

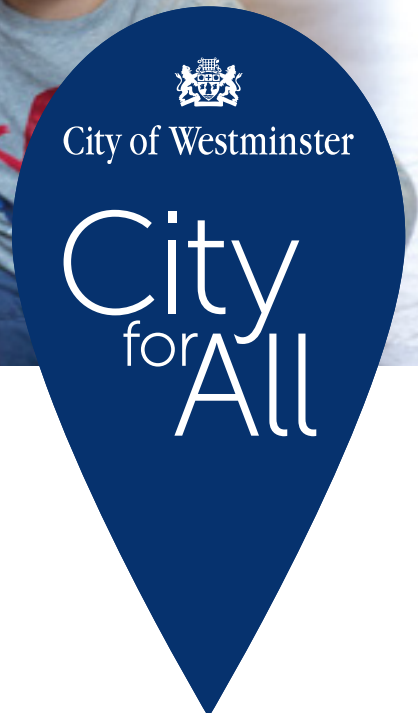
Public Document Pack

AGENDA

6. **Follow on Item: Westminster Community Cohesion Commission Report**

(Pages 1 - 40)

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Westminster Community Cohesion Commission



City of Westminster
City for All



“The Westminster Music Library is certainly a community gem. They do wonders here, always putting on excellent displays and concerts for people.”

#MyPimlico #MyWestminster

Peter, Pimlico

Contents

- 1. Executive summary.....4
- 2. A unique context: community cohesion in Westminster6
- 3. Scope and methodology8
- 4. Our findings
 - A. What community cohesion means to people in Westminster10
 - B. The opportunities and challenges for building a more cohesive city12
- 4. Recommendations.....16
- 5. Conclusion19
- Evidence base.....20

Executive summary

The national debates around community cohesion and social integration are acutely important to the community and local neighbourhoods that make up this global city.

We need to understand how our neighbourhoods are being affected by a fast changing world and how the city's community can best be supported to be active, ambitious and cohesive. We want people to be proud and content to live and work in Westminster and feel a strong sense of belonging to the city.

Given the pace and scale of change and the expectations, a cross-party Community Cohesion Commission was convened to undertake a review of community cohesion in Westminster.

The Commission was made up of:

- Cllr Nickie Aiken (chairman), Leader of the Council and ward councillor for Warwick
- Cllr Adam Hug, Leader of the Opposition and ward councillor for Westbourne
- Cllr Patricia McAllister, Deputy Leader of the Opposition and ward councillor for Queen's Park
- Cllr Adnan Mohammed, Deputy Cabinet Member for Planning and Public Realm and ward councillor for Bryanston and Dorset Square

The Commission set out to understand, first-hand, how our community is living together, side by side in an ever-changing city with their different backgrounds, experiences and interests. Commission members met over a hundred residents, community groups and businesses from right across the city. This report reflects what they fed back to us about what community cohesion means for the City of Westminster and what we can do to strengthen it further.

The Commission found that the cohesion and social integration of the community in Westminster should be underpinned by the following:

- meaningful interactions between people of different backgrounds, experiences and interests
- inclusivity, which means everyone has fair access to education and employment, receipt of public services and use of community facilities (e.g. libraries, leisure centres, community spaces)
- people who use the same space – such as living in a neighbourhood, where people visit, go to school or work – share common values, which could include minimising littering, following local customs such as celebrating events, or looking out for each other.

Overall, the Commission found these characteristics featured strongly across the city and that there is a great deal of pride associated with living in Westminster. However, concerns over cost of living, high population churn, and the affordability of housing in particular, undermine this otherwise strong sense of cohesion. These findings are explored in the report in further detail under the four key themes of:

- 📍 taking pride in the city and celebrating our neighbourhoods
- 📍 having a stake in the city – fairness and opportunity
- 📍 having a stake in the city – being involved
- 📍 having a stake in the city – feeling safe

The report concludes by setting out the actions the council will take to build on the strong sense of pride in the city whilst tackling head on the barriers to cohesion.



WE BUILT THIS CITY



A unique context: community cohesion in Westminster

For centuries Westminster has welcomed people from different places and of different backgrounds who have chosen to settle here and come to call the city their home.

As early as 1585, the Court of Burgesses was established as an early form of local government in the area, in part, to help manage migration to the rapidly expanding city around Westminster Abbey and the Palace of Westminster. Writing in 1720, an observer noted the 'abundance of French People, many whereof are voluntary Exiles for their Religion, live in these Streets and Lanes, following honest Trades...'¹ By 1903 60% of the population of the parish of St. Anne and of the adjoining district of St. James's were foreign born² and eight years later a quarter of the pupils at St. Anne's School in Dean Street were Jewish. A rabbi gave regular religious instruction there 'at the same time that the Christian children receive theirs'.³

The City of Westminster today is home to just under a quarter of a million people, with thousands of families raising 42,600 children who live, learn and grow up here. More than 150 languages are spoken in the city's schools and we are lucky enough to have 28,400 older people who bring their wisdom and care to our city. We are home to entrepreneurs who stake their future here and bring not just economic vitality, but also new ideas and opportunity. Westminster is the UK's cultural and entertainment centre. It is a local economy with national clout, contributing over £55bn to the country's economic output, and our shops alone generate £13.3bn of revenue and attract over five million visitors a week.

Since the start of this millennium, building a cohesive community has continued to be a focus for the city. On 14 March 2006, the then Leader of the Council, Sir Simon Milton, launched a report entitled 'Creating the Blueprint for Community Cohesion'⁴ in response to the 7/7 bombings the previous July. In the report, Sir Simon Milton wrote: 'building a common sense of the way forward... establishing new relationships... connecting [ourselves] to the heart of the decision making process. That is exactly what community cohesion should be about.'





This Commission's investigation, eleven years on from the report, into the level of community cohesion across the city found that the themes first identified by Sir Simon Milton still resonate strongly. Nowhere was this clearer than in the city's response to the attacks on Westminster on 22 March 2017. Community leaders were united in their resolve that events would not divide us and that daily life would continue as much as possible. Symptomatic of the strength of these shared values, the language used following the attack did not focus on the ethnicity or religion of the attacker but instead was unified in condemning an atrocity committed by an extremist.

