

For General Release

REPORT TO:	CABINET 15nd July 2013
AGENDA ITEM:	8
SUBJECT:	Community Cohesion
LEAD OFFICER:	Nathan Elvery, Interim Chief Executive
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Vidhi Mohan, Cabinet Member for Communities and Economic Development
WARDS:	All
CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT: The content of the report support the council's policy to encourage stronger communities ensuring that Croydon is a place noted for its safety, openness and community spirit.	

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Costs associated with implementing the approach set out below will be found from existing budgets and absorbed by departments as appropriate.

KEY DECISION REFERENCE NO.: this is not a key decision

The Leader of the Council has delegated to the Cabinet the power to make the decisions set out in the recommendations below

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet members are asked

- 1.1 To approve the approach to community cohesion over the short term summer period;
- 1.2 Agree the development of a community cohesion strategy and integration plan for consideration at a future meeting of Cabinet.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 Promoting good community relations is part of the Council's statutory equality obligations as well as cited in the government's strategy 'Creating the conditions for integration' published last February, which sets out the recommended approach to creating and sustaining strong communities. The overriding aim is to promote a 'clear sense of shared aspirations and values, which focuses on what we have in common rather than our differences'.

3. DETAIL

3.1 Since the murder of Lee Rigby in Woolwich senior members including the Leader, Cabinet Members as well as senior officers from the council and police have attended three community meetings in Croydon. The purpose of these meetings was to ensure the direct dialogue with Croydon's different faith communities in particular the Muslim community, and provide reassurance to that community in light of rising far right activity. A meeting was held at South Norwood Mosque attended by approximately 75 – 100 members of the Muslim community including leaders from each of the Mosques in Croydon as well as representatives from Croydon's inter-faith network. The second meeting was an inter-faith meeting at the offices of CVA. The final meeting, organised with the help of Cllr Bernadette Khan at the Zakia Centre was attended by up to 25 women from the Muslim community. Feedback from these meetings indicates they were well received and appreciated by the community.

3.2 Issues arising from these meetings include:

- Fear of far-right reprisal activity following Lee Rigby's murder
- Experience of anti-Muslim expression including verbal abuse, anti-social behaviour and hate crime with the police and council receiving little or no recorded reports - incidents include dog fouling outside front door, excrement smeared on front door, sworn at by people in the street, intimidation on public transport even in cars when stationary at traffic lights;
- Women and their children saying they are frightened to go out and men in the family suggesting they shouldn't be fearing for their safety;
- Members of the Muslim community are worried about the wider implications of growing Islamophobia and how this could impact on their livelihoods e.g. a member of the community reported losing a contract with a taxi firm because customers wouldn't feel comfortable;
- Anti-Muslim feelings on the increase even before the murder of Lee Rigby, and exacerbated by the media e.g. little or no coverage of the good work of the Muslim community but lots of coverage for far right groups.

3.3 Hate crime

Information about how to report hate crime and anti-social behaviour to those attending these meetings has been circulated and the borough commander reiterated the need for the community to report incidents. However, to date there has been very few incidents reported to either the police or the council. Under-reporting is reflected in the discussions with the community and the reasons include fear of reprisal, lack of knowledge about what to report and to whom, as well as suggestions that nothing will be done.

3.4 Graffiti

Over the past few weeks there has been approximately 10 EDL tags removed around the borough. The graffiti removal team has removed EDL related graffiti even though most of this was not reported by the community. It is the view of this team that this is the work of the same person(s) that did the original tag by the Croydon Minster and possibly dates from the weekend after the incident in Woolwich. Other than the initial report by the Croydon Minster the team did not

have these reported to them; they have just come across them in their work across the borough.

3.5 Proposed March

As with other places in London, Croydon will have at least two demonstrations by far-right groups – the English Volunteer Force (EVF) on 27th July, and the British National Party (BNP) on 14th September. The proposed march taking place in July coincides with Ramadan and potentially through London Road area past the Mosque and on to Lunar House.

