties or sports:

> *Food is a great uniter of people. Different cuisines, and the act of cooking, eating or sharing allows people to have a good time whilst learning about and directly experiencing other cultures.*
>
> *Workshop participant*

> *Sport is a good example of a community interest that can break down barriers.*
>
> *Workshop participant*

In parallel to these everyday informal occurrences, some participants highlighted how certain "life events" open doors to new networks and opportunities for interaction, which in turn can change people's perception of the community in

which they live. Parenthood and the conversations at the school gates was cited as an example of a time in life when people come into contact with new networks and services which they may not have encountered before in their locality. Attending school or college can be another, as can retirement, when people leave the world of work but often choose to become more involved in their local community instead.

> *Sure Start centres are great for developing family empowerment; they're quite good for social empowerment as well as they link you into your neighbourhood.*
>
> *Interviewee*

In talking about everyday and life event opportunities for interaction, many participants contrasted these examples – using terms such as "hanging out", "having a good time" or being "relaxed" – with the feel and nature of organised participation activities such as community meetings, which often focus on addressing specific issues.

> *Whenever people formally engage and participate, it is around a negative reaction – about how people construct and react to perceived barriers.*
>
> *Workshop participant*

Participants also highlighted the empowering nature of community activities that are organised by those concerned rather than being imposed from outside. One participant commented:

> *[What matters is] informality and self-organisation – not being reliant on other people.*
>
> *Workshop participant*

Although participants recognised the value of informal networks and relationships to building community cohesion, they also agreed that it is difficult for public bodies to support such networks. Indeed, one participant commented:

> *[The gap between] formal and informal means that it is unrealistic to expect local authorities to achieve all of the community cohesion and participation agendas.*
>
> *Interviewee*

Others pointed out that the bureaucratic nature of local authorities' working practices makes it difficult for them to engage with informal relationships or indeed judge whether their work supports their development:

> *Informal methods are extremely powerful and difficult to measure.*
> *Workshop participant*

For those working with communities there was a strong sense that local authorities tend to build forums and then seek to recruit citizens to attend them. Several participants argued that a more effective way of tapping into local community knowledge and supporting cohesion is to engage with the structures that already existing in communities. This way of working was seen to be about how best to interact with people in the right spaces, where everyday informal interactions are commonplace and so not externally enforced.

Community catalysts

In addition to arguing that local authorities need to use the right spaces to engage with communities, there was also interest in using the right "faces", or people who act as organisers – what one participant termed "community catalysts". These are people who hold either formal or informal positions within a locality and whose knowledge, social networks or enthusiasm stimulates other members of their community into action. Many participants recounted tales of particular individuals who had a skill for bringing people together and motivating others around a cause or an event. They commented:

> *In communities, there are definitely people who act as catalysts.*
> *Workshop participant*

> *It's about the people who make the connections.*
> *Workshop participant*

Participants did not necessarily depict this role as one rooted in leadership or formal power. Although in some cases the people who play this role within the community are in positions of authority, such as local councillors, chairs of residents' associations or faith leaders, others are able to fulfil this role without any formal responsibilities for the locality. Indeed, some participants reacted strongly against the notion of "community leadership" and the presumption that those who do hold a formal role within a locality can either speak for all residents or mobilise them to engage with others. This quote illustrates the caution expressed by several participants:

You've got to be careful; often what you get is the "movers and shakers" in the community. A lot of them are older men, and they are not necessarily representative… In fact, sometimes these "community leaders" are part of some quite dubious practices within their communities, and it can be very difficult to challenge them.

Interviewee

Instead the participants' accounts of community catalysts emphasised the amount of time these people gave to community affairs and their persistence. These are people with varying degrees of awareness of local political or social structures, who use their relationships with others either to drum up residents to participate in local authority activities or in some cases to bypass them completely. The need to recognise the power of this organisational role and the informal networks that underpin it was a key theme in the workshop. There were several discussions around the value of utilising such individuals and how they could alter the shape of local authorities' relationships with communities:

There needs to be key people from certain communities telling policy makers what is happening on the ground.

Interviewee

Local authorities need to tap into the informal networks in communities, and if they can't tap into them, then they need to use people who can. [They can] then create that bridge through that organisation or individual to channel this back up to the local authorities.

Interviewee

Identifying these community catalysts was considered to be a complicated and sensitive business. The lack of substantial research into the role of community catalysts also means that it is difficult to understand what creates or motivates such people and how their influence is sustained. Furthermore, although some individuals may self-identify as a catalyst or community leader, and make themselves known as such in a locality, others who fulfil such roles sometimes explicitly reject formal recognition or may not consider their influence on the area to be substantial. Being able to uncover and distinguish those who play this role within a neighbourhood, and those who do not or whose influence could be counterproductive to community cohesion, was seen to be a key issue for local authorities. Most participants suggested that this is a matter of spending time in a

locality to understand the rhythm of everyday life and how and when different individuals catalyse activities. Alongside the notion of the local resident as a community catalyst, some participants described how individuals who may not live within an area but represent a public agency can also become actively involved in the informal networks that exist in a community. A participant saw clear examples of this in his own local area:

