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LONDON BOROUGH
OF WALTHAM FOREST

ISBN: 9781940983325

Published by
OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS
224 West 57th Street
New York NY 10019
United States

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Design by Ahlgrim Design Group
Layout by Q.E.D. Publishing
Printed in Hungary. Printed on CyclusOffset paper produced from 100% recycled fibres

THE OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS
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WORKING WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN MORE THAN 100 COUNTRIES, THE OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS SUPPORT JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS, FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC HEALTH AND EDUCATION.

Acknowledgements

This report was prepared as part of a series titled Europe's White Working Class Communities. It builds on the findings from a previous comparative series Muslims in Europe, in particular the Muslims in London report which examined the integration experiences of Muslim residents in the London Borough of Waltham Forest.

The report has been prepared by At Home in Europe, part of the Open Society Initiative for Europe, Open Society Foundations in cooperation with Coventry University.

We would like to sincerely thank Professor Harris Beider, Chair in Community Cohesion, Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University, who spearheaded the design, field work and analysis. He was very ably supported by Kusminder Chahal, Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University, who was indispensable throughout the fieldwork stage and reviews of the draft report.

Councillor Karen Bellamy (London Borough of Waltham Forest) and Ayshea Farooq (Waltham Forest Asian Mothers Group) were catalysts for recruiting and convening focus groups and remained committed to the aims of project throughout the fieldwork. Open Society Foundations would like to convey its gratitude for their support.

This report would not have been possible without the cooperation of the residents in the London Borough of Waltham Forest who spoke so freely on the challenges, issues and opportunities that present themselves in their borough. The names of the residents have been changed to protect anonymity.

At Home in Europe has final responsibility for the content of the report, including any errors or misrepresentations.

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Executive summary

This report draws its findings from a qualitative study of stakeholders in two wards in Waltham Forest, a diverse borough in northeast London. Interviews, focus groups and a case study were conducted to explore residents' attitudes, perspectives, and opinions on a range of topics relating to the relationships between and among different racial, religious, and cultural communities.

Low-income white and Muslim communities both viewed the borough as home, and both commented on the social connections and capital of families, friends, shops and places to meet which generated reciprocity and a supportive environment. Diversity was viewed as being inclusive and an asset to Waltham Forest: most stakeholders enjoyed living there because it was a multicultural area. This was not merely tolerated but was the norm for people. The nuanced understanding of difference and diversity was in marked contrast to the retreat from multiculturalism by policymakers, politicians and the media.

Those interviewed had a flexible and inclusive notion of identity. This was not linked to skin colour, culture or class but was complex. White working-class communities spoke positively about the diversity of their families; British Muslims felt strongly about their British identity. They were born and brought up in the UK and viewed Islam as entirely compatible with pride in being British. This was not a choice because people had multiple and fluid identities. The white communities interviewed in this study presented as diverse and dynamic as any other group. This is in contradiction to policy frameworks, which do not consider these groups as being an important part of the discussion or the solutions on cohesion and integration. They valued ethnic diversity in personal relationships and across Waltham Forest and were hostile to any association with the extreme right.

Despite the reality of multiculturalism and diversity of whiteness, Muslim participants recounted experiences of racism. Most of these occurred outside Waltham Forest and were framed within the larger debates on Muslims after 9/11 and 7/7 and policies such as cohesion and preventing violent extremism.

The reality of multiculturalism was superficial and not embedded. Many social networks remained within communities despite routine interactions in school, college and employment. This soft integration was different to the hard integration demanded by the government. On balance the soft integration appeared to work in Waltham Forest and there was concern about any policy that was perceived to force interaction.

Both white working-class communities and British Muslim communities expressed concern about the impact of the arrival of new eastern European migrants into Waltham Forest. They felt that housing, health and educational resources would be

stretched and established communities were likely to lose out; a similar scenario was replayed on job displacement. Both groups stated that new communities needed to show respect for civil norms in the UK. They did not view eastern European migrants as British because of these factors and also perceived them as unwilling to learn English.

The negative views on new migrants and concerns on political correctness in schools and local government did not sit very well with positive perspectives on multiculturalism. This could be a reflection on the contradictory approach of government policy on immigration and integration which is fixed on keeping people out at the same time it attempts to build integration.

Both groups were disconnected from political institutions and representatives. White working-class communities complained about a lack of voice and the role of politicians in making matters worse on cohesion and integration issues; British Muslims were reflective and critical of faith organisations and councillors that did not have the capacity or expertise to make a progressive contribution on cohesion and integration.

Recommendations

The findings suggest a borough which continues to embrace multiculturalism even after two decades of government policy that has deemed the concept an unsuccessful model and even when there have been heightened concerns on terrorism and extremism, all in the midst of the worst financial crisis in recent memory. This should not mask the problems or concerns about new migrants, racialised discussion and the reduced credibility and capacity of government on cohesion and integration. The recommendations in this report build on successful work in Waltham Forest and attempt to address some of the specific challenges.

- **Renew and expand new leaderships for progressive change:** The political institutions are not working effectively to create opportunities for white working-class and British Muslim communities to be heard. Policy frameworks such as community cohesion and integration are involved with the usual suspect of embedded leadership and make it difficult to move beyond superficial impact. Instead a programme to improve current performance and attract new groups and organisations to support local cohesion and integration plans is required. This needs to reflect gender, age and diverse opinions within communities.
- **Support grassroots interaction in public spaces:** Soft integration appears to work well in Waltham Forest. Festivals, fun days and the Olympics galvanised communities across the borough and created a space for community conversations. The government plays a facilitative role but initiatives should be driven by grassroots activists who have credibility with local communities.

- **Establish a community project for bridge building:** A project separate from the local authority should be established to act as a catalyst for integration and cohesion. This could be the hub of community development, planning informal events, addressing the challenges of extremism and convening difficult conversations. The project could be set up as a community interest company and attract support from the private sector and charitable trusts.

Context

This report attempts to provide a grassroots perspective on integration and cohesion in the London Borough of Waltham Forest. The focus is on British white working-class communities and British Muslims living in the borough. This report builds on the previous Open Society Foundations report *Muslims in London* which was part of the Muslims in EU Cities project.

The key objectives of this research included reviewing similarities and differences in approaches to integration from these two groups; bringing together white working-class and Muslim communities to share ideas on how to build integration; and promoting the positive contribution of both in supporting integration, thus changing the negative way that both are sometimes viewed.

Policy frameworks and political debates have inevitably affected both communities. The emergence of community cohesion after the summer riots in 2001, attacks in New York and Washington, DC on 11 September 2001, and the "war on terror" combined with the military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, the 7/7 attacks in London in 2005, the agenda to prevent violent extremism and the 2013 Woolwich murder of a serving soldier have all contributed to the view that British Muslims are problematic. The electoral rise of the British National Party at the 2009 European elections and the success of the ultra nationalist United Kingdom Independence Party in 2014 when it topped the poll at same elections,, the emergence and associated violence and publicity of the English Defence League, alongside growing political disconnection and the debate on welfare reform, have similarly pathologised poor white communities.

Methodology

The data to support the analysis were predicated on engaging with residents from both groups. Crucial to the process was identifying community organisations and individuals who could be the access point. They needed to be viewed as credible and trusted as well as having the capacity to deliver focus groups to an exacting schedule. To this end, the researchers worked with Councillor Karen Bellamy (white working-class) and the Asian Mothers Group (British Muslims).

The borough is ethnically diverse with few locations fitting into a typology of low-income, white and disadvantaged. Following discussions with the Borough Council, Higham Hill ward was identified as meeting the criteria and residents who participated were recruited from this area. The Markhouse ward provided the base for focus groups for British Muslim communities and was clearly one of several hubs in the borough. The key findings in this report are based on the views of 78 local residents who were involved in six focus groups[1] whose discussions took place in Higham Hill and Markham.

Stakeholder interviews were designed to contextualise the study, refine topic guide questions and support the recruitment of residents; 21 stakeholders were interviewed.

A community study day was organised at Waltham Forest Council House, bringing together a representative group of 20 residents from Higham Hill and Markham. This created a space for participants to provide feedback on interim findings, to discuss challenges and opportunities for integration and to consider a practical legacy for jointly working in the borough. Participants were organised into mixed groups with sessions facilitated by the project team and key informants. The community day was a symbolic and significant event leading to community conversations between two disengaged groups. As a result residents agreed to continue the conversations beyond the original scope. For example, white working-class women agreed to volunteer at the Asian Mothers Group.

1 Focus groups: 21 white participants (13 women, 8 men); 33 Muslim participants (15 women, 18 men). Study day: 24 participants (white, 8 women, 2 men) (Muslim, 8 women, 6 men).

1. POLICY CONTEXT

This section will provide an overview of government policy on cohesion and integration since 2001. The overview will contextualise the findings emerging in this study, as national frames help to shape local policy and practice delivered by local authorities and community organisations. Moreover, the content and tone of national discussion may influence grassroots perspectives on cohesion and integration. Arguably the debates since 2001 on community cohesion (2001–2010 under the Labour government) and integration (2010 onwards under the Conservative and Liberal Democratic coalition government) have moved away from celebrating and valuing difference. Instead ethnic diversity is viewed as a problem. Of course, alongside the shift away from multiculturalism to first cohesion, and then integration, are international narratives flowing from 9/11 and 7/7, combined with national debate following the riots of 2001 and 2011. The international and national may affect how cohesion and integration are played out in Waltham Forest as well as how British Muslims and white working-class communities are perceived, and the way in which they view each other.

1.1 | COMMUNITY COHESION

This section provides a critical review of community cohesion. It begins with a discussion of its emergence in 2001 as a response to multiculturalism and a sense that it was characterized by straitjacketing and conformity in policies and outcomes, imposed by central government on local government. It also considers the demise of community cohesion and the rise of a new integration framework developed by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government elected in 2010. Community cohesion and indeed integration demonstrated that the national government was pursuing a policy of hard integration highlighted by top–down indicators, a nationally driven performance framework and the forced assimilation of migrant communities into an undefined notion of Britishness.

Community cohesion was a peculiarly British response to the perceived challenges of ethnic difference. It emerged after violent disturbances in Burnley, Oldham and Bradford largely between British Asian and British white communities (Home Office, 2001).[2] The framework generated a range of responses from policy, academic and practitioner communities.

