

POLICY TITLE

Community Cohesion Policy 2008

REVISION DATE

2010

REPLACES POLICY

New in 2008

POLICY NUMBER

POLICY AIM

The aim of the policy is to help local people of all ages and backgrounds live harmoniously together within South Holland. The policy seeks to define “community cohesion” and what it means to South Holland District Council. It outlines the community cohesion issues existing within the district and determines how the Council will address these issues through the provision of its services and its relationships with its partners.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy outlines the Council’s approach to community cohesion and outlines the nature of the work that the Council will undertake to improve and promote community cohesion.

The Council wishes to see cohesive communities within South Holland and has adopted the Local Government Association’s definition of a cohesive community to guide its policy. The communities in South Holland have seen sustained population growth over many years caused by the inward migration of older people from other parts of the UK. More recently communities have experienced more rapid population growth as workers have come to the district from overseas including Poland, Portugal, Lithuania, Latvia and a number of other countries.

The nature and speed of the population growth in South Holland has given rise to community tensions that are not in all cases fully quantified but are anecdotally led such as increased fear of crime, perceived lack of access to jobs, housing and school places. It is the concern of the Council and its partners that these local issues are addressed appropriately and are not allowed to build up in to resentment or, at their worst, lead to public disorder. The Council wishes to see people of different backgrounds expressing mutual respect for each other and living contentedly and harmoniously together in South Holland.

1. POLICY STATEMENT

- 1.1 In 2002 the Local Government Association and its partners agreed a definition of a cohesive community. The Council has adopted this definition to guide its own understanding of community cohesion issues within South Holland. This definition is:

A cohesive community is one where:

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

2. THE NATIONAL COMMUNITY COHESION DEBATE

- 2.1 The expression "Community Cohesion" is a relatively new term and has developed in the national arena from a range of work concerning equality issues, community relationships in a racially and ethnically mixed society and citizenship discussions. The term "Community Cohesion" is used as short hand to cover complex and fluid relationships between people in society. Poor community cohesion is used to describe situations where local people do not get on with each other to the extent that they feel no connection or warmth towards their locality and can be actively hostile towards their neighbours. People may then choose to act on their own autonomous interests rather than as a responsible, contributing member of a wider group or society.
- 2.2 The government debate about Community Cohesion is still developing. In October 2006 the government published a white paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities" which, amongst a wide range of other issues to do with local government, it set out its strategy for community cohesion. This focused on issues to do with communities that were from ethnic minority groups, radicalised Muslims and new migrants. It addressed issues to do with tackling religious extremism, public disturbances and disorder, far right myths and the underlying drivers of tensions between different groups. It set out eight "guiding principles" that would define central government's work:-
- Strong leadership and engagement
 - Developing shared values
 - Preventing the problems of tomorrow
 - Good information
 - Visible work to tackle inequalities
 - Involving young people
 - Interfaith work
 - Partners such as third sector organisations.
- 2.3. The 2001 census has shown that South Holland is not ethnically diverse. Thus the issues that concern the government of religious extremism are not directly relevant in South Holland. However, other issues do concern the district such as the need to develop shared values and involving young people. Certainly it was only a matter of years ago that saw riots "next door" in Boston emanating from community tensions.
- 2.4 In February 2008 the Department of Communities and Local Government published research findings that showed a number of predictors of community cohesion. These were:

- Both individual and community-level factors influence cohesion
- Ethnic diversity drives cohesion
- Disadvantage erodes community cohesion
- Crime and fear of crime strongly undermine cohesion
- Empowerment is an important factor
- Volunteering is a positive predictor of cohesion
- Vulnerable groups have more negative perceptions of cohesion
- The predictors of cohesion vary across ethnic groups.

2.5 Using these indicators, it can be seen that South Holland's community cohesion might be improved (in theory) by supporting community activity such as volunteering, supporting less advantaged members of society to fully participate, undertaking "myth busting" in the most deprived areas of the district and to be seen to be tackling crime.

