

Report Part Title: Conclusions

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12. CONCLUSIONS

Waltham Forest has for many decades been a destination for new migrants. However, the increase in the numbers and diversity of the population today makes it one of a growing number of local areas in London where the concept of super-diversity is applicable, and many residents in the borough face high levels of socio-economic disadvantage.

Although this report focuses on the experiences of Muslims, it recognises that in many areas covered by the report the issues and concerns raised and disadvantages found are common to individuals across different ethnic and religious groups. At the same time, there are issues which seem to be particularly relevant to Muslim communities. Muslim communities have faced intense scrutiny and focus from security officials, policymakers and the media following the arrest and conviction of a number of Muslims from the borough for offences relating to terrorism. Furthermore, even when a problem is common across different groups, the research finds that effective solutions can involve recognition of faith identities and working with faith-based groups or organisations in accessing groups that are hard to reach. Such work is complex, as Muslims are not a monolithic group and the borough's super-diversity is also reflected in the diversity of local Muslim communities in terms of ethnicity, religious traditions and experiences of living in the area. Many Muslims in the area have settled and lived in London for over 50 years, with children and grandchildren who have been born and brought up in the city, while others are new arrivals. Supporting cohesion and integration in such contexts remains a challenge for local communities, policymakers and practitioners.

When looked at from the local level and from the everyday concerns of local residents, there are indications of high levels of social cohesion as well as signs that further efforts to strengthen cohesion may be needed. A majority of respondents liked living in their neighbourhood, felt that people from different backgrounds got on well together and had a strong sense of belonging to the area. While a majority of respondents felt that people would help each other, a majority did not feel that people would work together to improve the neighbourhood. Nearly three-quarters of Muslim respondents to the Open Society Foundations' questionnaire indicated that they see themselves as British, although far fewer, just 41 per cent, believed that other people see them as British. Moreover, 45 per cent of Muslims also reported having experienced religious discrimination at least some of the time.

Socio-economic deprivation remains a feature in the lives of many residents in Waltham Forest, including Muslims. While key indicators for levels of education, employment and health remain below the national average and highlight the challenges policymakers face, there are important indications of improvements in all these areas over the past few years. The situation in Waltham Forest suggests a carefully calibrated mixture of different approaches from the local authority and service providers which may have contributed to these improvements by addressing deprivation and integration.

Much of the work that is undertaken by the local authority and other service providers involves a mainstream approach that is not directed at any particular group but aims to address all those who face deprivation and social exclusion. Policy approaches and initiatives focused on minority groups tend to be targeted at groups defined by ethnicity. In practice, this can mean working with faith-based organisations when working with groups that are predominately from one ethnic group, such as Pakistani and Somali communities. There are also some initiatives that have a more explicit focus on faith and religious groups. Faith-based community institutions such as mosques are used by service providers as a way to reach people and make services accessible. The key remaining challenges are to succeed in engaging with Muslim women and accessing newer Muslim communities or minorities within Muslim communities.

Cohesion policies use a mixture of approaches. There are mainstream initiatives such as the Waltham Forest One Community campaign that emphasised the shared community of all those living in the borough, and local authority support for an Inter-faith Week that interacted among faith communities and for building the capacity of faith institutions in the area. The local authority has undertaken a number of outreach initiatives specific to Muslim communities, such as Islam Awareness Week and the Muslim Young Leaders Project. The latter provides an example of a policy initiative that shifted from focusing on one particular group (young Muslims) to a more mainstream approach, when the Muslim Young Leaders project was replaced by a Young Waltham Forest Leaders Programme open to young people of all backgrounds.

In education, where ethnicity rather than religion is used to disaggregate data on achievement, there is recognition that those facing the greatest difficulties are from Roma and traveller communities. There is also work with faith communities, including Muslims, through the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education in developing a faith and values framework in recognition of the need for sensitivity when teaching about sexual health and sexual identity. Fears of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim bullying in schools were raised in the aftermath of the 7 July 2005 bombings and the Operation Overt arrests in 2006. The responses to this again illustrate mixed and calibrated responses that were mainstream where possible but recognised the need for targeted measures where necessary. Thus, while there has been clearer monitoring of anti-Muslim incidents, in most schools Islamophobia has been addressed alongside other forms of prejudice and bullying, including, racism, sexism and homophobia.

Most Muslim respondents to the Foundations' questionnaires felt that enough was being done to respect and accommodate the needs of people of different religious backgrounds in education, health care and employment. They noted the provision of *halal* meals and prayer spaces in school and hospitals, as well as the flexibility of many employers on religious holidays and clothing. The response suggested that recognising diversity and ensuring inclusivity are embedded in the practices of many local organisations and institutions. This may be a legacy of earlier policies of multiculturalism as well as more recent developments in equality and anti-discrimination law. The public-sector race equality duty was, for example, seen as

critical to ensuring that the local authority's workforce reflected the diversity of its population. The new public-sector equality duty, which covers religion and belief, has the potential to be a lever for ensuring greater inclusivity and equality. However, more effective data collection on religion would help to achieve this.

The tension between mainstreaming and focusing on particular groups or communities has been particularly acute in policing and counterterrorism policy. Relations with the police were more difficult following the arrests of Operation Overt. Many Muslim community groups and organisations opposed that part of the "Prevent" policy that focused on Muslim communities, as they feared that this unfairly stigmatised them. However, some initiatives with faith groups have been more positive. The appointment of a faith communities liaison officer has helped to build trust and confidence between the police and Muslim communities. The use of mosques as one of the third-party reporting sites for hate crime is also vital in ensuring better reporting.

Like in other local authorities in the UK, a key challenge in the next few years will be sustaining many of the benefits that have been achieved from the initiatives and projects that have been developed in the past decade with limited resources.