Institute of Community Cohesion

Far Right Electoral and other Activity: the Challenge for Community Cohesion

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Contents

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Summary

Since 2001 the numbers of votes cast for the British National Party (BNP) at general elections has grown from under 50,000 to over 550,000 and the Party has become an established part of the electoral scene. In 2009 the BNP won two seats in the European parliament and regarded itself as on the brink of a breakthrough into mainstream politics. However, its performance in 2010 saw it fail to make any headway in terms of parliamentary seats and lose half its council seats. This led many commentators to declare that the BNP had peaked.

That analysis fails to recognise the overall growth in the number of votes cast for the party at the 2010 general election and the fact that in most of the comparable constituencies where the party had stood in both 2005 and 2010 its share of the vote increased. Comparison of the results at the two elections does show a general decline in support in what had been seen as previous BNP strongholds. This suggests that there is a *broadening* rather than a *deepening* of support for the BNP. This has implications for the way in which we might respond to the BNP and its messages. While the electoral threat may have receded somewhat, the pernicious effects of BNP activities on community cohesion may be spreading ever wider into areas with less experience of dealing with community tensions.

The decline in electoral success but broadening of support for the BNP coincides with a dramatic increase in the profile and activities of the English Defence League (EDL). The EDL is not, at least currently, interested in electoral politics but in demonstrating, often violently. Much of its support and structure is based on 'firms' of football supporters. Although ostensibly only concerned with Muslim extremism, in practice the EDL has consistently portrayed an aggressively anti-Muslim stance. For many commentators the EDL is now seen as a greater threat to community cohesion than the BNP.

There are differing views as to how best to combat the threat of the EDL. Unite Against Fascism (UAF) and Hope not Hate (HnH) both challenge far right extremist groups but whereas UAF believe that a counter demonstration shows that the EDL are not welcomed in an area, HnH believes this simply encourages EDL violence and raises its profile.

The very nature of community cohesion programmes is such that they address far right extremism by focusing on building trust between disparate groups and minimising intolerance and the fear of difference in all communities. However, experience to date has shown that we will also need to encourage honest and open discussions about the genuine grievances that people have and what they see as a threat to our collective identity. We are no longer able to rely on the old approach to the far right of 'ignore them: do not give them the oxygen of publicity'. This has played into the hands of the far right who have been able to present themselves as the only ones who are willing to discuss race and migration issues and who are 'not afraid to raise the concerns of ordinary people.'

Community cohesion techniques have proven to be productive and useful tools in tackling prejudice and stereotypes of all kinds and there is now a plethora of research based evidence in support of 'contact theory'. But community cohesion is much more than an interaction process. Cohesion programmes also have to build respect for people and communities that are 'different' from ourselves and crucially, therefore, must begin to change the collective mindset so that people are prepared to embrace diversity as positive rather than see it as a threat.

People also need to have a sense of belonging, whether it be in a small town, a city or a local neighbourhood - where everyone can identify with and recognise the shared interests and the benefits that everyone brings to 'their' communities. Many local authorities up and down the country have already started to do this, for example, by 'branding' their town or city as a cohesive 'one community' in some way and by indicating the value they place on diversity, at every opportunity.

Much recent migration, particularly from Eastern Europe, has been to parts of the country with little previous experience of migration. This, together with the fact that BNP activity is now spread much more widely, means that many areas are now having to address cohesion challenges for the first time.

This approach is not as 'pain free' as it might appear. Firstly, it means recognising – as opinion polls and other work have shown - that many people do have real concerns about migration and change within their neighbourhoods. We dismiss these concerns as 'ignorant' or 'racist' at our peril.

Neither is this a static position in which the arguments can be had and resolved, it needs to be an ongoing process of engagement which recognises that communities are constantly changing. Local authorities and their partners therefore need to have a better understanding of the changing nature of 'difference' in their local communities and constantly monitor tensions.

There is also a need to engage with communities in different ways. In particular, it is dangerous to depend upon self-appointed community leaders who may simply be the community 'gatekeeper' and who use their position to control communications to preserve their position of influence. We need to develop a new model of 'gateway' community leaders who are willing and able to open their communities to wider and more varied influences and to empower them to do things for themselves. It is therefore also necessary to have a much better 'map' of local communities which is constantly updated to reflect the changing patterns of diversity – and also to recognise the diversity within particular communities. The focus of the Prevent agenda on a particular faith group (Muslims) resulted in Muslim communities being perceived as 'the problem' in the eyes of others and distracted attention from legitimate issues and concerns.

Tension monitoring is crucial to pre-empting the negative impact of campaigns by the EDL and the far right generally. This requires the whole community to work together to share communication, reduce tensions and provide reassurance. This needs to include minority and majority communities, the voluntary sector, statutory organisations, police, local business and other interested agencies/parties. Wherever possible, these opportunities for wider engagement should be used to measure, as well as create, a positive 'climate of opinion' in the area.

1. Introduction

The Institute of Community Cohesion (iCoCo) has consistently scrutinised support for far right movements in order to stay abreast of community tensions and as a measure of the way people think about diversity – the far right remains implacably opposed to a Britain based upon multiple heritages.

The Institute's principal focus has been on UK elections where parties such as the British National Party (BNP) have enjoyed growing success over the last ten years. It should be recognised that while much of the far right's activities fall within the democratic framework and that the BNP has legitimate political party status, they inevitably stir up hatred towards minorities, with little concern for the fear and divisions that develop within and between communities. The legitimate far right parties are also often accompanied by an illegal fringe element whose activities are often of a criminal nature and cause even greater concern in communities.

In terms of membership, candidates and votes cast, the BNP have become the flag bearers for far right activists in the UK. These activities are relatively easy to track year by year and do therefore serve as a proxy for far right support more generally.

However, in the last year or so, the English Defence League (EDL) has become very active and with a particular focus on the Muslim community. The EDL has little interest, as yet, in electoral activity and rather concentrates on protesting and campaigning at street level. In this sense, they are a much bigger threat to community harmony and create a high level of fear and anxiety in minority communities, especially amongst Muslims.

Further, a number of commentators are now including UKIP under the banner of 'the far right'. In electoral terms, they are also growing and appear to adopt a somewhat xenophobic tone. Though their propaganda is not overtly racist, they appear to be competing for something of the same territory, leaving some observers to claim that they have become the middle class extremist voters' preference.

We therefore have to think about the far right in broader terms: how we measure their support and how we respond to the challenge they pose to community cohesion.

2. The growth of support for the far right

2.1 Electoral support for the BNP and other far right parties

In terms of membership, candidates and votes cast, the BNP are clearly the largest group of far right activists in the UK. However, there are also one or two other unequivocally far right parties that contest elections, albeit on a more localised basis. These various electoral activities are relatively easy to track year by year and can therefore serve as a proxy for changes in far right support more generally.

As an indication of their growth, at the 2001 General Election the British National Party picked up just 47,000 votes. By 2005 this had grown to 192,000 and at the 2010 election their vote grew to 563,000 – well over twice the 2005 figure. Though this is only half of the near one million votes they received at the European elections a year earlier, the overall trend is clearly upward.

In 2009 the BNP had spectacular successes in the European elections, returning 2 MEPs (Nick Griffin and Andrew Brons) and capturing 943,598 votes in total in England, Scotland and Wales (the BNP put forward no candidates in Northern Ireland). This compares to 808,200 votes received in 2004 and with no seats won.

From an analysis viewpoint, the advantage of the Party List system in the European elections is that it provides a clearer look at geographic support for the British National Party and its policies. With the effects of the UK's simple majority system removed and without the issue of local personalities skewing results, the spread of voting for the party is far more indicative of the current level of support it enjoys amongst UK voters. Offset against this, however, is the perception that the European elections are of lesser importance than the national elections and therefore provide a more attractive context for protest voting. In addition, turnout for the European elections has historically been low in the UK. In 2009 the turnout for the UK was 34.5% (34.3% for Britain).

Table 2.1 shows the regional distribution of votes for the BNP in the European elections. The North West and Yorkshire and Humber, where BNP candidates were elected, are highlighted.

Table 2.1 BNP votes and vote share European elections 2009

Regions	Eligible Electorate	Valid Votes (total)	BNP	
			Vote share (%)	Votes (total)
North West	5,207,282	1,651,825	8	132,094
West Midlands	4,056,370	1,413,036	9	121,967
Yorkshire & the Humber	3,788,761	1,226,180	10	120,139
East Midlands	3,312,592	1,228,065	9	106,319
South East	6,231,875	2,334,858	4	101,769
Eastern	4,252,669	1,603,340	6	97,013
London	5,257,624	1,751,026	5	86,420
South West	3,998,479	1,549,708	4	60,889
North East	1,939,709	589,862	9	52,700
Wales	2,252,311	684,520	5	37,114
Scotland	3,872,975	1,104,512	2	27,174

Support for the party was concentrated in the English Midlands and the North of the country, as was the case with the local elections. However, the party also made some notable inroads into Wales and the East of England. Support elsewhere remains sporadic, but the penetration of Wales is surprising, particularly when it is considered that BNP involvement there has only been relatively recent. How much penetration of Scotland and Wales can be achieved is still open to debate, especially when nationalist parties such as the Scottish National Party are also very much in contention with what they see as 'the London parties'. However, it is notable that the EDL are also very active in Scotland.

While the returns in the local elections in 2009 were not as dramatic and represent a downturn in total votes cast for the party at 170,865 (and 11.2% vote share) compared to the previous year, the BNP nonetheless increased its total number of councillors to approximately 59 by returning 3 councillors in county councils for the first time. Local elections are not directly comparable year by year, because different authorities are on different electoral cycles. The 2009 elections were heavily focussed on county council areas and are therefore more directly comparable to 2005, when the BNP only achieved around 23,000 votes.

