



## **Association of Retained Council Housing**

Research briefing – Mixed and sustainable communities



## Introduction

This research briefing is intended to inform the reader about mixed and sustainable communities. The terms 'mixed' and 'sustainable' are open to interpretation even though both are in common use. There is an acceptance that if communities are mixed and sustainable they will be more successful, cohesive and the people within them happier and this is highlighted in Government documents such as 'Strong and prosperous communities', the local government white paper in 2006. This paper noted that 'Our aim is to create strong and cohesive communities – thriving places in which a fear of difference is replaced by a shared set of values and a shared sense of purpose and belonging. This briefing will look at the definitions of some of the relevant terms, consider the questions and issues which may arise when trying to promote and develop mixed and sustainable communities and the role of the local authority.

If mixed and sustainable communities are to be a realistic aim then the role of local government is vital in meeting that aim. The role of 'place shaper' for local councils was put forward in 'Strong and prosperous communities', the local government white paper in 2006 and has been a recurring message from central government since. Successful settlements, whether new or established, must be provided with a range of public services by the local authority to help build capacity amongst local people, promote interaction as well as ensuring a high quality physical environment.

*"This ubiquitous principle is the need of cities for a most intricate and close-grained diversity of uses that give each other constant mutual support, both economically and socially".*

Jane Jacobs, 'The death and life of great American cities', p. 14, Vintage, 1961.

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## 1. Policy context

The growth in diversity of the population, the gap in income levels between the richest and poorest groups in society, the number of people categorised as being in poverty and emerging housing problems have acted as drivers in developing the government's agenda. More recently the riots in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford in 2001, terrorist activities and increased immigration have focussed the government's attention further and community cohesion has become a central aim within a range of government policies.

'Sustainable communities – building for the future' was issued by ODPM in 2003 and looked to address the challenges of a changing population, the needs of the economy, housing shortages in London and the South East and the impact of housing abandonment in some areas of the North and Midlands.

The paper highlighted the government's determination to put an end to poor housing and bad landlords, to deliver more affordable housing, especially for key workers and young families and to develop new sustainable communities in regions of high demand

The main elements were identified as

- Sustainable communities - £22bn to improve housing and communities including over £5bn to regenerate deprived areas; a new regional approach to housing policy and; £350m to speed up planning.
- Step change in housing supply - £5bn for more affordable homes, including at least £1bn for key worker housing; support for people who wish to move into home ownership; action on empty properties and; a new focus on helping people into home ownership.
- New growth areas- £446m for Thames Gateway with new development agencies; Cabinet Committee chaired by Prime Minister to plan for development of the Gateway and; £170m for three other growth areas.
- Decent homes - £2.8bn to bring council homes up to a decent standard; £500m to tackle low demand and abandonment; £260m to tackle homelessness and; action to tackle bad landlords.
- Countryside and local environment - guarantee to protect green belt; £201m to improve local environment – parks and public spaces and; over 5,000 affordable homes in villages.

The paper noted that housing and the local environment are vitally important but that communities are more than just housing and that a wider vision of strong and sustainable communities is needed including the way our communities develop, economically, socially and environmentally to produce places where people want to live and will continue to want to live. As well as the now familiar concern with access to decent affordable housing and the supply problem, the paper talked about housing market collapse in some areas, use of brownfield land, problems with the planning system, urban sprawl, poor design and integration of wider public services.

These messages have been taken forward as the context within which the policy towards mixed and sustainable communities has developed. The Decent Homes Standard and Market Renewal Pathfinders have tackled issues of standards whilst growth areas in the home counties and London have aimed to boost supply specifically in the south east. Planning Delivery Grants for local authorities have continued and latterly been addressed to housing and funding for part ownership and key worker schemes have been maintained although they have not proved popular. New growth areas in Thames Gateway, Ashford, Milton Keynes/South Midlands and

Stanstead /Cambridge/Peterborough and 29 new growth points have been allocated. The latter are on the understanding that a proportion of the houses built therein will be affordable and/or social housing. These are just some of the developments which have emerged to address the mixed and sustainable communities' agenda.

## **2 What is a community?**

The terminology in use is open to interpretation and is worth consideration as shared understanding of what makes up a 'community' is important in this debate. The term means different things to different people and there is no universally agreed definition. A community can refer to either a group of people or to a geographical area. Again there is no standard definition for the scale of the geographical spread of a community. Some live across a whole town or village, others a part of a town, others being a single ward, a particular estate, new development or block of flats. A further view would describe, for example, those belonging to the same religion as a community, even though they may live across a wide geographical area.