The policy domain has arguably been the most prolific compared with academic outputs. This may be organised into three strands. First, before and after the 2001

2 Home Office, *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Reviewing Team,* HMSO, London, 2001

disturbances, a range of national and local interventions were generated.[3] Attention was drawn to fragmented and segregated communities living in poor neighbourhoods which had been pitted against each other by government policies on housing, education and regeneration. These reports suggested that policymakers had not taken note of the problematic outcomes of national and local policies. The focus of these studies was ethnicity rather than class. Most of the reports recommended increasing interaction and contact between different groups together with common shared values and interventions to challenge perceptions of unfairness.[4]

The second strand of community cohesion was being embedded in government policy from 2002 onwards. The focus was on defining community cohesion, generating guidance to support local government and related agencies to implement strategies and assess their impact. The guidance emphasised common values, and cross-community and cross-disciplinary working. These three strands shaped the new framework on integration that emerged with the publication of the report of the CIC.[5]

Community cohesion may be viewed as an example of formal or hard integration. This is defined by government-generated frameworks (community cohesion, integration) and a policy imposition on local communities filtered through local government. The narrowness of concepts and space for discussion is matched by a bureaucratic performance framework measuring local performance against national indicators. This is inculcated by a national political narrative that denounces multiculturalism and difference and tightens immigration control. In contrast, this research suggests that the challenges of immigration could be better served by informal or soft integration. This would be driven by grassroots discussion and debate to identify local issues and policy solutions, working in conjunction with local government. Rather than the battery of 198 performance indicators the focus could be on outcomes and neighbourhood trajectories. Finally an emerging national narrative could be formed based on the lived experiences of communities that have a realistic value attached to diversity and an understanding that British identity is not singular but arrived at from many different sources.

3 H. Ouseley, *Community Pride not Prejudice—Making Diversity Work in Bradford: The Ouseley Report,* Bradford District Race Review Panel, Bradford, 2001 (hereafter, *Ouseley, Community Pride not Prejudice*); D. Ritchie, *Oldham Independent Review: One Oldham, One Future, Manchester, Government Office for the North West,* Manchester, 2001 (hereafter, Ritchie, *Oldham Independent Review*); T. Clarke, *Burnley Task Force Report on the Disturbances in June 2001,* Burnley Borough Council, Burnley, 2001 (hereafter, Clarke, *Burnley Task Force Report*); Home Office, *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Reviewing Team,* HMSO, London, 2001 (hereafter, *Home Office, Community Cohesion*).

4 T. Cantle, *Community Cohesion: a New Framework for Race and Diversity,* Palgrave, London, 2005.

5 Commission on Integration and Cohesion (CIC). Our Shared Future, Report. London: CIC, 2007.

1.2 | CHALLENGING FAR-RIGHT EXTREMISM

Government policies to address the threat of far-right extremism have not been explicit in national approaches to community cohesion[6] or preventing violent extremism.[7] An exception was the "Connecting Communities" programme launched by the Labour government in 2009 (CLG, 2009).[8]The £12 million initiative largely focused on 160 white working-class communities across the country. These were places where community cohesion had deteriorated as a result of the 2008 economic recession and the perceived threat of far-right extremism. The programme was designed to make communities more resilient by improving local leadership, enabling people to have a space to voice concerns and frustrations and making communities aware of funding opportunities. Connecting Communities was discontinued by the coalition government after the 2010 general election.

1.3 | CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR INTEGRATION

The Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government took a different view from Labour's approach to community cohesion. In "Creating the Conditions for Integration"[9] the suggestion was that there had been too much state interference in shaping community cohesion and too many indicators trying to measure performance. Of course this argument is consistent with an ideological approach emphasising the role of the market not only in economic but also in social policy.

The "Creating the Conditions for Integration" programme is underpinned by the concept of common ground, individual responsibility, social mobility, increasing civic participation and addressing intolerance and extremism. The focus is on the locality rather than on government intervention. This stems from the 2011 Localism Act which the new government viewed as moving power away from central government towards local government and communities and stripping away bureaucracy.[10]

Five key features of "Creating the Conditions for Integration" are discussed below:

1. **Common ground:** The emphasis is on shared values and aspirations with the focus on commonalities rather than differences. This seems similar to the community cohesion,[11] discussed earlier, that emphasised common norms and

6 Home Office, *Community Cohesion*.

7 House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee, *Preventing Violent Extremism,* HMSO, London, 2010.

8 DCLG, "Connecting Communities", Policy Briefing, London, 2009.

9 Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), *Creating the conditions for integration,* Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), London, 2012 (hereafter, DCLG, *Creating the Conditions for Integration*).

10 DCLG, *Creating the Conditions for Integration*.

11 Home Office, *Community Cohesion.*

shared spaces. The document states: 'We will celebrate what we have in common and promote shared values and shared commitments which underpin and strengthen our national commitment.'[12] The "Big Lunch" (the act of people living in a neighbourhood coming together to have lunch) and a "Community Music Day" (coming together for learning to play a musical instrument and musical performances) and learning to play a musical instrument) showcase bringing people together. Volunteers drive these national initiatives locally with minimum support from the government. This is not simply about celebrating commonality, as the government also emphasises the importance of tightening immigration control through tests on British culture and the English language.

2. **Responsibility:** The document is laced with the importance of individuals accepting personal responsibility for actions, with the focus on young people. A number of activities are highlighted, including a National Citizens Service which '"...brings young people together from a wide range of backgrounds to develop their skills, contribute to their communities and promote integration."[13] "A Year of Service", which is about young people volunteering; and "Our Vision for Safe and Active Communities", that encourages activists to address anti-social behaviour in neighbourhoods.

3. **Social mobility:** The government stresses the importance of supply side schemes to optimise educational achievement as an essential building block towards integration. Additionally it seeks to promote enterprise culture in schools and colleges by bringing young people together to create jobs and wealth for the country as a whole. Business and faith- based organisations are seen as a key driver for integration, in contrast with the approach of community cohesion, which that was largely led by the state.

4. **Participation and empowerment:** Encouraging community action as opposed to waiting for government intervention marks a break with the community cohesion approach of the Labour government. This includes the recruitment of 5,000 community organisers who will "listen to residents, public service and third sector workers, small businesses and local institutions, to help them act together in the common good".[14]

5. **Tackling intolerance and extremism** Showing a continuation of the approach of the previous Labour government. In 2011 a revised "Prevent strategy" was published,[15] that became part of the wider "CONTEST" counter- terrorism strategy.[16] The Conservative-Liberal coalition government expressed concern that previous policies had moved between cohesion and preventing extremism with funding

12 DCLG, *Creating the Conditions for Integration*, p. 10.

13 DCLG, *Creating the Conditions for Integration*, p. 12.

14 DCLG, *Creating the Conditions for Integration*, p. 15.

15 Home Office, *Prevent Strategy*, Cm 8092, HMSO, London, 2011 (hereafter, Home Office, *Prevent Strategy*).

16 HM Government, *CONTEST: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering Terrorism*, 2011.

for the latter designed to support the former.[17] Under the coalition government's new approach, integration policy is being separated from "Prevent". As it recently stated:

> *Prevent depends on a successful integration strategy. But integration alone will not meet 'Prevent' objectives. 'Prevent' must not assume control of or allocate funding to integration projects, which have a value far wider than security and counter-terrorism; the Government will not securitise its integration strategy. This has been a mistake in the past."*[18]

The above have been put forward as key prime tenets of a new approach. However, this programme shows continuity with community cohesion. Common ground is based on shared values and was the idea underpinning cohesion; the previous Labour government invested in schools as an engine for social mobility and promoted the strategy of preventing violent extremism. Apart from the focus on community organisers and scaling down national indicators, there are a lot of similarities between the old community cohesion and the new integration strategy. Finally it should be noted that the political debate has continued to focus on the problems associated with immigration and "failed" policies of multiculturalism.[19] "Creating the Conditions for Integration" may be viewed as part of the formal or hard integration approach discussed above.

Importantly the focus is on localism and a micro-approach to integration, which echoes the 2011 Localism Act (discussed above) as well as the big society initiative launched soon after the 2010 general election. In place of government-based local communities, civic renewal and volunteering are viewed as the delivery agents for local integration. This new context meant means that location (or place) matters. There is recognition that integration is not framed by a national template but will vary according to local circumstances:

> *The Government's role in achieving a more integrated society is strongly shaped by localism and the Big Society. Past approaches have involved expensive programmes dictated from Whitehall, and made integration the preserve of narrow interest groups ...our new approach is focused on how we create the conditions for integration to happen. Instead of large-scale, centrally led and funded programmes, we want to inspire...local areas to take action on integration... from centrally led to locally led action.*[20]

17 House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee, *Preventing Violent Extremism*, HMSO, London, 2012.

18 Home Office, *Prevent Strategy*, p. 6.

19 D. Cameron, "Speech to Munich Security Conference", Cabinet Office, London, 2011.

20 DCLG, *Creating the Conditions for Integration*, p.19

The problems of government interference hindering integration are a consistent theme in the document. The discussion is littered with inferences that the state was bureaucratic, slowed down creativity and innovation and was infused with political correctness that contributed to worsening tension rather than easing it. This was about setting communities against each other rather than considering local commonalities:

> *Government must not, as happens too often, stand in the way by dictating general solutions to complex local issues, or seeming to label some people as 'different' or requiring special treatment.*[21]

Given that the role of central government has diminished, the importance of other actors in promoting integration is telling. For example, faith-based organisations are given an important role in helping to bring different communities together on common ground or in making commonalities between Britons. Again this could be viewed as continuing the role of faith- based organisations started under the Labour government:[22]

> *... encourage links and dialogue between people from different faith and cultural backgrounds, defend the valuable role of faith in public life, and will tackle cultural isolation and segregation.*[23]

The role of faith is enhanced by the new approach to integration. For example, local authorities are encouraged to commence or close meetings with prayers recognising the role of Christianity in the heritage of the nation. This seems in contradiction to the increasing secularity of the UK highlighted by the 2011 census. Indeed, the flat -lining of attendance in the Church of England is in contrast with the religiosity of minority communities.[24] Faith is also viewed by the government to be an important method for encouraging participation among communities and social action. To this end the Faith-based Regeneration Network is attempting to strengthen faith-based social action and an Inter Faith week is held in November every year to persuade different communities to come together and learn from each other.

The new policy was published before the killing of a serving British soldier in the Woolwich area of London in May 2013 This made national and international news for several reasons. First, the random nature of the attack was amplified by social media that captured the immediate aftermath when the perpetrator explained his actions. Second, the killing was justified because of the UK's involvement in the "war on terror"

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21 DCLG, *Creating the Conditions for Integration*, p. 6

22 Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) *Face to Face and Side by Side: A framework for partnership in our multi faith society*, DCLG, London, 2008.