The General and local elections in 2010 were amongst the most important in the party's history. The BNP fielded more than 1,000 candidates in local elections and 300 in the general election. Nick Griffin challenged the then Minister for Culture and Tourism, Margaret Hodge MP, in Barking and BNP deputy chairman Simon Darby stood in Stoke Central. Both were represented as having a chance of winning a seat. The results represented an unexpected reverse for the BNP. No seats were gained in the national elections, and the party experienced losses in the local elections, most notably in Barking and Dagenham, where all twelve BNP councillors were ousted.

Table 2.2 shows the number of elected councillors for all parties in the 2010 local elections.[1] As can be seen in this table, after many years of slowly growing the party's presence on local councils the BNP lost over half its councillors. Taken with the failure of the party to break through in the General Election, the prognosis from many commentators was that the BNP had peaked.

Table 2.2 : Councillors elected by party, UK local elections 2010

	Councils		Councillors	
Party	Total	Net +/-	Total	Net +/-
Conservative	66	-8	3447	-119
Labour	37	15	2945	412
Liberal Democrat	14	-3	1714	-129
Others	0	0	286	-107
Residents Association	0	0	63	0
Green	0	0	35	-9
British National Party	0	0	19	-27
Liberal	0	0	12	0
UK Independence Party	0	0	9	-4
Independent Health Concern	0	0	8	-2
Respect	0	0	4	-8

In the immediate aftermath of both elections, Nick Lowles of the 'Hope-Not-Hate' campaign, which actively opposed the BNP, suggested that their results were disastrous and would have far-reaching consequences for the party and Griffin. Matthew Goodwin, a leading academic on the British far right, stated:[2]

> "The BNP looks set to implode. Griffin may hang on but, if he does, it will only be because there is no easy way to oust him and no obvious successor. He had plans to expand his reach. Now he is fighting to survive."

Griffin has nevertheless hung on, even though the BNP continues to experience a great deal of inner turmoil, a feature which had also preceded the election and may have contributed to its poor showing. The BNP campaign may have collapsed in part at least, as a result of the very first televised debates which focused the electorate's minds on the competition between the mainstream parties and the gains of the Liberal Democrat leader in the early stages of the election. The minority parties' air time was completely squeezed. It also had to be said that much work was done on the ground by the mainstream political parties and many other organisations focussed on combating the far right – especially in Barking and Dagenham.

However, the euphoria which accompanied the reverses suffered by the BNP served to disguise a number of surprising results. Whilst many of the media

[1] http://news.bbc.co.uk/nol/shared/election2010/council/html/region_99999.stm
[2] *Guardian*, 14 may 2010, "General election2010: the defeat of the BNP" http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/may/14/general-election-2010-fall-bnp

reports concentrated on the failure of the party to secure itself a parliamentary seat, as we have seen earlier, the total votes cast for the BNP were surprisingly high and represented a very considerable increase on the total for 2005. Table 2.3. shows the total number of votes received by all parties in the 2010 general election.[3]

Table 2.3: Seats won, votes cast and net change for all parties, UK General election2010

Party	Seats	Gain	Loss	Net	Votes	%	+/-%
Conservative	306	100	3	97	10,706,647	36.1	3.8
Labour	258	3	94	-91	8,604,358	29	-6.2
Liberal Democrat	57	8	13	-5	6,827,938	23	1
UK Independence Party	0	0	0	0	917,832	3.1	0.9
British National Party	0	0	0	0	563,743	1.9	1.2
Scottish National Party	6	0	0	0	491,386	1.7	0.1
Others	1	1	1	0	319,891	1.1	0
Green	1	1	0	1	285,616	1	-0.1
Democratic Unionist Party	8	0	1	-1	168,216	0.6	-0.3
Sinn Fein	5	0	0	0	171,942	0.6	-0.1
Plaid Cymru	3	1	0	1	165,394	0.6	-0.1
Social Democratic & Labour Party	3	0	0	0	110,970	0.4	-0.1
Ulster Conservatives and Unionists - New Force	0	0	1	-1	102,361	0.3	-0.1
English Democrats	0	0	0	0	64,826	0.2	0.2
Alliance Party	1	1	0	1	42,762	0.1	0
Respect-Unity Coalition	0	0	1	-1	33,251	0.1	-0.1
Traditional Unionist Voice	0	0	0	0	26,300	0.1	
Christian Party	0	0	0	0	18,623	0.1	
Independent Community and Health Concern	0	0	1	-1	16,150	0.1	0
Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition	0	0	0	0	12,275	0	
Scottish Socialist Party	0	0	0	0	3,157	0	-0.1
				Turr	**29,653,638**	**65.1**	**4**

The total number of votes received by the BNP was, as we have seen, in excess of half a million (563,743). While this figure represented a mere 1.9 % of the overall vote, it represents a very substantial increase in support for the BNP at a general election, up from 192,746 in 2005 and just 47,000 in 2001. Had the number of votes the party received been translated proportionally, the BNP would have won 12 parliamentary seats.

It is also of interest to note that, excluding the three major parties (Conservatives, Labour, and Liberal Democrats), the next most popular parties in the general election were the UK Independent Party and the BNP, two parties with right-wing traits. UKIP and the BNP between them garnered 1,481,575 votes. Again, if these votes were directly translated into seats the two parties between them would have won around 32 seats. By way of comparison, the Scottish National Party, won 6 seats with just 491,386 votes. It appears that the nature of the UK electoral system also helped to mask the extent of voter support for the BNP (and UKIP).

[3] BBC, Election 2010 Webpage, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/election2010/results/

The BNP, unsurprisingly, was keen to point out the relative success of the party and this is especially the case in certain constituencies. Table 2.4 shows a list of 19 constituencies where the BNP feel they did particularly well in the 2010 general election. In these 19 areas the lowest vote share received was 7.6 % (Ashton-Under-Lyne) while the highest was in Barking and Dagenham (14.6 %) where the Chairman of the BNP, Nick Griffin, unsuccessfully stood.

Table 2.4 : Successful constituencies as identified by the BNP in the UK general election2010

Constituency	Candidate	Votes	Vote share (%)
Ashton-Under-Lyne	David Lomas	2,929	7.6
Barking	Nick Griffin	6,620	14.6
Barnsley Central	Ian Sutton	3,307	8.9
Barnsley East	Colin Porter	3,301	8.6
Burnley	Sharon Wilkinson	3,747	9.1
Dagenham & Rainham	Michael Barnbrook	4,952	11.2
Leeds Central	Kevin Meeson	3,066	8.2
Leeds East	Trevor Brown	2,947	7.8
Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford	Graham Thewlis-Hardy	3,864	8.4
Rother Valley	Will Blair	3,616	7.7
Rotherham	Marlene Guest	3,906	10.4
Sheffield Brightside	John Sheldon	3,026	7.8
Stoke-on-Trent Central	Simon Darby	2,502	7.7
Stoke-on-Trent North	Melanie Baddeley	3,196	8.0
Stoke-on-Trent South	Michael Coleman	3,762	9.4
Thurrock	Emma Colgate	3,618	7.9
Walsall North	Christopher Woodall	2,930	8.1
Wentworth & Dearne	George Baldwin	3,189	7.6
West Bromwich West	Russ Green	3,394	9.4

As the BNP pointed out, in all 19 constituencies their vote exceeded the 7.5 % cut-off point for representation as proposed in the then provisional reform plans suggested by the Liberal Democratic Party.[4]

Nick Griffin's share of the vote in Barking was slightly lower than the 2005 election (although there had been some change to the constituency boundary). However, elsewhere the BNP has grown its support base and can be considered third or fourth choice in a number of constituencies. Where previously such support was discernible at the local elections only, it would appear that in 2010 the BNP succeeded in growing support in the general election, though at a financial cost. The elections left the party badly in debt and a number of costly legal actions during the past year (related to membership of the party) have also added to financial pressures on the BNP.

The by-election in Oldham East and Saddleworth in January 2011 may not offer much in terms of general lessons – the former Labour MP had been forced out following dubious electoral practices in which unfair statements had been made against the Liberal Democrat candidate. The minority parties were

[4] Ibid

in fact little changed in terms of total votes compared with the 2010 result, with UKIP 2,029 (5.8%) and the BNP 1,560 (4.5%).

In March 2011 a further by-election took place in Barnsley with UKIP taking second place behind Labour, with 2,953 votes, the Conservatives squeezed into third place (1,999 votes) followed by the BNP with 1,463 votes. The Liberal Democrats finished sixth behind an Independent candidate. UKIP increased its share of the vote from 4.7% to 12.2% compared to the General Election in 2010 and the BNP share went down from 8.9% to 5.2%, though the English Democrats, who had not stood in 2010, polled 2.2% of the vote.

The 2011 local elections in May will provide further evidence of the strength of underlying support for the far right.

Comparing the 2010 and 2005 general election results

The picture which has been painted so far of BNP support is a mixed one. On the one hand there has been a dramatic increase in the numbers of people voting for the party between the 2001 and 2010 general elections, and the capture of two seats in the European parliament, on the other the party failed to make any breakthrough in the 2010 general election and lost half its local council seats. A constituency by constituency comparison of the BNP results in 2005 and 2010 can help to shed more light on what is going on.

In 2005 the BNP put forward candidates in 119 constituencies. In 2010 they had far more candidates and stood for the first time in many new areas. Part of the reason for their growth in overall votes was simply that they fielded more candidates, but this also of course reflects an increased confidence and capacity.

