

# New Deal for Communities

## The National Evaluation

### Research Reports

#### **Housing and Community Cohesion: The Contribution of NDC Pathfinders**

Research Report 43

The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is currently sponsoring the 2002-2005 national evaluation of New Deal for Communities. This evaluation is being undertaken by a consortium of organisations co-ordinated by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University. The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the NRU/ODPM.

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# **Housing and Community Cohesion: The Contribution of NDC Pathfinders**

Research Report 43

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

1. This report explores the current and potential contribution of NDC housing activities to the objectives of the community cohesion agenda. It draws on evidence to emerge from research undertaken as part of the Housing and Physical Environment (HPE) Team's contribution to the National Evaluation of the NDC programme, which was closely allied to a national research programme, funded by the Housing Corporation and managed by the Chartered Institute of Housing, exploring the role of housing management in promoting community cohesion.
2. Housing and regeneration are recognised as key policy themes in guidance on community cohesion. The importance attached to housing and regeneration reflects their recognised potential to actively promote community cohesion, as well the contribution of certain aspects of policy and practice to the apparent crisis of cohesion in certain towns and cities. Housing policy and provision - and, in particular, allocations and lettings policies - was criticised for contributing to high levels of residential segregation. Regeneration activities were singled out for fostering animosities between groups and communities who perceive that they have lost out in the competition for funding.
3. The research approach involved a review of available evidence in an attempt to identify recognised good practice or instances where housing activities were actively promoting community cohesion. This was followed by case study analysis in four local authority areas with local NDC Partnerships and which had either community cohesion pathfinder or shadow pathfinder status. District level discussions in the case studies were followed by more detailed work in five neighbourhoods. These five neighbourhoods included two NDC Partnerships. This report draws heavily on evidence to emerge from these two case study neighbourhoods.
4. NDCs are both directly engaged in and facilitating the delivery of a wide range of housing programmes and initiatives. These activities include three key housing interventions that have been recognised as having the potential to make a significant contribution to community cohesion: the provision of new housing opportunities; tenant and resident engagement and participation and; tenancy management and support.

## NDC Partnerships and Community Cohesion

5. NDC officers recognised the real potential of the housing activities of NDC Partnerships to actively promote community cohesion. Most were also able to point to aspects of current housing activities that believed to be furthering community cohesion. There was little evidence to suggest, however, that the impact of these activities was an immediate concern during their design, development or implementation. Community cohesion did not appear to be actively mainstreamed within the housing activities of the NDC Partnerships and there was little evidence to suggest that NDC Partnerships have evaluated the impact (positive or negative) of their activities on community cohesion.
6. NDC Partnerships do not appear to be major players in local community cohesion partnerships. Nor was it apparent that any mechanisms existed for disseminating information, advice or details of the local community cohesion area plan to NDC Partnerships, although there was a stated commitment in one area plan to ensure that the local NDC Partnership contributes to the effective development of local cohesion criteria.

## Providing New Housing Opportunities

7. The refurbishment, renewal and remodelling of the local housing stock is central to the delivery programmes of numerous NDCs. In some instances, regeneration also involves

the development of new housing for ownership and to rent from housing associations. Providing new housing opportunities appropriate to the needs of people from different backgrounds can open up the constrained housing choices of groups traditionally disadvantaged in the local housing system. Consequently, new developments can help break down existing patterns of residential segregation. A major demolition and new build programme in one NDC Partnership illustrated these possibilities.

### **Community Participation and Engagement**

8. The housing activities of NDC Partnerships can serve as a useful vehicle for drawing residents and tenants into participatory structures. The involvement of a cross-section of tenants in participation activities at the neighbourhood level can help foster a shared understanding and a common sense of purpose and vision. Participation activities can also help foster improved appreciation of the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances.
9. One Partnership had developed various structures for keeping residents informed and empowering them to engage with and shape the decision-making process. These included the appointment of Residents' Friends, independent advisors employed to provide local people with advice about housing renewal and regeneration in the area. A Residents' Charter had also been developed, setting out the principal concerns raised for residents by the proposed regeneration of the estate and providing the basis on which negotiations between local residents and the NDC Board and local authority should take place. Alongside these initiatives, steps had been taken to widen participation.

### **Tenancy Management and Support**

10. Tenancy management and support activities are vital to the successful promotion of community cohesion. By providing a punitive response to criminal activity, anti-social behaviour and racial harassment, tenancy management can extend the housing choices of households traditionally excluded from certain neighbourhoods by fear of harassment and abuse. Tenancy support can help ensure that new opportunities result in long-term positive housing outcomes and can help foster a common sense of place and belonging and to develop understanding between people from different backgrounds.
11. NDC Partnerships are working with social and private landlords on initiatives designed to increase safety, reduce the incidence of criminal activity, anti-social behaviour and racial harassment and to effectively tackle such incidents as and when they occur. Specific initiatives have also been developed to tackle anti-social behaviour in the private sector. NDC Partnerships are also actively engaged in tenancy support activities, the help provided including assistance with practical issues, such as tenancy related matters, benefit problems, environmental concerns, safety issues and harassment problems.

