

Developing Community Cohesion: Issues and Solutions

The third of a trio of conferences on the subject of community cohesion organised in 2002 by Runnymede took place at London's Barbican Centre on 10 October. **Vic McLaren**

Timed to coincide with the second anniversary of the Report on *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*, the event drew over 200 participants to debate the implications of the Government's community cohesion agenda, from the perspectives of Crime; Neighbourhood Renewal; Health and Social Welfare; Arts, Media and Sport; Employment and Education.

Sponsored by the Home Office's Community Cohesion Unit, the conference attracted ministerial support in the form of Beverley Hughes (Minister for Asylum, Immigration and Community Cohesion), as well as an extraordinarily high calibre of keynote speaker: Lord Parekh, Deputy Metropolitan Commissioner Ian Blair, *Guardian* Journalist Gary Younge; and Bradford Vision's Chief Executive Sharmila Gandhi.

The Conference, chaired by Lord Parekh, aimed not only to get to grips with issues, but, through a defining and refining process, to arrive at plausible strategies for use by the CCU Practitioner groups as they seek to provide workable policy solutions across areas roughly compatible with those addressed at the conference.

Space does not permit us to report all of the conference speeches in full, nor to reproduce the copious notes and myriad ideas generated in the mini-plenaries and policy groups,¹ but special thanks are due to all those who acted as presenters, convenors and advisers during the course of the day.

Presenters, Convenors and Advisers at the Developing Community Cohesion conference 10 October 2002

Naseem Khan and Jennifer Edwards
Rakesh Chandar-Nair and Malcolm Tungatt
Nick Carter and Samir Shah
Martin Davis, Chief Supt Derek Benson, and Sule Kangulec
Chris Browne and Karl Oxford
Robin Richardson and Phil Green
Dr Linda Harris and Val Barker
Debbie Gupta and Tony Burnett
Peter Ramsden and Maggie Lee
David Faulkner and Insp Matthew McFarlane
Dr Kate Gavron and Alveena Malik
Lord Chan and Dr Richard Stone
Judith Hunt and Trevor Phillips

Opening the conference

Two years ago, Lord Parekh reminded participants, publication of the Report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain had met with a difficult birth. He was of the opinion, however, that the Report's content had been sufficiently sturdy to survive the impact of the initial trauma surrounding its reception, and its lasting value and impact would be judged by two significant criteria – its success in:

¹ Add info about possible Conference proceedings for 2003. A series of articles based on the conference presentations to appear in Runnymede Bulletin throughout 2003, as our contribution to the developing community cohesion debate.

(1) putting important issues on the public agenda, and (2) providing potential solutions to the issues addressed

Allowing for certain limitations, the Report had become a clear success. It had added a number of important issues to the public agenda – issues which continue to occupy a pre-eminent place in our public life such as: social cohesion; the nature of racism and how to tackle it; how to combine equality with difference; plus the concept and reality of a sense of national identity, and what it means to be British.

Lord Parekh then went on to address the issue of cohesion in greater detail, reminding conference delegates that the Report, which pre-dated the disturbances in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham, had some important things to ask about cohesion – at a number of levels.

1. What does cohesion mean: is it simply a metaphor?
2. What are the limits of cohesion: how cohesive can a society be and remain consistent with individual liberty and differences?
3. How should we go about fostering cohesion?

In response to these self-same questions the Commission's Report had offered the following responses. A society is cohesive if its members:

- have a common commitment to the well-being of that community (in other words, we all feel we care for each other and the community enough to belong together a separate and independent community);
- are able to find their way around in it (in other words, if they know how to navigate their way through their society, and to understand its conceptual and cultural grammar, and, therefore, how to relate to each other);
- share a climate of mutual trust (and know that if they were to make sacrifices today for the wider community tomorrow, when their turn comes, society will take account of their problems).

