



## **The Worcestershire Partnership**

# **A Strategy for Cohesive, Strong Communities**

***"Getting along better together"***



## Foreword from Professor Michael Clarke, Chair of the Worcestershire Partnership Board

"It is widely recognised that living in communities which are cohesive, where people get along with each other and form positive relationships, makes a real difference to people's lives. There is also evidence that people who have a sense of belonging in their neighbourhood are more likely to be good citizens, take better advantage of public services, enjoy the benefits of a good education, have access to meaningful employment, be healthier and are likely to live longer. This is something we would all aspire to – as part of our vision for Worcestershire. The Worcestershire Partnership has, therefore, worked with the Institute for Community Cohesion (iCoCo) to understand how we can best support cohesive, strong communities in Worcestershire.

This strategy has been produced following extensive engagement with a wide range of people; it clearly defines what we aspire to for Worcestershire's communities and articulates the vision for strong, cohesive communities in Worcestershire. When communities are cohesive neighbours look out for each other, people have pride and satisfaction about the areas in which they live and feel safe going out. Residents also feel that there are opportunities for them to engage in decisions about their area and can participate in activities that bring people together.

All partner organisations have a part to play in improving cohesion in the county. As a cross cutting theme, cohesion needs to be embedded in current and future work and a practical online toolkit ([www.worcestershirepartnership.org.uk/cohesion](http://www.worcestershirepartnership.org.uk/cohesion)) has been developed to enable partners to adapt activities to ensure they contribute to this agenda and best benefit communities.

It must, however, be noted that the presence of this strategy does not mean that the partnership believes that there is a particular problem with cohesion in the county – quite the opposite. This document clarifies our challenges but also celebrates activities that already contribute positively to supporting cohesive, strong communities so that success can be replicated. We are, of course, not complacent and we will build on current achievements.

By remembering that cohesion within communities essentially relies on how well people get on together and by focussing on what people have in common rather than differences, we can make life better in Worcestershire. This strategy highlights the part that all partner organisations have to play, as together we can make improvements for our communities and empower residents to improve their neighbourhoods."

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Clarke', with a small flourish at the end.

## Contents page

<b>CONTENTS</b>		
<b>Section</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>The Vision for Worcestershire</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>The Sustainable Community Strategy – key priorities</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Our Vision for cohesive, strong communities and key strategic aims</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>What is the national definition of community cohesion?</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>What do we understand by cohesive, strong communities in Worcestershire?</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Links with other Partnership work</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>About Worcestershire</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>How do we measure how well communities get along together?</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>How this Strategy has been created</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>The main issues the Worcestershire Partnership needs to focus on to build stronger, well informed cohesion activities</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>What we have done already to develop and celebrate a sense of belonging in our communities, our challenges and changes we need to make for improvement</b>	<b>16</b>
	<b>a) Communities that are safe and feel safe</b>	<b>17</b>
	<b>b) A better environment for today and tomorrow</b>	<b>19</b>
	<b>c) Economic success that is shared by all</b>	<b>21</b>
	<b>d) Improving health and wellbeing</b>	<b>23</b>
	<b>e) Meeting the needs of children and young people</b>	<b>25</b>
	<b>f) Stronger communities - covering a range of issues including housing, culture and volunteering</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>Our key ambitions for the Strategy</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>Effective leadership to make the Strategy for Cohesive, Strong Communities work</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>Our strategic responsibilities</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>Delivering the Strategy</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>Creating learning opportunities</b>	<b>33</b>
	<b>Appendix One – Stakeholder Engagement</b>	<b>34</b>

## 1. The Vision for Worcestershire

The Worcestershire Partnership has developed a vision for the future of Worcestershire. The vision is based on what residents have told us was important to them in making Worcestershire a great place to visit, work or live in. The Worcestershire Partnership, which is the county wide Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), is made up of a range of partners, including local authorities, health services, the police, fire and rescue service and probation trust, organisations from the voluntary and community sector and business representatives. Our main objective is to work jointly to improve the quality of life for the people who visit, work or live in the county. The [Sustainable Community Strategy \(SCS\)](#) focuses on the activity needed in the short term (2008-2013) to make this happen. You can find out more about the Worcestershire Partnership, at [www.worcestershirepartnership.org.uk](http://www.worcestershirepartnership.org.uk)

### The Worcestershire Partnership Vision

A County with safe, cohesive, healthy and inclusive communities, a strong and diverse economy and a valued and cherished environment

We recognise that although the county of Worcestershire is one place, it has several identities characterised through its six District Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), and further, the district LSPs recognise the different identities within their own boundaries down to town, parish or ward levels.

The District LSPs all have community strategies designed to tackle issues at their local district or neighbourhood level. The Worcestershire Partnership LSP and the District LSPs all aspire to achieve improvements for their communities. They promote this through shared values and positive vision statements articulated in each of the [district LSP's Sustainable Community Strategies](#). We think this is a sound foundation on which to build our county Strategy for Cohesive, Strong Communities. It provides the basis to develop our county wide, and then more specific local approaches, to support better cohesion and integration within our varied communities.

## 2. The Sustainable Community Strategy – key priorities

The Worcestershire Partnership has six key county priorities:

- Communities that are safe and feel safe
- A better environment for today and tomorrow
- Economic success that is shared by all
- Improving health and wellbeing
- Meeting the needs of children and young people
- Stronger communities - covering a range of issues including housing, culture, volunteering, Gypsy Traveller and emerging communities.

Each of these priorities has a [Theme Group](#) of partner representatives who work together to achieve improvement across each of the priorities – some examples of their contribution to supporting cohesive, strong communities are illustrated in Section 11.

### 3. Our vision for cohesive, strong communities and key strategic aims

The Worcestershire Partnership has shown its commitment to cohesive communities by identifying community cohesion as a cross cutting theme which features in the delivery of all six priorities. It has also developed a specific vision for cohesive, strong communities in Worcestershire:

#### **The Worcestershire Partnership Vision for Cohesive, Strong Communities**

Worcestershire is one place and many places where everyone enjoys a sense of belonging, and where everyone is encouraged to build positive relationships and contribute to community wellbeing.

Our underpinning strategic aims are for:

- Local people to play an active part in civic and community life, and contribute to local decision making through ongoing and effective engagement
- Local people of all ages and backgrounds to have opportunities to mix together and share common experiences
- The Worcestershire Partnership to offer community leadership, celebrate diversity and promote equality of opportunity as a means of enhancing cohesion and quality of life.

#### 4. What is the national definition of community cohesion?

The definition below is used nationally to describe cohesion or community cohesion:

Community Cohesion is what must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well together.

A key contributor to community cohesion is integration which is what must happen to enable new residents and existing residents to adjust to one another.

The vision of an integrated and cohesive community is based on **three foundations**:

- People from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities
- People know their rights and responsibilities
- People trust one another and trust local institutions to act fairly.

**And three key ways of living together:**

- People have a shared future vision and a sense of belonging
- People have a focus on what new and existing communities have in common, alongside a recognition of diversity
- There is a strong and positive relationship between people from different backgrounds.

Department of Communities and Local Government

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/racecohesionfaith/communitycohesion/>

The definition is a useful starting point, and you will also find the term community cohesion referred to in this Strategy.

