

“Conversations with Muslim Community leaders in Redbridge about the Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) Agenda.”

by Redbridge Faith Forum
for Redbridge Safer Communities Partnership

Conversations with Muslim Community leaders in Redbridge about the Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) Agenda

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Summary of the report

This report is about:

- The perceptions and views of local Muslim community leaders about community issues.
- Their desire to have effective engagement with the local authority about their community safety, not withstanding macro issues.
- Their desire to have dialogue and channels of communication for the benefit of all residents of the borough.

We are writing this report to share with the Redbridge Safer Communities Partnership the findings we got from interviewing Muslim Community leaders about their experiences, opinions and understandings of the governments preventing violent extremism programme - PVE.

Although there were some initial misunderstandings, Muslim community leaders welcome some of the positive aspects that PVE has brought to their communities in Redbridge, including Islam awareness, capacity building of Mosques and training opportunities and programmes for young people.

Muslim community leaders were not previously fully aware of the role of Redbridge Safer Communities Partnership in creating community safety at a local level and the help that is available for local residents. They are hoping for new channels of communication and dialogue to build bridges for safety and are grateful to the local authority for the help that is available in this way. Work through Mosques and other faith community organisations can supplement the valuable work already going on through ward councillors, ward panels and area committees.

This report aims to inform RSCP about the views of Muslim Community Leaders. It also tries to set the PVE agenda in a wider community context. It is hoped that the report will attract a wider readership among faith communities and others interested in community cohesion work, both in this borough and beyond.

The central part of the report are the interviews with the Muslim community leaders. It has been organised into 13 sections as outlined in the contents page 2. These 13 themes were the key topics which emerged out of the conversations. This includes the immediate time context of the winter of 2008, in which the Gaza War took place and a geographic context that both includes Redbridge but also locates it in a wider world, and broader issues.

The report contains useful information about how PVE was understood and launched when it came into the borough and also about feeling about police engagement with PVE.

We assume the readers of this report have some basic knowledge of what PVE is about as a government programme- there are references to explanatory documents. Some will be sceptical of PVE, others in favour of it, not least because it can lever in new funds to their work, or enable new work to start. Although criticisms about the overall conception of PVE is contained in this report, this is not a criticism of the local authority.

Muslim faith leaders valued the involvement of RFF in this project, to show that someone outside their community is interested to be alongside the community, both in the genuine and acknowledged problems in the community around extremism and in showing solidarity in tackling Islamophobia.

Muslim leaders did not see why their community was the only one singled out for attention and not other faith groups. This was specifically - but not only - noted in the context of GAZA War, which happened during the reporting period and delayed the start of interviewing, due to the sensitivity of the topic.

In general most of the leaders did have an awareness of PVE, which they had acquired from a variety of sources, including direct contact with RSCP, Mosques, work in other boroughs, work in schools. Some had not been directly contacted by the RSCP.

Feelings ranged from those who were suspicious about the government intentions for PVE (particularly with respect to police involvement and (mis) understanding about the contest² and the panorama programme shown in February 2009 to those who were eager to make it work.

Most were aware of the extent of the government's financial investment in PVE, but in respect of this there were varied views for instance as to whether PVE should be mainstream funding and not just targeting Muslims specifically. Others commented that PVE grants went more to outside organisations rather than to more local, grassroots organisation. Although there were some delays experienced in the start of the PVE programme in Redbridge, many participants felt the programme will be very useful over the next two years particularly in terms of long term developments such as capacity building of Mosques / FORMO on the lines of developments in the voluntary and community sector generally.

However, the community leaders we talked to were not (on the whole) defensive about talking about PVE and wanted to make it a useful thing for the Muslim community.

Redbridge Faith Forum is grateful to the Redbridge Safer Communities Partnership for the funding and opportunities this research project has given them to work with RSCP and the Muslim community in this way.

Introduction

This report is about:

- The perceptions and views of local Muslim community leaders about community issues.
- Their desire to have effective engagement with the local authority about their community safety, not withstanding macro issues.
- Their desire to have dialogue and channels of communication for the benefit of all residents of the borough.

In November 2008, Redbridge Faith Forum (RFF) submitted a tender to take part in The Tackling Extremism Together, Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) programme. This report is based on interviews with Muslim community leaders in Redbridge about the Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) agenda.

It was written at the request of the Community Safety manager of Redbridge Community Safety Partnership as part of (RFF) Redbridge Faith Forum's contribution to the PVE programme up to March 2009.

We also agreed to run a workshop, held on March 29th 2009 called Tackling Extremism Together, which attempted to look at the issues from an interfaith perspective. A report on this workshop will also be produced in April 2009.

There were no specific written guidelines issued for the research, except that we would be expected to interview a minimum of 5 Muslim community leaders to include Councillors, Chairs and Imams of Mosques and Women leaders.

However it was expected that this study would be a kind of follow up to earlier research carried out by the University of Lancaster during 2007-8. This thorough research was carried out with Muslims living in Redbridge and we were specifically requested to meet with Muslim community *leaders*. These two documents included a research checklist, which we were asked to follow. This actually proved quite difficult to follow and was later modified by the research team.

Aims and purposes of the report

The objectives of the research Project are as stated in the tender document and research statement, which is to interview Muslim community leaders as their experiences of taking part in the Prevent PVE agenda and to report the findings to the Redbridge Community Safety Partnership (RSCP).

We understand that the government genuinely wanted to know how the Muslim community felt about the PVE agenda. The aims of this report are to report to the RSCP on the results of interviews carried out with a small sample of Muslim Community Leaders & Councillors in Redbridge, during February and March 2009 and to add value to the UCLAN reports carried out in 2007/2008.

We hope as a result of this report, there will be discussion within Redbridge around the role of PVE in the community and this will contribute to how PVE work is carried out in the borough.

The comments reported are broadly corroborated through other events during the reporting period, notably the PVE workshop organised by RFF, The discussions of those

attending Understanding Redbridge Communities Meetings in January and March 2009 and email correspondence circulating among Muslim networks.

PVE is widely seen as a problem of the Muslim community, not least in the government's own policy documents and it was hoped that RFF might be able to offer a sympathetic but not uncritical accompaniment with the Muslim community around this Project from which useful lessons could be learnt.

The immediate context of the study

The interviews were carried out in February and March 2009.

It is very important to note that the research was carried out during or in the aftermath of very significant international events, which appeared to overshadow the whole Project. The most obvious of these incidents was the War in GAZA. This in itself released a huge torrent of highly pertinent research material, often in email format or on the Internet or press, as people in Redbridge engaged with the issues raised by the war. They could also constitute valuable documentary evidence for a future research study.

The Gaza War also meant that a situation, which was thought to be 'in hand' prior to the war, suddenly became inflamed. Experienced Muslim PVE workers reported difficulty in keeping down the sheer frustration being experienced by the Muslim community. PVE programmes were adapted at short notice to allow young people to voice their frustrations through debate. One attempt to do this was misunderstood and got caught up in local political discourse during the Valentines Ward bye-election in February 2009. We worked hard to build the trust with those who participated in the project, but it is a tribute to the openness and concern of those people we interviewed, that it was possible to do the work. Lifting the lid or keeping the lid on the issue was one of the most significant findings of the research.(section 13)

Limitations of the study

We were only able to interview 9 Muslim leaders [minimum requested 5]. It is hard to preserve anonymity with such a small sample so we have broken down the interview transcripts and reallocated the comments made into a number of key themes, which form the sections of the report.

We used qualitative, not quantitative research methods- and wrote down what people told us.

Please note that this report does not try to explain what is the government's Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) agenda either at national or local level, but given that it exist, it seeks to find out what are the reactions and experiences of Muslim community leaders in Redbridge in dealing with it.

The style of the report has been adapted to fit in to the tight timelines of the project and to preserve the integrity and anonymity of the interview participants. For this reason it may appear over wordy and repetitive at times. This is because the document has tried to remain true to the participant's own words.

The views contained in this report do not represent the views of Redbridge Faith Forum, nor the views of the Muslim Community as a whole in Redbridge, but are

accurately based on the interviews that were carried out during February and March 2009.

Research methods used

- Semi-structured interviews using a guided checklist of questions
- Study of documentary evidence, including PVE reports, UCLAN and email material submitted from various sources
- Observations of the local area during field visits during the research period and attending other PVE events held
- Cross referencing between findings of our own interviews, triangulated with studies from other areas or the documents we collected

Methodological considerations

We set out to have confidential conversations, which preserved the anonymity of our respondents. Most interviews lasted an hour. We tried to create an atmosphere of trust, in which it was possible for people to speak with openness and candidness, knowing both that their views were taken with seriousness and would be presented to the respective authorities.

