



Community Cohesion 13th March 2015 Position Statement

Introduction:

The Voluntary and Community Sector plays a really important part in Community Cohesion issues and for this reason Hastings Community Network members nominated Community Cohesion as a theme for one of its networking events. The event, planned in partnership with Hastings Borough Council, looked at how the demographic of Hastings and St. Leonard's has been changing - how we need to adapt and respond to change, as well as consider the needs and aspirations of the diverse range of people living in the town. While acknowledging the successes already achieved, we also explored what has been learned and how we can minimize any risks which may be destabilizing. We want to make sure that Community Cohesion is firmly on the agenda for the future and explore how best to achieve a sense of place and identity amongst our community.

Overview of the event

We were delighted to welcome a range of speakers. Alex Ntung, Hastings Borough Council, presented aspects of the demographic make-up of Hastings and St Leonard's, highlighting its changing profile over recent years and introducing '*Many Voices, One Hastings.*' Following this, Professor Ted Cante CBE, founder of the iCoCo (Institute of Community Cohesion) Foundation, presented the context of Community Cohesion and Intercultural Relations. Globalisation has resulted in society becoming more dynamic and complex. Ted suggests that there is an opportunity to consider 'interculturalism', which is not defined by race, embracing all areas of difference. It views culture as more dynamic and fluid than some of the policies previously employed.

A range of local groups were invited to present case studies of how their work has been contributing to the Community Cohesion agenda, highlighting, from their perspective, how the demographics of Hastings and St Leonard's have changed over the past 10 years. Marc Turczanski, Links Project Co-ordinator (a multi-agency support and advice project for asylum seekers, refugees and new migrant communities living in East Sussex) explored how we can build trust with local communities. Mike Cornish from the Seaview Project talked about some of the most excluded groups in Hastings and St Leonard's and how Seaview works to support them. Women's Voice was represented by Shiva Serati and Mary Carter who gave us a brief history of Women's Voice, their range of activities and their intercultural approach. Opportunities and challenges were the theme of Oliur Rahman presentation from his perspective as Chair of Hastings Intercultural organization. The event was chaired by Steve Manwaring (Director of HVA) on behalf of the HCN Executive.

Fifty-five people attended the event (excluding organisers) with 45 members of the VCS and 10 from the statutory sector. The event was refreshing in that it engaged with many community leaders and activists who were not usually represented at events. It provided a safe space for an honest and challenging debate between sectors.

Key Issues

How can we respond to the changing town?

- *Leadership* – this should be at a community level. We can all change things. We do not need power to be active in our communities and speak to our neighbours. HBC should reflect what people want – funding and continuity.
- *Community Organisers* – important to organise communities. Hastings and St Leonard's bring people together through a diverse range of activities and community events.
- *What can communities do to bring about change?* Employ different ways of influencing? There is a need to engage with the system we have otherwise our voice will never be heard. Local Authorities still have a responsibility to facilitate this.
- *Create a sense of belonging* – Create a safe community space, for example, a women's cafe a joint project / venue for community groups. A community office (provided by HBC). Officers reflecting the communities they service.
- *Breakdown parallel lives* - This is achieved through integrated activities e.g. community festivals, art and sport. There is also a need for services to be inclusive e.g. Hastings Furniture Service. Good quality English teaching.
- *Develop Citizenship* – How is this implemented in our schools and becomes something embedded in every aspect of the school curriculum? What does this mean for Hastings and St Leonards?

What are the barriers / risks to the town that may destabilize cohesion? - Parallel lives:

- *Gentrification* – Whilst bringing money and a broader range of communities it can also bring displacement, economic exclusion, the alienation of communities and the polarisation of parallel lives.
- *Deprivation issues* – These remain and are potentially heightened by budget cuts and public sector withdrawal from services and supporting infrastructure. Loss of leadership. Negative perceptions of the town. Impact of digitalisation agenda.
- *Language* – Particularly for women.
- *Narrow geography* – Some local people have not visited the beach, are isolated or not using facilities.

Future Actions: As a result of the event Hastings Community Network will be:-

1. Strengthening HCN links with community groups, working to broaden the representation and channels to get voices heard within HCN, its Executive and to relevant partnerships;
2. Ensuring that the HCN Executive is as informed as much as possible by its membership;
3. Holding future event focussing on how to achieve an inclusive approach to the digitalisation agenda – the impact on individuals and service.
4. Maximising the unique representation at the event, for example, by linking participants to other discussions to shape local services such as East Sussex Better Together etc...
5. Ensuring that the information is fed back and informs discussion at the LSP;
6. Ensure that information about Health inequalities and funding to reduce them is made known to the widest possible audience; and
7. Using some of the information about Sport and Community Cohesion which came out of the conference to inform a partnership bid with Active Hastings to Sport England.

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