

Review of Community Cohesion in Oldham Metropolitan Borough

'Few towns have done as much as Oldham in seeking to build community cohesion'

These are the words of Professor Ted Cante of the Institute of Community Cohesion whose independent Review Report on whether things have changed in the Borough five years on from the disturbances in 2001 is published today.

The report has two main messages. The first is recognition of what has been achieved in the last five years. It says:

"few cities, towns or districts in other parts of the country have done as much as Oldham in seeking to build community cohesion. In short, Oldham has every right to be proud of its record to date."

Secondly, it sets out a challenge about how much more remains to be done.

Why have a Review?

In 2001, in a report about the disturbances in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford, Professor Cante concluded that, in Oldham and elsewhere, white and Asian people were not mixing and were leading "parallel lives."

The Review says even though there has been positive change in community relations there are too many people in the Borough's communities - from all ethnic groups - still reluctant to change.

Over the next 20 years the Borough is projected to become more ethnically diverse. More neighbourhoods will become mixed and more schools will have pupils from different backgrounds. This is already the case in parts of the Borough and other parts of Britain. And, by and large, people get on well together. But many people also feel threatened by change, and we need to work together to prevent this becoming a problem.

This is **not** about forcing people to mix. It is about choice and opportunities. People must remain free to choose where they live. But they also need to have the opportunities to do so, and the confidence to live wherever they want. Nobody should be able to prevent them doing so.

Facing up to the challenge of change

All our futures are linked to this. In Britain and elsewhere the most economically successful cities and towns are those which are outward looking and use their diversity as a strength - creating prosperity and attracting new residents and businesses.

Professor Cante's message to the people of the Borough - and it applies equally to many other places in England - is to face up to this challenge to change.

Other messages from the report

A number of other key messages from the Report are:

The need to involve local people in delivering change. This needs to involve work to bring people together across generations and between different parts of the Borough, as well as people from different ethnic groups;

That work should be done to develop wider leadership - with particular focus on involving more women and young people;

Improving communication with residents - both to help keep people better informed and to give them wider opportunities to contribute their views;

The Police need to do further work in building the confidence of communities, particularly in tackling problems relating to gangs and drug dealing and misuse;

Work to reduce inequality needs to remain a high priority. Work needs to be continued to make sure that the workforces of public and private sector organisations are more representative of our population - particularly at more senior levels.

The full report of the Review "Challenging Communities to Change Oldham" is available on the Council website at: www.oldham.gov.uk

Our achievements as a Borough

Significant progress has been made in addressing the social and economic challenges facing our Borough.

Achievements include:

- the new University Centre and £13m state-of-the-art library and lifelong learning centre,
- new business developments at Hollinwood junction,
- anticipated funding for rebuilding Failsworth and Radclyffe schools,
- reduced racist attacks and crime rates through work with the Police,
- massive investment to improve housing conditions across the Borough,
- refurbishment of Alexandra Park and much more.



Cross party support

'We welcome the report from Ted Cante and his team. It recognises the progress we've made in the Borough in the last five years - as well as the scale of the major challenge that remains. The report is right about the need for our communities to become more integrated. But that can only happen once people have the confidence to do so - and that will take time. Within the Council we're united in our commitment to this, as well as to work with our partners and the citizens of the Borough to face the challenge to change.'

Councillor David Jones, Leader Oldham Council

Councillor Howard Sykes, Leader Liberal Democrat Group



Positive about race and community relations

As part of the review, MORI recently surveyed the attitudes of local people and, compared with a previous survey in 2003, found that residents are increasingly positive about race and community relations in the Borough. In 2003, 58 percent of people believed that people from different backgrounds can get on well together. By 2005 this had increased to 66 percent who believed that people from different ethnic backgrounds can get on, and 77 percent believing that people from different social backgrounds can get on well together.

Your views

Over the next few months we want to gather views from local people about how to take forward the recommendations of the review. What do you think about what the review says? What are your ideas about how you or other people can get involved?

Please send your views to us by email at challengetochange@oldham.gov.uk or write to Challenge to Change, Freepost RLYT-UEGB-KTTX, Civic Centre, West Street, Oldham OL1 1UL. If you would like to be kept informed please include your contact details.

www.oldham.gov.uk

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