We are able to compare results from the 2005 general election with those of 2010 in the same constituencies. This ensures that the comparisons are being made between votes cast under the same electoral system, in the same constituencies and with the same general public attitudes towards the importance of the elections, albeit in a rather different context.

Of the 119 constituencies in which the BNP put candidates forward in 2005, there are 38 that are not directly comparable with 2010 results due either to the BNP not fielding a candidate in 2010 or boundary changes. Table 2.5 compares performance between the two elections:

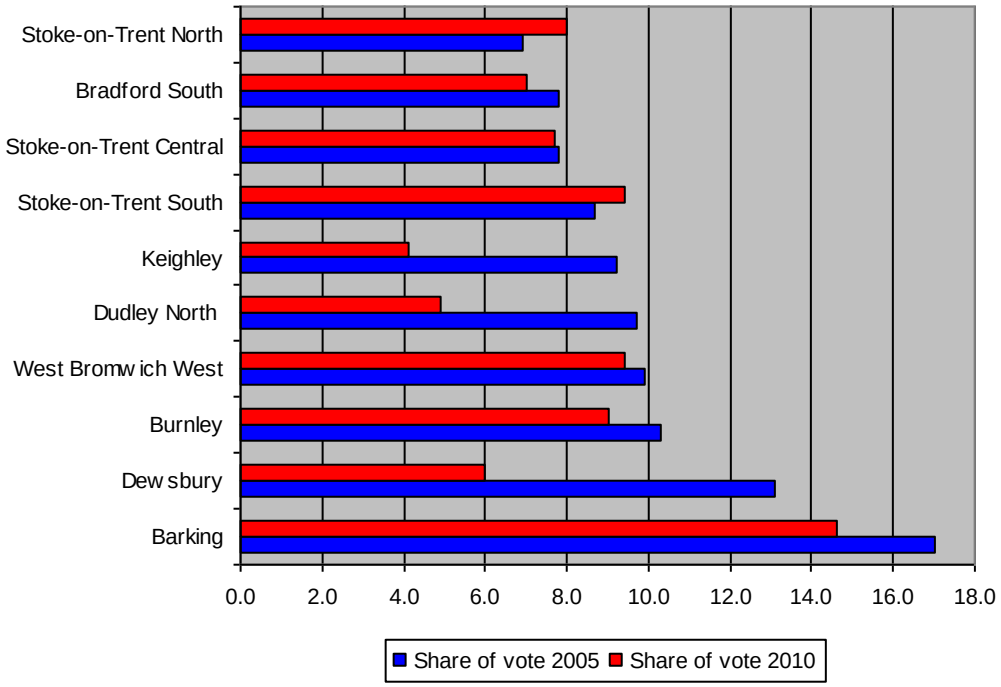
Table 2.5: BNP change in share of vote by constituency in 2005 & 2010

2010 Result compared to 2005	Number of constituencies
Gained a larger share of the vote in 2010	61
Gained the same share of the vote in 2010	3
Gained a smaller share of the vote in 2010	17
Candidate not put forward in 2010	16
Constituency boundary and/or name changed	22

The table clearly demonstrates that in the 81 comparable constituencies where the BNP put forward candidates in both the 2005 and 2010 General Elections, they generally made gains: 61 seats saw an increased share of the vote and only 17 a decrease. The average share of votes cast in these 81 constituencies increased from 4.6% in 2005 to 5.4% in 2010.

However as Table 2.6 shows, this growth in far right electoral support was generally not reflected in those areas with the strongest history of voting for the far right . Drawing only from the 81 comparable constituencies the bar chart shows the 10 constituencies which received the largest share of votes cast for the BNP in 2005 and compares this with result for 2010:

Table 2.6: Performance in the ten comparable constituencies in which the BNP gained the largest share of the vote in 2005 compared with performance in 2010

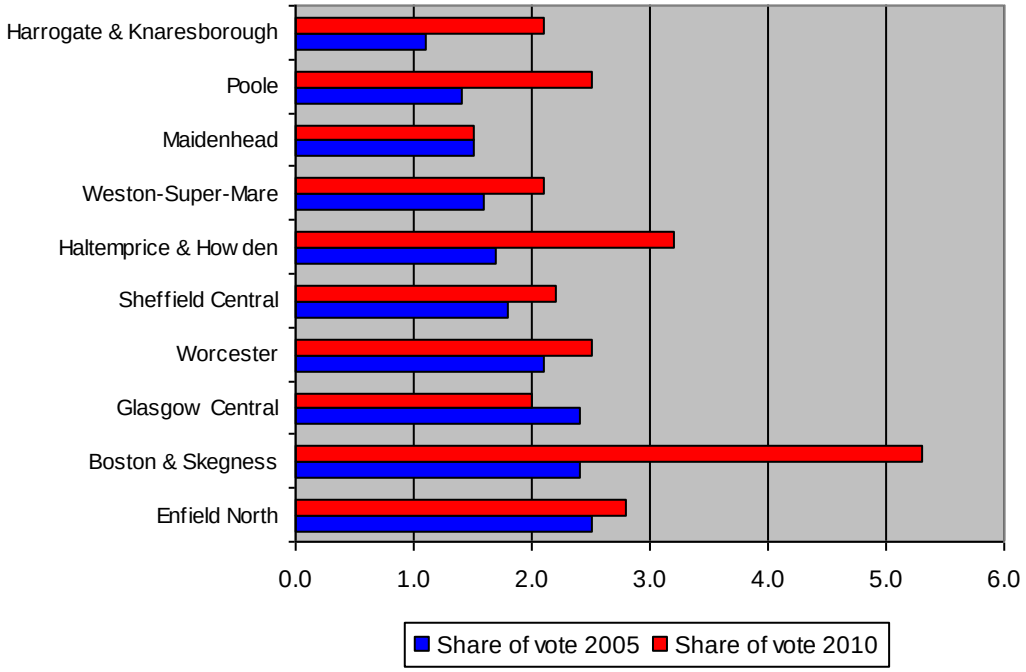


In only two constituencies, both in Stoke, was there an increased share of the vote in 2010, the other eight saw decreases. In the case of Dewsbury, Dudley North and Keighley there were large swings away from the BNP with

shares of the vote falling from 13.1% to 6.0%, 9.7% to 4.9% and 9.2% to 4.1% respectively.

In contrast to this is the evidence of increasing BNP support in areas with previously very small numbers of BNP voters. Figure 2.7 shows, from the 81, the 10 constituencies in which the BNP secured their lowest shares of votes cast in 2005, compared with how they performed in 2010.

Table 2.7: Performance in the ten comparable constituencies in which the BNP gained the smallest share of the vote in 2005, compared with performance in 2010



Though the percentage share of votes cast still remains low (except Boston & Skegness) it is clear that the BNP gained ground in 8 of the 10 constituencies and only lost ground in 1. In 4 of the constituencies the percentage share of votes won in 2010 was either, close to or more than, double that of 2005.

This could be indicative of the BNP gaining a much larger acceptance in the public's mind as a legitimate political party and being seen less as an extreme choice. It would certainly seem to be the case that the BNP is increasing its share of the total votes cast whilst at the same time becoming less concentrated in specific areas.

However, Table 2.8 may indicate the BNP's lack of capacity, or a clear strategy, in terms of constituency targeting (with the exception of the more obvious 'strongholds'). This table shows the 16 constituencies where the BNP put candidates forward in the 2005 General Election but then failed to put candidates forward in 2010:

Table 2.8: Constituencies with BNP candidates in 2005 but not 2010

Constituency	Share of vote 2005
Warley	5.5
Walsall South	5.0
Dudley South	4.7
Rochdale	4.3
Shipley	4.2
Aldridge Brownhills	4.1
Rossendale & Darwen	3.9
Denton & Reddish	3.7
Newcastle-under-Lyme	3.5
Hull East	3.3
Wolverhampton South West	2.4
Basingstoke	1.7
Havant	1.4
Cheadle	0.9
Sheffield Hallam	0.9
Wokingham	0.8

That the BNP chose not to stand in constituencies such as Wokingham, Sheffield Hallam and Cheadle in 2010 is no great surprise given the poor results from 2005. However, bearing in mind that the BNP average share of the vote in 2005 from the 81 comparable constituencies was 4.6%, it is odd that 3 constituencies which had achieved a larger share of votes cast than this were then not contested in 2010 and nor were a further 3 which achieved figures close to this average.

Some constituencies that were contested again in 2010, had only gained a very small share of the vote in 2005. This tends to suggest a party with limited capacity and a dependence on a small number of localised member strongholds. Our anecdotal evidence suggests that this may often be built around particular extended families and friendship groups.

Table 2.9 shows, from the 81 comparable constituencies, the 10 in which the BNP gained their largest shares of total votes cast in the 2010 General Election. In 7 of these 10 constituencies, the BNP received larger shares of votes cast in 2010 than they did in 2005 and in some cases these shares were much higher. In Leeds Central the BNP share of the vote more than doubled and Barnsley was not far short of the same. There were however notable decreases in the share of votes gained in both Barking and Burnley - two areas in which the BNP had expected to do well before the election.

