



# Charnwood Community Cohesion

*breaking barriers - building bridges*



## **SUMMARY**

### **COMMUNITY COHESION IN CHARNWOOD**

### **MEETING THE CHALLENGE**

**Report of the Charnwood Community Cohesion Pathfinder  
Team**

**April 2005**

## **CHARNWOOD COMMUNITY COHESION – MEETING THE CHALLENGE**

Meeting the Challenge is Charnwood's working document on Community Cohesion based on lessons learnt from the Charnwood Community Cohesion Pathfinder Programme. The issues developed in this report are based on current trends and responses. However, community cohesion is about continued assessment; the dynamics influencing these trends are constantly changing and thus need to be constantly understood.

### **THE MEANING OF COMMUNITY COHESION**

Often there is a misconception that community cohesion is only about 'race relations'. Community cohesion is to do with much more than race and social equality. It is about breaking down barriers and building relations between and within communities – rich/poor, old/young, transient /permanent, new comers/established residents, race/race, faith/faith etc. It is about celebrating and valuing differences and developing a common sense of belonging based on shared values for all communities. It lies at the heart of creating a safe and strong Charnwood and is about listening to and addressing the concerns of marginalised sections of the community.

The Local Government Association (LGA) defines a cohesive community as one where:

1. There is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities;
2. The diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued;
3. Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; and
4. Strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.

The Charnwood Cohesion Pathfinder adopted this definition.

### **COMMUNITY COHESION IN CHARNWOOD – WHAT IS WORKING WELL**

Although they may not label it as community cohesion, a considerable amount of work is being undertaken by various individuals, groups and agencies to develop cohesion. The main report considers some examples of this under the four components of the community cohesion definition.

### **CURRENT COHESION CHALLENGES IN CHARNWOOD**

The following challenges are based on the wealth of dialogues and research commissioned by the Cohesion Pathfinder management team and the emerging issues that need addressing.

#### ***1. Developing a common vision and a sense of belonging***

The challenge for the future is to work towards creation of common visions and of a sense of belonging in both local neighbourhoods and in Charnwood as a whole. We need to encourage activities that promote and develop this, particularly targeting those groups that are most disaffected.

## **2. Similar life opportunities**

The challenge for the future is to incorporate the findings of the Charnwood Renewal Framework within the review of the Charnwood Community Strategy and subsequent action planning. There is a need for the Local Strategic Partnership to adopt a long-term multi-agency approach to targeting peoples' needs within the areas of relatively higher deprivation and address the concerns of disaffected young people (from a very early age) in order to try to break the cycle of deprivation.

## **3. Strong and positive relationships**

The challenge is to work with communities identified in the report such as students, new comers and those living in 'territorial isolation', who feel threatened, fearful, unwelcome or who lack a sense of belonging. Agencies need to:

- Consider what can be done to minimise this through the delivery of mainstream services, events and festivals and,
- To encourage the development of a sense of belonging, greater integration, understanding and mutual respect between people from different backgrounds.

## **4. Valuing Diversity**

The challenge is to exploit festivals and other programmes to encourage a greater understanding of the differences and similarities of the communities that live in Charnwood. There is also a constant challenge to create new routes to participation and attendance for those not currently accessing or influencing what is available. This is far more than a promotional challenge but is rather based on a long-term commitment to challenge a variety of racisms, negative discrimination and prejudice alongside a positive commitment to developing healthy and vibrant community and cross-cultural relations.

## **SHARING THE COHESION CHALLENGES**

The role and responsibility of helping to encourage community cohesion rests with every one – individuals, groups, statutory and voluntary service providers, community leaders and politicians. **However, cohesion is a dynamic process, and there is a need for one Partnership to take responsibility in gathering intelligence and co-ordinating actions. It is recommended that the Charnwood LSP should consider taking this role.** The report includes a detailed table, which begins to develop an action plan based on the cohesion challenges identified earlier.