Likewise, following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower just over our borders on 14 June, there was an overwhelming outpour from the Westminster community to support victims with people offering everything from food and sustenance to shelter in their own homes.

In 2017 there is a strong sense of cohesion across the city's community but, compared to 2006 and even earlier, much has also changed.

In particular, the Grenfell Tower fire has brought to the fore national and local conversations about the divide between the rich and poor and the importance of reconnecting with people who feel ignored.

Further, echoing the national findings of the Casey Review, Westminster has been recovering from a recession and there are concerns about the economy, the future of public services and the pace and scale of social and technological change. Some people, particularly from some ethnic minority groups and disadvantaged neighbourhoods, feel that they are excluded and falling further behind. Most pronounced – and much stronger than in 2006 – are worries about fairness, particularly around the cost of housing.

Scope and methodology

In June 2016, the Westminster Community Cohesion Commission published its terms of reference which stated that it would:

- conduct a local review of policy and practice relating to community cohesion
- gather evidence to identify local barriers to cohesion
- recommend ways to strengthen and continue to support community cohesion in Westminster

The Commission began a six month long focused engagement exercise with Westminster residents, voluntary and community groups, and businesses.

The Commission engaged with:

- residents
- local businesses
- local voluntary and community groups
- faith and interest groups
- partners including Clinical Commissioning Groups and the Metropolitan Police
- the Children's and Adult's Safeguarding Boards
- council departments ranging from Libraries and Sports and Leisure to Community Safety and Environmental Health
- neighbouring local authorities





This report sets out what we heard from people via:

- roundtable meetings to explore the themes of hate crime, higher and further education, identity and faith, early help, safeguarding, businesses, health and care and primary and secondary education
- meetings at local community networks and venues
- our online consultation site, Open Forum

To structure our engagement we based each discussion with people on the four following questions:

- what does community cohesion mean to people in Westminster?
- what brings the community together and helps people of different backgrounds in Westminster get along?
- what challenges community cohesion in the city?
- what is the role of the council in supporting community cohesion?

The quantitative data used and presented in this report has been gathered from the following sources:

- the council's City Survey, an annual survey of residents
- departments across the council
- GLA
- National reviews
- Census data
- Office for National Statistics mid year estimates (country of birth, nationality)

Our findings

What community cohesion means to people in Westminster

We asked what community cohesion meant to people in Westminster. They said the following:



These features are what people in Westminster see as essential factors for a cohesive community; a mixture of respecting diversity, welcoming new people and groups and shaping a sense of common values through loyalty to a particular place, activity or issue.

We found a sense of hierarchy in these themes with people feeling that the most basic level of community cohesion requires people to abide by the law and tacitly tolerate others. In contrast, strong community cohesion, is where people live together side by side regardless of race, religion, income, housing and interest and have high levels

of social interaction. Strong community cohesion, for those we spoke with, is also characterised by a strong sense of pride and attachment to their local neighbourhoods and the wider city.

We also heard about the things that can cause breakdowns in community cohesion in Westminster. Factors such as fear and misconceptions of difference, unfair treatment, inequality, not feeling in control of one's own life, not knowing what support is available locally when needed, and not knowing how to seek redress if something goes wrong with a local issue or service, were all highlighted.

Figure 1: the building blocks of community cohesion in Westminster



The opportunities and challenges for building a more cohesive city

1. Taking pride in the city and celebrating our neighbourhoods

From evidence received by the Commission, it is clear that community cohesion is strong and people are largely proud to live in Westminster. People identify with their neighbourhoods and want to take pride in them. The strong sense of belonging and pride that people have in being part of the city was reflected in the 2016 City Survey. When asked, 82% of residents said that they thought people of different backgrounds got on well together. 69% of residents say that they say more than hello and chat to their neighbours at least once a week, and 72% of residents say that they feel like they belong to their neighbourhood.

However, the Commission also heard that people would like more opportunities to celebrate their neighbourhood and to get to know other people in their community, including those from different backgrounds. For example, it was felt that there was still a perception that white British people lived and accessed local services and facilities in parts of the city that people of different backgrounds felt that they could not access. Conversely, it was felt that some schools were seen as being dominated by certain groups, such as people from Black British or Muslim families, and that parents made choices to send their children to schools which had children with the same or similar background. Sometimes, it was felt that these choices to 'self-segregate' were made because people tended to mix with people with common experiences, interests and socio-economic situations. Whilst this was mentioned by people we talked to, it is also fair to say that housing circumstances often influence where children go to school hence the perception that some schools in the borough are dominated by one community.

People also told the Commission that more could be done to make sure that people of different generations were interacting more. Many felt that there was a gap between the young and the older generations. It was felt that inter-generational mixing could not only alleviate social isolation but also tackle perceptions that created fears of anti-social behaviour and crime.

The Commission also heard about Westminster's most unique feature – population churn. Whilst it was viewed as both exciting and challenging, some were concerned that this created challenges around anti-social behaviour, crime, air quality and pressures on the public realm and environment.

People also told the Commission that they sometimes felt divided or separated by language. The inability to communicate with each other through a common language was hindering meaningful interactions with others. The Commission heard stories from newly arrived individuals who felt alone and their inability to communicate through in English meant that they could not make friends easily, or learn about local services and customs.





2. Having a stake in the city – fairness and opportunity

Fairness, particularly when it comes to being able to afford to live in the city, was often raised as an issue. Most people who gave evidence to the Commission stated that the gap between high and low income individuals and families was a significant challenge to a cohesive community, and people were fearful that this type of inequality leads some young people in particular to feel disenfranchised.

The gap between the wealthiest and poorest parts of the city feels to many like an unbridgeable gulf. The 17 year difference in life expectancy between a baby boy born to a mother living in Knightsbridge and a baby boy born to a mother living in Queen's Park and the huge difference in cost of living were all highlighted as examples contributing to the growing sense of a lack of fairness.

