

Sources of resentment, and perceptions of ethnic minorities among poor white people in England

**Report compiled for the
NATIONAL COMMUNITY FORUM**



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Department for Communities and Local Government

The findings and recommendations in this report are those of the authors and the National Community Forum and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department for Communities and Local Government.

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Executive Summary

Background to research and methodology

The aims of this report, following from the literature review on perceptions of ethnic minorities among 'poor white' people in England, were:

- 1) to gather data on two not necessarily connected things: the sources of resentment, and perceptions of ethnic minorities among people resident on estates in four places in England
- 2) to attempt to unpick these perceptions
- 3) to identify suggestions to facilitate integration
- 4) and to put forward some recommendations for moving community cohesion and integration forward on this basis.

The four selected sites were relatively monocultural 'white' urban spaces with different migration experiences; Castle Vale (Birmingham), Netherfield, Beanhill and Coffee Hall Estates (Milton Keynes); Halton Housing Trust in Runcorn and Widnes; and the Abbey Estate in Thetford. In July 2008, four interviewers spoke to a total of 43 people using semi-structured questionnaires, and then as a team, identified key themes in responses to questions about their local areas, national concerns, and integration.

Contexts in which attitudes are expressed

The data needs to be understood against the context of changing understandings and interpretations of racism. Popular understandings of racism contain two misleading messages. Either the focus is solely on discourses of superiority (abusive and/or intimidating language) and violence, which is part of the story but not all of it, or secondly, it is seen as purely a matter of individual prejudices. However the concept of 'institutional racism' (a set of practices and processes at a level above that of the individual) has been recognised in British law since the 1970s. Moreover, racism is not only about physical, but also about cultural difference. White people can become the objects of racist discourse because of cultural reasons. In British history, Jews, Irish Roman Catholics and Eastern Europeans have been through this experience.

The four selected sites on which this report focuses had specific histories of migration and community development, which we argue are important in the way the people there respond to minorities and the issues of immigration and integration. Runcorn/Widnes has virtually no history of immigration, Castle Vale is a relatively white area of a city in which 30 per cent of the population are black and minority ethnic, and Thetford has a recent experience of European migrants (notably Portuguese and Polish workers).

In terms of development, the sites also differed: we found that in those where social and environmental conditions were better, there was, as a general rule, less apparent hostility to minorities. In Milton Keynes, where some of the accommodation was of very poor quality, the feelings of resentment and abandonment were nearer the surface. Another contextual point was the frequency and type of contact with black and minority ethnic people. Overall, few of our sample had frequent contacts with ethnic minorities. Some had a particular friend or acquaintance, and a few others worked in more multicultural settings.

Anxieties and priorities

The important local issues in each area differed, both in substance and priority. While anti-social behaviour figured in each of the areas, it was much more prominent in Thetford and Runcorn/Widnes than in Milton Keynes and Castle Vale. Poor living conditions were an issue for Milton Keynes but scarcely at all for redeveloped Castle Vale, where worklessness, litter and sustaining the gains of regeneration were the most important topics. Anxieties over benefits and entitlement on a very local basis exercised the minds of people in Runcorn, and were mentioned by a few people in Castle Vale, yet not as a pressing concern for most. Only in Milton Keynes did immigration and integration appear to be serious issues. The pattern seemed to be that morale was lowest and therefore identity-related anxieties at their highest, where the material conditions (housing and economics) were worst.

The important national issues raised were very varied. As expected, the spike in food and fuel prices was commented on. While anti-social behaviour is regularly referred to as being 'everywhere nowadays', thus linking the local to the national, the economy is seen purely as a national phenomenon. No particular pattern in terms of topics emerged, except that the important national issues were often seen through the lens of local ones. One national topic of interest however is that of 'political correctness'. This ideological space, mentioned by interviewees as a barrier to freedom of self-expression or of honest exchange, is referred to in a number of ways, which straddle the local and national spheres. We felt this type of comment needs unpicking also.

Immigration and minorities

By far the most frequent context for referring to ethnic minorities is that of perceived competition for resources -typically housing, but also employment, benefits, territory and culture. In Coffee Hall (Milton Keynes), feelings of anxiety around housing were so acute that respondents claimed they had voted against the regeneration of the estate (which meant pulling down all breeze block houses and rebuilding them with new and better materials) because they feared that their necessary displacement during building work would result in them losing their places on the estate to immigrants. This seems to epitomise the collapsing of fears about taking over; the priorities of authorities allocating

those resources; and those about retaining territory. Effectively, in this scenario, people prioritised territory and community over their own prospects for improved housing (in a context in which housing conditions were a major problem for many interviewees).

A woman in Runcorn says: '... you've now got towns which were predominantly white and now they're not. And you're expected to get on and not cause any waves, not look at people differently and be accepting. But at the same time how can you be accepting when they're taking your house off you?'

There is also another line of argument that focuses on the quality of services *per se*. This logic states that some existing services are not yet up to scratch for the majority of users, so cannot easily be shared.

The second theme focused on the conditions for becoming, or being accepted as a full member of society. This was most often expressed during talk of integration and cohesion. The main two arguments used are 'when in Rome' (people who come here must adapt to 'our way of life'); and the necessity for contributing in order to earn membership. This earning process can be undergone by something as simple as joining in community activities, or by making wider efforts to integrate, or paying into the welfare system.

Indeed, the onus for integration in these perspectives, as was found elsewhere in previous research, lies entirely with immigrants. There are also more nuanced appreciations of difference in terms of length of residence and degree of acculturation already achieved. Indeed there is a strand of this discussion that insists on integration as a two-way process, and that everyone must 'be flexible'.

Anxieties about other topics might well be attached to this type of reasoning. From them are drawn conclusions: there is an almost unbridgeable difference between particular kinds of people and the playing field is tilted toward minorities because they can do things white people are not allowed to get away with. This leads to frustration among the majority population, and here we are entering territory that is covered by the critical discourse about 'political correctness'.

Unfairness

In the narratives told to us, it is the white working class who are the biggest victims of social change. Some of the conversations included examples of how people perceive unfair situations in which minorities are advantaged; either directly or indirectly. From a variety of stories, two are indicative. One is about a community 'clean up day' in which members of all ethnic groups had taken part on an estate. After the event, a city councillor managed to get funding for a day trip as a reward -but only for the Asian participants. This story was commented on as having 'destroyed the ethos' of what they were trying to achieve by the original activity.

Another set of stories relates to the perception that incoming migrants are treated advantageously. A typical view in Thetford, for example, was that 'they seem to be getting what we've worked all our lives for and can't get'. This was interpreted as especially unfair when contrasted with the 'elderly who haven't got anything, can't afford to pay heating, worked all their lives and get nothing', and with 'single mums who have to live in hostels', while 'foreigners are in nice cars and have big houses'. Indeed, many stories pursue the theme of resources being 'given away' to minorities. We understand these stories as not necessarily a reflection of things that have really happened, but rather a coded way to signal that the speaker contests the frame within which all the unfairness is experienced by ethnic minorities. By doing this, the speaker's community is recast as the victim of discrimination.

In the interview material, we identified some key recurrent emotional themes; resentment; betrayal; abandonment; loss; defensiveness; nostalgia; unfairness and disempowerment. Local and central government are identified as doing the abandoning and betraying, while the communities experience loss and disempowerment. These take a number of forms, and for people from different generations, there are different landmarks on their emotional maps. However, it is clear that social class is a very important focus for people's identities: people are very aware of the results of class differences in terms of life chances. Seeing the hostility around resource allocation only between the white working-class and ethnic minorities is a one-dimensional view. There is also intra- and inter-class resentment without which, the position of the respectable, employed working-class makes no sense.

Ways forward

Among the negative attitudes toward ethnic minorities were a minority of positive comments and empathy to do with their predicaments as asylum-seekers, and labour migrants doing jobs the British don't want to do, or providing services the British can't provide. There were also a list of suggestions for activities that would encourage integration, but these were set against a context of criticism of government intervention in such a field, with people arguing that integration cannot be imposed.

Conclusions

Contexts

The contexts from which our interviewees were speaking differed in terms of:

- 1) local black and minority ethnic populations and histories of migration;
- 2) levels of economic and environmental development; and
- 3) the type of frequency and quality of contacts with black and minority ethnic people.

These contexts strongly inform, if not determine, people's attitude toward a number of issues, including perceptions of black and minority ethnic people.

The Importance of the local

Local issues considered important depended on the quality of the physical and social environment. This meant that in three of the four sites, immigration and integration were scarcely perceived as local issues at all. Local conditions are still very significant framing factors for any relationships between groups of people. This is categorically not to say that an improvement in the physical and economic conditions of estates will necessarily lead to the disappearance of all hostile attitudes to minorities. There is a cultural element to racism that will be more difficult to erode. However, the processes of democratically-based local development appear to contribute to the narrowing of the scope for the type of competition, and vulnerability to such competition that seem to pervade much of what we hear in these interviews.

Social class as part of identity

People experience their social position through a number of lenses, and an important one (necessarily in a project that focuses on the 'white poor') is social class. People in this research seemed happy to refer, unprompted, to themselves and communities as 'working class', and the concerns they focused on are seen through a set of experiences that are clearly marked by class.

'Assimilation' or 'integration'?

We asked all our interviewees what integration meant to them. It emerged strongly that a majority understand 'integration' as meaning minorities giving up identity and merging with the local one, ie 'assimilation'. Other qualitative research we have carried out elsewhere leads us to the same conclusion: most people think 'integration' means 'assimilation'.

Political correctness

An important issue for further discussion is the amorphous ideological space referred to in shorthand as 'political correctness'. There are different ways in which this idea is used to describe obstacles to communication. At present, the function of stories about political correctness appears to be to recast the power relations pertaining to the situations described so that the white majority assume the role of victims. There is a need to sort what is genuinely unhelpful to dialogue, on the one hand, from what is actually protecting groups of people from abuse, on the other.

Competition for resources

Where immigration and integration are discussed in depth as problematic, there is a focus on real or perceived competition for resources; housing, benefits, jobs, territory and national culture. The implications of this for the political capital that can be accrued by the Far-right are very grave. Our white interviewees' responses to minorities are far from universally negative. In fact everything from indifference, through empathy, a desire for

more and better engagement, to anxiety was registered in these interviews. People express a desire for equality and a level playing field, not only in economic terms, but also in terms of ethnic groups (and even sections of ethnic groups). In this reading, there is injustice and unfairness because the same rules do not seem to apply to everyone. However, the assumptions about who is entitled to resources seem to lean toward a racial base, with local variations.

Recommendations

There are four principal recommendations. The first is for the adoption of **shared and consistent approaches** at all levels of government, which for example, involves appointing a lead officer at local authority level.

The second is to aim to **reduce information deficits** around immigration and resource-allocation. The poor quality information available on which to base opinions is exacerbating people's sense of loss and frustration, therefore improving communication and making processes transparent can help address this issue.