> *There are certain individuals in organisations like the police, who in our area are reaching out to certain groups and giving them a tow-rope to come up and encouraging them to engage. They are bearing fruit and we need a lot more people like that.*
>
> *Interviewee*

The anecdotal evidence of this community catalyst role was strong throughout the research. The role of certain individuals in social networks has been examined in many contexts before. For example, the social theorist Malcolm Gladwell differentiates between individuals who are "connectors", "mavens" and "salesmen" within social networks. These different roles exist within any network, where some individuals will have a bigger influence than others, whether in shaping what information members of a network are privy to or what resources they can access.[99] The rich vein of literature around social network analysis, from Granovetter's strong and weak ties[100] to Krebs' network mapping software,[101] supports the way in which participants in the research identified certain people through whom community activity seems to flow. Yet formal and systematic analysis of how and why some individuals play this role in the context of community cohesion is notably absent. This is therefore an area around which the research team feels further investigation would be beneficial, not only for the community cohesion agenda but across a number of central and local government priorities.

The unspoken aspect of community: how social networks are not always good news for accountability and integration

A number of participants pointed out that it is important when working with community cohesion issues that a range of perspectives are sought, to ensure that it is not just established community groups or the most vocal residents who are heard. This echoes findings in the previous chapter, which outlined the potential and pitfalls of targeted approaches to participation, empowerment and community cohesion. Consequently, when local authorities and other bodies working with local communities seek to recognise the informal social networks that exist, and find ways to work with them, they should not exclude, either inadvertently or deliberately, those who are not part of particular social networks. In the words of one participant:

> *Participation must not occur in an inclusive/exclusive bubble.*
>
> *Workshop participant*

Participants also recognised that informal social relationships, while empowering to participants, can have a divisive effect on society. They cited gangs and racist groups as examples of people coming together in ways that undermine wider community relations. Practitioners raised fears both for individuals who are part of such networks and for those who are not:

> *Not all forms of empowerment are good for cohesion. You could argue that the growth of the BNP in certain white working-class areas is a kind of empowerment for those people, but it is bad for cohesion and detrimental to the rest of society.*
>
> *Interviewee*

Participants recognised that there is a careful balance to be drawn between offering opportunities for participation and managing tensions or divisions that may exist within localities. In particular, they warned that failure to deal with these divisions or to be seen to pander to certain groups could end up creating more social tension:

> *The local authority put on an Islam Awareness Week, and the town centre was booked [in order] to promote an understanding of Islam. An evangelical Christian group [turned up, and] started singing gospel songs etc. But the way they were coming across, challenging the Muslim camp right in the middle of town, and pointing fingers – you couldn't miss it.*
>
> *Interviewee*

> *If you look at some of the blogs and local papers, you can clearly see a lot of tension from the Christian Afro-Caribbean community toward the Muslim community. On the ground, I don't think it's from the younger members of society – it's more from the elders of the communities that are feeling somewhat let down as they feel that funds are being directed from their problems to the Muslim problem. That's creating a lot of tension.*
>
> *Interviewee*

These comments and experiences reflect the concern expressed by participants that community should not be idealised, and that not all forms of participation or instances of people coming together are always desirable. Participants argued that it is important when considering the value of public participation to community cohesion not to relegate other concerns, such as democratic accountability. Many of the informal networks in which communities interact with each other and in which capacity is built are resistant to the bureaucracy and formality which form a necessary part of accountable democratic structures. For those seeking a joined-up approach to community cohesion and public participation, there is thus a tension between working with the informal networks and forums that are at the heart of many local communities, while at the same time providing forums that are democratic and representative.

Recognising that there are drawbacks as well as benefits to working with informal structures, participants spoke of the need to provide a range of opportunities for capacity building, participation and interaction in communities, combining activities that target specific groups with open forums that encourage people from different backgrounds to come together. Many also stressed the importance of acknowledging rather than suppressing difference when working with communities. As articulated by one participant:

> *Variety is the key – people somehow being together, even in their individuality.*
>
> *Workshop participant*

This is consistent with findings from other studies, which have argued that acknowledging and respecting difference, between as well as within groups, is key to managing diversity and promoting community cohesion in Britain's communities.[102]

Strategy vs service delivery – bridging the practice gap

For many research participants the disjuncture within local authorities between those at the strategic level who devise community cohesion policies, and the "frontline workers" charged with running services and delivering change on the ground, was seen as a stumbling block to progress. In particular, participants expressed frustration with what they saw as artificial divisions between those charged with securing service outcomes such as improvements in social care or education, and those tasked with delivering authority-wide objectives such as community safety or cohesion. Concern centred on three issues; first, that this division often means competing objectives given to frontline services; second, that it creates additional bureaucratic structures which may lead to an overload of participation activities; and finally that political and short-term considerations become prioritised over the long term wellbeing of the locality.

