

Young People and Extremism

Some reflections from our of local studies

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Institute of Community Cohesion (iCoCo) has conducted a number of reviews of community cohesion across a range of local authorities in different parts of the country and has in each case engaged directly with younger people from many backgrounds in their own community settings. In all, we have spoken with more than 1,000 young people in informal focus groups, covering most regions, including London and largely in urban settings.

This study reflects the views we have obtained and draws together some of the common threads. From this we have developed a conceptual framework, which looks at the very wide range of pressures upon young people and especially the key influences. We hope to extend our research and to be able to better understand some of these key strands and, in particular, to further consider what might allow some of the disaffection to be turned into more positive attitudes. We also hope that this study may prove helpful to local authorities and their partners by providing them with a framework to analyse their own particular local context. We have been struck by the fact that although there are common features (and it is these we discuss in more detail below), this is not an area of work where 'one size fits all'. Further, the local circumstances and the influences in each community appear to be crucial and this underlines the importance of local authorities and other agencies being prepared to engage in this important and sensitive issue.

We do need to emphasise that, whilst young people are amongst the most vulnerable members of our communities, they should not be seen as the problem. The vast majority of young people do not support extremist views – and the vast majority of extremists are not 'young', in the conventional sense at least. For the most part, young people we spoke to had relatively little interest in politics, whether moderate or extreme and the views expressed rarely lined up with a particular political party or ideology. However, many young people begin to form political views in their teenage years as they become more socially aware. The allure of simplistic and extreme views can then prove attractive to some younger people and may be subsequently developed into a more coherent extremist ideology at some point, especially where this is supported by close contacts in their communities or networks.

This review complements the guidance – *Preventing Extremism: Promoting Cohesion – the Members' View*, which suggests some of the means by which local authority leaders and their partners can better engage with their communities, build a moral climate of opinion and provide leadership for a wide range of statutory, private and voluntary sector agencies.

1.1 Tackling Extremism and Building Community Cohesion

iCoCo is concerned about the way in which ‘cohesion’, or the lack of it, has been linked to the debate about ‘terrorism’ and the way in which particular communities have been characterised. It is important, therefore, to strike a note of caution in this context. The origins and aims of policies and initiatives aimed at addressing problems of community cohesion, whilst emerging from the conflict and disorder problems of 2001, are different from the more recent concern to engage communities and address their concerns in the context of counter-terrorism. Whilst it is true (as we will discuss in more detail below) that building cohesion will address some factors potentially contributing to the development of violent extremism, it is essential to avoid giving the impression that community cohesion is only of concern because of the this threat. There is a real risk that such an approach will do even more to marginalise certain groups within our communities and increase the resentment about apparently unequal treatment.

Community Cohesion is part of a broad agenda to tackle inequalities, promote a shared vision and sense of belonging and to build interaction to overcome the isolation and exclusion of some communities. In this way it aims to build understanding and mutual respect and break down the barriers between people of different backgrounds. Community cohesion should not be seen as a special programme: one of the challenges facing local authorities and their partners in tackling extremism and building community cohesion is how to integrate (or “mainstream”) these new approaches into the delivery of services across the board. We have been struck in particular by the apparent links between work on Child Protection and Crime Prevention and possible approaches to tackling extremism amongst young people. There is the potential here to harness existing resources and structures rather than ‘inventing new wheels’. And, making community cohesion a reality on the ground is, we believe, of key significance in addressing the underlying causes of disengagement and disaffection.

We have been encouraged by the most recent Government statements which emphasise the need to win the hearts and minds of communities and to work with them to marginalise and isolate extremists. Whilst we acknowledge that some extremists are attracted by a coherent ideological position which can be rationalised intellectually, most of the young people we spoke to were much more likely to be influenced by peers and by immediate situational and community pressures. It may well be that, subsequently, ideological and theological factors assume more importance, but the initial attraction could well be very prosaic. In our view these situational factors need to be much better understood and engaged with.

2. TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Background to the Research

The research work undertaken at local level has been based firstly, on developing an understanding of previous work in this area and particularly the determinants of 'extremist' behaviour. This is made more difficult by the lack of accepted terminology and little agreement about what constitutes 'extremism' and related terms, (see Annex 2 for more detail).

There have been relatively few studies which have examined the appeal of extremist ideology, at least in terms which are relevant at community level. Much of the previous work has been focussed on the personality traits of individuals, particularly the notion of the 'authoritarian personality' rather than the social, political and community contexts, which are constantly shifting and changing. Nevertheless, some new studies are now beginning to emerge which we believe are very complementary and we hope that this report will add to that growing body of knowledge.

In addition to examining a number of national studies, we reviewed the policies and practices of the local authorities we worked with, interviewed key stakeholders (including community leaders, those most closely in contact with young people and/or responsible for providing services to them, and, in some cases, community faith leaders). Another key feature of our work at local level was a series of focus groups – involving young people in a range of settings and including White, BME and mixed groups, specific faith based meetings and those with young women. These involved over 500 young people in London and a further 500 in West Yorkshire and the Midlands and more recently, we have interviewed young people in West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, The North East and the South.

It was, of course, very difficult to establish whether any of the individuals involved in the focus groups were actively involved in violent extremism, unless specifically declared. It was obvious from the discussion that some held extreme views, or were aware of extremist groups and that many were involved in some way with gangs. We had no evidence that any of them were actively involved in any form of violent extremism.

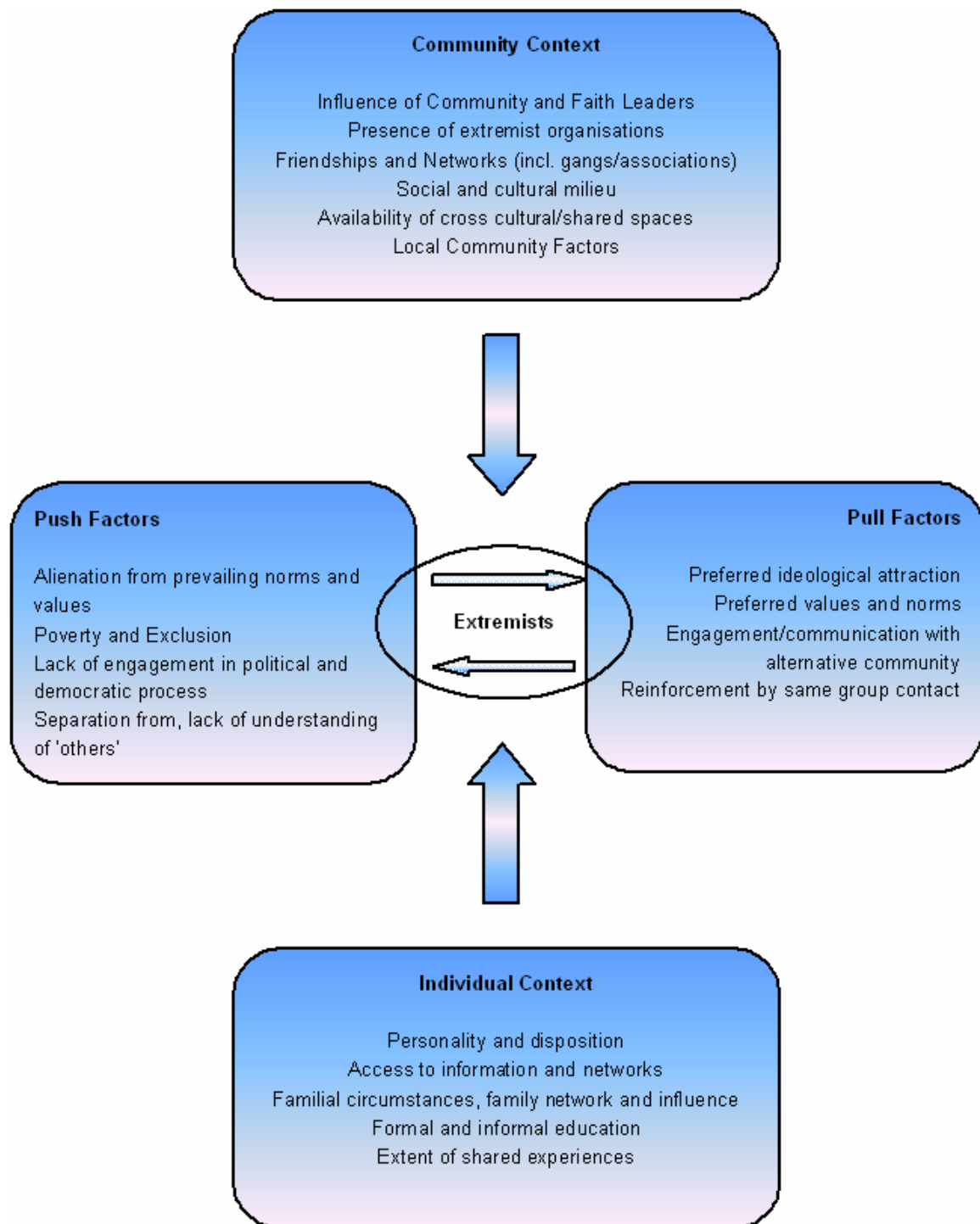
Whilst our interviews have been extensive, we cannot be certain that they form a representative body of opinion, especially given the wide variety of individuals, locations and circumstances. However, the group work gave us confidence that we had successfully identified the key factors and some clear trends began to emerge indicating some of the principal influences in each area.

