STRONG CITIES NETWORK

PESHAWAR-BIRMINGHAM CITY EXCHANGE: SUMMARY REPORT

Introduction

The Strong Cities Network (SCN) held its third bilateral exchange on 30 October – 1 November 2018 between the cities of Peshawar, Pakistan, and Birmingham, United Kingdom.[1] These exchanges aim to promote and share on a city-to-city basis vital practical tools and initiatives to reduce local risk, prevent violence and build cohesive communities.

Two District Council Members from Peshawar, Safdar Khan Baghi and Mubashir Manzoor, travelled to Birmingham to attend this exchange hosted by Waqar Ahmed, Prevent Lead at Birmingham City Council.

In addition to bilateral engagement with Birmingham, the SCN further sought to facilitate introductions and best practice discussions with other pertinent UK cities, especially those with large Pakistani diaspora communities. This exchange therefore also provided Peshawar delegates with an opportunity to travel to Luton, a recent addition to the SCN and a city with longstanding ties to Peshawar.

Aims and objectives

The SCN ran three direct city-to-city practitioner exchanges between member cities in 2017 and 2018, of which the Peshawar-Birmingham programme is the third. The objectives of these exchanges include:

- ✓ **Sharing vital practical tools and initiatives** to reduce local risk, prevent violence and build cohesive communities;

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[1] The first city exchange between Dakar, Senegal and Montreal, Canada took place on 16-18 October 2017. The second city exchange between Mombasa, Kenya and Kristiansand, Norway took place on 19-23 March 2018. Click here for more information.

- ✓ **Developing a mutual understanding of the strategic planning processes in each city**, including how local action plans are developed, how risks are assessed and profiled, how partners and resources are allocated, what mitigation/prevention approaches are chosen, and how strategies are monitored and evaluated;
- ✓ **Improving mutual understanding of how preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) activities are being communicated** by municipal actors at the same time as understanding the broader public perceptions of this work;
- ✓ **Seeing first-hand how the city is implementing key initiatives on the frontline** through local site visits. Visits include local welcome or information centres for refugees and new citizens, specialist centres of excellence on P/CVE and connected issues, youth centres and engagement programmes, community policing teams, or deradicalisation and disengagement specialist teams;
- ✓ **Building a long-term partnership between two SCN member cities** to provide bilateral support to design, share and implement effective P/CVE policies and practices beyond the exchange.

Summary

This city exchange was timed to coincide with the **[Building Strong Cities](#)** conference, hosted by Birmingham City Council in partnership with the SCN. The conference was designed to facilitate national and international knowledge-sharing on P/CVE, with a specific focus on practical best practice and knowledge exchange for cities. The event also aimed to share a wide range of UK cities experiences' in developing community-centric approaches to addressing radicalisation and extremism.

Peshawar District Council Member Safdar Baghi and Birmingham's Prevent Lead Waqar Ahmed were invited to share their respective experiences in the **breakout session "UK City Consultation & International Opportunities"** chaired by Daniel Hooton, SCN Senior Manager. In a full room made up of UK Local Authority leaders and practitioners, both cities were able to contrast their respective contexts and approaches, as well as examine the opportunities for international partnership and sharing of good practice.

Following the conference, the Peshawar delegation met with the **West Midlands Police Counter Terrorism Unit**, who provided an overview on police efforts to work in partnership with the community in Birmingham. Peshawar delegates highlighted how their respective contexts vary in this area in particular. The lack of infrastructure and support for the lower levels of the police hierarchy in Peshawar makes officers vulnerable to corruption and extremism, resulting in little trust in them from the community. West Midlands policing teams noted prior training engagement with local police in Pakistan, focusing in particular on technical capability, information sharing and case management.

The day finished with a meeting with the delegation from the **city of Aarhus**, Denmark who gave Peshawar colleagues an overview of the [Aarhus model](#). The Danish delegates underlined how tailored this model is to their city context and national legal framework.

On the second day of the exchange, delegates from Peshawar met with **Birmingham City Council's Prevent team**. They first received an overview of the Prevent programme by the Prevent Lead and the Prevent Officer at the West Midlands Police Counter Terrorism Unit. In the second part of the meeting the Schools Officer, the Engagement Officer as well as the Youth Engagement Officer, explained their different projects and how to sensitise different groups to extremism risks and prevention efforts. This also prompted discussions about drivers of radicalisation in both contexts, and how events happening in countries of origin can

lead to radicalisation risks among diaspora groups. The Prevent team underlined the enormous resilience of the Pakistani community in the UK in light of hate crimes, discrimination and reprisals targeting the community following terrorist attacks that have been carried out by British nationals of Pakistani origin in the UK. After the meeting, the delegates toured Birmingham's Council House with the Prevent Lead, giving them the opportunity to compare local forms of governance and representation, in particular with regards to decentralisation and devolution agendas in both contexts.

