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Kirklees

**‘Preventing Violent
Extremism’**

**Pathfinder: Issues
and Learning from
the First Year**

April 2008

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Introduction

This report details learning and issues from the first year of the Kirklees 'Preventing Violent Extremism' Pathfinder activity identified by the School of Education and Professional Development, University of Huddersfield through a qualitative evaluation process. This evaluation process involved in-depth interviews focussed on opinions, feelings and experiences with key figures involved in designing and delivering this initial PVE activity within Kirklees. The brief from Kirklees MC was to identify learning points and lessons for any further PVE-focussed activity; therefore, this report attempts to identify such issues and propose clear action points and proposals for the future. As such, these proposals are made by the University of Huddersfield, but they hopefully reflect the experiences, opinions and suggestions of the respondents interviewed.

Six in-depth, semi-structured interviews were held during February and March 2008 with eight professionals involved in the design and delivery of the PVE Pathfinder activity. These professionals included KMC staff and colleagues from partner organisations involved in delivery, and interviews were either held at Oldgate House, or at the professional's own work base. Whilst the views, opinions and suggestions of

respondents are utilised in this report, individuals are **not** identified – anonymity was seen as helpful in honestly assessing progress to date, and the object of this evaluation exercise was **not** to formally assess the efficacy of specific Pathfinder activity but, rather, to highlight learning points and lessons for future activity. For that reason, this report does not look discreetly at each area of activity within the Pathfinder programme. Instead, it identifies a number of key issues relevant to the Kirklees PVE Pathfinder programme as a whole, and comments on each of them. It then goes onto make clear recommendations for the design and delivery of future activity. Given that respondents had clear opinions around the emergence of the national PVE policy agenda, there is firstly a section on the ‘Political and Policy Context’, as views on this frame the key issues identified as relating specifically to the first year of the Kirklees Pathfinder programme.

The Political and Policy Context

‘Preventing Violent Extremism’ has become a key policy priority for national government in the wake of the ‘7/7’ bombings of July 2005 and the failed bomb attempts later in the same month. A key response has been the PVE Pathfinder Fund to support activities at a local level, targeted at all Local Authorities with significant Muslim communities in

their areas. The violent terrorist incidents detailed above, convictions following other foiled terror plots, and further ongoing investigations all demonstrate the importance of this agenda, not just for security and safety, but also for ensuring continued progress on Community Cohesion. The need for activity that engages with the causes and the consequences of support for violent extremism was clearly supported by all respondents, but there are also concerns about the national policy approach, and media coverage and interpretation of that agenda, which can be summarised in the following ways:

- **The apparently explicit focus on Muslims is problematic:** *'The overarching objective of creating a situation where Muslim communities reject and actively condemn violent extremism and seek to undermine and isolate violent extremists...'*

(DCLG,2007:2).All respondents had concerns over the implications of such an approach, fearing that the implied 'labelling' of an entire community, and the inflammatory 'amplification' of public fears about 'Muslims' by some sections of the media could be counterproductive in producing anger and defensiveness amongst some young Muslims. This is allied to an apparent lack of policy concern about 'extremism' in other communities, such as

significant support for racial harassment and the British National Party within some white communities, and fears that 'Muslim communities' are being viewed as homogenous and unified in a way that other ethnic/religious communities are not.

- **The potential tensions between PVE and Community**

Cohesion: *'It(PVE) is not the same as a wider concern for Community Cohesion'*(DCLG,2007:1).The developing policy focus on Community Cohesion(Cantle,2001;LGA,2002) since the violent urban disturbances of 2001 has viewed Integration and Cohesion(DCLG,2007b) as integral to all publicly-funded activities involving young people and communities. A core belief within Community Cohesion strategies has been that activities, facilities and funding concerned with one ethnic group only have deepened segregation and 'parallel lives' in the past, and that Community Cohesion should focus on promoting dialogue and contact across ethnic divides at every opportunity. Respondents had real concerns over whether this vision can be adhered to if PVE is **really** specifically focussed on Muslim communities alone, a fear shared by the Association of West Yorkshire Authorities(AWYA) at the outset of the PVE Pathfinder Fund. A focus solely on Muslim communities could not only have negative consequences within

those communities, as outlined above, but could lead to a 'backlash' from other socially excluded communities who felt that they were once again being ignored by government-funded programmes, a perception that fuelled the 2001 disturbances in Oldham and Burnley (Cantle, 2001). This tension is indeed acknowledged by the DCLG itself, with PVE being '*intended as an addition to our work on Cohesion rather than a distraction from it*' (2007:5).

