

COMMUNITY RELATIONS STRATEGY

**DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION
CRG 22nd SEPTEMBER 2010**

September 2010

CRS SUMMARY

Introduction

The London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham (H&F) is drawing up a strategy to guide the work of Community Relations in the borough. H&F firmly believes that it is essential to have a borough with strong community relations because it is beneficial for all to have strong links between communities. Similarly, H&F are committed to the promotion of two key concepts 'more for less' and 'hand up, not hand out'. The strategy will ensure that these foci are ingrained within the way the council pursues good community relations. In order to achieve this goal, H&F recognises the need to build the capacity of residents and communities. As a result, the strategy is linked to the work of the borough's Community Relations Group (CRG), as this group functions as a means of communication between organisations, communities and individual residents.

The strategy hopes to initiate a dialogue between H&F and the communities in the borough in order to ensure that community relations stay strong, the most vulnerable receive the help they deserve and individuals make the most of the opportunities that are available to them. In this respect, many of the goals that will be set out are long-term in their nature. However, it is a reflection of H&F's commitment to innovation and desire to provide the best possible services in the current climate that the strategy will establish a framework for guiding future council policy.

NB This strategy will be heavily influenced by the Government's spending review due to be conducted in October. However, whilst this event will determine levels of resource available, H&F has deemed it prudent to be pro-active in order to clarify a definition of community relations to ensure that this area is best placed to deal with the restraints that will occur, no matter how strict they may be.

Context

At the last CRG meeting, it was noted that a Community Relations strategy was going to be drawn up. This was a timely announcement given that the question of 'what is community relations?' Was brought up during the meeting. This fact showed the need for a document to define Community Relations and set out a strategic direction to help guide the work of the Council and the CRG in the future.

Since then the Council has embarked upon a period of research and consultation. For instance, CRG members as well as other public services (e.g. Police and PCT) have been presented with a draft definition of Community Relations and universally signed up to the concepts. Also, some very useful feedback was provided which has gone into drawing up the vision for the borough.

Similarly, within the council, numerous senior managers have been engaged to ensure that they provide their support for community relations. There was a real desire amongst these individuals to ensure that the important work of community relations and particularly the work of the CRG was given the attention it deserved and received new focus to see how it needs to adapt in the current difficult financial climate.

Indeed, the financial climate has affected everyone from community groups to individuals to the Council. Some recent events such as the proposed plan to dispose of underused assets that do not provide value for money and the recent funding round have been difficult messages to send out and in some circles hard messages to take. However, what these events show is that financial pressures are being felt by everyone. Consequently, the strategy will suggest that we all need to pull together to tackle the financial climate for the benefit of community relations in the borough.

Therefore, the Community Relations Strategy will be drawn up because:

- We are aware that many services which H&F provides have positive community relations impacts but are not recognised as such. A strategy document will be able to co-ordinate these activities and provide the basis for more effective communication of what is currently provided.
- The current financial climate means that ways of working will need to change. Consequently, we need to ensure that the importance of community relations is not lost and so there is a need to build it into way H&F operates. Therefore the strategy will highlight how community relations needs to be ingrained into the actions of the Council and the wider community.
- The Community Relations Group in H&F has evolved into a successful network and in order to achieve its potential and continue to grow it would be helped by a framework to help guide the strategic direction of the group.
- Residents and community groups need to take an increased share of the responsibility for improving community relations. Additionally, to achieve the best results community groups and individuals must be encouraged and supported to stand up and assume local leadership. For this reason, responsibility will be a central strand of the strategy and will help to convey this concept to individuals and the wider community.

How will this CRG meeting be used to inform the Community Relations Strategy?

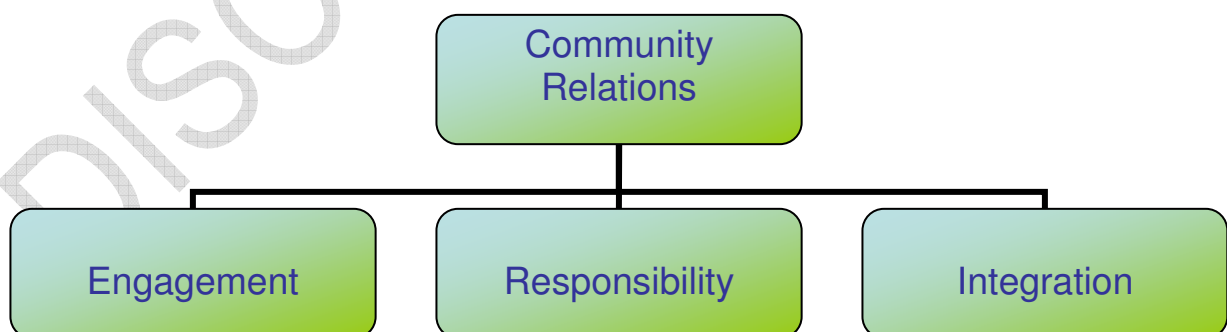
Feedback from CRG members as well as other stakeholders has already been used to compile this summary. H&F wants the final strategy to be a useful document and so has highlighted three goals for the CRG meeting on 22nd September:

- 1) Agree on definition of community relations
- 2) Discuss what the model means for community groups e.g. what are they doing? How do they need to change what they are doing?
- 3) Discuss what the model means for the council and its relationship with community groups e.g. what are the benefits of closer working relations? How can the relationship be improved?