23 DCLG, *Creating the Conditions for Integration,* p. 10.

24 See Office for National Statistics (ONS), at http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/detailed-characteristics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/rpt---religion.html (accessed 20 January 2013).

an specifically military action in Afghanistan. Third, the alleged perpetrators were born in the UK and had grown up in stable, devoutly Christian homes, converting to Islam in their late teens and early 20s.

In response, the government started reviewing the "Prevent" strategy that had only been launched in 2011. Discussion coalesced on curbing the activities of so-called hate preachers on the ground and the internet; working with schools, colleges and universities to combat the drift of young people to violent extremism and considering increasing surveillance of electronic communications. The extremist right, such as the British National Party (BNP) and the violent street movement the English Defence League (EDL), have both capitalised on Woolwich to renew their organisations. Their target has been British Muslims, the threat posed by Islam to the British way of life and the incompatibility of Islam with a largely Christian country. Given this backdrop it is no surprise that there was a significant increase in assaults, harassment on Muslims in the UK and arson attacks on mosques.[25]

This backdrop about the threat to the British way of life is not only limited to issues of security. As important is the way that concerns on high levels of immigration to the UK are being played out in national politics. The increased racialisation of the public policy debate was discussed previously. The context of immigration and the perceived lack of control of British borders has heightened the levels of mistrust and disconnection from politicians and institutions. Pointedly, a recent publication has suggested that older white working class men, or the 'left behind', feel lost and resentful about the impact of immigration on jobs, housing and welfare and the pace of change in neighbourhoods. They feel that mainstream political parties do not speak on their behalf.[26] Indeed, the 2014 European elections were groundbreaking in the UK with UKIP winning the popular vote ahead of both Conservative and Labour with the Liberal Democrats trailing well behind. The success was viewed as based on disconnection with traditional politicians and concerns about the impact of immigration in the UK. This type of causality needs to be subjected to scrutiny. Data is mixed on who voted for UKIP, with exit polling in 2014 suggesting that one in five were former Conservatives.[27] Moreover there has always been a section of the working class, and white working class, that has supported strongly nationalist and anti-immigration positions in British politics. Finally, and as we will see from the fieldwork analysis, white working class views ranged stretched from being antagonistic on immigration to celebrating the reality of multiculturalism.

25 See *Tell MAMA* research report on anti-Muslim violence and hate post Woolwich, http://tellmamauk.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/appg.pdf (accessed 1 August 2014).

26 Ford, R. and Goodwin, M. *Revolt on the Right: Explaining Support for the Radical Right in Britain.* London, Routledge, 2014.

27 Martin Williams, "More than half of Ukip voters were disenchanted Tories, Ashcroft poll finds", The Guardian, 24 May 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/may/24/more-than-half-ukip-voters-disenchanted-tories-ashcroft-poll (accessed 1 August 2014).

The aftermath of Woolwich has seen the continuation and extension of the debate on the integration of Muslim communities. The involvement of the BNP and the EDL at street level, including laying wreaths at war memorials across the country, and the spike in reported racist and religiously motivated incidents, raise the question of how far cohesion and integration initiatives have worked, and indeed whether cultural assimilation would work, or even be enough, to placate the strongest critics of multiculturalism. Furthermore, the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the London bombings of 2005 have placed the integration of Muslim communities in a context that links community cohesion and preventing violent extremism.[28]

1.4 | MAKING SENSE OF INTEGRATION

In a diverse, post-industrial and global society the simplicity of community cohesion and integration appears outdated. The 2011 census showed the force of societal changes on the daily activities of people. Reductionism to group identity and collectivised behaviours does not fit with the data. People have multiple rather than singular identities. The complexity of identity and social and personal relationships, together with a distrust of institutions, will hamper attempts by the government to put in place either a cohesion or integration framework at the national and local levels.

An IPPR report proposed a new way to discuss these themes, which they called "everyday integration".[29] This means that the processes by which people integrate into the mainstream are far more subtle than have been previously acknowledged. Following this methodological approach, some propose that future work on the best ways of integrating minority communities into the broader society should focus on everyday sites where identities are constructed and reconstructed and where new possibilities of group allegiance are continually developed.

In other words, it is crucial to deconstruct our views of communities as pre-set. Our thinking has to move from a view of the world as fixed in binaries to one that recognises complexity in everyday life and decision-making.

This recognition of complexity in everyday life and decision-making is part of the 2011 Localism Act. Here a more integrated society is strongly shaped by localism and the big society. This means that local areas would take the responsibility for integration projects and are not dictated to by the government. Such micro-responses to integration would be voluntary and led by the private sector. However, the government insists on there being core values and experiences held in common (cultural

28 The political climate that labels Muslim communities as a threat either through being culturally different or potential terrorists.

29 Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), *Rethinking Integration*, IPPR, London, 2012.

assimilation), and among other things a right to live free from persecution of any kind (cultural freedom).

In summary, cohesion—and latterly integration—are not agreed terms but are highly contested. The pathway from the Labour to the Conservative and Liberal government should be viewed as continuity rather than discontinuity. The success of UKIP at the 2014 elections on the basis of a strongly anti-immigration platform points to a hardening of approaches to current policies on integration. This makes it challenging to use either cohesion or integration as grand frameworks for society, which paradoxically is growing increasingly complex. A more nuanced approach to integration is required; one that does not make claims of inclusivity but is grounded in everyday actions and responses to events.

2.

CASE STUDY – WALTHAM FOREST

2.1 | BACKGROUND AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The focus of this report is on the London Borough of Waltham Forest. It lies on the outer edge of north-east London and has only been part of London since 1965 when the three boroughs which were then in the county of Essex (Chingford, Walthamstow and Leyton) were merged into Waltham Forest and joined to Greater London. Its name is a reference to the Royal Forest of Essex which covered much of the borough until the 19th century. Epping Forest now borders the north of the borough. Famous residents of the borough include the designer William Morris, the film director Alfred Hitchcock and the footballer David Beckham. It is one of the five boroughs hosting the 2012 London Olympics, with the main Olympic park in the area adjoining the south of the borough. Its neighbouring London boroughs are Hackney and Newham in the south and Haringey and Enfield in the west. To the east is the Essex county borough of Redbridge.

Waltham Forest has for a long time been a place where immigrants into the UK have settled and made their homes. In the late 19th century and early part of the 20th century, many migrants who settled there were Jews who had come to the UK to escape persecution in central and eastern Europe. The majority lived in the East End of London for a short period of time, and then made their way to the more affluent northern outskirts of the city. The largest influx into the area from overseas took place, as elsewhere in the UK, in the postwar years, with the arrival of immigrants first from the Caribbean and then South Asia, particularly Pakistan.[30]

Since 2004 with the expansion of the European Union, the borough, like other parts of London, has experienced an increase in the numbers of people coming from eastern Europe. According to data from the 2011 census, Waltham Forest (at 9 percent) has the second-highest concentration of residents from EU accession countries of all London Boroughs.[31]

In 2011 Waltham Forest had a population of 258,000. This was much more than 2016 estimates projected by the Greater London Authority (GLA) of a total of between 231,000 and 243,000. In 2011, the white British ethnic group constituted 36.5 percent of the population, down from 55.7 percent in 2001 and 74.4 percent in 1991. Ethnic-minority groups therefore constitute 64 percent of the population, making the borough one of the few municipal administrations with a majority minority status. The largest ethnic-minority group was Pakistani (10.2 percent), followed by black Caribbean and black African (both 7.3 percent) and Indian (3.5 percent). It should be noted that the "white other" category is 14.5 percent, probably composed of various EU migrants.

30 This section draws on the case study description provided in the OSF report, *Muslims in London*, 2012.

31 ONS, Office for National Statistics (ONS), at http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/detailed-characteristics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/rpt---religion.html (accessed 20 January 2013).

The Muslim population in Waltham Forest is one of the largest in London and constitutes 21.9 percent of the population (up from 15.1 percent in 2001). In contrast, the percentage of respondents stating that they were Christian had fallen to 48.4 percent in 2011 (down from 56.8 percent in 2001).

In 2011 the borough presented as a place of considerable change, with a significant decline in the number of white British and smaller declines in black Caribbean and Indian but a rapidly increasing concentration of Pakistanis and smaller growth in the black African numbers. Factored in was the fast growing and newly emerging communities drawn from eastern Europe. This changing population provided an interesting context for the study of policy on integration and cohesion.

In the Equalities Review 2007–2010 it was stated that both "equality and community cohesion are critical to the quality of life of local people".[32] The review recognised that the vast majority of commitments were delivered. For example, a Muslim women's community engagement project was set up to encourage Muslim women to express their views and ideas. A further example of delivery was responding to the need to help more black, Asian and other ethnic-minority people over the barriers they face in getting a job. This included developing an apprentice scheme.

The Waltham Forest Council Equality Plan 2012–2015[33] states that a key priority for the borough is the creation of a fair and equal society. The Equality Act 2010 consists of a general equality duty which requires councils to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the act;
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic[34] and those who do not;
- foster good relations between people who have a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The plan has established a number of equality objectives, including reducing the incidence of racist bullying in schools, reducing the percentage of over-representation of young people from black, Asian and ethnic-minority residents who are affected by gang violence and narrowing the gap between the educational attainment of Asian and black African pupils and their peers.

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32 London Borough of Waltham Forest, Equalities Review 2007–2010. http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:vtGJvO_PDOAJ:https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/Documents/Equalities%2520Review%2520Final.doc+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us Accessed 14 January 2013

33 See http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/documents/Final%20Version%20-%20WF%20Council%20Equality%20Plan%202012%20(2).pdf (accessed 14 January 2013).

34 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The borough has allocated a budget of £10,000 for 2013/2014 to celebrate and commemorate national days and events that promote community cohesion. This scheme is an interim measure for 2013–2014 until a "Community Cohesion Plan" is agreed and in place.

2.2 | METHODOLOGY

This project is based on a qualitative study of stakeholders and residents in Higham Hill and Markham wards in Waltham Forest. The methodology enabled the study to access communities that were hard to reach. It would not have been possible by deploying quantitative methodology because much of the nuances and multilayered nature of groups and social relationships would have been lost. The research approach showed the importance of working with important organisations and individuals as co-researchers and spending time building trust. The support of key informants who helped with recruiting residents was vital to the data collection. A major achievement of the project was building trust within and between communities that generated a richness of data, which is explored in this report.

