

Community cohesion

Headlines

The extent to which people and communities “get along” can be influenced by a wide range of issues including demographic structure, geography, ethnicity, culture, faith, politics and socioeconomic factors.

In 2012 4 out of 5 people (76%) were satisfied with their local area as a place to live and 2 out of 3 (66%) people agreed with the statement that people lived harmoniously together though this masked differences between localities.

Why is this issue important?

The demography and culture of Kirklees is complex and each local area has a particular character. Some areas are best defined by geographical or social identities and some by ethnic diversity and multiple identities including religious faith. This diversity brings a vitality that influences economic and social life in Kirklees, and the sense of belonging that people have to their immediate area is recognised locally as an important factor in generating cohesive communities¹.

What significant factors are affecting this issue?

Parts of the district have experienced tensions between communities and these problems are often exacerbated as people increasingly compete for resources and a credible stake within society. Perceptions of unfairness, in international and national events, as well as in local circumstances, can stoke tensions and polarise communities. Occasionally, these tensions can result in hate crimes and the potential for violent extremism. Equally, social change is invoking a sense of fear and isolation in some people in some of our neighbourhoods, leaving some people feeling disenfranchised and disempowered¹.

Community cohesion can be influenced by individual and community factors such as age, neighbourhood, ethnicity, culture, faith, politics and socioeconomic factors. Local feelings about perceived differences and fairness between treatment of communities can have an impact on tension between communities. Wider factors, including national and international issues and how these are reported, can also impact on cohesion and create tension in communities¹.

Despite all these influences, 3 out of 4 people (76%) were satisfied with Kirklees as a place to live in 2012. However, there were differences across Kirklees with people living in more [deprived](#) areas being less satisfied. Satisfaction with Dewsbury and Batley as places to live at 55% and 68% respectively was considerably lower than Holme Valley and Denby Dale & Kirkburton (both 91%). There are also differences across Kirklees when residents are asked whether people from different ethnic backgrounds get on well together. The Kirklees average showed that 2 in 5 people (43%) agreed people got on well together, though this masked wide variations, from 1 in 3 (30%) in Birstall & Birkenshaw to 6 out of 10 (59%) in Huddersfield North³.

When residents are asked whether people live harmoniously together 2 out of 3 (66%) agreed with the statement that people lived harmoniously together in their district in 2012. This masked significant variation with only half (52%) of people in Dewsbury agreeing compared to 4 out of 5 (81%) in Huddersfield North. The Kirklees Partnership has set a target based on 7 out of 10 people (70%) across Kirklees agreeing that people live harmoniously in their district⁴.

In order to strengthen cohesion in Kirklees, it is important to unlock and build the “social capital” that exists in the services, networks and relationships in communities. These issues are covered in the Community Cohesion Strategy¹ and Safer Stronger Communities Partnership Plan². Participation in regular volunteering is a measure used to evaluate [social capital](#) and in 2012 1 in 5 (21%) people across Kirklees volunteered at least monthly compared to 26% in 2010. This ranged from 1 in 6 people (17%) in Batley and Huddersfield North to 1 in 4 (29%) in the Holme Valley³.

Which groups are most affected by this issue?

Community cohesion is important across Kirklees and is not particular to any group. Strong, cohesive communities tend to also have high social capital and the combination of both these factors influences health and wellbeing².

Where is this causing greatest concern?

The Community Cohesion Strategy outlined the perceptions of community members in each locality as well as actions taking place.

Although there was evidence of neighbourhood level hotspots in a range of areas, based on current intelligence the priority wards were Heckmondwike, [Dewsbury](#) South, Dewsbury

West and Dewsbury East. Three other wards required specific but lower level support. These were Batley East, Batley West and Mirfield¹.

The Kirklees Safer Stronger Communities Partnership Strategic Intelligence Assessment for 2012 also highlighted the data showing the extent to which people perceived they got along and lived in cohesive communities².

Views of local people

The Current Living in Kirklees survey (2012) found that 4 out of 10 people (43%) in Kirklees agreed with the statement that “people from different ethnic backgrounds get on well together”. Almost 2 out of 3 people (64%) agreed that people of different ages got on well together, though this varied from 55% in Dewsbury to 77% in the [Holme Valley](#). 1 in 3 people (38%) agreed with the statement that “people pull together to improve things in their local area”, ranging from 29% in Batley and Dewsbury to 58% in the Holme Valley³.

What could commissioners and service planners consider?

The Kirklees Partnership has prioritised interventions designed to improve cohesion and the perception that people live harmoniously together. The following themes were agreed as the basis for commissioning of services and engagement with communities via the Community Cohesion Strategy:

- ➔ *Common ground*: a clear sense of shared aspirations and values, which focus on what we have in common rather than our differences.
- ➔ *Active citizenship* involving active participation in civil society, in public institutions, the workplace and in political life to enhance civic engagement and influence across the borough.
- ➔ *Equality* of access and opportunity for all residents to the labour market, housing, education, healthcare, social welfare and wide-ranging services.
- ➔ *Local identity* to help generate collective pride and a sense of belonging to the area, where individuals and communities feel safe and welcomed.
- ➔ *Promotion and awareness of the rights and responsibilities* of citizens and organisations to enhance the district’s social networks, strengthen community leadership and support social inclusion.
- ➔ *Participation and empowerment*: people of all backgrounds have the opportunities to take part, be heard and take decisions in local and national life.

- ➔ *Tackling intolerance and extremism*: a robust response to threats, whether discrimination, extremism or disorder, that deepen division and increase tensions.

References

1. Kirklees Community Cohesion Strategy. Available from:
http://www2.kirklees.gov.uk/childrenandfamilies/learning/documents/subjects/Community_Cohesion/Reports/Kirklees/Kirklees-Community-Cohesion-Strategy.pdf
2. Kirklees Safer Communities Strategic Intelligence Assessment. Available from:
<http://www.kirklees.gov.uk/you-kmc/partners/kirkleesPartnership/pdf/strategicIntelligenceAssess.pdf>
3. NHS Kirklees and Kirklees Council. Current Living in Kirklees (CLIK) Survey; 2012.
4. Kirklees Safer Stronger Communities Partnership Plan Performance Report; July 2013.

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