**1.  What does 'cohesion' mean to you? What does 'integration' mean to you? What might a community which is both integrated and cohesive look like?**

Cohesion is the process of bringing different sections of the community together so that they can successfully live and work together, but also understand and respect the differences in culture that exist between them. Cohesion occurs as a result of regular opportunities to interact with people from other backgrounds and cultures but is only possible when established groups are willing to afford new arrivals to an area the opportunity to become a part of that community.

Integration is the process that takes place when people are empowered to achieve their full potential as members of British society, to contribute to the community and to become fully able to exercise the rights and responsibilities as a citizen. A feeling of belonging to a local neighbourhood is difficult to quantify and artificially produce, but occurs as a result of positive interaction between people within an area, that support a sense of safety and security.
A community which is both integrated and cohesive is one where all groups feel that they have the same rights, opportunities and equality of access to services and local amenities. This is more likely to occur in an area with less competition for resources such as housing. Minority groups are often labelled as a result of culture, race, faith or political belief and as a consequence are forced to rely upon unofficial support networks from within their own community. This situation can lead to segregated communities and parallel lives, with little opportunity to meet anyone outside of ones own ethnic background.

**2.  What do you think are the main tensions between different groups in our communities? What factors do you think contribute to these and what are your thoughts about how to tackle them? What role can local leaders play in tackling them?**

One of the main sources of tension between different communities is the competition for resources such as housing and jobs. Tensions can also arise between new arrivals in an area and the local community if people perceive that they are not getting as good a deal as people who have just arrived. The perception may not be based on fact but can include allegations such as refugees being housed more quickly than others. Service providers should strive to ensure that provision of housing or other resources for one group does not appear to be to the detriment of other groups.

Local authorities should take their duty to promote good race relations seriously with projects that raise understanding and awareness. This can include more opportunities for people from different ethnic backgrounds to work together and learn more about each other, supported by the provision of accurate information in an appropriate format. This is particularly important to explode myths surrounding Gypsies and Travellers, refugees and to promote the positive nature of different faiths and the contribution that they make to society.

Shared aspirations and concerns at a local level can motivate people to work together. Projects such as the Communities R Us project run by the Housing Associations' Charitable Trust (hact) which seeks to build a better understanding of the ways in which long-term residents and newer refugee communities can build positive relationships at neighbourhood levels can help to tackle the tensions which arise.

A partnership approach such as that taken in Bolton has proved successful in helping refugees to integrate and to create a cohesive community through joint working between refugee community organisations, voluntary sector organisations and community

representatives. Partners are working together to increase understanding of new communities and to promote the benefits of integration to the whole community.

Local leaders can help tackle tensions between different groups by encouraging refugees and the wider community to work together on community projects such as providing play space for children which benefit the whole community as well as through cultural activities such as music and sport. They can also promote understanding by using their position of respect and trust in the community. Local leaders must also be prepared to stand up to local pressure and explain their decisions; for example promoting the benefits of the provision of pitches for Gypsies and Travellers as opposed to the high cost of evictions.

**3.   What things do you think help people from different backgrounds feel like they belong? Do you think there are particular values or 'ground rules' for shared life, which are or should be at the heart of society in the UK? What do you think they are?**

Our society must begin to recognise that integration is the responsibility of every member of society and if individuals 'opt out' it is difficult to achieve. The respect agenda aims to delineate the responsibility of the state and its citizens and it should be clear that successful integration benefits the whole of society. In America, the city of Utica has been very successful in integrating a large number of refugees by utilising the good will that exists within the wider community. In practical terms, this has involved the encouragement of volunteers from the settled community to work as mentors to new arrivals and to explain the benefits of immigration to others.

Access to housing plays a vital part in enabling new arrivals in an area such as refugees to access employment, education, training and services which the local community are able to access and helps people to feel like they belong. Support models such as those provided through the Gateway Protection and Sunrise Programmes which help refugees access mainstream services such as housing, employment, healthcare and education should be extended to enable more refugees to gain this support.

The ability to speak English is also very important in enabling refugees and economic migrants to feel that they belong in a community.

The opportunity to earn an income is an essential part of ensuring that refugees are able to become more settled and involved in their local community. Refugees face difficulties when trying to obtain employment such as poor English, a lack of UK qualifications and discrimination by employers. These issues need to be addressed to enable refugees to access employment and settle into new areas.