This lack of fairness and opportunity was felt most acutely in areas where wealth inequalities were biggest within a single neighbourhood. For example, on one side of Paddington Rec in the north of the city, homes regularly sell for £1m whilst on the other side over two thirds of household incomes are less than £35k a year.⁵ People felt that this inequality was divisive and resulted in neighbours with different incomes not mixing or interacting with one another and a strong element of self-segregation on the basis of income and housing.

Most acutely of all, the Commission heard that the cost of housing made a lot of people feel that they were being left behind. The high price of properties means that home ownership is unlikely for a lot of middle and low income households. The price of private renting can also be prohibitive for the same group of people. The Commission heard of older residents feeling socially isolated because their children have had to leave and live outside of the city because of the unaffordability of living in Westminster.

In addition, many who gave evidence to the Commission felt that there was a lack of youth provision in the city. The closure of youth clubs was an issue and few people were aware of future plans. These concerns came from the adults, children and young people that the Commission spoke to. The fear was that without youth club provision some children and young people would be vulnerable to anti-social behaviour, gangs and radicalisation.

3. Having a stake in the city – being involved

There is a perception that the council does not do enough to engage with, and involve, parts of the community, particularly when it comes to important decisions.

Many who gave evidence to the Commission felt that the transparency of how and why decisions were being made by the council could be strengthened and communicated in a more accessible way. Many people felt that local councillors had a role in explaining and relaying information from the council. Some people expressed that when they feel ill-informed about decision-making and about why changes in the city were taking place they felt excluded, mistrustful and distanced.

In addition to being involved in decision-making, people told the Commission they wanted to be more actively engaged on a continuous basis and to see that their voice can lead the council to make changes rather than be just consulted on limited topics for specific periods of time. Networks and groups in Westminster felt they were an untapped resource and could be used more often as sounding boards and that they could assist in gathering the views of the community. The Westminster Youth Council, Interfaith Matters and the Soho and Westminster LGBT Community Forum were among a number of groups who offered their assistance.

People said they wanted to be more aware of, and involved in, local decision-making. However, access to and presentation of information about decisions and opportunities to participate and influence needed to be tailored to different parts of the community. In particular, people raised concerns that some groups of women were harder to reach and there is more that can be done to engage with them, through more targeted communication and activity. Many people also felt that expecting the community to engage and seek out information through digital means was limiting for people who did not have access to technology and could reinforce exclusion.

People wanted more information to support and advise them through change, such as welfare or housing changes. They particularly felt that due to the reduction in advice services it was becoming increasingly difficult to access information. People sometimes were unsure of their entitlements and those who do not meet entitlement thresholds need information about alternative sources of support. Clearer information about the wealth of local facilities such as local community networks and groups as well as libraries, leisure centres and open and green spaces were all highlighted as examples.

People welcomed the opportunity for open and honest discussion as part of this review. In terms of future engagement people and groups preferred the council and partners to engage on their terms – to go to the places they frequent and at times convenient for them. People want to feel that their views matter and can shape their city, and engaging on their terms supports their feeling of genuine involvement and the value of their input.





4. Having a stake in the city – feeling safe

The Commission heard concerns around community safety. Some people in areas in the north of the city felt it was unsafe to go out after dark. This meant that they were limiting their opportunities, including those of their children, to socially engage in their community. Some parents said they were reluctant to allow and support their children and teenagers to be outside for fear of gang and other anti-social

activities. This then meant these children and young people were being confined to their homes and using the internet more, and some parents felt ill-equipped to ensure the online safety of their children.

The Commission also heard about the rise of hate crimes, abuse in the streets and growing anxiety about security following the Referendum.

Recommendations

The findings from this report provide a rich and valuable insight into the state of community cohesion across the city. We want to make sure that everybody knows they have a stake and future in the city and can actively contribute to their community. Below are the recommendations the council will take forward.

Taking pride in the city and celebrating neighbourhoods

RECOMMENDATION 1

The council will do everything it can to make sure that people feel safe and have a stake in the city, including making sure that there are decent and affordable homes across all types of tenure, giving our residents the ability to put down roots and build neighbourhoods filled with community pride.

Having a stake in the city - opportunity and fairness

RECOMMENDATION 2

Working with voluntary and community groups, the council should help to bring people together to celebrate their diversity and take pride in the city's neighbourhoods, including organising meetings and events and doing more to ensure that harder to reach groups have easy access to information and services.

Having a stake in the city - being involved

RECOMMENDATION 3

The council should work with businesses, voluntary and community groups to develop an approach that enables businesses and other groups to easily connect with the community and jointly deliver activities to strengthen community cohesion. This should include making it easier for smaller organisations and community groups to bid for funds from the council and to participate in contracts.

Examples of what we're already doing:

We have already engaged and involved residents in a celebration of their individual neighbourhoods through a #MyWestminster campaign, capturing and reinforcing the already strong feelings of civic pride in the city.

We have already taken forward an idea initially proposed by the former Youth MP for Westminster, Hamza Taouzzale, and organised a MyWestminster Day for the city's neighbourhoods and people of different backgrounds to come together.





"There is a good sense of community in this area. People are nice and friendly around here. When you go out everyone knows you which is nice. I feel safe."

#MyLissonGrove #MyWestminster

Nabila and her family

First family to move into the new homes built as part of the Church Street area regeneration.



Conclusion

The Commission welcomed the opportunity to have open and honest discussions with so many people and would like to see such engagement continue into the future.

The Commission found that in general people were proud to be a part of Westminster – particularly given our community's diversity, cultural heritage, economy, and status as an education hub with its excellent schools. However, there are challenges around housing, income inequalities, and how the council engages with different parts of the community.

