Problem OR Solution?

Conference report
13th September 2017

Prevent
Problem or Solution?

Equality Action, in partnership with Loughborough Council of Faiths, Charnwood Borough Council organised an event on 13th September 2017 at Rosebery St Peter's Community Centre. The event was free and booking was done through Eventbrite. Over 60 people attended.

Over the past few months the government's Prevent strategy has been back in the news in the aftermath of terrorist attacks in Manchester, London and at Finsbury Park Mosque. Billed by some as being as being fundamental in tackling terrorism in the UK and an effective way to lead people away from radicalization and by others as being a heavy handed counterproductive approach that has added to a general sense of mistrust across communities, Prevent has both its champions and its critics.

What does this look like in our local context? This event gave local people a chance to have their say about the Prevent Strategy, learn about how it works in local context and explore with others how we can address the challenges and concerns Prevent raises.

The event was chaired by Reverend Wendy Dalrymple. For the morning session there were Key Note speakers from Police and Prevent Team, who shared some of the ways in which the Prevent strategy is currently implemented locally. They gave case examples and talked about how Prevent is often perceived as one type of extremism. Attendees had the opportunity to share experiences, raise concerns and highlight key issues they wanted to discuss.

William Baldet, Prevent Strategy Co-ordinator, Leicester

Panel taking questions from the attendees

PC Peter Bumpus from the Leicestershire Police Prevent Team

Some of the issues raised

Disengagement with the Prevent agenda

Distrust of official procedures

Fear of intelligence gathering

Faith schools encourages isolates and polarisation

Why is prevent so negatively perceived especially in the Muslim community

Media responsible journalism both mainstream and social media

Part social isolation/deprivation plays

Issue around international scene on use of violence

Mental health – more vulnerable to being radicalised

Parents views impacting on young people – not being able to challenge home views to external views.

Local knowledge/int erfaith dialogue important

How we can create an effective cohesion strategy and practice

Wider political scene – BREXIT

Lack of recognition that arts and creative interventions, when applied fully, can achieve remarkable community building solutions.

Still not learning from history – our society is not immune from "tipping points"

Workshops

The afternoon session had 5 workshops that picked up key topics that came out of the morning session.

1. **Education**

   - role of faith schools,
   - what should be taught
   - training of professionals

2. **Prevent Strategy**

   - why is it so negatively perceived
   - what are the barriers to engagement
   - help or hindrance

3. **Political/International context**

   - ongoing use of violence between nations
   - role of the mainstream media
   - what can we do

4. **Religion and faith**

   - role of interfaith dialogue
   - deepening people's understanding of their own religion
   - place of spirituality

5. **Home versus community**

   - conflict between family and wider culture
   - how to engage with parents
   - role social media

Workshop 1 – Education

Whose responsibility is it?
-       Teachers - to report anything suspicious
-       Communities - to report anything that doesn't add up
-       Or both the above

Is this safeguarding or is this interference? Are teachers safeguarding against domestic violence or extremism?
Is this a new process or has the responsibility always been there for doctors and teachers to safeguard against domestic violence and signs of extremism?

Should the process be to report anything or to exchange information?
It is important that disclosures of safeguarding and observing potential risk cases are handled sensitively.
How should the professionals be engaging in this process?
-       Through outreach work of general practitioners and social workers
-       Or sign posting referrals

There should be relevant training given for each sector:-
-       Doctors
-       Teachers of primary and secondary schools
-       Teachers of adult learning
-       Heads of religious institutions
Teachers especially should be engaging in critical thinking so as not to add suspicion on innocent parties – however reporting is better than not to report.

What should be taught in schools and colleges? British values versus basic human values. Is it right to teach British values at schools or is that playing into the hands of the far right? Should it be basic human rights that need to be taught?

The teaching of accepting difference of opinions and accepting others views and to agree to disagree is essential in changing mind frames on all aspects of extremism and other prevent issues!

Workshop 2 - Prevent Strategy

Often in some communities Prevent is seen as actively spying. There is a need to collect and look at evidence at root level and then decide. Communities need to collect soft intelligence.

There are mixed messages of Prevent, when first introduced Prevent was seen as being mainly directed at Muslims, this needs to be addressed and more awareness needs to happen about the wider Prevent Agenda.

There seemed to be general consensus that Prevent has been negatively introduced into people's lives and many have one sided perceptions of what it is about.
More needs to be done to help isolated, vulnerable people who may be vulnerable to radicalisation.

There was discussion about what the Channel programme process is, who the first line of contact usually is – head teachers, governors and how the referrals works.

How do we address alienating some communities? What data do they have, often very broad information. 100% internet/social media publish information and there is a rise to online radicalisation. Quite often there is false/fake news of what people hear about. People facing mental health are more at risk of being radicalised and it was also noted that age group is an important factor with young people being more vulnerable.

There was a discussion about mental health professionals, school teachers and local authority's roles in reporting and raising awareness.

Another issue raised was what is being taught about Islam in schools. There is often misunderstanding about the history of war and gives rise to aggressive and violent perceptions. Identity was also a big factor with young people not being comfortable with what they are, British, immigrants?

It was agreed that there needs to more Common Assessment Framework (CAF) with multi agency work including health services and we need a more community based, community led co-design in creating a strategy that works better.

3. Political/International context

Problems are polarisation and authorisation. There is a level of distrust rising more than ever before.

There are more 'Yes or No' opinions with no middle ground on curtain issues e.g. Brexit which has great influence on people, especially the younger generation.