The third suggestion is, through concerted dialogue involving community groups, black and minority ethnic people and non-government organisations, as well as local authorities and central government, **to establish a working definition of integration**. Current understandings of this major policy concept are variable, and many tend toward assimilation rather than integration. Using dialogue to address what people really want and how to go about it, will focus on the shared solution of a problem, and provide opportunities for initiatives to develop from the ground upwards as well as from the top down, which is not presently the case.

Lastly, in response to the widespread reference to **'political correctness'** as a negative force, we suggest using a similar dialogue-based approach to evaluating exactly what people mean when they say this, and then attempting to sift what is helpful from what is less so. The process of dialogue itself is both a mechanism and part of the process of integration. Again, the objective is to lessen the scope for misunderstandings and to shrink the basis for the narratives of unfairness, while forming some bonds between people and communities that are not currently communicating.

Section 1

Background to research and methodology

This report was commissioned by the National Community Forum (NCF) in May 2008. Its aims were to:

- gather data on the sources of resentment, and on perceptions of ethnic minorities among people resident on estates in four places in England
- unpick perceptions of ethnic minorities
- identify suggestions for increased integration
- put forward some recommendations for moving community cohesion and integration forward on this basis.

The NCF aims to influence the development and implementation of government policies in relation to deprived and marginalised communities which experience social injustice and barriers to economic activity and well-being. To achieve this, the NCF is made up of 24 members who live and/or work in these communities with an independent Chair who shares this experience. The NCF brings a local, grassroots perspective within a diverse national policy context – local people, with local views, sharpening national policies and delivery. As such, the NCF is neither a member organisation nor a lobby group, nor a network of interested parties – it is a direct sounding board to government on the impact of national policies on the ground within disadvantaged communities. It has been set up by, and relates directly to the Department of Communities and Local Government through its ministers and civil servants. The distinct value of the NCF is in bringing grassroots experiences and perspectives which are refined by the members themselves to relate to a national context in order to crystallise challenges and suggest solutions.

The case studies were selected according to a logic of difference, ie four places whose context differed from one another, rather than being chosen to be similar. Moreover, no obviously multicultural inner-city site was chosen. This can be considered a critique of the work, but there is plenty of data available about such sites already, and the choice was made to go for areas with smaller minority populations in order to explore the dynamics of relatively monocultural ‘white’ urban spaces. The sites were; Castle Vale (Birmingham), Netherfield, Beanhill and Coffee Hall Estates (Milton Keynes); Halton Housing Trust in Runcorn and Widnes; and the Abbey estate in Thetford. In July 2008, we spoke to a total of 43 people¹. As the number of case studies and interviews in each place were small at

¹ 11 in Birmingham, Milton Keynes and Runcorn/Widnes; 10 in Thetford.

this stage, there is a limit to how representative this sample can be. However, we see this as a start in the process of scoping out key themes and as a departure point for future work. The research team would like to thank Halton Housing Trust, Castle Vale Community Housing Association and the relevant members of the NCF for their invaluable assistance in facilitating this project.

The methodology adopted followed previous work by the same research team in Bristol in 2007-08. A semi-structured questionnaire was constructed with sections dealing with a variety of topics (see Appendix I for questionnaire). The rationale underlying this is that we were asked to look for the sources of hostility, not merely to focus on the expressions of hostility. Our experience in previous research was that immigration and integration, whilst important topics on which many people have strong opinions, are not necessarily at the top of their priority lists. If they are, reference to them emerges when dealing with 'important local and national issues' (section 2 of the questionnaire). Using this model, we can get a more accurate picture of where attitudes to minorities fit into the set of concerns identified in the interviews. We also feel that this contributes to a better understanding of the dynamics of people's anxieties than an approach concentrated on a focused and set of questions exclusively about immigration, integration and minorities.

Interviews were set up with the assistance of a local NCF member contact and took place either in a community centre or in people's homes, depending on where the interviewees felt most comfortable. The data recorded then formed the basis of a number of waves of analysis between the team members.

Section 2

Contexts in which attitudes are expressed

2.1 What is racism?

The following data needs to be understood against the context of changing understandings and interpretations of racism. An entire report could be filled with a discussion of the arguments around this highly contested term, so this is merely a very condensed version. Popular understandings of racism contain two misleading messages.

1: The focus is solely on discourses of superiority (abusive and/or intimidating language) and violence. While these are constituent elements of racism, they concentrate on individual, psychological rather than collective, sociological models. Since the 1960s, the idea of institutional racism has been in circulation. This understanding of society, in which culture, processes and social structures can produce a pattern of discrimination (without the attitudes of individuals having a significant impact) now forms the basis of a set of legal equality instruments recognised at national and EU levels. Whatever else it is, racism is also a social relationship (like class and gender). The perception of racism (a system of society-wide discrimination) as being merely a synonym of prejudice (individual attitudes) is very misleading.

2: The nineteenth-century's obsession with scientific discourse about bodies and the Nazis' focus on physical differences between Aryans, Jews and others has profoundly marked contemporary understandings of racism. Racism is not only about physical difference but also about cultural difference. This relationship noted by social scientists from the late 1970s, when overt talk about racial differences had become taboo apart from among marginal circles on the Far-right. Martin Barker's study of what he termed the 'new racism' (1981) demonstrated that a form of talking about racial hierarchies through the themes of cultural difference, entitlement and innate capacities for civilisation had become the new mainstream. There is no necessity for describing or referring directly to bodies in this discourse.

In brief, racism requires us to think holistically. 'Race' is not the only thing going on in contemporary Britain— it is embedded in class, gender, nationality and faith for example. However, just because something is to do with class does not mean it is not also to do with 'race' and vice versa. Similarly, just because black and minority ethnic groups can identify with some aspects of anti-immigrant discourse (for fear of losing out on scarce resources) this does not mean that that discourse *per se* is not to do with 'race'. Rather it means that

the contemporary ways of thinking about difference are more complex than before and require more sophisticated models to help us understand them. Placing the boundary between 'us' and 'them' in a different place (so that it might include black and Asian British people living on a majority white estate for example) does not abolish the boundary. The people forming the 'them' are still racialised.

The consequences of these three insights provided by the social sciences into our discussions of racism is to set all the talk engaged in by our respondents within the framework of a historically changing set of ideas that depict social hierarchies. There is a minimal amount of explicitly hostile language in these interviews, and this should not surprise us: people have learned the appropriate public language and the 'safe' places to openly express racist ideas. Anyone reading this report would immediately be able to identify such places from their own experiences, and the report cannot capture this. What people do talk about however is a struggle for resources in which one arena is the importance of whiteness as a resource: for granting entitlement, for providing solidarity against a multicultural environment in which many feel uncomfortable or have lost their cultural bearings. These stories are told about what is seen as; unfair competition for housing and employment; the privileging of 'foreign' cultures over British ones; and the transformation of places from what our interviewees understand as recognisably British ones into what they deem strange ones. This is still about 'race' because it is speaking about bodies through culture, in a model where cultures are unchanging and wholly separate from each other.

The four areas clearly had specific histories of migration and community development, which we argue are important in the way they respond to minorities and the issues of immigration and integration.

2.2 Experience of migration and minorities

Thetford, in common with urban areas in East Anglia, has a small but longstanding black and minority ethnic population comprised mainly of people from the Indian sub-continent and the Caribbean who came to Britain in the 1950s and 60s and their descendants. However, the principal focus of conversation on the Abbey Estate was not about them at all, but the new phenomenon of European immigration, starting in around 2000, but not developing until 2002. This has two main sources; Portugal and Poland, with the former preceding the latter by a few years. The numbers are not official because the bulk of the immigration has occurred since the 2001 Census. That figure puts the black and minority ethnic population as 3.5 per cent of the ward, which is also the 43rd most deprived in the East of England region (EEDA, 2003).

On our three estates in Milton Keynes; *Coffee Hall*, *Beanhill* and *Netherfield*, there are numerically few black and minority ethnic people, but as proportions, they are representative of the town as a whole, and house even slightly higher than local average

proportions of Muslims on Netherfield (4.3% vis-à-vis 2.3%). According to the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) provisional 2005 statistics, Milton Keynes has a 16.3 per cent black and minority ethnic population (12% non-white), which is above the national average (Milton Keynes Observatory, 2008). It is worth noting that the levels of owner-occupancy (22.2% on Netherfield, 26.2% on Beanhill, and 36.4% in Coffee Hall, are far below the national average). (Please see Appendix 2 for weblinks to sources of official statistics on each site).

Castle Vale, in North-East Birmingham, lies in the Tyburn ward. There is a small and longstanding population of black and minority ethnic people who have been resident on the estate since its construction in the 1960s. However, the proportion does not appear to be rising, a fact noted spontaneously by some of the interviewees. While the black and minority ethnic population at the last Census is 8.9 per cent of the ward's population, a relatively high proportion compared with the other sites, it is small in the context of the City of Birmingham's 29.6 per cent. There was no mention of Eastern European immigration into the area, and the main focuses of what anxiety that was expressed featured Muslims and other white working-class people living in nearby areas rather than in *Castle Vale* itself.

Runcorn and *Widnes* are covered by Halton Borough Council, which recorded only 1.2 per cent black and minority ethnic population (cf. 6% for the North West) in 2001. As in the case of *Thetford*, the main focus of talk was of Polish workers, quite a recent experience of migration.

All in all, these are relatively 'white' locations in terms of their regions, with even *Castle Vale* having a much lower proportion of BMEs than its surrounding urban space. However, at least in two of the sites, the key migrants are white Europeans, so we would expect to see an increase in the 'White Other' category there at the next Census.

2.3 Current status of estate in terms of development

Three of the four areas have experience of housing association rather than local authority control. The estates' experiences of the development of the housing stock and general environment are closely connected to this fact, and we feel it is a significant factor in the way relations with outsiders are constructed.

In terms of development of the physical environment of the estates, *Thetford* and *Runcorn* and *Widnes* seem to occupy mid-points on the scale, with *Milton Keynes* at the low end and *Castle Vale* at the top. The latter has successfully emerged from a long period of regeneration (Mornement, 2007). In terms of the physical environment, the majority of problems appear to have been resolved in a programme that took a 1960s set of tower blocks and replaced them with a variety of well-designed low-rise units that would not look out of place on contemporary new-build private housing developments. This appears to have had considerable consequences for the way people there construct the area's identity.

The first question we asked was ‘how would you describe the area to a stranger?’, and in Castle Vale, the majority of responses began with the idea that it was a large estate that had been regenerated. While people are clear that there are other issues still to resolve, their position compared to that of the Milton Keynes residents is stark. In Coffee Hall and Netherfield, there were comments about the poor quality of housing (badly insulated breeze blocks) and the price of fuel bills, coming down to a choice between ‘heating and eating’, in the words of some residents.

In Runcorn/Widnes, awareness that a major improvement programme is underway has mitigated feelings about being neglected that are evident in the stories told in Milton Keynes, while the Thetford residents contextualise the complaints they have with the acknowledgement that the housing association has improved conditions over recent times.

This contextual basis influences the way people feel about their relationship with authority; their economic well-being; the brightness of the future; and, crucially for the themes of cohesion and integration, the amount of anxiety they feel about other people accessing resources ahead of them.

