



GOVERNMENT OFFICE
FOR THE SOUTH EAST

Community Cohesion Contingency Planning Toolkit



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1 An introduction to the toolkit

1.1 Introduction

This toolkit was commissioned by the Government Office for the South East (GOSE) to assist local authorities in its region in establishing, reviewing and improving their arrangements for community cohesion contingency planning.

It is designed to be a useful resource for all those involved in cohesion contingency planning, i.e. elected members, managers, community cohesion practitioners and those involved in emergency response structures (e.g. emergency planning officers). It is hoped that the document will be reviewed on a regular basis and added to as knowledge and learning on cohesion contingency planning increases across the region and elsewhere.

1.2 Setting the toolkit in context

Community cohesion is at the heart of safe and strong communities and events in recent years have shown that where there is a lack of cohesion, community tensions can result in serious disturbance with far-reaching social and economic consequences.

Arrangements for monitoring and responding to rises in community tension already occupy an important place in ongoing local community cohesion activity and councils and their partners should be working to develop contingency plans which set out the roles, responsibilities and processes which should be activated should local community tensions be assessed as likely to erupt into serious violence or disturbance and in the event of actual disorder occurring.

Communities and Local Government (CLG) will shortly publish guidance for all local authorities on cohesion contingency planning and tension monitoring. For its part, GOSE is offering practical support and advice to authorities in the South East. This has included the organisation of a 'Community Cohesion Contingency Planning Workshop' on 6 March 2007, which was attended by seven councils in the region. This toolkit was produced as a result of the discussions at the workshop. It is not designed to replicate or cut across the official guidance produced by the DCLG.

In producing the toolkit, GOSE was assisted by Mark Mower, an independent management consultant who has worked for the IDeA and others on community cohesion projects across the UK.

2 Agreeing what is covered

2.1 General

Not all local authorities have tangible, written documents outlining their cohesion contingency plans. Some are building cohesion messages and diversity requirements into their existing emergency plans. Others are mainstreaming elements of contingency planning into their general strategies or plans for community cohesion. Either way, it is important that agreed contingency arrangements are documented somewhere within existing or developing strategies, plans or protocols.

2.2 Some areas of focus

The following ideas could be considered in introducing or further enhancing local arrangements for cohesion contingency planning and tension monitoring in this area:

- Integrating the reactive work on cohesion contingency planning and tension monitoring into the ongoing, proactive, programme of community cohesion work.
- Avoiding complacency about the level of strategic input required to lead, build and champion community cohesion.
- Ensuring that there is greater 'joining up' of activities and services that contribute to effective cohesion contingency planning.
- Reviewing other council strategies and plans to ensure that they are 'cohesion proofed'.

3 Encouraging ownership of the process

3.1 General

The ownership of cohesion contingency planning can lie with a variety of departments in local government. Often the lead is taken by community cohesion, equalities or diversity teams. In others it may be the preserve of emergency planning or cultural services. A few councils appear to take a back seat, leaving other agencies or partnership forums (such as local strategic partnerships) to take the lead in tackling cohesion contingency planning.

Whatever approach is adopted, it is vital that there is clarity about where both the strategic and operational ownership of contingency planning lies and, in particular, how elected members are engaged in the process – they have key roles to play as suggested below.

3.2 Some areas of focus

The following ideas could be considered in introducing or further enhancing local arrangements for cohesion contingency planning and tension monitoring in this area:

- Working to ensure that community cohesion is understood and articulated by more elected members, and that all recognise their key community leadership role in reassuring local people, gathering intelligence, reporting on the potential for increased community tension, and acting as mediators when conflicts arise.
- Building trust and effective relationships between the agencies and the development of strong links into and across communities.
- Mainstreaming cohesion contingency planning work into the core business of local authorities.
- Ensuring that someone 'at the top' is responsible for driving the cohesion contingency planning agenda down to frontline services.
- Encouraging discussion of cohesion contingency planning matters at executive level.
- Identifying a 'communications plan' for contingency planning work, e.g. as part of any wider council communications strategy and including any 'good news' stories.

4 Establishing and reviewing the plans

4.1 General

Councils should be working to ensure that they have robust processes in place to provide a tangible response to any major incidents that may threaten or erode community cohesion. This should include arrangements for reviewing and testing the effectiveness of any agreed plans.

4.2 Some areas of focus

The following ideas could be considered in introducing or further enhancing local arrangements for cohesion contingency planning and tension monitoring in this area:

- Ensuring a 'needs-driven' approach by constantly listening, and responding, to communities in the development of community cohesion plans and strategies, rather than waiting for, and reacting to government directives.
- Testing cohesion contingency plans on a regular basis, using scenario planning or 'walk through' tests wherever possible.
- Constantly refreshing plans and initiatives which quickly become out of date in a rapidly changing world.
- Thinking through how community cohesion needs to be addressed in existing emergency planning arrangements.

