

The interventions below list some options based around community-led solutions, inter-agency interventions and communications. In reality, these three elements are inextricably linked and are critical to the success of managing any interventions where tensions are raised above normal. These interventions generally relate to tensions at level 5 or above, though levels 1 and 2 will require additional specialist responses.

Community-led solutions

Problem solving – analysing the current state of conflict, understanding the history and why it has changed or become ‘hot’, determine actions that could be taken to address the issues. A simple approach – the ‘Conflict tree’ - uses five steps:

- Describe the conflict
- Identify its causes
- Acknowledge its impact
- Identify actions to address the causes
- Identify actions to address the impacts

Community meetings – generally best led by community or faith leaders with respect from different sections of the community. Preparatory work with different ‘factions’ or representatives of those in conflict and clear objectives for such meetings will assist in helping such meetings contribute to solutions rather than adding to the problems. People usually want to have an opportunity to air their differences and the main protagonists may not turn up, so there can be limitations, especially where differences are long-standing.

Community facilitators and ‘honest brokers’ – many communities have ‘community entrepreneurs’, local volunteers or paid professionals, who are seen to have no vested interest other than the good of the whole community.

Conflict resolution – communities may wish to bring in external support from a voluntary sector organisation specialising in conflict resolution. This is a highly skilled practice, with a body of literature developed through work on international conflicts or for example, in Northern Ireland. Conflict resolution approaches seek to identify common ground and, if differences persist, to encourage empathy about other perspectives. It may involve:

- The facilitation of communication between parties in conflict when levels of antagonism make normal communication difficult or impossible
- The facilitation of an analysis of the causes of conflict, preferably as a joint effort involving all the relevant participants
- The creation of a safe environment that will enable participants to test their own assumptions and explore different options
- Broadening the range of options by facilitating the exploration of approaches in other places and historical experience of the resolution of conflict
- The provision of training in conflict resolution skills, including skills to deal with deeply ingrained perceptions
- The facilitation of opportunities to reflect on participants’ experiences in the past and to draw lessons from that

Mediation – community mediation services may, similarly, be engaged, and this also requires bringing in specialist expertise. Mediation has traditionally been used in one-to-one neighbour disputes but is beginning to be used in community conflicts. Mediation is ‘a process in which the parties to a dispute, with the assistance of a neutral third party (the mediator), identify the disputed issues, develop options, consider alternatives and endeavour to reach agreement. The mediator has no advisory or determinative role in regard to the content of the dispute, but may advise on or determine the process of mediations whereby resolution is attempted’. (Source: National Alternative Dispute Resolution Advisory Council 1997)

Single or inter-agency interventions

Support for community-led solutions – agencies can support in very basic practical ways such as providing venues, refreshments, help with publicity or translation – to assist the community to organise meetings or discussion sessions.

Having a visible senior presence in support but not taking control is often welcome – even if there is some antagonism towards agencies. Being present in the area, taking some of the heat and listening to what people have to say can, in itself help matters, as well as adding to the information picture.

Joint meetings and action planning – agencies working together with community leaders can share the analysing of the problems and consider joint actions. Where levels of trust have been built over time, local partners and community leaders can get together quickly, identify facts and myths and plan together. Joint action plans, with different partners taking responsibility for aspects of activity, generally produce the most effective approaches.

Identify necessary resources – timely decisions to deploy the right people with the right support and adequate resources need to be made as early as possible when tensions rise above normal. Anyone in the centre of things will need appropriate support and reassurance of organisational understanding of the circumstances and opportunities to debrief and reflect, particularly in serious and critical incidents.

A range of services may need to be brought into the frame – from highways, where road closures are required, environmental services for clearing areas of rubble or emptying bottle banks, to changing the patrols of community wardens or police community support officers. Does the Youth Offending Service need to be involved? Are there people with particular vulnerabilities requiring input from Adult Services?

As well as people there may be a need to consider other resources for such things as communications, remedial work, overtime, translation services, security.

Avoid ‘too little - too late’, especially as this is now a situation of above normal tension.

Ensure people available for contingency plans – linked to the above, agencies need to ensure that the people required in relation to their civil contingencies plan and cohesion contingencies plan are in a state of preparedness.

Media Management Plan – an agreed interagency communications plan and a specific media management plan should be produced.

Policing options – police will be engaged in all of the above but some specific interventions may be needed:

- High visibility policing and reassurance
- Specialist resources or patrols
- Law enforcement, arrests of individuals and ringleaders
- Forming an intelligence cell
- Forming a gold group

Again, it is highly likely that all of these will involve working with communities and partners.

Communications

Communication is at the heart of promoting cohesion, preventing tensions from developing or escalating, monitoring and managing interventions and in the aftermath of incidents, after the operational/acute phases.

Promoting Cohesion – The Institute for Community Cohesion has developed a communications toolkit to support their leadership role in breaking down barriers and building relationships between communities. The toolkit advocates a strategic approach to communications around the cohesion agenda.