2.4 Individuals’ experience of contact with minorities

There is a substantial focus on ‘contact theory’ in the NCF’s report on good practice in community cohesion and integration (Orton, 2008). Just to restate the main contention of this body of thought, drawn from social psychology: broadly speaking, people who interact more frequently and on an equal footing outside the workplace exhibit less prejudice than those who do not. We raise some questions about this in the conclusions, but we asked the question (if it had not already been answered in the discussion), about the type of contact our respondents had with minorities. The answers (from schools, employment, leisure, voluntary work, to virtually no contact) were mainly weighted toward the ‘infrequent’ end of the spectrum:

‘There’s no nastiness between the whites and the blacks... We haven’t got a lot of black people here’ (Woman, Runcorn and Widnes, 60s).

Some people’s work took them specifically to areas where they encountered minorities on a daily basis, but on the whole, among our admittedly small sample, people spoke of occasional individual relationships rather than frequent and meaningful contact with a number of black and minority ethnic people.

Section 3

Anxieties and priorities

3.1 Important local issues

The issues in each area differed, both in substance and priority. While anti-social behaviour (ASB) figured in each of the areas, it was much more prominent in Thetford and Runcorn/Widnes than in Milton Keynes and Castle Vale. Poor living conditions were an issue for Milton Keynes but scarcely at all for redeveloped Castle Vale, where worklessness, litter and sustaining the gains of regeneration were the most important topics. Anxieties over benefits and entitlement on a very local basis exercised the minds of people in Runcorn, and were mentioned by a few people in Castle Vale, yet not as a pressing concern for most. Only in Milton Keynes did immigration and integration appear to be serious issues.

The environment also concerns people in a number of ways; litter, play areas, physical attractiveness and management by housing association/local authority. It feeds into the discourse about ASB (see below) in that it is linked with the provision of amenities. Litter collection and garden maintenance are viewed as important because of how they can affect the feel or look of the estate. While difficult to measure, this may well be an important psychological element of how confident people feel about their area; rubbish-strewn grass areas and extremely untidy gardens signal something about a place that most people seem to consider negative and significant. In Castle Vale for example, litter collection is something that the local authority still does (having virtually been supplanted as a landlord), and the complaints focused on late collections of rubbish, and collection crews leaving bins on the road. As one respondent asserted, through the housing association, Castle Vale has been in control of a lot of services that are usually the province of local authorities, and people's satisfaction threshold is now much higher than it was:

'We've seen how services can be provided and we expect them to be at that level'
(Woman, 40s).

Environmental decline was also commented on in Runcorn:

'We used to have someone come round, see how your keeping, making sure your keeping the place clean enough, keeping your council house in a proper order'
(Woman, Runcorn and Widnes, 60s).

The association of elements around ASB is similar across the four areas. The majority argument runs; young people do not have enough to do and places to go, therefore they stay on the street in groups and get into trouble:

'If they give the teenagers something to do ie open up youth clubs and youth centres and what have you, give 'em somewhere to go to, you'll most likely find that the crime rate would drop' (Man, Runcorn and Widnes, 50s).

Indeed, one Castle Vale resident was actively raising money for the purchase of premises for a youth club. The next part of the chain of association is that police do not have the power to do much about ASB, so little can be achieved. The police reportedly respond with varying degrees of rapidity to being called out to disperse these groups. However, there are major differences in emphasis. On Castle Vale, ASB is noted as a relatively minor issue compared with the high levels of crime experienced in the pre-regeneration phase of the estate's history. The police have been involved in consultations with the Housing Association and were praised by a number of residents. In Runcorn and Widnes, the talk was a mirror image of this. The decline of behavioural standards there (into gun crime and other forms of physical violence) is tied into ineffective policing, with the result that people feel powerless and despondent about their chances of improving the situation, and therefore relatively unsafe:

'Where I lived before I had a lot of problems with the neighbours... with their kids [...] We had a very big back garden and they used to come... they were never at school [...] They used to climb out their window and knock on my window. They used to throw stones ... they broke my window twice. They used to throw eggs [...] It was hell' (Woman, 60s, Runcorn and Widnes).

Violence can also be seen taking place in the street:

'I was looking out my window [...] and he punched her repeatedly. Now I was looking out this window, and he was behind the car. And he was going 'thump, thump, thump', and he was wellying her, good style... in the face' (Man, 60s, Runcorn and Widnes).

The presence of drugs often accompanies the destructive forms of behaviour:

'And I can also say that someone in this street [is selling drugs], and I've been watching him every day, and I'm frightened to report him. But I know what's going on. I know he's selling stuff. And other people have told me where he's hiding it. One of my lads' mates actually comes down here for it' (Man, 60s, Runcorn and Widnes).

In opposition to this, the Milton Keynes estates emerge as having retained the vestiges of the informal social control exerted by peer pressure. The very tightly-knit white communities there appear to self-police, and ASB is less of a problem.

In Thetford-Abbey, police were seen as either doing too little or being too heavy-handed and focusing on 'easy targets'. This was attributed to a lack of police power (because of 'pc' and bureaucracy) and a lack of police knowledge of residents' concerns. The situation had recently improved slightly with the police working more closely with the housing association, who were seen as particularly responsive to the needs of the community.

The pattern seemed to be that morale was lowest and therefore identity-related anxieties at their highest where the material conditions (housing and economics) were worst.

3.2 Important national issues

On a national level, the issues raised were very varied. As expected, the current spike in food and fuel prices was commented on, especially in Milton Keynes. ASB is regularly referred to as being 'everywhere nowadays', linking the local to the national, while the economy is seen purely as a national phenomenon, with very few comments on the local one. No particular pattern in terms of substantive topics emerged, except that the important national issues were often seen through the lens of local ones. For example, Castle Vale residents were concerned about worklessness, housing provision and the possible effects of a change of government on the status of their housing association.

One national topic of interest to the NCF however is that of 'political correctness'. This ideological space, put forward by interviewees as a barrier to freedom of self-expression or of honest exchange, is referred to in a number of ways, which straddle the local and national spheres. In some cases it is said to stop people using particular terms or ideas. In other arguments, it prevents a level playing field from being maintained or unbalances a previously level one (by favouring of minorities at the expense of the majority). One man in Runcorn highlighted this pressure that is felt when discussing certain subjects:

'Why are they letting everybody else come in to the country? That is an issue, it don't matter who you speak to. Now whether they want to be honest or not is entirely up to them. But I will be honest' (Man, Runcorn and Widnes, 50s).

Further attention will be paid to this under 4.1 (below), particularly the rare and explicit claims to whiteness heard in Milton Keynes.

As noted, above, immigration, integration and minorities only drew serious comment as an issue at local level in one of the four sites. This is not to say that it was not mentioned in the discussions, but that it only seems to be a priority issue for some. This in itself is an important corrective to much of the opinion polling that seems to suggest that these issues have a much higher profile.²

² In the NCF's literature review (Garner, 2008), Section 3.3 suggests some of the in-built bias generated by particular methodologies. Here our choice of methods has enabled the respondents to raise the issues of immigration and ethnic minorities if they wanted to, before we did so ourselves. The result, we feel, is a more accurate indication of the position of this social issue on the lives of our respondents.

We cannot possibly generalise from just four small case studies, but this does raise two important points. Firstly, the headline polling may skew the importance of these issues within sets of priorities that people express without prompting. Therefore, policy based on this might not be directly addressing root causes. Second, when people discuss what their problems are, the associations between topics might give a more accurate picture of how people think rather than detaching 'immigration' as a separate topic and focusing on it in isolation. The principal illustration of this is in terms of entitlement, which we shall look at below (4.2).

Section 4

Immigration and minorities

4.1 Main themes and logic used

We have divided the following section into three but this is purely an analytical device: most of the themes and logics overlap at some point.

4.1.1 Resource competition

'I think with immigration ... I'm not a racist or anything like that. Don't get me wrong, but I think that erm ... they're allowing too many immigrants in. I mean the government have admitted themselves that they can't ... that they don't know how many people are coming in, and the reason why I say that is that we just haven't got the infrastructure to deal with these huge influxes of people. I mean they reckon that it's something like about 4,000 a day coming into Britain. Well we can't ... these people have to have jobs, to be fed, they have to have healthcare, they have to have houses, and ... you now ... we're having to build the equivalent of 150 houses a day, just to house these people' (Man, 50s, Castle Vale).

By far the most frequent context for talking of minorities is that of perceived competition for resources -typically housing- but also employment, benefits, territory and culture, sanctioned by a government perceived by some as having let the situation get out of control.

'Foreigners get handed everything on a bloody plate', says one man in Milton Keynes:

'We can't afford to keep ourselves, so how can we afford to keep every bloody foreigner that is coming in. And this is not prejudice, this is preferences ... I'm supposedly a pensioner, I'm still working: £90 a week. What can you do with £90 a week? And they get more than that in benefit. I got a wife that's disabled. All right she gets disabled benefits, but if she didn't get that we wouldn't live, because her pension is £50 per week'. (Man, 60s, Milton Keynes).

In Thetford, the focus of resource competition was around housing and employment. Housing in particular was a precious resource and there was a widely held belief that newly arrived migrants displaced locals who had been on housing waiting lists for several years. In addition, once in housing, new migrants would save money by renting out rooms, 'club together' for deposits to buy houses and repeat this process which was seen as exacerbating the housing shortage. A typical view was that those responsible for housing

allocation should 'look after their own first' (Man, 20s; Woman, 30s). A 21 year-old Milton Keynes man, who had to move away from the Coffee Hall estate as he was informed that there is not enough housing available there comments acidly: "The housing list is too long. I would have to be black, foreign or have a baby to get up there'.

In Milton Keynes Coffee Hall, the feeling of anxiety around housing was so acute that respondents claimed they had voted against the regeneration of the estate, which meant pulling down all breeze block houses and rebuilding them with new and better material, (as had been done so successfully in Castle Vale) because they feared that their necessary displacement during building work would result in them losing their place on the estate to immigrants. This seems to epitomise the collapsing of fears about taking over, into the priorities of authorities allocating those resources, and those about territory. Effectively, in this scenario, people prioritised territory and community over their own prospects for improved housing (in a context in which housing conditions were a major problem for many interviewees). Indeed the phantom of unfair allocation haunts contexts where there is no possibility of it occurring. A Castle Vale respondent reports a meeting where she felt the conversation was 'drifting to a racial one about who was coming to the estate'. The perception was that 'asylum-seekers will take everything' (Woman, 40s, Castle Vale).

Runcorn and Widnes respondents expressed many of these same views regarding housing employment and benefits, even though immigration is very low in the area. As previously mentioned, Polish migrant workers have settled here, which has created some unease. However the comparatively low level of immigration to this area did not stop many of the respondents having a view of immigration on a national level and expressing their fear of the 'potential threat' it poses to a 'nice area':

'I mean if you're in Shopping City and you see a lady in a gown, you do actually look twice. It's still so unusual for us [...] It's still quite a decent place to live, Runcorn. And I think we should have pride in it' (Woman, 60s, Runcorn and Widnes).

She goes on to express her fear for her home by expressing what she has heard happen elsewhere:

'But you've now got towns which were predominantly white and now they're not. And you're expected to get on and not cause any waves, not look at people differently and be accepting. But at the same time how can you accepting when they're taking your house off you?'

