

Step one: Set up a tension monitoring group and identify lead officers

This step will enable you to start by establishing a group to work together and build the tension monitoring system for your area. Looking at what works around the country, setting up an inter-agency tension monitoring group and having a named police lead and named local authority lead are prerequisites for developing a robust and integrated system.

Terms of reference, membership, key tasks, accountabilities and operating arrangements will be for local determination. The suggestions here are starting points for guidance and discussion and are not prescriptive – though they indicate the main headings that you need to address and work through.

Terms of reference for a tension monitoring group

The tension monitoring group exists:

- To understand local community dynamics and identify potential or actual tensions
- To minimise the potential negative affects of tension, prevent escalation and reduce conflict
- To consider and plan interventions – short, medium and long term
- To inform and support the management of critical incidents
- To support and promote community cohesion

Membership

Membership of the group should include representatives from the following statutory agencies/ departments/teams:

Community Safety

Police – borough liaison, safer neighbourhoods, borough intelligence

Education – schools section dealing with racial incidents

Community Development /Area or Neighbourhood teams

Youth service

Environment services

Housing – estate management, ALMO or Registered Social Landlord representatives

(Note: The person completing the Community Tension Assessment Return must be a member of the group)

Additional members involved in different parts of the country include:

Executive member with Cohesion or Community Safety portfolio
Community representatives - eg from Independent Advisory Group,
Tenants and Residents Associations, faith groups
Voluntary organisations - Race Equality Council, Voluntary Action Council
Health services

These will need some thought and careful consideration depending on the local dynamics, and due regard to handling confidential information.

The **level** of the representation clearly needs to be appropriate to the task. Representatives will need to be able to bring a broad overview of information from across the area, with some bringing specific information from communities where there is particular tension.

The **Chair of the group** – current practice includes Assistant Chief Executive in a number of authorities, Head of Community Safety, Head of the Local Strategic Partnership – indicating a high level commitment and priority to the task.

Key tasks for the tensions monitoring group

- Collect, share and co-ordinate information about community dynamics and tensions
- Analyse community information based on experienced, evidenced and potential tensions
- Produce Community Impact Assessments including risk assessments
- Devise interventions
- Produce an annual plan
- Produce a communications plan and determine media relations strategy

Frequency of meetings

The tension monitoring group should operate as a virtual team, keeping in regular contact, dealing with things as they arise and keeping each other informed. The group is more than just the meetings.

There can be a tendency to take the view that as tension is perceived to be low that monitoring can be infrequent. This doesn't accord with the preventative and 'early and upstream' approach. Small things can fester, minor nuisances grow into bigger problems if ignored. A seemingly peaceful local situation may be disrupted by national or international events. A 'dormant' issue may be 'bubbling under'.

In situations where tensions are high there may be a need to meet frequently. Many areas have weekly meetings of a smaller group to support the police weekly monitoring and reporting requirement. Some areas meet fortnightly, but generally holding tension monitoring meetings at least once a month seems to be good practice.

Identify lead officers

The task of co-ordinating tensions information on a day-to-day basis and to feed into the wider group needs to be allocated to a named person in the police service and a named person in the local authority.

In councils, **appropriate officers** could be the Hate Crime Reduction Officer, the Community Cohesion Co-ordinator, a Community Safety Officer, a Policy Officer in the Chief Executive's Office. The important thing is to have someone whose job it is to be the focus of co-ordination of information and to provide appropriate support and management to this function. You will need to assess and address the training needs of those involved in the process.