## 5. What do we understand by cohesive, strong communities in Worcestershire?

Evidence shows that there are many benefits when people get along well together in the communities in which they live. People who have a sense of belonging in their neighbourhood are likely to take better advantage of public services and enjoy the benefits of a good education, have access to meaningful employment, are healthier and are likely to live longer.

When positive relationships exist between people of all ages and backgrounds, communities are said to be 'cohesive.' These relationships also empower communities and make them stronger as by getting along together, people can work together to make improvements for their own neighbourhoods, and develop a sense of belonging where people trust and tolerate each other. This is a cultural change and is strengthening society to help itself. In addition to the benefits to residents, who are more in charge of their own destinies, this can also reduce the reliance on some public organisations in the long term. This is very much in line with the Coalition Government's thinking on the "Big Society".

We understand and work with the national definition of community cohesion. However, we recognise that a lot of what we do across our themed partnerships and in our districts and communities contributes to supporting cohesive, strong communities but it does not always have the label or definition of community cohesion attached to it.

Cohesion is about what people have in common, what brings people together and whether they get along with each other. A tendency can be to focus on people's differences, especially if being different isolates them from society or if they feel discriminated against. This can push people in communities apart. In practice we have far more in common; what we do, what we worry about and what we aspire to. We should focus more on these things.

Cohesive, strong communities can mean different things to people living in different areas. As a rule most people do not go about their daily lives asking themselves 'have we been cohesive today?' Cohesion is much more noticeable when it is absent, and where disharmony and community tensions are felt within communities.

Moreover, when people feel lonely and isolated in communities perhaps because they are older, or because they have a mental health problem or they are unable to afford transport costs to enable them to participate in social activities, they are unlikely to describe their situation as un-cohesive. They may express themselves in different ways which in some cases can have an adverse effect on themselves, or on others.

## 6. Links with other Partnership work

There are other county and local plans and strategies that are very relevant and complementary to this Strategy. They are important because they include work that the Worcestershire Partnership and its members take responsibility for. They include:

- **Equalities and diversity** – Many people associate cohesion with equalities and diversity. Nearly all public sector organisations have policies in place to ensure that people who work there are treated equally. Many businesses also have policies and practice to ensure equal rights in employment terms. A broad national definition of equalities says:

‘An equal society protects and promotes equal, real freedom and opportunity to live in the way people value and would choose, so that everyone can flourish. An equal society recognises people’s different needs, situations and goals, and removes the barriers that limit what people can do and be.’ Source – the Equalities Framework for Local Government 2009.

Our local initiative called ‘Being Different Together’ provides excellent guiding principles on which to build our community cohesion strategy. The initiative was successful in attracting funding from the region. We think this is an excellent platform on which to build our strategy for cohesive, strong communities and to extend it well beyond the workplace and our county and district councils, to all our partner organisations as well as people’s everyday lives.

- **Prevent** – As part of the national approach to tackling violent extremism and radicalisation, Worcestershire is developing its approach to the Government’s Prevent Strategy. This is a very specific area of work that is designed to ensure that individuals and communities are not put at risk by activities in relation to terrorism and extremism. It should follow that where communities are strong and cohesive that there are fewer opportunities for extreme views to develop and be played out, whether these relate to political, religious, race or wider issues such as animal rights. The work on the Prevent agenda needs to be embedded in a way that builds upon Worcestershire’s overall approach to supporting and protecting cohesive communities and challenging extremist views and activities that put that cohesion at risk.
- **New and emerging communities** – The [Welcome to Worcestershire](#) website is one of many contributions to cohesion providing information in different languages to new residents. It is designed for those who have recently moved to the county from outside the UK or who are thinking of making Worcestershire their home.

It is recognised that many new residents have chosen Worcestershire as a place to live because it is a beautiful county, very rural and "typically English".

However, it is acknowledged that moving to another country can, for many, be traumatic or confusing, particularly when people struggle to speak the English language. It is also a risk that newcomers gain an unrealistic view of British life from rumour or from

the media. The website aims to provide accurate and up-to-date information to help new residents find their way around Worcestershire, to help them understand what their rights are, and to point them to further sources of information, whatever their query.

- **Intergenerational issues** – Worcestershire has developed an Intergenerational Strategy that promotes and details examples of how young and older people can work together and understand each other better.

The strategy has pulled together in one document the relevant priorities from children's and adult services and provides a national and local policy context as well as examples of local good practice. It shows examples of shifts in perception that older people have of younger people and vice versa following an intergenerational project:

*"I didn't know there were young people like this around today." (Quote from older person)*

*"I expected older people to be 'mardy' but they weren't. They were very friendly and gave us tips. We've changed our minds about them." (Quote from younger person)*

The aim of the Worcestershire Intergenerational Strategy is to bring young/older/those with disabilities/culturally diverse people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities, which promote greater understanding and respect between generations and contribute to building more cohesive communities.

- **Considering and prioritising Worcestershire areas of highest need** – we have used strong evidence to identify those neighbourhoods in the county that are most deprived in terms of employment, health, education, housing and community safety and have a programme in place to deliver our priorities in these neighbourhoods through the district Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). These projects are being delivered over a three to five year period, using £2.4 million of funding from the Local Area Agreement performance reward grant. They are partnership driven and focus on a range of activities – including formal and informal learning opportunities, employment fairs, smoking cessation referrals and practical advice and funding to tackle fuel poverty – that will address the inequalities that can exist in some parts of the county.
- **Governance of the Worcestershire Partnership** – the Partnership is reviewing its governance arrangements to ensure that it is able to respond effectively to issues in the county, this is even more important in hard economic times.

## 7. About Worcestershire

The county of Worcestershire is located in the heart of England. It comprises six districts: Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills, Redditch, Worcester City, Wychavon and Wyre Forest. There are 161 town and parish councils / parish meetings in the County.

Worcestershire is diverse in terms of its population and it is diverse in terms of its needs.

Approximately one third of Worcestershire's residents live in rural areas. Here residents can have problems accessing local services or may experience a lack of facilities.

In total 70% of the total population live in urban areas<sup>1</sup>. Worcestershire as a whole is not deprived in comparison with the rest of the country, with only 2% of the County within the most deprived 10% of areas nationally.<sup>2</sup> However there are some wards in Redditch, Worcester City and Wyre Forest in particular, that experience deprivation associated with income, employment, ill health, crime and in particular education. We also recognise that some people living in our diverse communities are facing increased financial pressure with job losses or a reduction in working hours and freezes on pay.

Worcestershire has a slightly older age structure than the national average, with 18.1% of people in the County aged 65 and over, compared to 16.1% in England<sup>3</sup>. Older people can sometimes experience isolation and poor access to services, especially in rural areas.

Young people in Worcestershire have also reported that there is not enough for them to do in some areas and that a lack of public transport restricts their activities.

The percentage of people from black and minority ethnic communities (BME) groups is significantly lower than the regional and national averages. The BME (non-White British) and "White Other" population in Worcestershire is projected to increase from 7.2% in 2007 to 8.6% by 2011. This compares to a BME (non-White British) and "White Other" national average of 16.4% in mid-2007<sup>4</sup>

A long established minority community is the Gypsy Roma Traveller community, with some local families having roots in Worcestershire for several hundred years. Worcestershire County Council's Gypsy and Travellers' Service estimate that there are about 5,000 Gypsies and Travellers in the county, although the majority of families and children are of Gypsy rather than Traveller origin.