We included various perspectives of Muslim community leadership including Imams, chairpersons of Mosque Committees, leader of voluntary organisations and community centres, LA councillors, Women workers.

We also met with people from a variety of Muslim backgrounds (of origin) including Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and the Middle East

Abbreviations used

Preventing Violent Extremism	PVE
Understanding Redbridge Communities	URC
Redbridge Safer Communities Partnership	RSCP
East London Three Faith's Forum	3FF
Redbridge Faith Forum	RFF
Voluntary and community sector	VCS
Federation of Redbridge Muslim Organisations	FORMO
Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board	MINAB
University of Central Lancashire	UCLAN
Every Child Matters	ECM
Muslim Public Affairs Committee	MPAC UK

Bibliography of documents consulted

Narrowing the Gap, Macdonald et al July 2008, UCLAN

The Redbridge Muslim Newspaper , February 2009, issue 1, March 2009, issue 2

The Prevent Strategy: a guide for local partners , HM Government

Leading the preventing violent extremism agenda, Local Government Association, Nov 2008

Tackling Extremism Together in Redbridge , LBR, RSCP, 2008

Thanks and acknowledgements

Redbridge Faith Forum wishes to thank the Redbridge Safer Communities Partnership for the opportunity to participate in this project. To the chair, committee and staff of

RFF for the time put in to carrying out this work and last, but not least all the Muslim community leaders who kindly gave of their time to share their perceptions

Section One: The Preventing Violent Extremism Agenda (PVE) in Redbridge

1.1 Learning about the PVE Programme

One Muslim Community Worker described how the PVE Co-ordinator contacted her:

"I was contacted by (the PVE coordinator of Redbridge Safer Communities Partnership (RSCP)), who explained it to me. I took an interest and attended the first URC meeting. I have been able to study some of the contents, as sent by her. Lots of other organisations attended the meeting and discussed the issues, especially about the importance of creating a safe environment in the locality for all, prevention work and discussions in Mosques and their role and of how leaders can play a role.

"Before that, there was not any awareness of the PVE Agenda. Since PVE started, it is still not known about (by many). I only know because I was approached. I don't know how RSCP are conveying the message. Will they send information to organisations? It was all done in a hurry in the autumn of 2008 when they had to spend the money. Do they expect organisations to spread the word for them"?

1.2 The relation of the Mosque Committees to the RSCP and Involvement with PVE

One worker who also worked in schools said his Mosque was not invited to the meeting.

"PVE was uncomfortable for me. At the initial PVE meeting, we were not invited. I have not considered it in detail. I don't know about Redbridge PVE, except in the schools. Re PVE - what is it about? How are they allocating the funds? More clarity is needed on the PVE agenda. We need to learn from what other boroughs. There are 3 sides: Preventing, Cure and Awareness".

Another leader, who is also an Imam, implied that Imams were not necessarily informed about PVE, if the Committee Chair of the Mosque did not feel it necessary to inform them.

"Some say PVE was not set up properly in the beginning. For instance, how it was presented to local communities and who was talked to whom about it. But what do we mean by community leaders? When we talk about building trust, do we mean with the Imam or with committee or both? The Chair speaks to the Imam. He needs to get the Imam involved and on board."

'The role of Mosque Management Committees is to work with Redbridge Safer Community partnership. They have to do this. Nothing's going to come from staying as we are. There has to be a partnership. There needs to be dialogue. There should have been an invite from the RSCP to the Mosque leader and people to explain the PVE Agenda, but no one has come to the Imams around here. Imams did not get the information."

In another Mosque, the Chair implied he had not even been informed about the PVE programme at all at the beginning.

"Our Mosque could send a representative to the RSCP, but we have not had a communication from them. There has been no approach from RSCP. The Management Committee has discussed PVE, but we have been slow in applying to RSCP. We are busy people. Now we are considering a bid for a Saturday Masjid and want to recruit someone to run it while also doing interface work with the community. This takes

time. It's not easy to find the money. We are self-financed. It's about delivery, not just bidding and is a gradual process."

1.3 Attitudes toward PVE

Some Mosques were well set up to immediately get involved with PVE, but even so all expressed having to overcome considerable mental and emotional discomfort before taking part in it.

One Mosque Chair explained that his Mosque was comfortable with PVE, but not with the 'profiling' or to the suspicion linked to PVE.

"We as a faith organisation are comfortable with PVE. PVE is not a problem for us. Our community is much more mature now. Since 9/11 the wider Muslim community is more widely prepared than before. We are not denying the reality of extremism - but why should we have to deny it, if we are not part of it? But I get attacked as a Muslim - why give us this label as extremists"?

"We don't like the involvement of outside bodies. We want to drive our own agenda. Through PVE, there is a danger that we get seen to be funded to do other's 'dirty work'. (Dirty = becoming an agent informer?) The Muslim community can be seen to be agents for the police . We need to be very careful about the way we are perceived".

1.4 Dispersion of PVE funding

A lot of dissatisfaction was expressed about how the PVE funds in round one got to be dispersed.

"In the first round, a lot of people were not funded. Two or three organisations got a lot of funding under different names, but were part of one organisation - this created distrust. I did not like that."

There was also a general feeling that local grass roots organisations with an established track record of operating in Redbridge were ignored.

"RSCP should be making better use of local Muslim organisations with a track record of delivering projects. Local experienced people have not been involved. They feel excluded. Instead there was an unrepresentative selection of local voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations to deliver PVE projects. We need to look into which local organisations have been left out of PVE funding, while new non-local organisations mushroom and get the funding".

"The best people are not sitting round the table. Community credibility - What we need are people with real links to the local community, recognised by the community".

1.5 Funding Delays

"In this current round of PVE, there have been funding delays. Then the funds were dispersed too quickly, and not in a professional way. But we are confident that next year will be better. The money is spread too thinly. It is not targeted enough to achieve a lasting effect. PVE was previously better when the funding came directly from central government."

1.6 Other expressed criticism of PVE in Redbridge

Some concern was expressed that PVE spends too much on administration and not enough on addressing real needs.

“The Muslim community is not benefiting directly from PVE. Most money spent on PVE (75%) goes on admin and staff, but only 25% to Muslim organisations. The money is not distributed properly either.”

“Are needs being addressed by PVE? Not 100% to be honest. Some aspects of PVE are seen as ‘cosmetic’, others as ‘political’. There is a feeling of discrimination penetrating PVE, in the way the funds are being dispersed. Organisations close to the government get the benefit [of funding]- These are the high fliers with their glossy reports; the grass roots don’t benefit”

1.7 Stigma attached to PVE and lack of trust

The biggest misgivings of all with the PVE Agenda seem to be around the stigma attached to it. A lot of this was related to fear or suspicion of the police (which is discussed further in section ??? and how data / information is collected and used. Within the Muslim community significant concern was expressed.

“Why are Muslims identified in the PVE agenda? Why pick on us? Why not pick on the Zionist, the Foreign Secretary, and the Indian government over Kashmir? But I have no objection to PVE as if there is a problem over violence, then it must be tackled.”

“There was a fear of stigmatisation through involvement in PVE. Most of the money was all used for training and then people moved out. The local grass roots voluntary sector involvement dropped out.”

“PVE can isolate, label and stereotype Muslims; where as other policies try to include, acknowledge and accept Muslim young people. There is a contradiction between two policies going on. They are not interacting with each other.”

1.8 Trust and PVE

“There is about 50% trust in the PVE project. But there is a lack of trust in the police presence, because it is very sensitive giving this personal information. I think it is too personal what they are asking - ‘Requests for data bases with contacts’ -all their names, addresses and telephone numbers. People are not willing to give it.”

“The general feeling of the Muslim community is that PVE is treated with suspicion. The vast majority of people denounced 7/7 but there is real scepticism about the intelligence led nature of PVE. Also PVE gives Muslims a negative viewpoint.”

“Other faith communities will say ‘They get money because they are trouble-makers’. As Muslims, we want money for our communities to come through the mainstream, not through PVE. I am a voluntary sector type person. We do things through the mainstream, without the negative connotations”.

“We have suspicions with the PVE concept and how to engage in it but there is scope in some PVE projects. Some of them help us to learn affirmative action”.

"We are suspicious of the intelligence base/ stream to PVE. Some projects are positive - they are excellent, but on TV we learned about money given for a PVE project that was clawed back, when the rules were changed".

"Now there is a feeling that the police are driving the agenda. There is suspicion in the community about this police influence".

1.9 Contest2

Some of the biggest concerns of Muslims community leaders both in the interviews and from email newsletter sources were about the newly announced government's Contest2 Programme.