Competing demands: targets vs development

Participants in the research set out clearly the need to see community cohesion and community development as a way of working within a locality, rather than as an objective in itself. As one interviewee argued:

> *I hope that for all local authorities, community cohesion is seen as something that's not entirely separate; that it is something that runs through whatever your community strategy is, and that actually that whole community strategy should be about building a cohesive community. It's like the golden thread that goes through it.*
>
> *Interviewee*

Yet many pointed out that, in practice, service delivery and service objectives are often seen as separate from concerns around community cohesion. This could come from local authorities themselves, or from centrally imposed targets. Two comments were:

> *Regulatory pressures such as local area agreements are obvious factors that will influence how much policy is formulated and delivered at the local authority level. It is also worth understanding and making clear how sands shift around policy and practice from month to month, as well as yearly.*
>
> *Steering group member*

Inspection of local authorities has a detrimental effect in encouraging or allowing for innovation and participation.

Workshop participant

These quotes reflect the frustration that participants working in local authorities felt with being asked to achieve targets for both particular services and work within local communities without any connection being made between these two objectives. It was pointed out that often those charged with supporting community cohesion are not the same people who deliver services. Some participants working in local authorities explained how this had meant that activities designed to support community cohesion were not given funding, as they were not tied to service delivery budgets. Equally, activities designed to deliver services were not evaluated for their impact on community cohesion. Participants argued that this can cause confusion and lead to funding and services "just hanging about in the middle of the air and not reaching people".

The difficulty in capturing the outcomes of activities that are integral to community cohesion – such as the socialising activities outlined above – makes linking work to support communities with targeted interventions to improve service delivery all the more difficult for frontline workers. Many participants identified the need to support "soft" factors such as informal networking in order to assist community cohesion within localities and to improve service user satisfaction. Yet participants also recognised that the intangible nature of "soft" factors and outcomes makes it very difficult to show if and how these have been achieved, or if they have impacted on service outcomes. This left questions for participants about how to ensure accountability for the work required to support local communities when the outcomes are by their very nature difficult to measure.

In addition to the need to support "soft" factors, other practical considerations emerged from the division between efforts to address community cohesion and those to improve service delivery. Time and sustainability of funding were identified as crucial factors, with participants emphasising that building community capacity and interaction requires time and patience, while achieving service objectives is often seen as something to be delivered within the financial year:

We did some fantastic work after the 2001 riots... money got thrown at them [the towns] but it was all short term. Actually, those cities and towns needed not three-year funding, but five or ten-year funding.

Interviewee

All we get is anything from six months to three years' funding for projects, which means that we can't do follow-through work.

Interviewee

There need to be some demonstrator projects for five years with a review, and then another five years with a review – and then let's roll out what we've learnt.

Interviewee

When thinking about how this affects the capacity of participative processes to support community cohesion, concern about the division between service delivery and strategic objectives became even stronger. As one participant commented:

The rigidity of statutory services undermines participation.

Workshop participant

Again, this reflected the acknowledged tension between the need to secure specific outcomes – and so the prioritisation of service delivery – with the difficulty of capturing the role that community involvement can play in securing such objectives. Other participants highlighted how the separation between service delivery and strategic objectives for cohesion often meant that those in service delivery roles fail to see the benefits of public participation to service delivery. Providing more opportunities for officials from different levels of local government to take part actively in public participation activities was seen as key to making them understand the value of community involvement to their work and to the wellbeing of the wider community. One commented:

There are so many knock-on benefits [from participation], and sometimes it's about making people realise this.

Workshop participant

Given these concerns, many participants argued that greater co-operation between service delivery officials and strategic planners, as well as with local residents, is vital. This was presented as a means not only of improving services but also for addressing community cohesion in itself:

Strong and genuine partnerships can make local government dynamic and responsive.

Workshop participant

*It's not advisable to [work on cohesion] alone; there should be a cross
section of people and organisations from private, public and the
community and voluntary sectors involved.*

Interviewee

For many participants, local strategic partnerships (LSPs) were seen as the vehicle
for developing this way of working. However, some were sceptical about the ability
of LSP members to work effectively together, let alone find ways of involving the
public in their work. One commented that "community partnerships at council level
are shallow".

Others felt that inspection regimes are to blame, because they make bodies such
as LSPs which are in charge of budgets less willing to support projects and ways
of working that are not able to show distinct and measurable outcomes. These
accounts reflect the different experiences of partnership working across local
authorities, and how what works for one set of partner agencies may not work in
another area.

It is beyond the realms of this research project to identify specifically how the
present LSP model might be adapted to meet the different needs of local
authorities seeking to work in partnership on public participation and community
cohesion. However, the study confirmed that continuing the development and
improvement of local partnership working is critical to working effectively with
communities towards cohesion. In some cases, this will require a process of
awareness raising among partners and stakeholders, to ensure that all relevant
agencies understand their role in the cohesion agenda, as well as the value that
public involvement may add to their work. In the words of one participant:

*I think that a cultural shift needs to happen for people to take it all on
board.*

Interviewee

Public participation – too much, too hollow?
In addition to concerns about competing demands on the time of officers in
delivering services and objectives, participants also argued that separating out
service delivery and strategic objectives creates bureaucratic structures, which
then ask too much of the public. In some localities, residents are expected to take
part in neighbourhood forums, council meetings and residents' associations, as
well as various forms of service user groups. All of this is alongside any community

activities they may wish to engage in independently and, of course, alongside work, socialising and family life. Some research participants were concerned that there is a danger of communities being asked to participate too often simply for the sake of participation itself, thus creating an overload of participation activities with potentially competing objectives.