We believe that the approach has real potential for further development and we hope to be able to build on the work we have done so far, perhaps in different areas and on a wider basis, in due course.

The interviews and focus groups helpfully contributed a range of views, many of which inevitably lacked an evidential basis or were anecdotal in nature. However, they did enable us to add to the national and other views and to develop a firm basis upon which to conduct fieldwork and to test out a range of perspectives.

We developed a theoretical model upon which to base our fieldwork and to conduct the interviews and discussion with young people. This attempted to understand the way in which extremist positions might develop and be sustained, by reference to both ideological and political directions and from much more localised community and personal influences. The model is set out below.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: What Factors Determine Extremism?



Our studies have necessarily been limited by time and resources and we were not able to verify the model with full scientific rigour. This would have required much larger samples and the data to apply tests of statistical significance of each of the different factors. It would have also required many more interviews and with much greater emphasis on working with individual young people, rather than the group work upon which the study depended.

2.2 Identification of Influencing Factors

We are optimistic that the factors identified cover the range of extremist appeals which are many and varied. Much of the literature had suggested that political or ideological factors were influential, especially those which attempted to capitalise upon the frustration and hopelessness of people locked into poor socio-economic positions. For example, the 'push' factors associated with the attraction of the extreme right have been well documented in the past and they have often targeted areas of poor housing and unemployment. There is some evidence however that their focus is beginning to change. Similarly, a theory has been advanced in respect of religious extremism, suggesting that young people have been susceptible to those preaching hate because of the lack of integration into mainstream society and the denial of opportunities, which this would provide. Again, this may be rather simplistic and 'pull' factors may well be more influential. We have noted that most of those involved in religious extremism are, in fact, generally reasonably well educated and neither lack opportunities nor are they particularly 'young'. We were therefore able to consider where the young people we spoke to would place themselves on this 'push/pull' axis.

It is also possible, however, that the more direct and immediate pressures on young people are just as, or even more, significant. Perhaps their personal circumstances, family background, extent of education and personal life experiences are critical, or; perhaps the social and community pressures which surround them each day, particularly their kin, faith and friendship networks and patterns are more important. This is also difficult to understand and isolate in small studies and a more fine grained analysis based on the life experiences of individuals would be required. However, we were able to gain significant insights into the everyday experiences of young people in their different settings and record their views.

Other commentators have proposed similar models: the Young Foundation¹ suggest three key criteria – namely institutional, background, and drivers and triggers), and the Dutch Government identified similar criteria (individual, interpersonal, effect of circumstances).

The model set out at figure 1 above, which we have used as a framework for our local studies echoes these to some extent and we believe lends itself more readily to the analysis of issues at local level, defining “push” and “pull” factors within community and individual contexts.

We had expected what we describe as the “push” (eg alienation, social deprivation) and “pull” (eg ideology) factors to be the most significant as they have been most clearly and obviously associated with extremism in the past. However, as we show below, using this model to reflect on our findings in our work in London in particular, but reflected in other parts of the country, we found that the situational or community factors were much more important as influences. This emphasises the significance of local circumstances and how crucial the roles of local authorities and their partners are in tackling problems of disaffection and extremism.

“**Push**” factors include:

- *alienation from prevailing norms and attitudes*: racialised perceptions; pressures from “traditional” family ties and cultural values
- *poverty and exclusion*: ie low educational attainment; poor qualifications and job prospects; worklessness; problems with access to housing
- *low engagement with political/democratic process*: disillusionment with traditional party and various forms of “communal politics”
- *separation from, lack of understanding of “others”*: attitudes to recent arrivals into the area
- *misinformation and false perceptions* about service provision and, until recently, an inability or reluctance within communities to provide credible counter-argument to radical/extreme views

“**Pull**” factors include:

- *preferred ideological attraction*: far right parties appear to address issues of day to day concern and general cynicism about “mainstream” political process; and principles of religious extremism provide an attractive ‘certainty’ absent from “corrupt” western society and an alternative ideology.
- *preferred values and norms*: appeal of far right emphasis on the ‘British tradition’ of white communities; religious groups oppose the ‘decadence’ of Western societies.

- *engagement/communication with alternative community*: Council and mainstream political process not seen as relevant and compete with internet and more attractive communications.
- *reinforcement by same group contact*: the confines of insular communities, associations and gangs.

The strength or influence of factors such as these will depend on the **Community Context** including:

- *influence of Community and Faith Leaders*: more likely to be factors in terms of religious extremism than for far right; however, the “prevalence” of sympathy and traditional support for the extreme right in some areas, for example, cannot be discounted as an influence;
- *presence of extremist organisations*: clearly wherever active, such organisations will issue propaganda, discuss their ideas and provide networks
- *friendships and networks (including gangs and associations)*: gangs are clearly significant in certain areas and for certain groups of young people;
- *social and cultural milieu*: peer influence/pressure; and respect for traditional religious authority/structures remain strong amongst many Asian young people of all faiths; but the rejection of traditional cultural values can also be a significant factor
- *availability of cross cultural/shared spaces*: lack of facilities mentioned frequently in focus groups/interviews;
- *local community factors*: tradition and geography appear to influence attitudes/responses especially amongst young people.

Finally, we need to take account of the **individual** context, including

- *personality and disposition*: we are conscious that this has formed part of previous studies, but we have not been able to consider individual traits in any depth
- *access to information and networks*: whilst some networks are community based, whilst information is now also widely available to individuals via the internet, satellite television and printed media.

- *familial circumstances, family network and influence*: many of the young people we met “inherit” or adopt their family’s views, attitudes and political sympathies; but inter-generational conflicts also apparent in which the rejection of traditional family views seems to accelerate the attraction of extremist and other alternative value systems.
- *formal and informal education* – again, difficult to ascertain formal educational position in group work, but informal educative and associational factors were clearly important
- *extent of shared experiences*: isolation, segregation, or parallel lives may be a factor in this context. ‘Social’ segregation may be a particular factor.