One leader of a Mosque said:

"We are very worried, following the Panorama programme on 16.2.09 about Contest2, that people's civil liberties and freedom of speech are being undermined by the new Contest2, which tackles extremism [not just violent extremism]. I am absolutely dumbfounded, shocked and flabbergasted by this. We fear the British government is dictating what a religion can believe in".

"In my mind Contest2 is interlinked to PVE in the overall strategy. My God, what's happening here? If Contest2 is rolled out, there's a fear that lots of Muslims will be labelled as extremists. The government is defining what is halal/haram for Islam (- eg over homosexuality). Who is the government to say that"?

"We fear that Contest2 will increase extremism and drive it underground. So PVE has raised suspicion. Context2 cuts the democratic option. Contest2 tries to say how Islam will be -If I speak out about Palestine I will be labelled an extremist. That itself will stimulate extremism in others".

The view expressed here about extremism came to be a major expression of concern in the research and is covered further in the section x on extremism vis a vis violent extremism.

Finally, as a precondition for PVE to work, most participants felt that the international and foreign policy issues have to be addressed:

"The government dismisses (these) international issues but unless they are addressed, PVE can't work. The impact of international issues must be seriously looked into". These are discussed further in section ?????

1.10 Positive engagement with PVE

In spite of the negatives expressed about PVE in the sections above there were also many positive expressions of support for PVE from all the participants. Positives in and around the PVE agenda noted, include:

- Capacity building of the Muslim community and Muslim organisations, such as Mosques
- Development of FORMO (Federation of Redbridge Muslim Organisations) as a second tier organisation for the Muslim community in Redbridge
- Positive programmes going on within Mosques and Madrassas.
- Good citizenship

- Long awareness of some organisations around PVE since before 9/11
- Maturity of Muslim community since 9/11
- The true meaning of Jihad

“Using PVE as an opportunity to develop the Mosque. Yes we have had meetings with the trustees and have discussed the contents and objectives of PVE. The young people in the centre have also been involved to look at it. The PVE objectives make a lot of sense - trying to prevent violent extremism.”

“Before, there was not any awareness of the PVE agenda, now there is”.

“Some of PVE is a step in the right direction, provided it is not just about ‘glossy reports’. There are resource requirements. But if issues are highlighted but then no money is spent on tackling them, then this is no good. It is about time the government realised the Muslim community has been left behind on many targets. Eg on unemployment and that there is still under-representation of Muslim staffing levels in the Town Hall.”

“In two years time there may be more solutions to the problems. PVE will bring about a positive image of Islam. This will change the situation for the better, for the whole society and good will come out of it and lead towards good citizenship. This will give a positive message for the Muslim community all over the world. There’s a need for multi faith forums and dialogue.”

“PVE is promoting positive aspects of Islam. Recruitment outside Mosques has reduced. Our Mosque Committee stopped this recruitment. This has now gone underground.”

“There is scope within PVE for the preventative aspects of PVE project work to take place, to allow moderation.”

Note: this report may be stronger on the negatives than the positives of PVE at this stage in the process, but what people were asked for were their feeling and experiences at a point of time and these comments reflect this accurately.

1.11 Ideas for improving the prevent programme in Redbridge

“There could be more recreational activities. Then disenchanted people will be brought back into the community”.

Education around PVE

“There are four areas where education needs to go on - and this includes education of the value of Islam. Prevent work needs to happen in state schools, in mosques, on the internet and within families”.

“There needs to be a more interesting programme that gets the public to attend and explains the work in the community and of how the PVE will create a better environment- that would help. We need to find better ways to attract people to it through good, interesting programmes of events that convey the message”.

Section 2: Comments on The Muslim Community in Redbridge and the UK

In this section we report on conversations of different aspects of the Muslim community both here and in Britain as a whole. All of this has been sparked off by the coming of the government's PVE programme over the last year or so.

2.1 Need for Muslim champions at higher levels

"About PVE, some Muslims are uncritically *for* the government; others are more distant from the mainstream. But there is big scepticism towards the Quilliam Foundation, with its staff on £80,000 salaries".

The above negative view towards the Quilliam Foundation was held almost universally by all participants and corroborated by attending meetings including Understanding Redbridge Communities (URC) meeting.

Another Muslim leader felt quite cynical about who the government was listening to nationally and how major contracts got signed off. (Comments as to their views about the distribution of funds through PVE in Redbridge can be found in section 1)

2.2 Getting heard by the government

"Some unrepresentative individuals from the Muslim community get invited to number 10 Downing Street. Who are they? Wealthy businessmen, not the socially excluded. What does this businessman know about the Muslim community? He does not know about the Muslim community".

"Yes Muslims are talking to no 10 Downing St, but there are examples where the government is giving £1m to individuals who have no contact with the local community. Problems will come from this. It is not good giving money to the wrong people, with those who will all sing from the same hymn sheet that the government wants, because they appear to be meeting the government's set objectives"

"Kings can have good or bad advisers". Some Muslim advisers close to those in power are not actually good Muslim representatives themselves. They don't go to the local Mosques. They don't understand. They are not keeping their own Muslim heritage in its original form, for instance the Quran in Arabic".

2.3 The role of Muslim Council of Britain

The paragraphs below reflect on one Mosque leader's strong views as to who should represent Muslims nationally to the government, with comments referring to the Sufi Council of Britain and the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB). Criticism of the Quilliam Foundation was felt quite unanimously in the interviews held as shown above. Below however, was the only specifically mentioned support for the MCB amongst the interview participants. However, it was clear from attending URC meetings, that support for the MCB is widely felt among Muslim organisations in Redbridge.

This Mosque Chair was very adamant about the important role he wished the Muslim Council of Britain to play in representing Muslims at national level and to the government. He implied that the government were not in touch with grass roots Muslim opinion and had chosen their advisers unwisely.

“Representative grass roots organisations should be at the forefront of all this (consultative work with the government). The MCB (Muslim Council of Britain) were isolated by the government and the Sufi Council was promoted in their place. But people don’t accept the Sufi Council. The MCB should be representing Muslims nationally. We accept MCB at our Mosque. MCB say Holocaust Day should be for everybody and renamed the International Genocide Day and was disliked for saying this. The MCB does not go against the grain of the community. We work to consensus”.

“As Muslim community leaders, we have to be realistic. We can’t deny true feelings of Muslim community. There has to be a responsibility from central government. Their policy has an impact on the inhabitants. The MP follows the whip’s line. This is dangerous and causes resentment. People will be disenfranchised”.

2.4 Support for the Muslim Council of Britain

“The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), is not being allowed to represent the views of Muslims in Britain. Grass roots led organisations, with the voice of the people are affiliated to MCB. It has 400 *bona fide* affiliated organisations attached to it. The government needs to work with bona fide organisations. The MCB speaks in a just way, but the government does not want that. It stands up to Israeli bombings”

“It has a balanced approach and is objective. We hoped the government would work with the MCB and help them to build its infrastructure”.

2.5 Need for spokespeople for the Muslim community on the international issues

The international perspective came up frequently in the research and is referred to again in section 12. One major disappointment with the Quilliam Foundation was their silence on international issues and the need for the Muslim community to have an international voice in common with other major faiths.

“Instead (of support for MCB), they have given a £1 million to the Quilliam Foundation, who state that what happens in Palestine does not affect us here. Our support for Palestine is because of injustice. This is a two way thing. It is part of the principle of *communitarianism* of brotherhood all around the world. It is the affiliation we have because of the faith, of commitment to basic human values. The Roman Catholic Church is allowed to have this international perspective of connectedness all over the world. No one questions this. The same is true of British Jews and their commitment and support for Israel. We don’t say kill the Jews. That’s wrong”.

Omar Bakri is a joke- has some screws loose. We don’t support him. He says MCB are Muslim ‘chumchas’ – i.e. a sell out. But what MCB has done is for the first time in Britain to create a Muslim identity and a British identity, beyond people’s attachment to being Pakistanis or Bangladeshis. They were the first to do this. To promote Britishness.

“MCB goes with the sentiment in the community. That’s a democratic right. It goes by debate to reach consensus. Our Mosque is similar. We want to be part of the mainstream. The Muslim sentiment in the local community is similar to that of the MCB”.

2.6 Local channels to represent the Muslim Community in Redbridge

The absence of local channels to advocate, represent and help capacity build the Muslim community in Redbridge was addressed, by the formation of the Federation of Redbridge Muslim Organisations (FORMO), as reported in the Redbridge Muslim Newspaper in February 2001. The arrival of FORMO was well received in the interviews held.

2.7 FORMO - build the channels to make an impact on policy democratically

"We lack the channels. FORMO - this is a local platform to be used as channels to put forward these sentiments. This could help things locally and the MCB nationally. The danger is that if FORMO speaks out they will be classed as extremists. FORMO also needs to consider its relations to the Mosques and to other faith organisations. We need to build these kinds of bridges, to channel in a democratic way. Context2 cuts the democratic option. Contest2 tries to say how Islam will be -If I speak out about Palestine I will be labelled an extremist. That itself will stimulate extremism in others".