### **Implications for NDC Partnerships**

12. As major regeneration vehicles NDC Partnerships should be involved in local community cohesion partnerships. They should be helping to set the local agenda and to define district-wide and neighbourhood level objectives and priorities for action. Doing so might involve educating the local agency taking the lead on community cohesion about the potential of NDC Partnership activities to further community cohesion.
13. It is important that NDC Partnerships collaborate with landlords active in their area to ensure that housing activities attend to local community cohesion priorities and, at very least, do not undermine community cohesion. In doing so Partnerships might take on the role of local community cohesion co-ordinator and educate statutory agencies and voluntary and community organisations in the local neighbourhood about community cohesion.

14. The pursuit of community cohesion must be integrated into all housing activities of NDC Partnerships. Only if the full range of activities are pursuing the same objectives will the potential of these activities to promote community cohesion be realised. It is also vital that NDC Partnerships review the positive and negative impact of current housing activities on community cohesion and reform delivery mechanisms as and when required.
15. The final section of this report draws on lessons learnt across the four case study local authority districts by NDC Partnerships and social landlords to provide helpful hints about how NDC Partnerships might fulfil the potential of their housing activities in three broad areas – renewal and new build, tenant and resident involvement and tenancy support and management - to promote community cohesion.

# 1. Introduction

This report explores the current and potential contribution of NDC housing activities to the objectives of the community cohesion agenda. It draws on evidence to emerge from research undertaken as part of the Housing and Physical Environment (HPE) Team's contribution to the National Evaluation of the NDC programme. The research was closely allied to a national research programme, funded by the Housing Corporation, managed by the Chartered Institute of Housing and supported by the Home Office, exploring the role of housing management in promoting community cohesion (Robinson, D., 2004).

## 1.1. Housing and Community Cohesion: The Policy Context

The community cohesion agenda emerged in the aftermath of the street disturbances in the summer of 2001 in a number of northern towns and cities. Various local and national reports were commissioned to examine the background to the disturbances and all drew attention to the fracturing of local communities and the existence of 'parallel lives', whereby different communities and populations were seen to live, work and socialise separately (Independent Review Team, 2001).

Residential segregation was blamed for limited interaction between different groups, which prevents the development of common goals and a shared vision through which greater harmony and tolerance can emerge. Housing policy and provision - and, in particular, allocations and lettings policies - were criticised for contributing to high levels of residential segregation and identified as having a key role to play in promoting community cohesion. Regeneration activities were also singled out for criticism, the various reports recognising the potential of area based initiatives to foster animosities among groups and communities who perceive that they have lost out in the competition for regeneration funds.

The various reports into the disturbances in 2001 made a series of recommendations for action and in 2002 guidance on community cohesion for local authorities and their partners was published (LGA et al., 2002). The guidance included a widely quoted broad working definition of community cohesion as:

- a common vision and sense of belonging for all communities
- the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued
- those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities
- strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different background in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods

Specific community cohesion guidance has also been published for agencies and organisations involved in the design, development and delivery of Area Based Initiatives (ODPM, 2003).

In 2002 the government launched the Community Cohesion Unit (CCU), located in the Home Office, which strives to ensure relevance and sensitivity to community cohesion in government policy and seeks to encourage new learning through the Community Cohesion Pathfinder Programme. The Pathfinder programme was launched in 2003 with the aim of developing good-practice examples of areas that are 'getting community cohesion right'. Fourteen Pathfinders were approved and a further 14 shadow pathfinder areas were invited to join with Pathfinders in sharing good practice. In addition, the guidance on community cohesion emphasises the need for all local authorities to attend

to community cohesion. A suggested first step is a baseline assessment of how effectively current practice and programmes promote community cohesion. The guidance also identifies the community leadership role of local authorities as being central to the successful development of cohesive communities.

## 1.2. The Research Approach

The evaluation involved three key tasks. First, a review of available evidence was undertaken, which attempted to identify recognised good practice or instances where housing management, including renewal activities, were actively promoting community cohesion. This review drew on housing management guidance and research evidence, as well as a review of NDC Partnership Reports, the housing strategies in NDC Delivery Plans and the NDC Programme Report 2003 to identify initiatives relevant to community cohesion currently in development or being delivered by NDC Partnerships.

The second stage of the research involved case study analysis in four local authority areas with local NDC Partnerships located in the North West, Yorkshire, the East Midlands and London, which had either community cohesion pathfinder or shadow pathfinder status. Initially the team engaged in discussions with key agencies across the district with a responsibility for community cohesion (local community cohesion lead officers, partnership members, race equality officers and such like) and housing strategy and management, including housing associations, local housing authorities and stock transfer agencies (ALMOs and transfer associations). These discussions explored the understanding of and attitudes toward community cohesion and the role that housing might play in promoting community cohesion in the area.