---

<sup>1</sup> Source – ONS mid-2008 population estimates and DEFRA urban/rural classification by LSOA

<sup>2</sup> Source – CLG Indices of Deprivation 2007

<sup>3</sup> Source – ONS 2008 mid-year estimates

<sup>4</sup> Source – ONS experimental population statistics by Ethnic Group and WCC population projections

In recent years there has also been a significant number of people (over 14,000 in the last four years<sup>5</sup>) migrating into Worcestershire, particularly from the A8 European Union Accession countries, around half have come from Poland. Some of these people may have returned to their country of origin or moved elsewhere in the interim period. The main places they have chosen to live are Wychavon, Worcester and Redditch, and a number are seasonal workers who live on or near to their place of work.

Migrant workers bring proven and welcome economic benefits to the county – and indeed some employers are highly dependent upon them to run their businesses. This strategy wants to ensure that new groups of workers and families can become successfully integrated, within existing communities and in our local businesses.

There are reported economic and other benefits to new migrant labour working in Worcestershire businesses. However, some people think that new migrant workers may be displacing others from seasonal agricultural work. Established majority and BME communities have also expressed concerns about competition for jobs, housing and resources from migrant workers. This strategy tries to ensure that there is a better understanding about each other so that all people wherever they live within the county get along with their neighbours and can start to understand and recognise what each has in common, rather than feel threatened by what appears to be different.

A report called [‘The Story of Place’](#) provides a detailed account, down to ward level, of other aspects of the county.

---

<sup>5</sup> Source - National Insurance Number (NINo) Applications 2005-06 to 2008-09. It should be noted that NINo application data does not register how long people stay in the area, so many of these people will have moved elsewhere or returned to their country of origin in the interim period.

## **8. How do we measure how well communities get along together?**

In the past the Government collected statistics from an annual Place Survey which asked how people from different backgrounds get on with each other and if they have a sense of belonging to a local area<sup>6</sup>.

In 2008 the national average of people that agree or strongly agree that people from different backgrounds in their local area get along well together was 76%. The national average of people who feel very strongly or strongly that they have a sense of belonging in their local area was 59%. The figures below show that, looking at Worcestershire as a whole, the score is higher than the national average on these two indicators. This is something to celebrate. But Worcestershire is not complacent; especially as in some areas our results are less than the national average and some of our neighbouring counties have higher scores. Although the Government survey will no longer be carried out we will use the Worcestershire Viewpoint survey to track these issues. We are also committed to not being over reliant on what statistics tell us, but to use the numbers to guide us to particular areas where we have carried out much more extensive research to find out what people say about the problems in their areas.

---

<sup>6</sup> Source – Place Survey 2008

Figure One – Place Survey 2008 Results

<b>PLACE SURVEY 2008</b>	<b>% of people who feel that people from different backgrounds in the local area get on well together</b>	<b>% of people who feel they belong to their immediate area</b>
<b><i>National Average</i></b>	76%	59%
<b><u>Worcestershire County</u></b>	<b><u>77%</u></b>	<b><u>62%</u></b>
Malvern Hills	82%	70%
Redditch	72%	55%
Worcester City	75%	55%
Wyre Forest	73%	61%
Bromsgrove	82%	61%
Wychavon	79%	67%
<b><u>Neighbouring Counties</u></b>		
Shropshire	84%	71%
Gloucestershire	83%	63%
Warwickshire	81%	60%
Herefordshire	76%	66%
Staffordshire	75%	62%

## 9. How this Strategy has been created

A Project Group was established to oversee the development of this Strategy and a range of activities were designed to shape and deliver it.

We looked at more than 100 partnership policy and strategy documents and other relevant papers to find out about and report on partnership work that contributes to cohesion.

We asked approximately 250 people from a wide range of public, private, voluntary sector organisations and community and resident groups what are the specific issues for Worcestershire that need to be addressed via a strategy for supporting cohesive, strong communities. This included an event with about 60 stakeholders to help create our shared vision for cohesion in Worcestershire. We also met with councillors from the County Council and District Councils. The list of contributors is shown at Appendix One at the end of this document.

We have created an on-line Cohesive, Strong Communities toolkit (add link) so that everyone who is part of the Worcestershire Partnership can develop knowledge and skills to help integrate cohesion practice into current and future work plans and projects.

## 10. The main issues the Worcestershire Partnership needs to focus on to build stronger, well informed cohesion activities

We learned a lot from what people told us. In particular we heard about many examples of really good practice that organisations, groups and individuals do which help foster good relations in different areas and communities. We have picked out just some examples below where we have organised them under the six themes stated in the Sustainable Community Strategy. This demonstrates a few of our activities and some of our future challenges.

Our engagement was also really helpful because it showed us where there is potential to build on what is already being done to further support cohesive, strong communities and help people living in communities to get along better together. We also recognise and acknowledge that all partners are facing significant reductions in public spending in the next year and for the foreseeable future. In this sense our Strategy does not recommend new or resource intensive initiatives, but a county wide commitment to embed cohesion priorities and principles into all of our jobs and working relationships.

There are some key characteristics about Worcestershire that makes our approach to developing a strategy for cohesive, strong communities different, but not unique, from other parts of the country.

We believe we are ahead of the game in understanding our county and local issues and challenges that we need to strategically plan for and manage.

Key characteristics and issues are:

- The geographic diversity and number of small communities in Worcestershire and the challenge that creates – for example, we need to adopt very different approaches to address issues such as older people not accessing services in some rural areas, or anti social behaviour that impacts on cohesion in some urban areas.
- Ethnicity and faith differences exist in pockets around Worcestershire, and whilst we must be proactive and address any issues arising from this, other forms of diversity also have to be considered. In particular, the challenge of managing the tensions that can arise because of the arrival and churn created by new and emerging communities. Churn relates to the turnover of people moving in and out of communities which can have an impact on planning and delivering public services, in particular education, housing and health.
- Migrant workers are seen as a source of both economic benefit and possible tension – it will be important to involve employers in cohesion programmes.
- Many people we spoke to, who deliver services and helped us create this strategy, recognise the need to consider and embed cohesion more into what they do – especially in partnership with others.
- Worcestershire has plenty of examples of good practice, particularly the work with schools and with Gypsy Roma Traveller groups. Also tackling anti social behaviour by using sport as a tool to occupy young people in ‘hot spot’ areas to help keep them out of trouble. We celebrate some examples of thematic and localised good practice in this document and see such initiatives as helpful platforms on which to develop other aspects of partnership activity to enable cohesion. There are many more good practice examples ([link](#)) available through the Cohesive, Strong Communities Toolkit
- Information sharing between partner organisations could be further developed. For example, joint partnership work to build on the local picture of potential tensions and to engage with communities and to recognise and address those tensions.
- As Worcestershire grows with new jobs and new homes we need to think about cohesion issues both between new and existing developments and within new ones, so that development eases/ enhances communities which are cohesive and strong.
- We think our examples of good practice (some are highlighted in Section 11 below) need to be developed, shared and reflected by all partners to learn from each other and to become part of everyday service delivery from all the organisations that make up the Worcestershire Partnership.

