



Cohesion programme builds stronger communities

Successful implementation of the Government's 'Prevent Violent Extremism' (PVE) programme has made Peterborough an exemplar to other local authorities across the country.

Peterborough's commitment to community cohesion is also evident from its adoption of National Indicator 35 'Building Resilience to Violent Extremism' – the only area in the East of England to do so.

One initiative – the launch on 30 July 2009 of a Muslim Women's Forum – will be showcased at a Prevent conference in Birmingham on Tuesday 8 December 2009. The foundation for the forum was laid when 15 professional women volunteers participated in a leadership empowerment course with support from the Leadership Centre for Local government (LCLG).

The forum is now promoting the role of women in maintaining a peaceful society and strengthening the concept of supportive families. Members are working with four local primary schools running groups on the theme of parenting. Workshops have also been held to help mothers recognise and understand the dangers posed by internet sites and drug abuse.

In addition, efforts are being made to arrange ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) training to enhance the capabilities of Muslim women to engage with the wider community.

It is hoped that Muslim women will be encouraged to launch new business ventures and develop other career aspirations with the help of a Women's Enterprise Centre, which has been established by Peterborough City Council in a former shop unit in Peterborough City Centre.

Another initiative has focused on the role of 12 Imams in five local mosques. ESOL training for Imams was arranged in 2007 and in February 2009 four Imams were enrolled on an inter-faith chaplaincy course provided by Markfield Institute of Higher Education in Leicester.

The participants also undertook 60 hours of voluntary work at Edith Cavell Hospital, Thomas Deacon Academy, Anglia Ruskin University and Oakington Detention Centre in Cambridge. Building on this success, the Imams are now hoping to arrange community-based 'myth-busting' sessions to aid understanding of the Islamic faith and it is hoped that up to 12 teachers from different faith related educational institutions will be enrolled on a Preparing for Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTTLS) course.

Further progress towards greater community cohesion was marked in November 2009 when a women's section was launched by the previously all-male Senior Citizens' Association Central Ward. The association was founded in 2007 with 15 members now has over 108 male members and 30 female members.

Peterborough was also successful in bidding for Migration Impact Funds to: improve secondary school teaching among children from minority ethnic new arrival (MENA) groups; employ more bilingual teaching assistants so that pupils from settled communities can be helped to improve their literacy skills; and expand English lessons for speakers of other languages and offer EU language training to frontline service staff;

Other community cohesion initiatives have included: theatre-in-education performances for secondary school and college students; a Free-D Forum on British foreign policy in the Middle East led by a senior Foreign Office official; the launch of a grant scheme to support community cohesion initiatives; and an Inter-Faith Exhibition coinciding with the DCLG inspired Inter-Faith Week.