Finally, district level discussions were followed up by more detailed work in five neighbourhoods across the four case study local authority areas, focusing in on the development and delivery of specific housing initiatives and exploring their contribution to community cohesion. The views and opinions of senior management and front-line officers in a range of agencies in each neighbourhood were canvassed, as well as a small sample of local people. These five neighbourhoods included NDC Partnerships in London and the North West. This report draws heavily on evidence to emerge from these two case study neighbourhoods.

## 1.3. NDC Housing Activities and Community Cohesion: The Focus of this Report

NDCs are both directly engaged in and facilitating the delivery of a wide range of housing programmes and initiatives. A review of the Partnership reports produced as part of the main phase of the national evaluation of NDC reveals these activities to include three key housing interventions that have been recognised as having the potential to make a significant contribution to the community cohesion agenda (Robinson, D., 2003):

- **helping to provide new housing opportunities** - through the refurbishment and remodelling of the existing stock and the development of new housing
- **encouraging tenant and resident engagement and participation** - for example, through consultation and the master-planning as part of the housing renewal process
- **promoting tenancy management and support** - through neighbourhood management activities and partnership working with social landlords to develop tenancy support schemes

This report considers each of these activities in turn, scoping the particular contribution that Partnerships can make to the objectives of the community cohesion agenda through involvement in these activities and identifying if and how this potential is being fulfilled. First, however, the engagement of NDC Partnerships with the community cohesion agenda and the attention paid to community cohesion concerns in the housing activities of Partnerships is reviewed.

## **2. NDC Partnerships and Community Cohesion**

Housing and regeneration are recognised as policy themes of particular importance in guidance on community cohesion. The importance attached to housing and regeneration reflects their recognised potential to actively promote community cohesion, as well as their acknowledged role in contributing toward the apparent crisis of cohesion in certain towns and cities. Although there is no formal expectation that NDC partnerships will actively engage with community cohesion pathfinders, it might therefore be assumed that NDC partnerships will be working closely with local community cohesion partnerships and assisting with delivery of local community cohesion action plans. It might also be expected that NDC Partnerships, in tandem with their housing partners (housing associations, local housing authorities, ALMOs, tenant management organisations, private developers and such like), are directly addressing and actively seeking to promote community cohesion through their housing activities. The situation in the four case study districts, however, often failed to live up to these expectations.

### **2.1. NDC Partnerships and Community Cohesion Pathfinders**

NDC Partnerships do not appear to be major players in local community cohesion partnerships. There are some examples of NDCs being engaged with their local community cohesion partnership, for example, as part of a leadership development programme intended to develop local community cohesion champions. There was no evidence in the four case studies, however, that NDC Partnerships were formally engaged in community cohesion pathfinder partnerships. Nor was it apparent that any mechanisms existed for disseminating information, advice or details of the local community cohesion area plan to NDC Partnerships, although there was a stated commitment in one area plan to ensure that the NDC contributes to the effective development of local cohesion criteria.

The reasons for the limited involvement of NDC Partnerships with their local community cohesion partnership are unclear. It may be that the local baseline review of how current practices are promoting community cohesion has focused attention on other policy areas. NDC Partnerships, however, are active across a broad spectrum of policy themes identified as vital to the promotion of community cohesion. Another possible explanation is that the local community cohesion programme is focusing on neighbourhoods outside the NDC area. This was the situation in at least one case study, where the community cohesion area plan focused on fostering cohesion within ethnically diverse neighbourhoods and the NDC was located in a predominantly white neighbourhood. Even in this example, however, there is an urgent need for the local community cohesion agenda to engage with the NDC Partnership, given the divisive consequences that can stem from the perception that regeneration activities are favouring particular groups at the expense of others.

### **2.2. Mainstreaming Community Cohesion**

NDC Partnerships are contributing to community cohesion in their local neighbourhoods in numerous ways. The most obvious contribution is being made through community engagement activities, an area in which many Partnerships have been recognised as acting decisively and successfully engendering social networking within neighbourhoods and helping to restore the local social infrastructure (Marshall, F., 2003). What is less clear is the extent to which these and other housing activities are merely happening to promote community cohesion, rather than consciously seeking to further community cohesion.

NDC officers recognised the real potential of the housing activities of NDC Partnerships

to further community cohesion objectives. Most were also able to point to aspects of current housing activities that they believed were furthering community cohesion. These claims could not be validated, but seemed reasonable when considered alongside the broad working definition of community cohesion contained in the official guidance. There was little evidence to suggest, however, that impact on community cohesion was an immediate concern during the design, development or implementation of housing initiatives.

