Story: the link between engagement and cohesion in Bexley

The London Borough of Bexley serves an area with rapid migration. According to Origins data, the 2011-17 increase in the non-white British population was the 18th fastest in the country, an increase which was happening from an initially low base.

LB Bexley is also keen to increase civic participation and citizen power, rates for which vary across the borough. It is important to the council to support residents in doing more for themselves.

In 2017, the authority received funding from central government to tackle cohesion challenges. One of the key steps was to use Origins data to map where migrant communities were moving to – including pace of change, types of settlement, and specific cohesion challenges. The analysis also broke the wards down into five clusters, each of which had different types of migration and different levels of cohesion. This is working alongside other cohesion strategies being applied as part of the government funding, such as an arts-based programme of engagement.

This insight let the council identify areas where engagement with communities was needed most. It has fed into how the council thinks about services and engages with different parts of the borough. Forms of co-produced interventions are now being designed in areas where there are specific cohesion challenges.
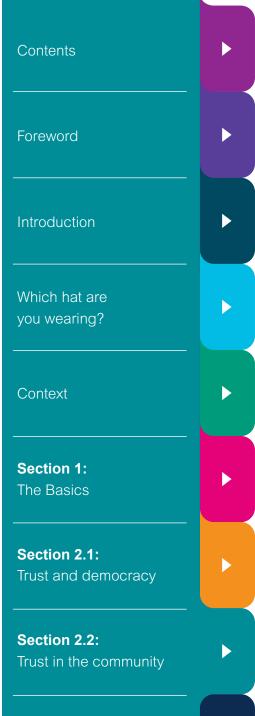
The Origins tool has helped with this, letting the council target funding towards specific areas, where there are different dynamics between new and existing communities. The council is also using the Values Modes tool, to understand the narratives around change and integration.

In particular, the Origins typology will feed into the council's Do It For Bexley campaign, due to be rolled out in 2019. This campaign encourages residents to step up for their communities in different ways.

By looking at how groups choose to volunteer in the different clusters, and encouraging different types of civic activities in areas with different levels of cohesion, the council can take a more tailored approach. It can foster citizen power and forge interactions between communities, while also increasing overall rates of civic activity.

This is ongoing project, but progress so far suggests it is a good example of how strong insight about integration and migration allow better engagement.

You can read more about Bexley's use of Origins here.

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