

Policy Statement

Community Cohesion 2009-12

Introduction

Rossendale Borough Council recognises Community Cohesion as important. The Council has developed and adopted this Policy Statement to demonstrate its commitment to building and strengthening cohesive communities across the Borough. This Policy Statement has also been endorsed by the Rossendale Partnership.

What does community cohesion mean for Rossendale?

Respectful communities that get on well together

Building communities that get on well together is critical to the quality of life for all local people. It brings benefits by creating a society in which people from different backgrounds and circumstances can live and work together in an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding; and by which business can grow and town centres can regenerate and flourish

The Commission on Integration Community Cohesion and the Local Government Association state that a cohesive community is one where:

- There is a common vision and sense of belonging for all communities.
- The diversity of people's backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated positively valued and respected.
- Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities and access to services and treatment; and
- Strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.

Equality is an underpinning aspect of cohesion. Without ensuring equality, it is impossible to foster cohesion.

Responsible Section/Team	People & Policy and Communities	Page	Page 1 of 6
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Policy Statement

Community cohesion is about more than just 'race' and culture, it can also be about younger and older people understanding one another better, or building bridges between neighbourhoods of relative wealth and poverty.

National & Local Context

The Local Government White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' strongly identified that Local Authorities have a key role to play in promoting cohesion, as part of their community leadership and place-shaping role.

The 2007 'Our Shared Future' report by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion establishes a framework and key principles to develop cohesive communities. The report also highlighted the importance of generating accurate local intelligence to help strengthen local leadership and help Council's meet local needs.

Authorities also have a legal duty to promote good relations between people as part of equality legislation such as the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000.

The focus is on local intelligence, leadership of place and partnership working as mechanisms for delivering our commitment on community cohesion. It is also reflected in the Council's performance management and inspection regime by the Audit Commission.

Community cohesion is an important theme within:

- Rossendale's Sustainable Community Strategy: 'Rossendale Alive' is underpinned by the principle of community cohesion and promoting equality and diversity.
- Rossendale Borough Council's Corporate Plan: The importance of cohesion is reiterated within the Council's corporate priorities set out in its Corporate Plan, specifically 'encouraging healthy and respectful communities.'
- Lancashire's Local Area Agreement (LAA): Cohesion is threaded through all of the themes within the LAA, particularly 'People and Communities' which identifies specific performance indicators to measure community cohesion:
 - The percentage of people from different backgrounds getting on well together.
 - The percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality.
 - The percentage of people in regular volunteering.
 - An environment for a thriving third sector.

Cohesion in Rossendale

In 2009, Rossendale in partnership with the Lancashire Community Cohesion Partnership was awarded Beacon Status for 'Building Cohesive and Resilient Communities'. The Council intends to continue to build on this example of excellence.

Policy Statement

Research has shown that the level of community cohesion is closely related to:

- Satisfaction with the local area as a place to live.
- Satisfaction of local service provision.
- Perceived anti-social behavior and crime rates.
- The proportion of people feeling that Council treats all people fairly.
- Satisfaction with cleanliness.
- Satisfaction with participation opportunities.
- Feel can influence local decision making.
- Satisfaction with parks and open spaces.
- Satisfaction with the Council overall.
- The deprivation of the area.
- International/national incidents/media.

The 2008 Place Survey demonstrated that:

- The percentage of people that think Rossendale is a good place to live has increased from 64% to 72%.
- 61% of people in the Borough believe that people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area.
- The percentage of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood was 62%.
- There has been a significant increase in the percentage of people in the Borough who regularly volunteer from 12% to 23%.
- 26% of people feel they can influence decisions in their locality.
- 19% of people perceive anti-social behavior as a problem.
- 65% of people feel that there is fair treatment by local services.
- 36% of people feel that people in the area do not treat one another with respect and consideration.
- 87% of people feel safe during the day and the number of people who feel unsafe after dark has fallen to 34%.
- Satisfaction generally with refuse collection has increased from 19% to 26% (very satisfied).