- **Some concern that there is a potential tension between locally-developed PVE activities and strategies, and the quite specific national targets and priorities laid out in the DCLG Pathfinder Fund documentation.** If implemented literally and fully from the start, those national priorities and targets would arguably further accentuate the concerns outlined above. This is acknowledged by Central Government, with the DCLG calling for '*the delivery of local solutions to local problems*' (2007:4), and respondents clearly felt that local design and implementation is the only way to manage the inherent and complex tensions of the inter-linked PVE and Community Cohesion agendas outlined above.

Kirklees Pathfinder Activity to date – Key Issues

1. Real Progress achieved

It was clear from the evidence offered by all respondents, and the enthusiasm and clarity with which they offered it, that real progress has been achieved during the first year of Pathfinder activity. This could not have been taken for granted, given the short lead-in time to the commencement of the programme, and the comparatively modest amount of funding available. The decision to focus on further developing existing programmes of work, such as with Madrassas/Mosque Schools, and intergenerational work in South Dewsbury, and to utilise existing working relationships, such as with Beaumont Street Studios and local Arts practitioners, has clearly been the right one, as it has allowed tangible outcomes to be achieved. Crucial also has been the considerable extra work by key KMC officers to get the activity up and running – this hidden cost needs to be acknowledged when discussing achievements. Given this reality, and the wider political and policy context outlined above, respondents talked thoughtfully about what has been achieved, and what could reasonably be judged as ‘success’. By consensus, achievements can be described as:

- A significant number of young people across several different programmes who have successfully engaged, developed relationships with workers and started to discuss key issues around citizenship and society. These young people can be the basis of programmes that go further and deeper in ways suggested below.
- Raised aspirations and awareness of the young people involved, both through the issues focussed on (e.g. 'Slavery Project', 'Radioactivity' work, YPS 'Active Citizenship' module), and the way it has been done (PYF trip to Liverpool, Dewsbury group visiting studios in Huddersfield for project work). Allied to this is a higher profile for young people within their own communities.
- Clear and continued capacity building within the Madrassas/supplementary schools sector, which is also starting to have tangible positive impacts on Community Cohesion, and on relationships with statutory organisations.
- Growing awareness amongst staff, both in YPS/KMC and in partner organisations, around what the PVE agenda is about, and how it might relate to other key priorities like Community Cohesion. Here, there has to be a sense of realism about

how quickly new policy agendas can be understood and operationalised, and the issues and recommendations below should be seen as positive learning from initial activity.

2. An Unhelpful Title

A universal view from respondents was that 'Preventing Violent Extremism' is an extremely unhelpful title, and has not been used at all. This has been reflected across West Yorkshire through the shared use of the Pathfinder label, and acknowledged by the DCLG in their shift towards use of the 'Prevent' title. Concerns over use of PVE partly reflected the broader concerns over the political and policy context discussed above, and the feeling that young people, families and communities would all feel that 'PVE' implied that they personally either supported such extremism, or were at risk from it, so providing a highly negative starting point. Such concerns have been shown both locally and nationally by the refusal of some Muslim community organisations to engage with the policy agenda in its current form and title. Therefore, the use of the Pathfinder title within Kirklees is sensible and understandable. However, this remains a problematic situation. The terms

Pathfinder or 'Prevent' are both quite opaque and, arguably, potentially dishonest, as they are a way of labelling the work without actually naming the policy agenda. They certainly do not feel to be positive and energising names or straplines that explain and clarify what the activity is actually about. The current situation means that unless you are in the 'know', the connection between the existing PVE funded activities is far from obvious, suggesting problems of coherence and clarity for staff working on them, let alone the young people and communities engaging with them.

Certainly, some of the respondents felt unclear as to how their activity related to others, and to the wider programme. They wanted a clear vision of what this work represents, and what it is contributing to within Kirklees, and they didn't feel that they had this at the moment. Given the real difficulties of 'PVE', and the limited helpfulness of Pathfinder or 'Prevent' as titles/ straplines, this suggests that Kirklees could and should take the initiative to define and use positive, overarching titles for this area of activity that both explains it clearly and honestly, but also clearly locates it within the wider and positive context of activities for young people and the centrality of the Community Cohesion agenda (see below).

This has become more urgent as it has become clear that DCLG intends to extend 'Prevent'/PVE funding to Youth Offending Teams and Police Forces, and, possibly, to the Further and Higher Education sectors. There is a real risk of duplication, confusion and 'turf' wars here, exacerbated by the lack of clarity discussed above and below.

3. The Relationship to wider Community Cohesion strategies

The above discussion around the wider 'Political and Policy Context' of the PVE Pathfinder activity highlighted the importance of the connection to wider Community Cohesion strategies. The Association of West Yorkshire Authorities were concerned from the onset of the programme that it should positively connect to ongoing and developing Community Cohesion work, and that it should avoid the past policy mistake of working with one ethnic/religious community only. However, this brings the ambiguities of the DCLG agenda into sharp view – how can there be a focus on Muslim -origin young people whilst avoiding contradictions and tensions with Community Cohesion policies? The prominence and political support given to the recently

launched Kirklees Community Cohesion strategy obviously underlines the importance of this question.