- Our local councillors representing the County, the Districts and the Town and Parish Councils are vital in helping to promote cohesion. The overriding message from councillors when we spoke with them is that supporting cohesive, strong communities is very much viewed as a cross-party issue with equal commitment from the main Political parties. Councillors are critical to knowing and understanding who their communities are and what their needs are – and we should support them in achieving this and sharing their community knowledge.

## 11. What we have done already to develop and celebrate a sense of belonging in our communities, our challenges and changes we need to make for improvement

Below are some examples of what we discovered through engaging with people to develop the strategy, which are presented under our six Sustainable Community Strategy themes. We wanted partners to tell us their success stories, however we also encouraged people to tell us about the problems that need to be addressed and to present ideas about what could be improved.

### 11. A. Communities that are safe and feel safe

#### What do we already do that contributes to supporting cohesive, strong communities?

Community Safety Partnerships hold Community Safety days or contribute to a range of community based events that allow local residents to engage directly with partners around specific issues of crime and anti social behaviour (ASB). One of the issues



affecting cohesion in Worcestershire is the attitudes of older people towards groups of young people (even when their behaviour is acceptable) and the anti social behaviour of some young people. Local residents have told us that the main things that influence their view about the level of Anti Social Behaviour in Worcestershire are young people congregating in public and the level of litter / rubbish on the streets. The examples below give just a flavour of what we are doing to tackle these challenges.

#### Bus Shelter and Underpass Scheme in Redditch

Some of the most vandalised features in Redditch are the local underpasses and bus shelters; particularly those within the district centres, so in order to reduce incidents of graffiti and vandalism and improve resident's feelings of safety, the Community Safety Team launched a project to tackle this issue using Community Art. The shelters are printed with a colourful mural generated by local young people using designs celebrating the local area. The Team has also worked with local youth groups to decorate a number of district underpasses using community murals designed and painted by young people. This has resulted in many positive comments from local residents and a big drop in graffiti or vandalism, as these facilities are owned by the local community that helped to create them. There is now an ongoing programme of replacing vandalised shelters and enhancing underpasses in Redditch. **These projects help to challenge perceptions of young people and promote the positive contributions they can make in the community.**

#### Broadwater Residents Action Group

In Wyre Forest, with the Community Housing Group as the lead, the Community Safety Partnership has been working to achieve the Cleaner Safer Greener kite mark (awarded by the organisation behind the Keep Britain Tidy campaign) in the Broadwaters area of Kidderminster. The kite mark is only awarded when a neighbourhood meets certain standards of cleanliness and security and can demonstrate that the local community has worked together to make positive changes. The process is being used to create a



Neighbourhood Agreement. Through this work the BRAG (Broadwaters Resident Action Group) has been established. **The Action Group is starting to bring the community together** by actively involving agencies and residents (through tidy days for example). This **approach really supports cohesive, strong communities** and, if successful, will be rolled out to the Areas of Highest Need (AoHN) in Wyre Forest.



### **Signposting Service**

The Herefordshire and Worcestershire Fire and Rescue Service Signposting Service allows trained staff to signpost or refer vulnerable residents to other services should they be required, in order to support them to live independently at home. The Safer Communities Board and Community Safety Partnerships can build on this approach, or combine it with existing activity, to deliver reassurance and home security advice to vulnerable adults, **helping to reduce isolation amongst vulnerable older people.**

### **Challenges and Actions**

Two of the key issues for the Safer Communities theme group are to **improve public perception of Anti Social Behaviour (ASB)**, and improve local residents' confidence in partner organisations' ability to deal with issues associated with crime and ASB.

The Safer Communities Board and each of the four community safety partnerships have identified ASB and litter / rubbish as a priority for 2010/11, which means that partners have committed to addressing these issues. Examples of projects to address ASB include the countywide "Stay Safe" project, which aims to tackle ASB in hotspot locations around the County and help protect vulnerable young people from becoming the victims of crime. The scheme will provide a multi-agency approach to identify young people who are out late at night, are far from home, drinking underage or taking drugs, and remove them to a place of safety until a parent or responsible adult collects them.

We want to re-assure residents that we are **working together to tackle crime and Anti Social Behaviour – and improve public confidence that these important issues are being dealt with.** The examples above are only a flavour of the wide range of work being done across Worcestershire. We recognise that we need to improve communication and engagement with residents about crime and ASB problems. We will research what residents really want to know (customer insights). We will use this knowledge to provide people with information about what is being done to reduce crime and ASB in their area, how they can get help with problems and how they can get involved in making neighbourhoods safer. How this is done will vary from place to place, depending on local circumstances. We will make sure that information and communication is properly targeted, and will reach different groups in different ways. The need for effective communication will be considered alongside all our community safety projects so that the right people are informed about the issues that matter in the right way.

## 11. B. A better environment for today and tomorrow

### What do we already do that contributes to supporting cohesive, strong communities?

There are many inspiring examples of projects related to the environment and sustainability that promote cohesive, strong communities by bringing people of different ages and backgrounds together, focused on a common aim.

#### Grow With Wyre Landscape Partnership Scheme.



This lottery funded project involves 30 members of the local community trained by archaeologists from Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service undertaking fieldwork surveys and condition assessment of archaeological sites. The volunteers are of mixed ages and backgrounds. Some have previous experience of volunteer projects, but for others this is the first time they have taken part in this kind of activity. The project contributes to cohesion by **providing the volunteers with an opportunity to work together towards a common aim; to gain a better understanding of Wyre Forest's historic environment; and to help people to feel attached to - and**

**responsible for - the wider landscape.**

#### Community Earth Heritage Champions Project

Funded by the Heritage Lottery, this project involves people from local communities working with the Earth Heritage Trust to monitor, conserve and use their own local sites of geological and landscape importance. Community 'Champions' (who can be local youth or heritage groups, schools, special interest groups and clubs or just a few dedicated individuals) 'adopt' a site. They are supported and trained to monitor the site's condition; report any changes and/or threats to the site; and to learn all about its unique importance and its place in the wider geology and landscape of the area. All of this is aimed at providing local people with a sense of "ownership" of the site, so that they can become actively involved in its use and can make fully informed decisions about its future. **This supports cohesive, strong communities by bringing people together and building the capacity of communities to do things for themselves.**



#### Faith in the future of Worcestershire

Worcestershire's first 'Faith in the Future of Worcestershire' conference was hosted by the County Council in November 2009. This conference brought together planners and religious leaders from across the County through the Worcestershire Interfaith Forum to discuss how social needs can be met, in the context of proposals to build new housing and employment in Worcestershire. **Faith communities play an important role in cohesion and inter-faith work helps to strengthen our understanding of each other.**

## St Stephen's Regeneration Project

St Stephen's Church in Redditch forms part of the St Stephen's Regeneration Project. The church will remain a place of worship, but will incorporate new facilities within the building to allow greater use and benefit by a wider section of the community. Proposals for redevelopment include space for meetings and exhibitions to support the local arts community, and a cafe for healthy food [www.newlifeonthegreen.org/leaflet.pdf](http://www.newlifeonthegreen.org/leaflet.pdf). In recent years there has been growing recognition of the multi-functional potential of religious and community buildings. **These buildings are often well-placed hubs and support cohesion by bringing communities together to offer shared spaces for all.**



## Challenges and Actions

Worcestershire expects housing growth in the future and it will be important that **future development in Worcestershire** takes into account the impact on cohesion and that partners work together to ensure that there are opportunities to build cohesive, strong communities.