According to Thetford respondents, employment is difficult to obtain because the Portuguese and Polish work longer hours for less money, which in turn keeps local wages down and makes 'locals' less attractive prospects for employers. Employers will 'take them on rather than the English' because its 'cheap money' (Woman, 50s). As one respondent commented, the Polish and Portuguese will 'do any job and no wage is too small' (Woman, 30s).

One final and distinct line of argument focuses on the quality of services *per se*. This logic states that some existing services are not yet up to scratch for the majority of users, so cannot easily be shared. 'How can we share services when they're not right for the people who have paid into them?', asks one woman in Castle Vale. "How can we stretch services that are already under pressure? How far can they stretch before they break?' (Woman, 40s).

This type of critical response to the provision of services and integration cannot readily be dismissed as a misperception, and we feel that it is qualitatively different from the idea that undeserving groups are accessing resources unfairly (often when this is not the case). The focus here is on the resource rather than its allocation, particularly important to note when the same interviewee had earlier argued that standards elsewhere need to be brought up to those of Castle Vale.

4.1.2 Adaptation and contribution as prerequisites for integration

The second theme focused on the conditions for becoming or being accepted as a full member of society. This was most frequently expressed during talk of integration and cohesion. The main two arguments used are the 'when in Rome' one (people who come here must adapt to 'our way of life'); and the necessity for contributing in order to earn membership. This earning process can be undergone by something as simple as joining in community activities, or by making wider efforts to integrate, or paying into the welfare system.

In Thetford-Abbey, the 'when in Rome' argument was used when discussing integration of the Polish and Portuguese, who should 'live by our standards' if living here. This is seen as a fair requirement because 'we have to if we go to their countries' (Woman, 30s). The Portuguese were considered less successful at this than the Polish who 'seem to have a similar way of living to us' (Woman, 70s), and 'blended in' (Woman, 30s). For many, the key to successful integration and cohesion, and part of the 'when in Rome' argument, was being able to speak English. This was less an issue for children of migrants who were attending local schools, but seen as creating barriers for adults whom it was thought kept to themselves for this reason. School activities were cited by many of the respondents as an area in which migrant communities were perceived as making efforts to integrate, either through helping organise events or simply attending them and getting to know people better. The efforts of the Portuguese to integrate were commented on positively with reference to a local Portuguese-run pub. The pub had previously been seen as for Portuguese only and had been the centre of disputes between Portuguese and English, but was now a mixed venue which some of the respondents frequented. Having separate social spaces and events was seen as contributing to an 'us' and 'them' mindset and 'just keeps us all apart' (Woman, 40s). For most, simple gestures such as smiling, nodding or exchanging brief greetings were indications that the Portuguese and Polish were integrating.

In Milton Keynes, there were a number of vocal critiques of perceived failure to mix on the part of minorities: 'I have found that there are a lot of Africans on the Estate', says one woman (50s), 'and they don't seem to mix ... I work in the shop and they are very ignorant, never say "please" or "thank you, and I don't like that. You know, it doesn't cost anything to have manners'.

Indeed, the onus for integration in these perspectives, as found elsewhere in previous research, lies entirely with immigrants:

'This is our country and we were kind enough to let them in. In their country we couldn't dress like this, we would have to respect their ways, but they don't respect us and our ways. The younger people do, but now they want to have Sharia laws ... they should adopt our ways' (Woman, 60s).

There are more nuanced appreciations of difference in terms of length of residence and degree of acculturation already achieved:

'Integration means... it's mixing, getting to know them. I mean, why should we always have to go out of our way? Be nice to them? It works both ways. They don't want to know. They've come here ... the new generation that's been coming over, not the older generation, you know people younger than me, who came over in the 50s and 60s. They ... are fine. It's the new people, that's coming in, that need ... guidance. I'm saying it polite, they need guidance. So they know what our ways are, and they learn to reflect them, the same as we get to know them, we learn their ways, we learn about their culture, and we respect their faith and their cultures, the same as they should respect ours. That's the only way you gonna get people to mix' (Woman, 60s).

Indeed there is a strand of this discussion that insists on integration as a two-way process:

'How can you integrate with that part of a community ... if you're not prepared to ... you know we're expected to understand values and backgrounds of other people, but it doesn't seem to sometimes be a two-way thing (...) When it's not a two-way thing that's what gets people's backs up. People have got to be flexible' (Woman, 40s, Castle Vale).

The array of cultural difference is perceived by some as a complex and troubling burden. One person in Castle Vale experiences the possibility of getting something wrong as a reason for avoiding particular areas:

'Perhaps I need to work harder in understanding the different cultures and things like that, but there's things that I see when I'm driving around Birmingham that I think ... that shouldn't be happening ... There's these areas that have completely been took over ... and you do feel very uneasy. Not just me, and I only drive into

these areas, never actually walk into these areas, I just wouldn't. Just in case I did do something that I ... because of their culture or their religion it was a threat or it was ... an insult or something, because we don't understand ... the British people don't really understand. And all of a sudden we've got to try and understand all these different things that have been thrown at us. And I think it's very, very difficult for a lot of people. (Man, 40s)

He talks of a few incidents that have occurred over previous years including a road sign in an area with a high Asian population, on which was sprayed the phrase 'No Whites after 8.30'. These 'no-go areas' according to him are mirrored by Castle Vale, a place where he feels safe but others would not dare go:

'so these are out little havens, places like Castle Vale, and it's about 90% white in this community, and it's just such a relief you know. Even though there's people out there that would be terrified to come to Castle Vale, we can't wait to get back to it'.

His work involves constant contact with the public, and he indicates that he feels unable to properly prevent misuse of the space he is in charge of when the perpetrators are Asians. His boss has told him to let it go. 'It's like you're treading on glass all the time ... and this is how a lot of people feel'.

The question of norms arises in a variety of areas, and a need for information emerged as a potential aid to integration. One woman (50s, Castle Vale) suggests that:

'Maybe it's a matter of retraining or making them aware of our standards as well 'cos it seems as if ... they come in and it's ... we have to ... change to their religions. I know that sounds harsh but there is a force getting stronger that says we've got to adjust to their ways of thinking and feeling, and what we should be saying and doing. But if we went into their country we'd have to abide by their ... and I would as well. I would respect their country's kind of policies and whatever'.

Many of the sentiments in the section above were echoed in Runcorn and Widnes but no strong pattern of ideas emerge. Language was of course an issue for many and expressed as a prerequisite for acceptance. Some respondents had experienced rudeness from the few migrants in their area:

'Its annoying when you get lots of them (immigrants) just walking together, having a conversation in their own language. But they just stick in their routine and they walk where their going. They don't believe in moving over for you, put it that way' (Woman, Runcorn and Widnes, 70s).

It was also felt that many of them had created their own segregated subculture. A minority of respondents who felt that it was their duty to be accepting of any migrants in the area, irrespective of their cultural differences, or even if they seemed to be acting in a way that was not in the best interests of integration. However, as previously mentioned in the report, these people were the ones who had had the most contact with minorities, either in this country or on their travels.

Anxieties about other topics might well be attached to this type of confrontation. From them are drawn conclusions: there is an almost unbridgeable difference between particular kinds of people, and the playing field is tilted toward minorities because they can do things white people are not allowed to get away with. This leads to frustration among the majority population. Here we are entering territory that is covered by the critical discourse about 'political correctness'. A woman in Milton Keynes sums this up:

'They got to stop saying 'that's politically incorrect'. You can't say that because they're ethnic, you can't say that because they are from there ... Why? Why should we have to be politically correct all the time when they're not, when they get away with it. Why should we? Why should we have to be the ones that step back and have to change it all the time, because that's what's happening! We have got nowhere to go. We don't have a white race relations board. But they have a black relations board or an ethnic race relations board they can go to and complain about us, but we haven't'.

According to the narratives we identified here, then, it is the white working class who are the principal victims of social change, and this is what we shall turn to next.

4.1.3 Unfairness

The section above highlights some of the incidents read as unfair by our respondents. Some of the conversations included examples of how people perceive unfair situations in which minorities are advantaged; either directly or indirectly.

Two examples of funding policies were evoked by Castle Vale respondents. One revolved around a football team on the estate that tried repeatedly to get council funds to no avail, while a team for Asians only that just started up received funding immediately. Another was about a community 'clean-up day' in which members of all ethnic groups had taken part on another estate. After the event, a city councillor managed to get funding for a day trip as a reward, but only for the Asian participants. This story was commented on as having 'destroyed the ethos' of what they were trying to do. 'How can you integrate a community', commented the interviewee (Woman, 40s) when you've got people doing that?'

Another facet of this type of experience is the perceived advantage for minorities given them by the existence of legislation against racism and the organisational structure that surrounds them:

'They've, they've got the Race Relations Officer at the Milton Keynes Council. They can phone him, or her, or whoever it is and say 'well, look the white man down the road is calling my son names'. You get a letter then, to say that you're a ... racist. But we're not!! We're not! We're trying to stick up for ourselves. We are white, we are ... this is our country, and as they are coming in they should be taught, there should be said 'alright, what can you offer, how do you feel ... living among white people? Will it be, you know, a hindrance? Will you be able to get on with your neighbours if they are white?' And if not, they shouldn't be allowed to come' (Woman, 60s).

Perceptions of unfairness in Thetford most often related to help that Portuguese and Polish people received upon arrival to the UK, the equivalent of which was not available to locals experiencing similar difficulties. A typical view was that 'they seem to be getting what we've worked all our lives for and can't get' (Woman, 40s). This was interpreted as especially unfair when contrasted with the 'elderly who haven't got anything, can't afford to pay heating, worked all their lives and get nothing' (Woman, 30s) and with 'single mums who have to live in hostels', while 'foreigners are in nice cars and have big houses' (Man, 18). Assistance such as providing training for Portuguese people was seen as unfair because those providing it 'don't do the same for us' and 'we wouldn't get it if we went there' (Woman, 30s). Conversations about unfairness also referred to preferential treatment by police, whom one respondent insisted had been told to 'go easy' on the Portuguese for offences such as drink-driving, and who were allowed to continue driving in order to keep their jobs. This contributed to some coming to the conclusion that there was: 'one rule for them and one rule for the locals' (Woman, 70s).

4.2 Stories about unfairness

In the discourse about the relations between minorities and the majority population, a number of narrative stances were adopted (as noted in the section above). We offer various ones here, with some examples to demonstrate the breadth of this form of communicating unfairness. These stories express both general perceptions as well as specific examples. It is unlikely that the type of event described in 4.2.1 is policy, or even the full story. However, the sense of grievance emerging is genuine. Overall, such stories can be understood, as Hewitt (2005) suggests, as a coded way to signal that the speaker contests the frame within which all the unfairness is experienced by minorities. This 'counter narrative' (Hewitt, 2005) is therefore located in the safe space of reporting a real event, or relaying the opinion of a minority person. In doing this, the speaker's community is recast as the victim of whatever discrimination exists. The key to this is the awareness of the political stakes of being considered racist. The counter-narrative formats enable people to avoid this accusation.