Some positive Cohesion work had clearly happened within the Pathfinder programme. Some of the 'Active Citizens' work delivered by YPS had involved ethnically-mixed groups, particularly at the Batley Centre, whilst the 'Inter-generational' work in South Dewsbury was clearly promoting 'Community Cohesion in a wider and important way. Young people had also had the chance to work with workers/professionals of a different ethnic background, for example Muslim young people working with White, Black and Sikh origin staff at Beaumont Street Studios, and had clearly enjoyed this, taking the opportunity to ask questions and explore respective backgrounds – this shows the potential for further Cohesion work. What this obviously raises is the issues of activity with one ethnic/religious group only, as most of the Pathfinder activity in Kirklees to date has been with Muslim-only groups. Given the DCLG national agenda discussed above, this can be seen as necessary and important. Also, good practice evidence around Community Cohesion work with young people (Thomas, 2007) suggests that careful preparation work first needs

to be done with individual groups/communities. Allied to that is the recognition that there is an important need for work around generic skills and understanding of tolerance, diversity and respect, as much of the current activity has done, and that trying to focus on ethnic diversity, racism and religion too quickly, or in isolation, would be mistaken. However, there remained real concerns amongst respondents that the Pathfinder activity seemed 'out of synch' with Community Cohesion, and that future activity needs to be more ambitious here. This reflects a concern that 'learning' about diversity, tolerance and respect in monocultural groups only may well be limited without the chance to expand and deepen knowledge, skills and values through (well-planned and sustained) contact with different ethnic, religious and geographical groups.

Alongside this was the lack of clarity over the role and place of the Pathfinder work – where and how does this activity relate to Community Cohesion work with young people in Kirklees? Good and significant Community Cohesion work is clearly already developing with young people in Kirklees, such as in the Youth Parliament, Youth Games, and Interfaith contacts, so how can Pathfinder activity link to this?

4. Is the work with Muslim Young People up-front enough?

The section above explored the tension between focussing exclusively on Muslim-origin young people and the integration inherent in Community Cohesion activity. However, given the centrality of Muslim young people to the PVE/Pathfinder policy agenda, and to the events which have shaped it, some respondents felt that the work taking place with Muslim young people to date has not been up front enough about the issues of terrorism and violent extremism. Whilst the Pathfinder work with Muslim young people has clearly focussed on broad issues of citizenship, raised aspirations, and provided new experiences, there was little evidence that it has raised and engaged with issues of extremism, terrorism and Islamist political activity. This is partially understandable given the need identified above to develop relationships and confidence, and to not jump straight into highly sensitive and complex issues. However, there was a feeling amongst a number of respondents that there could and should now be a step-up in this focus. This is partially because of the reality that Muslim young people are already actively discussing, and often having clear views about, such issues; an example is the

recent and very well attended meeting on the situation in Gaza and Palestine. Respondents felt that Muslim young people need and want to discuss these issues, but aren't getting the chance at the moment. Respondents identified, for instance, that young people from Westborough High School involved in the Inter-Generational work in South Dewsbury had partly been identified because of an active Police investigation into extremist activity amongst individual or small groups of Muslim young people in the area, but there is limited evidence to date of that piece of work actually going onto discuss such issues with young people. This suggests that there is scope for developing Pathfinder work to include more overt discussions around these issues with Muslim young people, and respondents felt that there is a clear desire for such a development within Muslim community organisations that engage with young people.

Additionally, there is clear evidence(Husain,2007) that support for violent Islamist extremism has often developed in Further and Higher Education settings, as highlighted in DCLG policy advice(DCLG,2007;DIUS,2008). To date, Pathfinder activity in Kirklees has not included a focus on educational settings such as

Dewsbury College, Huddersfield Technical College and the University of Huddersfield, but national evidence would suggest that this needs to develop. Such settings could be appropriate venues for open and positive discussions around extremism and terrorism, and would enable a further development of the 'Citizenship' focus of Pathfinder activity to date. Student Unions and Youth Workers/mentors already working in Colleges clearly have a role to play here, although there needs to be recognition that any such debates will include clear and robust criticism of British foreign and social policy from some Muslim young people, something that should be seen as a constructive and necessary step.