"We want to position ourselves as part of a proactive voluntary and community sector, with political awareness. We want to do well for the community. We are part of *Middle path Islam*. We see homosexuality as *haram*; but this does not mean we are hurtful or disrespectful to homosexuals".

Other perspectives on local issues will be found in the section 1 on PVE in Redbridge.

2.8 Diversity of the Muslim community in Redbridge

Strong requests were made for greater understanding of the diversity of Muslim in Redbridge. This applies (presumably) to the theological, political and affiliational differences between different Muslim groups as well as to the *ethnic* dimension that one Mosque leader referred to below.

"The RSCP need to understand better the diversity of the Muslim community - the range of ethnicities and perspectives contained within it - but it did not show it had this understanding at first. The Muslim community is as diverse as any other faith community. There are many ethnicities, for example Somalis, Indians, Pakistanis. They all see things differently from each other. Now Bangladeshis are coming to North Ilford. The RSCP has not recognised the ethnic diversity within the Muslim community. Having said that, what we share in common is an interest in a good future, a good education, respect and law abiding citizens. There is no idea of the whole population of the Muslim community".

2.9 History of experiences of Muslims in the UK

Part of the diversity of the Muslim community in the UK lies in their coming to terms with transferring from essentially South Asian context in the first generation, to second and third generations expressing their Britishness (see also section about MCB above).

One older Mosque leader, with a south Asian background, commented that:
"Muslim values have been vanished over the last 400 years - living in a wilderness. Muslims have got lost. Now they need to be exposed to new values. It takes time living here in the West to 'get up to scratch'. The first generation came with a load of South Asian baggage. There is more movement of thought in the second generation. We have also experienced major international changes- the fall of the Russian Empire".

2.10 Loyalty to Britain

Another younger leader spoke about his loyalty to Britain.

“There is a ‘silent majority’ of Muslims. I am British born and bred. This is my homeland. I want to be welcome. I want to be part of this society. My loyalty and life is here. My children are totally different from me. I get frustrated when government leaders don’t listen to me. I feel upset and disempowered. I am trying not to convey my frustration as a local mosque leader to the mass of members, but I can’t please everybody. It is heavy on my shoulders. I try to be as composed as possible. I try to promote something good in my community. I have to be fair and just”

2.11 Intergenerational issues

Most leaders remarked on issues between their own generation and younger people or older people. *One commented that:*

“The first generation of immigrants from Indian subcontinent came from illiterate backgrounds. They wanted to earn money, to get a house and a shop to create a livelihood. An education was not a top priority. Now some of the second generation of parents send their children to private schools because the state schools are not seen as performing well enough - especially in South Ilford. In South Ilford they are still neglected”.

2.12 Running of Mosques

Another Committee Chair commented how different generations and men and women are involved in the management of the their Mosque.

“Often we find that the elders don’t understand the context. They come for the tea and biscuits. The elderly are more likely to follow the government line. Elderly people may be running the mosque and the young people are not allowed to move forward and then feel blocked. Mosques need people who understand the context. Our Management Committee has 21members, including 2 women. 10 of them are over 45 and not the younger generation. The majority are professionals and are experienced volunteers for events. Does the Management Committee discuss PVE - yes.”

Section 3: Muslim Community Organisations in Redbridge, working on the PVE agenda

This section of the report, describes changes to the way Muslim organisations - Mosques, community centres, after school centres and Madrasas are being governed and managed, within the new PVE environment. This includes new regulations for Mosques from the Charities Commission, called the MINAB (Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board) standards - which seem to be a kind of voluntary sector capacity building for Mosques and training for Imams to carry out their role.

3.1 Mosques - improving relationships

One Mosque has deliberately tried to develop a good relationship with statutory partners like the police and the local authority. The chair commented "We invite the Police Borough Commander to meet us. We are experienced in dealing with officers of LBR. Our Centre is democratic. We make use of elections. Our Centre has built up an understanding with different sections of LBR, so people are exposed to the wider issues".

3.2 Identifying Muslim community leaders

So far in this report, we have been using the terms Muslim Community Leader mostly without defining if we are talking about the Chair of the Mosque Committee, or the Imam in the Mosque, or leaders of voluntary organisations or Local Authority Councillors and this has been done deliberately to help preserve the anonymity of the research participants. RFF was asked by RSCP to interview Muslim community leaders without it being specified who such a leader was.

However, one interviewee asked the question - *'but who are the Muslim community leaders?'* This was in order to tease out the sometimes, uneasy relationship between the Imam (an employee) and the Mosque Chair (an employer). This uneasiness is further underlined by the implication by the government, in relation to PVE that Imams need to be 'brought into line', 'speak better English' or comply in some other way. It also affected whom the RSCP first made contact with when working with the Mosque.

3.3 Educational Roles of Imams

On the one hand, there has been a concern within PVE to educate and train the Imams,, on the other hand, Imams may not have been informed at all about the PVE Programme, if all the channels of communication go through the Committee and the Chairmen.

One Imam said he had not been informed about PVE and said:

"Mosques have no idea about PVE. It's another example of poor explanation of PVE. No one has explained it to me (a local Imam). They don't get the Mosques on board. There is no reason for the community to come together"

Another Committee Chairman said: 'the role of Imams in PVE is vital. They are a key component. On Fridays there are huge crowds. Their opinions go a long way, but Imams are not always comfortable being told how to do it, nor about having to modify their language. Recently Imams Conferences were held around these issues". "We need to get 'technical ' with Imams - it takes a long time to press it. It takes time for the messages to be digested".

3.4 Improvements in the recent Imam's training in Redbridge

There were different points of view about recent training programmes for Imams and an Imams Conference held in Redbridge.

One Imam showed concern about the training programme being offered:

"Imam's training - I've not been to it, but from what I've heard and in my opinion because as a leadership programme, the Imam's training offers no accreditation, so it is pointless. Many things are presented in the Imam's training, but how practical is it? - how many have been implemented for the Imams? *MINAB* is not a [proper] leadership programme. There is nothing specific about it. However there is a Level 3 B Tech Management Skills for Imams which was designed for, and would be appropriate for, English speakers. Is *MINAB* following through about that?"

Another Imam was concerned about how Imams job descriptions were being changed and mentioned the example of chaplains:

"They have been changing job descriptions for chaplains [in hospitals and prisons] - adding a paragraph to do PVE work. The Muslim Chaplains were asked to do this, but not Chaplains of other faiths- why were just Muslim Chaplains involved in this extremist work? There are extremists in all faiths"

One Imam commented on how there were different training needs within the Mosque and that these needed to be thought about carefully.

"There had not been sessions just for Imams, or sessions just for those running the organisations. It varies from Mosque to Mosque, but the people *running* the organisations don't necessarily influence the congregation. The Committee does the day-to-day work of running the Mosque - for example ensuring Health and Safety/ Child Protection etc are in place".

"There is a need for nationally recognised accreditation training so that skills go with the people, (Imams) when they move on. Otherwise the programmes just become a consultation exercise."

"There are sessions in the Imam's training on job description, accounts, selection of speakers and checking their credentials, but there has got to be understanding about the role of the imam in understanding the needs of the community"

3.5 Selecting, inducting and introducing Imams to the community

The way Imams are selected, inducted and introduced to the community is critical for the development of the work with the Mosque. The following points were made by an Imam working in the southern half of the borough.

"The Imam's first responsibility is with their employer. The Imam is there as a servant not a leader or boss but the same goes for committee members too"

"The way the Imam is chosen is critical. Often a few people choose the Imam, but did they consult others before hand? Doing this won't fulfil the needs of the whole community. Some Imams never go outside their four walls into the community. Does the Imam ever go out into the community? If not, how can he speak practically about the needs of the community? How can he deliver a speech, without knowing the community? He just talks about what he hears from others, or has picked up uncritically from newspapers, not from what he has seen in his own experience".

“Many Imams have language gaps. Their lack of English education means they are not discerning in reading newspaper to distinguish facts from prejudice. They rely on others for information and don’t think for themselves. So the message may be wrong or distorted”

3.6 Capacity building of Mosques as organisations

The relation of the Imam to the Mosque Committee seems to be part of a drive to develop the capacity of Mosques as organisations, in the same way that the voluntary sector in general is expected to improve its governance procedures.

Another Mosque Chair commented that: “Some checks on Mosques have been useful to highlight weaknesses in the Mosque as an institution - for example, we don’t now use preachers without first getting references on them”

“The use of CRB checks also helps this. Self-regulation through the *MINAB* standards is to our advantage. There are 5 core *MINAB* standards. These help the Mosque Management Committee to improve the way it manages its own affairs. ‘If we don’t do it, someone else will regulate us’. This makes some Imams less independent”.