Lord Parekh recognised that in a modern liberal society there would be limitations on the extent of cohesion, and the Report had made it clear that a cohesive society does not rule out three things:

- ?? *differences*, because people have different moral and social biographies;
- ?? *disagreements*, because people are bound to disagree on very important issues about how our society should be organised, on the limits of government action, and so on;
- ?? *disobedience*, since there may be points where differences are so significant that people feel they must make a stand.

When attempting to foster social cohesion the Report, he said, had made five things clearly desirable:

- ?? Extend equal legitimacy to all citizens (all citizens are equally legitimate members of the community, and entitled to equal rights and equal life chances)
- ?? Achieve equality. This is a complex concept, and cannot mean uniformity. (Different people have different needs, different biographies, different aspirations, different conceptions of life, and therefore, equality must be reconciled with difference.) The Report had grappled with how to integrate the demands of equality with difference.
- ?? Eliminate that which stands in the way of equality of treatment – namely, racism in its various manifestations.
- ?? Foster common values, shared symbols, shared ceremonies, etc.
- ?? Ensure that public institutions and public services embody those aforementioned principles. (People must feel in their day-to-day lives a sense of belonging, and that they belong to some community. This can only be achieved if public services are delivered so that all are treated equally, their differences are recognised, and a common sense of community and commitment is built amongst them.)

Lord Parekh expressed the hope that *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* would serve as a starting point for discussions on community cohesion. He paid tribute to the Home Office for being prepared to welcome independent and critical thinking, and to Runnymede for seeing the Report as a starting-point rather than a terminus.

He went on to highlight aspects of Runnymede's work agenda for 2003 which emanated from the Report: to examine issues around government leadership; audit, inspection and regulation; plus a large body of questions raised by devolution.

Ian Blair on 'Policing a Multi-Ethnic Society'

Formerly Chief Constable of Surrey and currently Deputy Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Ian Blair began by saying he wanted to examine policing as a contributor to community cohesion. Particularly, he said, he wanted to look at policing as an exemplar of organisational change and impact in relation to the issue of diversity.

He identified the Stephen Lawrence Report as a seismic event which, he claimed, had changed the operating culture of the Metropolitan Police. Mr Blair cited Sir Robert Mark, the former Metropolitan Commissioner, who 25 years earlier had written that

'...the Police are an anvil on which society beats out the problems and abrasions of social inequality, racial prejudice, weak laws and ineffective legislation.'

There could scarcely be a better simile for the culture of the police, he argued.

Mr Blair went on to cite a speech he himself had made, in 1999, which acknowledged that the police had been seeking to serve a multicultural and modern Britain with a traditional and homogeneous working culture.

'The [Police] Service has been like one of those sleeping industrial giants which didn't notice change in the marketplace, like IBM refusing to accept the onset of personal computers, or Chrysler rejecting the notion that Americans might like small cars...'

He went on to describe changes in the Metropolitan Police over the past 3 years. Digressing briefly to praise Lord Scarman's astute analysis of what underlay the Brixton and Toxteth riots of the early 1980s, he drew attention to the comments from a contributor to the Macpherson Inquiry who talked of minority ethnic communities being under-protected and over-policed, and nothing having changed from Scarman's time.

Mr Blair felt the problem had been that the Scarman Report had been interpreted by the White Establishment as being about treating everybody the same – if you treated everybody the same you were treating everybody fairly. However, taking the composition of the Establishment into account, it was hardly surprising that Lord Scarman's messages went unheard:

Now, still:

- Of 50 police chiefs in the UK only one is non-white
- Of the 250 members of ACPO there are only 4 who are non-white
- Of 1200 district judges only 12 are non-white
- Out of 559 circuit judges only 5 are from minority backgrounds
- Out of 102 judges of the High Court all are white
- Of the Lord Justices of Appeal all are white
- No mainstream newspaper nor TV channel has a black editor or black proprietor
- There are only 3 non-white bishops in the Church of England

And yet:

At the 1991 census, 5.5% of the population of the UK were from minority ethnic backgrounds; Of the 32 London boroughs, 5 have minority ethnic populations of 30%, or above.