2.2.1 | SCOPING

- **Secondary review**: This considered policy transformations at the macro-level since the 2010 general election, specifically, the move away from community cohesion to integration alongside greater emphasis on localism rather than on the role of government.
- **Stakeholder interviews:** Twenty interviews were conducted with local councillors, local government officers and representatives of community and faith organisations working in the borough, as well as the police and activists who were interested in cohesion and integration issues. Snowball sampling was used and interviews lasted from 50 minutes to two hours. A semi-structured plan was used which was consistent with the guide for the focus groups. Each interview was written up and cross-referenced to explore common themes within and between interviewees and linked back to the policy framework and policy transitions discussed above.

2.2.2 | CASE STUDIES

The case study was based on two local council wards in Waltham Forest, one that is predominantly low-income white and the other being mainly Muslim. The selection of the local area was made following a review of the 2011 census data as well as discussions with stakeholders. Higham Hill was selected as the ward that came

closest in typology to low-income white communities and Markham represented British Muslim communities.

- **Selecting community organisations:** The process of scoping and neighbourhood interviews identified community organisations that could support the project by facilitating access to local residents and providing a space to convene focus groups. In short, the community organisations became peer researchers during the case study stage of the project. In Markham ward the project team reached out to the Asian Mothers Group, a community organisation that had helped with the Open Society Foundations' *Muslims in London* report. The organisation had access to and was trusted by residents and government alike, as well as having space to convene local meetings. The process in Higham Hill was much more difficult because no community organisation existed of the type needed for the study. Instead the project team worked closely with Councillor Karen Bellamy who was a Higham Hill councillor and had previously been a community activist in the area. It quickly became apparent that she was respected by local people and had credibility. It should be noted that without these key informants the project could not have been completed.

- **Focus groups:** Three focus groups in each neighbourhood took place, composed of 78 people in all. This was a mixture of residents in terms of age, gender and occupation. Key questions discussed in the focus groups included participants' understanding of national and local government approaches to integration, key problems and issues at the local level and ideas on how people from different backgrounds could support integration. Data were recorded digitally and in note form. In general, focus groups lasted for two hours and were facilitated by the project team with support from key informants. Interpretation for participants whose first language was not English was offered at the Muslim focus groups. More detail on the process is given in the context for the findings section below.

- **Community study day:** The final part of the field methodology was bringing a sample of participants from Higham Hill and Markham together to hear interim findings and work together to share common concerns and, more importantly, solutions. The lack of suitable space in the borough resulted in the study day taking place in the Council House. Twenty people participated in the session grassroots solutions on integration and assessment of prospects for success. The research team and key informants facilitated this.

- **Final report:** Data from the project were collected at different stages and critically analysed to show how approaches to integration are played out in local neighbourhoods. The interim and final reports highlighted similarities and differences, and showcased grassroots approaches on building bridges between people living in predominantly white working-class and Muslim communities.

3.

FINDINGS

This section draws on the data from focus groups and stakeholder interviews. The analysis is grouped under the headings of people, place and politics.

The data showed for the most part the positive reality of multiculturalism in Waltham Forest; white communities accepted established minority groups such as British Muslims but both groups were antipathetic towards new migrants who had selected the borough in which to live and work. Identity was complex for both groups. It was based on place, faith or ethnicity, and on many occasions all three. Grassroots perspectives on integration and identity were much more nuanced than depicted in government policy.

The findings also showed that there was considerable attachment to place. People enjoyed living in Waltham Forest because of its ethnic diversity, community infrastructure and proximity to family and friends. There was very little evidence of racism between white and British Muslim communities in the area. However, this was not the case in different parts of the borough or London. British Muslims across age, tenure and gender recounted incidents of harassment.

The findings showed consistent levels of disconnection and disdain for mainstream politics and political institutions. People did not trust the national government but there was no support for extremist politics of the right or Islamist groups operating in the borough. British Muslim respondents were critical of some of the established leaders in community and faith-based organisations.

Taken together the findings represent a considerable challenge to government perspectives on cohesion and integration and the perceived problems of multiculturalism. In reality the lived experiences of our respondents demonstrated positive views of living together and attachment to Waltham Forest. Lessons need to be learnt by the government that need to be distilled in the way that policies are framed.

3.1 | COMPLEX IDENTITIES

The Open Society Foundations research suggests that community perspectives on difference, diversity and cohesion are complex. Often they are contradictory to national government policy. Discussions on British identity are yet another example of the complexity and challenge of key debates which are often blunted and simplified by cohesion and integration policy. The much celebrated citizenship tests, or common norms, did not arise in community conversations. Instead participants spoke about the inclusive and multifaceted frame of identity. Being different was not viewed as being problematic to a British identity. For example, young people spoke powerfully about British identity, which they linked to being born or brought up in Walthamstow:

> *I think it's the life you grew up in. Because you were born here, you grew up here just like any other, not trying to be rude, but like any other white or black person. They're brought up here, everything, they went to school here, they speak English, we speak English so if they can call themselves British, why can't we?* (Asif, young British Muslim man)

> *British, it doesn't mean that you're white at all ... you're in this country and you're meant to be here, you don't need to be white to be British.* (Roxy, young white woman)

This appears to be an inclusive identity beyond the reductionism of phenotype and place that has often underscored national narratives. The views offered by communities who took part in this study seems to put forward a modern Britain as a diverse and multicultural environment that has little resonance with superficial appearance and more to do with respecting legal frameworks and codes of behaviour. To this end, newly emerging groups such as Poles and Lithuanians were regarded by both white and British Muslim communities as not fitting into the country or not being British even though they presented as white. Concerns about collectivised behaviour, jobs and pressure on health and educational services were shared by some of the focus group participants. It could be argued that identity was an earned right and not automatic. It seemed to be based on respecting social mores that could be as pedantic as putting out rubbish on the correct day of collection and not giving the appearance of being rude to Britons.

The importance of learning English as a proxy for identity cannot be underestimated. This appeared to be the cornerstone for both groups. In particular, the British white working-class communities felt that language was important in demonstrating a willingness to integrate and build bridges with established groups. New migrants were viewed outside British identity but many felt that in 20 years they would be accepted in the country. Indeed, British Muslims (as discussed previously) viewed the integration process as being easier for eastern Europeans because they are white.

> *I basically think that ... because they've got blue eyes and blond hair. Okay? ... Like my kids, three or four generations down they'll still have black hair brown eyes regardless. Eastern Europeans, three or four generations down, they won't know where they're from Birmingham or Lithuania ... they'll be recognised as white people.* (Badr, British Muslim man)

To this participant and others in his group phenotype continues to be important and is viewed as the norm. However, it should be stated that this view, while important, was in the minority. Both British white working-class people and Muslims regarded new migrant communities as outsiders.

A common policy and academic assumption is viewing white working-class communities as a homogenous group.[35] This theory goes further by ascribing collective behaviours. Both notions are problematic. Recent research demonstrates that communities are different and multifaceted in terms of tenure, employment and place, which may lead to nuanced findings on integration and cohesion.[36] The OSF found that participants were not only diverse in terms of these classifications but also in terms of ethnicity. A matrix of social, educational and work relationships with minority communities was the norm and this shaped some of the views on common challenges and opportunities related to difference and grassroots coalition building.

3.2 | RELATIONSHIPS AMONG COMMUNITIES

3.2.1 | THE REALITY OF MULTICULTURALISM

Multiculturalism and diversity are not options in Waltham Forest but a reality. Since 2001 it has been argued that macro-policy approaches to cohesion have been fixed on a narrative that suggests that communities do not come into contact with each other and lead parallel lives. The projection of segregated communities in conflict and not binding to societal norms has been influential at local authority level. However, resident focus group discussions and stakeholder interviews suggest a different and much more complex pattern.

A community cohesion framework may no longer be fit for purpose in Waltham Forest. Community conversations with white working-class people and British Muslims suggested different types of social interaction and relationships. For some, it was being neighbours living on the same street providing space for mutual support. This extended to the home being the space for micro-integration. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the experiences are generally positive:

> *Whilst I was in Chingford, the lady upstairs, she still have, we post a card to each other before Christmas ... and she remembered all my children's birthdays and sent me a card.* (Syeeda, British Muslim woman)

> *I love it, I love it. My house comes in and it's like the United Colours of Benetton. There's Asians, there's blacks, Asians, mixed race, white, Irish, everything, gingers, everything.* (Karen, white woman)

Beyond the home and the neighbourhood, the reality of difference was encountered in the workplace, school and college. People were pragmatic and realised they could not

35 C. Murray, "Underclass", *Sunday Times Magazine*, 26 November 1989.

36 Beider, *White Working-class Views*; S. Garner, *White Working-class Neighbourhoods: Common Themes and Policy Suggestions.* JRF, York, 2011.

and would not live in isolation. This was especially the case for the British Muslims interviewed across different age groups and gender:

> *But you have to communicate with them at work, you have to communicate with them, not as in my friends, I wouldn't go out with them or anything.* (Mohammed, young British Muslim man)

Young white-working class participants who did not differentiate between people on the basis of ethnicity mirrored this. In London, and especially East London, there was recognition that you could not select friends and acquaintances based on ethnicity:

> *It's everything round here. Like it'll be a mixed group fighting someone else in their group that they don't like or someone from another area.* (Chris, young white man)

It has been noted that both communities celebrated multiculturalism. People enjoyed living with difference and social relations developed in a number of domains. The conversations were more complex and it would be incorrect to present a completely benign view of community relations in Waltham Forest. British white, Muslim and Caribbean communities had lived together in the area for more than 60 years. Many individuals from minority communities were born, went to school and worked in the area. As noted below, their white peers regarded them as British.

For some individuals social interaction between different communities was an embedded and natural part of their everyday life. Difference was the norm and diversity was celebrated, and not merely tolerated. It should be noted that these routine interactions took place despite the challenges and pressures on integration from international and local events since 2001. In this context, the residents who were interviewed showed themselves to be remarkably resilient and progressive given that these are generally low-income communities in competition with each other for scarce public resources during a period of difficult economic circumstances.

To this end, an opportunity exists to build on the realities of multiculturalism and address some of the racist narratives expressed towards new arrivals by supporting progressive grassroots leaderships. Rather than being framed by top–down policy narratives, these individuals would build from the lived experiences of difference in Waltham Forest and promote an inclusive agenda addressing overlapping concerns.

3.2.2 | NEGATIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS NEW MIGRANT COMMUNITIES

It should be noted that while diversity is indeed the reality and a fabric of social relationships the result, this does not dissuade people from criticising new migrant

groups, especially those from eastern Europe. This could be the cohort effect.[37] New groups have not had the opportunity to interact and be accepted as part of the diversity of Waltham Forest.