3. COMMUNITY COHESION ISSUES IN SOUTH HOLLAND

3.1. Community cohesion within South Holland is very poor and has been challenged by recent population growth. Local society is now very fluid and people are trying to come to terms with that change. Census data has shown that the district's population has been growing at a rate greater than the national average. Prior to 2004 this was predominantly due to the inward migration of older people from other parts of the UK, mainly the southern counties. This distorted the age profile of the population in South Holland, which was older than the Lincolnshire or national average.

Relations between older and younger people

3.2 The distortion in the district's age profile has given rise to known tensions between older and younger people. The General Survey of 2006/07 showed that the aspect respondents' listed more often than any other as most in need of improving in their local area were "activities for teenagers" (41.1%). Anti social behaviour was increasingly seen as a problem with "parents not being made to take responsibility for the behaviour of their children" noted by 62.8% of respondents and "teenagers hanging around the streets" by 57.4%.

3.3 Younger people aged under 18 make up 17.9% of the population. They do well at school but need to leave the district if they wish to continue to study in Higher or Further Education. This group then tends to find work elsewhere in the country and do not return to South Holland, further distorting the age profile of the district in favour of older people. During consultation in the preparation of this policy, local young people said that they were aware that older people sometimes viewed them as "threatening" particularly when they were simply minding their own business. They felt this view of them was unjustified and they found it upsetting. Older people felt that there was not enough for younger people to do, that they were under occupied and then tended to be noisy while out and about on the streets. This was a concern echoed by Members. Members were also concerned at the poor educational attainment of those people choosing to stay in the District and supported any initiatives that would encourage continued vocational and professional training.

Relations between Indigenous residents and new migrants from the south of England

- 3.4. Less than half of South Holland respondents agreed with various community cohesion statements asked within the General Survey of 2006/07. The most striking response rate was to the question ‘this local area is a place where people from different racial or ethnic backgrounds get on well together, only 38.4% of South Holland people agreed with this. (The Audit Commission has re-based this figure for national comparison purposes and while the national rate was 79%, the South Holland rate was 58%. Nationally out of 387 areas only 10 scored less than 60% and there is a cluster of these districts around the Fens.)
- 3.5. Only 39.9% of local people thought “this local area is a place where residents respect ethnic differences between people”. Also only 46.3% of local people thought SHDC “caters well for people from different racial or ethnic backgrounds”. Agreement with each of these three community cohesion statements has increased since the General Survey of 2003/04 (undertaken prior to the large influx of European migrant workers) but the figures for 2006/07 are still very low indicating potential community tensions that have existed for some time but also very importantly these existed prior to the latest wave of new population from Europe.
- 3.6. Overall South Holland is a mid-ranking district in terms of the national Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2007). This measure takes account of the district’s sparse rural population and the consequent lack of services such as public transport, access to higher and further education and medical care. However, the lack of services is balanced against high employment rates – with low wages in some areas off-set by independent incomes in others. The district has two ward areas where deprivation is higher; St Paul’s Spalding and Sutton Bridge. But although it may be a factor in some parts of the district, deprivation alone cannot be responsible for such a poor community cohesion score.
- 3.7. South Holland’s aging population profile has been exacerbated by older people moving into the district from southern England. These new residents have been attracted to South Holland as it has low crime; affordable housing compared to the southern region and is perceived to offer an excellent quality of life. There is anecdotal resentment amongst more indigenous residents of this new group of people. This view was supported by older local residents during the consultation process for this policy who noted that although some of them had now lived in South Holland for over 10 years they were still considered to be “newcomers” and were not accepted in the same way as people who had a family history of living in the Fens.
- 3.8. However, this new group of residents has brought new attitudes with them from their experiences in their previous communities. For example, South Holland has a really low crime rate, but many people’s perception of crime is disproportionately high. Many of the newer groups of residents are retirees and have comfortable disposable incomes, having moved to more affordable housing in the district from high cost housing areas in the south of the country. They have the time and interest to get involved in local community groups and while this is to be commended it has also meant that through this they have gained considerable local influence that allows their attitudes to affect public opinion more widely.

