

Tackling radicalisation and extremism through a multi-agency approach to community integration: Luton Borough Council

Date published: 9 November 2012

Reference: 120346

Brief description

This example demonstrates how Luton Borough Council and its partners developed a multi-agency approach to addressing safeguarding issues related to radicalisation and extremism within a wider community integration strategy. The aim is to improve practice with the services provided and to reduce the risk to children and young people.

Overview – the provider's message

'One of the key issues for practitioners is how to take account of the risks presented by extremism and radicalisation as part of safeguarding children and young people. The multi-agency partnership has been integral to developing a clear understanding about the level at which thresholds of risk should be determined and at which point services should intervene. Safeguarding issues are managed as part of broader work on community cohesion with children, young people and their families rather than focusing on extremism, linked to a programme of safer neighbourhoods. This approach has placed greater emphasis on prevention and the need to intervene at earlier points before radicalisation takes place. Practitioners now receive support and are better able to challenge extremist narratives.'

Nick Chamberlain, Service Manager

The good practice in detail

Background

There is significant and long-term investment in community cohesion to manage ongoing community tensions arising from key challenges such as social deprivation and child poverty, youth unemployment, right-wing extremism, radical Islamic groups and competition for scarce resources.

Underpinning this work is the 'Luton in Harmony' campaign which is part of the council's community cohesion strategy, initiated through the multi-agency Luton Forum. Launched in January 2010, the campaign seeks to celebrate diversity and unity in Luton through its

message: 'Many Voices, one town'. The message was developed in response to international, national and local challenges and negative portrayal of the town in the media. Key to the strategy is the development of greater understanding and respect within and between communities in order to counter the threat of violent extremism and marginalise violent extremist activity and influence.

Local residents, statutory, voluntary and business sectors are embracing the initiative and are asked to 'sign the pledge' and 'wear the badge'. So far, more than 67,000 badges and pledge cards have been distributed across the borough. All schools and youth centres are working with 'Luton in Harmony' materials which sends a clear community cohesion message. The community cohesion team have attended over 100 public and organisational events and the key messages have been incorporated into community festivals and embraced by partners such as the Police, Luton Council of Faiths and the University of Bedfordshire. Over 100 practitioners have attended key awareness raising training or master classes in relation to anti-racism, extremism and radicalisation.

While Luton continues to be in the media spotlight, community cohesion, partnership working and community aspiration remain strong. Together with targeted youth work activities with young people, and the distribution of choices cards designed to tell young people about the possible consequences of being arrested or of a criminal conviction, these factors contributed to there not being any riots in the town in August 2011.

The Channel Panel

In 2011, the Channel Panel was established. Its role is to identify and provide support for people who may be at risk of radicalisation. The terms of reference are linked to both the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Community Safety Partnership and information is shared by all the partners. Chaired by the Corporate Director for Children and Learning, the panel meets every six weeks to discuss the outcomes of those referred to the process. Partners include the Borough Council, Health, Probation, Youth Offending and Police Services together with the CAF coordinator and Children's Safeguarding Manager. There has been a steady increase in Channel referrals since it was constituted.

During the 'English Defence League' and 'Unite Against Fascism' counter demonstrations in February 2011 and May 2012 an effective response from a range of partners sought to safeguard children and young people. Partners included: social workers and personal advisers providing diversionary activities for children in care; the deployment of youth workers and trained community mediators to work with young people to reduce community tensions and divert them from possible harm; and an 'Operation Stay Safe' which was a multi-agency initiative involving youth workers, youth offending officers and police officers that facilitated the protection of children and young people whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. Operation Stay Safe involved the legitimate and proportionate removal of children and young people from streets and public areas where they were considered to be at risk of significant harm or otherwise engaging in potentially criminal behaviour. It provided an opportunity to reduce or remove the risk of harm to children and young people and, after assessment, offered options for positive outcomes or support; included some targeted work with young offenders at risk of possible harm; and the distribution of thousands of consequence cards to young people across the Borough. As a result, very few young people were involved in either demonstrations and no young people were arrested.

Implementing the Prevent Strategy

Luton is one of 25 local authority areas in the country named in the current [Prevent Strategy](#) that continue to receive precisely targeted and dedicated support from the Office for Security and Counter Terrorism in the Home Office. A multi-agency delivery plan covers the key areas of the Prevent Strategy and aims to:

- respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism and threat we face from those who promote it
- prevent individuals from being drawn into terrorism and ensure that they are given appropriate advice and support
- work with sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation.

The council commissioned the International Forum for Community Innovations (TFCI) to explore issues of extremism for young people in Luton. The inquiry included exploring the implications for safeguarding and the training and development needs for Children and Young People's Services' staff, the Children's Trust and the Local Safeguarding Children Board. It identified a number of vulnerabilities and risk factors which potentially increase young people's susceptibility to radicalisation by extremist groups, including the far right. The process involved a complex interplay between individual, community and family factors including identity and belonging, alienation and boredom, denial and lack of challenge born out of passive support for racist and far right extremism, as well as intergenerational family attitudes and beliefs. In the preparation of the report young people from a range of backgrounds were engaged to produce a full and authentic account of the views of children, young people and their families in Luton. Together with the opinions of community leaders and other professionals this is helping to shape the response to the safeguarding issues raised for children and young people from radicalisation and extremism.

Multi-agency work and integrating safeguarding as part of a wider community cohesion strategy are the foundations for a cultural shift towards a whole-system approach which is underpinning the overall vision for Luton. There has been a measurable impact on children and families, reducing risk, improving outcomes and promoting community integration.

Provider background

Approximately 200,000 people live in [Luton](#). 32% of the population is from British Minority Ethnic communities, particularly the Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian and African Caribbean communities. Three wards are in the top 10% of deprived wards in the country and the proportion of the working population claiming benefits is 1.4 times higher than that for the East of England.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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