

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

INFORMATION REPORT TO CABINET COMMITTEE – EQUALITIES

23 MAY 2011

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES

DEVELOPMENT OF THE COMMUNITY COHESION STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN 2011-14

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Committee of the process for developing the Community Cohesion Strategy and Action Plan 2011-14 (CCSAP); to inform the Committee of the key evidence and emerging findings and to provide the Committee information on the proposed governance structure and next steps.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan / Other Corporate Priority

- 2.1 The strategy will support the aims of the Bridgend Community Strategy theme, 'Bright Future, Strong Communities', by helping to build strong and positive relationships between people of different backgrounds.

3. Background

- 3.1 The CCSAP for Bridgend is a local response to the national Community Cohesion Strategy for Wales, 'Getting On Together' published in November 2009. The Community Safety Partnership commissioned the CCSAP, supported by Communities First Partnerships, to gain a better understanding of the factors that contribute to, or undermine the strength of, our communities and to help the Partnership meet its specific commitment to developing strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds.
- 3.2 The Strategy is being developed by Safer Bridgend in partnership with other public, private and voluntary sector bodies represented on the Local Service Board and with involvement of the wider community. Developing a cohesive community will require a long-term, partnership approach covering both mainstream activity and targeted cohesion projects. The CCSAP aims to set out how the Partnership will achieve its vision, by understanding the current situation, gaps in current activities, and how public services can respond effectively to meet the needs of all who live and work in Bridgend County Borough.

3.3 In order to develop the Strategy a programme of Community and Stakeholder Engagement was developed and implemented to gain an in-depth understanding of community cohesion issues. The consultation included:

- a programme of interviews and small workshops with representatives of public and voluntary sector organisations and multi-agency partnerships;
- a residents' survey delivered through face-to-face interviews and an online version promoted through local community groups and representatives. This was not intended to be a statistically significant survey but provided important information that supplemented the additional consultation activities; and
- Small focus groups and workshops with different community groups representing a range of different geographical communities and communities of interest.

4. Current situation / proposal

4.1 The CCSAP provides:

- an evidence-based understanding of community cohesion in Bridgend;
- an in-depth understanding of the make-up of communities reflecting demographic, social and cultural change;
- improved availability of data and intelligence for the PREVENT agenda;
- a clear plan for improving community cohesion and performance indicators for evidencing outcomes; and
- a performance management framework to track changes in the cohesiveness of communities over time.

4.2 Four suggested Strategic Cohesion Priorities have emerged through the evidence, and these will be the subject of further consideration by the CSP. These are:

- respecting differences;
- improving access;
- raising awareness; and

- understanding neighbourhoods.

4.3 The emerging themes on which these priorities are based, are set out below:

- **respecting differences;** residents say that some minority groups are most likely to experience prejudice or discrimination on the basis of their race, ethnicity, sexuality, or disability. This can result in hate crime, which can range from verbal abuse to physical violence. One-quarter of residents say that this prejudice has a negative impact on community cohesion – but it is positive that over one-third of residents believe that an increasing number of people are willing to challenge this.

These behaviours need to be challenged by developing community ethics based on mutual acceptance and respect.

- **improving access;** different geographical communities and different communities of interest in Bridgend County Borough have a varied experience of accessing services. Ensuring equitable access to services, whether delivered by the public, private or community and voluntary sectors, means that systems and processes must be consistently fair and understandable for all – no matter what an individual's background or their specific needs. Perceptions of inequality in service provision are a major driver of community tensions and can have a negative impact on cohesion.

Service providers must therefore understand the needs of their users to ensure equality of access and reduce barriers that individuals face to obtaining access or understanding what is available. An understanding of these issues is required in order that they can be addressed

- **raising awareness;** education and awareness of key social issues amongst the population is a fundamental tool in creating a cohesive community. Ignorance reinforces stereotypes within communities that can break down relationships and cohesiveness. At the extreme, this can manifest itself in discrimination, hate crime and criminal activity.

It is crucial the awareness of these issues is raised by building on successful educational and awareness raising projects, such as those delivered by Bridgend People First to young people in schools.

- **understanding neighbourhoods:** some individual neighbourhoods within the County Borough experience significant social and economic problems. There are concentrated areas of worklessness, intergenerational welfare benefit dependency and financial exclusion. All are root causes of deprivation and lead to

more serious social problems. These have a significant impact on community cohesion and residents' quality of life. For example, domestic violence, hate crime and anti social behaviour are concentrated in particular neighbourhoods in the County Borough. The late night economy and substance and alcohol misuse further intensify the impact of these issues on the local sense of community and well being.

