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**Response to the
Commission on Integration and Cohesion's
(www.communities.gov.uk/coic)
consultation document
'Your chance to tell us what you think'**

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Seven key questions for local bodies

1. What does 'cohesion' mean to you? What does 'integration' mean to you? What might a community which is both integrated and cohesive look like?

In this context, we believe cohesion is the relationship that individuals (of like mind and background) share between each other. Often within communities consisting of disparate cultural groups, there is a strong sense of cohesion (belonging and holding together) within any one cultural group.

Integration is the ability of a cultural group to acknowledge the similarities and differences that they have with other such groups within the community, and work together to solve problems in the community and the country as a whole. In fully integrated diverse communities cohesive relationships will emerge that bridge and bond cultural groups together, allowing individuals to have a sense of ownership of the whole.

The members of a cultural group in a community that is integrated and cohesive will place their citizenship and/or belonging to that community above and beyond their membership of their cultural group. It is important, however, for cultural groups to still maintain a sense of their particular backgrounds and communities should celebrate their diversity. We believe that the different ideas that will arise from a diverse community should ensure the overall success of that community.

2. What, if any, are the tensions between different groups in your local area? What do you think tends to cause these and what are your thoughts about how to resolve them? What role can local leaders play in tackling them? What are the organisations in your community which would help when an incident is leading to tensions or when conflict resolution is needed?

We have not seen or heard about any tensions between different community groups within the workplaces that we cover.

We have experienced no tensions with the other faith groups representing people working in the City of London industries. We have in the past had discussions with

our counterpart organisation from the Muslim community and we believe we have a good relationship with them. We are also currently planning a joint event with our counterpart organisation from the Jewish community.

Some of the employers in the City of London have recently been making conscious efforts to recruit individuals from diverse backgrounds (for example diversity fairs are becoming popular during the graduate recruitment milkround). We believe this is a positive development with firms moving away from stereotypical recruitment and evolving their traditional cultures.

From a hypothetical perspective, we believe that to resolve tensions it is only worth engaging with community leaders who are fully connected to the people they purport to represent. We feel that in particular cultural groups there might be problems caused by a disconnect between the elders / community leaders and what, for example, the youth of that community feel on the ground. In these situations there needs to be a broader response focusing on where the problems lie rather than just the local leaders.

3. What activities help bring people together, build friendships and get a better understanding of people from a different background? Where do these activities take place – at school or college, socially, at work or in the neighbourhood? What are the shared spaces in your community where people can come together? What celebrations are there of local traditions in your area?

People can only get an understanding of other people from a different background if they have the opportunity to associate with them.

This means that schools, colleges, universities etc. that are funded by the state should not be allowed to select their students on the basis of religion, culture or race, but rather should be completely unsegregated in this regard and treat all citizens of the state, regardless of their background, equally. We believe that young people should be introduced to the diversity present in our communities from an early age as this will result in wider acceptance of different cultures in our country. Failing to do so will no doubt lead to unnecessary discrimination caused by inaccurate presumptions stemming from social/media opinions.

Public sector employers should be forced to have a workforce diversity that reflects the communities they work within and at all levels of their hierarchies and they need to illustrate and promote this diversity. Private sector employers will always in the end have to operate meritocracies as their own survival depends on having the best people to do the job; the pressures of the market will force their hand against discrimination.

Government funded social activities should encourage participants from all communities and must have in place clear diversity policies (that in particular do not discriminate against religion, race and culture) to encourage participants from different backgrounds.

We believe that being schooled, working or socialising together with people from other communities has a very important role to play in ensuring cohesion and integration and is vital for the successful future development of society.

4. What schemes in your community build a sense of belonging to your neighbourhood or community? What schemes in your community try to

build or teach a set of values or 'ground rules' about how to live together? What schemes to address poverty, crime and anti social behaviour in your local area have improved how people feel about one another?

In the City of London, since the big bang of 1986, and the subsequent takeover of many of the traditional firms by overseas (mainly American) banks, there was a step change to meritocratic employment and promotion practices in the City of London's firms.

Only last year, Barclays demanded that their law firms provide diversity statistics if they wanted to remain advisers to the bank. This clearly encouraged a certain sector of their suppliers to look more closely at their employment practices.

We feel that these sorts of programs are the best way to encourage a sense of belonging amongst minorities.

When barriers/glass ceilings are perceived to have been broken by, for example, someone from a minority community exceeding possible career expectations, it is important that these success stories are publicised. This should encourage and motivate others to pursue their ambitions.

If people believe that they have an equal chance of succeeding as anyone else then they will be happy to work and live together in the same community.

5. What schemes in your community help new people when they arrive? What schemes in your community aim to counteract people's negative perceptions of and attitudes to people from different backgrounds? In what ways can communities steer people away from extremism?

Please see answers to questions 3 and 4. We believe that complete integration and being given an equal chance of succeeding in normal life will steer people away from extremism.

6. What schemes in your area aim to get people involved in local decision making? What role do representative organisations for communities have in building communities in your area? How are you encouraging the formation of such organisations? How are people encouraged to get involved in your local community to make a difference?

We are not involved in, nor indeed have we been asked by any local decision making bodies to get involved in any particular schemes.

We have, however, attended meetings organised by Hindu Council UK with the Greater London Authority where they lobbied particularly for fairer representation in the public sector for people from our community, but we have not heard of any decisive decisions being made by them on this front so far.

We have been involved with the establishment of Hindu Networks/Societies at some of our member's workplaces. However, we feel that as long as we as a minority group are being treated equally when compared to other employees, these organisations do not need to play a role in terms of building communities as a successful model is already in place.

7. What role do local schools, workplaces and faith groups have in building communities in your area? What role do local authorities, public services and charities (e.g. the Police, Hospitals, Housing Associations) have in building communities in your area? How can the media help to build communities?

To build communities, schools, local authorities, public services and charities must provide equal access to their services for all. Their workforces should represent the diversity of the local communities in which they operate across the hierarchy.

Faith groups may provide a useful representative voice for their members but they must do everything in their power to ensure the successful integration of those members as well.

The media have an important role to play not only in education of the public but also in highlighting problems facing particular communities. They should be careful, however, to maintain the highest journalistic standards and be more objective in the reporting of these matters where there is so much at stake.

We feel that certain faith groups and communities have been given a favoured status by the government in terms of commitments, face time, and public funding (and to a certain extent the media has also provided more coverage to them) despite these being the communities which have most failed to contribute to Britain. It is a simple management principle that to get the best performance overall, those that are performing well should be rewarded and therefore we believe that this is not the best way forward. The government and the media need to treat all communities fairly and give them equal access to their resources. Preferential treatment is not acceptable and will not provide the route to a cohesive society.

In summary, we believe that any form of discrimination (positive or negative) unnecessarily draws focus to particular subgroups and will therefore be a hindrance to better integration.