Community cohesion does not appear to be actively mainstreamed within the housing activities of the NDC Partnerships. There is little evidence to suggest that NDC Partnerships have evaluated the impact (positive or negative) of their activities on community cohesion. This finding raises a fundamental question. Without considering the impact of their housing activities on community cohesion, how can NDC Partnerships be sure that their actions are not having negative, as well as a positive, consequences for community cohesion? The answer, of course, is that they cannot. There is therefore a danger that the housing activities of NDC Partnerships could unknowingly undermine the gains made in promoting community cohesion by other housing agencies and through the activities of the NDC Partnership in other policy realms (crime, health, education).

NDC Partnerships are not alone in their failure to consider the consequences of their actions for community cohesion in the local area. Few social landlords surveyed as part of the wider evaluation of housing management and community cohesion were aware if and how policy and practice might be undercutting community cohesion, not having reviewed the impact of practice on cohesion (Robinson et al., 2004). This fact raises a major concern for NDC Partnerships. If social landlords active in the NDC area are unaware if and how practice might be undercutting community cohesion, how can NDC Partnerships be sure that any gains made through their own activities are not been undercut by the policies and practices of landlords? This possibility points to the need for a collaborative approach to community cohesion. The aim should be to harmonise objectives and to minimise the likelihood that any gains made by one agency are wiped out by the practices of another.

### **2.3. The Contribution of NDC Housing Activities to Community Cohesion**

Despite little evidence that the housing activities of NDC Partnerships are consciously addressing or actively seeking to promote community cohesion, it is still possible to provide examples of housing activities that appear to be furthering community cohesion. These examples are reviewed in the following three chapters, under the following headings:

- providing new housing opportunities
- encouraging community engagement with housing issues
- promoting tenancy management and support

### 3. Providing New Housing Opportunities

The refurbishment, renewal and remodelling of the local housing stock is central to the delivery programmes of numerous NDCs. In some instances, regeneration also involves the development of new housing for ownership and to rent from housing associations.

#### 3.1. Potential to Contribute to Community Cohesion

Guidance on community cohesion emphasises the importance of guaranteeing that new housing opportunities are relevant and appropriate to a diverse range of needs in order to ensure the attractiveness of properties to as wide a range of households and groups as possible. Doing so can help ensure that new housing opportunities are appropriate to the needs of people from different backgrounds and open up the constrained housing choices of groups traditionally disadvantaged in the local housing system. Consequently, new developments can help break down existing patterns of residential segregation.

To summarise, the provision of new housing opportunities provides the opportunity to foster community cohesion by:

- remodelling the local stock to better meet the needs of the local population and to provide appropriate housing opportunities for all
- attracting new tenants from traditionally excluded groups through the provision of more relevant accommodation types and tenure opportunities
- improving the physical environment and quality of life of local residents and to foster community sustainability
- widening housing choices and countering segregation

#### 3.2. An Example from the NDC Partnerships

Central to the NDC programme in one case study is the demolition and renewal of some 1,500 properties. The Masterplan draws in a range of partners, including the local authority, housing associations and private developers. The overarching objective is to improve the quality of life of people living in the neighbourhood, but fundamental to the proposals are two key concerns of immediate relevance to community cohesion:

- **sustaining the existing community** – to this end the Masterplan commits to provide the same number of social rented properties as currently exist on the estate and has guaranteed that all residents wishing to remain on the estate will be able to, once renewal is complete
- **increasing the social mix** – integral to the Masterplan is the development of new properties for sale, the aim being to diversify the stock base and, in doing so, the social and economic profile of the local population. Given the commitment to maintain the same number of social rented properties, the development of private properties will demand an increase in density levels

A collaborative partnership between the NDC and the local authority has been central to the development of the Masterplan. Local housing managers have been seconded to the NDC to assist with development and implementation of the plan and the local authority has left the area out of plans to transfer its stock to an ALMO, to simplify the process of developing and implementing such an extensive programme of intervention. Of particular relevance to community cohesion is the master-planning process, which

has involved the active engagement of local residents in decision-making process about the future of the area and included efforts to reach out to traditionally hard-to-reach and excluded groups. Steps had also to be taken to clarify what is going to happen in the neighbourhood and allay resident fears (see chapter 4). NDC officers suggested that this process had been important in bringing together local people and fostering a shared vision and commitment to the local area amongst an increasing proportion of the local population.

### 3.3. Risks and Warnings

Clearly, this programme of renewal puts the NDC Partnership in a strong position to deliver on the potential of housing development to contribute to community cohesion. There is also the risk, however, that these activities could undercut community cohesion. It is therefore important that Partnerships are alive and attend to these risks:

- it is important that partnerships work to avoid the tensions that can arise because of real or perceived biases in the focus of renewal activities, by clearing spelling out the basis on which funding decisions are made and allocating resources through an open and transparent process:

*“We are focusing on the worst areas but we try and make sure that each area gets a bit of something. We try hard to be very fair. Residents are aware of how money is being distributed. Some tenants do feel aggrieved because their belief is that it is not being distributed fairly but we can show that it is. These perceptions sometimes come by word of mouth or the national press.”* Senior NDC Officer.