In the afternoon, Birmingham colleagues had organised visits to local community projects supported by Prevent. The delegation had the opportunity to learn more about **[Kikit](#)** from its founder, Mohammed Ashfaq. Kikit is a "BME specialist drug and alcohol support service that provides a range of services to meet the needs of vulnerable people". Kikit extended its services to address crime, radicalisation and anti-social behaviour issues. Mr. Ashfaq explained how some clients turn to religion during their rehabilitation process; Kikit tries to ensure that they don't find themselves at risk of being radicalised. The project left a strong impression on the Peshawar delegates, given the similar challenges that exist in their own context in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, and recognised that similar initiatives would be helpful in their city given the extent of narcotics trafficking along the border with Afghanistan. Aysha Iqbal, Director of **[ODARA Women's Network](#)** joined the meeting and

provided an overview of her activities. She talked in particular of the awareness workshops that ODARA runs covering a range of issues, including drivers of radicalisation and Islamophobia.

The third day of the exchange took place in Luton and was facilitated by Marek Lubelski, Community Coordinator at **Luton Borough Council**. The delegation from Peshawar met in the morning with representatives from the Borough Council, including Cllr Mahmood Hussain (Executive Member for Children and Young People) and Cllr Aslam Khan (Executive Member for Safer and Stronger

Communities), and the Community and Prevent Coordinators. After receiving insights into the P/CVE landscape in Birmingham the day before, this meeting was an excellent opportunity to understand how the implementation of the UK national strategy can vary from one Local Authority to the next depending on the context and actors involved. The Luton delegation underlined how extremism needs to be understood within the broader safeguarding spectrum that also includes gangs, drugs, domestic violence, female genital mutilation, knives, and sexual health and exploitation. They also introduced Luton's strategy for building a stronger community, "Many voices, one town". The delegates then had a chance to discuss their own mechanisms in Peshawar, including their public liaison committees made of local community members and aiming at addressing community issues.

Following this meeting, the delegation attended a **Women's Empowerment workshop**. Workshop participants told the delegates about the situation of women in different communities in Luton, and highlighted the central role women can play in preventing violent extremism in their families and communities. They were also very interested to hear about the context of Peshawar and the different women's projects that are conducted there. The last visit to take place during this exchange was at **Luton Central Mosque**, where the delegation took part in a discussion between the

Mosque's management team, two of their female teachers, as well as with Cllr Khan, the Community Coordinator from Luton Borough Council, and Luton's Community Cohesion Lead for Bedfordshire Police. The meeting covered a broad range of relevant subjects, and community colleagues explained that due to distrust in the Government's Prevent policy amongst some members and organisations in the community, engagement in this important policy area had proven challenging. This final meeting was an excellent opportunity for the delegates to understand the community's concerns regarding the UK's flagship P/CVE programme, and highlighted the importance of trust for the success of P/CVE-related policy implementation.

Throughout the exchange, the Peshawar delegation played a central role in enabling UK cities to have a more open and trusting conversation with their own communities about the purpose of their Prevent work. The Pakistani delegates' proximity to severe terrorism challenges, coupled with their humanitarian approach to violent extremism, continuously started profound conversations around the ultimate goal of P/CVE work and the contribution each actor can provide to build a secure and cohesive global society.

Next steps

This exchange was an excellent networking opportunity for all parties to start building stronger partnerships between local actors operating in the P/CVE field in all three cities. The SCN will continue to support bilateral cooperation between Peshawar and Birmingham, as well as with Luton, in addition to its individual cooperation with all three cities.

Peshawar exchange participants highlighted that there were significant contextual challenges, foremost institutional weaknesses and a lack of infrastructure, that would hinder attempts to apply UK mechanisms to prevent and counter violent extremism in Pakistan. However, they highlighted two specific areas that they wish to further develop. Firstly, they highlighted the need to define clearer roles within the public liaison committees and to include P/CVE as a main area of concern. Secondly, they were very interested to develop similar community projects in their city, particularly a drug rehabilitation centre. The SCN will continue to facilitate cooperation to this end. Birmingham exchange participants who shared their personal projects in Pakistan are encouraged to build on this new partnership with local politicians to further ensure political and community buy-in at the local level for their own initiatives in Peshawar and the wider region.