Individuals who talked about 'political correctness' did so in connection with expressing a feeling of disempowerment:

'The government is just gone too softly-softly, too politically correct. It needs to be changed, the whole concept needs to be locked up and changed. And everybody should stand up and say 'Yeah, I'm white and I'm proud of it!'"
(Woman, Milton Keynes, 40s).

In Runcorn and Widnes, there were a few people who expressed the unfairness that was being imposed on the people by government as their own fault for being weak and putting up with it:

'No, first things first, look after the indigenous people. Because basically in France, in Spain, [...] the Governments, they do look after their own people there. There'd be people on the street with banners and it wouldn't just be half a dozen. It would be mass' (Woman, Runcorn and Widnes, 60s).

This wasn't just in relation to issues surrounding immigration but she went on to link it to other national issues:

'It's like the gas and electric. We're just getting robbed all the time. But the thing is, were putting up with it. [...] Because really, basically, England hasn't got a backbone'.

4.2.1 Resources given away to minorities

'I know of [foreign] families who have got start-up vouchers to help them with their housing and I never got that. They all seem to get their houses and points and have decent places to live' (Thetford-Abbey, Woman, 30s).

'You hear different conversations. ...how they've [foreigners] been given a new car, a house and £3,000. Don't know if it's true, I'd be a bit miffed if they did'
(Thetford Abbey, Man 20s).

'I took this taxi and he was a Somalian and he said he was given £7,000 to buy a taxi... And then the council say 'it doesn't happen'... Nobody minds these people coming and living here, but it's when they get treated better, that's where the resentment starts'
(Woman, 40s, Milton Keynes).

4.2.2 From the horse's mouth

In this type of story the narrator is relaying what a person from a black or minority ethnic background told him/her. Any accusation of racism is thus sidestepped, and a layer of authenticity is added:

'This Polish person was quite happy to be bragging about it ... has a three month old baby back in Poland who they say they are getting child benefit for. Not on.'
(Thetford-Abbey, Woman, 30s).

Another one of these was a story of an Asian hospital doctor in Birmingham who was resigning (as he told our respondent) because he found out that other Asian doctors were intentionally damaging white women so they could not have children.

4.2.3 Minorities also disapprove

A version of 4.2.2, with the added legitimacy that this is merely reporting a voice that says what the speaker's community agrees with:

'I've got a Polish friend, she's lived here for years and you wanna hear her going on about the odd Polish who are coming over. She hates them. She says, I've worked here all my life, she says, and they come into this country and she says they get everything. All the young ones come in and they are getting it, they get everything they want. She says, I don't, she says, I'm off work at the moment, she says she can have jobseeker's allowance for six months, she says, what happens after that six months? I'm lucky 'cause my husband works but his wage won't cover us, and yet there's somebody just been given £7,000 to get a taxi to work, so he can buy a car to get a taxi job. She says, we won't get it. If I say I want to get a taxi job, they'd say 'go and get a loan and buy yourself a car'' (Woman, Thetford-Abbey, 40s).

4.3 Emotions and associations made between different topics

In listening to the interview material a number of times, we have identified some key recurrent emotional themes; resentment; betrayal; abandonment; loss; defensiveness; nostalgia; unfairness; disempowerment.

A man in Castle Vale (40s) related a lost relationship to Britishness. His grandfather had died recently, and he had spent time talking to him in his final weeks and going through his 'suitcase full of memories'. The grandfather fought at D-Day. In 1945, he argues, there was a 'necessary national identity'. The pictures showed only 'white British soldiers', who were given prayers and psalms (as there were only two religions) before the invasion. Over the last century, Britain has experienced an influx of people from other countries. His family has thus moved from a strong identification with the country, to the idea that 'British' is only a passport in three generations.

Loss can also be to do with community; buildings, an atmosphere or places to meet, as well as people:

'We haven't even got a Cinema in Widnes. [...] We had eight here. Where I said Wetherspoons before, that used to be The Premier. Cross the road used to be The Regal. Further up used to be The Plaza. Used to have The Century, The West Bank, and The Picture Drome on Ditton Road. We had Eight!' (Man, 60s, Runcorn and Widnes).

Among the loss of place emerges loss of safety, or at least the perception of safety:

'I mean when they were little I was quite happy for them [Grandchildren] to go to the town park and play and go to the Rangers' huts and things but not now [...] because of safety' (Woman, 60s, Runcorn and Widnes).

In Milton Keynes, the sense of 'disempowerment' felt was both evident and vocalised using exactly that term. Talking about the government's role in contributing to a better understanding between white British residents and ethnic minorities, a woman in her 40s says:

'They just need to take us seriously, you know, we can't say anything in our own country, you know. It's like... we've been disempowered, you know. They can do whatever they want with us'.

A number of people in Milton Keynes brought print-outs of bullet points and internet downloads with them. To us this indicated that they were not used to having people listening seriously to their opinions and wanted to make the most of it. One strand of this appeared to fuse resentment, betrayal and the critique of PC. It focused on the unfairness of not being able to celebrate whiteness without being accused of racism.³

In Runcorn and Widnes, this disempowerment was expressed in the context of a classist society, with people unable to take control of their lives as people in the 'upper classes' were making all the important decisions, with no consultation and no consideration for how life 'really is' for the majority:

"Instead of [Government] listening to, I dunno, the higher classes, who's not that bothered if fuel goes up or not, 'cause they've got a company car, they don't have to pay for it. I do' (Man, Runcorn and Widnes, 50s).

In Thetford, there was a general sense of abandonment by the local authority, which had 'washed their hands of us' (Woman 50s), and the area had subsequently succumbed to increased ASB and neglect. This in turn had resulted in a loss of the kind of community spirit people had experienced in the past, provoking comments such as: 'it wasn't like this when I was young'; alongside a rise in a 'lack of discipline and no respect' (Woman, 40s). For some the loss of community was compounded by high turnovers and multiple occupation of housing lived in by migrants, so that 'you don't know who's actually living there; their

³ One of the internet print-outs consisted of an argument *allegedly* written by American comedian Michael Richards (formerly 'Kramer' in the very successful US sitcom, 'Seinfeld') and read at his 'trial'. Richards was widely condemned for an outburst of racist name-calling during a live show in Los Angeles in November 2006, using the 'n' word a number of times and talking positively of the impunity with which African-Americans could be socially disciplined in the days before civil rights. He has not performed stand-up since, and his television show was cancelled. However, the text presented to our colleague was not the one for which he was criticised. This text contains merely an alternative view of race relations in which Whites are the victims of pc. The chain email in which this text was contained stated that Richards had been put on trial. This is not the case at all. While he was condemned in the media, and later apologised and retracted his statements on various radio and television shows, he was never put on trial. This kind of sleight of hand seems to be constitutive of the discussions of political correctness we encounter when carrying out this kind of research: the stories exaggerate situations to produce more contrast between fairness and unfairness, and also turn people who 'speak out' in to courageous defenders of the truth, as in this case of a trial that never happened.

house is not a home, it's just somewhere to sleep' (Woman, 30s). A sense of unfairness was expressed among many in relation to the perceived help and assistance given to migrants. One respondent said she felt 'disheartened' by the fact that she and her husband's unassisted hard labour had not resulted in the same material benefits as the migrants who had received help (Woman, 30s).

This expresses itself similarly in what we shall call the 'Castle Vale dilemma': ie that of a community that has made itself so popular for housing that demand for homes there now outstrips availability, and people begin to feel defensive about what they have worked hard to obtain. Expressing what she sees as the way Castle Vale people think about newcomers, this woman (40s) articulates the dilemma perfectly:

'I don't think it (becoming accepted on the estate) is about race because we've got the original (...) black families who were on the estate, and the original Asian families (...), but they're accepted into that ... It's not so much about race it's about new people coming in ... into that existing community. Because a lot of people who live here have lived for 40 years ... They just see it that we've gone through all that crap that we had, we've got all the improvements, why should other people benefit from those improvements?'

The Castle Vale example is virtually the opposite of what the Milton Keynes respondents feel about their housing. Their abandonment is also shared in terms of ASB and policing, by the Runcorn/Widnes people:

'Policing's a joke. Lady upstairs got her window put through. Called the police. It was a Saturday. 'Blah, blah blah, we'll be there Monday'" (Man, Runcorn and Widnes, 50s).

The degree to which the interviewees voice the negative emotions listed above seems to be at least partly to do with the position on the development spectrum mentioned at the outset in the section of this report on 'Contexts'. In other words, generally, the better quality the material environment, the less negative people feel about other areas of their lives.

Yet on Castle Vale too, the talk is explicitly around class: of work not being the solution to poverty when the wages are so low that you still need benefits to live on; of a lack of professional role models; of professionals who look down their noses at the inhabitants; of postcode prejudice; of ways of imagining the future that are out of reach for young people. There is resentment here not only about the socio-economic isolation of the Vale, but of pressure from the other end of the spectrum: the lure of benefits in a context where there is less to lose financially by going on them than there is in better-off areas, and how this makes people in employment and feeling the pinch feel unfairly treated vis-à-vis those who don't work. Seeing the hostility around resource allocation only between the white working-class and ethnic minorities is a one-dimensional view: there is also intra- and inter-class resentment without which, the position of the respectable, employed working-class makes no sense.

Section 5

Ways Forward

5.1 Positive comments and empathy

Among the indifference and negative comments about ethnic minorities and immigrants, there were a number of more positive things said, and a degree of empathy with their plight.

A Castle Vale woman noted that the 'melting pot' is happening, although she is ambivalent about its ramifications. While on one hand she sees this as leading to better mutual comprehension and a reduction of tension, she also says that:

'100 years from now there isn't going to be a distinguishable identity. And we, as whites in Britain, are losing our identity because they are getting married (...) we'll be a totally and utterly mixed race'.

The idea that underneath the cosmetic differences is a common humanity was often put forward:

'We are all humans, we are all equal, the same, really. I mean, we all have the same colour blood, so really I don't think that one is better than the other. I mean, when a certain group comes over, they *are* alienated, and you have only got to know them and give them a chance...' (Woman, 40s, Milton Keynes).

'I think you should ignore the fact that they are Polish, coloured, Chinese or what. At the end of the day, they're flesh and blood like anybody else, and you'd just treat 'em like you would... irrespective of what religion or what colour they are, you just treat them as you would treat your next door neighbour' (Woman, 50s, Runcorn/Widnes).

There were also attempts to view what are seen as 'problems' of minorities and migrants taking jobs, as in fact assets, or proof of entitlement. 'If you went up the road into an area called Kingstanding, that is where there is quite a large BNP following and you would get a different viewpoint there', points out a Birmingham man (50s) who has just argued for less emphasis to be placed on making minorities conform to imposed notions of Britishness. 'Even within Castle Vale, you'd get different viewpoints. There'd be some people here who think England should be for the English, but they'd be the first to scream if they had an accident and there were no English doctors to ... treat them'.

