

Company Executive Board Meeting

Thursday 17 December 2020

Equality & Diversity Champion- Supplementary Note to the Main Report

Social Cohesion

1. Covid 19 will continue to have a significant and lasting impact on our communities. The cost to society and the state are significant and will force future governments to make difficult choices which have the potential to undermine social and political trust which can be exploited by extremist groups for their own ambition. The economic impact is beginning to bite and there are people who are being hard hit financially - applications for universal credit have risen sharply as have requests to food banks.
2. Local outbreaks and enforcement of compliance with Covid regulations, as well as policing of local lockdowns, are also a threat to community cohesion. As the impact of the pandemic unfolds it is clear that it is impacting places, groups and communities differently. There is evidence of the disproportionate impact of Covid 19 on [black and minority ethnic communities](#), and on the elderly and the more vulnerable.
3. Since the start of lockdown, opportunities for social mixing, one of the ways of reducing prejudice and promoting empathy between different identity groups, has been severely curtailed with restrictions likely to continue for some time and most social connection has moved online.
4. Covid has also brought out an outpouring of kindness, compassion and community spirit across Staffordshire with many individuals and organisations reaching out to vulnerable neighbours and communities. A recent survey by the [New Local Government Network](#) has found that levels of trust and community cohesion have never been higher.
5. **Rising inequality and social fragmentation.** As well as becoming more unequal in socio-economic terms, the UK is becoming increasingly polarised and tribal in its beliefs, values and behaviours. In the period to 2040, there is an enduring, perhaps increasing, risk that existing fault lines could become more pronounced and that extreme or violent ideologies could start to take hold.
6. **A larger, older, more diverse population.** By 2040, the UK population will be larger, older and more diverse. As well as increasing demand on public services, demographic change will reshape the UK's political, financial and social priorities, necessitating tough choices and trade-offs.

Partnership conversations are already taking place about the opportunities for joint working to build stronger and closer communities. The planning of this work is particularly developed in Stoke-on-Trent with the Community Cohesion Strategy 2020-24 in final draft.

The work will focus on 4 key priorities:

1. Creating more safe space opportunities

To provide young people with more opportunities to talk in a safe place about what they see or hear in the news, social media or in their neighbourhood to build critical analysis skills.

2. Building stronger and closer communities in neighbourhoods

To work closely with local residents to build resilience through place-based problem solving and get more people to interact with others from a different background.

3. Improve Community Safety

To work closely with local residents, the statutory and voluntary sector to actively challenge intolerance, tackle discrimination and hate crime.

4. To develop a shared sense of belonging

Improve access to learning, skills and jobs for people from different backgrounds and promote the awareness and understanding of different communities across the city.

Report Commissioner: Sara Williams

Job Title: SSLEP Equality and Diversity Champion / Chief Executive Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce