

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET
20TH JULY 2010

**Worcestershire Partnership –
A Community Cohesion Strategy for All**

OPEN	
SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME:	Stronger Communities
CORPORATE PLAN AIM:	A Better Quality of Life A Well Run and Responsive Council
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor T L Onslow
DIRECTOR:	Director of Community and Partnership Services
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APPENDICES:	Appendix 1 - Worcestershire Partnership Community Cohesion Strategy <i>The appendix to this report has been circulated electronically and a public inspection copy is available on request. (See front cover for details).</i>

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To set out the development and implementation of the Worcestershire Partnership Community Cohesion Strategy and to outline key issues and learning for the Council.
- 1.2 All members of the Worcestershire Partnership, including the District Council, are asked to implement the Strategy, utilise the toolkit and develop further the approach of making community cohesion part of everything that all partner organisations do whilst working closely with communities.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is asked to DECIDE that:

- 2.1 **The Worcestershire Partnership Community Cohesion Strategy for All is endorsed (attached as an Appendix 1);**
- 2.2 **The proposed approach to the delivery of the Strategy is endorsed;**
- 2.3 **The proposed Community Cohesion toolkit is promoted and utilised across all Council Directorates.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Community cohesion is about what people have in common, what brings people together and whether they get along with each other. A tendency can be to focus on peoples' differences. Promoting community cohesion helps us to focus on what we have in common and promote good relationships between people.
- 3.2 It is widely recognised that living in communities which are cohesive, where people get along with each other and form positive relationships, makes a real difference to people's lives. There is evidence that people who have a sense of belonging in their neighbourhood are more likely to take better advantage of public services, enjoy the benefits of a good education, have access to meaningful employment, are healthier and live longer. This is something we would aspire to for all our communities – as part of our vision for the District and Worcestershire. It also very closely accords with the vision of the new coalition Government of the “Big Society” – through which people come together, take responsibility for problems and issues and are more engaged and involved in their local communities. The Worcestershire Partnership has, therefore, worked with the Institute for Community Cohesion (iCoCo) to understand what community cohesion means for Worcestershire.
- 3.3 The Worcestershire Partnership established a Project Group to oversee the development of the Strategy and as well as establishing local focus groups and interviews, reviewed the contribution Districts' already make to community cohesion.
- 3.4 The strategy particularly highlights a number of Wyre Forest based initiatives including Broadwaters Residents Action Group, Grow with Wyre, Shindig and partnership working in the District's areas of highest need, particularly around community safety and increasing public confidence. This demonstrates a small sample of the work across the District.
- 3.5 Approximately 250 people from a wide range of public, private, voluntary sector organisations and community and resident groups were asked about the specific community cohesion issues for Worcestershire that need to be addressed via a Community Cohesion Strategy. Representatives from across partner organisations also helped to create a shared vision for community cohesion in Worcestershire.
- 3.6 A focus group event was held in Kidderminster on March 3rd 2010 prior to the Wyre Forest Community Engagement Forum and members of the local community and representatives from both third sector and public sector organisations were asked their opinions on a number of subjects by iCoCo.
- 3.7 All County Council and District councillors were invited to contribute to the process and in addition the Leaders and Chief Executives of the 7 Councils were invited to be interviewed. The list of contributors is shown in the Strategy.

4. KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 The Worcestershire Partnership developed the following vision for Community Cohesion in Worcestershire:

"Worcestershire is one place and many places where everyone enjoys a sense of belonging and where everyone is encouraged to build positive relationships and contribute to community wellbeing."

4.2 The vision is underpinned by the following strategic aims:

- Local people to play an active part in civic and community life, and contribute to local decision making through ongoing and effective engagement.
- Local people of all ages and backgrounds to have opportunities to mix together and share common experiences.
- The Worcestershire Partnership to offer community leadership, celebrate diversity and promote equality of opportunity as a means of enhancing community cohesion and quality of life.