In local government terms delivering services for the community originally referred to those living in the local authority area. However the move towards differentiated services between areas means the local authority definition may develop on a neighbourhood basis. Business Improvement Districts are a further example of a community with specific needs serviced by the local authority.

The 'Sustainable Communities Plan' (February 2003) is accompanied on the DCLG website by a definition of a 'sustainable community'. It states that "*Sustainable communities are diverse, reflecting their local circumstances. There is no standard template to fit them all.*" It provides no guidance at all about the scale of a community such as a number of houses or people.

The Egan Review of Sustainable Communities does not define the physical area or size of population that constitutes a sustainable community, noting that it is a matter for each local authority and that in one area a city may constitute a sustainable community whilst elsewhere it may be a town or individual neighbourhood. The review also notes that functioning sustainable communities may well cross administrative boundaries.

What we can see from the above is that there is room for interpretation around the term 'mixed and sustainable community'. Despite an element of ambiguity there remains an understanding that 'mixed' and 'sustainable' are good qualities for a community to have.

### **2.1 What is a mixed community?**

The term 'mixed community' is used in different contexts depending on the issue being addressed and although the specific circumstances may change, the underlying principle is the same. A community may be mixed in one sense but is very rarely mixed in all senses. So a community with a range of income levels would not be truly mixed unless it had an appropriate mix of age, race, cultures, etc. which reflected the wider local population.

The two issues most commonly referred to are 'mixed income' (linked to tenure) and 'mixed race'. A related issue refers to 'mixed land use' and as a factor with an impact on the debate it will also be considered.

## 2.2 What is a sustainable community?

The DCLG website offers a description of a sustainable community as a place *“where people want to live and work, now and in the future.”* It says they must meet the diverse needs of current and future residents, be environmentally sensitive, and contribute to a high quality of life. They should also be safe and inclusive, well planned, built and run, and offer equality of opportunity and good services for all.

The definition within the Egan Review in 2004 was a little clearer but still vague, *“Sustainable communities meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, their children and other users, contribute to a high quality of life and provide opportunity and choice. They achieve this in ways that make effective use of natural resources, enhance the environment, promote social cohesion and inclusion and strengthen economic prosperity”.*

In terms of infrastructure, for communities to be sustainable, they must offer decent homes at prices people can afford, good public transport, schools, hospitals, shops, and a clean, safe environment. Open public space and the opportunity for involvement in how the neighbourhood is run. The physical element of a sustainable development has become more important as renewable energy, reduced carbon emissions, modern methods of construction and new products emerge following the attention focused on the built environment and construction industry with the emergence of the climate change debate.

The term ‘sustainable community’ therefore refers to both the people within the community and the physical environment.

## 3. The case for mixed income communities

The case for mixed income communities is based on the assertion that poor families face additional disadvantages and barriers when living in concentrated poverty. If these barriers are allowed to remain then existing and future residents will get drawn into the poverty trap. The argument persists that a low income family will fare worse in a low income community than it would in a mixed income community. Deprived neighbourhoods characteristically retain high levels of unemployment; a lack of contacts to find work and less ambition for people to find work; poor educational attainment; higher crime and disorder and damage to buildings; pronounced health inequalities; poor reputation; and lack of incentive for private sector investment into an area.

The theory of the ‘cycle of deprivation’ developed by Peter Townsend in the 1970s noted that *“individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diets, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities.”*

Townsend noted that there are many strands to poverty but that by far the most important was income level. The relevance to this paper is clear - people in mixed communities are more likely to experience a higher quality of life and opportunities to break out of the cycle associated with deprivation.

The link between mixed income and mixed tenure is also clear. Housing is the largest purchase most people make in their lifetime and for those that do not purchase a home, rent paid takes up a substantial element of income. In the UK with a culture of

home ownership and housing used as an investment for future generations, tenure closely, but not exclusively, reflects income.

Housing types built together encourage those of similar income to live together. There is no surprise here. The legacy of housing patterns in the past is well known and followed established approaches based on economies of scale, e.g. council estates, company-provided housing for employees, earlier street-based building programmes and new towns. All of these were characterised by similar sized and style homes built for either owner occupation or rent and located together on estates or streets.