There was general agreement that across all groups new migrants, especially originating from eastern Europe since the 2004 expansion of free movement rights within the EU, were not British. More than this, they were regarded as causing problems due to increased competition for jobs and housing as well as placing a burden on welfare.

As noted above, white working-class communities were concerned with the lack of respect shown by new communities. This is similar to related studies[38] on the impact of new migration in the UK. For example, disposal of rubbish is a significant problem in Waltham Forest and many felt that new Polish communities were to blame:

> *Every time I walk the kids to school, there's plenty of dog poo everywhere and like people just throw their beds out ... if you go down the alleyways ... it's just piled up with rubbish everywhere.* (Christine, white woman)

New migrants were associated with contributing to environmental problems and not taking the initiative to integrate. Both white working-class and British Muslim communities seemed to agree that that Eastern Europeans were not British compared with established minority communities:

> *Eastern Europeans keep themselves to themselves.* (Jo, white woman)
>
> *But where they're born [here] they're English.*
>
> *Q: So what about new people who have been moving in like Polish people?*
>
> *They're not English.* (Chris, young white man)

The attachment to Englishness, to place of birth, was to a limited extent found in the Muslim focus groups, especially among young people. However, the commonality between white and Muslim communities that formed this study was based on much more intangible factors, such as respect for local customs and behaviour, learning to speak English and contributing to the neighbourhood.

Some British Muslims considered new migrants to be problematic. This was, in part, expressed in pathological perspectives of rising crime in Waltham Forest correlated with the increase in the size of the Polish and Romanian communities:

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37 Affirming views for this particular group.

38 K. Sveinsson, (ed.), *Who Cares about the White Working Class*, Runnymede Trust, London, 2009; J. Pearce and E. Milne, *Participation and Community in Bradford's Traditionally White Estate,* Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York, 2010; H. Beider, *White Working-Class Views of Neighbourhood, Cohesion and Change*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York, 2011 (hereafter, Beider, *White Working-class Views*).

> *But ... not to be racist but the crime level has risen significantly especially with the Romanian community, because they, you know, steal a lot, especially when it comes to metal, things like that. I've had bikes stolen from my garden, all sorts, you know.* (Asif, young British Muslim man)

Demonstrating a resonance with the views expressed by white working-class communities, many of the British Muslims expressed concern that new migrants did not show respect, nor indeed did they have a desire to integrate. This was expressed as a lack of experience and a problem with English-language usage:

> *There's not very many of them that have been born and raised here, so they're bringing a lot of their mannerisms along with them and we see that as very rude, obviously, because they don't know how to interact ... language is a barrier for them. They might say something like "You give me this!' and I say "I will give you a slap you know!"* (Hassan, young British Muslim man)

Spitting, and burning poppies were three other micro-issues raised that became conflated with wider debates on integration.

Spitting in public was associated with minority communities and was viewed by some white working-class participants as a key cultural marker. A small personal act becomes involved with identity and respect:

> *They should respect their country; they go spitting everywhere ... they should keep the floors tidy. I mean we can't go round and spit in their country can we? ... They get chucked out the country.* (Damon, young white man)

> *I don't think it's changed over the years. I remember someone spitting in the playground in that school when my son was there and my son was 21 this year, and they spat in the playground and I went mad. I said like with no disrespect like, there's no reason for spitting on the floor. I went in, and he wasn't the headmaster then, and they went, it's cultural. I said hold on a minute, I said, let me get this right, because in some countries it's cultural to give birth in a field, but you wouldn't want me to do it in your playground would you?* (Jo, white woman)

Similarly, the importance of migrants speaking English seemed to have struck a chord with participants. It was not only seen as being a primary agency to support integration but also viewed by white working-class groups as causing problem when ethnic-minority people spoke in their mother tongue. Specifically, speaking another language in a public space was deemed as showing lack of respect or even rudeness:

> *I think the only thing I get fed up with is when they talk in their own language in front of you. It's not even about learning English it's just the simple fact that if you're standing there talking to an English person, in pure English and then the*

same conversation turning round to your Turkish friend or whatever, you're still standing there and you're just like don't know where to look really. (Christine, white woman)

Well basically, I don't like other people talking different languages because I don't understand them. They just walk past me ... talking to their mate and then just start laughing and I think they've done something to me. (Damon, young white man)

Some participants suggested that learning and communicating in English leads to mutual respect and understanding. Of course this fails to recognise that increasing numbers of households speak many different languages. Here competency in English appears to be more than simply communication but part of a set of rules that enables cohesion and integration to take place. There was a view that the core British identity is predicated on the ability to speak the majority language. In this context, new migrants such as Poles and Somalis were not perceived as British, in contrast with Caribbean and Pakistani communities in Waltham Forest.

The burning of poppies before Remembrance Sunday was another example of lack of respect for social mores. This actually happened near the Royal Albert Hall in Kensington, London in November 2011, although media reports suggested that a group now banned, Muslims against Crusades, conceived of it in Walthamstow. This seemed to have made an impression on the young white people taking part in the sessions:

I remember hearing about a load of Asian people banning the poppies or something. That pissed me off. (Damon, young white man)

It makes you angry innit because they're burning our stuff. (Joseph, young white man)

If we'd done that it would be a different story. (Chris, young white man)

Exactly, we'd get banged up for life, (Joseph, young white man)

Well, what would happen if we took that, what's that book called? (Damon, young white man)

Responding to why burning poppies made people so annoyed, the responses were:

Because its remembrance. (Damon, young white man)

That's our people. (Roxy, young white woman)

This act was viewed as something graver than simply breaking the law. Young people saw it as a symbolic act by some Muslim Britons to show lack of respect for British history and tradition. The narrative showed separation and otherness in minority

groups, with the assertion that burning the Qur'an would be treated more harshly than burning poppies. This is also illustrated in the reference to "our people".

The custom of spitting, the importance of learning to speak English and the act of burning poppies are all construed as being problems relating to cohesion and integration. They evoke imagery that does not fit well into the policies and frameworks that are set out by government, and they seem to be litmus tests for conflict (or accommodation) between communities. Though spitting and burning poppies are extreme acts, and the large proportion of minority communities speak English, these disparate encounters become part of community memory. Minorities are thought to be supporting these outlier positions.

The perceived economic threat posed by new migrants at a time of recession led to many of the negative comments. These new migrants were viewed as being a separate entity from the established norms of multiculturalism, which had been developed over many decades. The welcome was not extended, nor were they viewed as supporting the codes and respect that both white and British Muslims communities implicitly observed:

> *I think people just think, they despise them because they're getting the jobs, they're getting the stuff.* (Hassan, young British Muslim man)

A commonsense and consensual racism is developed between white working-class and British Muslim community attitudes towards new arrivals. The tropes applied to recent migration are similar to the experiences of British Asians when first arriving in the UK in the 1950s and 1960s. The recycling of racism from both communities has not been addressed by local or national cohesion policies. The complexity and layering of diversity need to be deconstructed to reflect the everyday experiences that were encountered.

Racialised discussion on the impact of new immigration peppered the focus groups alongside the championing of Waltham Forest as a diverse and multicultural borough. This appears to be a contradiction, but could be placed in the context of national political narratives on immigration. At the national level successive political parties have attempted to restrict immigration to the UK, but at the same time have promoted integration though policies such as community cohesion. Controlling the number of people entering the country while at the same time encouraging shared norms and values is a difficult political balancing act to achieve. Both Labour and the coalition government have attempted further constraints on migrants, as witness by the presence of the BNP and especially UKIP at local and national elections. Given national political leadership, it is not surprising that views on immigration in Waltham Forest appeared to be divergent and contradictory. This is reflective of national tropes. Both white and Muslim communities demonstrated willingness to either label new

migrants as problematic or to blame the government for local problems in Waltham Forest:

> *You've got to blame the government, they've been blind. Will be a very, very big problem and government not be able to handle that.* (Akil, British Muslim man)
>
> *Shall I say openly? Basically, criminal migrant. They steal if they can now ... go on benefit; they will do so straight away. But soon they will be able to get the benefit, everything, they will suck this society. They are not here for work.* (Mushtaq, British Muslim man)

A contradictory view is given by a white participant responding to suggestions that the white working class may be attracted to supporting far right and extremist groups such as the BNP:

> *That's a load of shit. I'm not being funny but it's a multiracial community, no one's racist around here ... I mean it's a multiracial community.* (Jo, white woman)

The juxtaposition of resentment towards migrants and viewing Waltham Forest as being a supportive multicultural community shows again how national policy is played out in a local environment. Indeed, given the sometimes virulent content of contemporary political debates on immigration, it is especially noteworthy that local communities in Waltham Forest continue to celebrate aspects of multiculturalism and unanimously disapprove of right-wing extremist politics. A more progressive and enlightened view on community relations and immigration may lead to further advancement at the local level.

Social interaction with individuals from different communities was the norm for many in the low-income white focus groups. Young people who had experienced this close sense of difference throughout their lives did not perceive this as a problem. Rather it was a by-product of growing up in a multicultural neighbourhood:

> *My cousin has just been born today, mixed race.* (Ed, young white young man)
>
> *I've got a Pakistani cousin that's just got married ... like I don't even know them but yeah it's my uncle's daughter innit? She doesn't keep in contact with the family ... like I've just found out.* (Chris, young white man)
>
> *Yeah, my Nan's married to a Jamaican man, so it's like, culture is not a problem really.* (Roxy, young white woman)

Government interventions such as community cohesion have focused on the lack of cross-cultural contact as being problematic. In short, communities were seen as living parallel live' apart from each other even though they share the same urban space. The

experiences in Waltham Forest demonstrate that culture and interaction are close and personal. The participants in the OSF research had lived alongside and with minority communities for many years. Thus positing conflict between communities as a clash of culture' has to be deconstructed and policy, which continues to be framed on this narrative, is unlikely to meet its objectives. This is not simply restricted to young people under 24 who have grown up in an ethnically diverse area of an international city. The focus group consisting of women with a range of ages also demonstrated ethnic diversity in personal relationships.

> *There's a lot of diversity in respect of a lot of the people here, X is Irish, you've got mixed race children, obviously the lady's black, my son in law is mixed race, there's a, it's a very diverse situation, do you know what I mean?* (Jo, white woman)

Not only does this demonstrate the personal reality of difference in Waltham Forest but also the complexity of personal and interpersonal relationships in modern Britain, revealed by the 2011 census.

The norms of diversity and discounting culture may be traced to the well-established patterns of migration in East London, following access to jobs accessible housing markets and making links with community infrastructure and people.