One way we intend to plan for this is through our **Infrastructure** planning, which will not only look at what roads, transport and employment land may be needed, but will also consider social facilities such as schools, community centres, etc. that may be required to give people opportunities to come together and support cohesion.

Recent research from the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment has shown that almost 90% of people use parks and green spaces (compared with 30% who visit concert halls and galleries). This highlights how important **outdoor opportunities and recreation** are in providing a shared resource for everyone and for bringing people together.

Worcestershire's growing move towards developing "Green Infrastructure" will allow for a comprehensive picture of these environmental resources to be established, and help to ensure opportunities are provided where they are needed in the future.

The Worcestershire Partnership's Parks & Countryside Task Group plays a key role in bringing together partners from across the county to help realise these aims.

## 11. C. Economy and Transport Theme

### What do we already do that contributes to supporting cohesive, strong communities?

We know that a thriving economy helps to support cohesive, strong communities. We recognise the importance of removing barriers to employment faced by disadvantaged groups and communities in Worcestershire. To support the economy we need to develop a skilled workforce and keep our young people and graduates in the County. We also need to increase the numbers of 19 year olds who are in employment, education or training.

#### Creating Jobs and Employment Opportunities

Worcestershire has been awarded £880,000 over four years (2009 – 2013) through the Connections to Opportunities programme funded by Advantage West Midlands. The aim is to address "worklessness" (this term covers people on benefits or who are



economically inactive) and economic exclusion. We will help and support around 400 people (primarily focusing on people on incapacity benefit, lone parents and ex-offenders) to gain the skills they need to find work. Take for example "Adam"<sup>7</sup> who lives in Worcestershire. He has been unemployed for two years and was living in hostel accommodation. Adam has had support to develop his literacy, numeracy and IT skills. Adam's confidence has increased. He has moved into his own accommodation and enrolled at a Job Club at the YMCA where he will receive more support to apply for jobs. **This programme will support cohesion by helping people like Adam who are furthest**

**from the job market back into work.**

Worcestershire has secured £1.979 million from the Department for Works and Pensions Future Jobs Fund. The award will enable 309 'extra' jobs (i.e. jobs over 25 hours per week that would not exist without this funding) to be created in the County between December 2009 and November 2010. The jobs will be created by a variety of organisations including public, voluntary and community sector bodies. Each job must last at least 6 months to qualify for funding. **The Fund supports cohesion by creating 309 jobs for 18-24 year olds who have been Jobseekers for 26 - 50 weeks.**

#### Supporting young people not in education, employment and training (NEET)

In a project being run by Connexions older people are being recruited to work with young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). The older volunteers will help the young people with job searches, creating a curriculum vitae and writing application forms and act as a mentor for interviews and even during the first few weeks of work. vTalent also works with young people not in education, employment or training to get them volunteering in a workplace that they are interested in, expanding their experiences and opening up more opportunities for employment.

**These projects provide real support to one of our target groups of young people and breaks down barriers between generations.**



<sup>7</sup> Name changed to protect identity

## Improving services in rural areas

The Workwise scheme **supports cohesion by helping people in rural areas of Worcestershire to overcome the lack of suitable transport to access opportunities in employment, training and further education.**



Applicants may be offered the loan of a moped for 6 months along with training, safety equipment, insurance, tax, breakdown cover, servicing and maintenance. The scheme assisted 84 people in 2009/10 and has 42 mopeds currently on the road. Further help will be provided to rural communities through the LEADER programme. Worcestershire County Council has been awarded grant funding of £1.5 million over three and a half years to improve services and facilities for people in rural areas. Parts of Wychavon, Wyre Forest and Malvern Hills are eligible for assistance. Organisations with community led

project ideas to improve their local area have been invited to apply for funding. **LEADER will support cohesive, strong communities by improving conditions and opportunities for people living in designated rural areas.**

## Challenges and Actions

Two key issues for the Economy and Transport Theme group are to **improve the skills of the existing workforce** – particularly focusing on those at NVQ Level 2+ and below to move them onto NVQ level 3 and 4 and to reduce worklessness by working to remove barriers to employment - especially for those who are out of work due to their circumstances such as people with disabilities or family commitments.

We know the recession is having a direct impact on the incomes of many individuals and households and this has triggered an increase in the number of people seeking benefits advice. In the current climate there are fewer jobs and less disposable income. Rising prices have further exacerbated the problems for the residents of the County. Recent studies show that it will take seven years before the unemployment in the country will be at par with 2007 levels. It is therefore really important to improve the employability levels and skills of the local population and to concentrate on those who are made redundant to find alternative jobs. We are also **working to remove barriers to employment for disadvantaged groups and communities.** The Economic Strategy for Worcestershire is being reviewed to take into account the impacts of the recession and the need to concentrate on **creating more jobs** in the County.

## 11. D. Health and Well Being Theme

### What do we already do that contributes to supporting cohesive, strong communities?

Health and cohesion are linked. Health tends to decline in communities where levels of interaction between people are low and where people feel insecure. People's state of mental and physical health affects their ability and motivation to engage in community activity. When people are fit and well they play a more active part in their communities than when they are ill or depressed. It is then much easier to engage with people and to be sure that services are meeting local needs.

#### The Health Improvement Fund

A £1million Health Improvement Fund (HIF) has been made available for partners to draw on to deliver healthy lifestyles projects. These projects are delivered locally (often by the Voluntary and Community Sector) and are targeted to meet local health needs. Whilst health hotspots (areas where there are concerns about health inequalities or social deprivation) are given priority, projects (such as a cookery class in a village hall) ensure that the specific health needs of local communities are met through the funding. The HIF has funded a portfolio of community based, short term health and well being activities – which have successfully reached people who are traditionally harder to reach and involved them in activity to promote health and well being. Some

examples are given below:



#### Workers Educational Association (WEA)

The Workers Educational Association received a grant of £74,927 to run a pilot community based health education programme aimed at adults, older people and adults from BME communities in health hotspot areas of Bromsgrove (Charford), Redditch (Batchley and Central) and Wyre Forest (Greenhill and Broadwaters). The programme has been specifically designed to address the risks of circulatory diseases amongst older people and is comprised of physical activity taster sessions including tai-chi, Otago and keep fit classes. These sessions are complimented by health education courses which increase awareness of what constitutes good health; topics include healthy families, women's health and assertiveness and confidence. **This supports cohesion by not only**

**improving awareness about how to adopt healthy lifestyles, but also increases people's confidence to access mainstream public health and/or social care services.**

#### Deaf Direct

Deaf Direct received a grant of £30,000 to run a pilot healthy lifestyle programme tailored towards the needs of deaf adults and young people within health hotspot areas of Worcester and Malvern. Activities include keep fit and sports sessions at local leisure and sports centres and a healthy living course covering topics on nutrition, and alcohol awareness and smoking cessation. Funding will be used to employ a project co-ordinator and a team of deaf mentors. Sports centre staff involved in the project will receive deaf awareness support and work related sign language to **overcome challenges to participation** in sport and exercise **experienced by Deaf people.**



## Sport as a way of bringing people together and improving health



Sport and physical activity not only improves health it also **brings people together from different backgrounds and is a great way of building relationships between people and actively involving people in their local community.** There are many initiatives and opportunities to get involved in sport and physical activity across Worcestershire. For example the Bromsgrove Sports Development Team received just over £4000 from the HIF to run an intergenerational sports programme in health hotspot areas of Bromsgrove. The programme aimed to tackle rising levels of obesity by encouraging adults and older people to engage in regular physical activity with their children whilst promoting the importance of families in the community. The Sports Development Team worked intensively with a range of partners including the PCT, Age Concern, County Sports Development Officers and local sports clubs and Associations to ensure that those that took part could

continue developing their sporting interests and remain active. The project concluded earlier this year and proved such a success that a number of new clubs have been established.