As a tenure, council properties traditionally housed tenants with a wider variety of income levels than did owner occupiers because the latter needed a minimum level of income and access to a deposit to afford a mortgage. Council properties housed both those people who were unable to purchase a home and many who were able to but chose not to.

As Right to Buy became more popular and fewer council properties were built to replace those lost to the new owners, those left in council housing were increasingly likely to be those unable to buy their home because they were the least well off. The homes least likely to be sold off were also those most likely to be in need of physical repair and upgrade or on the least popular estates. It is easy to see how the average income of the population living within council properties gradually reduced. The private rented sector often had the worst conditions of all sectors and housed some of the worst off in society.

Tenure patterns have been further complicated by the recent trend towards buy to let where properties remain in private ownership but with occupants who are renting. Housing associations have also added to the debate as they have bought up individual properties peppered amongst other tenures.

The number of gated properties has increased rapidly over the last 10 years with most having between 10 and 50 properties. Some of these are mixed communities but the majority are purely for those with higher incomes who are looking for a more safe and secure environment. Some studies in the US have noted that those who live in gated communities may feel safer but they have not experienced closer relations with their gated neighbours or an enhanced community spirit.

The concept of a gated community runs counter to existing government policies to increase social cohesion. The Report of the Urban Task Force highlighted higher density living, mixed use neighbourhoods, better public transport and increased use of urban public space as methods to bring about a better urban environment. Mixed tenure neighbourhoods were also highlighted for exactly the reasons noted in this paper.

The proliferation of new flats in the centres of most cities and towns has also attracted a certain type of occupant. Mostly young and employed this group is more likely to live alone, work and socialise in the immediate vicinity of their home and to want to move to the suburbs and a bigger property at a future date.

As a result, estates or streets which were originally designed and built as single tenure developments have often become mixed tenure whilst in others have attracted occupants with a very similar income levels or who are at a similar life stage.

### **3.1 The impact of mixed income communities**

A study by Allen (2005) noted that the impacts of mixed tenures are as follows:

- mixing tenure types promotes what are considered 'ordinary' communities and alleviates prejudice based on tenure
- demand for all tenures remains high despite some local deprivation
- resident satisfaction remains high
- local environment especially shared parking enables occasional interaction
- mixed tenure can support extended families
- mixed tenure appears to have improved the relative desirability of the study areas allowing people to distance themselves from the prejudice that is often faced by those living on council estates
- the benefits of reduced crime and ASB accrue mostly to poorer households

but...

- some claims were exaggerated such as a transfer of know how, owner occupiers being viewed as role models and an enhanced reputation for the area
- as people get more affluent they tend to shop, socialise and work elsewhere and increasingly send their children to private schools, so reducing mix within schools

### **3.2 Delivering mixed income communities**

When attempting to deliver mixed and sustainable communities there is a point at which a definition must be agreed upon and a set of criteria specified by those involved in the delivery, in order to know that they have emerged.

Drawing on the work of a range of authors and their own examples, Bailey et al in 'Creating and sustaining mixed income communities' identified the following as key criteria for successful communities;

- a clear assessment of housing needs in the area
- diverse housing types and sizes built within an environment maintained to a high standard
- flexibility in the planning process to take account of changing housing demand and local demographic make-up
- high levels of community involvement

The experience of many councils when attempting to promote mixed tenure in new estates is that the affordable or social element of a development is not integrated into the fabric of the development, i.e. between houses for sale. The affordable or social housing is built together in one part of the development so that it remains separate even though it is built within a mixed tenure development. This has a number of problems such as limiting the amount of interaction between residents on the estate, different arrangements for maintenance of communal areas and the problems that develop from concentrating some social tenants together.

## **4 Mixed race communities**

Clearly housing is a fundamental determinant on the shape of communities and on the relationship between different races and cultures. The trend of new immigrants and religious groups settling in close proximity to others of the same groups has existed since the first mass immigration of the 1940's.

The Cattle Review on community cohesion noted that they had seen no evidence that the impact of new developments has been considered in relation to cohesion but that some estates simply reinforce existing separation patterns. The assumption in the report is that this is a negative development.

Over the past decade immigration from new EU countries has increased dramatically and as the lowest on the ladder, in terms of access to private and social housing, there is evidence that attitudes towards them as a new group are similar to those experienced by Asians and West Indians 40 years ago. This highlights two issues, first that the problems faced by new immigrants are consistent to all new groups, that they are restricted financially and so limited to the worst or cheapest accommodation and secondly that they choose to live with others from their own community.