On the basis of what it heard, the Commission is clear: community cohesion is not an optional luxury for the city. A cohesive community is a vital foundation for a successful and strong Westminster, in which people are proud to live, work, study and visit. Is it also clear that community cohesion is everybody's business. Leadership on this issue must come from all levels in our city starting from the Leader and continuing from ward councillors to faith leaders, community organisations, residents, businesses and visitors.

To make sure the City of Westminster is truly a City for All, we need to:

- foster and encourage opportunities for meaningful interactions between people of different backgrounds, experiences and interests
- make sure that everybody feels like they have a stake in the city and has fair access to education, employment, public services and use of community facilities
- enable and encourage the sharing of values – such as pride of place, looking out for each other, and sharing community spaces

We want to respond with ambition and pace to these findings and we hope that our partners will work with us to implement them.

Evidence base and detailed findings

Defining community cohesion

Community cohesion as a policy concept was born in the 2001 report, *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team (2001)*⁶, chaired by Ted Cante following disturbances in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford. The report found the existence of 'parallel lives' where different groups were living in isolation to each other and had few experiences of engaging with one another.

Since the Cante report, community cohesion as a policy area has been developed by a number of reviews and inquiries. The most recent of which is *The Casey Review: A review into opportunity and integration (2016)*⁷. This year long review found that 15 years after the Cante report's first recommendations on building and promoting community cohesion, communities in Britain remain as divided as ever. Much of the review's findings and recommendations largely echo those published in past inquiries and states that the failures of successive governments to take decisive actions has resulted in lack of social integration in some parts of the country. The Casey Review particularly emphasises the need to ensure social integration and community cohesion, particularly in London, now more than ever, given the rapidly changing global and national context, migration and population growth.

The Mayor of London, after identifying a lack of social integration as a barrier to positive health and wellbeing outcomes and social mobility, made social integration a core priority in 2016.⁸ He defined social integration as "an everybody issue"⁹ which people of all backgrounds and circumstances need to work together to address. The Mayor's appointment of a London lead for Social Integration, Deputy Mayor Matthew Ryder, signals London's unique challenges around and importance of ensuring cohesion and social integration and the priority this is being given within his administration.

The Social Integration Commission, which reported in 2014¹⁰, set out the costs of poor social integration and community cohesion. A lack of unification of communities can lead to mistrust and tensions and poor community health, and wellbeing outcomes,

as well as impediments to employment and career progression. The Challenge recently published a report¹¹ which argued that a lack of interaction between people of different backgrounds and experiences can cause insecurity and fear, community tensions, prejudice leading to extremism, harsh political divides and inhibit life changes, especially for young people.

Detailed findings

The case for a cohesive and socially integrated community has always been abundantly clear. For those who live in Westminster's diverse neighbourhoods, as well as those who work in and visit the city, social integration is already a way of life. This section of the report sets out what the Commission heard from local groups, workers, residents and businesses. It considers what cohesion means to them, how they feel about it in Westminster, and what more we can do to strengthen community cohesion and social integration in the city.

What currently supports community cohesion in Westminster?

Westminster's people feel proud of being part of the city – as residents, workers, students and visitors.

Our 2016 City Survey found that 82% of residents said that they thought people of different backgrounds got on well together. 69% of residents told us that they say more than hello and chat to their neighbours at least once a week. 72% of residents say that they feel like they belong to their neighbourhood, 59% feel that the friendships and associations that they have with other people in their neighbourhood mean a lot to them, and 58% believe that their neighbours help each other out.

We found a range of work and activities going on in the city that enable social integration and support community cohesion, carried out by residents, community groups, the local authority and partners, and businesses. A number of examples are highlighted on the next page.

Case study

Abbey Community Association

The Abbey Community Association is a charity established in 1948, which supports the community in south Westminster to improve its quality of life. They focus on households with priority needs living in the wards of Churchill, Tachbrook, Vincent Square, Warwick and St James's. The south of Westminster is very diverse, with areas of deprivation sitting alongside some of the wealthiest households in the UK. This diversity presents unique challenges for our community, expressed in perceptions of low community cohesion. The Abbey Community Association works in partnership with organisations to promote improved health and wellbeing for local vulnerable residents and families, and to increase inter-community and generational understanding and connections. They do this by supporting local community action through provision of facilities, development and promotion of activities, sharing of information and provision of networking opportunities to local groups and organisations.

Case study

Community Health Champions

The Commission heard from parts of the community that are being empowered to support themselves, giving people a sense of control and influence over their local areas. The Community Champions model in Westminster is a good example of local people being trained and upskilled to enable them to support their neighbours and community. Not only do Community Champions benefit from the experience themselves but they are able to shape and advise the community.

The Community Health Champions project has been growing since 2012 and now operates across five wards. There are over 40 Champions volunteering with many more waiting to join. The Community Champions spread important messages and promote local services that can make a big difference to people's health and quality of life. The team is well linked into other initiatives taking place such as Early Years Services. The Maternity Champions are playing a crucial role in providing support to expectant and new parents in Queen's Park. The team is starting to work closely with staff from the local Children's Centre alongside midwife and health visitor teams to encourage and support parents to access these important services. Many of the Champions have their own children and know how challenging, lonely and difficult the first few months can be. The team play a key role in reaching out and helping those who need more support, whilst also providing hands-on experience that will help those who want to pursue a career in this field.



Case study

Integrated Gangs Unit (IGU)

As part of its ongoing engagement with the community and its Stop the Violence campaign, the Integrated Gangs Unit brought together young people in the community, the police and the voluntary sector. At a meeting the general agreement was that 'the violence must stop'. Everyone in the room cared about young people. They wanted them safe and out of prison. Young people were offered support to stay away from violence and were encouraged to make the right choice and take this message to the rest of their friends.

In the two weeks prior to the meeting there was a spate of stabbing incidents in the north of the city and across the borders of Kensington and Brent, which were believed to be connected to drug dealing. All these events served to underline the importance of working partnerships to tackle youth violence.