Relations between indigenous residents and new migrants from Europe

- 3.9. Another challenge for community cohesion in South Holland is related to migrant workers. The Fens area has always had a large seasonal workforce due to its reliance on agricultural and food production industries. However after the European Accession in 2004 the area saw a large influx of migrant workers from the ex-eastern block states. The exact numbers are not known (there is no comprehensive data set) but there are estimated to be in excess of 5,000 additional people in South Holland. For example, between May 2004 and September 2007, 4,920 people from the A8 states registered under the Worker Registration Scheme as working in South Holland. Although there are limitations with this data, this is a good proxy for the number of migrant workers working in South Holland. The most commonly requested languages used with the Council are Russian, Polish and Portuguese. Nationally, South Holland and its neighbour Boston have received the largest number of EU nationals as migrant workers in the UK outside London. The sudden growth in non-UK nationals in the district has presented a range of issues for local communities.
- 3.10 This new community has been excellent for local businesses, providing a flexible workforce that enables businesses to respond to the demands of agricultural production and supply food swiftly and appropriately for the demands of the major supermarket chains. This ready supply of labour has undoubtedly ensured that many of the district's large scale food processing businesses have remained in South Holland and not considered re-locating. However, it is not uncommon to hear that local people feel that they do not get adequate access to local jobs and that the ready supply of migrant labour depresses local wage rates.
- 3.11 Considerable pressure has come to bear on the local housing market with many larger family homes becoming Houses in Multiple Occupation. Smaller, cheaper houses are also proving popular for both multi-occupation and individually rented/purchased homes for migrant families. There is anecdotal evidence that people that ran Bed and Breakfasts for the tourism trade now no longer worry about attracting tourists as they can fill all their rooms with workers. There is increased use of temporary caravan based accommodation across the district and it is common to see minibuses full of workers being driven from site to site.
- 3.12 However, South Holland has lived with this phenomenon for a number of years now. Migrant workers are more established in the district and research in 2006 (The Dynamics of Migrant Labour) showed that nearly 40% were interested in settling permanently in the UK. Many "migrant" workers are no longer "migrant" and are buying properties locally. As has been the case in other areas and with other groups of new migrants to the UK, there are early indications that certain nationalities are choosing to live near to each other – for social and community reasons. What is still unknown is how many will choose to stay and for how long – what the “churn” in this community will be. This makes forward planning for all public services extremely difficult.
- 3.13 It is estimated that there are an additional 450 school age children in the district due to migrant worker families, and while Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) has been challenged with teaching English as a second language for these children, their presence has prevented a number of primary schools from being considered for

closure as their rolls are no longer falling. It is a challenge for both Councils to help ensure that the communities integrate and not fragment.

- 3.14 Consultation in preparation of this policy saw young people of both the settled and the migrant communities stating that they did not mix well either in or out of school due to language barriers. Primary school aged children seemed to acquire English language skills very quickly, but there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that older pupils were being placed in lower ability streams at school; held back by their lack of language. Migrant workers have difficulty in accessing services such as health provision as they cannot speak adequate English. Voluntary groups such as the Citizens Advice Bureau that provide support and advocacy for all residents have also been challenged by the level of need for support and translation by members of this community. Members have been clear that while the Council will provide “on-demand” translation to assist residents to access our services, it is not this Council’s role to undertake English Language training. However, Members were very supportive of English conversation opportunities that could be arranged through volunteers in the community as they saw this as a way of helping the two communities to understand each other and bridge differences.
- 3.15 While many migrant workers are trying hard to fit into their local communities, the recent growth in numbers of migrant workers from overseas has also given rise to a political response. Prior to the 2007 District Council elections, South Holland District Council had the only sitting British National Party member in the East Midlands region - a councillor who changed to the BNP from his original elected party. In the 2007 elections the BNP fielded three candidates in Holbeach Town gaining over 600 votes each – setting these amongst the numerically largest number of votes for BNP candidates in the region. While none of the candidates were selected as Councillors, they did gain a significant proportion of the vote. Other BNP candidates across the East Midlands won seats with fewer votes for example in Charnwood (324), Brinsley Broxtowe (439) or North West Leicestershire (449). In other parts of the region, the BNP won seven seats in uncontested wards. The BNP are still very active and regularly leaflet homes in South Holland.
- 3.15 The issue of Gypsy and Traveller sites is also one that has caused local controversy. The Council has a legal obligation to identify sites suitable for permanent and transitory encampments. The planning process the Council has embarked upon from the autumn of 2007 to identify these sites has resulted in a great deal of local interest and a number of negative racial stereotyping comments being received by the Council. The Council’s Hate Crime reporting procedures have recently been revised and these will help to monitor the level of local response.
- 3.16 Members of the Policy Development Panel felt that the sort of issues they had heard expressed arising from the settled community in the debate concerning Traveller sites are that Travellers intended to settle instead of keeping moving and that the settled community felt Gypsies and Travellers were being given preferential treatment to the settled community. This is not the case. It is the purpose of the Council’s planning policies to ensure that all members of our local society are treated fairly and equitably within the parameters of the law. As part of the consultation process members of the public noted that the Council should prioritise work with the Gypsy and Traveller community more than it does at present.

