Event Report

Transatlantic Initiative
City-Led Support for Community-Based Prevention Programmes

Butcher's Hall, London, UK
29 March 2023

Summary

On 29 March 2023, the Strong Cities Network hosted a transatlantic dialogue on *City-Led Support for Community-Based Prevention Programmes*, offering cities the opportunity to learn from promising practices for and challenges with investing in community-based efforts to addressing hate, extremism and polarisation. The event, which was co-hosted by the London Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC), and supported by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), convened more than 40 representatives from local governments and civil society in Europe and North America. This included officials from the cities of Aurora, Houston and New York City in the US; Toronto, Canada; Berlin and Essen in Germany; Birmingham, Liverpool, London, Luton and Portsmouth in the UK; Mechelen, Belgium; Strasbourg, France; and The Hague in The Netherlands.

The event featured two panels that highlighted city-led approaches to supporting community-based prevention efforts. This was followed by a presentation on how such approaches can be evaluated, based on the Strong Cities Network's experience doing just that for the City of London, and an interactive conversation about aligning national frameworks with local needs, with a focus on the UK's Prevent programme and its recently completed Independent Review. Three key themes emerged out of these discussions:

1) **While there are various types of support that cities can provide to civil society, regular, proactive and sustained community engagement is (or should be) at the core of all such efforts.** Regular communications between local governments and community-based stakeholders is important to help cities understand the threats communities face and what is actually needed on the ground to address these and to ensure, in turn, that the support they provide meets these needs. Importantly, this also builds trust in local government amongst communities.

2) **Transparent and publicly available evaluations of city-led prevention frameworks, including those that entail support for civil society, are still nascent despite the multitude of benefits this carries for cities and supported organisations.** Impact data is important to improve the city schemes being evaluated as well as for securing political and community support for continuing such schemes and developing new ones. A comprehensive evaluation framework can also serve to enhance the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacities of funded organisations, supporting the sustainability of their work.

3) **There often remains a disconnect between local and national perspectives of the threat.** Participants commented on how national frameworks are often removed from local realities, and that a lack of consensus on key threats (including their framing) risks a misallocation of national-level resources. This can create challenges for local governments as it may impact the level and types of support they receive from the national government for local prevention programming.

This event is one in a series of transatlantic dialogues Strong Cities has hosted since October 2021, in recognition of the increasingly hybridised and transnational threat landscape cities in Europe and North America share, and that they have much to learn from one another. Over the next six months, the Strong Cities Network will continue this effort to address the above and other key themes it has identified in these dialogues. This includes through a practitioner-focused day at its Global Summit in New York City in 2023, where local government and civil society practitioners will be invited to learn from the City's approach to prevention and to exchange – on a global scale – city-led responses to hate, polarisation and extremism.

Key Challenges & City Needs

Participants identified a number of key challenges related to the operationalisation of city-led support for community-based prevention programmes. For example, they observed that many national frameworks are removed from realities on the ground, which has implications for the availability of national-level resources and support for local action (see *Key Theme 3*).

They commented on the challenges posed by limited budget for local prevention (which, in some cases, is due to the above-mentioned disconnect between national and local perspectives of the threat). This makes the sustainability of city-led support for community-based prevention particularly challenging and can impact the future of supported projects and organisations. Further, it was noted that this creates challenges for investing in the M&E of prevention programmes, as many cities would need to extract budget for evaluation out of their already limited budget for delivering programmes. To this end, there was general consensus on the pressing need for more funding and that this should be multi-year in scope.

Further, participants commented on challenges with sustainability that come with changes in city leadership. For example, if a sitting mayor invests in prevention programming, their successor, particularly if from a different political party, may not necessarily continue these efforts. Some participants suggested that securing community buy-in and empowering them to deliver prevention programmes were critical for sustaining impact beyond a mayor's time in office.

Participants remarked that forums such as this, where cities are brought together to share practices, are an important step in learning how counterparts in other contexts have addressed these challenges and pursued and sustained a role for their city in prevention. In this context, participants also welcomed the announcement of two Strong Cities guides – one for mayors and the other for local government practitioners – which will provide a series of actionable steps that cities can take to enhance and sustain their role in prevention.