The young people heard from an ex-offender who gave a powerful and personal message. Detective Supt Jess Ruddell added her own personal message of the care that she feels for the young people and how their deaths and stabbings affect the Police Officers too. A parent gave her personal experience of the murder of her son two years ago. Social workers had a joint message about the impact on the community of violence and their own experiences of supporting young people and families and seeing the effect of violence across the generations.

At the end of the meeting all the young people stayed to speak informally to the other participants and many valuable conversations were had over food and drink. At the end of the time allotted people were still speaking about the messages and their experiences and this spilled out on to the street as people chatted on their way home.

Case study

Apprenticeships to support young people's aspirations

An important part of giving children and young people the best start in life in Westminster, so they can be active and contributing members of their the community, is to create training and employment opportunities that boost their confidence.

Charley-Mae Foster, 22, from Pimlico has been an apprentice with the Policy, Performance and Communications team at Westminster City Council since March 2016. Working at the council has been an opportunity to kick-start her career in her local area. In her role at the council she is responsible for general office administration, event organising, and working closely with the Director's personal assistant.

"Over the past 10 months I have learnt more than I imagined. Not only have I grown professionally and strengthened my confidence, but it has also broadened my knowledge about Westminster where I've lived since I was born. It feels really good to be able to contribute to my local community this way".





Case study

From Exclusion to Inclusion

The Commission found that people in Westminster were proud users of the city's sports and leisure facilities. The power of sport to engage people and bring the community together, and include those who feel excluded is evident in Westminster.

The council's Sports and Leisure department have a dedicated team focused on creating opportunities in housing estates for sports activities, encouraging children and young people to participate in a range of activities and making sure that physical activity is made accessible for all age groups in the city.

As part of this the sports and leisure team undertook a project through our gyms working with females, aged 16–25 years, who were not in education, employment or training as they believed that this group could be vulnerable to engaging in anti-social behaviour, bad health and fitness habits.

Faiza Mahdi walked into All Stars Gym as an angry 17-year-old girl growing up on the Mozart Estate in Queen's Park. She came to the gym hoping to find an outlet for her frustration and pent up anger, she was welcomed and quickly took to boxing. After a few weeks she decided to try out with the senior amateur boxing sessions. Faiza enjoyed these sessions and decided she wanted to box competitively and take a coaching course. The sports and leisure team enrolled Faiza in an Amateur Boxing Association Level one coaching course. She also volunteered at the gym and became involved in community events.

“All Stars have helped me out in more ways than I imagined. Walking in there I was expecting to just punch out all the built up anger and frustration but I am now walking out with a family. I've come a long way, growing into an adult, coaching, competing, enrolling on courses as well as losing the anger I came in with. The coaches have been there for me since the beginning, pushing and encouraging me all the way to be the best that I can be and to reach my full potential. The club has done a lot for me and I don't know where my life would have led if I didn't find it – or more – if it didn't find me.”



Case study

Dementia Friendly Cricket Ground

Westminster is a unique city, with a range of thriving businesses of all sizes and types. The Commission explored the important role the business sector plays in building local community cohesion both as employers and place shapers. The Commission found many examples of businesses working together to support community cohesion, such as the Cross River Partnership and the city's eight Business Improvement Districts. The Commission also found practices by individual businesses to be inclusive and improve the quality of experience of some of the most vulnerable.

Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) is working towards becoming a dementia friendly club by raising awareness and supporting those living with dementia within the local community. In partnership with the Sporting Memories Network Lord's trained staff and members who were interested in volunteering to run monthly sport reminiscence sessions.

It is important to MCC that visitors living with dementia and their carers receive a positive customer experience. To this end, all of the match day stewards (over 130 people in total) and volunteers are trained as Dementia Friends. MCC also designate one match each season as a 'Memories Match' with free entry to the ground for people with dementia and their carers. In addition to watching the cricket, guests are invited to the Nursery Pavilion during lunch to enjoy refreshments, sample table cricket, take part in health checks and various local organisations have stalls to speak to visitors about topics ranging from sporting activities to finance.

MCC are currently planning on improving signage at Lord's and therefore have committed to ensure that all new signage at Lord's is dementia-friendly.

In response to mystery shopper feedback, MCC developed match day packs for visitors with dementia. The packs contain basic information about Lord's and a dementia friendly ground-map, including a guide to a place to store match day tickets and also for a carer to include their contact information.

What are the challenges to community cohesion in Westminster?

Residents, businesses and visitors are justifiably proud of all the activities that are being delivered to strengthen community cohesion and city. The Commission, however, also invited people to provide honest feedback about what the current and potential challenges to community cohesion in Westminster could be and ideas on how to tackle these. This section sets out what people felt were the real and potential challenges to community cohesion in Westminster by theme.

Identity

At nearly every event and forum people spoke about Westminster's most unique feature – population churn. This was viewed as both exciting and challenging. Some were concerned that this created challenges around anti-social behaviour, crime, air quality and pressures on the public realm and environment. Others expressed concerns that tourists and businesses, because of their ability to generate income for the city, were prioritised over residents. Residential neighbourhoods felt that planning and licensing decisions did not sufficiently take into account local neighbourhood needs.

Population churn– residents

Long term population churn was seen as a significant challenge to social integration in the city. Westminster sees a third of its population move in and out of the city every year and this means that our population is relatively transient in comparison to other London boroughs. Short term accommodation in the city has been further popularised by a growing Airbnb culture, where more and more people are staying in short term lets in residential areas for tourism, business or study. All these factors affect how neighbourhoods and groups gel together. A common comment was that, by the time people got to know their neighbours they had left. Long term residents also felt that those who lived in the city for short periods were less invested in looking after the local area and mixing with residents.

Newly arrived residents

The city is home to newly arrived as well as long established residents. The Commission heard that sometimes new residents who are of different backgrounds and life experiences can find Westminster unsettling. However, people generally are accepting and welcoming of diversity and often reach out to support to new arrivals.

Language

We heard that some people in the community felt divided or separated by language. The inability to communicate with each other through a common language can hinder meaningful interactions with others, seeking and securing employment, obtaining services and self-advocating. This can lead to feelings of social isolation, low self-esteem, confidence and physical and mental health issues.