It is important to challenge some of the assumptions which underpin our approach to minority and immigrant groups. If people from different racial and cultural groups interact on a day to day basis within society there will be obvious benefits in terms of common understanding and appreciation of their differences whether they are racial, religious or cultural and this is more likely to happen at a young age at school.

Fundamental to encouraging greater understanding is that no culture is superior to any other. When groups of immigrants choose to live with others of the same nationality or religion or close to their place of worship, they are maintaining their culture at the same time as helping to promote a strong community. It may not be the culture of the indigenous population but it is a culture which must be treated as just as important.

The difficulty is ensuring that cultures remain strong and foster strong communities, at the same time as encouraging enough interaction between people from different groups to cultivate further understanding. People will congregate with like-minded people but this is not a problem in itself. In the case of many ethnic minority groups it leads to strong and sustainable communities who provide supportive networks for others in the community and can provide an effective voice for that community. Geographical proximity is a key factor in promoting a strong community and those communities who are dispersed are not as able to develop such a community.

The term 'multiculturalism' is open to interpretation and it could be argued that it is a way of dumbing down different cultures into a single white culture without its variety. Others would see multiculturalism as an attempt to promote a range of different cultures each as successful as the next. Forcing people to interact with each other is a move towards the former interpretation and against the natural instinct of people to live with people from a similar background.

Therefore it is important to question the assumption that ethnic minorities that wish to retain their own culture within their community is a bad thing. They are often strong communities and fit into the criteria that Government is looking to promote. Equally attempts made to help integrate people from ethnic minority groups into white groups should be mirrored by encouraging people from white groups to integrate with ethnic minority groups. If this is not taken forward it shows a reluctance to accept that all communities and cultures are equal.

#### 4.1 The case for mixed race communities

Following their research Ferlander and Timms noted 3 main characteristics in a definition of community cohesion;

- individual commitments to common norms and values
- interdependence arising from shared interests
- individual identification with a group

That said they feel that participation takes place across local communities, *"knitting them together into a wider whole"*. Given this takes place across local communities it can then divide those communities which may be linked in other ways so creating further divisions. They pose the question, what are common norms and values? as well as noting that cohesion may be a positive attribute in all circumstances.

As noted above, the term mixed communities means different things to different people. Having an established ethnic minority community alongside an established white community can be seen either as two distinct communities with separate identities or it can be seen as a single mixed community. In trying to promote sustainable communities the aim should not be to break down or dilute established communities in an attempt to encourage a single nationwide culture. It is good practice to maintain strong communities whoever they comprise. Attempts to promote mixed communities is justifiable but the aim should not include breaking up communities in the process.

#### 4.2 Delivering mixed race communities

Mixed race communities will hopefully result in deeper understanding, greater appreciation and less distrust of other people with different norms and values. The Cattle Review notes that there is evidence to suggest that a significant amount of self help and volunteering takes place within ethnic minority groups but that it is predominantly for the benefit of others from the same minority or community. Social capital is closely linked to community cohesion and volunteering is an essential part of social capital. Social capital allows people to resolve collective problems more easily, it widens people's awareness of the ways in which their fates are interlinked and the networks that constitute social capital serve as conduits for the flow of useful information. Volunteering is not something individuals can be pushed into but councils do have a role in building capacity within communities by promoting and publicising the benefits of cohesion, encouraging the third sector to take an appropriate role in supporting public services, working with existing community groups to promote engagement with the council and other organisations and providing training and development opportunities to individuals.

Safety and trust are issues which racial minorities often state as significant and it is important that local authorities are ready to engage, listen and act upon their feelings in this regard. Designing out crime principles and street lighting are examples where this kind of issue has been taken on board over recent years. The emergence of wardens and community policing have also attempted to address the concerns of minority groups and it is imperative that good practice is taken on board.

However we must not act as though safety is an issue only for ethnic minorities. Many people feel this way whether they be women, elderly, disabled or young and attempting to define neighbourhood or community issues is a difficult job.