5. Maximising Pathfinder Impact

As outlined above, this Pathfinder activity had very little lead-in/planning time, and comparatively modest resources, and real credit goes to all the staff involved in achieving positive outcomes and progress. Given this reality, respondents inevitably had a number of comments relating to how the approach can be organised and managed to maximise impact in the future. These comments should not be seen as criticism of co-ordination to date,

but as recognition that further funding allows a development of the organisational approach. One clear learning point was a desire to have longer timescales to develop work with individual groups. A number of respondents felt that they were just starting to make progress with groups as funding/time periods ended, and that longer time periods with the same group(e.g.4-6 months) would enable deeper engagement with the core issues in the ways suggested in the previous section. Allied to that is the fact that specialist practitioners/providers are dependent on YPS/schools, etc, to deliver young people, and in such situations, short timescales can be very unrealistic.

Given the short lead in to the initial Pathfinder activity, it was inevitable and understandable that the activities have been designed and largely delivered by KMC/YPS directly. However, this inevitably has created a number of problems. One has been that, while the national policy agenda(DCLG,2007) has called for ownership of the 'problem' and leadership by Muslim communities themselves, the Pathfinder arrangements have only enabled this to a certain extent, such as in the Madrassas development programme, and Pakistani Youth Forum's work with young people.

Developing Commissioning/Partnership approaches for future funded Pathfinder activity would enable a stronger and more proactive role (possibly through consortium arrangements) for Muslim community organisations that have the skills and capacity to carry out work with young people. This would both demonstrate to the wider Kirklees community that there **is** Muslim community leadership and activity on the PVE issue by Muslim communities themselves, and that resources **are** reaching Muslim community organisations. It would also accentuate ongoing Cohesion work by entailing closer relationships between Muslim community organisations and other Youth activity providers in the area. Allied to this would hopefully be greater shared clarity over the efficiency of resource use and appropriacy of activities used within the programme. Some respondents identified perceptions within Muslim communities over the scale of resources granted to specific providers within the Pathfinder programme. In the context of the delivery situation discussed above, and the perceived lack of transparency associated with it, such concerns are inevitable, even if resources allocated reflect the real cost of utilising particular forms of activity. Given the debate outlined above about whether current activity is 'up front' enough with Muslim young people

about the core concerns of the PVE agenda, there is a genuine debate to be had about the cost-effectiveness of technically-based work with comparatively small amounts of young people.

Alongside that are apparent concerns within some Muslim communities about the use of music, dancing and photography with young people – this clearly reflects wider and ongoing debates about different perceptions of ‘appropriacy’ within communities, and how funders should respond to such concerns.

The earlier discussion around the lack of clarity amongst respondents over the purpose of Pathfinder activity and its relationship to wider strategies of Community Cohesion and youth engagement was reflected in a clear desire for more coordination, discussion and sharing of good practice across the Pathfinder programme. DCLG plans a good practice website, and a local version might be helpful, but there are clear limits as to how far a website can help practitioners. Given that a number of respondents identified a lack of confidence and skills amongst practitioners working with young people in debating difficult issues of extremism, prejudice and terrorism, there would seem to be an urgent need to develop ‘good practice’ or training events that

would allow the sharing of good practice and the debate of core issues and potential approaches to them. This would also help to develop a more obvious coherence and sense of ownership amongst agencies and individual practitioners involved in designing and delivering 'Pathfinder activity'.

Recommendations

- **Develop and use a positive, overarching title and explanation for future Pathfinder activity**, ideally one that connects to wider Youth activity ('Vibe'?) or Community Cohesion work. Placing 'Preventing Extremism' within a wider, positive statement of what activity with young people in Kirklees aims to achieve will provide a clear context to practitioners and the public, and will avoid any allegations of underhandedness or duplicity.
- **Develop an approach to planning and commissioning future activity that enables substantial and sustainable involvement from community-based voluntary organisations**(possibly through consortium arrangements),

and which provides realistic timescales to enable work of real depth and substance

- Based on the progress of the initial year, **now be more ambitious in linking Pathfinder activity to wider Community Cohesion work**, making integration and Cohesion one of the key goals of all Pathfinder activity
- **Develop ‘good practice’ events and networks around Pathfinder activity with young people; connect this to similar activity around Community Cohesion activity with young people.** This needs to involve face to face meetings and events that enable the sort of debate and dialogue vital to equipping practitioners with the skills and confidence necessary to develop this work and debate these issues with young people and their communities
- Within the developing Pathfinder activity **ensure that more overt work around issues of extremism, terrorism and the position of Muslims in society is developed with Muslim young people**, particularly from the age of 14 years upwards. Young people need and want to talk about these issues, and explore their own identities, in an open and serious way, and ignoring it or downplaying the ‘political’

element of such discussions will only drive young peoples' debate, and possibly actions, underground.

- **Urgently develop work in the Further and Higher Education sectors in Kirklees** that enables the sort of debates suggested above, but which also promotes Cohesion and Inter-Faith activity.
- **Urgently develop a Kirklees-wide Pathfinder /'Prevent' Steering or Reference Group to avoid duplication and confusion, and maximise positive impact**

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