Many people felt that their integration into their local community was hindered or slowed down by not being able to communicate because they did not have a good understanding of the English language. This meant they felt isolated and possibly judged by the established residents which enhanced their sense of exclusion. Lack of English language knowledge also meant that new people were not able to get to know their neighbours, make friends and learn about the local services and customs. They are also likely to feel less able to contribute to the community through activities such as volunteering.

People also told us that the provision of English language classes and support could be better in terms of providing classes in more locations, at flexible times and with childcare provision. There was a strong desire for people to learn English but equally people were proud of their diverse backgrounds which they wanted to celebrate and share with others from different backgrounds. A significant part of celebrating heritage was practising one's own language and some felt that support to do so would be welcomed.

Diversity

The Commission heard at every meeting and event of people's pride in being part of an ethnically, diverse city. However, it was clear that although diversity exists in the city this does not mean that groups are always integrated. People felt that individuals or groups of people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds did not always mix or interact regularly. Several reasons were suggested for this which included:

- self-segregation – some people, such as those from white British origin lived in or accessed local services in certain areas. Conversely, there were some schools that were seen as being dominated by people from other backgrounds – for example black or Muslim. Parents made choices to send their children to schools which had children of the same or similar background. Sometimes, it was felt, that these choices to self-segregate were because people tended to mix with people of common experiences, interests and socio-economic situations
- it was felt that there were not enough opportunities for people of different backgrounds to mix more
- housing, specifically where people lived, and income were recurring themes that people felt prohibited mixing within the community

Equality

Everyone the Commission spoke to agreed unanimously that equality is fundamental to community cohesion. Without equality, people are likely to feel disenfranchised and unlikely to engage with their local community. Equality based on the nine characteristics protected by law is essential. Race and religious inequality were usually picked out as potential challenges to community cohesion and needed to be monitored. Data shows that Westminster was ranked seventh in London for overall inequality in 2011, with Bangladeshis, Black Africans and Mixed Others experiencing the largest overall inequality in terms of housing and employment disadvantages¹². Inequality of experiences and outcomes affect how people relate to others of different backgrounds and their relationship with the local community and this can lead to tensions.

However, most people felt that socio-economic inequality – the gap between high and low income individuals and families – was a more significant challenge to a cohesive community. People were fearful that this type of inequality could encourage

young people to feel disenfranchised. They also felt that the gap between the rich and the poor connected to health inequalities, where men in the wealthiest wards are living on average 17 years longer than those living in the most deprived. The wealth 'gap' is, they felt, exacerbated by the cost of living in the city.

The wealth or income gap was divisive in some parts of the city, where it was felt that people of different income bands and occupations were not mixing or interacting with one another. There was a strong element of self-segregation on the basis of income and housing.

The Commission heard of the danger of perceptions of inequalities between groups. For example, community tension can be created if people feel groups are unfairly receiving public funding or resources over other groups.

Faith

The Commission engaged with several inter-faith groups in the city. The consensus among these groups was that it was important for faith groups to mix to understand each other as they all had similar basic values. Mixing on the basis of faith was a good opportunity to support social integration and achieve greater community cohesion. Faith leaders felt that religious and faith institutions were sometimes treated as redundant and as not having a role in the community. The Commission heard of how many faith organisations and groups undertake charitable work in the community to support the vulnerable and marginalised, such as the homeless.

Common values

The majority of people the Commission met with agreed that common values brought people together. People and groups tend to coalesce around issues of interest or concern, but mostly the latter. In times of crisis the community pulls together. The concept of common values for Westminster tended to cluster around issues such as looking after their physical neighbourhoods, sharing resources such as community spaces, respecting and celebrating diversity, and being treated equally. People were largely incredibly proud to be part of the City of Westminster, the heart of national government, economic success and cultural heritage. Their pride of place started at a city-wide level and in many cases translated down to area and neighbourhood level. For example, the Commission heard of the sense of community in Lupus Street where people of different backgrounds and housing situations shared a strong pride of place.



Homes And Neighbourhoods

Affordability

The Commission heard that housing and living in Westminster are core issues that people feel challenge community cohesion. The high price of properties means owning a home is unlikely for a lot of middle and low income households. The cost of private renting can also be prohibitive for the same groups of people. The Commission heard of older residents feeling socially isolated because their children have had to leave and live outside of the city because of the unaffordability of living in Westminster.

Due to the affordability of housing and rent in the city, people of certain income bands can sometimes be concentrated in particular areas of the city. There were also concerns that private renters, social housing residents and homeowners were segregated, and that this segregation is reinforced by income differences.

Regeneration

Westminster like most other cities and boroughs is experiencing necessary regeneration to replace ageing housing stock, renewing neighbourhoods and modernising the public realm. Where there is good engagement with the community and when they feel their needs are prioritised, regeneration can be viewed as a positive change. For some however, it was felt that redevelopments and new build homes in Westminster would still be unaffordable to many. For some long-term residents it can feel like they are not able to share in the benefits of the exciting changes and modernisation and as a result can feel left behind. Such feelings can be divisive for the community.

Many felt that regeneration (for example, the Church Street regeneration project) was an opportunity to shape the future of the community and encourage greater social interactions between people of different housing situations, incomes and backgrounds. Some people talked of their local area as not being community friendly because of the physical design with a lack of community space for people to convene and meet.

Social isolation

Social isolation was also talked about as a barrier to social mixing and integration. Some individuals were vulnerable to social isolation due to older age, immobility, poor health and wellbeing and concerns

were raised that the loss or re-design of some services could increase social isolation.

Others felt isolated if they felt unsafe particularly if they felt at risk of becoming a victim of crime including mugging, burglary, anti-social behaviour, prejudice or hate crime. Further people and groups felt vulnerable if they felt they would be judged for their differences. These factors could lead to voluntary or involuntary social isolation. The Commission heard some concerns that social isolation could lead to vulnerabilities to extremist radicalisation and gangs.