5 Developing a multi-agency approach

5.1 General

Cohesion contingency planning is a team effort and should involve some form of multi-agency approach. Typically this means involving key partners from the statutory sector and occasionally soliciting wider involvement from representatives of the voluntary, community and/or faith sectors. Whatever approach is taken, contingency planning should involve people who can articulate and speak for community groups, particularly those at risk of exclusion.

5.2 Some areas of focus

The following ideas could be considered in introducing or further enhancing local arrangements for cohesion contingency planning and tension monitoring in this area:

- Close, multi-agency working with all sectors of the local community and the development of trust between the partner agencies and between the police and community/faith groups.
- Establishing an effective multi-agency group for continuous tension monitoring.
- Improving information gathering and sharing with key professionals that hold valuable intelligence, e.g. housing officers, neighbourhood wardens etc.
- Agreeing with the police appropriate arrangements for information sharing.
- Formalising the collection of anecdotal information which can be used for tension monitoring purposes, e.g. use of e-forms on intranet or internet sites.

6 Being able to respond - quickly

6.1 General

Cohesion contingency plans should be an essential component of councils' wider resilience work, produced on a multi-agency basis and reviewed regularly in the light of events which might threaten cohesion. Beyond this, councils need to be able to respond quickly.

6.2 Some areas of focus

The following ideas could be considered in introducing or further enhancing local arrangements for cohesion contingency planning and tension monitoring in this area:

- Acting rapidly in the event of any threats to community cohesion to reassure the public and counter rumours and misinformation.
- Having the systems and relationships in place (proactive cohesion leadership) to be able to respond quickly when the need arises (reactive cohesion leadership).
- Not making assumptions about previously used networks of contacts and the willingness of some community groups to re-engage in cohesion contingency planning.
- Being observant of new communities and changing social profiles and the impact of this on community needs.
- Maintaining an up to date list of contacts for community tension monitoring.

7 Getting messages out to local people

7.1 General

Without effective communications, it is likely that cohesion contingency planning will fall apart. Communication plans must cover contact between the key agencies involved, those not involved but likely to be affected and, most importantly, the wider body of local people. Crucial within this will be the ability to engage with the press and media to ensure that key messages reach local people.

7.2 Some areas of focus

The following ideas could be considered in introducing or further enhancing local arrangements for cohesion contingency planning and tension monitoring in this area:

- Using a clear, articulate approach in tackling the exploitative messages of extremists, whilst giving 'voice' to the most socially excluded communities.
- Working with partners in times of threat to ensure that consistent, accurate and culturally sensitive messages are shared the media.
- Continually giving thought to the messages that the council gives out – effective community engagement and communications are key tools in tackling unfairness, preventing problems, and enabling appropriate responses in times of difficulty.
- Working closely with local newspaper editors to build rapport and establish effective communication channels, e.g. involving them in multi-agency planning, writing features for the local press etc.

Appendix A – sources of further information

Publications:

Building a Picture of Cohesion: A Guide for Local Authorities and Their Partners, Home Office/Local Government Association, 2003.

Building a Relationship with the Media, IDeA, 2006.

Community Cohesion – An Action Guide, Local Government Association, 2004.

Community Cohesion Risk Management, 'Briefing' Magazine, Local Government Information Unit, September 2004

Community Cohesion: Seven Steps – A Practitioner's Toolkit, Home Office/Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, March 2005.

Community Conflict: Causes and Action, Gerald Lemos, Lemos & Crane, 2004.

Evaluating Cohesion Outcomes, IDeA and Cheshire Fire and Rescue Services, March 2006.

Guidance for Local Authorities on Community Cohesion Contingency Planning and Tension Monitoring, Department for Communities and Local Government, March 2007 (*still in draft*).

Guidance on Community Cohesion, Local Government Association, 2002.

Improving Opportunities, Strengthening Lives – the Government's Race Equality and Community Cohesion Strategy, November 2004.

Leading Cohesive Communities: A Guide for Local Authority Leaders and Chief Executives, Local Government Association/Improvement and Development Agency, 2005.

Preventing Extremism Together, Home Office Working Groups, October 2005.

Reporting Diversity, Society of Editors/Media Trust, 2005.

Scrutiny of Community Cohesion Issues, Local Government Information Unit, 2005.

Working Together: Co-operation between Government and Faith Communities, Home Office Faith Communities Unit, February 2004.

Websites:

<http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk>

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1503278>