

1. Introduction and background

In June 2017, TSL ran a thematic workshop looking at the theme of community cohesion and resilience, with a specific focus on the work of Leeds City Council around the counter-extremism strategy and supporting the third sector to play a role in this work. As a next step, members of the TSL Leadership Group agreed to continue these discussions at an appropriate local level through the TSL Goes Local programme.

2. Presentation 1 – community cohesion and resilience

Following an opening welcome by Chris Hollins, Interim Chair of TSL, the South and East event received two presentations, the first from Adrian Curtis of Groundwork and the second from Habib Khan of Hamara. Both spoke about a wide range of work that their respective organisations undertook around the theme of community cohesion and resilience, including specific projects aimed at bringing different communities together and grassroots work to develop community assets and spaces.

3. Group discussions and key findings

Following the presentation, attendees were split into small groups and asked to consider a number of questions around ongoing work, challenges and opportunities within the sector to promote community cohesion and resilience. From the discussions a number of key findings emerged which can be summarised as follows:

Challenges and opportunities within the third sector

Whilst people talked about a lot of ongoing work within the sector, the challenges associated with this related to the lack of available funding, meaning the tendency is for organisations to compete rather than collaborate. Taking more of a partnership approach was seen as a real opportunity however it was acknowledged that for some this would involve a shift in attitude and approach. Provision of small amounts of funding to enable small-scale projects and events to take place was seen as essential in order to kick start work, particularly in areas with low levels of current activity.

Asset-Based Community Development

Many attendees felt that taking an ABCD approach was gaining traction in the city and that putting the community at the centre of work and enabling them to steer and develop would make best use of the assets we have within communities – both individually and collectively. It was acknowledged that there are examples of low-cost or no-cost projects which have a great impact on community cohesion (Park Run was cited as a good example). However, some people reported that those within the communities in South Leeds often have low levels of confidence about their skills and abilities to effect positive change – this signals a clear role for groups and organisations to build this confidence and nurture the potential within the community.

Involving the whole community

The need to ensure that the whole community were involved in activities around community cohesion was seen as vitally important, particularly involving younger and older people to build better inter-generational understanding and relationships. It was also pointed out that the term ‘community’ doesn’t just refer to a community of place, that it could be a community of interest too. In either case, people felt that there are lots of opportunities to bring different people together – provided people know what’s going on within the local area.

Promoting positive work and sharing information

It was felt that there is potential for many more ‘good news stories’ both to inspire others but also to highlight work and create opportunities for partnership and collaboration through increased knowledge and information sharing. Using traditional media and social media were seen as good avenues for this, along with building relationships with local councillors, who have a key role to play in promoting positive initiatives within the community. Attendees also felt that TSL should play a role in this work, and that use could be made of digital platforms (Doing Good Leeds and the [Ideas to Change Leeds](#) site) as well as workshops / events organised through TSL Goes Local.

Opportunities for partnership working

As well as the need to work more closely with others within the sector, attendees also felt that continuing to work closely with the Council was important, as well as working to build better links with businesses local to an area. Some people expressed the view that the third sector has the freedom to be more innovative and responsive to emerging needs within the community, but that working with the local authority on issues of community cohesion was important, with the Community Committees seen as a good means of ensuring this link.

4. Presentation 2 – developing the counter-extremism strategy

Attendees then received a presentation from Beverley Yearwood, Community Coordinator at Leeds City Council regarding her work and the overall aims of developing a counter-extremism strategy. Attendees heard that the aim of the Community Coordinator’s work is to:

- Identify partners
- Engage and build networks
- Build capacity

Bev shared information and advice about how third sector organisations can support the development of the strategy and the approach in Leeds through a focus on building resilience.

5. Group discussions and key findings

Following the presentation, attendees were split into small groups and asked to consider a number of questions around how third sector groups and organisations can support the delivery of the counter-extremism strategy and any assistance needed. From the discussions a number of key findings emerged which can be summarised as follows:

Information and awareness-raising

Attendees felt the need for further and continuing information on aspects of the counter-extremism strategy to enable them to more confidently provide raise awareness and provide support within the community. This included knowing what to look out for, how to report any concerns and how this relates to confidentiality, data protection and safeguarding.

Training, support and guidance

In order to be able to support the delivery of the strategy, organisations requested access to further training and sources of support. Opening up a positive ‘challenging conversation’ was seen as an important role for groups and organisations, but there was acknowledgment that further support to enable them to do this confidently was key. (Attendees were informed that a recent VAL-led project entitled Challenging Conversations had led to the development of a [toolkit](#), and further work was ongoing to develop a package of training which would be made widely available).

Supporting delivery

Whilst some attendees felt that the third sector is already delivering on the strategy, others questioned what the local authority’s expectations were and how they want organisations to deliver on their behalf. People

asked for clarity on how they can get support if they have concerns and who to speak to. Others suggested it would be useful for a clear steer from the Council on their stance around related issues, such as free speech and incitement.

Investment in young people

Some discussions focussed on the need to engage young people in constructive dialogue around these issues and the positive impact that youth work can have in this respect. Many felt that funding for youth work needed to be increased in order to enable more young people to access opportunities to engage with those from different backgrounds, take part in dialogue and develop positive role models. Alongside this, some attendees also felt that attention needed to be given to older people who express extreme views and who are likely to negatively influence the opinions of younger people.

The impact of national issues

During the conversations many people made reference to the impact of national issues at a local level. Whilst not confined to Leeds, many attendees felt that the EU referendum and its aftermath had seemingly 'legitimised' more extreme and racist views within some communities. The spike in hate crime following Brexit was referenced as an example of this. In terms of media, discussions centred on the negative portrayal of modern Britain seen in some of the national press, which again was felt to be exacerbating the views of some individuals. Social media was seen as a particular issue, with attendees expressing concern about the narrow views some individuals are exposed to, alongside a view that more needs to be done nationally to counter hate crime and speech online.