## Community Leadership for Health

A Community Leadership for Health initiative has been launched to help elected members of the County Council act as champions for better health and play a role in improving the health of their constituents. This includes a £500,000 Community Leadership for Health Fund to support local projects to improve health. Projects have ranged from £50 - £12,000. For example in Malvern Hills councillors clubbed together to fund a "life coach" at Evesham and Malvern Hills College to help individuals take greater charge of their lives. **This supports cohesive, strong communities by enabling elected councillors to support "grass roots" community initiatives – building social capital in communities**



## Challenges and Actions

The Health Improvement Fund (HIF) has closed (although some projects still continue), however it is very important that all partners learn lessons from the projects and are able to assess how they have contributed not only to narrowing the health gap between people living in different areas, but also how they have enhanced cohesion in an area. These lessons will be drawn out when evaluating the HIF projects so that they can influence how health services and initiatives are funded in the future.

We know that health services may be better taken up and easier for people to use when they are provided very locally. For this reason we aim to broaden opportunities to access services (for example stop smoking services) in local settings and by local providers such as voluntary or community organisations. On a one to one basis health trainers will provide information and advice to support people to live healthier lifestyles right across the County from April 2010. These initiatives have the potential to achieve both cohesion and health gains.

## 11. E. Meeting the needs of children and young people

### What do we already do that contributes to supporting cohesive, strong communities?

This Strategy recognises that children and young people have a key role to play in contributing to and promoting cohesion across the County. We want to celebrate young people's contribution – and to challenge and support them to recognise the difference that they can make to improving cohesion in the future.

#### Generations Together



Generations Together Project  
Margaret Addis (87), Sally Ellison, Worcestershire Volunteer Services and Michael Close (21).

A successful bid for a Generations Together grant secured £386,800 funding for intergenerational activity across the county. The scheme has funded over 26 different projects, mainly in the voluntary and community sectors. **It supports cohesive, strong communities by bringing younger and older people together to share their skills and experiences. This work promotes greater understanding and respect between generations.** For example Sight Concern is recruiting young volunteers to help older people who are blind or partially sighted to learn to use new technology such as 'talking' newspapers. Also young volunteers who are blind or partially sighted are sharing their experiences with older people who are losing their sight to help them come to terms with the situation.

#### Young People in Control

Worcestershire's Youth Cabinet has developed the Worcestershire Youth Manifesto, which sets out what young people want to see happen in Worcestershire. It is based on the results of the Big Questionnaire, which was completed by 8,623 young people across Worcestershire. Young people decide how money is being spent in their areas through programmes such as FLOSS (Funding Lots of Super Stuff) and Bromsgrove District Council hosted a 'U-Decide' event which saw local youngsters deciding how to spend £35,000 on activities for children. YouthComm is run by and for young people and aims to build a youth community through communication. It offers TV, website and radio outlets and gives young people access to information and advice, whilst the Plug and Play website provides young people with information about what is going on in Worcestershire. Young people actively contribute to YouthComm through reviews etc. **These and other similar initiatives, support cohesion by actively engaging with children and young people and really involving them in decisions that affect them.**





### **Challenging Stereotypes of Young People – "Goody in a Hoody"**

Sometimes young people get a bad press. International Youth Day is a fantastic opportunity for young people across the county to get out and about and raise awareness of a particular theme. In 2009 the theme was Sustainability and young people went out to High Streets across Worcestershire giving out top tips on recycling and sustainability, whilst at the same time **promoting cohesive, strong communities by challenging negative perceptions of young people in hoodies.**

### **Cohesion in Schools, Children's Centres and Early Years settings**

Schools have a duty to promote community cohesion. **Nine contrasting schools in different geographical areas have acted as community cohesion good practice case studies. They developed a wide range of approaches appropriate to local circumstances** including "twinning" with schools in more ethnically diverse areas, looking at accessibility and cohesion in the wider community and various projects to encourage parents into schools through arts and training programmes. These case studies are published for other schools, together with a range of training resources. Lead schools have been identified and briefed to act as centres of good practice in cohesion focusing on children for whom English is a second language (EAL) and Gypsy, Romany and Traveller (GRT) communities. **Schools also participate in wider cohesion initiatives** – for example a High School in Redditch is an active member of the Redditch Anti Harassment Partnership (RAHP), and works closely with other partners to enable reporting of hate incidents and to identify and resolve incidents within local communities. Through RAHP Middle Schools will be piloting a new training package delivering workshops to promote community cohesion. **Children's Centres are developing new ways of supporting all families to feel they are members of their local communities**, for example the Polish communities in Worcester and Redditch. All early years providers are working to **narrow the gap in achievement between the 20% of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers.** A 'Guide to Community Cohesion' leaflet has been developed in consultation with Extended Services and circulated to all schools and governors. The leaflet shares the strategy and maps out the development of Community Cohesion in Worcestershire. **The Finstall Centre has been set up as a 'one stop shop' to deal with enquiries.** This has been supported by the development of a flowchart to guide the enquiry to appropriate support.



### **Challenges and Actions**

The Children's Trust recognises the important work taking place in the community by the partners across the districts including the Voluntary and Community Sector. Through the **Children and Young People's Plan** we will continue to develop ways of **working with partners to improve cohesion** across Worcestershire.

## 11. F. Stronger communities - covering a range of issues including housing, culture, volunteering, Gypsy Roma Traveller and Emerging Communities

### What do we already do that contributes to supporting cohesive, strong communities?

The Stronger Communities theme brings together a wide range of partnership activity that contributes to supporting cohesive, strong communities. Critical issues such as housing provision, tackling poverty and exclusion, working with new communities (including migrant workers), and dispelling myths about and providing support to the Gypsy, Roma Traveller communities are all tackled under this theme. The Partnership recognises the vital contribution of the VCS and cultural and leisure provision to building cohesive, strong communities and enabling communities to work together and build relationships between people.

#### The Rural Housing Enabler



The Rural Housing Enabler helps communities to identify local housing need through a survey and – where housing need and an appropriate site are identified – provides impartial support through the planning process, ensuring that people who wish to stay in their rural community can afford to do so. **The work of the Rural Housing Enabler supports cohesion by delivering affordable housing and in ensuring that rural communities are sustainable so that, over time, social networks and village services are not lost** as a result of the changing demographic profile of the village. The role also promotes an understanding of affordable housing amongst village residents, parish councils and local planning committees, in order to address negative perceptions of social housing and its impact on rural communities.

