



REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY COHESION PANEL¹

Introduction

1 The Community Cohesion Panel has introduced a breath of fresh air and common sense into the debate on cohesion. For the first time in the series of reports that have flowed from the disturbances in the Northern Cities in 2001, the Panel addressed the issue of migration.

2 The panel was set up in April 2002 to fulfil a commitment in the Denham Report to appoint people independent of the Government to work with and advise Ministers and Officials on the development of community cohesion at a national and local level.

3 Some 200 practitioners from Central and Local Government, as well as the voluntary sector were involved in twelve groups. The panel reported in July 2004. its full report can be found at

Migration

4 The Panel recognised that concerns about migration cannot be simply dismissed as “racist”. Nor did they see them as resulting from “ignorance about the facts”. They continued:

“We recognise that inward migration does create tensions and that these do not necessarily revolve around race. It is easier for the more affluent communities to be tolerant towards newcomers as they do not perceive them to be a threat..... By contrast, many disadvantaged communities will perceive that newcomers are in competition for scarce resources and public services, such as housing and school places. The pressure on resources in those areas is often intense and local services are often insufficient to meet the needs of the existing community, let alone newcomers. These fears cannot be disregarded.”

5 The Panel called for additional investment to accommodate the new demands, before rather after the event. They continued:

“Further, there are other concerns about the speed at which newcomers can be accommodated. Housing, education, health and other services all take time to expand. But people also take time to adjust. The identity of the host community will be challenged and they need sufficient time to come to terms with and accommodate incoming groups, regardless of their ethnic origin. The “pace of change” (for a variety of reasons) is simply too great in such areas at present”.

Concentration and segregation

6 The report went on to point out that, although black and minority ethnic (BME) communities make up only 8% of the population of the UK they are heavily concentrated in particular parts of the country. For example, Leicester’s BME population increased between 1991 and 2001 by around 37% while in Newham it increased by around 70%. Moreover, half the entire BME population is in London and 76% is in London, the West Midlands and three other areas.

7 The report also mentioned a study by Bristol University and the LSE which suggested that the concentration of BME pupils in schools in some areas is greater than the concentrations in neighbourhoods, even in London. They recommended policies to ensure that the choice of a mixed environment is seen as both desirable and obtainable. White households should feel secure in their present area and resist “white flight” to mono-cultural neighbourhoods. They recommended that the Office for National Statistics be given a clear remit to monitor and compile information on a regular basis to map concentration and segregation and that these reports be used to inform policy.

The economic case

8 The Panel’s economic knowledge was, however, very weak. They also believed that “there should be greater recognition of the fact (sic) that we are reliant on newcomers to create prosperity and growth.” Even the government only claim an extra 0.4% of GDP per year which has to be set against an increase in population of 0.25%. The benefit comes out at about 50 p a week, leaving aside the additional costs of integration and the congestion costs involved.

Note

The full text of the Report is available on the Home Office website. Click on the link below, scroll halfway down the page, to ‘Report of the Community Cohesion Panel, July 2004’, then download the report by clicking on the purple link: ‘The End of Parallel Lives – report’ (294 kb).

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¹ <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/comrace/cohesion/keydocs.html>

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