Key Themes

1. **While there are various types of support that cities can provide to civil society organisations, regular, proactive and sustained community engagement is (or should be) at the core of all such efforts**

Participants had the opportunity to hear from the cities of London, New York, Aurora, Houston, Strasbourg, and Mechelen about the types of support they provide community-based actors and how this came to fruition. For example, through its recently-established Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes (OPHC), New York City funds six large community associations, like the Asian American Federation, which serve as "credible messengers" with and intermediaries between the City and smaller, hyper-local grassroots organisations that may lack the human resource or linguistic capacity to engage directly with the City, let alone manage prevention programmes. Further, OPHC runs an "innovation grants" initiative, which entails a competitive call for proposals inviting individuals, community groups, non-profit organisations and academic institutions to propose "projects that promote community respect, prevent hate violence, and explore ways to address hate crimes".

The City of London similarly runs a civil society funding scheme called the Shared Endeavour Fund, the fourth round of which will be announced in April 2023. Administered via a competitive call for proposals, projects are selected for funding through a multi-phase moderation process that includes experts in a) prevention policy, b) the hate and extremism threat landscape as this pertains to both the UK broadly and London specifically, and c) international good practice for responding to such threats. This ensures project proposals are reviewed with an understanding of what is currently needed, how the proposed projects fit within the broader domestic prevention landscape and how they align with international practice.

The event also highlighted **training** and **networking opportunities** as core areas of support that cities can provide to community organisations. For example, the City of Strasbourg offers training on extremism and prevention to its local partners. This includes regular threat briefings hosted by subject matter experts, operating on the understanding that broad sensitisation to the threat helps enable a truly whole-of-society approach. Training is offered "as widely as possible" and thus fosters networking and relationship-building between participating organisations. This is supplemented with dedicated investment by the City to build local prevention networks, where interested partners are convened to collaborate on prevention programming. The City of Mechelen

similarly offers training and networking opportunities to local organisations, while also safeguarding some budget for youth innovation, where young people are given small grants to deliver creative projects that build community cohesion.

In Houston, the City invests in training but takes the distinctive approach of empowering community groups to deliver training to law enforcement on topics ranging from mental health to cultural sensitivity and inclusion. This fosters community-oriented policing while also improving relations between law enforcement and community-based actors. In Aurora, the City is using training as a means to implement its [Immigrant Integration Plan](), empowering volunteers from the refugee community with the technical skills to serve as integration case workers. The City of Aurora also invests in partnerships between Aurora Police Department and newcomers to the city, addressing concerns about refugees and other migrants feeling uncomfortable to go to the police should they need to report a (hate) crime.

While the scope, scale and focus of these approaches clearly differ from city to city, at the core of all these efforts is **regular, proactive and sustained engagement between the local government and the communities it seeks to or is already supporting.** For example, the City of Aurora's Immigrant Integration Plan was developed following a [year-long city-led consultation]() with community stakeholders (with a focus on "foreign-born residents") and other local stakeholders. Similarly, the Mayor of London's Shared Endeavour Fund was borne out of a [city-wide mapping exercise]() in which the City of London consulted community organisations across London to understand from them what they need to deliver sustainable prevention programmes. Through MOPAC, which oversees the Shared Endeavour Fund, the City continues to engage with these organisations and has made a concerted effort to connect organisations supported through the Shared Endeavour Fund to each other. This has resulted in a city-wide network of organisations delivering hyper-local responses to hate, polarisation and extremism that MOPAC is able to consult and learn from as it plans future rounds of the Fund.

> "If you are not engaging with your community, they won't come to you when they need help."
>
> Crystal Okorafor, Deputy Inspector General
> City of Houston, Texas

OPHC is similarly in regular communication with local organisations, prompting them for insights into the changing hate environment and thus enabling *informed* decision-making about where to invest its resources. This also builds trust between community actors and the City, where the former feels empowered to share their concerns, needs and priorities and the latter has a network of trusted partners it can leverage as it seeks to reduce harm across the city.