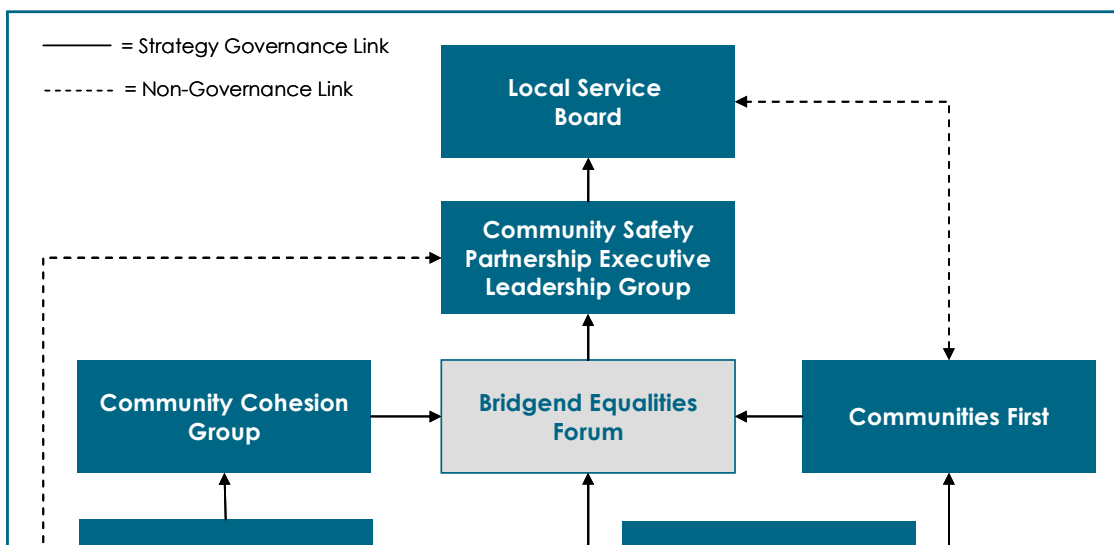
These factors increase fear of crime and residents' perceptions of community safety. This suggest that there is a need to address hotspots of domestic violence, hate crime and anti social behaviour. This could be achieved by:

- working with the police and public protection partners to demonstrate that such crime will not be tolerated; and
- encouraging the reporting of incidents and ensuring that victims feel safe in doing so,.

Addressing these problems will help to improve perceptions of particular areas of the County Borough as a place to live, work, or visit.

4.4 Community cohesion cannot be achieved by any single organisation. An active partnership approach between the public, private and community/voluntary sectors, through the Local Service Board, is an essential element to the successful delivery of the strategy. The suggested approach to delivering the Strategy and Action Plan through existing partnership arrangements is illustrated below.

Governance Structure



4.5 The Bridgend Equalities Forum and other partners will play an important role in sharing good practice and updating on service improvements delivered. The Community Safety Partnership Executive Leadership Group has overall responsibility for monitoring the progress of the Community Cohesion Strategy and Action Plan. This will include maintaining strategic oversight of progress against the vision and priorities and the extent to which outcomes are being delivered. The CCSAP will be presented to the Community Safety Partnership Executive Leadership Group on 7th June 2011 for agreement; following this a further report will be presented to Cabinet to approve the CCSAP.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules

5.1 None

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 Where the Authority is involved in the determination and delivery of the Partnership's priorities it will do so in accordance with its equality duties and undertake Equality Impact Assessments where appropriate and required.

6.2 A stage one Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on the plan to assess its relevance to the Authority's public equality duties and potential impact on protected equality characteristics.

6.3 Extensive consultation was undertaken with diverse groups to gather the evidence required determining the direction and scope of the strategy, and further consultation has been undertaken on the draft strategy itself.

7. Financial Implications

7.1 None from this report.

8. Recommendation

8.1 It is recommended that Cabinet Committee Equalities :

8.1.1 notes the process for developing the Community Cohesion Strategy and Action Plan 2011-14 (CCSAP);

8.1.2 notes the key evidence and emerging findings;

8.1.3 notes the proposed Governance Structure and next steps.

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Attachments: Background documents: None