- a detailed understanding of local neighbourhoods and careful preparatory work and ongoing support and dialogue with residents is essential when moving people out of an area, for example, to undertake demolition and building work, in order to avoid undermining local social networks and driving local people away from the area
- the design and layout of new properties will need to recognise the requirements of different sections of the population if housing opportunities are going to be provided for all groups and interests in the area and the resentments that can arise from certain groups perceiving that an initiative is not meeting their needs and they have ‘lost out’ are to be avoided
- the changing social profile of the local population and the inward movement of new residents could create tensions that will need to be carefully monitored and managed, through resident support and management initiatives targeted at new and long-standing residents
- some new residents will need support when moving into the area, to forge social networks, to access services and facilities and to foster a commitment to the area. Work may also be necessary with existing residents to limit suspicion and tensions between new and exiting residents

*“The neighbourhood management of this area is going to be key. And that includes the private development. In terms of socio-economic, this will be a more mixed community. That’s a good thing, but from a community cohesion viewpoint it needs careful management.”* NDC Chief Executive.

- partnerships will need to work closely with private sector agencies (landlords, letting agents and such like) to manage the neighbourhood management headaches that might arise from increasing the size of the private sector on an estate, given the

more limited range of powers available for dealing with anti-social behaviour in the private sector

- it is vital that NDC partnerships are mindful of the allocation and lettings policies of landlords in their area. The allocations and lettings policies of housing associations and local authorities are capable of bringing about major changes in the profile of the local population. Particular attention will need to be paid to the mechanisms through which newly built, remodelled or renovated properties are let and which households benefit from these new housing opportunities

## 4. Tenant and Resident Engagement and Participation

Many Partnerships have recognised community engagement as a key priority and have developed initiatives to promote resident involvement. Analysis of the 39 Delivery Plans undertaken in 2002 found that Partnerships had instigated a range of initiatives designed to promote community engagement and a review of Partnership activities in autumn 2002 reported a host of community involvement projects, including community surgeries, the recruitment of community involvement officers, credit unions, informal consultation through festivals and events, resident panels and committees, newsletters and the employment of local residents (Marshall, F., 2003). Partnerships had also often engaged in detailed consultation and master-planning exercises with local people about remodelling of their local neighbourhood and the refurbishment of existing properties and development of new housing opportunities.

### 4.1. Potential to Contribute to Community Cohesion

Guidance on community cohesion and the recommendations contained in the various reports into the disturbances in 2001 emphasise the importance of promoting contact and fostering understanding between tenants and residents from different groups and communities. The involvement of a cross-section of tenants in participation activities at the neighbourhood level can help foster a shared understanding and a common sense of purpose and vision. Participation activities can also help foster improved appreciation of the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances and how they might be better appreciated in service provision. Finally, drawing together between people from different backgrounds in a working partnership can help foster improved relations between people in the local neighbourhood:

*“There’s no magic wand for community cohesion. Cohesion does occur around issues. Every resident has different things that are important to them. Getting people together to discuss and deal with the issues is where you get community cohesion.”* NDC Chief Executive.

To summarise, fostering tenant and resident involvement can promote community cohesion by:

- fostering a shared understanding and a common sense of purpose and vision
- assisting with efforts to ensure that the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated in service delivery
- assisting in developing strong and positive relationships between people within local neighbourhoods

### 4.2. An Example from the NDC Partnerships

The housing regeneration and renewal activities of NDC Partnerships can serve as a useful vehicle for drawing residents and tenants into participatory structures, giving people a clear reason to engage and providing a focus for deliberations. It is also vital that the fears and concerns of local residents about proposed plans for their neighbourhood are allayed, through the dissemination of information and advice and participation in decision-making. One Partnership had recognised this fact and developed various structures for keeping residents informed and empowering them to engage with and inform the decision-making process:

- **providing information and advice** - Residents’ Friends had been appointed by a panel of local residents to provide local people with advice about proposals for

housing renewal in the NDC area. The stated aim was to ensure that residents receive information in a clear and balanced way, so they can better understand what the proposals will mean for themselves, their neighbours and the neighbourhood

- **giving tenants a say** - one particular innovation is the development of a Residents' Charter. The Charter was initially drawn up by a small group of local residents and attempted to state the principal concerns raised for residents by the proposed regeneration of the estate. Following consultation with fellow residents, the intention is for the Charter to form the basis of negotiations between local residents and the NDC Board and the local authority about the specifics of the regeneration programme. Once a form of words has been agreed between these key stakeholders, the Charter will then be used as a basis for negotiating with all agencies involved in building or managing the housing on the estate now and in future
- **widening participation** - the success of these resident centred initiatives rests on the ability of participation and consultation structures to effectively engage the representative cross-section of the local population. Recognising this fact, a widening participation scheme has been developed and supported through the commitment of major resources. The aim of the scheme is to reach out to a range of often excluded or overlooked groups in the local population and to draw them into the decision making process:

*"We're the only NDC with a 'Widening Participation' theme and we spend £5 million on it. There are nine sub-groups in that range, from elderly, youth, voluntary sector, gay and lesbian, Somali group, refugee group etc. etc. So we're reaching out to all these different groups, which connects people, gives them a voice and enables them to participate in decision-making processes."*  
NDC Chief Executive.

