



RACE ON THE AGENDA

RESPONSE: Draft Guidance on Community Cohesion

July 2002

1 Introduction

Race On The Agenda (ROTA) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the 'Draft Guidance on Community Cohesion'. However ROTA has a number of concerns regarding the method of consultation employed by the LGA, CRE and Home Office in the production of this draft guidance;

1. There has been little or no effort to consult fully with the Black Minority Ethnic communities of London or the voluntary organisation and community organisation that serve them. I do realise that at an early stage a meeting was held in Redbridge to discuss this draft, however this does not constitute engaging with London stakeholders.
2. There is a definite bias towards the northern cities within the tone and content of the guidance. If London local authorities are to have ownership of the guidance and to implement its aims successful, then London must be consulted fully. It is no longer acceptable to gather the Chief Executives of a few local authorities in a room and call it consultation. London is distinct culturally, geographically and economically from its regional counterparts, it is inappropriate and foolhardy to expect that policies on community cohesion as defined in Oldham and explored in Redbridge will be relevant to Tower Hamlets, Islington, Enfield, Greenwich, Lambeth etc. etc.

ROTA urges that the LGA, CRE and Home Office begin a programme of London-wide events (communities in London often cross Local Authority geographical boundaries) consulting on this amended guidance and looking at the nature of community cohesion.

ROTA would suggest before issuing this guidance consultation takes place with the Greater London Authority and their stakeholder groups and in addition pilot projects with additional funding be undertaken in areas such as, Thamesmead, Eltham, Camden (Somersetown), Bermondsey, or other areas in London with concern regard to community cohesion.

If there is not a visible commitment both in terms of centrally allocated resources and from London's stakeholders then ROTA fears this will yet again become 'bumf on shelves' for local authorities policy makers.

2 General Comments

The guidance frequently mentions 'minority and majority communities' or makes statements such as 'including the white community'. It must be made clear from the outset that implicit within the guidance definition of community, are all of the communities within any area, be they old or young, black or white.

ROTA suggests that the introduction section of the guidance begin with an inclusive definition of community, neighbourhood and communities, which will run throughout the document. Indeed this would be an opportunity to redefine community as the sum of its parts as oppose to a collection of disparate groupings.

3 Community Cohesion

ROTA firmly believes that a cohesive community is one where individuals and communities that are social excluded are provided with **positive action measures** from a multitude of public and private agencies, to ensure that opportunities many take for granted; education, employment, good quality housing etc. are available to all. We would encourage this objective to be included in the definition of a cohesive community.

In the section entitled Community Strategies, Race Equality Schemes and Community Cohesion Action Plans; it is clear there are a number of exciting policy guidance's and statutory obligations that local authorities have to meet regarding the community and obligations under the RRAA. It would appear nonsensical to have a separate Community Cohesion Action Plan separate from the Race Action Plans of local authorities, the guidance should ensure that Race Equality Schemes and Action Plans ensure Community Cohesion is equally weighted in its considerations. Indeed the processes and principles outlined in Race Equality Schemes sit well with an ongoing community cohesion strategy.

ROTA suggests the CRE include Community Cohesion guidance as part of Race Equality Scheme Guidance. These are not separate issues but part of a larger agenda.

4 Vision, Values and Strategic Objectives

Vision statements are of often-useful management tools within a number of organisations, very often vision statements do not translate to the wider community as a whole. ROTA recommends that any shared vision as well as being 'challenging and aspirational' should also make sense and be written in clear and accessible English. A good example of this is Lewisham's overall vision.

ROTA strongly supports the concept of a public commitment to community cohesion and envisages this as an opportunity to ensure young people in various communities have a chance to portray a positive self-image. It would be a missed opportunity to fall back on 'community leaders' or the usual suspects to promote community cohesion in an area.

An example of positive young role models forwarding the community agenda can be found in the Kick Racism Out of Football project and in a number of voluntary organisations throughout London.

5 Ownership of the Community Cohesion Agenda

ROTA welcomes the recognition of the role of the community within promoting community cohesion, however to ensure this the guidance must stress the importance of an effective communication strategy, that has the support of the public, private and voluntary sector. Again a central plank of communicating community cohesion must be to stress the positive

contribution that young people play in society. A high quality communications strategy would monitor:

- The portrayal of the allocation of funding to differing communities
- Positive portrayal of young people and children
- Monitoring of election material from local political parties for honesty
- Ensuring that all communities within a community are proactively targeted for information on; regeneration, the work of the council and other bodies

6 Community Organisations and You

ROTA welcomes the possibility of reviewing funding to incentivise community cohesion, however this must ensure that any outcomes would not jeopardise existing funding. Indeed a number of funders have policies that already promote community cohesion (the diversity of users for projects based in multicultural areas) however for a number of reasons these measures are not always fulfilled. This would be a good starting point when looking at voluntary sector funding.

ROTA would also like to see the guidance contain information on the positive nature of Compacts between the sectors and as a possible structure for working with the voluntary and community sectors. ROTA would also like to see examples of thinking outside the box when engaging young people, for example the routine inclusion of young people in care in the political process. In addition actively engaging young people at night-clubs and events where young people congregate or cement community links.

7 Housing

Desegregating housing is a complex issue that has provided years of debate for planning professionals, in London the problem is acute with a shortage of housing stock. Numerous policies from local government, regional government and central government have been published in the last few months in an attempt to provide new affordable housing. However all of these policies are in conflict with the Draft Guidance on Community Cohesion, if Britains decision-makers are determined to ensure that new build affordable housing is focused on 'key workers'. The allocation and management of existing London housing stock with regard to community cohesion would appear insignificant if new build allocation of housing is to be based on profession and not need.

ROTA recommends that this guidance ensure that local authorities that are working in partnership on large new housing development are mindful of their duty to excising communities.

8 Employment and Economy

ROTA recommends that local authorities encourage all employers in their area to strive to ensure their workforce reflects the community in which it is situated or serves.

9 Local Government as an Employer

ROTA recommends that local authorities workforce reflects the communities that it serves, and positive action measures are taken to ensure young disadvantaged people are brought onto the workforce, this could include the reintroduction of apprenticeships schemes and working with local education institutes.

10 Conclusion

In conclusion ROTA would wish to see the community cohesion agenda of which this is only one part widened to include all of our communities. At this stage the guidance and work around community cohesion has been policy driven, but to role out a national programme of work takes real commitment to all the communities in all the geographical areas of Britain and ROTA has seen no commitment to this in London.

About ROTA

Race On The Agenda (ROTA) is a social policy think tank devoted to the issues that affect London's Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) community. We work towards the elimination of discrimination and promote equality of opportunity and best practice.

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