## **MAINSTREAMING COMMUNITY COHESION**

The focus of mainstreaming has been to seek to embed the cohesion findings in key policy documents, appraisal/check lists, training, action plans and grants bids. A wealth of data and information has been gathered and is now available for all to use – available from [www.charnwoodonline.net/pathfinder](http://www.charnwoodonline.net/pathfinder). Various networks have also been developed as a result of the programme, and a networking directory is being compiled.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Charnwood Community Cohesion Pathfinder provided an opportunity to 'experiment and learn' about what community cohesion means to Charnwood in particular. The concept of community cohesion takes on an important local interpretation due to the variety of the people that make up Charnwood. Essentially the community cohesion agenda asks us to question our current practices by analysing and understanding the impacts of our actions on diverse populations with often contradictory needs. Secondly, as we develop new services and activities it asks us to put ways of combining the different needs, values and perceptions of people and the desire for healthy communities first.

Community cohesion has at its heart the idea that prejudices, negative perceptions and barriers can be changed through community activities. Sustained small-scale programmes are an important means of breaking down barriers between different communities of interest and building relations.

The Charnwood Cohesion Pathfinder has highlighted a number of challenges that are specific to Charnwood. Many of these challenges are inter-related and based on a series of complex community based problems. A root cause of cohesion tensions is often linked to economic deprivation. The consequence may be a non-cohesive community, where residents don't speak to one another, people are lonely and isolated, fear going out and don't engage in services. If some of the issues identified are not taken seriously, there could be concerns about inter-community conflict and an impact on the long term economic well being of Charnwood as a consequence.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Charnwood LSP should consider the following recommendations in relation to community cohesion:

1. Consider establishing a Cohesion sub group to produce a strategy / framework for community cohesion in Charnwood and to take responsibility for gathering intelligence and co-ordinating cohesion action.
2. The local media in Charnwood has a major impact on the perceptions created about certain groups and issues. It is essential to engage in a dialogue with the media to develop an understanding of community cohesion issues, as a basis for influencing public perception on specific issues such as young people, students, deprived communities and faith groups.
3. Work towards creating common visions and a sense of belonging for both local neighbourhoods and for Charnwood. To encourage activities that promote and develop this, particularly targeting those groups that are most disaffected (as identified in this report).
4. Consider and adopt the proposed priority areas in the Charnwood Renewal Framework and develop joined up, long-term, targeted action to address the needs of deprived communities.

5. Seek to ensure that renewal programmes are transparent, well understood and widely communicated so as to avoid inter-community resentment and ignoring the concerns of the wider community. Similarly it should seek to communicate with and involve those from more affluent communities in the development of programmes targeted at relatively deprived communities.
6. Develop pilot areas for joint working such as the Warwick Way Estate illustrated in the report and seek to bring in additional resources for a holistic approach to the problems of such areas.
7. Develop strategic level joint working between service providers for young people, particularly targeting those not in employment, education or training.
8. Seek to develop greater positive inter-action between young people and adults in 'hot spot areas' to address inter-generational conflict and seek to develop greater understanding, support and mutual respect.
9. Encourage greater contact and joint working between young people and adults from different neighbourhoods in order to address the issues of 'territorial isolation' as identified in the report.
10. Recognise students as members of the Charnwood community and seek to develop better student / permanent resident relations that encourage a sense of belonging to the area and mutual respect.
11. Recognise the impact on cohesion and the need to take joint action in specific areas that experience a sudden influx of new arrivals to an area – either via new developments, or international events.
12. Seek to develop exploit festivals, events, and service programmes to encourage greater understanding of the communities that live in Charnwood.
13. Develop and sustain small-scale programmes that help to break down barriers and build relations between different communities of interest.
14. Seek to create new routes to participation and attendance for those not currently accessing services and events.
15. Seek to involve a representative of the Disability Forum onto the Charnwood LSP board and forum.

The above are a list of the recommendations, more explanations as to these issues and examples of projects are contained in the main report available from <http://www.charnwoodonline.net/pathfinder>