### 4.3. Risks and Warnings

This programme of activities puts the NDC Partnership in a strong position to cash in on the potential of tenant and resident involvement to contribute toward community cohesion in the local area. There is also a danger, however, that participation activities will prove divisive and undermine community cohesion:

- consultation, participation and active involvement can serve to raise expectations. Failing to meet these expectations can have serious consequences for the sustainability of an area, as people become disillusioned with the NDC programme and commitment to the neighbourhood, raised by the arrival of NDC, begins to wane. It is therefore important that partnerships are honest and realistic regarding proposals for the neighbourhood and keep residents informed about ongoing developments, successes and failings
- inequalities in the power or influence exercised by different groups in the local population can stem from the inadequate representation of certain interests on participatory structures. The result can be resentment and tensions between individuals, particularly if one group is perceived to be benefiting at the expense of another. It is therefore vital that the diversity of the local population is recognised and represented:

*"One big issue is which community members are involved. [NDC area] is a small place, and it seems to be the same community reps popping up all the time. And they don't necessarily represent the whole of the community. I think there is a real problem with large sectors of the community being poorly*

*represented on steering groups and boards etc. For community cohesion that's very negative, and probably suggests it's a bit dismal."* NDC Housing Development Officer.

- involving people from different groups must be recognised as intensive exercise, demanding a range of skills (community language expertise, negotiation skills, appreciation of the recent history of the area and different groups etc.) and significant resources:

*"We knew we could never crack the consultation at the macro level. We had to do it at the micro level. Every door was knocked. Every block had at least two coffee mornings to answer questions. All the staff put a lot of effort in."* NDC Chief Executive.

- it is important that partnerships do not make assumptions about the groups and communities that resident representatives are able to speak to on behalf of and thereby inadvertently excluding certain interests from participatory structures
- the operating principles of consultation events and participatory structures can serve to restrict the willingness and ability of some individuals and groups to access and contribute. Careful consideration should be given to the time and location of meetings, how meetings are managed, standards of acceptable behaviour and such like

## 5. Tenancy Management and Support

NDC Partnerships are working with social and private landlords on initiatives designed to increase safety, reduce the incidence of criminal activity, anti-social behaviour and racial harassment and to effectively tackle such incidents as and when they occur. Examples include the formation of cross-tenure anti-social enforcement teams and the recruitment of neighbourhood wardens. The effects of excluding anti-social tenants from social housing, who are subsequently re-housed in the private rented sector, have also been recognised and specific initiatives have been developed to tackle anti-social behaviour in the private sector.

NDC Partnerships are also actively engaged in tenancy support activities. Help and assistance is being offered to local people through drop-in services and outreach workers, often focusing on vulnerable households. The help provided includes assistance with practical issues, such as tenancy related matters, benefit problems, environmental concerns, safety issues and harassment problems. Tenancy support can also involve pastoral care, such as introducing new residents to their neighbours.

### 5.1. Potential to Contribute to Community Cohesion

Tenancy management and support activities are vital to the successful promotion of community cohesion. By providing a punitive response to criminal activity, anti-social behaviour and racial harassment, tenancy management can extend the housing choices of households traditionally excluded from certain neighbourhoods by fear of harassment and abuse. Tenancy support can help ensure that new opportunities result in long-term positive housing outcomes and, together with tenancy management, can help with efforts to foster a common sense of place and belonging and to develop understanding between different people from different backgrounds.

To summarise, tenancy management and support can promote community cohesion by:

- limiting the fear and experience of abuse, harassment and violence that can restrict the housing choices of particular groups by undermining their willingness to consider living in certain areas
- tackling anti-social and nuisance behaviour and crime that impact on quality of life and undercut community sustainability
- limiting the incidents (abuse, harassment, violence) that can create divisions between different groups from different backgrounds and foster tensions
- asserting the principles and standards of tolerance and respect that are central to community cohesion

### 5.2. An Example from the NDC Partnerships

One NDC Partnership has developed an intensive housing management initiative in partnership with the local authority, providing tenancy support and management. The project is designed to meet two key objectives. First, the project aims to enhance the sustainability of the NDC area by supporting vulnerable tenants to maintain their tenancy, thereby reducing turnover and churning in the local population:

*"It's to help sustain tenancies. There's been very high turnover and a number of people unable to create a home and look after themselves in it. There's people that need a lot of support from many different agencies and not getting it in many 'cause they don't know how to access services."* Intensive Housing Support Manager.