A practical example of this concern is shown when contrasting two types of public participation in local government. The first, user participation in public services, tends to be directly linked to the provision of services, its purpose being to help users to shape services according to their needs. However, this is in contrast to those seeking participation within strategic objectives. Often, this element of local government seeks participation "in its own right" – which can take the form of neighbourhood forums, citizens' advisory panels, or committees within local authorities themselves. Participants argued that the development of these different kinds of public participation opportunities in parallel risks creating tensions about priorities within localities. The danger of this amount of participation is that it will cease to be seen as meaningful and lead to participation fatigue among local residents. As one participant articulated:

> *Just getting loads of people coming to workshops and going workshop-crazy or citizen forum-crazy, I don't think is necessarily going to lead to community cohesion – there are many other ways to do it more effectively.*
>
> *Workshop participant*

Hence, as public participation gains a bigger role in local government decision making and service delivery, it is vital to ensure that those who deliver these activities work collaboratively both across local authority departments and alongside voluntary and community organisations. This is to ensure that they do not duplicate each others' efforts, and that the activities that do take place make best use of the time and resources of the citizens and institutions involved.

Politics over people?

Finally, several participants expressed concern that service delivery and strategic priorities are subject to political interference and political considerations, sometimes to the detriment of social outcomes. Participants identified the role of political leaders within localities and the political constraints placed on their work as influential factors. Turning first to the role of political leaders, many participants highlighted the important role that councillors play in determining the success or failure of any schemes to support communities. One commented:

Often, policies live or die by convincing local councillors to back something.

Workshop participant

Some expressed frustration with politicians' attitudes to these agendas. One cited the "rhetoric and bluster about participation" given by political representatives, highlighting concerns about the difference between a stated commitment to engaging with communities and the reality of following through the outcomes of an engagement process:

If there is a young lad and we encourage him to participate, then he will. But when he comes across a local politician, he can see the superficial side [of the politician], the insincerity as he hasn't been around before and that he's only doing it as a PR stunt.

Interviewee

More generally there was concern about how the outcomes of any activity designed to work with a community often become "politicised" through people's political involvement in participation activities and the politicisation of the role of participation in itself within a locality. One participant commented:

Local politicians do not have much contact with people but the local council officers that we work with do it with a lot of sincerity. It's sad that it can't bear fruit as political agendas take over the show and then that project and that initiative drops by the wayside. And then, again, it leaves the young person feeling frustrated that they were encouraged to do this and then they've gone and dropped it.

Interviewee

For others, the nature of the democratic process in itself was seen to set constraints on working with communities because of the need to adapt to changes in leadership:

Appointing councillors every four years inevitably places a time constraint and a definite cycle of events.

Workshop participant

However, participants also recognised the role that elected representatives play in maintaining accountability and transparency, thus acting as a counterbalance to

the less regulated ways of working with communities, such as public participation activities and community development work. In squaring these considerations, there was general support for the role of local councillors as representatives of the public, and as individuals who can balance the demands of those who participate in community activities, whether formal or informal, with a broader concern for the needs of all residents.

The range of issues addressed in this report reflects the experience of working with real people in real contexts to secure community cohesion. Britain is a nation characterised by a diversity of cultures and lifestyles. This chapter has illustrated how finding ways to support cohesion within this varied social fabric requires a better understanding of the complexity of how everyday lives are led and the often informal and unstructured relationships at the heart of neighbourhoods. This chapter has also shown how effective working on community cohesion and public participation requires broad-reaching partnership approaches that draw on the knowledge, contacts and skills of a range of stakeholders, including local authorities, service providers, third sector organisations and community members. Crucially, the research shows that those working with communities need to tread carefully and show considerable patience in order to achieve their intended outcomes.

96 Field, J. (2003) *Social capital.* London: Routledge, pp.11–44.
97 Creasy, S. (2006) "Understanding the lifeworld of social exclusion", doctoral thesis, Department of Social Policy, London School of Economics.
98 See for example: Blake et al. (forthcoming) *Governance and diversity*; CLG (2008) *Predictors of community cohesion*; CLG (2007) *What works in community cohesion*; Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) *Our shared future*; Hudson et al. (2007) *Social cohesion in diverse communities.*
98   See for example: Blake et al. (forthcoming) *Governance and diversity*; CLG (2008) *Predictors of community cohesion*; CLG (2007) What works in community cohesion; Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) *Our shared future*; Hudson et al. (2007) *Social cohesion in diverse communities*.
99   Gladwell, M. (2000) *The tipping point.* London: Little, Brown and Company, pp.30–88.
100 Granovetter M. (1974) *Getting a job: a study of contacts and careers.* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
101 See Krebs' website www.orgnet.com/
102 CLG (2007) *What works in community cohesion*; Home Office and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005) *Community cohesion: seven steps – a practitioner's toolkit.* London: Home Office; Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) *Our shared future.*

6. Conclusion

The focus of this study has been on the relationship between local level public participation and community cohesion. As the report acknowledges, this is a contested debate. Community cohesion is driven by a range of factors, and the capacity of public participation activities to support it will always depend on the character of the community in question as much as the quality and purpose of the participation activity.