The Cattle Report recommends that in order to deliver mixed communities housing agencies need to

- review their allocation systems to ensure more contact between different communities and to reduce tension
- have ambitious and creative strategies to provide more mixed housing
- provide further support for minorities facing intimidation and harassment
- review of the impact of housing policies upon school catchment areas
- provide a full range of housing types and sizes with high quality public realm
- put in place a plan which is adaptable enough to accommodate future developments in the local housing market
- promote good housing and environmental management and opportunities for tenant and resident engagement

One of the reasons for ethnic minority communities becoming established is that many white people do not want to live in the same area as those from ethnic minority groups or go to the same schools or use the same local facilities – the impetus for ethnic minority communities developing comes partially from white people moving out as it does from ethnic minorities moving in.

Some local authorities have been accused of operating a segregationist housing policy which exaggerates existing patterns of separation within housing. The growth of choice based lettings has enabled people to have a greater say in where they live often helping them to live in close proximity to family and others from their ethnic group. The example from Birmingham highlights that ‘white flight’ has spread to ethnic minority groups who have moved out of established communities as their incomes have risen. There should be no surprise here – it is natural that as people become better off they wish to live in better homes. They are not moving away from their community, they are moving out of the poor housing that ethnic minority communities often find themselves in.

The existence of highly segregated schools, specialist shops and services and an inward looking attitude can develop quickly in areas – a process which has been seen frequently where asylum seekers and immigrants are housed in close proximity.

## **5. The role of local authorities**

Council youth services can have a vital role in bringing young people together from different communities and helping them interact and the most successful of them view each community as equal

When looking at responsibility for making sure that communities are sustainable, The Egan Review noted that *“it is essential to clarify who takes the lead...and we believe this role should lie with local authorities. Our reasoning is that no other institution has the same responsibility for the long-term success of one locality, and no other is directly elected by and accountable to the local population. A further factor is that the majority of the sustainable community components can only be delivered at a local authority level”*. This approach resonates with the place-shaping role of local authorities as promoted by Central Government.

Councils who have retained control of their council housing stock are in a position of influence when addressing some of these issues. As well as having the strategic responsibility for housing they have detailed knowledge of the make-up of the local community. They must spend time researching how they intend to spend their resources and look for ways of doing so innovatively alongside other service providers within the council and partner organisations. Mixed and sustainable communities are

made up of a range of elements and councils who have retained their stock are able to provide a holistic package of services to help create a successful community without the barriers which accompany different suppliers.

Clearly councils have a role in guiding the physical layout of their area via the planning process and in supporting vulnerable groups via community development. As mentioned above not everyone in a specific community should be considered vulnerable but there are benefits in helping different groups within an area to interact.

There is debate about the role of local authorities or indeed any organisation attempting to fully integrate the population. Years of experience of dealing with people of limited resources and latterly with immigration has taught councils that the natural reaction of people is to seek out and settle with people they feel comfortable with, often those in similar circumstances to themselves. As financial resources grow, people from ethnic minorities are likely to move out of poor housing but attempt to remain close to their community. Through targeted training, community benefit clauses, capacity building, access to advice and support and wider economic development work, councils can have an impact over the ability of people to improve their earnings but these schemes will be limited by resources.

Within the planning and housing professions the issue of design has been gained a higher profile over recent years. Design can be used to highlight the similarities between different tenure types rather than make them appear as stark and separate. Hiding these differences can conceal the distinction between the two tenures and halt the emergence of tenure prejudice. The provision of community centres and facilities, parks and open spaces and local shops as well as sensitive road and housing layouts in new developments can all help to promote physical and social integration in new developments and renewal projects. Designing out crime is another well known example of design impacting on communities. The government has set a target of 240,000 houses to be built each year and local councils have the opportunity to influence the design of many schemes and the layout of some major housing schemes to address some of the issues noted above.

Densities also tend to be higher for mixed developments with developers arguing that this is necessary to ensure the developments are financially viable bearing in mind the affordable element. This also results in a greater number of smaller houses and a complaint of less choice for those looking to buy a private home. This will have knock on effects as the population of the area ages, has more children, looks for bigger homes and has more money to spend on housing. Mixed tenure housing developments need a mix of styles and sizes able to accommodate the future population if they are to be successful. Councils can have an impact via promoting good design as a priority with officers and by negotiating significant social and affordable numbers within housing schemes via section 106 planning agreements. Some councils are building council houses and as well as employing high energy and water efficiency standards and using sustainable materials they are able to address the wider issue of a shortage of affordable housing. Councils should be looking to promote this issue in general – that they are experienced in building houses, can bring a range of benefits to the local community by doing so and can take forward their role as place-shaper.