Second, the project aims to improve the quality of life for local authority tenants on estates in the NDC area by tackling problems, including crime and the fear of crime, anti-social behaviour and neighbour nuisance.

The project was developed in response to evidence from household surveys and monitoring data collected by agencies including the police and the local authority, that highlighted a number of problems that were undercutting quality of life in the local area. The project is funded jointly by the NDC Partnership and the local authority, in the first instance, for five years. NDC funding and involvement was reported to have proved vital to the development of the project, providing resources for extra staffing, covering start-up costs and ensuring a tie-in with other local NDC funded projects (for example, the funding of a dedicated police officer to cover the local authority estates in the area).

The project team consists of 16 full-time employees, including a local housing manager, four community management workers, a tenancy enforcement officer, a senior caretaker, an estate caretaker and seven mobile caretakers, as well as an administrative officer. Tenancy management and support activities provided by this team include:

- **caretaking** - delivering improvements to the local environment, forging closer relations between the community and housing services, identifying environmental crimes and anti-social behaviour and prompting a rapid response from the relevant agencies
- **security patrol** - providing a visible presence in an attempt to deter crime and anti-social behaviour, deal with problems as and when they arise and thereby limit the likelihood of incidents escalating
- **tenancy enforcement officers** - leading a response to incidents of neighbour nuisance and anti-social behaviour. This is a cross-tenure service provided throughout the NDC area
- **community management activities** - dedicated workers providing intensive practical and social support to tenants, targeting vulnerable groups and new tenants in an attempt to limit tenancy failure and reduce turnover. The service also provides a bridge between tenants and statutory service providers, engages with individuals involved in anti-social offences and supports the work of community groups in the area

Early wins in the first year of the project were reported to include:

- the discovery of vulnerable tenants, disengaged from service provision, who have subsequently been referred to appropriate services
- partnership working with the police and the tenancy enforcement team has begun to impact on the level of crime and anti-social behaviour in the area
- improvement in the maintenance of tenancies among vulnerable tenants, resulting in a slight reduction in turnover and void rates
- anecdotal evidence of an improved 'community spirit' among local residents
- reported improvements in relations between different community groups living in the area, although it was suggested that these gains could be undermined by the failure of participatory structures to engage all sections of the local community

### 5.3. Risks and Warnings

This programme appears to be delivering the recognised potential of tenancy management and support activities to contribute toward community cohesion. There

remains, however, the risk that these activities could also undermine community cohesion:

- the good practice of one landlord can be undone by the failure of another (social or private) to work to the same agenda or standards. It is therefore important to secure the commitment and co-operation of all landlords to tenancy management and support initiatives
- the failure of initiatives to deliver noticeable improvements in the problems encountered by local residents can serve to reinforce negative perceptions of both the NDC programme and the future of the neighbourhood, undermining commitment to the neighbourhood among current and prospective residents and threatening the future sustainability of the area. Partnerships therefore need to be realistic in their projections and trumpet their successes, as well as explaining their failings
- it is vital to act swiftly in cases of nuisance or anti-social behaviour or racial harassment. Failure to do so can serve to undercut commitment to the neighbourhood among particular groups vulnerable to persecution and victimisation, including minority ethnic households, undercutting the willingness to consider living in the area and thereby risking increasing segregation
- the effective delivery of tenancy management and support demands inter-agency co-operation, although multi-agency working can prove problematic:

*“There’s some (agencies) that are very keen, like police, housing, environmental services. Then there’s others that are very difficult to engage with; social services, education, health. We’re banging our heads against a brick wall getting them involved. And they’re the ones needed. Even we have difficulty getting them (local residents) referred to the appropriate people. And they’re really major issues too.”* Intensive Housing Management Officer.

## **6. Implications for NDC Partnerships**

NDC Partnerships have the potential to make a significant contribution to community cohesion through their housing activities. This chapter provides a series of suggestions to help NDC Partnerships realise this potential, working in collaboration with local housing agencies and community cohesion pathfinders. Observations are organised into two sections. The first looks at the need for NDC Partnerships to formally engage with the community cohesion agenda and to forge a common understanding with landlords working in the NDC area. Finally, some key lessons are drawn out from the case studies about how to maximise the contribution that NDC Partnerships can make to community cohesion through their housing activities.

### **6.1. Engaging with the Community Cohesion Agenda**

#### **NDC Partnerships and Community Cohesion Partnerships**

As major regeneration vehicles active across the key policy themes recognised as having a role to play in promoting community cohesion, NDC Partnerships should be involved in local community cohesion partnerships. They should be helping to set the local agenda and to define district-wide and neighbourhood level objectives and priorities for action. The fact that they are not suggests that NDC partnerships urgently need to educate the local agency taking the lead on community cohesion (typically the local authority or Local Strategic Partnership) about their potential to further community cohesion. To this end, Partnerships might need to highlight their potential to make a significant contribution to changes in the local environment, the housing stock and the local tenant base, to advance resident involvement, to counter criminal and nuisance behaviour and to assist vulnerable residents.