3.2.4 | BROAD BUT SHALLOW RELATIONSHIPS

It has been noted that residents interviewed for this project enjoyed living in a multicultural area. Moreover, there were numerous instances of intercultural contact between white working-class and British Muslim communities. Low-income white communities spoke about the personal ties in families, which showcased diversity. In contrast to other neighbouring areas, Waltham Forest functioned as a place for different groups.

Whilst diversity was an important part of the attraction of living in Waltham Forest, it would not be accurate to suggest that this was hardwired into the community. Despite well-established cohesion and community engagement interventions, different communities did not have an extensive embedded set of social networks and friends. Most continued to associate with immediate friends and family living on the same street or in the same neighbourhood. In this way it could be argued that community cohesion has not worked. Those interviewed did not share common spaces or community organisations with the purpose of understanding difference. While the experiences in Waltham Forest are far removed from the community cohesion rhetoric of parallel lives, with communities entrenched in segregated and symmetrical pattern of living, their lives may be characterised as ones of soft rather than hard integration.

Everyday, or soft, integration was a common theme in Waltham Forest. The focus group participants engaged with different communities in a variety of public spaces: the park, schools, workplaces, market. However, this did not always lead to strong and meaningful relationships, and while everyday integration did occur, particularly in the workplace and in education, this did not lead to relationships outside those settings:

> *I enjoy the company of my varied colleagues, but the thing is, when I finish work I go home. I have no interest whatsoever and neither do they, basically.* (Mudassar, British Muslim man)
>
> *You do communicate with them at work, you have to communicate with them, not as in my friends; I wouldn't go out with them or anything.* (Faizal, young British Muslim man)
>
> *You'll see that white parents are happier talking to themselves, you'll say hi or hello but you'll just see them socialising with themselves, the white group and Pakistanis together just talking amongst themselves.* (Fatima, British Muslim woman)

Many in the young people's focus group said that the lack of meaningful relationships or hard integration was not by design but it just happened. In the British Muslim Women's Group this was seen as something that has changed over time:

> *I see more of a divide as well within, like with the schools as well. In our time we were hanging out with white, black. We were all together, and now you have got the whites, you know, kids hanging out together, Asians hanging out, so there's groupings happening.* (Sana, British Muslim woman)

However, one example given was different from the events held by the council that highlighted a process of integration that went beyond superficial relations:

> *On my road, we have a church at the bottom; we've got a mosque at the top. Now what they have done is once a year they do a street party. They have an open day for the mosque on one day and they have an open day for the church. But the whole neighbours are given leaflets and they say we need help with the street party, everyone puts their name down, and everyone comes together.* (Syeeda, British Muslim woman)

Social bonds and networks were not dense, but should this be a problem? The focus groups showed soft contact in different spaces where ordinarily people would interact. Increasingly modern society seems to be composed of fleeting encounters. For example, people employed in Waltham Forest would describe routine friendly encounters with friends:

> *If I see someone that was black or of a different culture to me, but I know them, I'll go over and start speaking ... if they ain't got nothing on, I'll tell them to*

come ... wherever we are, when we see our mates, then we get together. (Chris, young white man)

It's nothing that you like aim towards ... it just happens by itself...like I'll see my white friends, I'll say hello and they'll go and probably drink and I don't drink so I'll leave them to it and do other things, we'll go somewhere else. (Sarfraz, young British Muslim man)

3.3 | A SENSE OF PLACE

3.3.1 | WALTHAM FOREST AS HOME

There was a significant attachment to place for most of those interviewed. People liked living in Waltham Forest for similar reasons: diversity, proximity to family and friends, and a sense of mutual support. Though there were similar concerns about the environment and the importance of addressing traffic, litter and pollution, many thought that Waltham Forest was a safe place.

For white working-class participants this was about embracing multiculturalism. People embraced difference and diversity but also the proximity to family and friends. Access to support networks in the local area was repeated excessively in discussions. This may reflect the fact that unlike middle- and high-income families, which may be able to buy support in care services such as child care, people in low-income communities have to rely on the informal support of their family and friends. Similarly, British Muslim communities selected Waltham Forest as a destination neighbourhood because of access to family and friends. In addition they had access to community infrastructure, including shops, places of worship and schools

In all of the focus groups there was a general view that Waltham Forest was a good place to live. Low-income white communities had either lived in the area from birth, or a very long time. Some had moved to Waltham Forest because it was seen as a good place to bring up their families. This is seen in the following quote, which emphasises the point that despite social and economic challenges the borough continues to be viewed in a positive light.

When I first moved here it was a really, it's not a bad area now compared to a lot of places but when I first moved here it was a really, really nice area to live in. There wasn't a lot of street crime; there weren't a lot of problems locally. It was a nice area to live in, the people were nice. (Jo, white woman)

The white working-class focus groups demonstrated the importance of social capital generated by the connections between family and friends. Reciprocal support to each and looking after children was an important part of the discussion for white women. In

this way the matrix of social relations and the benefits accruing to the collective rather than individuals were similar to the discussions with British Muslim communities. However, on balance, family networks were emphasised much more than community organisations for low-income white focus groups than for British Muslims:

> *Oh yeah! Everyone does watch everyone's backs, do you know what I mean, even if you, even if there's an indifference, you still go, oh there's an issue with so and so, or your kids, or I saw someone had a go at your kid and then someone straight away and whether it's got anything to do with you, it ain't, but you would still intervene, do you know what I'm saying? If there's an issue with people do that round here, they do tend to watch each other's back even though they've had their own disagreements and whatever over their time.* (Sarah, white woman)

The importance of welcoming and integrating newcomers in Waltham Forest is discussed in the following quote, which started with the view of the area as having a clean environment.

> *Yeah, it's quite a clean environment, it's kept clean and I've noticed that the neighbours that I've got are quite helpful. When I first moved into my property, the day that I was in there just trying to put down the floorboards, the neighbour came in and asked me if I wanted a cup of tea, did I want something to eat, and he just made me feel welcome, so yeah.* (Sarah, white woman)

Similar views were expressed about the borough by British Muslims interviewed. Some described it as a joining up of community and home:

> *It's just the community. You feel like you're at home as soon as you walk out of the door.* (Imran, British Muslim man)

The extension of home outside the private home into the community was largely because there was a critical mass of people from a similar ethnic background.

> *There are people the same as you though.*
>
> *Q. So the fact that there's a big Pakistani community here is important?*
>
> *A. Yeah, it is easier to like integrate us in.* (Saif, young British Muslim man)

Being "integrated in" was important in the focus group bringing together Muslim women. Speaking through a translator, one woman summed up her reasons for liking living in Waltham Forest through a strong sense of familiarity:

> *There are facilities that are helpful for her as a Muslim, in a community, so she is looking to be with other people that are Muslim. She wears a headscarf and*

> *she wants to be around people who also look like her and accept her for who she is and what her background is.* (Hina, British Muslim woman)

Being with sameness was a crucial aspect in the development of self-identity and feeling comfortable in the area they lived. However, sameness was not exclusively expressed. The experience of otherness, or diversity, was perceived by many as a key positive part of living in Waltham Forest:

> *I think Walthamstow is quite a good area. It's quite a diverse area; you have got loads of different communities.* (Syeeda, British Muslim woman)

> *It's a multicultural environment, you've got black people, and you've got white people.* (Saba, British Muslim woman)

Sameness and otherness came together to create a place to live in that was integrated. The balance between having local shops, mosques and other facilities enable Muslim communities to have a place in Waltham Forest:

> *We have our religious centres and also the amenities, we have the shopping and the schools and the hospital, everything is very close.* (Nasreen, British Muslim woman)

Waltham Forest was viewed positively by many of the respondents to the point that some had deliberately moved to the area from other parts of the country looking for community:

> *My parents lived in a very tiny village when they came here, English village and they deliberately after about five or six years moved to Waltham Forest because more and more Muslim people were living here. It is a deliberate choice for people to build their links ... in schools we do Chinese New Year, we do Guru Nanak's birthday, but as soon as you leave London you think well where have you been, well how come you don't know about what the Chinese New Year is?* (Fatima, British Muslim woman)

Waltham Forest represented closeness to cultural facilities, to being able to raise their children in a cultural value system and with a celebration of multiculturalism and openness:

> *We've got so much freedom, so much we are allowed to do, so if you go to Whitechapel during the month of Ramadan, they sing as well and you hear it outside the mosque. Outside in the street. They give you all this freedom. The rest of the world hasn't got this freedom.* (Imran, British Muslim man)

There was recognition that there was population movement and that white people were moving out of the area, although there were whites who were happy to stay:

> *I think that the white community here that are happy, they're staying put here. The ones that are not happy around Walthamstow are actually moving out now, so they are going to Chingford.* (Kusmaila, British Muslim woman)

Both communities taking part in the focus groups viewed Waltham Forest as home and had similar drivers for arriving at this conclusion. At various stages people spoke about the importance of the area, which provided a network of family and friends who provided extended and unconditional support. This level of grassroots community activism could be harnessed to develop new types of local leaderships embedded in the neighbourhoods. Diversity and difference were embraced as part of the lived experience in Waltham Forest. It was an incentive for regarding the borough as a good place to live, giving an infrastructure of community organisations, places of worship and shops. However, this should be qualified. New arrivals, especially the range of different groups from Eastern Europe, were not viewed as being inside this cosy framework. The extended welcome of Waltham Forest as home had not been given to them as yet.

3.3.2 | WALTHAM FOREST AS A PROTECTED SPACE

People understood safe and unsafe spaces outside Waltham Forest. Low-income white communities viewed some areas, such as Canning Town, as unsafe. Chingford, while viewed as aspirational especially in terms of access to good schools, did not have the social capital present in Waltham Forest. Those interviewed enjoyed the proximity to family and friends and community infrastructure, such as ethnic shops or the local pub. This was absent in Chingford.