The *MINAB** standards have been introduced by the Charities Commission as a kind of quality standard for Mosques. This was welcomed by the Committee Chair above and also by an Imam below, who saw the important educational role of Mosques and commented:

“We also needed to improve the set up within the Mosques. I like the *MINAB* standards. I am proud they are fully implemented here in our Mosque. We engage with women here. Women’s participation in mosques is needed. We need qualified people to teach in Mosques. As charities, we as Mosque trustees have to comply with the regulations required by the Charities Commission”.

3.7 Education in Mosques, the Internet and within families

This Imam was keen on the educational role of Mosques.

“Mosques also serve as schools, after school centres and community centres. This is a main place for acquiring Islamic knowledge. The Mosque agenda is important. The syllabus of all mosques in UK should be agreed as a national curriculum.”.

Through the Internet:

“This is a ‘dangerous area’ and is difficult to control, but there is a need for a site run by Muslim scholars. This will attract hits eventually. The family, parents, need education, but there are often generation, national, culture and technology gaps which are hard to bridge”.

3.8 Mosques and Imams have a role to play in community cohesion

These views were corroborated by a woman community leader who suggested

“Mosques should have a strong role to play, which I have argued strongly. For example, during Friday prayer, when the Hutba sermon is made, there should be a talk on contemporary affairs. The preacher should also let all the people who come to prayer be aware of what is going on and make suggestions, especially for youth. There is not much for youth in this borough.”

This was also supported by a Local Authority Councillor and member of a mosque.

“Mosques should serve as community centres and not just prayer halls. They should welcome everyone and give support to individuals with individual problems. An Imam should be well trained to communicate with the local Muslim community and understand their problems and social issues. However, the main onus for denouncing violent extremism should fall on the family and the whole community”

Another councillor observed that:

“Whilst Muslim children are acquiring knowledge at their local Mosque, it becomes the moral duty and responsibility of the mosque and its teachers to guide and educate the children according to the tenets and beliefs of Islam.”

(Note: The way the Local Authority deals with the Mosque and the relation of the Mosque Committees to the Redbridge Safer Communities Partnership and involvement with PVE will be dealt with under section 1

Section 4: Young Muslims in Redbridge

All the interviews highlighted issues for young people in Redbridge, though none were carried out specifically with young people themselves. (The section 5 on the police also notes Muslim young people's attitudes towards the police).

4.1 Issues for young people

One Muslim leader, with extensive educational experience observed:

"Throughout their schooling, Muslim youth straddle two or more cultures and sets of moral values. They have a vacuum of role models and history, and can feel isolated and then alienated in an environment that does not affirm and acknowledge their traditions, cultures, and values. Outside of school and the home, they face rejection through racism or anti-Islam/Muslim-mania (otherwise known as Islamophobia); the vociferous right wing and irresponsible sectors of the media. This causes the Muslim community to feel demonised, while its young people see themselves depicted as raging savages, criminals or terrorists in most media coverage".

"Where they are from homes that are not providing the moral, emotional, faith and spiritual nurturing needed for their sound development, by parents who are unengaged with their growing needs and perhaps even tribal in outlook, some Muslim youth develop very little real knowledge of Islam".

The section below suggests that PVE treats Muslim young people as *different* from other young people and is concerned as to how to make them feel they belong, are affirmed and acknowledged. ??? suggests Muslim young people are growing up in a hostile community and in families without spiritual anchors.

4.2 PVE and treating Muslim young people differently to other young people

One leader who worked a lot with young people observed:

"The PVE exercise treats young people as *different* from other young people. I think this is unhelpful. Young people from any background often feel misunderstood and angered by double standards. The experiences of young Muslims growing up in a society where they are a minority resonates with the experiences and problems of any other minority group".

4.3 Understanding methodology by government used to evaluate PVE issue

"I fully accept that the duty of any responsible government is to act against all criminality, as well as against threats of acts of crime or terror. I feel there are questions that need to be addressed regarding the methodology used to understand or evaluate the problem and how to go about solving it."

"All behaviours have a cause. People have a right to reply and there needs to be an understanding of the experience of the few young people engaging themselves in extremism. There must be understanding and dialogue. Why are they disaffected? What are their experiences through school? Has this evaluation really happened? A thorough analysis and evaluation is needed".

Another Muslim leader, emphasised the negative influences on Muslim young people and urged the resourcing of places like Albert Road Islamic Centre for use in leisure activities.

“Anything that helps to bring any awareness about any undesirable happening or undesirable people maybe brings awareness of factors that prey on youth. Youth are easy to get manipulated by people with different agendas. They also get misled because they are not being told the right stuff by responsible people.

“Albert Road is a key resource. People are very generous with their donations and this should be used. Places like Albert Road should be more used for youth programmes and leisure pursuits. Because of the frustrations expressed by many youth (generally), we should try to keep them busy, through leisure clubs/ sports/ discussions/ forum”.

“Positive Islam awareness needs to be promoted and the different schools of thought should be explained, because youth are very open. They don’t know what is happening or the meaning of Islam. I would like to see a reference library of books on Islamic topics provided for youth in Albert Road”.

4.4 Sporting and recreational activities for young people

Most leaders commented on the needs of young people for recreational activities for young people and it was a general view that more PVE money should be used for this purpose. It seems that in view of the shortage of youth facilities for young people in Redbridge, Mosque premises are increasingly used for recreational purposes. A clearer picture of how well Muslim young people are catered for in out of school activities in the borough is needed.

“We need especially to involve young people better. So they can look to good role models - eg the boxer Amir Khan. More sporting facilities and recreational facilities are needed”

Boxing was especially mentioned several times.

“One father’s desire for leisure activities for his son led to him getting him involved in boxing. Now the dad has become a coach. Boxing is useful to channel energy”.

“Our Mosque piloted a youth club. We have a football programme with 70 people. We do this as a leisure activity. We will set up a Saturday Masjid, but right now are not in a position to deliver more things due to a lack of human resources”

Another leader with extensive experience with young people argued that more needs to be done to help young people into work and leisure opportunities.

“There’s a need for more facilities for young people linked to life skills and for vocational help for 18+ school leavers and post 6th form around employment. Many young people make unrealistic university applications, when they need realistic career progression advice. Crime diversion work is also needed, and helps with Drugs problems, ASB etc. On the streets, young people can be vulnerable to negative situations.”

“There’s a youth/age gap. Set up projects where young people can help the elderly, so they feel appreciated. There’s a need for college (and university) mentoring projects. At school their timetables are much more busy and set out, with less free time”.

4.5 Youth engagement and the Mosques

Youth participation in decision making is on the agenda of at least one mosque.

“We have engaged young people to be on our board of trustees here and on our service committees. We have set up a sports programme. Young people are involved in competitions with people of other faiths. This is already happening - football, cycling, boxing and wrestling .There was an inter Mosque tree planting event at a Muslim burial site in March 2009.”

“We have a match making service to help people get married. We are interested in educating young people in education in their responsibilities as marriage partners. Women are very pleased with this. We involve young people in how we develop the syllabus of our school”.

4.6 Joint activities for young people across faiths

Two other leaders advocated *interfaith* youth activities.

“I would like to see young people taking part in joint activities across faiths because it leads to more understanding of each other’s faith. There could be a role for the Faith Forum to promote interfaith youth work. Events like Eid parties and Diwali parties could be used to promote interfaith activity”. We also get visits of many young people of all faiths to our Mosque from schools. We are very happy for this to happen”.

Section 5: The Relation of PVE to the policing role of Community Safety

On the surface of it, the PVE programme that is seen by Muslim representatives attending URC meetings is about positive Islam awareness and deterring young people from violent extremism. Underneath this however, there is a suspicion that the PVE programme is deeply penetrated by the police, whether this is actually true or not. The launch of the Contest2 agenda has further aroused this concern. See section 1 The comments expressed below were made by all shades of Muslim opinion, including moderate Mosque leaders. Some of the experiences go back a long way into memories of how police have treated their community.

5.1 Muslim community and the police

“The Muslim community is very interested in the PVE Agenda, but are suspicious of the police. They are very open to taking part in focus groups and keen to discuss cases of young people. In order to ‘prevent’, the authorities have to ‘engage’ with the Muslim community”.

“We first got involved in PVE a long time ago, but since 7/7, PVE became more prominent. UCLAN (University of Central Lancashire) approached us with the police. There were trust issues for us with the police and their request for us to *interview* young people. That revealed issues around people not getting fair justice from the police and around how incidents are reported to the police”.