Moreover, although employment was highlighted as an area of contention in Thetford, it was also recognised that the Polish and Portuguese had an enviable work ethic, which was lacking amongst the English. It was also the view that if migrants were working and paying taxes they should 'get what we get' (Woman, 30s) but should 'pay into the system before they get anything back out' (Man, 20s).⁴

On the question of how people behave in foreign countries, the following respondent was not the only one to hint that the British are not the best at integrating when they go abroad:

'We as white people are just as guilty as the Poles, right? You look around at how many ex-pat communities there are around the world. We do exactly the same. We go in to places like Dubai and we go to Spain and we set up these little communities and it's like all Brits live here. So we're just as guilty of it' (Man, 40s, Runcorn and Widnes).

Indeed, the policy problems are not universally and unquestioningly taken for granted: 'It's almost like been blown out of proportion by the media' argues one Birmingham man (20s), and they're basically saying 'These are bad people. This is such and such'. And they're demonising people'. Moreover there is a level of understanding that some of the people who've come to Britain in recent years as asylum-seekers have 'had horrific lives, but they are trying to get on with it here' (Woman, Castle Vale, 40s).

Another man with a variety of contacts in Birmingham goes so far as to suggest that on balance, he gets on better with black people than white. 'You don't have the class thing with black people. White people, they'll grade you ... 'Where do you come from?' 'What job do you do?' Black people don't do that' (Man, 40s, Castle Vale).

So a minority of our interviewees have given consideration to the other side of the story, and based on their experiences and what they have heard, sometimes come to more positive and open-minded conclusions. Why they do this when others do not is a question worth posing.

5.2 Suggestions for integration

While there was a strand of discussion that was implicitly about people getting on with each other, it would be hard to argue that this was a topic very high up on many of our interviewees' priority lists. Indeed there were a few critiques of the idea in general, which we shall cover first before going on to see the suggestions made in direct response to the question about how more mixing could be encouraged.

⁴ One of the information gap issues is this understanding of who is entitled to social welfare. The assumption that people are legally getting things out of the system without paying in is not borne out. Different types of visa and status entitle people to very different pieces of welfare, yet all who work are taxed. Only asylum-seekers are afforded welfare without working and making contributions, as they are forbidden to do paid work. The assumption seems to be that all migrants get access to welfare without working and paying contributions.

5.2.1 Critiques of government intervention

Two Castle Vale interviewees summarise the two most frequent arguments about integration, which however, is understood as something positive that the government wants to induce.

'The government wants people to integrate more, but you can't *tell* people to integrate: people have got to want to do that on their own haven't they? (...) it's worth having a policy to encourage people, but it's like the old adage – you can take a horse to water but you can't make him drink'.

'Cohesion and integration within 2 years or 3 years, will be forgotten, and the buzz words will be 'celebrating diversity'. You cannot force people to mix with other people from different cultures. No way! You try that and you're gonna finish up with big problems (...) There's got to be that willingness first. It's not there, and why should it be there? Why should they be forced to do something they don't want to do?'

A broader ethical critique of integration within the context of other pressures placed on the white poor is given by this Birmingham man:

'There is a very strong message that people should get on. Where people struggle is ... capitalism. People are shoved together and told to get on. Everything is to do with work. Don't smoke – because you won't be able to work. Lose weight – because you're missing hours and days off work. 'Worklessness' is something to get rid of. Women getting back to work. So, it's the same idea: 'get on for the sake of the work'. People don't mix outside the workplace'.

While for some, integration is something unachievable ('not in my lifetime' Woman, 50s, Milton Keynes); 'It will never be possible. But that's me. I think other people could do that...' (Man, 20s, Milton Keynes), others have come up with a few practical suggestions, such as enhancing communication between communities:

'Communication is the key to everything. If people in general would become more communicated, they would see that they are 'us', or actually we are 'them'. A lot of the time... no one does really understand anyone, unless you're that close. It's all about understanding... even down to their beliefs' (Woman, 20s, Milton Keynes).

Children are also viewed as a means of engaging and being engaged with other cultures:

'If the parents would allow their children to mix as one, I think we wouldn't have any problems. That would be the next generation, and they would be growing up knowing' (Woman, 60s, Milton Keynes).

Others seek a pragmatic target.

'I reckon you should have like a certain level where, fair enough, you're not always going to be best of friends, but can you at least live in harmony? ... You now ... basically saying ... if you're gonna have your place of worship there, can you respect us' (Man, 20s, Castle Vale).

5.2.2 Suggestions for integration activities

In the context of the neighbourhood, ideas differed about how easy it was to encourage friendliness, neighbourliness and civility above and beyond nodding in the street, a conclusion on which we have heard variations in other places (Hoggett et al., 2008). 'People don't want to be friendly any more', concludes a Birmingham woman (50s), who had arranged a neighbourhood watch meeting and dropped off 500 invitations: five people turned up. Residents' groups have not been so popular since regeneration apparently, which is a sign that many problems have been resolved. Yet this raises the question of what makes the best context for conviviality: either having too many problems, or not many left seem to both discourage it. Will the optimum conditions be temporary and hard to find?

In addition to elements of the story that might be more widely applicable, such as the gradual shift away from public civility in urban areas, there are also contextual factors that are specific to place. In Castle Vale this is a tension of ideas between the past system of family connection and the current, needs-based criteria for housing on the estate. One of my interviewees would like to see family preference come back:

'That won't happen because it does also have an impact on things like ... young people ... Closing the waiting lists 15 years ago had an impact on BME groups and how many people from the inner city was coming onto Castle Vale. And I know that Castle Vale was a majority white community way and above what it should have been for too long because of a result like that, so it's about balance I think' (Woman, 30s).

Yet there is, among those interested in the idea of integration, the conviction that there is difficulty in getting more black and minority ethnic people to be involved in the meetings other than residents' groups; and that it is difficult to 'encourage Asians onto the estate' as the closest mosque is five miles away. 'Not enough research was done at the beginning' concludes one of the respondents (Man, 50s, Castle Vale). This has led to some demographic inertia. A younger man explains that:

'People look around and say 'It's always been white people down this road. There's never been anything else. It's like 'this is new', and that's what you get ... not so much negative views from people, but they just don't understand, because they're not immersed with anyone else from different religions, different faiths' (Man, 20s).

Information

One of the clearest issues around attitudes toward minorities and immigrants is the vast deficit of available information on which people can base their views. There is an idea that if people have had to flee a horrible situation, they should be looked after. However, alongside this is the competing idea that White UK friends and family have been on waiting lists for years but can't get housing. In that scenario, why do new immigrants get housing ahead of others? This is the starting point of much of the resentment identified in other literature (notably Lewis, 2005; Dench et al., 2006) and which forms the basis for one strand of BNP campaigning. It has provoked public interventions such as that by Margaret Hodge MP in 2007.⁶

The information gaps are to do with:

- i) Local housing policy: What are the criteria? What categories of people are actually excluded from local authority housing?
- ii) The status of various groups in the UK and what they are entitled to: labour migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees have quite different entitlements, and asylum-seekers are not even housed in local authority accommodation.

As demonstrated in the literature review, these gaps are 'filled' both by media reports that confuse these categories and misrepresent policy; and by people interpreting what they see in a racialised way. Lewis' study (2005) showed how there is a process of amalgamating everyone who isn't white so they are suspected of being 'asylum-seekers', with all the negative connotations this term now has accumulated in popular understandings. People who are actually renting privately on estates are suspected of having been given accommodation by the local authority. These assumptions are underpinned by ideas about who is entitled in the first place.

In a number of cases over the last four years when the conversations have been touching on asylum-seekers allegedly being given local authority housing information has passed on to the interviewee after the recording has stopped: asylum-seekers are legally prevented from taking paid work, and they are housed in private rented accommodation, purpose-built centres or converted premises by a government agency in co-operation with the local authority. So far, every time this conversation has occurred, the person has said 'I never knew that', and altered their opinion. In this round of interviewees, one person suggested: 'Every person in the area should have a letter sent explaining why people have had to leave their country, who is organising the move ... People don't understand (...) To me that would avoid a lot of tensions in the area, and it would help with integration as well'.

⁵ 'Margaret Hodge, 'A Message to my Fellow Immigrants' *Observer*, 20.5.07: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/may/20/comment.politics>

There is a trade-off to be considered here: how much should people *have to* reveal about themselves, when the presumption is that they are somehow dangerous or not entitled to be in the country? On the other side is the fact that not knowing (who the new people are, why they are here, or what agency is handling their accommodation) seems to fuel people's resentment. Greater access to accurate information is not a panacea, but it would surely remove some of the grounds for misconceptions.

Another element of the equation is the importance of local solutions.

Contact and local solutions

The majority of the suggestions are based on the idea that integration is best served by activities to which a variety of people are attracted.

'Food, sports, music ... that's what brings people together. Why would they want to come to a meeting and talk about it?' (Man, 50s, Castle Vale).

Indeed, often these three areas were noted as ones that interest everyone, and a 'good basis' for integration.

The most popular idea in Milton Keynes was to bring people together on a social level, to join themed parties, to organise info evenings or cooking lessons for everyone to participate: "Bring them together on social events. They have to come out and mix with us. Like we do with the Community Evening, we invite all of them to come and bring their food, or a piece of literature or whatever... something they wear in their country... and if we get everybody to mix, that would mean that we would get to know them, and they would get to know us and how we do things here." (Milton Keynes, Woman, 50s).

A set of activities that had been tried and tested in Castle Vale and had success in attracting a mix of people were; trips to the seaside, plays and musicals; a Youth council; a Summer play scheme; cooking sessions in which parents were also involved; and including both younger and older people in shared activities (such as cooking, line-dancing, oral history, computers).

One other suggestion was for a 'befriending service', in which existing residents become friends with someone new to the area, through 1:1 meetings, on a family level, or through children in schools.

'As a community group, one thing we could do, with funding from the Government is have like integration grants from the Government, where if people come to the area from another country, we could be given maybe £50 per week per person, to actually show the people round and show them where the hospitals are and introduce them to members of the community so that they don't feel so isolated and withdraw into themselves' (Man, 50s, Runcorn/Widnes).

It was also pointed out that language occupies a crucial position, acting as a bridge or a dividing factor within communities. Many perceive that the ability to communicate and engage in general is based on the effort immigrants make when learning to speak English. Therefore, introductory language lessons (English and others) could be very helpful for communities to become confident to engage with others. Indeed it is hard to see how the activities mentioned above are sustainable without a parallel or overlapping programme of language acquisition.

Section 6

Conclusions

6.1 Contexts

The contexts from which our interviewees were speaking differed in terms of:

- 1) local BME populations and histories of migration;
- 2) levels of economic and environmental development; and
- 3) the type of frequency and quality of contacts with black and minority ethnic people.

These contexts strongly inform, if not determine, people's attitude toward a number of issues, including perceptions of black and minority ethnic people. It would be a simplistic equation to argue that poverty alone breeds hostility toward minorities. The situation is far more complex than that. The places where the Far right has been successful in British elections are not necessarily always those with the highest indices of deprivation scores, for example. However, on our evidence, people's feelings of discomfort with the physical and social environment appears as a significant contextual factor.