Table 2.10 shows, from the 81 comparable constituencies, the 10 in which the BNP gained their smallest shares of votes cast in 2010 compared with 2005:

Table 2.9: Performance in the 10 comparable constituencies in which the BNP gained the largest share of the vote in 2010 compared with performance in 2005

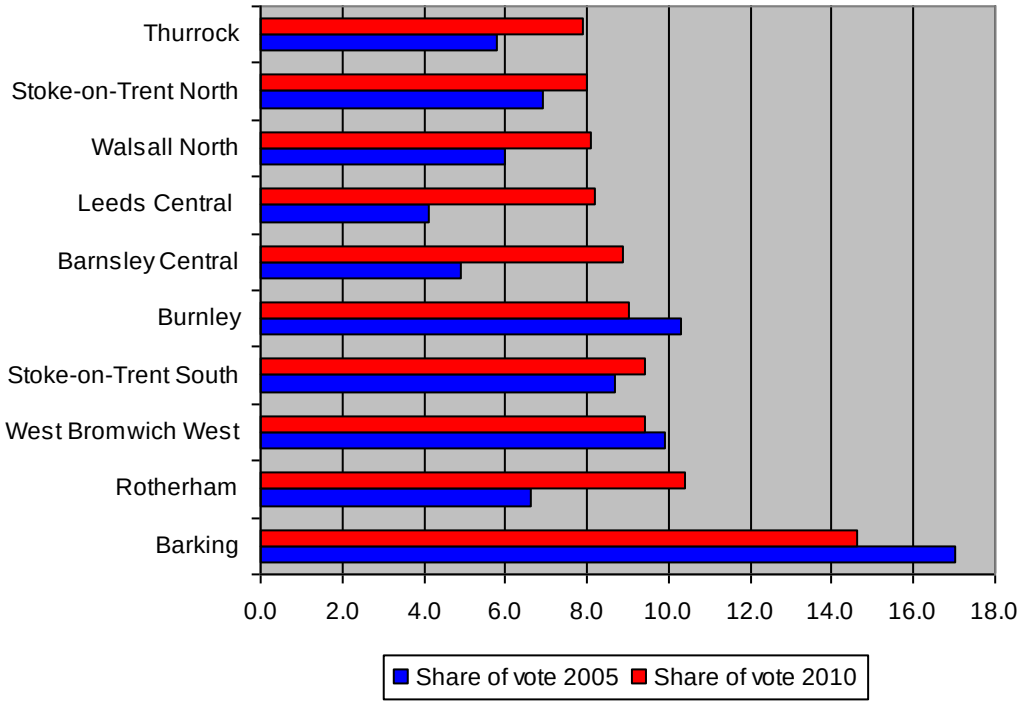
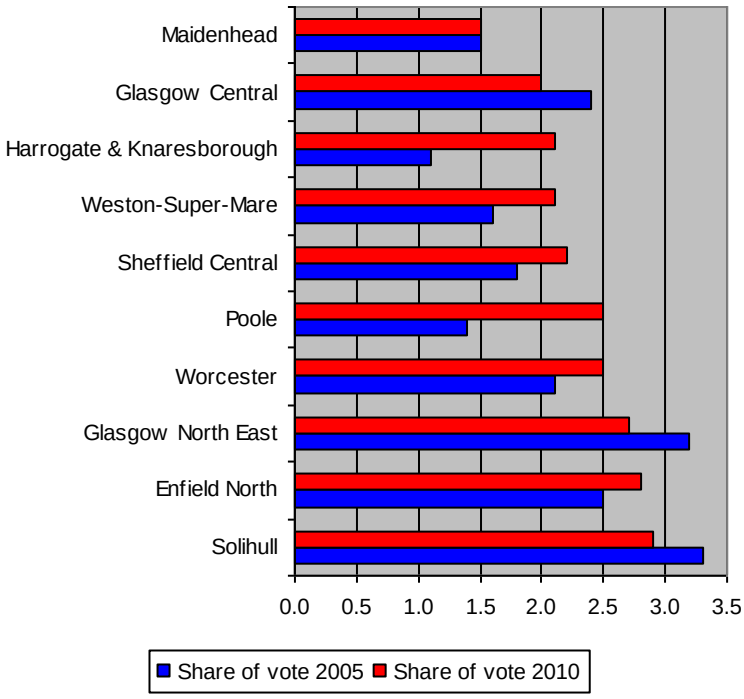


Table 2.10: Performance in the 10 comparable constituencies in which the BNP gained the smallest share of the vote in 2010 compared with performance in 2005



Is the BNP in decline?

The picture of changing support for the BNP is a mixed one. Since 2001 the numbers of votes cast for the party at general elections has grown from under

50,000 to over 550,000 and the party has become an established part of the electoral scene. In 2009 the BNP won two seats in the European parliament and saw itself as on the brink of a breakthrough into mainstream politics. However, its performance in 2010 saw it fail to make any headway in terms of parliamentary seats and half its council seats were lost. This led many commentators to declare that the BNP had peaked.

That analysis fails however to recognise the overall growth in the number of votes cast for the party at the 2010 general election and the fact that in most of the comparable constituencies where the party had stood in both 2005 and 2010 its share of the vote increased. On the other hand comparison of the results at the two elections shows a general decline in support in what had been seen as previous BNP strongholds. This suggests that there is a *broadening* rather than a *deepening* of support for the BNP. This has implications for the way in which we might respond to the BNP and its messages. While the electoral threat may have receded somewhat the pernicious effects of BNP activities on community cohesion may be spreading ever wider into areas with less experience of dealing with community tensions.

Other far right party electoral activity

The British National Party was not the only far right party to contest the 2010 elections. As reported in a Searchlight magazine article,[5] The National Front, once Britain's leading fascist party, fielded 17 candidates in the General Election. The analysis of NF votes shows a poor result for them, though two exceptions were Chris Jackson in Rochdale, who took 2,236 votes (4.9%) and almost saved his deposit, and Kevin Bryan in Rossendale and Darwen, who won 1,062 votes (2.3%). Both men were until recently North West BNP organisers.

Michael Davidson's 1,089 votes (2.3%) in West Ham and Joe Uttley's 880 votes (2.8%) in Hull East were the only other results above 2%.

In the local elections, the NF fielded 18 candidates: East Midlands 1, London 3, North East 3, North West 1, South East 1, West Midlands 7 and Yorkshire and the Humber 2. Five NF candidates contested Birmingham, clashing with the BNP in Kingstanding, Oscott, Sheldon, Shard End and South Yardley. Only in Sheldon, where Paul Morris polled 831 votes (8.8%), its highest vote in the city, did the NF beat the BNP whose candidate took only 101 votes (1.1%). Everywhere else the NF was comprehensively outpolled by the BNP.

In Hull, where the BNP branch recently decamped to the NF, the cross fertilisation between the two parties continues. Jason Carr, the BNP council election candidate for Longhill ward, signed the nomination papers for Joe Uttley, the NF candidate for the East Hull parliamentary constituency.

[5] http://www.searchlightmagazine.com/index.php?link=template&story=323

Nick Walsh, the NF organiser who stood in Myton ward, Hull, had his nomination papers signed by Nigel Piggins, a former member of the Racial Volunteer Force, who was jailed for two years and three months in 2005 after he admitted conspiracy to publish the group's magazine, Stormer, with the intention of stirring up race hate. He received a further three months for distributing a racist DVD, 'Skrewdriver Live' in Germany.

In the West London borough of Hillingdon, Ian Edward the NF chairman, polled 504 votes (13.2%) in Harefields ward, a higher percentage of the vote than the four BNP candidates achieved in their respective wards and the highest percentage of the vote achieved by any NF candidate in the elections. Kevin Bryan, the NF candidate in Irwell, Rossendale, which he had previously contested for the BNP, polled its second highest percentage of the vote (11.6%). How either vote would fare against competition from the BNP is yet to be tested.

It should be noted, however, that direct comparisons of percentages do not always give the full picture as much depends on the turnout and which other candidates contest the ward. London percentages have been adjusted for the fact that voters were electing two or three candidates in this election compared to one in most of the rest of the country.

The lack of electoral success for the far right after their high hopes leading into the 2010 elections, does not mean that the threat has passed. As we have seen, the numbers voting for the BNP has continued to grow albeit more widely spread. This may well have implications for the focus of far right energy and activity. According to Sonia Gable in Tribune Magazine[6] 'The risk is that, disillusioned with electoral politics and with a simplistic outlook on the world, they will be attracted to the English Defence League's brand of Islamophobia and street violence.'

2.2 The rising profile of the EDL

The English Defence League (EDL) has become an increasing concern in the UK and in the short term at least, is a greater threat to cohesion and social harmony than the BNP. The EDL appears to have little interest in electoral activity. Their preference is for direct action and street level confrontation. The EDL came from nothing: two years ago it did not exist. There has been rapid growth of the EDL and it remains to be seen how much support it can garner. It is known to be building links with other extreme groups in the United States and in Europe and may draw strength and legitimacy from such development. However, many of the marches and demonstrations still attract limited numbers and it remains to be seen whether it will build support beyond its hard core supporters, many of whom exhibit thug-like behaviour.

[6] http://www.tribunemagazine.co.uk/2010/12/decline-and-fall-but-not-the-far-right%E2%80%99s-end/

The EDL is described by anti-fascist activists as a very different type of challenge from that of the BNP. The reputation is one where the EDL do not want debate or discussion, says an East Midlands Hope not Hate Coordinator, “they don’t even want to fight, the EDL want to smash your heads in”. This has also been suggested by a special investigation into the EDL which was reported in the Daily Mail on 13 Dec 2010 – it supports the view that the EDL is mainly concerned with street violence.

John Cruddas, Labour MP for Dagenham and Rainham, writing in the Evening Standard[7] described the EDL as a small, violent street militia "but it speaks the language of a much larger, disenfranchised class". Writing in The Times, he said: "The EDL may well pass through, and crash and burn like many of its predecessors. But it may not, because it taps into a politics born out of dispossession but anchored in English male working-class culture - of dress, drink and sport. Camped outside the political centre ground, this is a large swath of the electorate, a people who believe they have been robbed of their birthright and who are in search of community and belonging. Many are traditional Labour supporters. Many working class people appeared to be turning to the far-right cultural movements that are sweeping across Europe” he warned.