Thus the overwhelming message from this report is that this is an intricate and challenging area for local authorities to operate within. However, the research has also made clear that when they do, the rewards can be immense to both public agencies and the communities concerned. There are a number of reasons for supporting public participation at the local level, from securing meaningful interactions between different groups, to empowering and building the capacity of particular individuals to become involved in local decision making, or making local public services more transparent. Many of these are directly relevant to the drivers and indicators of community cohesion, as identified by the CLG.[103] In considering the role of local authorities in supporting communities, the research team therefore argues that there is good reason to address the two agendas together.

However, the complexity of social relationships and the diversity of Britain's neighbourhoods make it difficult to offer blueprints for how to work with communities towards greater cohesion. Therefore, this report has not sought to find a single approach or "magic bullet" that can be replicated across every council. Rather, public agencies need to focus on how they can take the learning from others in this field and apply both the principles and the processes used to find a way of working that suits their locality. The examples of principles and practice included in this report are therefore not to be seen as "best practice" or as processes to be copied to the letter. Rather they offer a starting point to inspire local authorities and other bodies to develop their own ways of working with local people. Getting public participation right in a manner that can also support community cohesion requires a detailed understanding of the community in which the activities take place. However, it also requires a strong culture of collaboration within the local authority, in which the value of involving the local community is appreciated at all levels.

This report has been split into two sections to reflect this twin challenge of methods and mindsets: of practical action and institutional culture. Thus, the practical framework in the first part of the report offers practical guidance for those seeking to develop a joint approach to public participation and community cohesion. In contrast the contextual framework in the main body of the report analyses the

existing evidence and seeks to stimulate further debate among those working in local government about what community cohesion means to their locality and the ways in which participative activities can support local people. Taken together, these two sections offer the distilled practical wisdom of practitioners and policy makers from a diverse range of backgrounds on how to turn strategy into effective action. Running through their advice is the recognition that working effectively on public participation and community cohesion requires a holistic approach, with community cohesion objectives running as a cross-cutting theme through all the work that local authorities carry out in communities. This is essential, as Ted Cantle articulates:

> *Community cohesion programmes should be quickly turned into part of the everyday way of doing things and put into the mainstream activity of public service, private enterprise and voluntary effort.*[104]

This report has also identified the existing gaps in our understanding of how communities develop and interact. In particular it has identified three areas of knowledge which would benefit from further investigation: how to identify, foster and work with community catalysts; how to tap into informal networks within localities in a manner which could also support democratic best practice; and how to ensure better partnerships between public agencies and communities at a local level through LSPs and other ways of working. As this report has set out, these were issues that were raised throughout the research as being critical to effective working at a local level, but there was only anecdotal evidence about them. Conducting investigations into these topics was beyond the remit of this short project. The research team therefore recommends that further research is carried out into these areas.

In the spirit of this research process, the research team welcomes comments and contributions from all concerned regarding both the outcomes of the project and the next steps. You can do this by logging onto www.involve.org.uk/cohesion

103 CLG (2008) *Predictors of community cohesion.*
104 Cantle, T. (2005) Community cohesion: a new framework for race and diversity. Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, p.160.

Bibliography

Allport, G.W. (1954) *The nature of prejudice.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Bauder, H. (2002) "Neighbourhood effects and cultural exclusion", *Urban Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 1, pp.85–93.

Begum, H. (2003) *Social capital in action: adding up local connections and networks.* London: National Council for Voluntary Associations.

Blake, G., Diamond, J., Foot, J., Gidley, B., Mayo, M., Shukra, K. and Yarnit, M. (forthcoming) *Governance and diversity: fluid communities, solid structures.* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

b: RAP (n.d.) "Community consultation: a guide", Briefing Paper No. 1, available at http://brap.moonfruit.com/#/brapbriefings/4515242356 (accessed 1 April 2008).

Cabinet Office (2007) *Fairness and freedom: final report of the Equalities Review.* London: Cabinet Office.

Campbell, C. and McLean, C. (2002) "Ethnic identities, social capital and health inequalities: factors shaping African-Caribbean participation in local community networks in the UK", *Social Science & Medicine, Vol. 55.*

Cantle, T. (2005) *Community cohesion: a new framework for race and diversity.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Chambers, R. (1998) "Foreword", in Guijt, I. and Shah, M.K., *The myth of community: gender issues in participatory development.* London: Intermediate Technology Publications.

Clarke, T. (2001) *Burnley speaks, who listens? Report of the Burnley Task Force.* Burnley: Burnley Taskforce.

Commission for Racial Equality (2007) *A lot done, a lot to do, our vision for an integrated Britain.* London: CRE.