4. IMPLEMENTATION

- 4.1. The Council has adopted the Local Government Association's definition of a cohesive community. This section of the Council's policy suggests ways that the Council can deliver its community cohesion principles. Each section of the definition is highlighted in bold and the Council's actions noted below it:

There is a common vision and sense of belonging

- 4.2 Members of the Council have an important and clear community leadership role. One of the Council's priorities is Democratic Community Leadership. There is a role for Members to embrace the changes within South Holland's communities and work to integrate the newer members of the population without alienating its longer standing residents.
- 4.3 Traditionally young people have little influence within the community, being the least likely to join influential local community bodies such as Parish Councils. The Council will work to counteract the negative views held by many residents concerning young people by supporting initiatives such as the Youth Council and by continuing to provide a range of outside school sports and cultural activities that encourages their positive participation and engagement.
- 4.4 The Council will continue to ensure that newer members of its population are included in local democratic processes from community consultation to playing an active role in local citizenship issues. It recognises that many members of its local population do not have English as their first language and so it will take steps to ensure this "hard to reach" group is catered for and its concerns appropriately addressed.

The diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and positively valued

- 4.5 The district has experienced rapid population change. Although the Council has undertaken extremely useful local research to understand the general nature of some of the changes that have taken place, it still needs to undertake more detailed specific research into the on-going changes and the demands that this is making on its local infrastructure and its community issues. It is a changing situation that gives rise to varying circumstances requiring a range of positive responses. The Council will share good practice and knowledge and where appropriate work collaboratively with its partners.
- 4.6 The Council will work to influence its partners, helping them to understand the issues that South Holland faces and the role that they can play in partnership with the Council to address and answer the issues within our local communities. It will do this primarily through the local strategic partnership; Rural Action Zone (RAZ). The Council is also an active partner of the local Community Safety Partnership and will work through this and other groups to ensure that community cohesion issues are fully addressed.
- 4.7 The Council will continue to promote "myth busting" through its publications and other work so that it addresses some of the incorrect issues that provide fuel for

underlying community tension. The Council will also seek to place positive news stories and tackle instances where media coverage may appear to be biased.

- 4.8 The Council will continue to seek to make the district one in which there is a high quality of life for all residents. It will continue in its role of maintaining open spaces and a clean and tidy street scene within the district. It will also prioritise the removal of racist graffiti and seek to prosecute those that choose to act in this manner. It will also encourage and support community events that celebrate local heritage, culture and traditions. SHDC needs to remove barriers to and promote opportunities for interaction e.g. language, timing of events, transport, location, cost etc

Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities

- 4.9 The Council's Equality Policy (2007) clearly states that services will be provided fairly and equitably across the district for all residents whatever their background. In May 2008, the council reached Level 2 and is now working towards gaining Level 3 of the Local Government Equality Standard and is using this process to ensure it meets its legal duties. This includes the duty to positively promote good relations between people of different races and backgrounds. Council staff's equality training will include the need to not collude with discriminatory attitudes expressed by customers and to encourage more inclusive and objective attitudes.
- 4.10 The Council will improve its hate crime reporting system and share this information with its partners. This will assist the police to monitor any tensions that may be arising and assist in forewarning of significant issues that might result in disorder.
- 4.11 The Council will also seek to influence funding agencies to provide additional resources into the district to enhance its own effort. The response to the changes that South Holland has experienced needs to be made over a considerable length of time and new attitudes and methods of support thoroughly embedded.
- 4.12 The Council will actively encourage people to participate in their local community. Effective communication is important if we are to empower people and give them the knowledge and confidence to be active citizens. This can be achieved through the local media, leaflets, websites and similar. The Council will seek to improve service information and access especially about very practical things such as which day to put your bin out!
- 4.13 One of the Council's priorities is Democratic Community Leadership and it will work to improve community and democratic participation.

Strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds and circumstances in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.

- 4.14 The Council has provided translated induction packs for local employers and will continue to maintain a migrant workers website to provide accessible and translated information for migrant workers. The Council's policy is translation on demand, not per se.
- 4.15 The Council works with its County Council colleagues in Children Services and sits on the Lincolnshire Children's Strategic Partnership and the Lincolnshire

Safeguarding Board. Through these groups it will seek to influence its partnership and so improve the experience for the children of new arrivals in the district within their school environments.

- 4.16 The Council will encourage relationships between schools and the indigenous and new arrival communities to develop interaction, mutual respect and understanding. Young people are ideally placed to help influence the wider community on community cohesion issues.
- 4.17 Within neighbourhoods, the Council will continue to seek ways in which it can assist with the integration of newly arrived people. It will work to prevent fragmentation and will address any negative or hostile feelings within its communities. It will do this through addressing and confronting hate crime issues, as well as by ensuring that newer residents have proper and equal access to its services.
- 4.18 The Council will continue to help and support the development of local community initiatives.
- 4.19 The Council currently positively addresses neighbourhood disputes not only through its role as a social landlord, but also in the private sector through an Anti-social Behaviour worker and an environmental protection service. The Council will seek to enhance this area of work wherever it can within the resources available to it.
- 4.19 As a landlord, the Council has over 1,000 sheltered housing units accommodating elderly residents. It has deployed “mosquitoes” to deter young people from congregating at inappropriate locations and will continue to do so. It will also continue to work in partnership with the local Community Police Support Officers in order to tackle neighbourhood issues quickly and so take residents concerns seriously.

5. MONITORING

5.1 The policy will be monitored in the following ways:

MONITORING ACTIVITY	PERSON RESPONSIBLE
This policy overall will be monitored by the Corporate Equality Working Group	HoECD
Partnership Working, influence	ACX
Continuing research into local population change and other community cohesion issues	ACX
Resource identification	All HoS
Anti-Social Behaviour work & Environmental Protection	HoCNS
Social integration issues and culture	HoECD

- 5.2 The Council will use the same Performance Indicators that the Government will be using to measure PSA 21 - “to build cohesive, empowered and active communities”. This will quantify change against three national indicators:
- The percentage of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area. (NI1)
 - The percentage of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood. (NI2)

- The percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality. (NI4)

6. POLICY CONSULTATION

- 6.1 This policy was sent for consultation to the Council's partners on the Rural Action Zone and to all Parish Councils. It was published on the Council's web pages and received local press coverage encouraging local people to comment. 19 written responses were returned to the Council.
- 6.2 In addition, three focus groups were held, one with migrant workers, one with older people and one with young people as representatives of the South Holland Youth Council.
- 6.3 The draft policy was also taken to two meetings of the Policy Development Panel on the 27th May and on the 11th June 2008. Officers were very grateful for Members' time and comments.
- 6.4 Comments received from this consultation process have been built into the policy.

POLICY APPROVAL

Draft Policy approved by SMT date: 25th February 2008
 Draft Policy approved by Cabinet date: 15th April 2008
 Final Policy approved by the Cabinet on: 15th July 2008

RELATED POLICIES & STRATEGIES

Strong and Prosperous Communities White Paper October 2006
Predictors of community cohesion: multi-level modeling of the 2005 Citizenship Survey
 Department for Communities and Local Government February 2008.
Government's Response to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion Dept of
 Communities and Local Government February 2008

Links to SHDC's:-

Corporate Equality Policy 2007
 Housing Strategy (2006 – 2011)
 Cultural Strategy 2007 – 2012
 Economic Development Strategy 2006 - 2009