Returning to the Macpherson Report, Mr Blair stated that though it made horrifying reading, the Report found no evidence of deliberate discrimination – the investigating officers were requiring the Lawrences to behave as they expected white working-class people to behave, and refusing to make allowances for the black community's different experiences and expectations of policing.

Ian Blair acknowledged that Macpherson had delivered a devastating report, which had shaken the very foundations of the Metropolitan Police, with the prevalence of institutional racism detectable in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racial stereotyping.

According to Mr Blair, the Met's response has been to recast itself as an organisation. John Grieve, the first Head of the Race and Violent Crime Taskforce, had made clear his job was to make arresting racists as significant a cultural commitment in the Metropolitan Police as arresting armed robbers and terrorists.

The results according to Mr Blair include:

- Reporting of racist incidents up by 400%
- 300% growth in the number of arrests for racist crimes
- Community Safety units in each borough dealing with race hate
- New methods of family liaison training (500 officers trained)
- Critical Incident training for senior managers
- Advisory Groups on Race and Diversity
- Staff Associations for different ethnic and religious groupings
- Race and Diversity training for 30,000 staff
- Changed operational practices (including keeping families of victims properly briefed)

The moral, but also a business imperative, of this – because at 40,000 staff the Met is London's largest single employer with a responsibility to provide a working culture that enables people to work to the best of their ability – is that only if staff were treated fairly would that fairness be apparent to the Police's customer base.

Ian Blair acknowledged the challenges ahead:

- How was the Service to ensure a properly representative police service?
- How does the Service get all communities to declare and take on ownership of the police?

Certain positives were identified. The Service now has a reasonable representation of officers from African-Caribbean, Indian, Sikhs and Pakistani backgrounds (although barely any representatives of the Chinese and Bangladeshi communities), and signs were that police cadets and community policing support officers were broadly representative of London's present ethnic composition.

However, Mr Blair acknowledged that many problems remained – including a disproportionality in stop-and-search,² but he also called for influential figures from all communities to come forward to say that crime is a problem for the community and not just for the Police.

Issuing a challenge to the conference for delegates to take forward the issues raised within the sphere of race relations into the broader realm of diversity, Mr Blair ended by returning to the theme of social cohesion:

² This speech was delivered a month before the Government published figures showing a significant rise in the numbers of people from visible minorities being stopped relative to white people.

'Nobody should underestimate the enormous implications of policing well done for social cohesion, as well as the enormous implications of policing done badly...'

Mr Blair fielded a number of questions and was praised by Lord Parekh for his openness, and for the sensitivity with which he had tackled the prevalent issues.

Beverley Hughes on Cohesive Communities

The minister answered a series of questions, some of them highly critical of Government policy on Immigration and Asylum, with a stout defence of the Home Secretary's policies, arguing that left and centre-left politicians cannot afford to ignore the 'distortion' of the Asylum system by economic migrants.

In thanking the minister for her response to audience questions, Lord Parekh commended her frankness.

[Full speech \[link\]](#)

Sharmila Gandhi talks about Bradford

Next on the platform was Sharmila Gandhi, who described how many people had approached her over the lunch period to ask what exactly was the 'Bradford Vision' of which she is Chief Executive? Her response, that this was Bradford's Local Strategic Partnership, appeared to further confound people until she explained it was simply the name given to the over-arching partnership of public, private and voluntary sector organisations, plus community representatives, tasked with providing Bradford with a long-term economic strategy that had social cohesion at its heart.

Sharmila spent some time outlining the composition of Bradford District, its racial make-up, and its physical and cultural diversity. However, she concentrated on Lord Ouseley's report, jointly commissioned by Bradford Council and Bradford Vision prior to the 2001 disturbances, and the efforts of all parties to implement key aspects of that report in the wake of those disturbances, whose immediate impact had produced, variously, feelings of anger, disbelief, frustration, powerlessness and shame, and, for a short period at least, a feeling of mass bereavement.