The concept of safe neighbourhoods for British Muslim communities was referenced to racist activity. There was some evidence from participants of experiences of direct racism in Waltham Forest through disparate incidents that were recounted. However, outside the neighbourhood, a number of areas were regarded as being off limits due to fear of racism, including Barking, Chingford and Canning Town. Experiences ranged from a lack of awareness or knowledge to direct experiences of racial harassment:

> *Yeah moved to Essex with my parents and the women they were saying oh my God, she's a Muslim! She's wearing a scarf! And I said, so what's wrong with that? And they were all looking and saying stuff. But I didn't say nothing. I was just like what do you want? I wasn't scared of them. And they were like making assumptions, saying why do you Asian people come into our community and stuff like that. I only went there for an appointment, and my mum is like "Stop starting fights!"* (Ruksana, British Muslim woman)

Experiences of everyday racism and discrimination from British Muslim communities were mentioned, but not to the extent that might have been expected given the topic

of discussion. There was a general view that racism does occur but not much in the borough:

> *We have never had racism.* (Haroon, young British Muslim man)

> *I don't think we experience face-to-face racism.* (Hina, British Muslim woman)

However, there was a strong perception that racism did or would occur outside the borough in various places:

> *When you go out [of the borough] they do look at you as if you're an alien. Look at you like you're a different person.* (Ushba, young British Muslim woman)

> *Sometimes when you live in a white community people doesn't accept you.* (Fatima, British Muslim woman)

Living in multicultural Waltham Forest was viewed as a protective factor against experiences of racism. But for some living in predominantly white areas in Waltham Forest also led to positive experiences:

> *This lady has lived here for 30 years. She has white neighbours and she has found them to be welcoming and helpful and it has been a positive experience for her.* (Haleema, British Muslim woman)

> *My road is predominantly all white people really. They are all so lovely. We have got no issue with anyone.* (Saba, British Muslim woman)

Some respondents had a sense that although racism does occur, it is less overt now and far more covert:

> *A lot of it is disguised in the sense that before people would name you, you know Paki. Now it's more, if, for example, you go to a shop they might not want to serve you just because of your colour or whatever. So it is very hidden now.* (Ushba, young British Muslim woman)

> *East London is very multicultural, but if you venture out into areas like Essex or areas like that you definitely meet racism ... it is easy to feel the vibes.* (Haroon, young British Muslim man)

However, even though East London was viewed as multicultural, participants were still able to identify areas where they would not go, so as to avoid racism and discrimination. This process of mental mapping was often contradictory; some feeling the East End was safe, others having experienced racist name calling, or generally being intimidated because of wearing a headscarf (see quote from Ruksana above)

As the British Muslim community had settled and become more established, one participant expressed the view that younger people were less likely to accept abuse and racism from people:

> *Initially our elders would not fight back if they were bullied or picked on in the streets because they were concerned about their families back home [in Pakistan]. Now we have a couple more generations, the youngsters they have no responsibilities whatsoever. They go home, they get fed, they go to bed and they get their clothes ironed. So they don't care. If somebody says something to them, they say come on then, we'll have you mate.* (Adil, British Muslim man)

3.3.3 | THE PUB

British Muslims thought they were excluded and problematised locally because of the British custom of using public houses as a space for social meetings.

The pub was a key theme among some of the Muslim focus group participants as a barrier to integration:

> *For me, normally on Thursday and Fridays after work everyone is trying to go into the pubs ... I can't go there, they say you don't interact with us. I can't interact in this place.* (Fatima, British Muslim woman)

> *A lot of people are mixing together well after work in the pub. That's the truth of it. And as Muslims we're not allowed to go to the pub. For whatever reason it is, to integrate, but we are not allowed to associate ourselves in an environment like that.* (Khaled, British Muslim man)

Socialising in the pub prevented British Muslim people from joining in. Not going to the pub was an exclusionary marker that highlighted their separateness:

> *Basically, if you're not a drinker, you don't go to pubs, and then you are not going to mix with these people. I have my neighbour, I know that she knows that I don't go to the pub, but every day she asks me which pub do you go to?* (Dawood, British Muslim man)

Some consider the option of meeting colleagues or friends in a pub but fear being seen coming out of a pub as they feared that they would be associated with drinking:

> *It's not about if you drink or not drink. You're being in a pub after work, you're walking out, someone else sees you coming from the mosque, they will associate you coming out of the pub and you're drinking. And a lot of Muslims are scared of that.* (Khaled, British Muslim man)

Those who in the British Muslim community who did drink were or would be isolated:

> *I would hang around with them less and less until like they're not really my close friends any more. It'll change our friendship.* (Faizal, young British Muslim man)

The pub also hindered Muslims' networking opportunities. It was seen as a place where business and career decisions are made, thus putting British Muslim people at a disadvantage:

> *If a lot of your sons have gone to university and they've gone to work in banks or in the city, where does all the networking happen after work? Where do you get to talk to your boss and talk about promotions and things like that? It's at the pub, or it's staying out late and stuff. Now if you don't want to do that and you go home, you're missing out on this whole world that is going to get ahead and I think that is a big issue.* (Sadiq, British Muslim man)

The pub was seen as a bigger obstacle for Muslim women in their professional lives. Overall for Muslims the fact that they felt they could not go to the pub was an impediment to advancement in a chosen professional career, because it was perceived as a place where networking and socialising took place.

3.4 | RESPONSES TO GOVERNMENT POLICY

3.4.1 | THE IMPORTANCE OF GRASSROOTS ACTION

Grassroots community interaction does not necessarily require the government to intervene by pulling communities together. Earlier analysis (see section 3.2.2 above) showed the levels of frustration from white working-class communities about perceived political correctness in schools. This can be taken further in terms of the government's engagement on cohesion. Those interviewed suggested that the macro-intervention was counterproductive. Multiculturalism was fluid and organic and did not need to be forced or hardwired into people:

> *I think the government causes half the problems with stuff like that to be truthful ... but you see what I'm saying, they force the issue, which makes an issue that there shouldn't be in the first place.* (Rachel, white woman)

The role of the government should not be directing or telling people to interact with each other, but on informal or soft interaction in public spaces. Many participants discussed the positive impact of community festivals such as the Mela and leisure (with an emphasis on play) and food. These events have the capacity to mobilise people across communities because they incentivise and celebrate:

> *Because we used to go the Lloyd Park Asian one (Mela), and that was brilliant with the curries and all that and the mixed foods.* (Christine, white woman)

There was criticism of the local authority for cutting spending for fun days in the park:

> *Well the problem is, everything they had they took away from us. Because we … and some of the other people here locally, we worked tirelessly for years taking the kids out to trips to Colchester Zoo, doing stuff over the park, putting on fun days of 2,000, 3,000 people in one day through the gates working for weeks and weeks and weeks on end and then they stopped all the money. And there is no better place to integrate when you've got everybody locally.* (Jo, white woman)

The catalytic role of grassroots informal events bringing together different groups are in sharp contrast to the inflexible, top–down frameworks of community cohesion. The view of focus group participants during the community study day was that the state should be the facilitator and not the driver sponsoring local groups to deliver. This would not result in the withdrawal of government. Racism should be addressed and the Equality Act 2010 provides a legal framework as well as an encouragement to promote good relations.

In short, oversight and legal remedies are examples of the hard wiring of integration while community interaction at festivals and engagement in national events like the 2012 Olympics are examples of soft integration.

The realities of multiculturalism seem to be in contradiction to much of the national narratives developed since 2001, such as community cohesion and integration. Of course, problems exist in terms of competition for public resources such as housing, or accessing representation and increasing voices in local politics. Communities are not in conflict with each other and they are not living parallel lives. Rather, people interviewed in Waltham Forest demonstrated the experiences of living in a diverse area. They did not particularly want to come into contact to talk about difference but rather to address the local challenges affecting the many. There was agreement on the importance of creating spaces for people to come together organically in public spaces to consume leisure, arts or sports. The local authority may be able to use these platforms to facilitate grassroots interaction rather than the top–down directives that have marked community cohesion.

3.4.2 | REDUCED CREDIBILITY OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND POLITICIANS

White working-class people revealed a jaundiced view of politics at the local and national level in the focus group discussions. The general opinion was they had neither voice nor influence. These views emerged in a local authority that had been

awarded beacon status for community cohesion policies designed to be inclusive and create shared spaces. Discussions with local stakeholders revealed that low-income white communities had not been the focus of either cohesion or indeed preventing extremism work. Moreover, it became clear during the course of the project that local government spending on community development and equalities work was being reduced. A compelling case had to be made for cohesion and integration alongside the need to protect frontline services.

This appeared to be even more the case for work with white working-class compared with minority communities. Some of the white participants in the research felt that minority communities had a voice. They saw them as having local councillors, funded community organisations (with extensive networks with the local authority) and an infrastructure of faith-based organisations. It was felt that there was no shortage of individuals or institutions that could advocate on behalf of minority groups. It was much more difficult to identify a similar community infrastructure for white working-class communities. The sense of a forgotten community is summarised in the following:

> *I'm not being racist here, but I don't think, like, whereas the Turkish people, they'll have their family and they'll all get together and there are doing events and then you've got everyone else who are doing their own events with their own kind, white people, they just sort of like, that's it!* (Christine, white woman)

Christine celebrated living in a multicultural Waltham Forest. However, she was reflecting the sense that white working-class communities could be viewed as the forgotten minority in cohesion and integration frameworks. This was not the fault of the local authority. They were taking national guidance on cohesion policy. Low-income white communities were only referenced in the "Connected Communities" programme in 2009.

The goal of building grassroots responses to integration has been further compromised by people's views on local political leadership. Participants believed that this had failed local communities. As noted above, white participants felt that local equality interventions had been mired in political correctness. Nationally there was severe criticism of government policy and politicians. Young white people like Roxy disagreed with the cohesion framework that suggested that people clustered within their own groups rather than with each other:

> *That's the problem with the government because they don't get out from behind that big chair to look in the real world and see what goes on and they don't know what goes on and us kids do, we know what goes on. (*Roxy, young white woman)

Similarly British Muslim communities were critical of local leaders who purported to represent their interests. Consistent complaints included the poor quality of political representation on the local authority. It was suggested that some Muslim councillors did not have the capacity to advocate and some could not speak English. There was also much scepticism about the role of faith institutions like mosques, which are characterised by a parochial approach to faith and politics, little participation and periodic infighting.

> *Our community ... is absolutely divided, they don't have unity in them, we are the only community in this country, we can't even celebrate our holy day of Eid ... and you know small children in school ... half will be celebrating Monday and half will be celebrating the next day ... some people joke with them, saying you have two moons in the sky. Tell me, we're living in a modern country and we, our community can't even sort out this little problem ... what sort of divided community are we?* (Saad, British Muslim man)

Political disconnection, mistrust and a lack of credibility are not the bases for building links between communities. The OSF research suggests a need to create opportunities for new organisations and individuals to work with the local authority on these issues. National and indeed local political institutions are blemished and it will require significant and thoughtful investment to deliver inclusive and progressive engagement.

Despite these comments, it could be proposed that the challenge is not simply about improving knowledge between communities but addressing the wider disconnection that institutions have with white working-class communities.