3.6 The community was very concerned about this event and thought it could be a flash point especially as

- it will take place in the lead-in to the second anniversary to the riots;
- many from the Muslim community (not just from Croydon but elsewhere in London) will be attending prayers late into the evening as this will be during the holy month of Ramadan;
- a number of community events will be taking place on that day in the London Road area in particular the power league football tournament potentially involving up to 1000 young people and community event at Brigstock Road involving 100 or more.

3.7 Community cohesion and integration

Some of the discussion at these meetings moved towards looking at what can be done to address growing concerns about the lack of community cohesion and integration in the borough.

4. SHORT TERM (OVER THE SUMMER)

4.1 The Leader and interim Chief Executive have written to the Borough Commander requesting the proposed EVF march is banned. However, it is considered unlikely a ban will be imposed. At best it is likely the march may be re-routed through another part of the borough.

4.2 ACTIVITY

Assuming it proceeds, and the date and route are known, before and after the event, the police and council work together to address the risks and outcomes that arise from it. In addition

- For a limited period of up to two months hold regular joint meetings with the community especially the Muslim groups. Ideally, these meetings should take place a couple of weeks before each event and in settings that are used by the community – the first is scheduled to take place a week before the march. These meetings will be attended by the Leader, Cabinet Members as well as senior leadership of the council and police.
- Keep open lines of communication with key leaders to assess the mood of the community and tensions;

- Encourage the community to report crime, anti-social behaviour and hate crime and ensure reporting telephone numbers are known within the community;
- Encourage and help the Muslim and other faith communities plan and organise activities that will promote community cohesion. Events already planned include an open day and exhibition organised on 7th July by the Thornton Heath Mosque; and Croydon's interfaith network is proposing to host a seminar in September focussing on Islamophobia.

4.4 MEDIUM TERM

4.5 At these recent community meetings discussion has involved beginning to look at what more can be done in the medium to long-term to improve community relations and encourage cohesion and integration.

4.6 Initial proposed community activity includes

- Hosting exhibitions to raise awareness of different faiths – using different spaces. The Mayor is proposing to launch a photographic competition to be focussed on promoting the borough's diversity with an exhibition in the Clock Tower;
- Where possible open up the use of Council space for the hosting of such exhibitions and events including the Braithwaite Hall and the Clocktower;
- Opening up religious buildings to the wider community e.g. Mosques and other places that are of interest to the wider community;
- Encouraging a greater role for inter-faith activity e.g. the council will be hosting small public events mark events important to the main religions in the borough and host community meetings as well as promote the work of the inter-faith network.

4.7 At these recent meetings the council has made a commitment to improving community cohesion and integration in particular giving it greater emphasis in the forthcoming Community Strategy 2013 – 18 as well as considering how it can be taken forward by the strategic partnership. It is envisaged that greater dialogue with the community will lead to some initial coordinated action. In the medium to long term the community relations team will explore options to take forward this agenda and bring back to Cabinet a community cohesion and integration strategy and action plan.

5 FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

5.1 Any expenditure will be drawn from existing budgets or the council will seek external funding where appropriate.

2 (Approved by: Helen Sach on behalf of the Director of Finance)

6. COMMENTS OF THE COUNCIL SOLICITOR AND MONITORING OFFICER

6.1 The Council's Solicitor comments that the proposals in this report will support

the delivery of the Council's public sector equalities duty as detailed in the body of the report.

(Approved by: Gabriel MacGregor, Head of Corporate Law on behalf of the Council Solicitor & Director of Democratic & Legal Services)

7. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

7.1 There is not impact on Human Resources arising from the information found in this report.

(Approved by: Heather Daley Acting Director of Workforce)

8. EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.1 The council has a statutory duty to promote good relations between different groups of people, advance equality of opportunity between different groups of people and eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation. The action contained with this report will help the council to deliver these regulations.

9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

9.1 There are no environmental impacts arising from the information found in this report.

10. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

10.1 Community safety is a statutory responsibility and the actions in this report will help the council address the concerns raised by members of the community.

11. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS/PROPOSED DECISION

11.1 Set out in the body of the report.

12. OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

12.1 The Council could do nothing but this option is not considered appropriate.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS - LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: none