“Previously, the police handling of incidents was not done well. For example, at one time, the police invited *non involved* people from different faith groups to make a comment as to whether they thought an incident was a racially aggravated incident or not”.

“The way the police carried out these consultation processes showed they were quite ignorant of the customs and culture of the faith. In one example, police were trying to decide about a religious discrimination incident, which happened in a pub at 2.00am - when it was obvious that a practising Muslim that was involved.’

“There is stereotyping by police on issues that are more to do with gang culture than faith. But the damage has been done. People paid to be working with communities do not understand the communities they are working with”.

“Young people are suspicious of the police now. The police used to come round to visit the Mosques. But now the 16+ young people are becoming more suspicious of them than before. The raid in Forest Gate in 2007 left a legacy of bitterness. It turned out to be nothing and the people involved were released. Then the papers made a witch hunt out of the issue to justify themselves”.

5.2 Experiences of Race relations and collaborative working

Another Muslim leader who had extensive experience of race relations work in other boroughs, including Tower Hamlets said, “Remember Burnley and Oldham. They said ‘watch Tower Hamlets’, where we were able to pacify people. We had good relations with the police and the Town Hall there”.

He then went on to recount very negative experiences of Muslims attending a recent demonstration in London.

“Police struggled with me at a demonstration. I tried to talk to them. I was on the front row. I went with other people from our Redbridge congregation. A policeman grabbed my scarf and started strangling me. I asked him ‘Why are you provoking me? If I head butted you, then you will arrest me.’ It is similar to the 70’s riots. I have seen it myself. The attitude of these front line police shows their racism and Islamaphobia”

He also commented that:

“I have also seen good relation amongst neighbourhood police. We welcome the community-based officers who work with respect. It’s the ‘*Response* team’ police who are the problem”.

5.3 Profiling

The Muslim community needs assurances about the way that ‘*profiling*’ is taking place. We are not comfortable with ‘profiling’. The minority of extremists - we all condemn them. But why is the other 99% also being profiled?. There are benefits for Muslim community ‘as a whole’, if something good does come out of it this shows that 99% of Muslims are law abiding.

Section six: Islam Awareness

Within the PVE programme, Islam awareness plays a large part and interviews with the Muslim leaders during this project confirm that:

- They are overwhelmingly committed to seeing Islam as a peaceful religion
- The true teachings of Islam are an positive antidote to extremist views
- Islam and the Muslim community in Redbridge sees itself as contributing to community cohesion.

6.1 Role of faith in modern society

One women's leader noted:

"It might be interesting to also examine the experiences of faith communities and people of faith in society today. People of faith can feel defensive about their beliefs as they often feel under attack and have to apologise for or explain their practises and convictions. They can feel their intentions are suspect - this is certainly true for many from the Muslim community. Muslims experience anti-Muslim feeling in schools and societal institutions. I feel the same is true for those of other faiths. Perhaps the antipathy for faith is linked to the development of the post-modern rational society and a dominant, vocal secularist sector that has a strong distrust of people of faith who they see as superstitious and irrational. This sector appears to desire faith and faith communities to play no significant part in society and this pressure may be causing faith communities to be pushed to the fringes".

6.2 Portraying the peace making roles of Islam

One leader in the south of the borough stated:

"There needs to be more recognition that Islam is a major faith, like Christianity and Judaism. People will start to realise this".

"We need to appreciate that Muslims are not extremists as the media portray them, but peace loving people. This message has not filtered through to the whole community. There is a need to portray this and to highlight the contributions of Muslim faith and culture. Muslims were advanced in science in the middle ages, but this has gone unrecognised"

Three different Muslim leaders including an Imam and two Councillors commented on the contribution of Islam to peace making:

"Islam is a religion of peace. The Muslim religion itself and the actions of people are two different things. Islam does not teach wrong things that some people do. Islam is against violent extremism. Violent extremism is appalling to the majority of Muslims".

'Violence has no place in Islam. Yes, it is totally against the teachings of Islam. As a Muslim, a person should look after everybody's welfare and that is the correct teaching of Islam.'

'Islam is not a religion, but a way of life. Islam teaches Peace and Harmony. The Prophet Mohammad, PBUH, has taught us to "love thy neighbour", which does not mean only the neighbour living besides you, but wherever you may be. The message is be polite, be courteous and live harmoniously and this should be the practice of a good Muslim".

6.3 Educating people in the positive message of Islam

In spite of the peaceful message of Islam, one Imam felt that people generally, needed to be educated into the positive message of Islam. The following section is a validation of the positive role of Islam awareness in the PVE programme:

“There is a disease of violence. To prevent someone becoming violent, people need to follow the teachings of Islam for the remedy: that there is no compulsion in religion; that we are all brothers and sisters in humanity”.

“Islam is a religion of humanity. There should be mutual recognition of rights; there must be responsibilities. Muslims must engage with non Muslims, be kind to the environment, respect their neighbours, carry out their professional duties and serve people equally what ever their faith. This ethos needs to be promoted; that there are etiquettes and manners in Islam, which people should be aware of”.

6.4 True Jihad

“We must emphasise true jihad and the weakness of terrorism. All terrorist attacks on innocent people (by anyone), are condemned by God and weapons on the ‘weak’. We must put an end to terrorist attacks. We can’t justify the killing of innocent people. This is a crime against God which carries severe punishment according to the Quran. No one has the right to kill anyone”.

“Everybody has grievances. This does not give them the right to attack others. People have to control themselves and learn to deal with their frustrations. The bombing of Gaza, the disproportionate attacks there, the denial of basic human rights - none of this gives me the right to kill my Jewish neighbour. This is the most important part of the Muslim message. To kill one soul is to kill the whole world. We need to get this message into young people as to the true meaning of Jihad. Writing letters to the Prime Minister, boycotting goods because of apartheid, doing community service or donating money or blood - all these are Jihad”.

6.5. Violence and ignorance

‘Why do people become violent? - Because of ignorance including misinterpretations of the Hadith. Some Hadith is taken out of context, and does not portray the true message of Islam. We should engage with non-Muslims in debates”.

6.6 The Muslim community contribution to community cohesion.

Islam respects diversity and pluralism

‘It is patently clear from its divine sources that the religion of Islam accommodates diversity and pluralism in its world and social view. It demands respect and compassion from its adherents towards all other members of society. Getting on with your neighbour is mandatory in Islam, criminal acts like murder and violence are forbidden and considered sinful.’

‘Islam gave basic human rights to slaves, to men and to women. There is no segregation in Islam. Everyone is equal in the eyes of God. Islam was first to promote equality and human rights. It helped to abolish slavery. Islam insists on the responsibility of the wealthy to look after the less well off or sick etc. Islam in Saudi Arabia created a social security system. Our responsibility is to every individual. It has promoted community cohesion over the centuries, irrespective of creed and colour”

6.7 Our neighbours are everybody

'We have to look after our neighbours, whoever they are. That was how the Prophet Mohammed lived. People told him he was going too far in caring for all his neighbours; including those of other faiths - but that was what he did.'

Section Seven: Muslim Children in Schools.

This section draws some links between the PVE programme and its relationship to schooling.

7.1 PVE Mentoring Project in schools

Firstly, one community leader, who is also involved at an operational level in a school, described his impressions about the PVE Mentoring Project, including some cynicism about how it was thought through and the teething problems it has encountered in its early days of winning acceptance both within schools and with Muslim children and parents.

“£70,000 was earmarked for mentoring in PVE. The Project was not thought out properly. Two schools were involved, but the schools referred nobody. The school where I work, got an email in January 2009 about the Mentoring Project for PVE.

‘They’ve got the mentors, but not the mentees’. From the schools point of view, if there is an extremist problem where is it? The schools were not aware of it, so how could they target it? The issues were not explored before the Project was announced to the schools. There had already been a Mentoring Project at our school since 2001. But it does not just focus on extremism (or Muslim children alone).”

“Was the PVE mentoring Project ill conceived? They were trying to do something, but it was not practical. Throwing money that they don’t know what to do with. They try to engage with schools who may not make referrals. These schools were not consulted in the first place”.

7.3 Linking PVE to Every Child Matters (ECM)

An educationalist expressed concern that the new PVE programme in schools bore no relation to the acclaimed Every Child Matters programme - or rather could work contrary to it: “Many schools could cater for the developmental needs of their Muslim pupils and students better - even when judged by the inclusion agenda. Schools should reflect the intake of their pupils better. This is really about the ‘Every Child Matters’ agenda (ECM)”.

7.4 Education about Islam in schools

Many leaders were in favour of Islam being on the curriculum of state schools.

“I would like to put Islam on the main curriculum in government schools - eg learning Islamic history, etiquette and manners. Islam should be taught as a topic to be chosen in schools. I want Muslim children to be mixing with people of other religions.”