#### **NDC Partnerships and Local Landlords**

As well as engaging with local community cohesion delivery structures, it is important that NDC Partnerships collaborate with landlords active in their area to ensure that housing activities attend to local community cohesion priorities and, at the very least, do not undermine community cohesion. NDC Partnerships are the agency best placed and most able to foster this collaborative approach at the neighbourhood level and might take on the role of local community cohesion co-ordinator. In fulfilling this role, NDC Partnerships should educate statutory agencies and voluntary and community organisations in the local neighbourhood about community cohesion.

#### **Mainstreaming Community Cohesion**

The pursuit of community cohesion must be integrated into all housing activities of NDC Partnerships. Only if the full range of activities (development, renewal and refurbishment, allocations and lettings, tenancy management and support and tenant participation) are 'on-side' and working toward the same objectives will the potential of these activities to promote community cohesion be realised. It is also vital that NDC Partnerships review the positive and negative impact of current housing activities on community cohesion and reform delivery mechanisms as and when required.

### **6.2. Fulfilling the Potential of Housing to Promote Community Cohesion**

This section draws on lessons learnt across the four case study local authority districts by NDC Partnerships and social landlords to provide helpful hints about how NDC Partnerships might fulfil the potential of their housing activities to promote community cohesion.

## **Providing New Housing Opportunities**

NDC Partnerships can help ensure they fulfil the potential of housing renewal, refurbishment and new build to promote community cohesion by:

- providing local intelligence about inadequacies in current housing provision and the requirements and preferences of different groups in the neighbourhood regarding housing design, layout, size and tenure
- requiring new developments to respond to local intelligence about the requirements and preferences of different population groups, including any groups traditionally disadvantaged in the local housing market
- acknowledging and accommodating the cost implications of responding to the need for specific stock types, such as housing for larger families, when resourcing new housing opportunities
- working with local landlords to reach agreement on lettings policies that ensure that existing and refurbished, remodelled and newly built properties are available and accessible to all sections of the local population. This will necessitate recognising and responding to aspects of allocation and lettings policies that have in the past disadvantaged particular groups (actions of individual officers and institutional procedures and practices)
- monitoring the outcomes (applications, tenancy offers, acceptances and refusals and long-term housing outcomes) of new lettings schemes for different groups and household types and respond to evidence
- providing information about the social landlords active in the neighbourhood and the accommodation they provide in a manner accessible to all local people. It is particularly important that people understand local allocations and lettings policies and that the process is recognised as fair and transparent, in order to counter suspicions and concerns about equality of treatment and access to housing

## **Tenant and Resident Participation and Engagement**

NDC Partnerships can help ensure they fulfil the potential of tenant and resident involvement to promote community cohesion by:

- questioning whether existing structures are representative and working to widen participation. This might involve a review of the exclusionary and discriminatory consequences of current resident engagement activities (nature of meetings, location, venue, time etc.)
- where necessary, developing new participation structures in consultation with all groups and interests, that are inclusive and representative of the local population
- asserting the principles of equality and anti-discrimination and ensuring procedures are in place to tackle disputes and disagreements between participating groups and tenants, including racism and other forms of discriminatory behaviour
- making the resources available to support the planning, development and implementation of new and innovative tenant participation programmes to facilitate the involvement of all sections of the local population
- utilising new and innovative means of engaging tenants in formal participation structures, such as leafleting and personal contact, and encouraging resident feedback, through resident focus groups and door-to-door surveys

## Tenancy Management and Support

NDC Partnerships can fulfil the potential of tenancy management and support to promote community cohesion by:

- helping to develop local intelligence about the locations and situations in which tenancy management initiatives are required
- involving all social and private landlords in tenancy management initiatives, given the possibility that the problems encountered by the tenant of one landlord might well be caused by a tenant of another landlord
- disseminating guidelines to local residents about unacceptable behaviour and action to be taken as and when incidents occur
- working with landlords to help ensure that tenancy support initiatives are in place to support tenants likely to experience problems (new tenants, people new to the area, groups known to be vulnerable to harassment etc.)
- working with landlords and other service providers to co-ordinate support services that can often be disconnected and overlapping, the aim being an effective and efficient local service base capable of responding to the variable needs of local tenants (ranging from intensive and personal support through to emergency on-call support and alarm systems)
- informing local people about how to report racist harassment or abuse or other forms of intimidation and violence and explaining what action will be taken
- ensuring staff engaged in tenancy support and management initiatives are representative of the local population and skilled in relevant community languages

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