3. KEY EMERGING THEMES

Each of the study areas followed a number of common themes:

- how well did young people get on with others from different backgrounds in the local area?
- did they think that these relationships were improving or getting worse?
- What did they see as the principal causes of any difficulties they experienced?
- What did they hope to see improved?

In addition, we sought their views on:

- The nature of ‘extremism’ in their area and whether they saw it as a serious threat
- What they saw as the main contributory factors

And, in discussing these issues, we sought to ascertain:

- The level of interest in extremism
- The level of knowledge about extremist thought and ideology
- Key areas of attraction

In each case, we considered how these views related to our analytical model and how the different factors might be considered.

3.1 Local Community Factors

As indicated above, local community factors seemed much more relevant to young people, who by and large did not trumpet extremist rhetoric (neither violent religious extremism, nor extreme right). They seemed to be much more influenced by immediate context and by peer pressure.

A large proportion of the young people we heard from lead lives to a greater or lesser extent isolated from young people from other racial or ethnic groups, even if they live and attend schools in apparently “mixed” areas. Such ‘single identity support systems’, or insular communities, provide potential pre-conditions of extremism which are mutually reinforcing and are more likely to go unchallenged. Agencies such as youth services, and schools need to take account of the role and significance of these peer relationships in considering whether and how best to intervene to challenge extremist messages and support vulnerable young people.

3.2 Young people: Security, identity and gang culture

Security was a key concern amongst many of the young people we met. The lives of such young people are circumscribed by fear, or by perceptions of 'no go' areas in their localities – which inhibit their willingness or ability to move in different circles and take full advantages of the opportunities available to them. Gangs and gang culture featured in discussion in the focus groups more strongly than we had expected. This is of concern not only in terms of criminal activity and propensity to violence, which may be overstated or owe more to bravado, but more generally in terms of creating peer pressure, ideas of victimhood, and racialised perceptions of others seen as the "competition".

In some areas, gangs will be focused more or less exclusively on territory; in others, they reflect racial, as much as territorial tensions. They can also be influenced by related criminal activity in neighbouring areas. We were told that one gang, with a largely Somali and other Muslim membership, was associated with violent and criminal behaviour such as stabbings and muggings, and was also responsible for graffiti and vandalism, was response to white gangs, which, in turn, were responsible for similar behaviour and extreme right graffiti. Members of at least one of the white gangs in the same area appear to take pride in being described as racist or Islamophobic.

Some of the claims may be exaggerated and part of the need for status and desire for bravado. But some of the sentiments expressed by young people also represent views which echo those in other parts of London recently in the news:

"If something happens to me I know I've got all these people to look after me."
[member of Albanian Youth Group]

"not anti anybody unless anti-them."

"Most kids we know are in gangs".

Gangs and associations may do more than reinforce local territories and provide group support. They may also help to determine identities and change existing self-perceptions, especially where these associations are separate from – and even at odds with – family and kinship networks. Shiv Malik, in his research into the background of a suicide bomber² describes the separation of Mohammed Siddique Khan from his family over number of years, to the point where relationships were severed. His new network, became his 'family' and re-defined his identity. Ed Hussain in his book *The Islamist*³ charts a similar journey.

"If you don't belong in your family then you join a gang."

People of all backgrounds, and including the young, have multiple identities. Gangs and associations perhaps provide just one of that number. It is not possible to say at what point different identities rise and fall in importance and this will clearly depend upon many local and personal factors, as well as

national and international drivers. However, it seems that a combination of 'pull factors' in which particular ideas are reinforced by a close circle of friends and associates and 'push factors' in which disaffection and alienation from familiar family and community norms, is particularly powerful.

Some of the "gangs" we heard about had a more or less explicit "Muslim" focus. We gained the impression from the young people we met that Islam commands a high degree of respect and is a key source of identity for the young – for both longstanding migrant groups and new arrivals, such as the Somalis. But this did not mean that those young people necessarily had a deep understanding of their religion and in some cases it appeared to be very limited. Indeed, some, young people appear to translate half understood ideas drawn from so-called radical Islamic or other extremist points of view, into a justification for violence, and anti-social behaviour. Rarely did the discussion in the focus groups indicate a real knowledge of extremist positions and in that sense at least, were not 'pulled' by an ideological attraction. Nevertheless, there was a particular status or even 'glamour' associated with extremist positions which was apparent in gangs of Muslim young people, and Sikh extremism plays a similar part for Sikh gangs, as does the Far Right for the White gangs.

And, although not directly linked to extremism, "gang culture" contributes to pressures on girls at least in some of the areas we have worked:

"Girls go around acting like boys nowadays. They want to prove themselves so they go out doing all the things that boys do but because they've got something to prove they take it to the extremes."

[Young black man in discussion: Waltham Forest]

Many of those working in statutory or voluntary agencies "on the street" tackling gang culture will also pick up evidence of the activity of extremist groups seeking to recruit in the area. And although different factors influence the small number of young people who become involved in violent extremism as compared to those which lead to drug misuse and other criminal or anti-social behaviour, there are similarities in the interventions intended to address or challenge disengagement and alienation. This reinforces the importance of close co-operation between the various agencies working in this area and effective "joining up" planning and delivery of services to this challenging group – in particular in considering, perhaps on a case by case basis, whether the focus should be on Child Protection or Crime Prevention (we understand that some national agencies are piloting a similar approach with selected local authorities).

Case Study: “Defendin’ da Hood” – Waltham Forest

This initiative, led by SafetyNet (the Waltham Forest Crime Reduction Partnership) sought to reach those young people actively involved in, or on the periphery of, local gang culture to reduce incidents of gang-related violence and create alternative pathways to improve their life chances.

More specifically, the Council wanted those young people to understand that they might consider it appropriate to defend their “hoods” against other young people using violence but if they did this, they also needed to understand that the Council and its partners would target them, as they, too, would seek to defend their “hood” – the borough.

The project has provided a mechanism for engaging young people, has led to a reduction in crime (by 40% around the time of the first event) and has been awarded a Race ActionNet Award.

It has helped the Council and its partners to engage with disaffected young people in a way that meant genuine involvement for them. It also meant that the Council had to demonstrate that they were really listening to the young people and that their views made a difference. It involves events where young people have enjoyed entertainment and music but always having to discuss a serious topic first, with the Council and its partners committed to listening to what they say.

Topics dealt with include: helping young Asian people build better communication links with their elders (following the London Bombings in July 05); teenage pregnancy and gun crime.³

There has been much discussion in the press and media about the extent to which violent extremists have been ‘integrated’ into mainstream society. Much of the focus has been on the more obvious considerations of housing area, school and employment. In some areas it is clear from the relevant data and from what we heard in the focus groups that young people experience significant degrees of isolation from those from other communities or backgrounds. But this is not always the case and there has therefore been an assumption of a reasonable degree of integration. Gangs and informal networks may in fact provide a very powerful force for social segregation, where friendships reinforce an entirely separate and distinct set of ideas and values.

3.3 Young people: School environment

We were struck by the extent to which the formal networks in schools were described to us by both young people and their parents, as racialised environments where gang and/or peer pressure seems to go unchallenged. This may not, of itself, be leading to any form of extremism, let alone violent extremism, but potentially extremist views may be reinforced and sustained in such situations. On the other hand, we also heard of many good examples where schools had made real and effective efforts to engage students from different communities and had encouraged debate and discussion including on issues of particular concern to young Muslims.

Case Study: Kirklees Primary School Twinning Programme

The aim of the programme is to build bridges between Primary Schools dominated by White and BME pupils, bringing pupils of different ethnic backgrounds together for joint activities.

A particular strength of the programme is the extensive and thorough planning and preparation including careful “matching” of pupils.

Both teachers and pupils spoke highly of the programme, even where they were concerned about the time and resources involved.

It was found that the programme worked best where it was part of a range of activities to promote interaction between pupils and parents of different backgrounds in the wider local community. These activities also worked well where schools had developed a close working relationship with the Youth Service and Community Support Services.

Sticking together

Schools face a real challenge, however, in terms of countering, or ‘compensating’ for, the influence exerted by family and friends. Focus groups in all the areas we have worked paint a picture where, often despite a strong school ethos of respecting different cultures, pupils of different ethnic groups “stick together” in insular communities, especially once they leave the classroom:

“People stick in own communities and cultures and people don’t want to learn.”

“We split our children at primary school into Whites and Asians which is sad.”
[Comments from Hounslow focus groups]

“Asians on one side and whites and African Caribbeans on the other and only one or two individuals with friends across different groups”

“Races in my school don’t mix. We are four whites and the rest are Asians. No matter what we do to mix, they will not let us.”
[Comments from Sandwell focus groups]

“Children mix up until year 7, when they don’t. In school it is fine. The name calling starts outside school.”

“For protection our children are driven to and from schools. In schools it is very segregated.!”
[Comments from Kirklees focus groups]

Radicalisation

Teachers in some schools recognise the effects of radicalisation. We heard very little about obvious signs of identification with far right groups, but amongst some Muslim pupils, changes in behaviour had been noted though teachers did not always know whether or how to tackle the issue. Waltham Forest dealt with such concerns (which were expressed in particular following the arrests of suspected terrorists in the borough in August 2006) by involving a newly appointed Muslim Advisor, and also by using a child protection framework or perspective. Head Teachers appreciated the support they received, in particular the clarity about what avenues were available to them.

Such issues clearly need to be handled with great sensitivity: as many we met emphasised – radicalisation of itself is not necessarily nor indeed generally a problem. Many young people become radicalised, or take what adults may regard as extreme views as part of the process of growing up. Such involvement in the civic process is to be welcomed. And where “radicalisation” is associated with the adoption of what many describe as “fundamentalist” religious views – namely increased devotion and an interest in spiritual issues, this is likely to have positive effects on young people’s behaviour. The challenge for schools and other agencies is to identify where such attitudes and beliefs lead to hostility towards other beliefs, religions, or cultures or are likely to lead to illegal [or criminal] behaviour. (see also ‘Understanding Muslim Communities’ at Annex 1)

2.4 Children’s and Young People’s Services

Many of the young people we met, as well as their parents and professionals working in the field, bemoaned the lack of facilities for young people and not having anywhere for them to go. This echoes the findings of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion⁴ and the emerging thinking of the ‘make space’ Youth Review⁵ and is, to some extent, linked to the prevalence of insecurity, and of “no-go” areas associated with gangs and related criminal or anti-social behaviour described above. Young People’s and Children’s Services clearly have a potentially key role to play in responding to this agenda. The local authorities involved in our review, as elsewhere, face a range of challenges including in the context of Youth Matters, some of which are potentially of direct relevance to tackling youth disengagement and extremism.

Partnership working/"joining up" services

We came across many examples of good practice where Youth Services and/or non-statutory agencies have used sport or other cultural activities (eg music) to bring together young people from different communities. Such initiatives help undermine the sense of isolation and disengagement which supports the development of extremism.

However, the lack of an effectively "corporate", cross agency approach in many cases inhibited the effectiveness of local authorities' responses to issues of extremism and youth disengagement. Relationships with the local police service potentially play a key role. The experience of dealing with an event such as the arrests of suspected terrorists in Waltham Forest in August 2006 demonstrated the effectiveness of their "emergency response"; but it has also exposed the need for more sophisticated and closer partnership working for the medium and longer term.

Such an approach presents challenges for all involved and, perhaps, in particular to the tradition of youth work and young people's services hitherto.

Every Child Matters/Youth Matters

The development of strategies and plans in response to Every Child Matters and Youth Matters provides local authorities with an opportunity to create an environment in which issues of extremism and youth disengagement can be tackled. It is important not to get this issue out of proportion. A very small proportion of young people will get involved in violent extremism. It should not be necessary (or desirable) to set up new machinery or to develop specific, additional plans and strategies, but to be clear (for example through the development of appropriate protocols) about how existing arrangements can be used to deal with problems or concerns which may arise.

The London Borough of Waltham Forest in particular has highlighted alternative potential approaches to tackling these issues: Child Protection and Crime Prevention (see Annex 3). Neither provides a simple or straightforward solution but both are likely to include mechanisms or systems which might usefully support work focused on tackling extremism amongst young people.

2.5 Muslim communities

Our work on youth disengagement and extremism has included a particular focus on local Muslim communities given the national concern and debate on counter-terrorism and related issues. We set out below some of the common themes to emerge from our work in this area. However many of those we encountered reinforced our own concern about an apparently disproportionate focus on Muslim communities and the consequent risk of reinforcing the sense of victim-hood and isolation already being experienced in those communities following 9/11 and the London Bombings in July 2005.

Pressures and challenges facing young people in Muslim communities

Some of the people we spoke to, especially those working with young people, emphasised the difficulty for many young Muslims of coping with conflicting pressures in terms of their religion; family expectations; the gang culture; and other aspects of “westernised” life. This is, perhaps, reflected in a related observation about inter-generational issues affecting Muslim Communities.

“Young people are moving towards western life which is causing tensions in the community. Parents fear change and hold on to traditional values.”

“We don’t know how to communicate with our children - we need to learn how to engage – we fear it and if we see them mixing we judge them wrongly.”

Focus group discussion in Kirklees

“Our young people are not sure and confused as to whether part of the Asian or Western culture; at home they are Asian and outside they are White”

Asian Woman in focus group discussion in Waltham Forest.

“Our young people are not sure and confused as to whether part of the Asian or Western culture; at home they are Asian and outside they are White”

Asian Women in focus group discussion in Waltham Forest.

Some young people appear to provide the only link between their parents and wider society: parents rely on their children to tell them what is going on in what appears to them to be an alien environment in which they don’t know how to engage.

However, the messages we heard were not universally negative.

“We rebel in a good way – we don’t forget our religion and culture and still live in this society.”

Young Asian Girl in focus group discussion in Waltham Forest.

And the ‘street cred’ of Islam, which appears to influence, to some extent, those young people involved in “gangs” can also provide an effective counter to the appeal of anti-social behaviour and criminality. We heard of instances where young people had been influenced through their interest in and engagement with Islam to renounce their involvement with gangs and associated behaviours.

We also heard that some of the people working with the Muslim communities in Waltham Forest had found that different age groups had particularly pronounced differences in attitude: for example, those aged 40 and 50 tended to be positive, supporting police and other agencies and generally “integrated” into wider society. Those aged between 25 and 40, or 50+ tended to be more ambivalent about western society and their place in it. And those aged under 25 were in many cases actively hostile.

Women and girls

Not all Mosques include provision for Islamic schooling or involve women on their Committees or provide services for women and girls. However, there are some, which, for example have a separate Women's committee and welcome women and girls from across Muslim communities. In other Mosques, facilities for women are under-used.

