

Background and Context

Pan-London partners commissioned the IDeA to undertake a scoping review of community cohesion reassurance activity, in the wake of 7 July bombings. Findings were presented at the pan-London Communities Together seminar in January 2006. The aim of the review was to identify and examine the types of reassurance activity used, gauge its effectiveness and how this was measured. In particular, the findings had to identify what worked well and what didn't; key issues and challenges arising; and support and resource needs.

How the Topic was Handled

There were fairly consistent definitions/understanding of reassurance activity in relation to the 7 July 2005 London bombings, however, some stakeholders did not like or own the term 'cohesion cohesion', and preferred 'community reassurance' (making activity user-focused rather than policy-focused). All partners shared a belief that reassurance objectives were to respond to perceived threat as well as real threats. The shared definition resulted in consistent and shared objectives by pan-London partners, but which were reflective of individual relationships and relationships between and within communities across London.

There was a wide variety of reassurance activity, ranging from strategic statements, to provision of service delivery, and brokering relations and joint working. As part of the review, these were plotted on a Delphi-matrix, looking at the scale/scope and depth of engagement. Similarly, the group is a collection of a wide range of partners, and reflects the ethos and the centrality Stakeholders give to cohesion as a cross-cutting, multi-sector priority. There was a high level of collective pride in the positive reassurance outcomes post 7 July bombings.

The project highlights the importance of tension monitoring, and indicates how reassurance works if operated on four levels:

- Competency of action, of self and in mobilising others, prior to, and during the crisis
- Consistency and timeliness of message throughout and after the crisis situation
- Visibility of leaders and resources (so the public can see and feel the difference)
- Monitoring and learning – crises can force a 're-think' and new paradigm, with tension monitoring now a normal part of what London bodies do

Communities, partners and the London-wide Emergency Planning Network were cited as the main sources of support, so much of the investment was already accounted for through mainstream activity, networks and mechanisms. The investment for undertaking the review was £8k. But it did provide a wealth of independently gathered information to partners on the range and effectiveness of their work.

Lessons Identified

For reassurance to be delivered effectively it has to be part of corporate, mainstreamed approach, and there was a belief across the group – as evidenced by its practices under crises - that effective cohesion relies on strong community leadership. Other lessons learnt were:

<i>What worked well</i>	<i>What could have been improved</i>
Level and timeliness of information (to communities and staff)	Contact with communities could have been better co-ordinated
Partnership working	Resource availability
Listening to communities concerns	More culturally sensitive policing
Consolidating and mobilising existing resources	Measuring impact, rather than activity or throughput
Diversity of London made reassurance activity easier – highly diverse but more tolerant city	
Increased organisational transparency	

Key challenges for London partners relate to capacity building, consolidating resources, and ways of working that will enable shared systems and processes. Giving middle managers more of a decision-making mandate will help embed the transformational leadership that individual public workers had shown during the crisis.

The activity of the pan-London stakeholders shows three key success factors:

- Stakeholder leadership and reassurance focused on three facets of cohesion contingency planning: the technical aspects of ‘blue light’ emergency services (ensuring safety and minimising risk), assisting the police (solving the crime); and increasing visibility (in identifying, assessing risk and reassurance) to communities.
- Reactive community leadership and reassurance relies on pro-active leadership outside of the situation of crisis or threat, and relies on trust. The threat of not being pro-active is the space that is exploited by extremists.
- Crisis forces a rethink, and innovation (but only where there is a strong foundation of effective partnership working).

The group now plans to use their learning experience and apply it to contingency planning for other challenges such as avian flu. It is gearing up to use Local Area Agreements (LAAs) as a key delivery mechanism for cross-cutting cohesion, and considering a region-wide pool, to be mobilised at time of crisis for economies of scope and scale.

Contacts for Further Information

[Department of Communities and Local Government](#)