Commission for Racial Equality (2007) *Regeneration and the race equality duty.* London: CRE.

Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) *Our interim statement.* Wetherby, Commission on Integration and Cohesion.

Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) *Our shared future.* Wetherby, Commission on Integration and Cohesion

Communities and Local Government (2006) *Managing for diversity: a case study of four local authorities.* London: CLG.

Communities and Local Government (2006) *Strong and prosperous communities: the local government white paper.* London: The Stationery Office.

Communities and Local Government (2007) *Improving opportunity, strengthening society – two years on, a progress report.* London: CLG.

Communities and Local Government (2007) *Preventing violent extremism – winning hearts and minds.* London: CLG.

Communities and Local Government (2007) *Statistical release citizenship survey: April–June 2007, England & Wales.* London: CLG.

Communities and Local Government (2007) W*hat works in community cohesion: research study conducted for Communities and Local Government and the Commission on Integration and Cohesion.* London: CLG.

Communities and Local Government (2008) *Community cohesion impact assessment and conflict prevention tool.* London: CLG.

Communities and Local Government (2008) *Government response to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion.* Wetherby: CLG.

Communities and Local Government (2008) *Predictors of community cohesion: multi-level modelling of the 2005 Citizenship Survey.* Wetherby: CLG.

Communities and Local Government and Local Government Association (2007) *An action plan for community empowerment.* Wetherby: CLG.

Community Development Exchange (n.d.) "What is community development?", available at www.cdx.org.uk/files/u1/what_is_cd.pdf (accessed 25 March 2008).

Community Services Volunteers (2006) *Transforming communities – 5 years of achievement: the CSV action desk 2001–2006.* London: CSV.

Creasy, S. (2006) "Understanding the lifeworld of social exclusion", doctoral thesis, Department of Social Policy, London School of Economics.

Creasy, S., Fisher, H., Gavelin, K., Holmes, L. and Desai, M. (2007) *Engage for change: the role of public engagement in climate change policy, research for the Sustainable Development Commission.* London: Involve.

DeFillipis, J. (2001) "The myth of social capital in community development", *Housing Policy Debate*, Vol. 12, Issue 4.

Department for Work and Pensions and Oxfam (2006) *Get heard: national action plan on social inclusion 2006.* Manchester: Oxfam.

East London Voluntary Sector Alliance (2004) *Empowering East London.* London: East London Voluntary Sector Alliance.

Electoral Commission and Hansard Society (2007) *An audit of political engagement 4.* London: Electoral Commission and Hansard Society.

Etzioni, A (1995) "The community of communities: a communitarian position paper", available at www.gwu.edu/~ccps/Comofcom.html (accessed 23 March 2008).

Evans, K. (1997) "'It's all right 'round here if you're a local': community in the inner city", in Hoggett, P., *Contested communities: experiences, struggles, policies.* Bristol: Policy Press.

Fahmy, E. (2004) *Youth, social capital and civic engagement in Britain: General Household Survey.* London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Foley, M.W. and Edwards, B. (1999) "Is it time to disinvest in social capital?" *Journal of Public Policy*, Vol. 19.

Gardner, W., Pickett, C. and Brewer, M. (2000) "Social exclusion and selective memory: how the need to belong influences memory for social events", *Personality and Social Psychology* Bulletin, Vol. 26, No. 4, pp.486–96.

Gavelin, K. and Wilson, R. with Doubleday, R. (2007) *Democratic technologies?* London: Involve.

Gilchrist, A. (2004) *Community cohesion and community development: bridges or barricades?* London: Community Development Foundation and Runnymede Trust.

Gladwell, M. (2000) *The tipping point.* London: Little, Brown and Company.

The Goldsmith QC Citizenship Review (2008) *Citizenship: our common bond.* London: Ministry of Justice.

Granovetter M. (1974) *Getting a job: a study of contacts and careers.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Guijt, I. and Shah, M.K. (1998) *The myth of community: gender issues in participatory development.* London: Intermediate Technology Publications.

Halpern, D. (2005) *Social capital.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hanley, B. (2005) *Research as empowerment?* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Hetherington, M., Benefield, P., Lines, A., Paterson, C., Ries, J. and Shuayb, M. (2007) *Community cohesion for children, young people and their families: a rapid review of policy, practice and research in local authorities.* Slough: National Foundation for Education Research.

Hewstone, M. (2003) "Inter-group contact: panacea for prejudice?", *The Psychologist*, Vol. 16, No. 7.

Hibbitt, K., Jones, P. and Meegan, R. (2001) "Tackling social exclusion: the role of social capital in urban regeneration on Merseyside – from mistrust to trust", *European Planning Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2.

HM Government (2005). *Disability Discrimination Act 2005.* London: The Stationary Office Ltd.

HM Government (2007) *PSA Delivery Agreement 21: build more cohesive, empowered and active communities.* London: HM Government.

HM Government (2000). *Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.* London: The Stationary Office Ltd.

HM Government. *The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (Amendment) Regulations 2003.* London: The Stationary Office Ltd.