We heard in some parts of London, for example, that the bombings and subsequent developments had had a particularly negative impact on some Muslim girls in terms of an increase in abuse on the streets; and pressures to adopt the Hijab, Jilbab or even the Burka or Niqab. This experience made some young women leave home. Conversely, we heard in several focus groups that Hijab or Jilbab wearing Asian girls and women had been taunted, or that people had tried to pull off scarves or veils, which increases their sense of fear. Others mentioned an increase in the incidence of self harm amongst young Asian girls and their sense of isolation (being prevented by their communities from expressing their views and finding a voice) and the potential consequence of under-achievement at school.

Conversely, we heard of positive examples of the ways in which girls from Muslim communities were succeeding in schools, expanding their horizons and making the most of the educational opportunities available to them. Several Head Teachers (again in London) emphasised the importance of teachers from the Muslim communities as role models in supporting students in their schools.

Several of the people we spoke to commented on the potentially key role of mothers and young women who did not feel they could speak out and challenge or evidently disapprove of some of the behaviour and views of their young men. Such women were excluded, for reasons of language, circumstance or family or community pressure, from efforts on the part of the local authority or other agencies (statutory and voluntary) to engage and involve them more widely. They felt dependent on the men in their communities for any information about what was going on around them and discouraged from participating in schools, employment or community activity. (For further discussion of diversity in Muslim communities, see Annex 1).

2.6 Role of VCS and faith communities

It is difficult for Councils to engage directly with young people. Nevertheless, many of those we met in focus groups expressed strong interest in "the Council" and a wish to be consulted. In some areas, the young people claimed that they had never been involved in any form of consultation exercise and were excited by the prospect, wanting to give their views – and to see things change as a result. Some Councils, such as Sunderland and Waltham Forest, have set up innovative web based ways of encouraging

feedback from and contact with young people (although these cannot yet be said to have a very extensive reach). But many young people find it easier to deal with “officialdom” indirectly, through trusted intermediaries, often working in the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), including the faith sector. This of course depends upon the extent to which they are seen to be able – and trusted - to represent their views

Case Study: Sunderland e- Neighbourhoods

The e-Neighbourhoods Programme actively promotes the use of, and facilitates access to, Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) within the City of Sunderland working closely with the voluntary and community group sector. By exciting interests in new technologies and the possibilities they offer, the Programme is working to enable all citizens access to ICT and the opportunities that it affords. We encourage everyone regardless of age, gender, occupational status and ethnicity to make better use of the facilities within their communities. Our aim is to promote social inclusion by facilitating the participation of local people and to assist the development of Community based ICT provision.

Electronic Village Halls – better known as “EVH's” in Sunderland, are a critical component in the issue of accessibility to the Council’s Services and promoting Social Inclusion. They are Neighbourhood based facilities offering facilitated access to technology. They are free at the point of access, operate on flexible hours and offer a range of services and support for local people to use ICT to meet their individual needs.

The Community e-Champions Project is an integral part of the e-Neighbourhoods Programme, working in partnership with existing Community and Voluntary Workers who play a key role in engaging local communities in the use of ICT. The Project builds upon their effective community relationships and networks and encourages the Community e-Champions to act in a facilitation role encouraging other members of their community to identify needs and requirements then use the ICT to help meet these requirements. This community development approach directly engages and encourages the hardest to reach groups to develop skills and knowledge, which enables them to access council e-service provision.

As indicated in Annex 1 (diversity in Muslim communities) and in 'Preventing Extremism: Promoting Cohesion, The Members' View', the Muslim communities (as other BME communities) are not homogeneous. Many such communities are ethnically diverse, and often as strongly influenced by the legacy of or current developments in their country of origin as by local politics. The VCS can play a key role in helping local authorities gain a full understanding of the communities they serve, and in engaging effectively across those communities. They can also make a significant contribution in supporting and working with those communities, and are often much better placed than statutory agencies to tackle the sensitive and complex issues associated with extremism and youth disengagement.

"Research shows that communities with a strong and rich infrastructure are more resilient and better equipped to deal with internal problems. They also find it much easier to engage with the Government and others outside their community because they have a ready made network through which to work. Some Muslim communities lack this infrastructure or have community organisations that are dominated by a small group of leaders who are reluctant to share power or adapt institutions to the needs of the wider community." ⁶

In some of the areas we have worked in, the VCS is relatively weak; in others it sometimes reinforces, rather than addresses, divisions between communities and the associated insularity, through an exclusive focus on one section of the community reflected in

- providing services and facilities predominantly to members of a single ethnic or faith group;
- appointing exclusively members of their own communities to key posts; and
- competition with other VCS organisations for resources reinforcing perceptions between communities of inequalities and unfairness.

Local authorities can help address these problems through the leverage of its funding role (see also the recommendations of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion in this context)⁷. We heard of imaginative approaches including building community cohesion into the funding criteria for VCS organisations; and bringing VCS organisations together to form a "consortium" to manage and deliver council funded services and activities.

Faith communities have a potentially important role to play in this context, as has been the case, for example in Leicester. However, some faith organisations remain dominated by community elders who do not necessarily relate to or represent the interests of younger members of their communities. In some areas, faith communities are making efforts to address the disengagement of young people, for example by involving younger members in Mosque Committees. Local authorities and other statutory agencies cannot, of course, influence such developments directly, but can encourage and support moves towards greater inclusiveness within their local voluntary, community and faith sector.

Sunderland Youth Conference 2007

The Youth Conference 2007 was attended by 108 young people from the 6 areas of City. Discussion Included ideas on 'What would make their area 'ideal'.

It also included an e-voting survey on various issues including racial tensions:

- 43% felt they had increased
- 43% felt they had decreased
- 22% felt they had stayed the same

Their views about the biggest cause of local tension was:

- The Iraq war – 31%
- Recent terrorist incidents – 24%
- Myths about refugees and asylum seekers – 16%
- Lack of understanding of diversity – 13%
- Big Brother – 10%
- Incorrect information – 1%
- Media portrayal – 1%

Case Study: Brentford Football Club Community Trust

The Trust runs football coaching for schools both in-school and after school. Now focusing increasingly on issues concerning social cohesion, it covers all sports, not just football, for example cricket involving girls and boys from a variety of communities.

This work was linked with the Trust's involvement with "Positive Futures" – a Home Office sponsored programme focusing on supporting those young people most at risk of becoming problematic drug users.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Vision and leadership

We highlight the importance of strong and visible leadership in “Preventing Extremism: Promoting Cohesion, The Members’ View”. Looking at this from the perspective of young people presents particular challenges for Council Leaders. In developing ways of reaching and engaging with young people it may prove more effective to meet them on their territory and on their terms, rather than expect them to attend meetings in Council offices or other more formal environments.

Councils therefore need to

- demonstrate their commitment and determination to engage effectively with young people on a sustained and long term basis, not just through the occasional event or initiative; and
- encourage and work with and through credible role models who may be completely outside the political environment. This may include respected role models, such as Amir Khan, the well known boxer.

4.2. Communications specifically focused on young people

Again, as we emphasise in the companion document referred to above, Communication is fundamental to any work in taking forward this agenda. Gearing communication to a younger audience presents particular challenges. The key issue, and one which was underlined in practically all of our focus group discussion is the importance of listening and being seen to act on (or provide feedback to) what young people say.

Some of the local authorities we have worked with are developing innovative ways of engaging with young people in their communities. Examples include: “Defendin da Hood” (see earlier case study) and “ForestFlava” in Waltham Forest; the “Peacemaker” project (in Oldham and elsewhere), youth councils and youth parliaments (<http://www.sunderland.gov.uk/e-neighbourhoods/>).