Inter-generational mixing

People told the Commission that we could all do more to make sure that people of different generations were interacting more. Many felt that there was a gap between the young and the older generations. Inter-generational mixing could alleviate social isolation for some, where people meaningfully interact and look out for each other, creating the basis for a caring and cohesive community.

Community Involvement and Engagement

Decision-making

The Commission heard concerns about how local decision-making was communicated to the community. Some felt that the transparency of how and why decisions were being made by the council could be strengthened and communicated in a more accessible way. Many people felt that local councillors had a role in explaining and relaying information from the council. Some people expressed that when they feel ill-informed about decision-making and why changes in the city were taking place they felt excluded, mistrustful and distanced.

In addition to being made aware of decision-making, people told the Commission they want to be more actively involved on a continuous basis and not just consulted on limited topics for short periods of time. Networks and groups in Westminster felt they were an untapped resource and could be used more often as sounding boards and they could assist in gathering the views of the community. The Westminster Youth Council, Interfaith Matters and the Soho and Westminster LGBT Community Forum were among a number of groups who offered their assistance.

Access to information

People said they wanted to be more aware of, and involved in, local decision-making. However, access to and presentation of information about decisions and

opportunities to participate and influence needed to be tailored. Many people felt that expecting the community to engage and seek out information through digital means was limiting for people who did not have access to technology and could reinforce exclusion.

Types of information

People wanted more information to support and advise them through change, for example welfare or housing changes. People sometimes are unsure of their entitlements and those who do not meet entitlement thresholds need information about alternative sources of support. Clearer information about the wealth of local facilities such as local community networks and groups as well as libraries, leisure centres, and open and green spaces were all highlighted as examples.

Rules of engagement

People welcomed the opportunity for open and honest discussion as part of this review. In terms of future engagement, people and groups preferred the council and partners to engage on their terms – to go to the places they frequent and at times convenient for them. People want to feel that their views matter and can shape their city and engaging on their terms supports their feeling of genuine involvement and the value of their input.

Safety

The Commission heard concerns around community safety. Some people in areas in the north of the city felt it was unsafe to go out after dark. This meant that they were limiting their opportunities to socially engage in their community. Furthermore, parents said they were reluctant to allow and support their children and teenagers to be outside for fear of gang and other anti-social activities. This then meant these children and young people were being confined to their homes and using the internet more and some parents felt ill-equipped to ensure the online safety of their children.

Following the results of the Referendum on the UK's membership of the EU, a range of people (including faith groups and early years' providers) told the Commission that they had heard of a rise of hate crimes, abuse in the streets, and growing anxiety and security.

Data shows us that there has been a year on year increase of people in Westminster saying they felt safe at city level. However, indications in recent council statistics show that there are some areas,

such as the business areas of the West End and Marylebone and some areas of south Westminster and Westbourne in the north, where people feel less secure and more worried. The council and Metropolitan Police have wards which are particularly vulnerable to high harm crime and both agencies are working together to reduce crime and the fear of crime.

Best Start in Life

Early years

The Commission heard from a range of Early Years Centres, children's centres and nurseries who talked of these being ideal places to foster community cohesion and social contact. Parents and children of all backgrounds are drawn into the centres where they meet and mingle with people on the basis of the shared experiences and challenges of having young children. However, the attendees would often reflect the local resident population which means if there were concentrations of single or few ethnic groups living in the local area then social mixing between people of different backgrounds could be limited. The Commission also heard of some centres being seen as only providers for particular groups such as refugees, and parents would self-segregate by going to centres with people of the same or similar background.

The issue of limited number of places on courses, activities and facilities aimed at children and families affects community cohesion because not everyone can be included. Facilities are continually oversubscribed and funding is severely limited.

People also told the Commission that often information about the available community facilities and support does not always filter through to families but commended the Community Champions as an effective way of sharing information across all parts of the community.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding practices and practitioners are not only crucial to preventing and tackling behaviour that are destructive to the community (i.e. radicalisation, far right extremism, gangs) but are critical in ensuring that children and young people have the best start in life to enable them to transition into adulthood with the skills and opportunities to improve their life outcomes.



Children with disabilities and special health needs

The Commission heard concerns about the social exclusion of children (and their families) with physical and learning disabilities, and special health needs. Sometimes this can be attributed to families feeling that the needs of their children are not catered for in their local community or they feel different to other parents and families.

Out of school

The Commission heard many concerns from a range of people and groups about the perceived lack of youth provision in the city. The closure of youth clubs was an issue and few people were aware of future plans. These concerns came from the adults, children and young people that the Commission spoke to. The fear was that without youth club provision some children and young people would be vulnerable to anti-social behaviour, gangs and radicalisation.

Some young people mentioned the lack of opportunities to meet with people of different backgrounds outside of school. Some told of their experience of using Victoria station as a convening spot to meet others. The Commission also heard that some young people felt that sports and leisure was a good way to engage young people but not all children and young people like sports.

Education

Schools

Schools, as institutions which bring together children and their families of different backgrounds to mix and learn together and from each other are considered the ideal test-bed for community cohesion. Schools have had a duty to promote community cohesion since 2007; which Westminster schools have been actively doing. However, the Commission heard that in some instances schools were not sufficiently mixed to foster social integration between children of different backgrounds. For example, the Commission heard of concerns about faith schools and home-schooling, isolating children from mixing with those of different backgrounds. People also raised the issue of primary school catchment areas as prohibiting social mixing. There were also some concerns around perceived racial segregation in schools.

A key challenge for schools is managing and responding to information and misinformation children access both in the media and through social media. Concerns were raised about the increasing levels of inaccurate and polarising information that young people are exposed to and the ease with which that information can be absorbed unchallenged, making them vulnerable to unhelpful and dangerous narratives. The difficulty for our educational institutions is how to challenge and counter some of this information without being political and, particularly in the case of higher education organisations, upholding the principle of free speech.

