

A practical guide to Tension Monitoring for Local Authorities, Police Services and Partner Agencies

This guide was commissioned to develop a more integrated, systematic and sophisticated approach to understand community dynamics and anticipate and address community tensions.

Three basic tenets underpin this guide:-

1. That communities themselves are best placed to identify their own priorities and problems and to determine their own futures and solutions. Engaging with and supporting communities, building the capacity, confidence and resilience is at the heart of the approach.
2. The guide is concerned with knowing how people are feeling, potential and emerging tensions, so that there can be an 'early and upstream' response, rather than reacting once tensions have become manifest.
3. There is a vast amount of information available to partner agencies whose staff have daily face-to-face contact with the community - in schools, housing offices, voluntary agencies, youth projects, advice centres - and they have a key role to play in contributing to the complex picture of community dynamics. The guide seeks to address the challenge of capturing that information and sharing it between partners, pooling knowledge and expertise to support a predictive and preventative approach to community tensions.

The broader context of this is the drive to support more cohesive communities, where there is a common vision and sense of belonging and the diversity of people's backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and valued. In cohesive communities, people of different backgrounds have similar life opportunities and strong and positive relationships are being developed between people of different backgrounds and circumstances in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.

The specific concern is to prevent or minimise the risk of disorder, fear of crime, insecurity, illegal or criminal activity, damage, violence and loss of life, which can occur when tensions are heightened. Public bodies have general and specific duties with regard to the safety and well being of communities and to promoting good race relations. Disorder on any significant scale will severely damage the local reputation and could result in the curtailment of investment in jobs, housing and employment.

The guide uses good practice already developed within the police service and seeks to promote this with other partners. Equally, the tension monitoring system seeks to bring techniques and information from other partners to build the bigger picture.

Together, the aim is to prepare partners to work with communities to address tension and manage situations in ways, which are collaborative, sensitive and effective, but with a reduced reliance on police led intervention