Case Study: ForestFlava – Waltham Forest

Waltham Forest has set up this website for 11 – 19 year olds as one way of getting them more involved in what is going on in the borough. It contains information on what is happening in Waltham Forest, upcoming events and podcasts. Young people can also contribute their own material, or look at that provided by others.

The website is managed and edited by the “Flava Press Gang” which includes young people.

ForestFlava also provides a means for young people to sign up to “Young Voice” – a panel for 11 – 19 year olds. The Council sends out surveys by email once a term on issues which matter and then writes back to tell everyone who took part what all the young people in the borough have said.

The Council also runs an annual Youth Week.

In developing an engagement strategy targeting young people, Councils need to

- explore and develop appropriate channels of communication to complement more traditional approaches, reflecting the views of local young people, and working in partnership with non-statutory organisations;
- work within the networks within which young people move and be prepared to understand the key influences from peers, informal associations, gangs and more formalised structures
- challenge the misinformation and propaganda of extremists including in schools through a strong counter-narrative

4.3. Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)

Councils and their partners need to develop close links with their faith and other voluntary and community sectors. There are a number of risks and challenges involved in developing such relationships as we discuss above. Depending on local circumstances Councils should

- ensure that their funding criteria for faith and Voluntary and Community sector organisations reflect principles of community cohesion to encourage organisations to work across communities (rather than

- focusing exclusively on a single group – see also the recommendations of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion⁸) – the Peacemaker Project mentioned above, is a good example – run by young people
- explore ways of bringing VCS organisations together rather than set against each other in competition for resources
- develop relationships with organisations and individuals who can act as trusted intermediaries and third parties and engage and influence “hard to reach” young people

4.4. Children and Young People’s Services

Schools

Schools and the educational process constitute a means of challenging and tackling extremism amongst young people. This is not an easy role and those working in schools and related areas need support and training. Options for Councils to consider include:

- twinning and other measures to counter the tendency by students to “stick together”, isolation, segregation etc ;
- building close links with police and community liaison officers;
- developing and disseminating a “counter narrative” through Citizenship education, including full implementation of the Ajegbo Report⁹, with support by the education authority and wider council, ensuring that the programme is challenging and interactive;
- ensuring that schools address their duty under the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promote equality and good relations between different ethnic groups. Evidence from our work in other local authority areas suggests that this can make a significant difference in the way pupils of different ethnic backgrounds relate to each other. School governors clearly also have a key role to play in this context.

Youth Matters; Child Protection, etc.

Councils have an opportunity, as part of the wider agenda affecting youth services, to incorporate measures to tackle extremism and build cohesion, including

- recognising the potential links and inter-relationships by joining up services/policy streams eg drugs/crime etc

- increasing awareness/sensitivity of the communities to which the Council provides a service– eg understanding and taking account of issues affecting particular communities eg Muslim young people
- recruiting young people from the community to work as mentors
- responses to Every Child Matters, Youth Matters, partnership working, including the imminent changes to the Connexions Service.

Finding out what is going on

As we suggest in ‘Preventing Extremism: Promoting Cohesion – the Members’ View’, it is essential for the Council Leadership to keep a finger on local communities’ pulse. Councils need to know and understand their communities and be aware of any problems or tensions. Much will depend on close co-operation and effective inter-agency working, both statutory and non-statutory. The process needs also to include

- regular reviews of perceptions;
- knowing the strengths and contributions of communities; and
- identifying vulnerabilities and those at risk.

Provision of facilities, diversionary activities, help lines

Many of the young people we have met during our work for local authorities complain that there is “nothing for them to do”. In some areas there are facilities but, for some of the reasons described above (eg ‘no-go’ areas defined by gang territoriality, fear of leaving their immediate neighbourhood), young people do not take advantage of them. In listening to and responding to their young people, local authorities need to ensure that they are aware of the facilities which are available, and that those facilities are made as accessible as possible. Whilst giving young people constructive things to do will not necessarily prevent extremism, they will help address the underlying sense of alienation and disaffection from which extremism can grow.

Examples of initiatives which help address these needs include

- developing diversionary activities, especially in the summer and holiday periods
- providing interaction – eg based on sport, culture, bringing together young people from different backgrounds and communities;
- supporting and providing advisory or counselling services such as those provided by the Muslim Youth Helpline;
- challenging stereotypes and prejudices through indirect mediums – eg drama

Case Study: Hounslow Community Cohesion Focus/Awaaz Football Team

Hounslow suffers from an unfortunate polarisation of young people within the borough, central Hounslow having large South Asian and Somalian communities, whilst areas like Feltham in the west are predominantly white. This division is reflected in the schools young people go to, leading to a lack of social mixing and therefore a lack of tolerance and understanding. This is certainly the case on the Beavers Estate, where the Focus Centre is based. There is a pattern of white young people going to Longford and Feltham schools, with Asian and black young people going to Hounslow Manor, Lampton and Heathlands schools.

The football project was a joint venture between Awaaz and Focus youth clubs. The young people from the Focus club are mainly White and those from Awaaz are from an Indian, Hindu background. The principal aim of the project was to challenge the prejudice and narrow worldview of young people to develop interaction

Young people from both youth clubs were very keen on football and one worker is a qualified football coach. During late 2003 and early 2004 teams were taken from both centres to football tournaments in the same mini bus. This was moderately successful until Awaaz beat Focus! This happened twice and then the usual insults and impersonations of an Asian accent would come out, upsetting workers and young people. However there appeared to be potential for future work and it was decided to integrate the young people from both centres into one cohesive team.. Young people with potentially racist views suddenly found themselves sharing an identity with young people they previously felt negatively about. Regular training and playing matches, however, enabled them to get to know each other through a shared passion for football and through various exciting team building activities they started to mix socially.

In addition, two team-building activities to allow the young people to socialise together other outside of playing football have been undertaken. They were open to all young people that attend the Friday training sessions. Tickets were obtained to be in the studio audience for Soccer AM, a football programme based at the Sky TV studios in Isleworth. This was attended by about fifteen young people and seemed to be enjoyed by all. Secondly, on Easter bank holiday Monday a mixed group were taken on a Go Karting trip to a track in Surbiton.

Social interactions are now beginning to develop into friendships – and the team has been successful on the pitch too!

Annex 1: UNDERSTANDING DIVERSITY IN MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

Muslims in the UK comprise a multi-diverse group of communities, and whilst the collective majority are born into the faith with origins or heritage in Muslim countries and regions overseas, the Muslim community in Britain is in fact represented across all ethnicities including indigenous White English and those of Dual/Multiple heritage. Among this diverse community there are long established communities of second, third and even fourth generations as well as recently settled and newer arrival communities. It follows that there are considerable differences between and within these groups. Yet, despite these differences Muslims appear to be an internally cohesive and highly organised community. Indeed Muslims share a bond of belief and core values that shape common perceptions and opinions – epitomised by the Islamic concept of the Ummah i.e. the global Muslim communion – with most Muslims in Britain generally feeling connected with and sympathetic to the plight of fellow Muslims elsewhere in the World. However, as is inevitable in such a diverse group, Muslim communities are subject to many differences ranging from theological to cultural and generational.

The following provides a brief overview of the denominational breakdown of British Muslim communities, looking at religious and ethnic diversity, where these intersect to influence leadership structures and networks and how all these are evolving within the context of British young people.