6.2 The Importance of the local

Local issues considered important were primarily to do with immediate experiences. These differed from place to place, depending especially on the quality of the physical and social environment. This means that in three of the four sites, immigration and integration were scarcely perceived as local issues at all. Two major if not particularly original conclusions to draw from this are first, that community cohesion and integration are hampered most by poverty and related socio-economic issues⁶; and second, local conditions are still very significant framing factors for any relationships between groups of people. This is not to say that an improvement in the physical and economic conditions of estates will lead to the disappearance of all hostile attitudes to minorities. Economic factors beyond the local frame are significant, and there is also a cultural element to racism that will be a lot more difficult to erode. However, the processes of democratically-based local development would contribute to the narrowing of the scope for the type of competition and vulnerability to such competition that seem to pervade much of what we hear in these interviews.

⁶ See also Hanley, 2007a; Stubbs, 2008 on this *specific* point, and an extensive academic literature, most recently and pertinently Hickman et al. (2008).

6.3 Social class as a source of identity

People experience their social position through a number of lenses, and an important one (necessarily in a project that focuses on the 'white poor') is social class. Over the last 20 years or so it has become increasingly difficult to talk about class in debate about policy, as the language of 'social exclusion' and 'disadvantage' have come to occupy the space that it held a generation ago⁷. However, people in this research seemed happy to refer, unprompted, to themselves and communities as 'working class', and the concerns they focused on are seen through a set of experiences that are clearly marked by class. The experience of being working class is still mediated by age, locality, gender, ethnicity, employment status, etc, but this does not make it irrelevant.

6.4 Integration or assimilation?

We asked all our interviewees what integration meant to them. It emerged strongly that a majority understand integration as meaning minorities giving up their identity and merging with the local one, i.e. assimilation. The limits of what this actually means in practice need to be tested by further work. However, it is clear that the official definition of integration as a 'two-way process' (Castles, et al, 2003), which a minority of our respondents had picked up on, is not the accepted one in this section of the public. Other qualitative research we have carried out elsewhere leads us to the same conclusion: most people think integration means assimilation. People involved in policy-making and communication messages around this topic need to clarify what 'integration' means, as opposed to assimilation, at a more popular level.

6.5 'Political correctness'

An important issue for further discussion is the amorphous ideological space referred to in shorthand as 'political correctness'. There are different ways in which this idea is used to describe obstacles to communication. A project dealing with developing a new language for talking about 'race', immigration and integration, such as that sought by the NCF, would need to unpack what people actually mean when they use this catch-all phrase. At present, the function of stories about political correctness appears to be to recast the power relations pertaining to the situations described so that the white majority assume the role of victims. Moreover, by labelling a speaker as 'politically correct', you can discredit an argument, consigning it to the realms of excess and irrationality. However, there is certainly a need to sort out what is genuinely unhelpful to dialogue on one hand, and what is actually protecting groups of people from abuse on the other. The right to freedom from racial abuse has been an advance struggled for over decades, and should emphatically not be given up.

⁷ See Lynsey Hanley's very accessible insider's discussion of how social class impacts upon every day life in British estates (Hanley, 2007). For a comprehensive discussion of class, see Devine et al. (2004).

Moreover, while political correctness and the issues pertaining to the local council are usually two separate topics, they can also be intertwined, and perceived as almost having a causal relationship. This is particularly noticeable in the Milton Keynes interviews, where on one hand the feelings of abandonment and being ignored by the Council as regards to obvious problems stands out: 'The Council tends to ignore us' (Man, 40s): his evidence is a rat-infested area and poor housing conditions. On the other hand, there is the perception of seemingly flourishing immigrants who get preference from the local authorities because these authorities want to avoid allegations of racism. For the local authorities, runs the argument, not being racist is preferable to being 'fair. This has contributed to 'having caused a lot of resentment in the area'. So, really the Council is seen as spineless, or without authority or power, because it is unable or unwilling to stand up for and make decisions in favour of residents. Again the question boils down to which residents are considered entitled and why.

6.6 Competition for resources

Where immigration and integration are discussed in depth as problematic, there is a focus on real or perceived competition for resources; housing, benefits, jobs, territory and national culture. Given the thrust of the British National Party's ideological attack on and twisting of the equality paradigm, this and the previous bullet point seem to indicate that; a) some degree of engagement has to be undertaken by authorities to address these types of issues positively, and b) some consultation is required in order to devise strategies aimed at winning back this ideological territory.

People express a desire for equality and a level playing field, not only in economic terms, but also in terms of ethnic groups (and even sections of ethnic groups). In this reading, there is injustice and unfairness because the same rules do not apply to everyone.

People tell stories about unfairness that convey emotional attachments to the idea that socio-economic conditions are stacked against white UK working class people and not necessarily against black and minority ethnic people. Yet the statistics for employment, income, imprisonment and educational achievement (especially that of boys) does not bear out the idea that black and minority ethnic communities in general are flourishing at the expense of the white working class.

Moreover, the associations made between contributions and membership cover not only immigrants but white locals seen as not playing by the rules or contributing properly. This must also be taken into consideration as one of the ways people define themselves as deserving and unfairly treated.

6.7 Responses to and perceptions of ethnic minorities

Our white interviewees' responses to minorities are far from universally negative. In fact, everything from indifference, through empathy, to a desire for more and better engagement, to anxiety was registered in these interviews.

The definition of racism outlined at 2.1 makes a distinction between a form of discrimination that is covered by existing UK law (institutional racism), and individual prejudice. We feel strongly that the current popular understanding of racism as *merely* constituting verbal and physical abuse hampers proper discussion. Absence of evidence of this in the interviewees' accounts does not mean there is 'no racism' in a given place. Indeed the assumption of non-entitlement to resources, based on skin colour, which some people express, is clearly a racist idea. While one major complaint about housing is that is distributed to people seen as not belonging to the area, the prior system of local and family connection operated to exclude people who were in need but not necessarily with as long a claim on living in that area. The relative homogeneity of some estates is therefore partly a function of how the local connection criteria served to reproduce the same group's residence patterns despite the demographic changes going on in the administrative area beyond its boundaries.

6.8 Contact

The NCF has commissioned and produced a separate report on contact and integration (Orton, 2008), so this concluding point will be relatively brief. In formulating and advocating policy, it should be clear that the kind of power relationship defined as constituting racism in this report is not only about individuals but about society and how that society functions. Social psychology theories such as 'contact theory' are derived from individual, and in more sophisticated incarnations, inter-group relations.⁸ They can be seen as complementary ways of understanding racism or ethnic conflict but should not be understood as capable of explaining the subject alone. The polls looked at in the NCF literature review (Garner, 2008) for example, suggest that more contact between white UK and black and minority ethnic people at leisure and in the home are indicators of more open attitudes, yet we are not sure which way round this relationship functions. Are people with more open attitudes already more likely to seek such contact in the first place? Opinion polls cannot tell us this, although the better empirical research might. Certainly, most of the people living in the four sites we have examined here did not have much contact outside the workplace with ethnic minorities, but this helps us understand neither the histories of the places in which they live nor their own biographies. Our conclusion is to acknowledge the importance of the local in shaping opinions, and to see the question of contact as one that requires more fleshing out before it forms the basis of policy.

⁸ The work of Miles Hewstone et al. on Northern Ireland, provides much more sophisticated examples (Turner et al., 2008; Tausch et al., 2006).

Section 7

Recommendations

7.1 Shared and consistent approaches

Evidence: There is an apparent correlation between empowerment, anti-poverty measures, the quality of physical environment and relatively positive attitudes. Whatever else is involved in changing people's opinions, it seems wise to recognise that this is a major framing factor: attitudes toward ethnic minorities do not develop in a vacuum.

Justification: Compartmentalising the aspects of the agendas (even though it might have an organisational logic) makes responses ineffective and does not allow the scope of the issues to be understood properly. Moreover, the frequently changing demarcation of governmental areas of responsibility hampers continuity and coherence. This is as true of central as of local government.

Recommendation 1

Establish shared and consistent approaches at national and local levels.

R1:

- The Department for Communities and Local Government's role is to collate agendas and offer associated guidance to local authorities;
- Local authorities need a lead member and officer. This then either rests with the LSP or Chief Executive's department; and
- Local authorities need to monitor this on an annual basis.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- Improved capacity for intervention because of dedicated staff whose job focus is horizontal, across the strands of government and local authority work, rather vertical
- Less duplication of effort and waste of resources. Aside from duplication, there should be less opportunity for one department to inadvertently inhibit or undermine work in another area (of which evidence has been found elsewhere (Hoggett et al., 2008))
- Improved responsiveness to local issues and less frustration for local people.

7.2 Reducing information deficits

Evidence: This research and similar exercises in the past few years point to yawning information deficit(s) and transparency issues particularly around resource distribution and migration.

Justification: One strand of anxiety among people who feel they are losing out in competition with various groups of minorities is to do with not having access to accurate information about migration and resource allocation other than the quite misleading emphasis and frequently flawed factual information available in the media, particularly the print media. This is not to say that there are not already initiatives in the field aimed at doing this, but that they are insufficient. In the absence of this issue being addressed, misinformation and unhelpful messages will continue to occupy the space where accurate information should be, thus exacerbating feelings of resentment and frustration that have been picked up in this and previous research. This is clearly an environment that makes people more vulnerable to disinformation, as witnessed in areas covered by the reports on Far-right activity covered in the NCF's literature review (Garner, 2008).

Recommendation 2

Establish plan and guidelines on what information is placed in the public domain on resource allocation and migration, and how it is disseminated.

R2:

- Local authorities need to identify what information should be included. This should be done partly in consultation with community groups. There is no point producing information in which nobody is interested
- In terms of provision, there needs to be one source of clearly worded information on what is spent, the various policies, who benefits and how to appeal, etc
- Central government could also produce some justifications or rationales for the various policies that local authorities have to implement, so that there can be consistency. Inconsistencies in the information available weakens the messages being conveyed; and
- The forms in which such information is communicated must be appropriate: contemporary communication technologies should also be included.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- A reduction in the scope for people to feel as though they are not being communicated with, which leads to feelings of powerlessness and neglect
- Better quality information should generate a clarification of policy and a better quality of debate and discussion about it
- One part of the struggle against Far-right mobilisation is to counter ideological messages. Having an authoritative source of information telling a single version of the story across the country, with comprehensible rationales and transparent bases will severely hamper one element of such groups' campaigning capacity.

7.3 Establishing a working definition of integration

Evidence: This and previous research has highlighted the variety of understandings of integration held by white UK people. If there is a spectrum whose two poles are 'assimilation' (as a one-way process of divesting oneself of one's cultural baggage) and 'integration' (as a two-way process of negotiating what to give up and what to retain, as well as where and when, and how), then the majority of people interviewed see it as much closer to assimilation than integration. Amidst this lack of clarity or consensus, desired policy outcomes are bound to be difficult to achieve.