Hoggett, P. (1997) *Contested communities: experiences, struggles, policies.* Bristol: Policy Press.

Home Office (2001) *Building cohesive communities, report of the ministerial group on public order and community cohesion.* London: Home Office (the Denman Report).

Home Office (2001) *Community cohesion: a report of the Independent Review Team.* London: Home Office.

Home Office (2004) *The end of parallel lives: the report of the Community Cohesion Panel.* London: Home Office.

Home Office (2004) *Firm foundations: the government's framework for community capacity building.* London: Home Office.

Home Office (2005) *Together we can, action plan.* London: Civil Renewal Unit, Communities Group, Home Office.

Home Office (2006) *Community engagement impact review for Civil Renewal Unit.* London: Home Office.

Home Office and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2003) *Community cohesion advice for those designing, developing and delivering area based initiatives (ABIs).* London: Home Office.

Home Office and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2004) *Building community cohesion into area based initiatives.* London: Home Office.

Home Office and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005) *Community cohesion, seven steps, a practitioner's toolkit.* London: Home Office.

Home Office and Vantagepoint (2003) *Community cohesion pathfinder dissemination programme – finding new routes into local communities.* London: Home Office.

Home Office et al. (2003) *Building a picture of community cohesion; a guide for local authorities and their partners.* London: Home Office.

Home Office Community Cohesion Unit (2004) *Community cohesion standards in schools.* London: Home Office.

Howarth, C.S. (2001) "Towards a social psychology of community: a social representations perspective", *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour,* Vol. 21, No. 2.

Hudson, M., Phillips, J., Ray, K. and Barnes, H. (2007) *Social cohesion in diverse communities.* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Institute for Volunteering Research (n.d.) *Volunteering for all? Exploring the link between volunteering and social exclusion.* London: Institute for Volunteering Research.

Involve (2005) *People & participation: how to put citizens at the heart of decision-making.* London: Involve.

Involve (2007) *Better outcomes – Ofsted and user engagement.* London: Involve (not published).

Involve, ippr and Ipsos MORI (2006) *User empowerment in local authority service delivery.* London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Jayaweera, H. and Choudhury, T. (2008) *Immigration, faith and cohesion: evidence from local areas with significant Muslim populations.* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust (2005) *The far right in London: a challenge for local democracy?* York: JRRT.

Keaney, E. (2006) *From access to participation: cultural policy and civil renewal.* London: Institute for Public Policy Research.

Leadbeater, C. (2005) *The user innovation revolution.* London: National Consumer Council.

Local Government Association (2004) *Community cohesion – an action guide.* London: LGA.

Local Government Association (2005) *Leading cohesive communities.* London: LGA.

Local Government Association et al. (2002) *Guidance on community cohesion.* London: LGA.

Lowndes, V. (2004) "Getting on or getting by? Women, social capital and political participation", *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 6, No. 1.

Lowndes, V. (2005) "The case for local devolution: community cohesion and self-determination", paper prepared for Lyons Inquiry Seminar, 22 June 2005.

Lyons Inquiry into Local Government (2007) *Place-shaping: a shared ambition for the future of local government.* London: The Stationery Office.

Maguire, K. and Truscott, F. (2006) *Active governance: the value added by community involvement in governance through local strategic partnerships.* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Maloney, W., Smith, G. and Stoker, G. (2000) "Social capital and urban governance: adding a more contextualised, top-down perspective", *Political Studies*, Vol. 48, No.4.

Maxwell, R. (2006) "Muslims, South Asians and the British mainstream: a national identity crisis?", *West European Politics*, Vol. 29, No. 4.

McCarthy, L. (2007) "Interaction at neighbourhood level: strategic approaches can bring success", in Flynn, D. and Williams, Z., *Towards a progressive immigration policy.* London: Compass.

Milgram, S. (1977) *The individual in a social world.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Ministry of Justice (2007) *The governance of Britain*, green paper. London: HM Government.

Muir, R. (2008) *One London? Change and cohesion in three London boroughs.* London: Institute for Public Policy Research.

Mumford K. and Power A. (2003) *East Enders: family and community in East London.* Bristol: Policy

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005) *Civic education and local government: a literature review.* London: ODPM.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005) *New localism: citizen engagement, neighbourhoods and public services.* London: ODPM.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2006) *Promoting effective citizenship and community empowerment.* London: ODPM.

Ouseley, H. (2001) *Community pride not prejudice – making diversity work in Bradford.* Bradford: Bradford Vision.

Pahl, R. and Spencer, L. (2006) "The politics of friendship", in Spencer, L. and Pahl, R., *Rethinking friendship: hidden solidarities today.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Parker, S. and Parker, S. (2007) *Unlocking innovation: why citizens hold the key to public service reform.* London: Demos.

Paxton, W. and Dixon, M. (2004) *The state of the nation: an audit of injustice in the UK.* London: Institute for Public Policy Research.

Pearse, A. and Stiefel, M. (1979) *Inquiry into participation: a research approach.* Geneva: United Nations.