Sects – Shia and Sunni

Muslims are divided into the two main sects of Shia and Sunni. The Sunni make up the vast majority and constitute around 80-85% of Muslims throughout the World and the Shia 15-20% – the proportion in the UK is similar. Both the Sunni and Shia Muslim Sects have many subdivisions, though only a significant few seem to be either represented or established in the UK. Of the two sects, Shia Muslims appear to be the least represented and least diverse.

The majority of Shia Muslims belong to the mainstream Jafari School of Thought which divides into the two main denominations; the Ithna Ashari and Ismaili. The Ithna Ashari are predominant throughout the Shia world and likewise in Britain, constituting the majority amongst Shiites from Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Lebanon, Syria, India, Afghanistan and Bahrain. Ismailis in Britain constitute a minority though represent an eminent section of the Shia community and are mainly of Indian and Pakistani heritage, with a significant proportion being secondary migrants from across East and South Africa. Both the Ithna Ashari and Ismaili subdivide further, but only the Usuli Fiqh of the Ithna Ashari denomination and the Khoja/Nizari and Dawudi Bohra branches of the Ismaili denomination appear as established in the UK, and then only in a select few cities such as Leicester and the London Borough of Waltham Forest.

Most Sunni Muslims belong to one of four major Orthodox Schools of Thought (known singularly as Madhab and collectively as Madhaib) - Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali, named after the Scholars or Imams who founded them circa 8th and 9th Centuries AD. Madhab adoption varies and is generally related to global geographic region(s). The table below shows the range of Madhab adoption across the globe.

School of Thought (Madhab)	Range of Global Adoption
Hanafi	Indian sub-continent, Turkey, Albania, the Balkans, Iraq and Central Asia
Maliki	North, Central and West Africa.
Shafi	South East Asia, Southern Arabia, and East Africa
Hanbali	UAE and Saudi Arabia

The major Sunni Madhabs subdivide into further branches, with most interlinked with Sufism. Sufis are organized into orders (Tariqas), grouped around a spiritual leader (Shiekh, Pir or Wali). Although, Sufism is often characterized as the mystical component of Islam, practices vary in terms of degree of emphasis, ranging from passive meditation to direct action.

Despite the variety and complexities, only three Sunni Muslim branches are commonly found established within almost all British Muslim communities; the Barelwi, Deobhandi and Wahabi-Salafi.

Both the Barelwi and Deobhandi are derived from the Hanafi Madhab are interlinked with Sufi Tariqas, and originated in India, however, represent two distinctly different types of Islamic practice with varying degrees of adoption related to a large extent on ethno-national and regional heritage. The Barelwi place emphasis on spirituality, whereas the Deobhandi, originating as a reformist movement represents a more doctrinaire approach. The Barelwi are the single largest majority Muslim community in the UK (approximately 40%) and prefer to be described as Ahle Sunnah Wal Jammah i.e. exclusive adherents of the true Sunnah (Traditions of the Prophet). Barelwism is predominant amongst British Muslims of Pakistani Punjabi and Kashmiri heritage and also has a following among Muslims from Bangladesh and India. The Deobhandi strand constitutes majority adoption amongst Muslims from Indian Gujarat, specifically Surat, the Northern Pakistani region of Peshawar, throughout Afghanistan and Bangladesh. There are further variations within and between the branches of Barelwi and Deobhandi, some related to ethno national culture but also along theological lines.

The Wahabi or Salafi strand, has its origins in Arabia and though confirmed primarily to the Hanbali Madhab, is actually based on teachings that reject the need to be bound by any one of the four Madhabs, and significantly, considers teachings from all four. The Wahabi/Salafi – though most predominant in Saudi Arabia – draw followers from all nationalities and ethnicities including many converts to Islam. Consequentially the Wahabi-Salafi have many sub divisions – lending their theological basis to puritanical factions such as the Jihadist movement and proscribed groups Al Muhajiroon and Al Ghuraba. Whereas, most Salafi follow a less puritanical form of Islam as is espoused by groups such as Pakistani based group Ahle Hadith.

The differences outlined above generally tend to be accepted and tolerated and although sectarianism and factionalism would be quite entrenched in the Muslim world, in the UK – a more cosmopolitan environment – Muslims tend to get along and can often be seen worshipping together in the same Mosque. Nevertheless, most Mosques are established along ethnic and corresponding factional lines and though differences may be subtle and obscure, it is possible to find followers of a particular strand making a principle of boycotting other Mosques. Mosques are typically run by an elders who dominate the management committee and represents the predominant ethnic group and traditional faction for that particular mosque. The committee is also in charge of appointing the imam who tends to be from the same ethnic group and that faction. Control of the Mosque committee is often the subject of ethnic, doctrinal, political and/or other rivalries. Similarly community leadership and representational structures within Muslim communities are typically ethnically and factional based.

Community Leadership Structures

All societies and communities have hierarchical social structures. Most Muslim community leadership structures operate within traditional extended family, tribal/clan networks and allegiance systems, usually transposed from the cultural norms of their respective countries of origin. Common amongst Muslims of Arab, African and Indo-Pakistani origin, these systems are almost always organized with male elders at the helm and developed along nepotistic blood lineage and ancestry. The degree of influence, adherence and power is dependant primarily on the population size and concentration of the respective community.

Probably the most sophisticated and widely utilized in Britain and certainly most influential is termed as the *Birardari* (brotherhood) or *Khandani* (ancestral clan) system. Originating in India, this system is formulated on a complex combination of religious, tribal, economic and regional dimensions and is also common in other Indian faith communities including the Sikh and Indian Christian communities. There many variations in terms of influence, representation, adherence and practice specific to Islamic Strand and ethno national heritage.

Since Barelwi Pakistanis form the majority of Muslims in Britain, the Birardari system is most prevalent in Pakistani Barelwi communities but similar structures can also be identified in most Muslim communities, such as the Somali and Newer arrival communities, due to the tribal roots and politics of developing countries.

The culture of the Birardari system dictates that the leading Birardari or Khandani elders' word is final. Along with elder control, this system is sometimes criticized by young British born Muslims for being exclusivist, discriminatory, engrossed in denial and fuelled by a defeatist victim mentality - and excluding women and young people. However, there are also voices commending the Elders and local Birardari leaders for providing essential services of representation and also being invaluable in settling disputes. The Birardari/Khandani system is undergoing adaptation in a British context, and the domination by the elders is beginning to change. There is a new generation of British-born, educated leaders, keen to make a change and widen participation to include all ethnicities, the young and women.

Just as all cultures throughout history alter, adapt and are influenced by exposure to new ideas and environments, similarly Muslim culture in Britain has changed. British born Muslims practice and understand their faith in a different context to their parents, increasingly aware of their identities as Muslim as distinct from their ethnicities. There has been a diffusion of ideas and a growth in confidence relative to first generation elders. Moreover, recent events such as 9/11, 7/7, 'the war on terror', and the unrelenting media attack and demonising of Islam and Muslims have had a major impact in the current context. Yet a new factionalism is sometimes evident. An illustration of change in a contemporary British context is the array of Muslim Groups and organizations active and originating in Britain, their aims objectives and relative popularity. These organisations number many though it is possible to categorise them into three types; Islamic, Muslim and Ethno National.

Islamic – Aims and objectives are based, governed and restricted by Islamic teachings. Such organisations are often linked to particular denominations and branches of Islam.

Muslim – Membership and representation is concentrated on Muslims, though not governed by Islamic principles. Umbrella groups, forums and Self-help groups typically fit this category.

Ethno National – Organisations that are formed around a particular ethnicity or nationality who also happen to be Muslim.