In terms of new housing provision, the need for social housing currently has a very high profile. Councils need to use their knowledge of the local area to provide homes where they are necessary irrelevant of whether that is for a specific ethnic minority community or not. If homes are being provided in a area where ethnic groups may be expected to live practical issues need to be addressed such as larger homes for extended families or appropriate cooking facilities.

## 6 The impacts of land use and design

The foreword to the Egan Review states that *"There are too many housing estates simply dumped into spaces with no amenities and no thought for their future governance. Too many ugly retail parks serving no other purpose than shopping by car. Too many hospitals and schools isolated from the communities they serve. Too many business parks, pristine and splendid, but hermetically sealed from the outside world, thus effectively relieving business from the need to give leadership to the communities they serve"*. The quote from Jane Jacobs at the beginning of this paper refers to the benefits of a diversity of land uses and although she wrote nearly 50 years ago her approach is coming back into favour. The Report of the Urban Task Force echoes the call same principles of mixed uses in close proximity – in other words, the provision of mixed communities via land use.

The planning system in the UK, and indeed in most parts of the world, has developed in a way that the problems associated with certain different categories of development are kept apart from each other. The problems of traffic, noise pollution, large numbers of people congregating at specific times, anti-social behavior and access have all led to specific land uses being planned together.

There is a greater distinction than ever between what happens in our towns and city centres and what happens in the suburbs and rural areas. Town and city centres have seen a growing number of people attracted back to them following the exodus of many families from poor housing in city centres in the 1960s and 70s. In the main it is single people, students and couples without children who are returning to town and city centres to occupy flats rather than houses. These centres are becoming more like each other with the same outlets of national shopping chains, similar leisure activities and a dearth of unique one off shops (outside London).

This segregation and sameness has a number of knock on effects. There is a lack of choice and access to shops outside of city and town centres. Suburban roads that were previously busy with shops, restaurants and general activity are much quieter with less interaction between people of the local community. There are fewer people on the street acting as a deterrent to anti-social behavior or criminal behaviour or generally to observe what is happening with in the neighbourhood. The lack of local shops mean that most people travel to large stores for their shopping adds to the lack of people walking. The building of retail parks, sports facilities, office centres and transport hubs which cater for the car mean they are physically separated from neighbouring uses because of the need for car parks and there are large areas of land unused for regular periods of time. The separation of land uses within towns and cities mean that some areas are very busy during the day and become virtually no-go areas when the working day is finished.

The centres of our bigger cities and some towns have become more attractive over recent years as regeneration projects have seen leisure and recreational developments emerge alongside retail and commercial developments. One of the major influencing factors over the success of a community is the extent to which local people physically come in to contact with each other. That means there need to be places for people to walk to such as local shops, surgeries, religious and community centres and leisure activities. More and more these kinds of activities are being centralised in larger facilities catering for the car and as a result people are coming into contact with people from their neighbourhood less and less. This trend has clear implications for individual interaction, community cohesion, social relations and community safety.

## 7. Conclusion

The Egan Review Skills for Sustainable Communities stated that *"Places where people want to live – and that are sustainable – do not happen by chance. They are the product of visionary thinking and commitment by highly skilled civic and national leaders, developers and professionals"*. Long term commitment is the key to sustainable communities to ensure that people are committed to seeing their locality develop effectively. It also reaffirms the role of the local authority as civic leaders, delivering services, engaging with citizens, promoting the benefits of sustainability and helping to support and shape the actions of partners.

Ultimately the choices being made by those able to choose are contradictory to the theoretical ideas of how cities and towns would best function. Given the opportunity to make a choice, people consistently live with people of a similar life style to themselves. With this in mind councils, must help to maintain strong communities as well as promoting interaction between communities. In some ways communities of low income people or ethnic minority people can be easier to provide public services for but if the trend of poor communities congregating together continues the implications for the worst off in society appear dire. They will be trapped in poor quality housing with accompanying health problems, dependent upon state help with reducing opportunities to escape the deprivation cycle they find themselves in.

In order to address this problem councils and central government will have to intervene in order to help provide options. Councils will be unable to do this without centrally provided resources so there is also a need for central government to learn the lessons from pilot examples of mixed and sustainable communities if they are to see the resultant benefits experienced more widely. Equally councils know their area and citizens and are best placed to spend this money but it is reliant on spending limited funding wisely, setting priority outcomes and maintaining investment.