The information that comes out of the CRG meeting will be used to draw up a final draft of the strategy document.

Definition of Community Relations

Community Relations refers to the relationships that are formed by and amongst individuals, communities and organisations within a locality. At its heart is an understanding that the links within communities themselves and between different communities play an important role in quality of life of individuals. Community relations encompasses three functional areas: engagement, integration and responsibility. Each of these is clarified below with example elements.



ENGAGEMENT

This element refers to the process of effectively communicating and responding to the thoughts, ideas and concerns of residents, organisations and communities. In this respect it is a two-way dialogue. Below are set out some examples of what engagement can look like:



- Facilitation – e.g. *Enabling communities to come together with organisations,, establish dialogue and work together (e.g. CRG).*
- Involvement – e.g. *Providing the opportunities for different communities to play active roles in local issues and the running of the area (e.g. School Governors).*
- Communications – e.g. *Promoting local shared values and good news stories with the aim of abolishing myths and changing unfounded perceptions.*

Possible benefits of engagement include:

- Better designed council services based on a better understanding of residents' needs
- Happier residents who feel that their thoughts and concerns are listened to and acted upon
- Early warning system for concerns in the community

RESPONSIBILITY

Responsibility refers to the obligations that individuals, communities and public sector providers have with regard to the provision and uptake of services and civic duties. At its core is an understanding that public services can only be delivered effectively and at value for money if there is an understanding between residents, communities and organisations where both parties find a balance of give and take. This situation will only occur if local leadership is strong, successful and representative of the community. Below are two components of a responsible borough:



- 'The Deal' – *Two-way (give and take) agreement between all parties in a local area (individuals, communities, organisations) that sets out the necessary respective commitments for each partner in order to establish a successful model for improved community relations.*
- Local Leadership – *An understanding that local leadership is an objective good and a goal which individuals, communities and public sector bodies all need to play a part in and pursue.*

Possible benefits of responsibility include:

- Protecting essential frontline services to vulnerable people by using resources more effectively
- Stronger and more effective community groups who can grow and thrive.
- Increased sense of civic duty

INTEGRATION

Integration is what is required to ensure that parallel communities do not emerge and therefore prevent social tensions from being generated or made worse. It focuses on improving understanding, building an appreciation of the viewpoints of other communities and promoting a common ground of shared values (e.g. democracy and citizenship). Below are three aspects of integration that H&F has highlighted:



- Interaction – *Trust, culture and networks built up through day to day contact and interaction between individuals and communities in an everyday environment.*
- Break-down of barriers – *The absence of strict barriers between how individuals identify themselves. i.e. people do not identify themselves in opposition to other individuals or communities.*
- Understanding – *The ability to understand and appreciate common principles and shared values but also differences.*

Possible benefits of integration include:

- Reduction in anti-social behaviour and increase in positive attitudes towards local area.
- Sharing of cultures, ideas and opinions
- Removing both real and perceived social, economic and other barriers
- Communities getting on well and working together on shared issues

About our borough

The following information has been provided to set the context in which the Community Relations Strategy has been drawn up. The data displayed does not provide a complete picture of the borough but is indicative of some of the challenges that we face and is therefore useful to help inform CRG's discussions.

H&F has some of the wealthiest households in the country, but it also has significant areas of deprivation: 27% of people in H&F live in poverty compared to an inner London average of 20%. Socially it is a polarised borough with a resident turnover rate of 30% per annum.

Living Environment

- H&F is one of 13 Inner London boroughs, situated in central-west London on primary routes linking the City with Heathrow airport
- The borough covers 1,640 hectares, making it the third smallest, in terms of area, of all London boroughs (excluding the City of London), whilst also being the seventh most densely populated borough in London (105 persons per hectare)

Deprivation

- H&F is ranked 38th most deprived local authority¹ across England

¹ Index of Multiple Deprivation 2007

- 48% of households in the Borough do not own a car, which is higher than the London average (37%)

Population & Households

- H&F is home to around 172,000 residents in an estimated 78,600 households. The population is projected to increase by +8.7% during the 2009-2019 period, and by a further +4.9% between 2019-2029
- Almost equal proportions of 'family' and lone person households – stark contrast to predominance of 'family' households recorded across London (62%) and throughout England (63%)
- Higher concentration of young people on the estates than the borough average

Ethnicity & Religion

- 61% of H&F's residents are White British, 22% are from minority (non White) backgrounds
- 64% of H&F's residents are Christian, 7% Muslim, 18% have no religion

Satisfaction

- 73% of residents are satisfied with their neighbourhood

Housing & Tenure

- The housing stock in H&F is characterised by a mix of purpose-built flats, maisonettes and apartments (38%), converted flats (31%) and terraced houses (23%)
- Home ownership (44%) is lower than the London (57%) and national (69%) averages
- 5533 overcrowded households² throughout the borough

Education

- 45% of residents hold Level 4 or 5 qualifications, compared to 31% throughout London and 20% across England
- 41% of all pupils living in H&F and enrolled in school are eligible for Free School Meals – London 26% and national average is 16%

Income & Employment

- Almost equal proportions of households have median incomes of less than £30,000 per annum (37%) and in excess of £50,000 per annum (32%), contributing to the extent of polarisation in H&F
- 14% of working age residents receive Income Support, Job Seekers Allowance or Incapacity Benefits, which is consistent with the London average.