Practice Example
Breaking Bread, Building Bonds (B4)
City of New York, USA

- **Goal:** T*o break down silos and segregation between different communities in New York City.*

- **Approach:** *B4 is a city-wide initiative that brings New Yorkers together to share a meal while learning about other's cultures and traditions. It operates on the belief that the prevention of hate, polarisation and extremism requires individuals to "engage beyond their social circles", committing to learning more about cultures and traditions that differ from their own. B4 is led by OPHC in partnership with the Mayor's Community Affairs Unit, Office of Faith-Based and Community Partnerships and the City's Commission on Human Rights.*

- **Impact:** *While B4 is still a new initiative and impact data is pending, it offers a replicable model for city-led community engagement and mayoral leadership against hate, polarisation and extremism (Mayor Adams has attended B4 dinners, for example).*

https://www.nyc.gov/site/breakingbread/index.page

2. Transparent and publicly available evaluations of city-led prevention frameworks, including those that entail support for civil society, are still nascent despite the multitude of benefits this carries for cities and supported organisations

The event also featured a session on key findings from the Strong Cities Network's evaluation of the Shared Endeavour Fund, which Strong Cities has supported MOPAC with since the Fund first launched in 2019 (see the *Practice Example* on page 5 for more information). This session, as well as broader discussions about evaluation in the field of prevention, revealed several advantages of investing in evaluations of city-led approaches to supporting community organisations. For example, evaluation data can help cities secure buy-in (e.g., from other local government stakeholders and/or the national government) to continue their investments in community-based organisations. Representatives from MOPAC commented on the value of having an independent evaluation in securing new rounds of funding, for example.

Further, participants observed that evaluations can help enhance the inhouse capacity for and experience with M&E of those whose projects are being evaluated. At the project level, it can add to the sustainability of funded projects by giving programme implementers data to secure buy-in from existing and new donors. Representatives from the Future Leaders Programme, which is being supported by the Shared Endeavour Fund, shared that the Programme has grown more than tenfold (from 40 to 600+ beneficiaries) in just four years due in part to having access to impact data from the independent evaluation of the Fund that they can share with prospective investors.

Despite the benefits of transparent and accessible evaluations, it remains a nascent practice. For instance, in a live poll conducted by Strong Cities at the event, roughly 69% of respondents said their cities conduct evaluations. Few, however, were able to share details about the approach and findings. This was highlighted in particular by representatives from cities in the UK, who shared that while there is an evaluation of Prevent, it is inaccessible and therefore of no benefit to those delivering Prevent programmes.

> "Not having a transparent evaluation framework is a disservice to Prevent because we cannot share our story."
>
> Local Prevent Coordinator, UK

Practice Example
Shared Endeavour Fund Evaluation
commissioned by MOPAC
City of London, UK

- **Goal:** To *understand the impact at a project- and fund-level of the Mayor of London's Shared Endeavour Fund*

- **Approach:** *MOPAC held a competitive call for proposals, inviting M&E practitioners with expertise in counter extremism to apply to serve as the Shared Endeavour Fund's independent evaluator. MOPAC has since worked closely with the evaluators (which includes the Strong Cities Network) to develop a comprehensive evaluation framework for the Fund that assesses both the impact of awarded projects and of the Fund as a city-led mechanism for supporting civil society-delivered prevention projects.*

- **Impact:** *Evaluations of Calls One and Two of the Shared Endeavour Fund have had multi-faceted impacts on the Fund itself and supported projects. Firstly, as a result of the Call One evaluation, MOPAC worked with the evaluator to further refine the City's Countering Violent Extremism Programme's strategic objectives (around which the Fund is framed). This has, in turn, given applicants to the fund a clear framework around which to orient their proposals. Further, MOPAC has ensured its evaluation process and outcomes are transparent and publicly accessible, to enable other cities to learn from this process and to highlight why city-led investments in community-based prevention programmes is so important. Finally, the close partnership between the evaluator and MOPAC ensures there is a constant feedback loop where impact data is used to refine new iterations of the Fund, including the types of projects that are prioritised for funding.*

https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/mayors-office-policing-and-crime-mopac

3. Overall, there remains a disconnect between local and national perspectives of the threat

As mentioned, participants expressed concern about how some national frameworks are removed from local realities. This was discussed particularly in the context of the recently published Independent Review of the UK's Prevent programme. The review made 34 recommendations, all of which have been accepted by the UK's Home Office. However, some participants shared that many of the recommendations are considered out of date by the wider counter-extremism community. Moreover, some pointed to controversial aspects of the review, including its focus on actual incidents (excluding ones that were thwarted) and ideology, implicitly downplaying the role of environmental factors in fuelling hate and extremism. With the Home Office's acceptance of all 34 recommendations, participants expressed concern that this risks misallocation of Prevent funding for cities.