Some groups and organisations may overlap categories though aims and objectives can often easily be determined through simple semantic analysis. Some of the best known and most popular are listed below:

Islamic

Tableeghi Jamat (Preaching Group) – Largest Muslim evangelical group in the world, linked to the Deobhandi Strand and thereby large external network Deobhandi Mosques and seminaries spanning Newham to Dewsbury. Mostly appeals to Indian Gujarati heritage Muslims, though also have significant following amongst Pakistani Peshwaris, Bangladeshis and North African Arabs.

Hizb Ut Tahrir (Party of Liberation) – Political Group whose “Ideology is Islam”. Aim is to re-establish the Caliphate somewhere in the Muslim world. Though not Salafi, operate at and appeal to the Sunni Madhaib (Schools of thought) level. Historically, enjoyed wide support amongst young Muslims and some elders, mostly of Barelwi Pakistani heritage, though in recent years support and membership has waned.

Ahle Hadith (Way of the Traditions of the Prophet) – Pakistan based Salafi Group.

Al Muhajiroon (The Immigrants) – Salafi based group, and although proscribed by government, former members still actively propagate their ideas. Mixed heritage support, typically Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Somali and African Caribbean reverts.

Muslim

Islamic Society of Britain – National organization mainly involved in organizing family social activities.

Muslim Council Of Britain (MCB) – Umbrella organization.

British Muslim Forum (BMF) – Umbrella organization representing mainly Barelwi inclined Mosques and organisations.

Ethno National

Various – All/any organisations with specific ethnicity mentioned in title e.g. Indian Welfare Association, Somali Community Centre etc..

Annex 2: DEFINITIONS: What do we mean by extremism?

The language used in the context of extremism can be emotive and subjective. Terms like “extremism”, “fundamentalism”, “radicalism” and “terrorism” are often used interchangeably, in many different ways, and with different, unspoken connotations – often in a highly charged political context. In their simplest form, however, they do not necessarily indicate a problem. For example, it is possible to hold an extreme view which is only ‘extreme’ because it is shared only by a minority, or to hold ‘fundamental’ beliefs which represent certain founding or traditional principles. Similarly, a ‘radical’ view can be one which serves to represent a step change in our thinking. For the purposes of this exercise, therefore, we look at all forms of extremism which might incite or seek to legitimise violence or other behaviour potentially of a criminal nature and which threatens social harmony.

In addressing this agenda, we need also to distinguish between individuals and communities: just because the majority of supporters of far right groups are often identified with the white working class does not justify the assumption that members of the white working class are racist. Equally, the fact that some terrorists use

“a distorted and unrepresentative version of the Islamic faith to justify violence”¹⁰

cannot be construed as suggesting that all members of the Muslim communities share such views.

Focusing attention exclusively on one community can, in our view, only be counter-productive. We therefore discuss in this report issues affecting young people from all communities, recognising in addition that we cannot, in any case, isolate the expression of extremism in one community from its development in another. For example, it is possible to discern an almost symbiotic relationship between the rhetoric and appeal of the far right and that of religious extremism.

Violence is common to the various definitions of extremism found in work by the Young Foundation (see references) and others, and is also reflected in the Government’s Counter-Terrorism Strategy (July 2006, quoted above) and the recently published guidance for Higher Education Providers (DfES, November 2006):

“Unacceptable extremism can range from incitement of social, racial or religious hatred, to advocating the use of violence to achieve fundamental change to the constitutional structure of the UK, to carrying out terrorist acts. Individuals can and do hold extreme views without espousing violence. The authorities are concerned with any form of extremism that espouses, promotes or leads to violence: ‘violent extremism’.”

ANNEX 3: Some lessons from Waltham Forest: Young People: child protection or crime prevention?

One of the challenges facing the police, schools and other agencies in tackling extremism is whether, and if so how, to “intervene” in cases where they suspect an individual is developing extremist views likely to lead to violent, illegal behaviour, or being recruited to a group or organisation with such aims. This raises a host of sensitive and complex questions. The approach taken in some quarters in Waltham Forest has been to see the locus for any intervention as an issue of child protection in the context of *Every Child Matters* (in particular the key outcome: stay safe). In developing a longer term strategy, one option, therefore, may be to invite the Local Safeguarding Board (or equivalent body) to develop a more systematic approach - key elements of which would be:

- to ensure that the relevant professionals (eg working in schools, youth service, police, and other agencies) have sufficient understanding and awareness as to know when to seek advice about the behaviour/demeanour of an individual young person:
- that the relevant agencies have sufficiently well established relationships across the Muslim communities in Waltham Forest to be able to identify an appropriate individual who will be able to support the young person and provide a credible counter-narrative and support and work with the family and wider community as appropriate.

However, child protection is normally associated with concerns about an individual child and his or her family. In majority of cases, will be important not to imply/act as if the family is the problem/stigmatise. However, there are limited sanctions available. One option would be to take a young person at risk into care but the appropriateness of such action would clearly have to be very carefully considered.

Another approach would be to see “radicalisation” as a matter of crime prevention, adopting tactics eg along lines of YJP/YOT and the YISP for young people most at risk, involving trusted adults as mentors. This might prove a useful model, including involving appropriate members of the relevant community seen as credible to challenge/present counter-narrative. A similar approach is being developed by the Home Office in its “Channel Project” – in which Waltham Forest is planning to take part, subject to formal approval by the Council later in June.

It must always be clear that radicalisation (and/or holding “extreme views”) itself is not a problem – but illegal behaviour stemming from it has to be dealt with. The vast majority of young people who become interested in following the principles of Islam will benefit from the experience, as will their families and communities.

There is clearly a strong commitment within Waltham Forest to tackling youth disengagement and discourage extremist activity. In tackling such complex and potentially sensitive issues, effective partnership working will be essential. There may also be scope in building on the work already taking place, for example in the context of tackling gang culture, in the context of youth disengagement and extremism. Increasing the involvement of the police in schools on a day to day basis may make a significant contribution to this and related agendas.

As in other areas of work with young people, including those who are vulnerable/at risk, different approaches or interventions are appropriate in different circumstances. In the context of its commitment to Every Child Matters and Youth Matters, the Council is seeking to develop its “universal offer” to all young people in the borough. We offer at Annex 4 a possible model of tiered interventions to tackle extremism and disengagement.

Annex 4: Tackling Extremism and Disengagement: Tiered Interventions

Areas of work relevant to tackling disengagement and extremism applicable to all young people include:

- clarity across the borough on civic values and principles
- using the Citizenship curriculum or other aspects of school and college life to reinforce what people have in common rather than what divides them, as well as to increase understanding of and sensitivity to issues affecting particular communities in the borough
- bringing people from different communities together – eg through sport and other activities to increase a sense of belonging on lines similar to those adopted for other young people at risk
- building confidence and understanding amongst young people and those who work with them to challenge and question different political and religious points of view.

Approaches aimed at those young people potentially vulnerable or at risk would include:

- ensuring that teachers and others working with young people are sensitive to changes in behaviour and attitude and aware of support structures and systems available to provide further advice and guidance as necessary, on a similar basis to approaches to dealing with issues such as substance misuse and other problems [supported by dedicated police school liaison officers]
- working with Faith and community leaders and role models to identify individuals who can present a credible alternative vision or counter-narrative.

And for those at serious risk of radicalisation/developing violent extremist views, interventions might include:

- providing support and help to individual and his/her family either from statutory or voluntary sector, including it appropriate the relevant faith community.

Those suspected of being actively involved in illegal activities would primarily be subject to the appropriate measures on the part of the police and security services. However, bearing in mind recent experience it is important in planning and carrying out such exercises to consider the impact on the individual's family and the wider community – again on the basis of strong partnership working.

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