Another person with teaching experience suggested:

“The incorporation of the teaching of the Quran and Islamic Studies in schools, using trained and appropriately qualified teachers should be explored as should the inclusion of relevant units and topics within the school curriculum -in a wide range of subjects. Local Authorities, head teachers and schools need to inform themselves better about Islam and the needs of their Muslim pupils and families whilst simultaneously remembering that not all Muslims are adherent, not all express their faith in exactly the same way or with the same fervour/religiosity/spirituality/Godliness”.

7.5 Schools and PVE awareness

Another worker felt:

“In secondary/ primary schools children of 11+ should be made aware of A rep from PVE should go to schools to give talks to *all* the children in the schools and not just the Muslim children as part of the curriculum”.

7.6 The Inclusion Agenda

It was felt that: “Schools could do more to cater for young people from all minorities. In the inclusion agenda there is welcome recognition of the black community, but this is not the same for the Muslim community. Admittedly this identity encompasses many different racial backgrounds and languages but it also has vast critical commonalities that all Muslims strongly cherish from spiritual and moral values through to history and culture. Schools must work hard to welcome, acknowledge, affirm and incorporate the history, heritage and background of their Muslim pupils as faith is the backbone of the lives of Muslims and their families”.

7.7 The high standards of Muslim faith schools

“It must also be noted that no person charged with such crimes has attended a Muslim school and anecdotally the evidence suggests that young people who attend such schools are better grounded in their faith and emotional, moral and spiritual development. They are also calm in their behaviour and mature in their outlook on world and social problems and adopt positive civic responsibility and participation as a faith obligation”

Another mosque chairman spoke highly of faith schools:

“Many of the pupils at Canon Palmer are Muslim. We are in favour of faith schools. A Muslim school helps to enhance the community’s self image. Al Noor School has performed very well. We don’t believe that having Muslim faith schools would create more segregation. In any case, why is this allowed for other faiths? Being allowed to have state funded Muslim schools is an issue of equality - in parity with other Jewish / Christian run state funded faith schools. The aim of a faith school is to make a better foundation in life for young people.”

7.8 Educational attainment

It was noted that the Muslim community is *lagging behind* in educational attainment. Like working class communities, only 6% of Muslims go to University’. (Reference was made to the ‘*Lagging behind*’ report, which was published by the League of British Muslims in 2004 to highlight these problems).

Section Eight: Negative Stereotyping and Stigma of the Muslim Community

In this section leaders express their frustrations about the way their community gets stereotyped in negative ways. This is especially, (though not only) in the media. Examples of how the community is trying to make better use of the media to redress this imbalance and reframe perceptions are noted

In this section leaders express their frustrations about the way their community gets stereotyped in negative ways. (See also kkk) This is especially, but not only in the media. Examples of how the community is trying to make better use of the media to redress this imbalance and reframe perceptions are noted (see cc)

8.1 The labelling of the Muslim community as 'extremists'

The leader below makes use of her understanding of labelling theory to explain what happens when the label of extremist is attached to the Muslim community and they get stuck with the label. In different ways all the interviewees had experiences like this to tell:

"Whilst I acknowledge that extremism and the threat of terror is a problem there are a number of other negative phenomena in society that people are unhappy about too. It appears to me that many of these have a greater probability of occurrence than acts of terror -but they are not being dealt with by the government with the same vigour."

"Furthermore no other community has been labelled as responsible for these anti-social and/or violent behaviours (eg drugs, gangs, anti social behaviour, unsafe streets and general crime) in the same way the Muslim community has been over extremism. The media is unhelpful and at times inflammatory in its sensationalist and double-standard reporting on extremism, violent extremism, Islam and Muslims."

"Fears have been expressed about the similarity between the current climate of hostility towards Islam and Muslims and that towards Jews in Nazi Germany in the 1930s leading to the terrible events of the holocaust. The media has also been reporting fears of an increase in racial violence as a result of the current credit crunch. This needs to be carefully considered, there needs to be some degree of caution, rigour and fairness in how issues that could inflame hatred towards any community are dealt with by the media, government and everyone."

8.2 Negative stereotyping

Another leader who also runs a women's voluntary organisation pinpointed how negative stereotyping operates in her experience:

"All Muslims get tarred with the same brush. Muslims are targeted throughout the world, including the Muslim nations, because one Muslim has done a non-Islamic act. During 9/11 we got a lot of threatening calls, perhaps because our organisation has Muslim in the title, but this has died down now. It arises because we are Muslims. People don't like us. And the media amplify it. The local paper is all right".

Most people were (as above) positive towards the Ilford Recorder, but one leader noted: "There is a danger in the way that the editorial control of local newspapers is carried out (eg Ilford Recorder) in that it can distort the image of Muslims".. Two reported examples of this are noted below:

8.3 The Media - and the Muslim community

Most of the leaders participating in the research project had stories to tell of how media coverage towards the Muslim community was negative, unbalanced, unfair and incorrect and these are recorded in different sections of this report see ????

During the research period one participant noted : "There has been poor coverage for the Muslim community recently. In February 2009, 6 reports* spotlighting (some in a critical way) Muslims and mosques have appeared (including a Charities Commission report on Mosques). This negative publicity has been going on for years and is creating grievances".

Another story reported in the Ilford recorder, in January 2009 about an alleged terrorist attack on King Solomon School was also mentioned.

Another Muslim worker, who is close to the street level spoke with a lot of frustration of the negative impact of bad media coverage on the young people he worked with in the South of the borough.

"The build up of the constant daily pressure of events and the way the media portrays the Muslim Community must be added to the reasons for violent extremism arising. There are events happening the whole time and in the media, which frustrate Muslims so that they come to feel they are being treated differently than everyone else. For instance in February 09, there was the case of whether the extremist Dutch MP could be let into the country - there are different viewpoints on this issue. People were arguing 'It is free speech if Dutch MP is let in; but not if a Muslim [so called] 'extremist' speaker is let in.' Young Muslims see these double standards; they are frustrated by cases like the Dutch MP."

"Some time ago, the *Ilford Recorder* published an inflamed report - that 'a terrorist made a threat to a local resident'. This was an issue of car parking by the Mosque near the Drive. The media does half of the scare mongering. Then the damage is done. But, the apologies in the press for incorrect stories are small."

"Another example was about the BBC not making 'Disasters Emergency Appeal for Gaza'. (January 2009). This is confusing for the Muslim community. 'We are tax payers'. We pay for the BBC. The BBC says it is not getting involved in politics. But we go back in our minds to atrocities in Bosnia, Afghanistan and Palestine. The UK Government leaders tell us 'don't say anything' 'It's nothing to do with us here in the UK'. But we notice that Tamils can demonstrate here about what is happening in Sri Lanka, but not Muslims. The policy of the government makes us question things as to what's happening."

"Another example is of local Redbridge people fundraising for GAZA. A local young person is going to GAZA on a relief effort in a convoy with George Galloway. We try to channel young people's anger in constructive, practical ways by political means; boycotts of goods and companies, lobbying, relief and voluntary work."

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"In Dec 2008, two bona fide [Muslim] charities who were registered with the Charities Commission to do international relief work found problems with their bank accounts; One organisation was told by Lloyds TSB to move their accounts from Lloyds.

They had already been 'investigated' by the Charity Commission and cleared twice. A Jewish lobby group was behind the allegations. Another charity did relief work in Pakistan, and though approved by the Charities Commission, was asked to remove their accounts from Barclays. Moving a bank is hard for a charity if it has built up a direct debit system, which it would have to transfer with difficulty. In these circumstances, people get frustrated. They get no explanation of the issues."

8.4 Reversing negative media coverage and correcting stereotyping

Interviewees also mentioned that as well as the negative stereotyping there were examples of where Muslim organisations were trying to positively influence the media. For example one Mosque leader noted:

'We have gained a lot of benefit from the workshops that MPACUK have held. This gets us used to holding informed discussions. Foreign policy gets debated. MPACUK uses the political system and political education. PVE has helped advance the debate, though it follows too narrow an area. It uses money to help politically educate people, as a deterrent from violence. FORMO discussed this last week and so too did the Imams Conference. The civic duties of Mosques and Muslims are being explored and responsibilities get designated.

8.5 Media training

PVE allows media training. (See above MPAC). The local Muslim newspaper, called the Redbridge Muslim is a good thing. Two issues of this free newspaper with a print run between 1000 and 6,000 copies were distributed during the research period.

8.6 Learning how to react

A mosque leader in another part of the borough had a very positive view of the power of the message of Islam and suggested:

'We need to teach people how to react, eg not by burning flags, raiding shops and breaking windows. This is not Islam. Over the Dutchman's film or the Danish cartoons, the behaviour of some Muslims was disgusting and disgraceful, reflecting a violent approach.