Further education and universities

Westminster is fortunate to have a large and diverse range of high quality further education colleges and universities, attracting students and educators from all over the globe. This vibrant education hub is an essential asset for the city and can help to support social mixing and increasing mutual understanding between people of different backgrounds.

Colleges and universities do, however, face some challenges as institutions encouraging and providing space for exploring ideology, diverse experiences and free speech. The Commission heard that institutions encounter issues with ensuring that the platforms they provide for free and diverse speech, are not abused by being used for extremist messages, are equally shared by different interest groups, and that students who want to use these platforms are safeguarded.

Role of the council

Throughout their engagement with local people and groups, the Commission was keen to understand what they felt the role of the council (beyond any statutory duties) should play to support community cohesion in the city.

Civic leadership

People expect the council to provide civic leadership, to organise and guide the community and advocate on their behalf. Particularly, the Commission heard that ward councillors have a significant role to play in the local community and people felt their locally elected representatives needed to have a higher profile and be supported to be local leaders and advocates.

People told the Commission that they expected their councillors to play a significant role in the community by:

- providing the community with information on what the council offers, what other offers and support people can access in their wards and to signpost to these services
- relaying and explaining policy and service decisions to the community – particularly explaining the benefits to people, being honest about the risks and challenges and letting people know what their scope of influence is
- advocating back to the council and partners on behalf of community needs
- helping the community to problem solve, particularly in times of crisis
- bringing people together to celebrate their neighbourhoods

Our elected councillors already offer local surgeries, contribute to local groups and take part in local events but people want strong local leaders whom they can rely on and bring their community together.

Convenor

The council has the influence to bring together the community in times of celebration and crisis. The council has the expertise to:

- organise or support local events (regular or one-off)
- create branding and sense of place to capitalise on the strong sense of belonging people feel to Westminster and their specific neighbourhoods
- signpost to assets and facilities that the community can use or enjoy

Facilitator / Enabler

The council can provide support or advice to community groups so they can support themselves. An example given was the Community Champions model. The council has a unique overview and knowledge of the city and its assets, challenges and relationships with businesses and partners. Using this special perspective the council can provide advice and signpost to support and opportunities.



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Communicator

Given its ability to gather, possess and access information, people expect the council to relay key information to the community in formats that are tailored to ensure that the most vulnerable are able to access it. This information should include local and city-wide information on areas such as:

- events to celebrate or bring people together to socialise (religious festivals, community lunches)
- meetings of community interest (neighbourhood watch, community meetings to address local concerns)
- activities that people can take part in for health and wellbeing (yoga for new mums and their babies, falls prevention classes)
- opportunities to contribute to the community (volunteering, jobs, training, education)
- news about the local area and the city
- advice and support, particularly when there have been significant changes in policy, such as welfare reform
- information about council decisions and changes to the local area (libraries, youth centres)
- community facilities and special sessions (such as leisure centres with women-only swimming or baby swimming)
- information about local and city-wide services available to residents and how to seek redress when things go wrong

People also told the Commission that they expect the council to shape positive news stories about the community and work with media outlets to do so. They also felt that the council has a role in myth-busting to help clarify and address misconceptions between different groups.

Collaborator

People expect the council to work with partners in the city, such as the NHS, police, TfL, the Mayor of London, other local authorities, cultural institutions, voluntary and community organisations and businesses to deliver improvement in their lives and environments. The council is expected to influence partners, share resources and jointly plan to deliver a strong city.

Place shaper

The council is expected to use opportunities such as refreshing housing stock, building homes and permitting new businesses and facilities to shape the physical environment conducive to community mixing, 'designing out crime' so people feel safe and include key community facilities.

Service provider and commissioner

As service commissioner and provider, people expect the council to know the community – its composition, needs, characteristics, behaviour patterns and their views. Without knowing these things people cannot be confident that public services are for their best interests, efficient and meeting local needs.



Westminster's assets

Our businesses

Westminster is home to over 60,000 diverse and vibrant businesses and enterprises of all shapes and sizes. The majority are employers and integral parts of local community and neighbourhoods. The Commission heard from a range of businesses and business partnership organisations, who agreed that they had a significant role in shaping local neighbourhoods.

Our businesses are keen to play their part in building and supporting a cohesive community. The Commission heard from some businesses that they felt a moral responsibility. They shared their concerns about the economic prosperity of the city not being shared by all. They felt that they had a role in fostering trust with the community.

The Commission heard of great examples of businesses engaging with the community. Some Business Improvement Districts told of their regular community breakfasts and attendance at neighbourhood forums and ward panels. They also often found themselves as local facilitators and brokers between different parts of the community.

Many businesses have corporate social responsibility funds that are used for community activities. The Commission heard that some businesses had the resources but were struggling to raise awareness of the funds they held or encourage the community to apply for them.

Businesses speaking to the Commission cited the West End Partnership as a good example of businesses partnering up to strengthen and restore local community environments to improve and support local areas for local people.

Our voluntary and community sector

Westminster's voluntary and community sector has an important role to play to reduce local inequalities, improve the quality of life for residents, promote community advocacy and foster cohesion.

The Commission engaged with over 30 organisations covering a diverse range of expertise and insights and it is clear that voluntary and community organisations are essential to building and sustaining a cohesive community. People told the Commission that providing places where people could meet was important to community cohesion. The Abbey Centre was cited as an example of a place offering a wide range of opportunities for people to learn new skills, meet others to discuss specific issues, such as health and wellbeing, families, culture and to socialise. People also told how community events brought people in the community closer together and encouraged them to play a more active part locally.

The Commission also heard concerns from the sector about the administrative burden to access funding, and about the cumbersome reporting system, which were both felt disproportionate to the amount of money on offer. This was particularly felt by smaller organisations which often represented the most vulnerable. The Commission also heard about the need to better advertise wards budgets as many organisations were not aware of them.

Short term funding pots were raised as a significant issue for community organisations. Many such organisations rely on grant funding rather than donations. Multi-year funding helps them to plan ahead, gives them space to make efficiencies and improvements and helps them to reassure service users of continuity.

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