**4.   Why do you think people from different backgrounds may live parallel or separate lives? Is this negative or positive?**

The Cantle Report visited several Northern communities in the wake of riots between different communities. The report found segregated communities, with cultures having little or no opportunity to come into contact with each other. The Citizenship Survey reveals that people are more likely to have a positive attitude towards multi-culturalism, when they have the opportunity to meet with people from other ethnic backgrounds.

Resentment as a result of competition for scare resources can cause divisions between communities. Experience has shown that creating community projects of common interest, such as environmental improvements, sports, cultural events or community safety initiatives, can have a positive effect in bringing together people from different backgrounds.

Many refugees prefer to move to areas where people from the same ethnic community live in order to feel safer and more supported and also to increase the chances of finding employment. This can lead to large communities from different backgrounds forming and not mixing with each other.

For some groups, particularly Gypsies and Travellers, discrimination has led to extreme social exclusion, with little opportunity to integrate with the settled community. In their particular case a lack of authorised sites has been a major cause of this separation as it has led to unauthorised encampments which have caused tensions with local communities.


**5. What role in contributing to community cohesion and integration do you see for organisations and institutions such as: local authorities, the police, the health service, schools, youth organisations, faith groups, inter faith and race equality bodies, housing associations, private sector bodies, voluntary organisations, theatres, arts centres, sports associations and the media? (Please comment on as few or many as you wish)**

All of the organisations listed have a role to play in contributing to community cohesion and integration. The media in particular is crucial to tackling some of the issues which can prevent cohesion and integration from taking place as often the image portrayed of groups such as refugees and Gypsies and Travellers is not a positive one. A well thought-out media strategy is needed to counteract the misreporting of issues around migration, asylum and refugees and Gypsies and Travellers. It also helps to emphasise and communicate the more positive stories and create an awareness of the potential opportunities that new communities can bring to an area. Local authority staff, police, GPs, teachers and faith and other community leaders are best placed to promote understanding. Various reports have criticised local authorities which react to tensions as they occur and fail to create a long term plan that encourages integration. It is particularly important to prepare host communities prior to the arrival of refugee communities and to ensure that appropriate services are in place and do not cause a conflict with the wider community. Local authorities must also create longer term plans with regard to the provision of sites for Gypsies and Travellers, rather than taking a short term view, which relies on expensive enforcement action.

Local authorities and social housing providers have an integral part to play in this process as they can provide appropriate housing as a first step towards integration, combined with important support services that expedite the process of self-reliance and contribution to the wider community. Local authorities should work with voluntary and community organisations to benefit from local knowledge in order to develop partnerships, which create a joined up support framework. The provision of meeting places and other resources should be combined with opportunities for activities such as cross-community exchange visits and knowledge transfer, which increases the capacity of community groups.


**6. What help do new people to a community need when they arrive? What help do existing residents need to cope with change in their community?**

Housing is a key stepping stone to accessing employment, education, training and other services and advice and assistance in securing housing is crucial for new people to a community such as refugees when they arrive.

Communities which are receiving refugees need to be prepared for their arrival. Investing in local communities before the arrival of refugees or asylum seekers to help ensure that good services are available to all equally, to avoid tensions that arise if it appears that they are getting a better deal than local people can help to reduce some of the potential problems. It is also important to be honest with the host community as to the opportunities and possible problems which may occur so that these can be discussed and tackled. Projects such as the Gateway and Sunrise programmes should be extended to ensure that all refugees have access to mainstream services and to prepare communities for the arrival of refugees.

New arrivals to an area such as refugees have capabilities as well as needs and can be an asset to the community in which they settle. This positive image needs to be portrayed to show the benefits that they can bring to communities.

**7. What do you see as effective ways to counteract people's negative perceptions of and attitudes to people from different backgrounds?**

Familiarity does not breed contempt – it is important to create opportunities for people from different backgrounds to engage with each other positively.

The media has an important role to play in counteracting people's negative perceptions and attitudes to people from different backgrounds. Often the only stories which appear are very negative and serve to fuel these views. Positive case studies should be used to promote the benefits of integration and diversity.

Projects which can bring different communities together to work towards a common cause can be an effective way of changing attitudes and encouraging people from different backgrounds to get to know each other.

The potential role of young people in building bridges between communities should also be further exploited through school visits, cultural exchanges and mentoring schemes and such opportunities facilitated.