Justification: Decision-makers as well as voters need to understand the difference between a two-way integration process, and a one-way assimilation process. What is each aimed at achieving? If clarification is not forthcoming, there will be a lot of talking at cross purposes and frustration around an agenda that people think they understand but do not. 'Trying to fit in', which was seen positively in all our sites, covers a wide range of actions, but this is too flimsy to be the content of a national policy with the ambition of forging a closer set of bonds between 60 million people. Moreover, if 'integration' also covers things to do with sharing resources and seeking to bring about good neighbourliness and peaceful, crime free and healthy places to live, then there is no reason why that agenda should focus only on new arrivals to the UK. The point is not so much to impose a top-down understanding, but to arrive at a shared set of understandings informed by local practice. The dialogue itself is part of the integration process. So in order to ensure that the two-way integration process becomes more acceptable than the one-way assimilation process, is for the communities themselves to 'own' and engage in the processes – with scope to be flexible. This is the alternative to one group controlling the process, whether one community, one association or a statutory body, etc. Part of this dialogue involves listening to and understanding the stories of another community, at a local level.

Recommendation 3

Develop an understanding about what the concept of 'integration' actually means in practice.

R3:

- Central government should clarify what exactly is meant by integration in the 'community cohesion and integration' agenda, *in practical terms*, so that local authorities can provide proper support for initiatives aiming to encourage integration
- This type of work must be carried out in the form of an extensive set of dialogues with national partners, eg community networks, the third sector, CEHR, the LGA
- Some questions that need to be answered and should form the basis of how authorities explain the policy to people are; what is 'integration' supposed to mean and why?; what is the policy aimed at achieving?; how does it benefit the working and middle classes (including black and minority ethnic people)?
- The conclusions from the dialogues then have to be disseminated in appropriate formats (see R2 above) in order to maximise penetration of messages.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- Increased focus for policy-makers
- Increased sense of ownership for local stakeholders (having been consulted about what it is they are supposed to be doing)
- Avoidance of waste of time and other resources that are generated by poorly understood policy parameters.

7.4 Targeted dialogue

Recommendation 3 leads into number 4, which aims to initiate dialogue around a particular obstacle – as seen by white working-class residents – that of 'political correctness'.

Evidence: Within the community cohesion agenda, a focus on one very broadly drawn 'community'; here white working-class people living in social housing, allows some communication gaps to appear. We see community cohesion as also involving groups other than these; both the white UK people who live in middle-class residential areas, and black and minority ethnic people, wherever they live in the UK, have roles to play in this process. The people we talked to here seemed to be on one level, isolated from both these groups. Without meaningful contact, there is a need for dialogue, *around specific topics*, to begin the process of cohesion.

In terms of 'pc', qualitative interviewing in the last five years, including this report's data, has evidenced a great deal of frustration among both working and middle-class interviewees on a range of social issues that have membership of the national community as a common thread. One recurrent theme in the responses is the idea that 'political correctness', or 'pc' is interfering in relations between people and the authorities, and between different groups of people. To an extent this might be driven by media reports: in some cases there is no evidence to support the assertions that someone somewhere 'banned' Christmas, or told all the employees to take down Christmas cards so they did not offend Muslim co-workers, etc. Other elements of this problem are to do with perceptions about funding decisions favouring minorities (see Section 4), or about language that used to be acceptable but now is not. We feel that given the national breadth of the response, this area is a useful one to explore using a process of dialogue. The National Community Forum (NCF) is ideally placed to take this strand of the work forward, in combination with other interested agencies, such as the CEHR.

Justification: Dialogue at all socio-economic levels: this research focused on white working-class communities, but the challenge of community cohesion is surely to make the various groups cohere, so the dialogic element has to be extended to include black and minority ethnic people in estates, as well as middle-class residential areas. These places should not be left off the map of community cohesion just because the socio-economic indicators seem largely unproblematic. Everyone has a role to play in the dialogue and the sharing of resources. The second element is for a dialogue about common experiences. Part of the frustration and resentment about resource allocation seems to be fuelled by the idea that people who are not entitled (a problematic logic that needs to be unpicked as well) just walk into good quality accommodation, etc., at the expense of the local white people. Black and minority ethnic tenants of social housing, asylum-seekers and migrant workers all have experiences of living in poor quality housing and in restrictive conditions to do with their immigration status and the rules governing this, as well as facing racism on the private rented market. Exposure to this information on a first-hand basis from people who have actually been through these things ought to create some empathy that is part and parcel of redefining the community as more cohesive and inclusive.

The Commission on Integration and Cohesion identified that a strategic objective for cohesion would be for 'all communities being able to air their grievances and concerns, but for those discussions to have clear ground rules'. Its report states that white groups in particular felt unable to discuss their concerns for fear of being labelled as racist and recommended that, 'Racism can never be pandered to, but it is important for the ground rules of discussions to give room for honest feelings to be aired, and then managed by skilled mediators' (CIC, 2007: 95).

Using the 'pc-gone-mad' argument may well perform the function of neatly putting a variety of complicated social changes into one basket, or it may undermine someone else's argument if you call it 'pc'. There is no prescriptive definition of this, or agreement about what function 'pc' serves in the way people talk about contemporary Britain. However, to improve the context in which people relate to each other, there is a need to break 'pc' down into manageable slices in order to distinguish the helpful from the unhelpful in relation to ethnic minorities and equality. Where is the evidence for example that Muslims in Britain are 'offended' by Christmas, or that people of African origin are upset by the term 'black coffee' when buying a hot drink? The ideas that these are incontrovertible truths, and that 'they' -are making us talk and think in a particular way- are unfortunately very widespread, and require addressing, because they constitute part of the ideological context in which hostility flourishes.

There are four things to take into consideration here.

First, the dialogue itself is the key element here, as its roles: building bridges and generating reflection on others' stories, may develop a momentum that can hopefully be used to address other topics. The focus on 'pc' is a starting point, rather than the end point. Language is very important culturally, but it will not resolve the material inequalities that form part of people's lives. It is our conclusion, based on the associations made in interviews about what makes white UK people feel anxious, that discussion of 'pc' will almost certainly lead to discussion of social inequalities beyond those to do with black and minority ethnic and migrant communities.

Second, an initiative of this kind would undermine the arguments of those who wish to contest the advances in equality made over recent decades, as well as acknowledge the doubts of a much larger group who genuinely need convincing, and want the stakes explained. This latter group, our research suggests, want to be talked and listened 'to' rather than patronised. The local pilots must involve white and black and minority ethnic representatives talking about what people think are useful and not so useful elements of what is called 'PC', and take what they say as the starting point for policy.

Third, discussions about a policy initiative should not take place from the top down because that replicates an element of 'pc' that people identify in interviews as being annoying (its imposed and patronising character).

Recommendation 4

That the Department for Communities and Local Government develop forms of local dialogue; both between socio-economic groups and between white UK and black and minority ethnic groups around particular issues, such as, in this case, 'political correctness'

R4:

- This process should be piloted by the Department for Communities and Local Government in partnership with other bodies, such as the CEHR
- Local groups should be involved from the outset to define the objectives and mechanisms of the work
- One of the outcomes should be a tool kit for all local authorities, who will be funded, after the pilots have been evaluated, to carry out their own local exercises
- Some of the ideas put forward for integration activities on a local level by our respondents could also form part of the basis of dialogue.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- Reduction in tensions that derive from the idea that migrant and black and minority ethnic groups are advantaged as a matter of policy in the social housing sector
- The development of inter-ethnic and inter-class relationships between community groups. This can be within local spaces but also across them within the same town, city or rural area
- Stressing the local over the national fits in more with the way people articulate their own identities, and focusing on estates, wards or even sections of cities and towns would correspond more closely to the way governance is understood from the bottom up
- That people who feel frustration and/or hostility because of what they see as 'pc' placing them in the position of victims will feel listened to. This recognition will reduce a degree of the frustration with policy. It would no longer be possible to say that 'they' were not explaining anything, or 'imposing' ways of thinking and talking
- The actual dialogue will entail contact with other groups that enhances understanding of what is common ground, and what is not. Both can then be addressed by further policy
- The act of collectively clarifying what is at stake will help people to distinguish measures established to protect communities from verbal abuse, or to assist them in a context of previous forms of institutional discrimination, for example, from rumours that have assumed a life of their own and are based on dubious assumptions.

Section 8

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire

NB Bullets are points to catch up on if they are not covered by the respondent's answer.

Part 1: Feelings towards local area

How would you describe your area to a stranger?

How do you feel about living here?

- Changes that have taken place during the time the interviewee has lived there.
- An assessment of the plus and minus points about living there.

What could be done to improve the local area?

Who would you say is responsible for improving the local area?

*The other sections need not be covered in that order, as long as they are covered.
Numbering is not important from this point on.*

Part 2: Feelings towards local authority

What do you think of the service(s) provided by your local council?

- What the local authority does or doesn't do (perceived as problems by the interviewee)
- What things the local authority does that are seen as positive.
- Can you think of anything your local authority could do to improve your local area?

Part 3: National authority

What are your biggest concerns on a *national* level in this country?

- How would you tackle those problems?

Integration

What do the terms 'cohesion' and 'integration' mean to you?

How does someone go from being an outsider to becoming a member of their community?

Appendix 2:

Statistical Information on the Research Sites

1. Castle Vale is part of Tyburn Ward, Birmingham, for whom figures can be found at the following sites:

i) Birmingham City Council: http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/GenerateContent?CONTENT_ITEM_ID=1331&CONTENT_ITEM_TYPE=0&MENU_ID=5520&EXPAND=231

ii) Office for National Statistics' *Neighbourhood Statistics* site:

<http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadAreaSearch.do?a=3&r=1&i=1001&m=0&s=1231260433372&enc=1&areaSearchText=tyburn&areaSearchType=14&extendedList=false>

iii) However, in the statistics available through NOMIS, the ONS' official labour market statistics website (<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>), Kingsbury ward boundaries are used instead of Tyburn's:

<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/ward/1308627802/report.aspx>

2. Thetford-Abbey Ward

Information is available from the following two sources:

i) Office for National Statistics' *Neighbourhood Statistics* site:

<http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadDomainList.do?a=3&c=t&hetford&d=14&i=1001x1002&m=0&r=1&s=1231260657153&enc=1&areald=6101084&OAAreald=469512>

ii) The Keystone Trust's profile of Thetford:

<http://www.keystonetrust.org.uk/common/pdfs/thetfordprofile.pdf>

3. The residents of **Halton Housing Trust** whom we interviewed are spread over a number of electoral wards in Runcorn and Widnes. The figures here are those presented for the whole unitary authority, and therefore can only give a broad overview. The source for these is: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/profiles/printV/00ET-A.asp>

4. In **Milton Keynes**, statistics relating to Coffee Hall, Netherfield and Beanhill estates are available from the Milton Keynes Intelligence Observatory www.mkiobservatory.org.uk, and the specific profiles are listed below.

i) Coffee Hall:

<http://www.mkiobservatory.org.uk/Download/Public/1026/DOCUMENT/6980/Coffee%20Hall%20estate.pdf>

ii) Netherfield:

<http://www.mkiobservatory.org.uk/Download/Public/1026/DOCUMENT/7035/Netherfield%20estate.pdf>

iii) Beanhill:

<http://www.mkiobservatory.org.uk/Download/Public/1026/DOCUMENT/6955/Beanhill%20estate.pdf>

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