It is very difficult to gauge membership and level of support for the EDL. It is not formally organised with structured membership lists and it is not electorally active.

Whilst it is true that estimates, from the media, the Police and the EDL itself, have shown some increases in the numbers of people attending the marches, such estimates are always disputed and notoriously unreliable. Estimates for individual marches vary wildly: for example, the Bradford march attracted 300 people according to one source and 700 to another. There are also problems caused by ‘counter marches’, often by Unite Against Fascism, swelling numbers of people on the streets and the numbers of arrests.

Arrests at EDL marches also give an insight into the make-up of EDL supporters. They suggest that although the majority of regions and core cities have hosted EDL marches, support may be more narrowly based. For instance, at the Leicester march in October 2010 there were 13 arrests yet only one of those arrested came from Leicester.

Below is a list of 20 EDL marches and demonstrations that have taken place between August 2009 and the end of 2010. Further marches have taken place in Luton and in Rochdale, in 2011.

Table 2.11: Location and dates of EDL marches and demonstrations

Date	Location

[7] http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard/article-23890912-jon-cruddas-urges-mainstream-parties-tochoke-off-edl-surge.do

August 2009	Birmingham
September 2009	Birmingham
September 2009	London
October 2009	Manchester
October 2009	Leeds
December 2009	Nottingham
January 2010	Stoke on Trent
March 2010	London
March 2010	Bolton
April 2010	Dudley
May 2010	Aylesbury
May 2010	Newcastle
July 2010	Dudley
August 2010	Bradford
September 2010	Oldham
October 2010	Leicester
October 2010	London
November 2010	Preston
November 2010	Nuneaton
December 2010	Peterborough

The EDL claims to be a 'human rights organisation'[8] that:

> "was founded in the wake of the shocking actions of a small group of Muslim extremists who, at a homecoming parade in Luton, openly mocked the sacrifices of our service personnel without any fear of censure. Although these actions were certainly those of a minority, we believe that they reflect other forms of religiously-inspired intolerance and barbarity that are thriving amongst certain sections of the Muslim population in Britain: including, but not limited to, the denigration and oppression of women, the molestation of young children, the committing of so-called honour killings, homophobia, anti-Semitism, and continued support for those responsible for terrorist atrocities".

The tone is however rather different from the BNP in that they wish to appear reasonable and not be seen to condemn all Muslims or even the Islamic faith as a whole:

> "Whilst we must always protect against the unjust assumption that all Muslims are complicit in or somehow responsible for these crimes, we must not be afraid to speak freely about these issues. This is why the EDL will continue to work to protect the inalienable rights of all people to protest against radical Islam's encroachment into the lives of non-Muslims".

They also seek to depict Muslims as victims and wish to protect them, though perhaps only from other Muslims:

[8] http://englishdefenceleague.org/content.php?136

> "We also recognise that Muslims themselves are frequently the main victims of some Islamic traditions and practices. The Government should protect the individual human rights of members of British Muslims. It should ensure that they can openly criticise Islamic orthodoxy, challenge Islamic leaders without fear of retribution, receive full equality before the law (including equal rights for Muslim women), and leave Islam if they see fit, without fear of censure.
>
> British Muslims should be able to safely demand reform of their religion, in order to make it more relevant to the needs of the modern world and more respectful of other groups in society."

The EDL's 'Mission Statement' also champions English Culture and taps into the general Far Right appeal of the loss of identity:

> "The EDL believes that English Culture has the right to exist and prosper in England. We recognise that culture is not static, that over time changes take place naturally, and that other cultures make contributions that make our shared culture stronger and more vibrant. However, this does not give license to policy-makers to deliberately undermine our culture and impose non-English cultures on the English people in their own land**."**

However, they are again anxious not to appear as supporters of assimilation:

> "If people migrate to this country then they should be expected to respect our culture, its laws, and its traditions, and not expect their own cultures to be promoted by agencies of the state. The best of their cultures will be absorbed naturally and we will all be united by the enhanced culture that results."

And they claim to be:

> "keen to draw its support from people of all races, all faiths, all political persuasions, and all lifestyle choices"

Again, they seek to position themselves as separate from other far right groups and be more liberal, for example in respect of gay rights.

For all of the reasonableness of their statements, however, the website is otherwise full of stories featuring angry people on the street demonstrating and using strong and vitriolic language against Muslims and it is clear that this is their main focus of attention.

A BBC report[9] also found that the EDL core support has far less lofty ideals and suggested that their background owed more to football hooliganism:

- They found common cause with other 'soccer casuals' and 'firms' associated with major clubs. The chatter concluded that this was a national problem and they had to put aside club rivalries. Things really

[9] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8250017.stm

took off after the same Islamist group 'converted' an 11-year-old boy in Birmingham city centre in June. That incident caused a minor tabloid furore - but a greater reaction on the net, particularly on websites and forums associated with football violence and far-right activity.

- By the summer there were English Defence League 'divisions' run by football supporters in Luton, north London, Bristol, Portsmouth and Southampton, Derby, Cardiff and the West Midlands.

- The EDL has now organised around 15 principal figures loosely based around the football firms providing the most support. Not all of those involved are from a football background, and many of the men have yet to meet each other face-to-face. But they are mobilising for each other on trust, using websites including Facebook and YouTube.

- The British National Party has distanced itself from the EDL, but anti-racism campaigners have identified BNP party activists at demonstrations. They have also identified people at demonstrations with a record of football violence.

- Each demonstration has led to confrontations. But leaders like Tommy are appealing for demonstrators to avoid drink because they don't want to be written off as racist thugs.

- In Birmingham recently, the BBC filmed black and white men alongside each other on EDL's lines.

Recent reports have also suggested that the EDL now have support from at least one very wealthy backer and that they have inspired 'copycat defence leagues' in many other countries[10].

[10] http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/oct/08/far-right-geert-wilders-protest

3. Responding to the challenge of the far right

The challenge of the far right is considerable. The Searchlight Educational Trust[11] recently commissioned the polling organisation Populus to explore the issues of English identity, faith and race. The *Fear and Hope* survey explores the level of fear, hate and hope. It details what pulls us apart and what brings us together. With 5,054 respondents and 91 questions it is one of the largest and most comprehensive surveys into attitude, identity and extremism in the UK to date.

On one level it is not happy reading. The study concludes that there is a deep resentment of immigration, as well as scepticism towards multiculturalism. There is a widespread fear of the 'other', particularly Muslims.

3.1 The EDL challenge

There are differing views about the best way to respond to the EDL, as demonstrated by the approaches of the two main anti-fascist national organisations in the UK. Unite Against Fascism (UAF) and Hope not Hate (HnH) both challenge far right extremist groups but they have different views on what is the best response to demonstrations, EDL marches and other far right activity. UAF believes that a counter demonstration shows that the EDL are not welcomed in the area, whilst HnH believe this encourages EDL violence. UAF is also critical of the HnH and their backers Searchlight in more general terms and has recently criticised a Searchlight Educational Trust Report, *Hope not Fear*.[12]

In responding to the prospect of the English Defence League marching in Bradford on Saturday 28 August 2010, UAF did not, however, simply stage a counter protest and preferred to support a visible demonstration of peaceful multicultural celebration. It was nevertheless on the same day as the EDL action[13]. This is in contrast to the view expressed in the August edition of Searchlight magazine and in the Morning Star newspaper by Hope Not Hate organiser Nick Lowles[14], where he argues that banning the EDL march in Bradford "….is our only option and sole focus." He goes on to criticise UAF for their support for "the call made by Bradford trade unions, local community and faith groups for a ban of the proposed EDL demonstration in Bradford on Saturday 28. But we do not agree that this is the 'only option', nor that if thousands of EDL supporters manage to get into Bradford then we have already lost".

UAF also justifies counter-protests on the basis that the EDL is more likely to go on the rampage when there is no public opposition to them on the day of their actions and point out that whilst section 12 and section 13 of the Public Order Act allow the police to ban both marches and static demonstrations, to

[11] Searchlight Educational Trust, *Fear and Hope*, 2011
[12] http://uaf.org.uk/2011/03/a-response-to-the-searchlight-fear-and-hope-report/
[13] http://uaf.org.uk/2010/08/we-are-bradford-peaceful-celebration-is-not-a-counter-protest/
[14] http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=22047

date, apart from one in Luton, the authorities have refused to ban EDL demonstrations.

However, UAF also recognises the need to build a climate against hate and support for broader cohesion. In Dudley, the UAF worked closely with local communities to peacefully celebrate 'one society, many cultures'. This was such a broad and united response that dismay at its success was apparently publicly voiced by leaders of the EDL. The effectiveness of this campaign, and the support it won locally, was also reflected in a decline in the BNP vote at the General Election in the town and the warm support this received from the local media.

A march celebrating multiculturalism in Tower Hamlets on the day of a planned EDL demonstration, brought together the breadth of the anti-fascist movement, including local elected politicians, faith communities, trade unionists, lesbian and gay activists and all those who oppose fascism. UAF claimed[15] that it was the largest anti-fascist mobilisation in London for a decade and a peaceful, focused and vibrant expression of unity.

It should be recognized that EDL activity does have a real impact for wider communities and service providers. The cost of policing EDL activity is significant: for example, West Yorkshire Police has recently indicated that their costs have topped £1million[16]. The scale of the events is indicated by a report of the Preston EDL protest in November 2010 in the Lancashire Telegraph[17]. This indicated that the police made 14 arrests during a protest by supporters of the far-right group when around 1,000 people joined the demonstration by the EDL in Preston city centre, and 150 counter-demonstrators from Unite Against Fascism gathered nearby.