Perhaps more fundamentally, participants highlighted the limited nature of Prevent, with it accounting for only 2% of the UK's total counter-terrorism budget. Only 40 local authorities across the UK currently receive Prevent funding, leaving a further 293 without national-level support to deliver local prevention programming. Participants expressed concern that the allocation of Prevent funds, which is linked to official statistics, e.g., Prevent "referral" and national hate crime statistics, is misaligned with the actual threat landscape, especially given that a) the threat is dynamic and easily transcends local jurisdictions, whether that's through social media or travel between cities (e.g., by extremists), and b) many communities are hesitant to report hate crimes. Given this, participants noted that with funding being allocated based on Prevent referrals, hate crime and other statistics, rather than on the needs as expressed by local authorities, Prevent funding becomes reactive: primarily addressing a threat landscape where violence has already manifested rather than also supporting local authorities where this has yet to happen. Some observed that the lack of consensus between national and local stakeholders as to what the fundamental goal of Prevent should be (e.g., addressing terrorism specifically or hate-motivated violence more broadly) is complicated by it being situated within the UK's counter terrorism strategy and its implementation being overseen by the Home Office, ultimately orienting it around the narrow and securitised threat of terrorism.

> "Hearing examples from other contexts is super insightful and interesting, as there is much to improve. Many [national] frameworks still polarise and are therefore counterproductive."
>
> Eric Poinsot, Coordinator for Preventing Violent Extremism
> City of Strasbourg, France

Examples of this disconnect were also highlighted in France and Germany, where central governments focus heavily on ideology and continue to prioritise responses to the threat of Islamist extremism, despite cities and other local actors expressing greater concern with anti-government and right-wing extremism.

Reflecting on this experience in Europe, local officials and civil society representatives from New York City shared that, rather than ideology, they explicitly frame their approach around the agnostic concept of harm reduction, whether that harm is racism, homophobia, transphobia, etc. This avoids politicised and historically stigmatising terms like "Islamist extremism" as well as the US federal government's categorising of "domestic" vs "international" terrorism, while leaving a broad enough mandate that enables OPHC to address all (and often shared) root causes of such harm, including at structural and institutional levels.

> "Throughout our transatlantic initiative, we have seen a disconnect between local and national perspectives of the threat."
>
> Eric Rosand, Executive Director
> Strong Cities Network

Next Steps

As an immediate outcome of this event, the Strong Cities Network is producing a ten-step roadmap for operationalising city-led support for community-based prevention programmes. Over the next six months, we will continue to facilitate transatlantic learning, incorporating findings from this event and the ten-step roadmap in our future engagements with European and North American cities.

Further, we will consult cities represented at this workshop and others on both sides of the Atlantic to ensure their inputs are reflected in our forthcoming mayoral and local government practitioner guides. Once these are launched at our Global Summit in New York City in September 2023, to which European and North American member cities will be invited, we will support interested cities with their tailored application.

Strong Cities will also continue to serve as the evaluator of the Mayor of London's Shared Endeavour Fund, and will work with MOPAC to ensure findings from future evaluations are shared with cities and civil society in Europe and North America.

Additional Resources

- 10 Key Takeaways – Ongoing Transatlantic Initiative, Strong Cities Network
- Immigrant Integration Plan, City of Aurora
- Mainstreamed Extremism and the Future of Prevention, Institute for Strategic Dialogue
- Shared Endeavour Fund Evaluation – Call 1 and Call 2 commissioned by MOPAC and led by Tim Hulse (Strong Cities M&E Manager) and Michael Williams (Independent Evaluation Consultant, the Science of P/CVE)
- State of Play – NLC in Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism. What We Learned and What Needs to Improve, Strong Cities Network

Donors & Partners

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Contact Information

For more information on this event and the Strong Cities' Transatlantic Initiative, please contact Eric Rosand at er@strongcitiesnetwork.org.