#### Worcestershire Shindig

Shindig is Worcestershire's programme of live arts and entertainment for community venues, hosted by local community groups who sell tickets locally. Touring companies and performers with regional, national and international profiles, specialising in work for small spaces, provide a wide range of theatre, dance, music, opera, storytelling, cabaret theatre, children's theatre, circus and clowning including cultural diversity work. The scheme visits both rural and urban venues during each season. **Shindig contributes to cohesive, strong communities by providing a focus for activities for all parts of the community, bringing people together and reducing social isolation, as well as providing high-quality cultural provision.**



**Encouraging adults with disabilities to use the County Record Office** As part of the Heritage Lottery funded Worcestershire Archive Source Project the County Record Office engaged with adults with disabilities who might not otherwise consider spending time carrying out historic research. The group researched the history of their Worcester Technical College site and created an "Archive Source Map of Old St Andrews Parish" as a creative way to present their findings. **This created a 'sense of place' that helped the students to engage more with Worcestershire.**

## Role of Community and Voluntary Sector

Countless Voluntary & Community Sector organisations across Worcestershire **provide a range of valuable services to local communities that help to build cohesive, strong communities.** These services can include befriending and community transport for older or isolated residents, the provision of positive activities for young people or those bringing together generations, festivals and events celebrating diversity or cultural heritage and thousands of volunteering opportunities that build strong social networks, including those provided through the county's network of district based volunteer centres. There are also a range of opportunities for smaller voluntary and community groups to contribute to cohesion. For example Councils allocate grants for community projects to bring people from different backgrounds together. Examples include celebrations of the Chinese New Year, the Rainbow Redditch's Mardi Gras, a multi-cultural women's sports day, disability awareness activity in schools and community events showcasing and celebrating English songs.



## A celebration of Gypsy and Traveller Heritage and Culture



The Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) Partnership brings together a range of partners to improve the quality of life for Worcestershire's Gypsy Roma Traveller community. The group launched its manifesto with a publication aimed at **raising awareness of Gypsy and Traveller culture in order to tackle misconceptions and to assist professionals in the public sector to respond appropriately to the needs of the communities.** In partnership with the County Council and local schools, they held a public event at the county's Hartlebury Castle as part of GRT History Month, celebrating Gypsy and Traveller heritage and culture and continuing to tackle direct and indirect discrimination.

## Challenges and Actions

Young people and families living in some rural areas within the county are unable to afford to buy a house. **Affordable housing** was a 'challenge' raised across most of the themed stakeholder groups and interviews with individuals. There could be opportunities for the Partnership to work more closely with the county's registered social landlords (RSLs) to improve and increase the provision of affordable housing. The good work of the Rural Housing Enabler could be further developed, with engagement from a wider range of partners.

There are still many myths about members of the **Gypsy Roma Traveller community and migrant workers**, which can lead to direct and indirect discrimination and prejudice. The Emerging Communities Task Group secured funding from the Migration Impacts Fund, (made up entirely of contributions levied on migrants entering the UK for the first time) to deliver a programme of support to public services that are adapting to the needs of new communities, particularly those from Eastern Europe. Initial priorities include the need for more translation and interpretation services supporting local authorities and community organisations and the promotion of training opportunities within the local migrant community in order to increase the number of interpreters from within these communities. Other objectives include supporting and developing English language programmes for children and adults to assist migrant workers with a smoother integration into their local communities. The project will link with

existing initiatives such as Communities in Schools which works with settled communities (such as the Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities) and will aim to support the excellent work already taking place.

## 12. Our key ambitions for the strategy

As a County partnership we recognise the need to target certain resources to the areas that need the most support. However, we are not complacent about the need to build good relations in **all** parts of Worcestershire and want to work with and support all partner organisations to make that happen.

Our overriding ambition for the whole county is to support work going on within the strategic thematic groups and in local areas that bring our communities together and help to make them more self reliant and less dependent on public services. Some relevant areas of work are:

- Improving education from early years through to practical and relevant adult education – continuing our work with schools and further developing this with colleges and Worcester University and other providers.
- Developing Worcestershire's economy through our Economic Strategy and working with employers and anticipating changing labour markets – helping to create and develop more jobs and better jobs.
- Providing better access to health care – in particular advice and support to improve health such as helping people to stop smoking, exercise, advice about eating properly, access to health screening for diseases such as diabetes and coronary heart disease etc.
- Improving transport and making housing more affordable are particular issues in Worcestershire's rural areas and within some towns – supporting and promoting the work of thematic groups to consider cohesion opportunities relating to developments and services.
- Building a positive and proactive partnership approach working together to understand and address possible community tensions – where creating opportunities for dialogue between groups is seen as the best way to minimise the risk of tensions developing into more serious situations.
- Providing leisure and culture facilities that will particularly encourage young people to mix more with older people and people from different cultures and backgrounds to discover what they have in common so they can better appreciate and experience living, working and enjoying leisure together.

This strategy does not have all the answers, but our engagement has shown there is existing capacity and a richness of ideas and potential to use the principles of cohesion to tackle some of the ambitions outlined above.

We describe one important cohesion principle as building '**social capital**'. Social capital is based on a belief that 'relationships matter' and that social networks and friendship are a valuable asset.

It is where good relationships enable people to build communities, to commit themselves to each other, and have a sense of belonging where people trust and tolerate each other.

It is suggested that this brings great benefits to people and seeks to redress some of the negative impacts that change has had on society. We recognise the importance of activities designed to bring people together whether through schools, neighbourhoods, arts, culture and leisure, in the work place or in any other setting.

### **13. Effective leadership to make the Strategy for Cohesive, Strong Communities work**

The Worcestershire Partnership is mostly made up of leading representatives of their organisations. The structures can seem quite complex. The County Partnership, the District Partnerships, (including Town and Parish Councils), often provide different services in addition to other public service and voluntary sector provision which can be confusing to those accessing services.

Our joint leadership commitment is to not allow the complexities of such structures to prevent delivery of this strategy. Rather we aim to build on our existing partnership approach to fully embrace what can be achieved together. We have been reviewing our leadership response to what we consider are our biggest priorities – in other words the social problems that all public sector partnerships have to address in particularly hard times across the whole of the UK. We are committed to working together to secure best possible use of public funding coming into Worcestershire.

Our commitment to cohesion is to ensure that at senior levels we have the right people with the right influence representing the strategic partnership and that we each work with our own partnership teams and other teams to put cohesion at the heart of what we do. We will help to celebrate and share the learning from existing and new examples of excellent cohesion practice and provide [tools](#) that help people to integrate cohesion into the work that they do.

Our performance will be measured through our existing internal mechanisms to monitor and manage performance. We have agreed, as a partnership, to deliver against certain indicators, including those that measure people's perceptions of their communities. We are signed up until March 2011 to achieving ambitious targets for these because we believe it is important – therefore we are committed to supporting action that will improve cohesion and people's perception of it. Above all else we will strengthen all channels of communication so as leading partners we can share responsibility and challenge each other's actions as critical friends.

Our desired outcome is to create a genuine culture of continuous improvement so that all people in all our neighbourhoods do enjoy a sense of belonging and can celebrate the richness of cultures shared by people from different backgrounds – and learn to understand and appreciate the things they have in common.