At a separate EDL protest in Nuneaton, Warwickshire, as reported in the Coventry Telegraph[18], four men and a teenage boy were arrested. Warwickshire Police said a 21-year-old from Nottingham was detained on suspicion of robbery, a 42-year-old from Barnsley, South Yorkshire, was arrested on suspicion of being drunk and disorderly, a 23-year-old from Nuneaton was held for an alleged public order offence, and a 44-year-old man from Walsall, West Midlands, was arrested on suspicion of affray. A spokeswoman said: "We are grateful for the support of local communities for today's operation and apologise for any unavoidable disruption caused to local residents, most of whom were able to go about their normal business."

The indirect cost of far right activity is also an issue that the general public is concerned about. In Leicester, where 2000 EDL protesters sparked the biggest police operation for 25 years[19], local people signed an anti-EDL petition on the grounds that the EDL demonstration had resulted in the police shutting several of the main shopping streets which meant that retail assistants could not go into work, causing bad feeling: "We don't want them

[15] http://uaf.org.uk/2010/06/thousands-march-in-unity-against-racism-and-fascism/
[16] http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bradford-west-yorkshire-12698128
[17] http://www.lancashiretelegraph.co.uk/news/8707037.14_arrests_at_Preston_EDL_demo/
[18] http://www.coventrytelegraph.net/news/coventry-news/2010/11/29/missiles-thrown-during-tense-edl-march-in-nuneaton-92746-27735718/
[19] http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-11505724

here and why should I lose a day's work because they cause so much trouble the shops need to close", said one woman.

Banning the demonstrations and marches on public order grounds will reduce costs to the public purse, prevent the intimidation of Muslim and other communities and allow normal economic and social activities to continue. However, in so far as such marches and demonstrations do take place, there remain different views about whether or not to confront them or to refrain from counter demonstrations.

We believe that it is necessary to look beyond the immediate and damaging environment of each march and consider the broader context. If the anti-fascist movement is to deal effectively with the threat posed by the EDL it is necessary for it to understand the causes of its growth and the sense of grievance and loss which is also shared by supporters of the British National Party and other groups.

The rise of Islamophobia across the UK is mirrored in many other countries and it is in this context that the EDL has been emboldened to make gross attacks on the freedom of Muslims. If there were demonstrations against Christian churches or Jewish people and synagogues these would quite rightly be met with widespread outrage and condemnation, whereas the EDL protests are not generally regarded with such outrage. The general political context is therefore very important and the climate of anti-Muslim sentiment clearly also has to be tackled.

3.2 The BNP challenge

The BNP may have been surpassed by the EDL as the 'nasty party' but it maintains a hard right edge, as demonstrated by their continuing stance on immigration, which remains tough and unrelenting and is shown in their party policy outlined below:

- Deport all the 'two million plus who are here illegally'
- Deport all those who commit crimes and whose original nationality was not British
- Review all recent grants of residence or citizenship to ensure they are still appropriate
- Offer generous grants to those residents 'of foreign descent' who wish to leave permanently
- Stop all new immigration save for exceptional cases
- Reject all asylum seekers who passed safe countries on their way to Britain.

The BNP 2010 manifesto repeated much of the above, adding that they wished to institute the right of 'the indigenous population of Britain … to remain the majority population of our nation'. Discussion about exactly what constitutes the 'indigenous population' has caused much interest and more

than a little mirth as Griffin asserted in a number of media interviews that it meant that they had to prove ancestry in the UK stretching 'back to the Ice Age'.

While the party has made efforts to appear more mainstream by advocating policies aimed at income equalisation and social housing, their well-timed public jibes on issues of race, culture and society serve to maintain extreme support for the party. While dissent amongst the more radical elements in the BNP still threatens to boil over, electoral success was on an improving basis, up to the 2010 elections at least, and the bulk of the party appears to remain behind Griffin's approach.

Tellingly, it is the issue of immigration that is helping it to secure a wider, sympathetic audience. A poll conducted by the research company YouGov prior to the elections in May 2009 gave an insight into the typical BNP voter. Despite recent attempts by the BNP to appeal to a wider audience including rural voters and pensioners, the bulk of supporters remain largely male, young, white, working class, poor and with few opportunities. The poll found that nearly half of BNP voters come from traditional Labour backgrounds. Two thirds of respondents thought Labour used to care for the concerns of people like them; but only one fifth think it does so nowadays.

In addition, 87 percent of respondents felt that the BNP were the only party willing to engage with the controversial subject of immigration. They believed that because traditional parties like Labour and Conservative have refused to engage with them on this key topic they were forced to switch allegiance. This however is the crux of the matter. 77 per cent of BNP supporters believe that the people who suffer the most discrimination in modern Britain are 'white people'; but this view is also shared by 40 per cent of all voters. As Peter Kellner of YouGov explains, [20]

> "BNP voters occupy one end of a broad social [and political] spectrum… in some ways their views are like those of many other voters, only more intense, rather than having utterly different views. Their support is the visible bit of a much larger iceberg of public alienation."

Support for the BNP's stance on immigration is not confined to a fringe group of radicals; instead it can be seen as the extreme outpourings of a much wider concern amongst the British public on the issue. It comes as little surprise to learn then, that the gains being made by the BNP continue to be primarily at the expense of the Labour Party.

The failure of the mainstream parties to address this issue in the 2010 elections was even more surprising. The Economist[21] noted that 'immigration merits about a page in each of the Labour, Conservative and Liberal

[20] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/eu/5479327/European-elections-2009-How-Labour-let-the-BNP-flex-its-muscles.html

[21] May 1st 2010

Democrat manifestos'. Considering that each of these manifestos were over a hundred pages long, it could be argued that this is indeed scant regard for the issue.

Until the appearance of the 'bigoted woman' of Rochdale just eight days before the general election, the subject of immigration had received very little attention at all during the campaign. All the political parties had managed to keep it as a low level issue and, despite the usual mischief from the BNP, it was only put centre stage because of the then Prime Minister's gaffe. Given that immigration has generally been the second biggest concern expressed by the public over the last few years and only recently knocked off the top spot by the economy, it is hard to understand how the oft expressed concerns of so many people had not been much more evident until that time.

None of this should really be a surprise: the political parties are genuinely caught on the horns of a dilemma. All politicians are acutely aware of the anti-migrant sentiment, which is now shared by both White and BME British voters, and that any debate could easily turn into a gift to the far right .

In one sense, keeping immigration as a low level issue is entirely laudable and party leaders know that the controversy which inevitably surrounds any discussion of 'race' could dramatically heighten public tensions. On the other hand, they also know that any seeming unwillingness to discuss the issue plays into the hands of the far right who portray this as 'a conspiracy of silence' and that only they are prepared to represent the real views of 'ordinary people'. The restraint on debate, however, means that the positive impact of migration is also not discussed (no doubt much to the delight of the far right) and there is little by way of an open attempt to confront the myths and to champion the economic realities. And as Ted Cantle has explained,[22] there is also little preparedness to respond to the real concerns and grievances that result from the additional population, in terms of additional pressures on housing, health and education services.

This dilemma is not new and has characterised many previous elections. What is new is that the Conservatives have become less and less prepared to represent the anti-migrant view and David Cameron's re-positioning of the Conservative Party as being inclusive and of the centre ground, has all but extinguished the mainstream 'anti' position. What is also new, but perhaps very much connected, is that the far right has grown significantly over the last ten years or so and has a much stronger presence across the country. With some further support from UKIP, and an effective ongoing campaign by MigrationWatch, the 'anti' voice is far stronger and much more shrill than for many years. The far right made no further impacts in the 2010 elections and lost ground, most notably in Barking and Dagenham, but they have continued to grow over the last ten years and have steadily built a bigger base.[23]

[22] http://www.democracyforum.co.uk/bnp/78409-bnp-isn-t-beaten-yet-article.html

[23] Searchlight, December 2010

Nevertheless, as we discussed in the first section, there is a widespread feeling that BNP support has peaked and is now in decline. A Searchlight article[24] also explained the perceptions of the demise of the Party and felt that 'eighteen months on, the BNP is disintegrating'. It went on to suggest that 'Party officers have been expelled and it cannot pay its bills. It has lost half its district councillors and its London Assembly member, who now sits as an independent. It is contesting few council by-elections and where it fights, it gets few votes. Members are leaving and it faces crippling legal costs if the High Court rules against the party in the action brought by the Equality and Human Rights Commission over racial discrimination in its constitution'.

The BNP's apparent collapse, according to anti-fascist groups, was not really surprising and is the result of several factors coming together. A dysfunctional party of bigots and extremists who prefer bickering among themselves to campaigning, led by a man who cannot bear genuine democracy, reason and compromise, and whose only real skill is in political intrigue and playing off one faction against another, could only go so far. Few people with any professional ability or management skills are attracted to the party and any who have been given party positions – which are in the sole gift of Griffin – have been removed as soon as they inevitably clashed with him. Others are promoted far beyond their ability on the back of their unquestioning support for their leader.

Five weeks before the 2010 general election came the shock revelation that the BNP's head of publicity had been arrested for threatening to kill Griffin. Mark Collett, who was in charge of producing the BNP's election literature, was also accused of "financial irregularities and scamming"[25] and of trying to sabotage the party's campaign. He was suspended from membership and Eddy Butler, the BNP's national elections officer, accused of conspiring with him, was relieved of his post.