The Rossendale Approach to Community Cohesion

Respecting difference within our communities is a vital element of a strong and healthy community. Our focus is about building better relationships between people and about recognising and respecting differences.

Building more cohesive and resilient communities is by its very nature a bottom up process around neighbourhoods and localities. We recognise that our Neighbourhood Forums will be key to the building of cohesive communities, and this will be recognised in the development and delivery of actions in our Neighbourhood Plans. The Council is committed to a number of core principles that underpin the way in which we do things.

Policy Statement

Rossendale Borough Council is committed to:

- Provide leadership & coordination to embed cohesion in everything we do.
- Mainstream community cohesion through our Neighbourhood Forums.
- Actively challenge racism, discriminatory myths and combat prejudice in any form.
- Work in partnership with others in order to meet the differing needs of communities within our Borough.
- Continue to support 'Pride in Rossendale' and Community Pride Grants which support the delivery of cohesive communities.
- Ensure robust Community Impact Assessments are undertaken on all Council decisions and policies to ensure that the potential impact on our customers and communities is fully considered, and where possible this is eliminated or reduced.
- Understand our community, through working in partnership and strengthening our neighbourhood intelligence and developing our understanding of who makes up our communities and their needs. We will use this information to identify tensions and opportunities and inform or decisions and policy development.
- Drive and promote a sense of a 'shared future', where there is an emphasis on what binds our communities together rather than what differences divides them.

Aims and Values

The Borough has a clear and shared vision:

“By 2018, Rossendale will have strong communities with an enhanced environment and heritage. It will be an attractive place to live, where tourists visit and employers invest.”

The aim of this Policy Statement is to confirm Rossendale Borough Council's commitment to ensuring a better quality of life for all, by encouraging and promoting cohesive communities – that is communities that get on well together regardless of background and circumstance.

Our focus will be on the following areas:

- **Providing equal and fair treatment:** We will strive to ensure that the needs of all communities are not overlooked, that they feel valued and included in our community and that they have both the opportunity and 'know how' to register and voice their opinions and influence their local services.

Policy Statement

- **Ensuring we meet the different needs of our workforce and communities:** We will ensure that the Council and the organisations it works with conform to the highest levels of equalities good practice.
- **Supporting communities to deal with the impact of economic decline:** Rossendale is perceived as a relatively affluent Borough. However, this hides real pockets of deprivation. We will help local communities to deal with increasing levels of unemployment, closure of shops and services and other issues that have a negative impact on our neighbourhoods. Regeneration of our town centres will be a priority.
- **Supporting our rural communities:** We will engage with our rural communities and understand the challenges and inequalities they face. Further we will help communities to tackle the divide between urban and rural communities.
- **Transport:** We will seek to further improve the ability to travel across the valley between the east and west of the Borough and to moorland areas.
- **Supporting different age groups & encouraging respect and understanding among them:** We will bring communities and the people within those communities closer together via positive engagement. We will seek to ensure that young people and older people are able to voice their views and play a full part in society as active citizens.
- **Health & Wellbeing:** People in Rossendale don't live as long as elsewhere (75 years), this is below the national average. Even within the Borough there are differences between wards. We will help to tackle inequalities in health by working with partners and the community to improve health outcomes and to ensure citizens play a more active role in their community.
- Promoting people getting on well together through **education** in schools, colleagues and adult education.
- **Ensuring people feel safe in their communities:** We will work together with partners to reduce hate incidents and crimes across Rossendale and increase the reporting of incidents of hate crime. We will support and develop existing services offered to victims and act strategically to promote a multi-agency approach for dealing with hate crimes and incidents across the Borough.
- **Valuing difference:** We value the fact that Rossendale has a variety of different communities and will promote respect and understanding between them.
- **Encouraging participation in local decision making:** We will encourage people from all backgrounds and circumstances to participate in local decision making and to ensure their views and opinions are heard/inform council service improvement and decision.

Policy Statement

- **Taking care of our Borough:** We will encourage people from all backgrounds and circumstances to be more aware of their impact on the environment and to think and act responsibly to ensure a better environment for all.

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