- Talk about it – create opportunities for people to talk frankly about their experiences and concerns and give space for people to air their views.
- Communicate all the time – use every opportunity to promote positive messages and images of your communities and individuals
- Bust the myths – stop rumours and provide correct information to counteract divisive myths – for example in relation to refugees and asylum seekers
- Make the media your friend – develop relationships with the local media, organise background briefings and give them regular stories.

www.cohesioninstitute.org.uk/resources/toolkits/communications

Communicating during an incident

- Keep close contact with communities involved and affected
- Be sensitive to the effects of a 'crisis' on different parts of the community – for example this will be especially pertinent if the incident relates to counter terrorism activity
- Continually collect information to enable accurate monitoring of tension and develop sensitive and effective responses.
- Update Community Impact Assessments frequently – up to 3 times per day during critical incidents
- Keep communities informed, let them know what's happening – distribute leaflets if necessary
- Use personal contacts to disseminate key messages face-to-face in communities
- Engage with people who don't speak English via interpreters or people within that community who can translate
- Be honest, don't promise what you can't deliver
- Keep colleagues and those working on the ground informed
- Provide support for colleagues in stressful situations

Media relations

- Have a media strategy in relation to incidents and events
- Identify clear key messages at each stage
- Identify spokespeople and try to have a protocol or understanding in place that directs the media to the agreed spokespersons (difficult but worth a try). Have a united front across agencies and an agreement on the most appropriate communications lead
- Be proactive and go on radio phone-ins or arrange a press briefing whenever possible
- Provide media training to community leaders and keep employees informed as they have a key role in helping to counter rumours and misinformation

The IDeA – Improvement and Development Agency for local government have an excellent toolkit on building a relationship with the media. Its guidelines to managing bad news and crises includes:

- Act quickly – a speedy response and a good council statement will help limit the damage
- Never say ‘no comment’ – if there isn’t enough factual information to give out
- Build up background briefings and key facts for big stories in advance
- Be honest and open and do not try to deceive the media
- Issue the news in a planned and managed way – rather than just react
- Ensure officers and members are aware of media guidelines and media protocol

There are many other tips, guidance, good practice examples and links in www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=4451961

UK Resilience also has an excellent ‘Information and the Media’ section aimed at supporting key communications objectives in emergency response – to deliver accurate, clear and timely information to the public so that they feel confident, safe and well informed.

www.ukresilience.info/response/media.aspx

After an incident

When the incident or event completes its operational/acute phases, police and partners should ensure that activity is reduced in a phased way rather than ceasing suddenly or without warning.

Let people know what’s happening.

There may still be ongoing events relating to what has occurred which will need monitoring – eg funerals, people being detained or released from custody and their family needs, re-opening of facilities which have been damaged. **Keep people informed.**

The debrief process should be multi-agency and within single agencies and it should seek to identify lessons learned, actions needed to amend processes or ways of working and actions needed to respond to the issues raised through the incident. **Share the learning.**

In practice

In practice: Using mediation and an interagency approach to conflict between gypsies and travellers and the local community

Inadequate site provision for gypsies and travellers in an English county resulted in an unauthorised encampment. Tensions between the local community and gypsies and travellers led to an incident in which an effigy of a caravan with a gypsy family painted on the side was torched. The police subsequently arrested several people on suspicion of inciting racial hatred, and referred the case to the Crown Prosecution Service and the director of public prosecutions to consider prosecution under the Public Order Act.

Following the incident, external organisations with experience of similar situations were asked to get involved as mediators. A meeting was held for local authorities and community representatives. Following the meeting, an action plan was drawn up to help local authorities deal with potential conflict in the community. The local council agreed to improve its provision of services and sites for gypsies and travellers, and decided that it needed to increase involvement by all members of the community in its work and its consultations, including gypsies and travellers. The council reinstated its gypsy and traveller multi-agency forum, and employed a permanent liaison officer to work with gypsies and travellers in the area. Plans have been drawn up for permanent and transitory site provision across the county.

www.catalystmagazine.org/duty/grr/general_case4.html.pr

Case study supplied by the Commission for Racial Equality

In practice: reassurance and communication - Southwark Partnership Operations Group

The Southwark Partnership Operations Group meets on a two-weekly basis to share police and partnership intelligence. This tasking group is attended by over 18 different services, including voluntary providers, and co-ordinated joint activity to tackle crime antisocial behaviour and plans for emerging events which could cause increases in crime or potential tensions.

There is a protocol for 'managing serious violent incidents' including to respond to gang gun and knife crime. This includes a communications plan which is activated in a similar way to an emergency response.

After the bombings on 7/7, a decision was taken by the Partnership Operations Group (POG), to use the extra police presence at transport hubs which we had been allocated not only to provide a visible presence, but also to talk to the community. This was partly reassurance but also enabled information from the community to be communicated and it meant community messages were heard. This supported the POG in their engagement with faith groups and reassurance work continued. There were no racially motivated attacks in the borough in the wake of 7/7 accordingly. The effectiveness of this activity means that when we are allocated resources for a large visible presence, we use it to engage with our communities as well.

In practice: joint action planning - learning lessons from football related tensions in Boston

Following disturbances during the Euro 2004 tournament, the police and local authority in Boston planned early to prevent similar occurrences during the 2006 World Cup. Local residents feared a repeat of the disorder. In January 2006 a partnership group was formed. This group planned a range of actions and interventions including:

- Identified critical games in the schedule and checked with pubs which games they would be screening
- Put stickers on glasses in pubs with a hotline number for community information about anyone planning trouble
- A poster and beer mat campaign in pubs 'Enjoy the world cup in bars not behind bars'
- Early identification of potential trouble makers and issuing of Antisocial Behaviour Contracts or reinforced

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

- Ensuring bottle banks in the town centre emptied, skips moved and market stalls cleared
- Beat teams communicated with local Portuguese population
- Workforce planning to ensure availability of personnel
- Mobile CCTV in place