Unite Against Facism also maintains that the BNP continues to lose members rapidly. It has debts that could cost Griffin his seat in the European Parliament if he is held personally responsible for them and made bankrupt and although they think the BNP will continue there is not the same tone of threat: "The BNP may limp on, as does the NF, which still insults Britain's war dead on an annual basis by marching to the Cenotaph on the afternoon of Remembrance Sunday. Few of the BNP's ex-supporters have joined other far-right parties. The threat of the BNP has been overcome[26]."

The performance of BNP councillors has also not helped the Party, HnH suggests "a shocking list of incompetence, absence and general indifference". Most BNP councillors, they say, 'rarely participate in council business, regularly skip meetings and ignore requests for help from local people'. When

[24] http://www.tribunemagazine.co.uk/2010/12/decline-and-fall-but-not-the-far-right%E2%80%99s-end/#
[25] ibid
[26] ibid

they do attend meetings ‘they vote against policies on which they campaigned for election, vote for cuts to services, or put forward illegal motions’[27].

Many commentators have suggested that most people voting BNP do so as a protest and tend not to vote BNP more than once or twice. BNP supporters may not therefore be ardent racists or fascists and vote BNP as a protest over a number of issues. In particular White communities may sometimes feel abandoned by mainstream political parties, especially in deprived and poorer neighbourhoods. Such communities may also feel that they have lost a sense of local community belonging, with a decline of leadership and social capital often brought about by the demise of traditional industries and the rapid turnover of population in the local area which adds to the sense of instability and what is seen as an unacceptable pace of change.

The BNP currently has just 24 councillors out of a national total of over 22,000 on principal local authorities (districts, boroughs etc) in the UK. The BNP regularly claims to have "over 100" councillors but this figure includes the BNP's parish, town and community councillors, the lowest tier of local government, most of whom were elected unopposed. To put the BNP's representation in context, there are nearly 100,000 parish, town and community councillors in England and Wales.

However, as we discussed earlier, whilst support for the BNP changes from year to year, the general trend is strongly upwards. While the party may be losing ground in terms of its likelihood of capturing parliamentary and local council seats the spread of its support is widening into areas which have not previously shown electoral interest This, taken together with the undoubted rise of the EDL, is far from the collapse in far right support suggested by the reporting of the general election result and the focus on the defeat for BNP leader Nick Griffin. Indeed, the upward trend in support for the far right is something which the UK shares with many other countries and is symptomatic of wider concerns built around the demonisation of the Muslim community and the sense of loss associated with tradition and national identity.

[27] http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/the-real-bnp/BNP-councillors.php

4. Responding to the challenge in local communities

The proposed changes to the Prevent agenda will have an impact. Until last year, the Prevent agenda focused on violence in the name of Islam, this being changed in the later stages of the last Government to include far right extremism. As iCoCo has pointed out on many occasions[28], the Prevent agenda was counter-productive, both alienating the Muslim community, because they were demonised and associated with terrorism, and reinforcing this view in the eyes of non-Muslims. The activities of the EDL do nothing but encourage violent acts against Muslims.

The Select Committee supported the iCoCo position and the new Government endorsed the view that it was necessary to separate cohesion and counter-intelligence work and to extend the remit of Prevent to far right groups.[29] The Government is expected to announce its new policy shortly. Tackling all forms of extremism under one umbrella will help to unite all communities in a common fight to defeat violence, intimidation and intolerance.

The very nature of community cohesion programmes is such that they address far right extremism by focusing on building trust between disparate groups and minimising intolerance and the fear of difference in all communities. However, experience to date has shown that we will also need to encourage honest and open discussions about the genuine grievances that people have and what they see as a threat to our collective identity. We are no longer able to rely on the old approach to the far right of 'ignore them: do not give them the oxygen of publicity'. This has played into the hands of the far right, who have been able to present themselves as the only ones who are willing to discuss race and migration issues and who are 'not afraid to raise the concerns of ordinary people.' The local anti-far right campaigns during the 2010 General Election have demonstrated the value of confronting the views of the far right, though have not yet succeeded in making local communities comfortable with change.

Promoting interaction and a sense of belonging

Community cohesion techniques have proven to be productive and useful tools in tackling prejudice and stereotypes of all kinds and there is now a plethora of research-based evidence in support of 'contact theory'[30]. The plain fact is that myths and misconceptions about others are more likely to be successfully overcome by face-to-face engagement, in which people begin to value the overwhelming commonalities that they can see in others, rather than the relatively insignificant differences.

[28] See for example the iCoCo submission to the Prevent Select Committee (INSERT LINK)
[29] See iCoCo Cohesion and Society Journal for analysis of the ne Government's agenda http://network.cohesioninstitute.org.uk/live/images/cme_resources/Public/documents/Journal/Cohesion-SocietyIssueOne.pdf
[30] Cantle Ted, Community Cohesion: A New Framework for Race and Diversity. Palgrave Macmillan. 2008

But community cohesion is much more than an interaction process. Cohesion programmes also have to build respect for people and communities that are 'different' from ourselves and crucially, therefore, must begin to change the collective mindset so that people are prepared to embrace diversity as positive rather than see it as a threat. This means that work in local communities at an individual level has to be reinforced by wider measures and experiences. It also means that more positive messages need to be communicated through other channels, outside the immediate local context, especially through schools and workplaces.

People also need to be part of an 'inclusive' sense of belonging, whether it be in a small town, a city or a local neighbourhood - where everyone can identify with and recognise the shared interests and benefits that everyone brings to 'their' communities. Many local authorities up and down the country have already started to do this, for example by 'branding' their town or city as a cohesive 'one community' in some way and by indicating the value they place on diversity at every opportunity. This branding has taken various shapes and forms, from high-profile, city-wide campaigns promoting the diverse nature of their communities, to more subtle and localised approaches. This has often been linked with a 'counter narrative' against far right extremist arguments by producing 'myth-busting' materials and articles, and demonstrating the benefits that have resulted from a more open and diverse society.

Recognising legitimate concerns

Much recent migration, particularly from Eastern Europe, has been to parts of the country with little previous experience of migration. This, together with the fact that BNP activity is now spread much more widely, means that areas are now having to address cohesion challenges for the first time.

This approach is not as 'pain free' as it might appear. Firstly, it means recognising – as opinion polls and other work have shown (see earlier sections) - that many people do have real concerns about migration and change within their neighbourhoods. We dismiss these concerns as 'ignorant' or 'racist' at our peril. There is no doubt that the increased population numbers and changes in composition of local populations have increased pressure on local services and these do have to be understood and addressed. It is true that they are often exaggerated by the far right , but some are very real and pressing and are most keenly felt in poorer areas which already feel under the greatest pressure. In engaging with those arguments, there will no doubt be some expression of racist views, but these are in the minority and whilst people do have real concerns, they are likely to respond positively to debates which acknowledge the problems and where there is a willingness to address them.

This is also not a static position in which the arguments can be had and resolved. It needs to be an ongoing process of engagement to recognise that communities are constantly changing. Indeed, communities are changing much more rapidly than ever before with much higher levels of population turnover and 'churn'. Local authorities and their partners therefore need to

have a better understanding of the changing nature of 'difference' in their local communities and constantly monitor tensions. They will also need a range of approaches to community cohesion, which take into account the varying local circumstances in different areas or neighbourhoods.

Communications are key. We have to remember that the far right is constantly putting out messages, spreading alarm with misinformation and false rumours. Counter-messages therefore have to be at least as pervasive and persuasive. Formal publications, and even myth-busting leaflets, may well only serve to reinforce the myths, or they may be disbelieved on the basis that 'they would say that wouldn't they' or simply not be read. Again, there is no substitute for face-to-face engagement and debate, in which local people are involved and, whenever possible, are recruited as champions. It is also important to consider the need to implement a range of techniques, as 'one size will not fit all'. We need to be able to 'reach out' to people in a number of different ways and at different times. Opportunities should be created which allow for any dialogue to be a 'two-way' process where people feel that their views are genuinely being listened to as well as responded to. We should also bear in mind that the far right has been able to gain the 'interest' and votes of people who previously would not have engaged in the political process – we should learn from this!

Engaging with communities

There is also a need to engage with communities in different ways. In particular, it is dangerous to depend upon self-appointed community leaders who may simply be the community 'gatekeeper' who use their position to control communications and preserve their position of influence. We need to develop a new model of 'gateway' community leaders who are willing and able to open their communities to wider and more varied influences and to empower them to do things for themselves. It is therefore also necessary to have a much better map of local communities which is constantly updated to reflect the changing patterns of diversity – and also to recognise the diversity within particular communities.

In this regard, we need to avoid homogenising communities and assuming that people are of any one type. We can learn from past experience, for example with the Prevent agenda, which, as has already been said, created a lot of hostility, confusion and mistrust amongst Muslims who resented being pathologised and associated with terrorism. The focus on one particular faith group (Muslims) resulted in Muslim communities being perceived as 'the problem' in the eyes of others. Furthermore, this focus was seen as distracting attention from legitimate issues and concerns.

Gary Younge summed up the problem in the Guardian (30th March 2009):

> "… the government continues to approach Muslims as though their religion defines them. It rarely speaks to them as tenants, parents, students or workers; it does not dwell on problems that they share with everyone else; it does not convene high profile task forces to look at

how to improve their daily lives. It summons them as Muslims, talks to them as Muslims and refers to them as Muslims - as though they could not possibly be understood as anything else."

There was a similar danger in relation to the former Government's *Connecting Communities* programme which focused on those predominantly White areas which are attracted to the far right . A one-dimensional approach needs to give way to a recognition that all communities are multi-faceted, diverse, constantly changing and adapting to internal and external forces and influences. Previous experience has shown that people are much more likely to engage with positive labels and images, rather than negative ones. And if engagement is the objective, this should be central to any strategy, policy or activity.