## 14. Our strategic responsibilities

As the Worcestershire Partnership we will:

- Show our commitment to cohesion – embedding cohesion into our partnership agenda for example by using the [toolkit](#) or by asking for reports from partnership organisations to show how as partners we are contributing through our strategic priorities to supporting cohesive, strong communities – feeding back into the Worcestershire Partnership as an ongoing two way process.
- Demonstrate the role of the Worcestershire Partnership as energetic community leaders and the value we place on building respect and understanding between all sections of the community – rural and urban - and promoting commonality rather than difference.
- Enable better co-ordination of these activities – through the toolkit and by providing contact details of key people in partner organisations willing to offer help and support.
- Support robust action plans as appropriate for partner organisations – which need to be realistic and fit with existing strategic plans and thematic priorities.
- Address inequalities in the county and help to close the gap – for example, health, affordable housing, rural transport etc. The responsible themed partnership groups will communicate their objectives and approaches to show the links with [cohesive, strong communities](#).
- Discover and distinguish what needs to be done where:
  - Some activity will be county wide
  - Some activity will be specific to local places.
- Ensure a coherent approach that brings together the range of cohesion activities already undertaken by the Worcestershire Partnership – this will principally be through the toolkit and publication of good practice.
- Ensure a greater impact on cohesion in the county by establishing mechanisms to share learning across the partnership – through the toolkit and other existing methods of learning.
- Build a more coherent approach to community engagement right across the partnership – build on what we have achieved already and explore good practice from elsewhere – local examples can be accessed through the toolkit.

- Help to clarify perceptions about what people think and feel about where they live, local services, their ability and will to develop more civic pride and citizenship – for example through mechanisms such as Worcestershire Viewpoint (our joint Citizens Survey) and the [Worcestershire Consultation Portal](#).

## 15. Delivering the Strategy

Our aim is to support rather than direct the delivery of this strategy. In doing so we have agreed eight core principles to underpin our actions and responsibilities:

1. We recognise that not one size fits all – issues vary from community to community across Worcestershire
2. We must focus on what people have in common, rather than what divides people
3. We must build even stronger networks within and across organisations, as well as areas, and within communities
4. We should encourage the role of the business and the voluntary sector to be developed
5. We must recognise and listen to young people – they are an important resource to help achieve improved community cohesion
6. As our populations and communities grow we should enhance our response to cohesion
7. We must achieve ‘bottom-up’ involvement to achieve buy-in from communities – who, how, when, where etc. are recognised as important challenges – but is nevertheless essential
8. We must ‘mainstream’ cohesion work, especially when resources are under pressure – creating a golden thread of joint working from leading partners through to all people who work in communities.
9. We recognise that partner organisations cannot do it all – drawing on the skills and expertise of people across the county will be really important, helping communities to do things for themselves.

## 16. Creating learning opportunities

People need to be properly equipped to make the right connection with what they do in their jobs and how that does and could impact on building cohesion. People working directly with communities or in public or voluntary service settings can be best placed to keep channels of communication open and to be advocates to express the voices of, in particular, new or vulnerable groups within the county and in local areas. They can also be the most creative at finding ways for people of different backgrounds to work, live and play together. There are examples above to build on and to further unlock the potential of people working in local areas – they need effective leadership and the confidence and skills to make things happen.

There is a [web based cohesion toolkit](#) that accompanies this strategy which can help all of us turn some of our ideas for change into activities that support cohesive, strong communities. Its intention is to help:

- Build confidence – of leaders, managers, staff working in communities and people living in neighbourhoods – to raise awareness and develop ways to, for example, ‘bust the myths’ of negative propaganda or information that can create mistrust in communities
- Develop skills and sustainability in communities – build social capital
- Provide a mechanism to raise a broad awareness of cohesion issues for all – for example by providing useful tools that will enable everyone to build cohesion into their plans, services and activities.

Through consulting widely to develop this Strategy we have recognised and celebrated the excellent examples of improving cohesion – and we understand that people do not always use the label or definition of community cohesion, but what they do definitely contributes to achieving improved cohesion.

We have also recognised there are still many challenges and variances across areas and organisations where collectively and individually there is potential for improvement. Some of the changes we can make are flagged in the ‘**Stakeholder Feedback and Evidence**’ **Appendix** which reports the CELEBRATIONS, CHALLENGES and suggestions for CHANGES people told us about when we engaged with them to help develop the Strategy.

This should help to provide impetus for projects and action plans to be developed, implemented, evaluated, shared and then embedded right across the Worcestershire Partnership.

## COMMUNITY COHESION – STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

We would like to thank the following groups and individuals who contributed to the development of the Community Cohesion Strategy through one to one interviews or telephone interviews, and/or attendance at meetings, events or focus groups.

<b><i>Groups and Organisations</i></b>
Worcestershire Partnership Board
Worcestershire Partnership Management Group
Wychavon Local Strategic Partnership
Malvern Hills Local Strategic Partnership
Redditch Local Strategic Partnership
Bromsgrove Local Strategic Partnership
Worcestershire Children & Young People's Partnership Advisory Group
Safer Communities Board
Cultural Theme Group
Economy & Transport Theme Group
Health & Well Being Theme Group
Worcestershire Partnership Environment Group
Stronger Communities: Housing Representatives
Stronger Communities: Emerging Communities Group
Community Strategy Task Group
Seminar for County and District Councillors
Joint Chief Executives Panel
Worcestershire County Council Corporate Equalities Board
Worcestershire County Council Chief Officers' Management Board
Worcestershire County Council Virtual Community Cohesion Group
Worcestershire Inter-Faith Forum

Worcestershire VCS Forum
Being Different Together Project Group
Gypsy Roma Traveller Forum
Representatives of Crime & Reduction Partnerships
Oldington & Foley Park Pathfinders Board
Parish Conference
<b><i>Individual Meetings / Telephone interviews</i></b>
Chair of Local Strategic Partnership
Leader – Bromsgrove District Council
Leader - Malvern Hills District Council
Leader – Redditch Borough Council
Representative of Leader - Worcester City Council
Leader – Worcestershire County Council
Chief Executive – Redditch Borough Council/Bromsgrove District Council
Representative of Chief Executive – Malvern Hills District Council
Chief Executive - Worcestershire County Council
Chief Executive – Wychavon District Council
Acting Chief Executive Wyre Forest District Council
Representatives of West Mercia Police
Representative of Hereford & Worcester Fire Brigade
NHS Worcestershire Community Engagement lead officer
Assistant Director of Public Health
LSP Voluntary Community Sector Representative
Representative of Worcestershire Voices Hub
Chief Executive of Hereford and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce
Representatives of Worcestershire County Council
<b><i>Focus Groups</i></b>

Community Cohesion Visioning Event
Community Cohesion event with elected councillors
Community area focus groups at: Worcester City, Redditch, Kidderminster and Badsey in Wychavon
Community Black and Minority Ethnic Residents Focus Group

*To the best of our knowledge information was correct at the time of printing: July 2010*

*For further information please contact:*

*Margaret Reilly, Projects and Policy Officer, Worcestershire County Council [-mreilly@worcestershire.gov.uk](mailto:mreilly@worcestershire.gov.uk)*