4.3 The table below identifies the recent community cohesion indicators, as measured in the Place Survey in 2008.

PLACE SURVEY 2008	% of people who feel that people from different backgrounds in the local area get on well together	% of people who feel they belong to their immediate area
<i>National Average</i>	76%	59%
<u>Worcestershire County</u>	<u>77%</u>	<u>62%</u>
Malvern Hills	82%	70%
Redditch	72%	55%
Worcester City	75%	55%
Wyre Forest	73%	61%
Bromsgrove	82%	61%
Wychavon	79%	67%
<u>Neighbouring Counties</u>		
Shropshire	84%	71%
Gloucestershire	83%	63%
Warwickshire	81%	60%
Herefordshire	76%	66%
Staffordshire	75%	62%

- 4.4 In developing the strategy, the engagement process identified the following key issues for Worcestershire:
- The geographic diversity and number of small communities in Worcestershire and the challenge that creates – for example, very different approaches need to be adopted to address issues in rural and urban areas.
 - Ethnicity and faith differences exist in pockets around Worcestershire and whilst we must be proactive and address any issues arising from this, other forms of diversity also have to be considered. In particular, the challenge of managing the tensions that can arise because of the arrival and "churn" created by new and emerging communities. Churn relates to the turnover of people moving in and out of communities which can have an impact on planning and delivering public services, in particular education, housing and health.
 - Migrant workers bring proven and welcome economic benefits to the county – and indeed, due to the seasonal nature of the work, some employers are highly dependent upon them to run their business. The partnership wants to ensure that new groups of workers and families can be successfully integrated within existing communities and in local businesses.
 - Information sharing and work between partner organisations could be further developed especially around cohesion issues.
 - Good practice that exists in Worcestershire needs to be shared and partners assisted to further embed cohesion into what they do.
- 4.5 A practical online toolkit is being developed to enable partners to assess and adapt activities to ensure they contribute to the community cohesion agenda and best benefit communities. The toolkit will offer practical assistance to enable cohesion to be considered at all levels in an organisation.
- 4.6 The toolkit will bring together in one place the work that has been developed across the country to promote community cohesion. It will also showcase existing good practice in Worcestershire and elsewhere to enable this to be recognised and where relevant replicated or applied.
- 4.7 Councillors are vital in knowing and understanding their communities are, what their needs are and in helping to promote community cohesion. The community cohesion agenda links very closely to councillors' community leadership role. Going forward councillors have a role to play in sharing their knowledge of what is happening in their local communities, promoting and celebrating good relationships between people and challenging any misconceptions that may arise between groups.
- 4.8 The Council and its partners are increasingly supporting and developing resident led initiatives and projects particularly empowering residents to take control. There are numerous success stories in relation to Friends of Parks Groups and the level of community activity organised, directed and led by local people. The Wyre Forest Community Engagement Forum provides an opportunity for a wide range of people to connect with the Council agenda.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications other than embedding the agenda within existing officer resources and Council service development. The Council supports community cohesion work through a number of officers, including the Equality and Diversity Officer, the Wyre Forest Matters Partnership Officer, Cultural Services – events and community development, Health and Sustainability Officers, Parks and Open Spaces Officers and Democratic Services.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 None identified.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 The Project Group envisage that, alongside the use of the toolkit, the Council and each partner organisation and thematic group will be responsible for the promotion of the community cohesion strategy within their organisation and with local communities as part of their ongoing approach to engagement.
- 7.2 With the reduction on public finance the capacity to deliver this aspiration will require ongoing resource at the current level.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The Strategy is not set in stone; it will be adapted and developed by the partnership in response to feedback from partners and communities. Further development will take place to ensure it remains relevant and addresses the changing needs of Worcestershire's communities.

9. CONSULTEES

- 9.1 Cabinet Member for Community and Partnership Services
9.2 Director of Planning and Regulatory Services
9.3 Director of Resources
9.4 Director of Legal and Corporate Services