Sharmila went on to highlight some of the developments of the past 12 months:

- ?? A Women's Forum had emerged.
- ?? Faith representatives from the City's Inter-faith forum had become involved with the Local Strategic Partnership.
- ?? Communities were now agitating for their voices to be heard within the LSP structure.
- ?? Business Interests (initially demoralised by the riots) were forming a new network, 'Manningham Means Business', to work alongside other interests in regenerating the area.
- ?? A Council Scrutiny Committee had been established to oversee the implementation of Lord Ouseley's recommendations from his 'Community Pride – Not Prejudice' Report.
- ?? The Council had committed to address representation of minority groups within its workforce, particularly at all levels of management.
- ?? The Police were establishing an Open House Forum to identify tensions, and to keep the Public abreast of policing strategies.

Finally, Sharmila outlined the role of Bradford Vision in developing the District Community Cohesion Plan around four themes:

1. *equality* of access and outcomes for all communities in relation to public services.
2. *civic pride* and participation in public life – not only Lord Ouseley's report, but other national reports such as those provided by the Inter-Ministerial Group (the Denham Report) and by Ted Cattle's team, all highlighted significant levels of alienation and exclusion from public life (particularly amongst young people) and the need to remedy this situation.

3. *healthy communities* with positive relations – with the object of reducing tensions and mistrust, and ensuring that the different communities are not constantly competing with each other for scarce resources.
4. *a safer district* - recognising the need to tackle anti-social behaviour, violent crime, hate crime, drugs-related crime and public disorder.

In order to deliver the above, a multi-agency Community Cohesion Task Force has been set up by Bradford Vision, with each agency identifying a lead officer, and the council agreeing significant Neighbourhood Renewal Funding to aid in the delivery of community cohesion within the district. The key challenges ahead are identified as:

- ?? Mainstreaming successful pilot projects (including 'schools twinning').
- ?? Ensuring that all of the various communities are engaged and valued.
- ?? Successfully reintegrating offenders from last year's riots back into the community.

Sharmila Gandhi highlighted the centrality of the bid to secure the title of European Capital of Culture 2008, using the advertising slogan "One landscape, many views" (taken from David Hockney's photo-montage 'Pear Blossom Highway').³ Sharmila convinced her audience that Bradford's adverse press publicity notwithstanding, the city now had a vision and a sense of direction which over the next 20 years would succeed in revitalising its environs both economically and socially.⁴

Lord Parekh thanked Sharmila Gandhi for her 'moving' presentation, and remarked, by way of tribute, that the Conference photographer had been so absorbed by her speech that he had forgotten to take pictures. Fortunately, that was not entirely true.

Gary Younge on the media

Gary Younge's speech, [{Full speech link}](#) was a tour-de-force, and a fitting finale to what had been an excellent conference. By turns amusing and chilling, Gary made the point that if you want to take the racial temperature in Britain you would be better off examining the reactions to the Commission's Report, rather than the Report itself. Lord Parekh, paying tribute to Gary Younge's great moral seriousness, tempered as it is by wit and irony, nevertheless took a more upbeat view. Whilst the initial reaction to the FMEB Report (from certain quarters) had been truly shocking, indeed scandalous, he argued that the Report had weathered the initial storm, was in robust good health and was being taken seriously by ministers. Not only that, but it had so far spawned 22 major articles in academic and other journals; two PhD theses; plus a £25,000 research project investigating the media and other reactions to the Report. Interest in it had clearly not abated.

Lord Parekh thanked everybody for their attendance, and the assistance their ideas would give to Runnymede in formulating policies in 2003/4. He also reminded participants that Home Office representatives had been present for the duration of the Conference, and would be taking full cognisance of the various policy suggestions.

¹ A full set of Conference proceedings will be published in 2003.

² This speech was delivered a month before the Government published figures showing a significant rise in the numbers of people from visible minorities being stopped relative to white people.

³ Sadly, a week or so after the Conference, it was announced that the Bradford bid had not made the final shortlist, despite the wit and ingenuity of opening an Embassy in London to extol the virtues of the City (an initiative widely reported, not least in the *Bahrain Tribune*).

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⁴ Runnymede has invited Sharmila to write an article on progress in 12 months' time.

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