Crime & Anti-social behaviour

- 7th highest rate of reported crime per 1000 residents amongst all London boroughs
- Decreased fear of crime

² 2008 Housing Needs Survey

The vision (how we want look):

- Residents feel a strong loyalty and sense of belonging to the borough
- A borough full of vibrant and successful communities that willingly interact and get on well together
- Individuals do more for themselves and their communities
- A borough of opportunity where residents are given a 'hand up' and not a 'hand out'
- Greater involvement of residents, where they take on responsibility to help themselves and others in their communities
- A situation where organisations in the borough (and this includes Council, community groups, voluntary sector organisations, commercial businesses etc.) take collective responsibility for improving and sustaining the borough.

WHAT WILL ENGAGEMENT LOOK LIKE IN THE CONTEXT OF COMMUNITY RELATIONS?

- The impact of the significant reductions in the Council's budget (estimated at 25% over 4 years) means that any engagement between residents and the Council needs to be open, and transparent – needs to recognise that services are going to look very different in the future and residents will be vital in future service design
- A recognition that 'more engagement' does not necessarily mean 'better engagement' – i.e. it is all about the quality, robustness and honesty of the conversation between individuals and organisations
- Greater use of existing and mainstream engagement mechanisms such as the Community Relations Group or the 'Council Listens' instead of separate consultation events for single or special interest groups
- Increased and widespread use of the internet and social networking sites to engage with the Council and partners
- Communities take local action on issues which affect their neighbourhoods and streets
- Individuals get more involved with local groups and societies e.g. Resident's Associations or Neighbourhood Watch Groups or even set up a Book Group
- As organisations face significant budget pressures, greater use will need to be made of cheaper channels of engagement

WHAT WILL RESPONSIBILITY LOOK LIKE IN THE CONTEXT OF COMMUNITY RELATIONS?

- With individual rights and entitlement should come responsibilities and duties – both at an individual and group level
- In the context of the national budget cuts, residents will be required to do more for themselves recognising that the Council will need to do ‘more for less’ and focus on those aspects which are statutory or fundamental
- Local groups and charities will need to look for radical and innovative ways of raising money and not just expect the Council to provide support
- Community Groups need to come together to work for a common purpose around a shared set of values and principles, e.g. through membership of the CRG
- Increased levels of volunteering will be indicative of the active uptake of responsibilities

WHAT WILL INTEGRATION LOOK LIKE IN THE CONTEXT OF COMMUNITY RELATIONS?

- People of all backgrounds have a common set of values e.g. respect for the rule of law
- A borough where individuals of different social and economic backgrounds naturally mix and get along with each other
- Where all communities and individuals improve their English language skills in order to get on in life and do well
- Residents experience ‘equality of opportunity’ when accessing services
- The Community Relations Group is seen as a positive and effective network for different communities to come together to focus on cross cutting issues and themes

Fundamentally, then, H&F wants to build stronger, more integrated communities where residents have access to opportunities and exercise their responsibility to make the most of them whilst the quality of services the council provides is maintained within increasingly tight financial constraints

Potential Actions

A number of potential actions have been suggested in the course of researching the Community Relations Strategy in order to help achieve the vision. These include:

- **Using CRG to feedback on the success of the Community Relations Strategy**

CRG has a role to play in keeping the strategy alive. It can do this by regularly checking what progress is being made. For instance the Council can feedback what actions they have been taking and similarly community groups can have a chance at meetings to show what part they have been playing in trying to achieve the strategy's vision.

- **CRG mentoring scheme**

Where CRG members who are experienced in a particular field can share their knowledge with others. E.g. governance or writing funding applications.

- **Produce a list of the Councils community relations activities**

Provide a document that shows the whole spectrum of community relations activities that the Council provides. This action would help alleviate some of the problems that are caused by poor communication or lack of engagement.

- **Community Champions**

Similar schemes are run by other councils. It provides formal recognition of those individuals who stand up as local leaders

- **Promote existing council and community led youth opportunities**

e.g. work by H&F and the Challenge Network in piloting national citizen service activities

However, any further ideas for actions that can realistically be put into practice would be greatly appreciated.

Next Steps

- Draw up a final draft of Community Relations Strategy using feedback from CRG for circulation around CRG members.
- Sign-off Community Relations Strategy by the Council
- Standing item on CRG agenda to appear every 6 months to refer to the strategy and give feedback on what progress is being made. This item will also provide a chance for Community Groups to show what they are doing in advancing community relations