Going back to the 80's there were a lot of political issues and the trend started then being either on the left/right then during 90's things slightly softened. It feels like young people are less inclined to be involved in politics and debates have started to become more personal which doesn't help the public or give an actual picture of the argument.

Poverty impact on society depends is also a factor, depending on which side you are.

Is the information obtained by the media always reliable? Media representation is often misleading. More problems are caused by politicians and journalists than resolved.

There is a lack of knowledge and fear, debate needs to be taught in schools. British education does not focus on pros and cons.

Newspaper headlines have strong influence on people. The Internet is another problem as it gives people a platform to say whatever they want, often making it personal.

Examples quoted included the Minors strike, a far right combination which caused vulnerability particularly in Nottingham. The murder of MP Jo Cox made no difference on Brexit.

Debates have been closed down and certain subjects avoided. Some people have been banned from universities for speaking about certain topics. Debate can cause

fear of violence and there is often danger in free speech. Sometimes it feels that bringing communities together rattle fear.

4. Religion and faith

Role of interfaith dialogue:
Loughborough council of faith is a good example of interfaith dialogue and celebration of each other's faith. Discussion about various issues (including even climate change) is important.

It was agreed that regular interfaith dialogue helps reduce interfaith misunderstanding, fear of the unknown and divisions in people from different faith

Public and every institution must encourage interfaith dialogue, bringing people from faith and non-faith together, helping develop cohesiveness.
We should plan and deliver activities not only around faith (football, climate change, health & well-being)

It is important that people's understanding of their own religion is deepened.
It is important to understand the religion itself – not only the spirituality of it.
Religion itself can be very judgmental.

Deep and clear understanding will promote tolerance, respect, celebration and sharing.

An example of something that takes place in Loughborough was shared:
Place of Spirituality:
Simply stand together in silence at least once in a week for half an hour
Spirituality is not about a place of worship only
Usually people get on well with each other
Interpretation of the spirituality is varies from people to people.

Workshop felt that there is no need for faith education in the UK. Because, it is biased and has its own set of mind – what other school cannot provide. It encourages isolation and segregation. Faith schools are often seen as a barrier towards better understanding with each other.

ISIS is not representing any religion, what they do is done in the name of a religion. Perception and interpretation of faith causes more war. There is a fear of insecurity and above all greediness for wealth, name and fame.

It was agreed that individual religious representative need to counter the extremism narrative.

5. Home versus community

Key issues included
        Potential conflict between family and wider culture
        Role of social media

It is vital that parents should show interest in their children's life, discuss and share information. Some parents feel distrustful and do not want to be told on how to do parenting.

When people migrate from other countries they hold a different set of values and cultural norms, which sometimes conflicts with what is current. As a result parents become more concern on cultural changes and get over protective.

2nd and 3rd generation are more likely to adopt cultural changes in their new society, however 1st generation finds it difficult to let go of what they believe is the norm.

Often there is a fine line between parenting and spying. Parents often feel that if they ask too many questions to their children, they are overstepping the bounder but there needs to a healthy acceptance that parents need to take an interest in their children's lives and ensure they are being kept safe. There is a need to develop these simple understanding and educate ourselves.

It is also important that parents try to learn about technologies such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, etc. so they can keep up with what their children might be accessing. Parents are often not aware of what their children are viewing on television or with whom are they communicating online. Influence of media in our lives is changing our morals. There is a lot of "fake" news out there and a danger that people are "liking" or posting comments on these.

Mentors and role models can play a positive role, families spending time together is vital to encourage dialogue and bonding although this is becoming more difficult with modern technology, Social Media and how young children are accessing these.
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There need to have a balance between "what values you hold" and "what's out there"

Some project ideas: "Where Real & Virtual World Meet"- In such projects, we can give people a moral understanding that social media has missed to address and help develop the understanding that social media is not the real world. There needs to be a link between physical and online world.

There is a big need to educate young people on self-esteem, morals and values. Parents, family members, schools, politicians and social media itself should take the responsibility. In our modern world, we cannot avoid technology, we need to adopt and develop our attitude to learn, make ourselves aware of new technologies.

Summary of Workshop Recommendations

Workshop 1 - Education

- Training for Teachers and school staff to identify vulnerable pupils
- Prevent to be included into School Safeguarding Policies

Workshop 2 – Prevent Strategy

- Communities are good source for soft intelligence so should be engaged
- There needs to be more awareness of wider Prevent agenda

Workshop 3 – Political/International Context

- The high level of distrust needs to be addressed
- Community's feel politicians are sometimes part of the problem, this need to be addressed.

Workshop 4 – Religion and faith

- Regular interfaith dialogue to overcome misunderstanding
- Celebrate each other's cultural and religious festivals.
- Individual religious representatives to counter extremist narratives

Workshop 5 – Home Vs Community

- Parents to be trained in discussing sensitive issues with children
- Parents to be trained in using latest technologies and social media platforms
- Build on young people's self-esteem, morals and values

Useful contact details

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Feedback/evaluation

35 people completed feedback forms

100% of the participants stated that the event was either as expected or better

80% of the participants rated the speakers to be very good

10 % stated the speakers were good, 10% didn't specify

100% of the participants said the programme; venue and catering were either good or very good. 50% of the participants had issues with parking and gave it a satisfactory while another 20 didn't bother bringing their cars. 30% of participants gave parking a good or very good.

100% of participants stated that they gained lots of informative knowledge from the event.

55% of participants didn't have anything to add as a suggestion or recommendation on this topic.

20% of participants wanted more group focused discussions.

Some participants wanted more information or supplementary materials either online or in person.

Some participants wanted more work to be done via multi faith, multicultural and interfaith activities.