The single most significant factor in the debate about the input of mixed tenure is the current lack of an adequate supply of homes although this is by no means an issue in all regions of the UK. In a majority of places choice is much reduced due to the small number of homes being built compared with expanding numbers of households. Councils are being asked to take on more responsibility in providing homes either as builder, enabler or partner and they would certainly be able to influence the scale of mix and sustainability in new developments if they are given access to the resources to make a direct impact.

It is worth noting that there is unlikely to ever be a mix of people in a community which reflects the values and demographics of the area and which fits into an area which is considered a neighborhood by all concerned. The drive for mixed and sustainable communities is a reaction to the real problems of those areas where deprivation and racial problems have emerged. However there are areas where severe deprivation exists in close proximity to real wealth, where ethnic minority communities live happily next to white communities and where crime and the fear of crime exists in mixed communities. In other words, the existence of mixed communities does not mean they will be free from everyday problems. Nor does it mean that ethnic minority or poorer communities will automatically lead to severe social, economic or environmental problems.

Councils should look to replicate what works best in their localities, to ensure housing policies are relevant to local circumstances and most importantly that local people are actively encouraged to engage with public service providers and with the wider community. Local Strategic Partnerships are a step in the right direction to providing a

united front to addressing some of these problems. It will take input from central and local government, other public service providers, local businesses and most of all, local people to work at living together for happy and successful communities.

## **8 Examples**

### **8.1 Defining communities - Sheffield**

In order to track crime levels in Sheffield a system known as SNIS - Sheffield Neighbourhood Information System has been established to map data in 100 local neighbourhoods across the city. The system maps data in seven key areas, known as 'domains', that cover community safety, health and social care, economic activity, the environment, housing, education and access to services to put crime in its proper context.

The system has won praise for its definition of neighbourhood boundaries. It bases these on a combination of natural boundaries (major roads, rail, rivers, groups of major estates) and census output areas, the smallest unit of the census. They had to be big enough for the statistics to be robust and small enough to show differences within wards. The key is to design boundaries that local people recognize, are meaningful and work with the grain of local cultural characteristics rather than just looking for uniform size. The result is a set of 100 area profiles that summarise the data results for each of the seven domains.

'What is a neighbourhood?' is a question that continues to vex many local authorities. Sheffield has demonstrated that mapping natural neighbourhoods can be done with relative ease. Defining natural neighbourhoods can enhance local community engagement and understanding and help community forums or committees to work more effectively by representing an area that people identify with immediately.

Councillors often cite lack of detailed or relevant intelligence about neighbourhood-level problems as a barrier to influencing decision making and defining relevant neighbourhoods help to promote the democratic process.

### **8.2 Break up of mixed communities - Birmingham**

Evidence from Birmingham suggests that the exodus of better-off families from the inner cities to the suburbs and villages which was originally termed 'white flight' now includes the black and Asian middle classes as their prosperity increases. 'What we are aware of in Birmingham is that there is middle-class flight, that in fact the better educated and those with better incomes - whether they come from white backgrounds or the various ethnic-minority backgrounds - are moving out of the inner cities,' said Sukhvinder Stubbs, chief executive of the Barrow Cadbury Trust.

'And what our research actually picked up was that neither the white groups (nor) the Asian and black Afro-Caribbean want whites to move out. They do not want segregation.' They feared it, she said, because each community believed they were weaker without the other. Both white and ethnic-minority respondents canvassed in the trust's focus groups believed that the other attracted an undue share of public money, and therefore neither wanted the city reduced to one group. 'In the poorer white communities there is a sense that resources go with the ethnic minorities and partly for that reason they want more mixed communities, and similarly I think a lot of

Asian and Afro-Caribbean groups think that actually resources tend to be located within the white community. So generally what the research shows is that people don't want segregation, they don't want white ethnic groups to leave, and they actually want more mixed lives.'

#### References.

The 'Egan Review: Skills for Sustainable Communities' recommended a set of sustainable communities indicators including indicators from established performance indicator sets as well as some new ones. It can be found at;

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/152375.pdf>

The DCLG definition of a sustainable community can be found at;

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/sustainablecommunities/whatis/>

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Bailey, N. et al, 2006, 'Creating and sustaining mixed income communities': A good practice guide' CIH/JRF

Ferlander, S., & D. Timms, 1999, 'Social Cohesion and On-line Community, Brussels: European Commission.

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