6. Characteristics of a Thriving Community

During the workshop attendees had the opportunity feedback on the draft document 'Characteristics of a Thriving Community'. People were asked to consider whether the characteristics reflected their understanding of what would signify a thriving community, whether anything was missing and how their group or organisation is contributing towards these activities.

The document is attached at appendix A, with additions made during all three TSL Goes Local sessions marked in red.

7. Recommendations

The TSL Leadership Group is asked to consider the following recommendations and consider whether any other work should be taken forward as a result of these discussions.

1. For the TSL S&E Locality Lead to feedback the key findings of this workshop discussion to relevant colleagues, including local councillors and Leeds City Council Communities teams
2. For TSL to consider how it can play a role in supporting organisations to share resources and support one another, linking larger organisations to smaller / newly formed groups.
3. For TSL to use a variety of methods – including TSL Goes Local and Doing Good Leeds – to share relevant information regarding opportunities, funding, activity and good news stories with third sector organisations and groups.
4. For TSL to ensure that third sector organisations are able to influence ongoing work to develop the Counter-Extremism Strategy, including accessing support and training to enable them to support delivery at a local level.

Appendix A

Best City for Thriving Communities

In order that Leeds delivers on the ambition to be the Best City for Communities the City aims to ensure all communities in Leeds thrive. Community affects each of us personally, including quality of life, how long we live, and how much we enjoy it.

Characteristics of a thriving community include:

- Members of the community feel they have control over their own lives, and influence over their own futures; they understand their role and their contribution to the common good is recognised. Trust is fostered within/between communities/individuals and organisation.
- There is recognition that social connections are as important as work, socio-economic status, or health factors. People are socially connected to community, to family, to friends. The quality of close relationships matters and topping them up when things change is important. Relationships are strong enough to identify when people need more support and when emotional, mental or physical wellbeing is noticeably changing.
- Members of the community have shared purpose (e.g. through a family, friends, workplace, community groups, shared identity, faith), the confidence to act when things need changed or improved and they support the purposes of other communities; but with enough room to pursue individual aspirations.
- No-one is set aside from the community and their ongoing contribution is recognised, welcomed and supported (e.g. older people, people with learning disabilities).
- The characteristics of personal resilience are taught in schools and supported in other shared environments (e.g. care environments and workplaces) including understanding boundaries, self awareness, self care, managing disappointment/stress, taking the lead, team working and mindfulness.
- Work opportunities and pathways to a useful occupation are accessible to all including paid employment, volunteering and cultural or artistic activity. Noting that it's not any job that delivers good outcomes and people who work too much are at risk of serious health consequences. Work aims to be a place that helps create social connection, and sustain wellbeing and resilience.
- Members of the community are involved in key decisions which affect their communities and take the lead when necessary. They are able to contribute to wider economic, political and social decisions where different communities need to cooperate with each other and there is a culture of sharing knowledge and skills. There is space to raise and deal with difficult issues in a safe environment.
- There is community supported/led, accessible social infrastructure that facilitates human connection and exchange (e.g. libraries, parks and places to learn such as schools, universities and vocational institutions, places of worship.) including local institutions which act as communications hubs/spaces where all members of the community can mix & mingle (e.g. community anchors and community centres).
- Community led urban planning is in place and facilitates easy movement between work, home and community facilities such as support providers, heritage/cultural venues, transport & broadband

infrastructure.

- There is an enterprising and sustainable economy which includes locally run businesses and social enterprises with a culture of healthy competition.
- The community respects and takes pride in their surroundings; it is resilient and able to mobilise to provide support in times of crisis.
- Contact in and between communities is supported by press, media and local events – helping to maintain information, knowledge and understanding between community members and their traditions.
- Members of the community feel safe both at home and when moving through the community (and beyond) at any time of the day.
- The community welcomes newcomers and treats each other with respect regardless of differences; recognising that, whilst people have differences, there is much more they have in common.
- There is a high degree of cooperation and collaboration amongst organisations and institutions that deliver support services to the community; with all services co-produced with the community.

Key to achieving the Cities ambition of Thriving Communities are clear indicators for each community that can be measured. However, it is also crucial that any measurement takes into account the vision of thriving from within a community and demonstrates that a community is meeting the goals it has set for itself.

Potential Indicators of a thriving community:

- Education including:
 - School attendance and expulsion levels
 - Levels of Educational/Vocational Training attainment
 - Verbal proficiency in children starting school/nursery
- Economic contribution including:
 - Numbers of people on a self sufficient/living wage
 - Number of adults in regular work and/or volunteering
 - Numbers of people employed/volunteering locally/commute times
- The people within the community including:
 - Mix of population by ethnicity, age and income
 - Life expectancy (including infant mortality)
 - Levels of Poverty and Child Poverty
- Levels of participation in the community including:
 - Levels of positive contact between neighbours
 - Level of Community Led activity/ABCD
 - Numbers of people who feel part of and supported by the community
 - Levels of attendance at community events/activities
 - Numbers of people accessing to community spaces (including open spaces)

- Community confidence in challenging negative behavior in their community
- Levels of involvement in policy making/influencing and service design including:
 - Involvement in Community Committees
 - Voter Turn Out at Elections
 - Levels of support from service providers and levels of community involvement in service design
- Community Confidence including:
 - Crime Rates/Perceptions of Crime Rates, people reporting that they feel safe
 - Stability of population (do people stay?)