At a profound level the commentary reflects broader tropes in the cohesion and integration debates. First are the impact of socio-economic change and displacement as a result of immigration. The transformation from being a majority to a minority community aggravates people's loss of voice with institutions such as schools and local government. Second, people's perception of preferential treatment given to minority communities to take time off for religious festivals echoes some of the debates in the media. Third, there was concern that government was forcing an issue on communities and specifying a problem existed with cohesion and integration when the reality is that participants valued living in a multicultural society.

The concerns that low-income white communities voiced about not being listened to by government and institutions mirrors those expressed by British Muslim communities earlier in the findings. Both show a healthy disregard for established leaders and their public portrayal. The recommendations in this report point to a new way of connecting with groups and building grassroots political alliances between communities. Moreover, this research suggests that there is space for a project that could kick-start this work in Waltham Forest.

Maybe cohesion and integration policy under successive governments has failed to understand the role of small issues that really matter to local people. More than this, there was a general reluctance to engage with these views because they may have been considered to be based on ignorance or racism. The problem for community cohesion and integration policy is that is framed nationally and does not travel well or have the currency of language to describe cohesion and integration at the grassroots level.

Across all focus groups with white working-class communities and among the majority of participants cohesion and integration were linked with political correctness. This term was used pejoratively and made it difficult to discuss the impact of multiculturalism in Waltham Forest. More problematic was the perception that the needs of minority groups were favoured over the needs of low-income white communities. The idea that political correctness supported the needs of minority communities was a recurring theme:

> *Well if a white, not being funny, if a white person said anything about Asians, you're racist straight away.* (Christine, white woman)

In many of the groups, education and specifically schools became the nexus for anger and frustration related to political correctness. In contrast to the perceived protection afforded to minority communities (and, in particular their children) from racist comments, white children did not have the same rights, and were often labelled as racist. Preferential treatment for minority children and their parents was viewed as both embedded and endemic in recounted interactions with teachers and politicians alike:

> *I'm going back to when my son was at primary school and we went in there and it was like, I can't even, oh it was the Golden Jubilee I think it was, and they went oh we're having a Caribbean Carnival, I was like, okay, but it's the Golden Jubilee. So that should be bunting and de de de de de and as I said, I come from a multicultural family so I ain't got a problem with black or white, but even the black people in the school were saying like, they force an issue all the time, they make things an issue, do you see what I'm saying? The government go oh well you can't do, and the next thing was Mary was making Joseph a curry, like seriously; she wasn't making him a curry was she? That wasn't in the Bible. She didn't make him a curry. (Anne, white woman).*

Political disconnection, contradictory views on immigration and multiculturalism and respecting social mores suggest that national and local interventions have not made the impact that perhaps they should have after over a decade of investment and policy framing. They point not only to challenges in the content and message but also to the agencies that are delivering the message. Government and local councillors seem disconnected from the communities that they seek to represent. The recommendations in the next section—a new political leadership, informal spaces to convene community conversations and a new grassroots project—provide practical answers to these deep-seated problems.

4.

CONCLUSION

The findings from the OSF research suggest a borough which continues to embrace multiculturalism even after a decade of government policy that considered it an unsuccessful model and even when there have been heightened concerns about terrorism and extremism, all in the middle of a severe national financial crisis.

This seems to signal resilience and a commitment to making diversity work locally. Indeed, the findings showed that multiculturalism was a normal position in Waltham Forest. Moreover, there was no support for extremist organisations that purport to represent the views of either white working-class or British Muslim communities. The BNP did not register in the discussion and debates and neither did the EDL. It should be noted that young white working-class participants interviewed for this research commented openly about the British Caribbean and Muslim friends in their networks and the ease with which they could converse and engage with them. Participants in the mixed-gender and women-only focus groups were strident in their opposition to racism. The point is that white working-class communities are conventionally viewed as bedrock support for the extreme right, but the findings in this research suggest that they are in fact an important bulwark against the far right.

Similarly, there was disdain among British Muslim groups for some of the extremist perspectives of the so-called hate preachers based in Waltham Forest. Many felt that their work made it easier for the media, politicians and the EDL to categorise British Muslims as a threat to the UK. They claimed that the activities of Anjem Choudary and the Muslim Patrols are given more credence than they should be.[39] They are a minority within a minority and do not represent mainstream British Muslim opinion. There was also trenchant criticism of some of the mosques and faith-based organisations for being parochial and beset by infighting. These organisations, together with British Muslim councillors, should have been at the forefront of integration initiatives. Instead there is a leadership vacuum.

The reality of multiculturalism is a key finding but should not mask some of the issues that emerged from the fieldwork.

New migrants and especially those from Eastern Europe were not as yet part of the positive multicultural narrative of Waltham Forest. In many cases the discussion about this group was racialised, with adverse references to the impact of migrants on overcrowding, crime and the environment. They were not viewed as being British, but yet were seen by the British Muslim groups as having the advantage of whiteness. It is clear that newly emerging groups in Waltham Forest need to be included in the progressive initiatives that this report recommends. Embryonic structures need support to create a platform for new migrants to engage with established communities.

39 Anjem Choudary is a vocal critic of the UK's involvement in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and is based in Waltham Forest. The Muslim Patrols were active in late 2012 and early 2013 promoting Sharia law in the UK.

The local authority has been seen as an example of best practice on community cohesion and there are many examples of excellent initiatives which have engaged with communities to build cohesion. However, our findings show that the policies are at best superficial and do not connect with groups. White working-class groups feel marginalised and ignored. They do not appear to have been part of the local authority cohesion debates despite having strong family and friendship links with different communities. The focus has been on British Muslim groups, specifically Pakistani, who are concerned over being singled out for either special treatment or the subject of criticism. The delivery agencies responsible for promoting cohesion and integration are also problematic. That is, politicians and established institutions do not have the credibility to engage with both communities. In short, the community cohesion policy does not engage with grassroots organisations and its messengers make this more difficult.

The recommendations below build on work that has been successful in Waltham Forest and attempt to address some of the specific challenges highlighted in the report. Of course the central challenge is about securing sufficient resources for housing and health as well as boosting the economy to increase the supply of jobs. Theoretically this should ease competition for resources between different groups, thus easing points of conflict. However, this is not realistic. Policymakers need to manage difference in a cold fiscal climate and some of the findings cannot be reduced simply to economics.

Crucially these are grassroots perspectives from groups who believe that they have been excluded from debates on cohesion and integration. To this end the recommendations of this report focus on addressing the leadership challenge, creating opportunities for soft integration to be hardwired into the borough and putting forward a project that could act as a hub for activity.

The ideas underpinning these recommendations were generated from focus group discussions and the community study day. In both instances, participants were invited to suggest ways that grassroots integration could be generated and bridges built between different communities in the borough.

4.1 | NEW LEADERS FOR PROGRESSIVE CHANGE

The political institutions are not working effectively to create opportunities for white working-class and British Muslim communities to be heard. Both felt their views were stifled rather than empowered by the political system and welcomed the opportunity to share challenges and opportunities.

Policy frameworks such as community cohesion and integration are entangled with the usual suspects, embedded leaderships, which were viewed as gatekeepers, rather than gateways, of concentrated, rather than distributive, power. Community engagement and conversations within and between groups does not materialise and policies have a superficial, not a deep impact.

New types of advocates are needed to take this agenda forward. These will be community activists, volunteers or concerned residents who are passionate about Waltham Forest and wish to build cohesion and address extremism. The recommendation is for the creation of a project on local leadership development, first, scoping individuals who could be engaged and have the skills and capacity to deliver change. The recruitment would target a mixed group working with key informants and that would specifically engage with women (especially over 40[40]), young people and new communities. Second, a leadership programme could be devised challenging participants to become better leaders. This might be modular in format and accredited with a higher education institution to add value and incentivise individuals. Third, participants would have opportunities to be placed with organisations and activities in a different community, for example, white working-class women from Higham Hill with the Asian Mothers Group. This would improve intercultural contact and encourage the management of future challenges in the borough.

4.2 | SUPPORTING GRASSROOTS INTERACTION IN PUBLIC SPACES

Soft integration appears to work well in Waltham Forest. Festivals, 2012 Olympic gatherings and Fun Days galvanised communities across the borough. They attracted many thousands of people from different communities on the basis of enjoyment, a shared sense of well-being and participation. Concern was expressed that the austerity programme was leading to fewer opportunities to bring residents together in this way at a time when it was even more important. The disconnect between community aspiration and the reality of local-government expenditure needs to be bridged, perhaps by looking at the private sector and its commitment to corporate social responsibility.

Grassroots interaction in public spaces could create a forum for community conversations on challenging topics. The recommendation is to convene a single event based on food, music and play, branded as a local conversation. The local authority will play a facilitative role with content and initiatives being driven by grassroots activists and key partners who have credibility with local communities.

40 Middle-aged women may have untapped skills after bringing up children and supporting their families, for example, organisation, budgeting, mediation and entrepreneurialism.

In this way Waltham Forest would pioneer a grassroots, dynamic event celebrating difference but incentivising community participation. This will bring communities together not in a forced but in a positive way.

4.3 | SETTING UP A COMMUNITY PROJECT CATALYSING COMMUNITY BRIDGE BUILDING

Participants at the community study day came up with a suggestion to develop a new grassroots initiative that could act as the catalyst to drive ideas on integration and cohesion. This would be distinct from the local authority and not reliant on the patronage of politicians. Indeed, the project would have the option in the business planning stage of being self-sustaining or fixed for a period of five years.

Based in a central location, and inspired by people and organisations inside and outside Waltham Forest, it would be the hub for community development, planning informal events, addressing challenges of extremism or convening difficult conversations. The structure would be flexible, modelled on pop-up enterprises, inculcating ideas and engaging with groups at the micro-level but also using social media to attract interest and ideas across the country and internationally.

A project will need investment for between three and five years. This would support a core team of a director, administrator and community development workers. Programmes on leadership development or the annual grassroots event could be supported by the project. It would also be the incubator for new ideas on cohesion and integration that could eventually become social enterprises.

The project could be set up as a CIC company enabling a flexible and nuanced response to grassroots challenges. Discussions have commenced to secure interest in principle from the private sector to move this from idea from the conceptual stage to a business plan, starting operations in2015.

These recommendations provide a practical and radical response to the challenges of building grassroots integration in Waltham Forest. They also help stakeholders such as the local authority and institutions to improve services to an increasingly diverse population. The community conversations, which have been at the crux of this project, demonstrate individuals of talent and ability who need to be part of the future and not simply the past.

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