Pettigrew, T and Tropp, L. (2006) "A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 90, No. 5, pp.751–83.

Portsmouth City Council (2006) *Portsmouth: involving local people and communities in the decisions which affect them.* Portsmouth: Community Involvement Empowerment and Development.

Reicher, S. (1996) "Social identity and social change: rethinking the context of social psychology", in W.P. Robinson (ed.), *Social groups and identities: developing the legacy of Henri Tajfel.* London: Butterworth, pp.317–36.

Richardson, L. (2008) *DIY community action: neighbourhood problems and community self-help.* Bristol: Policy Press.

Richardson, L. and Mumford, K. (2002) "Community, neighbourhood and social infrastructure", in Hills, J., LeGrand, J. and Piachaud, D. (eds), *Understanding social exclusion.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ritchie, D. (2001) *Oldham independent review: one Oldham, one future*, available at www.oldhamir.org.uk/OIR%20Report.pdf (accessed 8 April 2008).

Rogers, B. and Muir, R. (2008) *The power of belonging: identity, citizenship and community cohesion.* London: Institute for Public Policy Research.

Skidmore, P., Bound, K. and Lownsbrough, H. (2007) *Community participation: who benefits?* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Taylor, M. (2000) "Communities in the lead: power, organisational capacity and social capital", *Urban Studies,* Vol. 37, No. 5–6.

Taylor, M. (2003) *Public policy in the community.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Walker, D. (2005) "View from the top", *Guardian,* 27 July 2005.

Warburton, D. with Wilson, R. and Rainbow, E. (2007) *Making a difference: a guide to evaluating public participation in central government.* London: Involve and Department for Constitutional Affairs.

Wood, P., Landry, C. and Bloomfield, J. (2006) *Cultural diversity in Britain: a toolkit for cross-cultural co-operation.* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Research Methodology

The focus of this study has been to identify the practical issues and challenges facing those seeking to develop a joint approach to public participation and community cohesion. The research has brought together a wide range of academics, policy makers and practitioners who are involved in shaping policy in this area.

The aims of the study were:

- to understand how and to what extent public participation at the local level is linked to community cohesion
- to identify practices that have been conducive to this outcome in relevant contexts, with the help and input from experienced practitioners in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors
- to offer practical guidance as to how best to learn from these examples.

In its approach and recommendations the research has set out to be as useful as possible to public institutions and other bodies charged with delivering the government's cohesion agenda and generating positive change within Britain's communities.

The research drew on the following resources:

1. In the first instance the project team set up a **steering group of experts** in the field of study to advise on the research methods and relevant literature.

2. Second, an extensive **literature review** was conducted, which included a critical evaluation of the existing literature and research available.

3. Having identified a number of key areas for further exploration, the team then undertook an interactive **research workshop** with 25 community development workers, local authority officials, academics and others with experience of working in the field of study. The workshop challenged the participants to draw on their extensive experience of a diverse variety of communities in the UK.

4. This was supplemented with 10 **interviews** with key figures working on participation, community cohesion and empowerment issues across England. These individuals were identified in partnership with the steering group and through the literature review. The interviews were used to explore

the objectives of the research and to gather additional feedback on both the outcomes of the workshop and the priority themes identified in the secondary data analysis.

5.   Finally, the research team conducted a **data analysis and produced the final report**.

Following on from the research and publication of this printed report, the next phase of the project will focus on disseminating the findings and giving practical guidance. This will be undertaken by Involve staff and steering group members and will seek to target practitioners working on community cohesion and public participation in local authorities and in the community and voluntary sector across the UK.

Everybody needs good neighbours?

A study of the link between public participation and community cohesion

The last decade has seen a growing public debate about the changing nature of Britain's social fabric. The media, academic researchers and government reports all paint a picture of a society that is struggling to cope with a transient population and changing economic climate. Tension, it appears, is everywhere: between different generations, immigrants and settled residents, Muslim and Christian populations. The effects of this perceived strain on our social fabric are not only manifested in corroding social relationships but are seen to be linked to any number of problems. Be it crime, racism, voter apathy or overcrowding, Britain is deemed to be fracturing into a nation of divided communities, loyalties and identities; a country ill at ease with itself.

Although there is disagreement about what causes these social divides, there is a growing consensus that promoting cohesion and integration is vital if Britain is to successfully face the challenges of the 21st century. In these discussions, there is an emergent recognition that community relationships benefit from people coming together to deal with shared issues and concerns.

As a consequence, there is a broad understanding running through current policy debates that public participation can provide part of the answer to building strong and cohesive communities.

It is this assumption that is the focus of this report. It presents the findings from a study into the relationship between public participation, community cohesion and empowerment. Drawing on a literature review and the experiences and insights of a broad range of people from local and central government, academia and third sector organisations, the report explores how local authorities and Britain's communities can best work together towards greater cohesion.

The report is divided into two parts: a **practical framework**, which gives practical tips to those working with Britain's communities towards greater cohesion; and a **contextual framework**, which analyses the theories and evidence that underpin the current policy agenda on community cohesion.

involve

ne͜p National Empowerment Partnership