

Cohesion in Sunderland

Community Cohesion – Challenge and Recovery

22 October 2024

Agenda & activity prior to August 2024 events

- Sunderland has seen tensions over the past 10-12 years including demonstrations and protests by the far right
- City of Sanctuary Motion passed by Sunderland City Council (June 2022)
- Partner conversations about sentiment within the city over the past 12-18 months
- Sunderland Interfaith Forum working together to share experiences and perspectives
- Partner Hate Crime & Tension Monitoring Group in place
- Draft Cohesion Action Plan in place
 - Short/medium/long term activities across three strands: Strategic Approach; Community Activity; Communications
 - Priority to progress any actions we can/those already underway – including Citi Comms Group work; work of the Hate Crime Tension Monitoring Group and Hate Crime Champions training
- Key links with Asylum and Resettlement work
- Ongoing dialogue between Council team and MHCLG Cohesion Unit

Recent Disorder & Response

Friday 2 August

- Significant gatherings, violence and disorder in city centre and surrounding neighbourhoods – Mosque (St Mark's Road) also targeted
- People from outside of the city joined by residents – estimated 700 – 1,000 in total
- Very little intelligence to work on in advance – different to previous protests and demos
- Significant damage caused to property – Citizens Advice, Central Police Office, roads, street furniture
- Clean-up – outstanding community and business response supporting council team – city centre pristine by early Saturday morning

Saturday 3 August

- Media activity, interviews, statements to reassure residents and promote the real Sunderland
- Enhanced Police presence / patrols for public reassurance and advice
- Youth disorder and vandalism in city centre in the afternoon/early evening – swiftly managed by Police
- MP & Councillor evening meeting with Muslim community leaders

Recent Disorder & Response (2)

Sunday 4 August	Prayer Walk – 2-300 participants
Monday 5 August	Interfaith Meeting - politicians, civic leaders, partners met with faith and community leaders – joint statement issued about working to build the city back better, stronger and together
Wednesday 7 August	Intelligence to suggest targeted attacks (throughout country including two locations in Sunderland) on organisations and premises supporting asylum seekers – didn't transpire
Thursday 8 August	Sunderland City Board online meeting – partners shared responses/activities/approaches
Monday 12 August	Citi Comms Group – urgent response meeting
Wednesday 14 August	Extraordinary Council Meeting – unanimous cross-party support for Cohesion Motion
Wednesday 21 August	Visit by Lord Khan – meetings at Sunderland Minster and St Mark's Road Mosque
Thursday 22 August	Safer Sunderland Partnership meeting – focus on response to the disorder and Police and other partner actions

City sentiment & reflections

- City described as a ‘ticking time bomb’ – building on prior Justice for Chelsea and EDL events (over past decade), Brexit was a key point in time and feelings within some white, settled communities of having less hope and opportunity, have grown since then.
- Our diverse communities feel as white communities do on concerns about asylum and immigration issues and impacts. It’s deeply unfair and unacceptable that Muslim communities in particular have been targeted and attacked by the far right.
- Muslim communities are fearful for their safety and don’t feel that what has happened is being acknowledged as Islamophobia at a national level. (Council motion on 14 August 2024, agreed to write to Home Office urging them to appoint an independent Government advisor on Islamophobia as soon as possible).
- Social media is a fundamental problem – both the encrypted, disorder-convening side, and the side out in the open spreading misinformation.

City sentiment & reflections (2)

- The Police are under-resourced in the event of dealing with the type of disorder recently seen. Additional resource is also needed to do vital engagement and reassurance work in communities.
- The publicity around zero tolerance, swift arrests, fitting charges and sentences undoubtedly had a dissuading effect in terms of the further suggested attacks on targeted locations around the country on 7 August, including some organisations and premises in Sunderland.
- Residents from all of our communities need the space and agency to voice their concerns and it will take skill and new approaches to facilitate these conversations and then shape solutions within a comprehensive, co-created cohesion strategy.

Our Asks of Government

- Continuation of the additional Home Office security funding and measures for Mosques
- An urgent review of the national curriculum, and cohesion and anti-racism educational resources for schools, colleges and universities, needs to be undertaken.
- Funding cuts over the past fourteen years have had a real impact – in particular, the decimation of budgets for youth provision and for cohesion work has contributed to this situation and we appeal to the new Government to restore this funding.

Our Asks of Government (2)

- Review of the Further Education model and the move away from community-based provision
- Adequate and sustained funding to make interventions count and deliver long-term change including for:
 - targeted youth interventions
 - drug and alcohol use interventions
 - violence reduction
 - anti-social behaviour
 - temporary accommodation, and
 - supported housing
- Invitations extended to Ministers to visit our community projects and models of good practice, for example the SARA, HALO and SAIL projects.

Next steps

- **Development of action plan for use of MHCLG Recovery Fund Grant – spend required by 31 March 2025**
- **Staying in close contact with our existing networks of organisations and faith/community leaders**
- **Production of a comprehensive Cohesion Strategy for the city**
- **Core principles for our working going forward**
 - Partnership approach
 - Co-created
 - Embedded as appropriate in all partners' work
 - Evidence-led based on comprehensive engagement with all of our communities

Cohesion Strategy Development & Delivery

- Expert facilitation
- Data gathering and analysis work
- Fieldwork and engagement with communities
- City stakeholder event
- Mapping and action planning
- Short/medium/long term actions agreed and delivered

A message from Sunderland's young people....