A wider view of each community is therefore essential – where do children go to school, where do people work, are shopping patterns local, are there faith influences in the area, what sports and cultural activities are relevant? Focussing on the neighbourhood itself may have very limited success and we need to recognise that people have many different identities and are subject to a range of influences. This wider approach also recognises the need for partnership – no single agency can expect to have success alone. All public and private sector agencies need to work together, engage at all levels and develop consistent messages which resonate with the local community and respond to genuine grievances.

At a neighbourhood level, there are lots of opportunities that already exist or that can easily be utilised - more open and shared spaces can be created, for people from different backgrounds, community facilities and places can get people together for work, leisure and socialising. There are lots of examples of interaction good practice across the country (see the iCoCo website) such as school twinning, inter-faith networks, sports and arts projects etc. As well as small-scale and local activities, large-scale open community events and festivals can be a way of bringing people together. But still more work needs to be done to support the many banal encounters that people experience in their day-to-day lives which have the ability to make people comfortable with each other.

There should be a specific focus on work with children and young people. The duty to promote community cohesion in all 23,000 English schools is already making an impact. But it does need to be connected to the wider community. It also needs to involve parents and be carried over to youth centres and other local groups, to create more opportunities to develop their educational and employment skills, and to do this in the broader context of providing services and activities for 'the community'. A greater emphasis should also be put on work with young people around street gangs and gang culture and especially why gangs seem to play an increasingly important and significant role in young people's lives and what can be done to address this growing concern. Again, having an open and honest discussion with young people from different backgrounds, communities and areas, about cohesion issues and how they impact in a positive or negative way, is vital. Their views

should be used to try and find out why they have the perceptions that they do and how real these are when compared to various known factors. In parallel to this, young people need to be given access to a wide range of activity-based programmes, where they not only learn new skills, but can also learn about different communities, cultures and generations. It is encouraging to note that the new Coalition Government's 'Big Society' plan recognises this.

The primary focus should be on insular communities, whatever their make-up and origins. If a particular community is inward looking and is not engaging with other communities, it is clearly necessary to be more pro-active in providing opportunities to meet and learn about others and to change beliefs and behaviours. It is too easy to condemn communities for being hostile to outsiders and unwelcoming to people not like themselves, but we have to provide the opportunities for them to engage with others and to enable them to become more open to change and difference.

Social capital and identity

In long-established communities, social capital and leadership have been slowly eroded. Working Men's clubs, trade unions, local shops, clubs and societies have been under pressure and in some cases all but disappeared. These local institutions also provided an opportunity for people to air their views and discuss concerns about what is happening (or what they perceive to be happening) in their communities. In common with many other parts of society, there is some evidence that the 'glue' of social networks which helped to bind local areas together has given way to an individualised community in which families provide their own entertainment and have little time for their neighbours. This is, again, to some extent recognised in the Coalition's commitment to a 'Big Society'. In the context of poorer, insular and disaffected communities, we therefore need to ask how civil society can be rebuilt to give people the opportunity to learn about others, come to terms with change and develop shared interests.

In recent years, communities have also become much more complex. In comparison to the position in the 1950's and 60's, when Britain's diversity was in the form of a small number of migrant communities, we now have an era of 'Super Diversity' with over 300 languages in London schools and as many as 65 in small market towns. But the identities of individuals are no longer fixed and are subject to many more diaspora and transnational influences. People also develop 'hybrid' and sequential identities which operate on different levels and at different times during their lifetime. This would apply not only to people from different races, but also in relation to faith, sexual orientation, social class, disability and many other characteristics. For many, these multiple identities are often recognised and acknowledged as being part of a multi-racial and multi-faceted Britain. The evidence suggests that people who live in diverse communities are generally more 'comfortable' with difference, as compared to those that live in communities which are more homogeneous or mono-cultural. White communities, in particular, feel that their collective identity is under threat and, in contrast to minority

communities, tend to believe that they have no personal recognisable identity and that they are somehow not part of diversity or multiculturalism.

Some activities have been used to reinforce such views, for example, St George's Day celebrations have been hijacked by the far right to try to narrow identity and are used to focus on a very backward looking notion of 'Englishness'. However, this is changing and many local authorities and communities have seen St George's Day as an opportunity and taken the initiative to create a celebration which is set in the context of a growing, multicultural, multi-faith country, which welcomes and embraces diversity. Many have organised successful community events on St George's Day, and these try to involve and engage with all groups and are often promoted as 'multicultural'. Some have even included the history of minority and migrant communities as part of telling their 'English Story'.

There has been a growing number of very negative campaigns which have been led by groups such as the English Defence League (EDL). Due to the nature of their campaigning, much of their movements can be pre-empted and counter-measures can be taken by local authorities and the police, working with the community, in anticipation of any public order issues which may arise. Tension monitoring is crucial in these instances, involving the whole community working together to share communication, reduce tensions and provide reassurance. This needs to include minority and majority communities, the voluntary sector, statutory organisations, police, local business and other interested agencies/parties. Wherever possible, these opportunities for wider engagement should be used to measure, as well as create, a positive 'climate of opinion' in the area.

5. Proposed practical measures

There is, therefore, a number of practical steps that local authorities and their partners have begun to develop to minimise the impact of far right extremism, provide community reassurance and promote cohesion. These include:

1. **Institute community mapping** to recognise the diversity within and between communities; constantly monitor the changing dynamics; and develop engagement strategies which reach all sections of the community (see the iCoCo COHDMAP toolkit). The mapping work should seek to identify:
    - The make-up of the local community
    - The extent and nature of population change and turnover – some LAs have tried to reduce the amount of turnover in rented properties in some areas and improve stability.

2. **Develop communications strategies** which resonate with local communities:
    - Led by champions from the local community
    - Repeated by community sources that are respected by local people – e.g. local businesses, religious leaders, local GPs
    - Reinforced with broader messages about belonging and the value of diversity to support localised communications.

3. Present the reality of 'super diversity', allowing people **the opportunity to come to terms with change** and accept that these debates may be challenging and difficult:
    - Arrange for debates to take place that do tackle difficult issues – e.g. the benefits of migration
    - Provide for such opportunities in the workplace, schools and local communities
    - Use imaginative approaches – e.g. a local theatre company to provide space for 'dangerous conversations'.

4. **Recognise that some areas do have real grievances** and that services may have been adversely impacted by additional and new populations; and that these grievances, even if sometimes exaggerated, do need to be addressed:
    - Housing allocations have been a particular source of discontent. This may be exaggerated but may also have some justification
    - There are also perceptions that schools provide resources for newcomers which reduces those for existing students – again this needs to be taken seriously
    - Be prepared to discuss these perceptions openly and honestly and avoid dismissing them as ill-informed.

5. **Understand the key influences and influencers** in local areas and involve a broad grouping to lead discussions and provide an alternative point of view:

- These may include respected sports stars, local celebrities, business leaders and trade unionists
- Engage with the press and media to ensure responsible reporting
- Review and use social media.

6. **Ensure that communities understand the realities of the far right.** Far right groups often try to campaign on local issues, rather than reveal what they really stand for:
    - Expose the reality of the far right – e.g. publicise the statements made by far right leaders and details of their web sites
    - Challenge their narratives and provide powerful and effective counter narratives.

7. **Keep abreast of extremist methods** which they use in order to influence and shape opinion and promote violence, whilst at the same time, avoiding reinforcing a 'victim culture':
    - Misinformation is often used – e.g. that a local library is about to be turned into a mosque – and responses need to be immediate and effective.

8. **Create real and positive opportunities for communities to develop shared interests** and acceptance of the diversity of local communities:
    - Many people have limited experience of those who are different from themselves and are naturally fearful of people they have not met
    - Priority should be given to insular and mono-cultural communities where there is little by way of routine opportunities to engage with others
    - Such encounters need to be positive and rewarding
    - At a community wide level, festivals and events that bring communities together also help to break down myths and stereotypes and improve respect and tolerance.

9. **Develop effective tension monitoring**, (see iCoCo toolkit) working with the police and other agencies to anticipate and respond to concerns, using community-based assessments and interventions whenever possible:
    - Monitor rumours regularly, e.g. on pirate radio, local social media, in schools
    - Anticipate events, e.g. far right leafleting, provide reassurance and effective responses
    - Use front-line staff and voluntary agencies to contribute to gathering information and spotting tensions before they become problematic (this requires a small investment in training)
    - Use community-led interventions rather than police responses
    - Develop a very specific response to the EDL and other provocations, including community re-assurance and building

agreement on whether to use counter demonstrations, or respond with more broad-based 'support for peace' campaigns.

10. **Build alternative and responsible community leadership**, especially where there is a vacuum and where local people are prey to organised far right activists:
    - Recognise that many traditional leadership structures have been eroded and local institutions that provide social capital may have to be re-built
    - Where community leaders do exist, some may be unrepresentative and more like 'gatekeepers' of their community than 'gateways' to it
    - Local councillors may be able to become more engaged.

11. **Think longer term sustainability** rather than focussing entirely on immediate responses and special initiatives:
    - Build social capital by investing in civil society organisations which can become trusted advocates for the area and give the local community an effective and responsible voice
    - Develop a greater sense of belonging by presenting a more inclusive picture of the area (see good practice examples on the iCoCo website)
    - Put community cohesion into mainstream programmes - schools, housing, health, the workplace etc.
    - Encourage voluntary agencies to collaborate rather than compete and develop inter-cultural programmes where people can learn together rather than in single identity programmes.