The way to respond to religious attacks is by organising talks, conferences and debates on these topics. It's been happening the whole time, since the day of the Messenger. We should produce good quality TY programmes, which can be shown over and over again. These things will all go on till Judgement Day. We must prepare ourselves. It is useful to remember how the prophet Muhammad himself dealt with insults"

Section 9: The Effects of Deprivation and Discrimination

In response to the question: 'Would you say that deprivation and discrimination are factors in people turning to violent extremism?' The views of two Councillors are expressed below:

"They both are certainly contributory factors, but the main causes are global issues affecting the Muslim community, a very biased Western media, propaganda and injustice."

"Generally speaking NO. A knowledgeable and educated Muslim will not be swayed in his/her views and will be able to distinguish between right and wrong, and good and evil, although you will come across some isolated incidents where certain misguided and misinformed persons may resort to extremism"

Another leader said "Discrimination does create terrorism; it does contribute to it. Young people in schools, colleges and universities are easily brainwashed'. Another replied : 'But does this deprivation *cause* terrorism? – yes and No. Some terrorists are highly educated."

Finally, a Mosque Chairman argued that from his experience that "the Deprivation argument as an explanation of violent extremism is a shallow argument. Violent extremism is not coming from deprivation. The violent extremists are professionals. I have worked with many criminal and drug addicts, the hard core. I've been stabbed breaking up fights. We can't blame the poor for extremism. Foreign policy is the main driver, in the sense of cause of behaviour. We can't deny it. Any Muslim who says otherwise- where are they coming from?"

Concern was expressed about discrimination facing the Muslim community.

Two leaders compared the situation of Muslims living in the UK now to that experienced by black people in the 1970 and 1980s, leading to the Stephen Lawrence Report:

"Black people have Black History Month. Jews have Holocaust Memorial Day. There is no programme for Muslims. But we don't want to use our grievances as an obstacle for moving on. Muslims want to move forward and ensure mistakes don't happen again. E.g. Stephen Lawrence - positive came out of it."

"Muslims feel the issues are 'brushed under the carpet'. They know it (Islamophobia) is an issue. They feel excluded, both intentionally and unintentionally - in a way similar to the Stephen Lawrence situation; it took a long time before that enquiry began to address racism."

9.1 Issues of discrimination

"Muslims are lagging behind and concerned about not having a future

There is a *perception* that the government is not bothered about the Muslim community. There is a widely felt sense of discrimination against Muslims.”

9.2 Muslims applying for jobs

One Muslim worker with extensive contact with young people said that:

“Young people are now increasingly getting an education, but find it hard to get a job - especially because he is a Muslim. If you have a Muslim name you have less chance of getting interviews than if you have a non-Muslim name. A Muslim HR professional from Barclays Bank tested this out. We have done what we can, but can’t get what we need.”

“I am not accepted as British because of my skin and name. There is specific discrimination because I am a Muslim. This is not just the police, but the media and government as well.”

Section Ten : Extremism and Violent Extremism

Many participants in the research project hotly discussed the differences between extremism and violent extremism. It became particularly alive after a Panorama programme was broadcast on BBC in February 2009 on the subject of Contest2. [See section 1]

Opinions varied as to the extent of violent extremism in the borough as indicated below by three participants including Muslim Councillors in the borough. When asked, Do you think violent extremism is an issue in Redbridge and if so, to what extent?, replies included:

“Not very bad; not too noticeable”

“Yes to some extent and as a Councillor I have experienced this and I have to combat this.”

“My view is not too a great extent, but there are certain isolated incidents, which no doubt, each Borough would have to deal with from time to time”

10.1 Differences between extremism and violent extremism

One mosque leader commented:

“To prevent extremism is difficult, but preventing violence is more important. For example, football fanatics are extreme, but not all of them are violent. Good supporters can be extreme in their passion, travelling to every game, paying money for season tickets, but not necessarily violent. One may be an extremist, but if he becomes violent, then that is the problem.”

“Extremism has many facets. There can be extremism in football or in politics or even in love! The state is imposing rules on people. The BNP members do not see themselves as extremists, but when they become violent and burn down Mosques, they become violent extremists.”

10.2 The fear and danger of being labelled extremists

The Chair of one Muslim community organisation expressed great concern that *extremism* was being targeted by the government and not just violent extremism:

“Along with thousands of other people, and with many people from our congregation in Redbridge, we attended demonstrations. But now we are learning that speaking what you think (non violently and democratically) is labelled as extremist. Believing in the Khaliphah is seen as extremist. Hisbat Tahir - are not violent extremists. They advocate ideologies, but don't advocate violence. They live round here. There is shame for this in Context2 and the way it is going and for the Centre left to advocate it. We fear the Tories would be even hard-liner - I am a Conservative myself. It's feeding the BNP agenda. It will lead from the Ban's *Paki-bashing* to Muslim bashing. Fascists on the streets in the economic recession.”

“Along with thousands of other people, and with many people from our congregation in Redbridge, we attended demonstrations. But now we are learning that speaking what you think (non violently and democratically), is labelled as extremist.

Section Eleven: The Need for Dialogue and Openness

This section discusses the need for dialogue and openness about the PVE programme and the need to improve communication, especially amongst Jews, Muslims and Christians talking together in Redbridge. It also acknowledges the role and importance of interfaith organisations in Redbridge, such as Redbridge Faith Forum (RFF) and the East London Three Faith Forum (3FF). It argues that we should not stifle debate. The experience of breakdowns in communication in Redbridge during period of the research, which coincided with the Gaza War are noted see????

We asked the question do you think debating and discussion forums on violent extremism are a good idea and in responses got the following replies:

“Yes, dialogue of all sorts is always welcome and beneficial, but the person leading the debate should be knowledgeable and trained to carry out an educated and informed debate.”

“Yes, I would always welcome any forum where an exchange of ideas is encouraged and where young people are free to air their views without fear of being branded extremists.”

11.1 Creating channels of effective communication

It was felt that creating good channels of communication is a real need and would be a positive way forward.

“PVE is a problem for people who lack channels for interaction. In our Mosque, we have built, nurtured and supported channels of communication- eg through interfaith work, through the Three Faiths Forum (3FF). We had these channels before PVE. We have held discussions in our Madrassah schools about PVE. So now the young people are used to talking about it there. We hold debating competitions of topics of importance- including Islamaphobia. We run events on environmental awareness.”

11.2 Building Trust

“We need to build trust between the Muslim community and other community institutions, including Redbridge Safer Communities Partnership (RSCP) and other faiths. For this, there needs to be open discussion and dialogue and also addressing the specific needs of the Muslims communities, which are not met.”

11.3 Better and Positive Islam awareness

“Some people say they cannot co-exist with Muslims, but this is based on a misunderstanding of the Muslim faith. Muslims believe we are all created as human beings and that humanity is the best part of creation.”

11.4 One God for all faiths

“We all share the same needs, the same God. We can live together in peace. We share our Abrahamic faith.”

11.5 Roles of interfaith organisations in Redbridge

One leader commented on the role of interfaith organisations in Redbridge: “We need to make better use of local institutions, including the Three Faith’s Forum(3FF). The

3FF is good up to a point at getting conversations going, between Muslims, Christians and Jews, but other faiths feel excluded from that.”

“Redbridge Faith Forum (RFF) can be a good vehicle, but is not effective in doing this yet. Even so, when someone says something - eg the statement over Gaza, they get blasted by Jewish Rabbis for what they have said and the Chair got blamed for what was said.”

“In the past the Race Equality Councils were seen as creating problems to justify their existence! These organisations can get taken over by certain individuals and lose their purposes. Some times the wrong people get to be the leaders!”

11.6 The Positive work of Three Faiths Forum in improving communication between Jews, Christians and Muslims

“We need to improve communication with Jews, Muslims and Christians talking together about difficult questions - and other communities too. If something goes wrong everybody suffers”.

One Imam commented: “Yes. Jews and Muslims should talk together. We need to talk with groups of other faiths. I am interested in Muslim- Jewish encounter and attended a study on it at Cambridge University in 2008. We learnt about how we relate to the 'other', who does not share my views? I approached a rabbi to do this with.”

Another Muslim leader spoke about his experiences of membership with the Three Faiths Forum: “We get ‘zipped up’ from talking about difficult questions. But dialogue on constructive issues is the key. We have enjoyed good conversations on tricky topics with Jewish colleagues through the 3FF. It is essential that we can speak about issues of truth and justice.”

11.7 Establishing a dialogue

Difficulties may be encountered when discussing sensitive issues, but building on existing lines of communication can help to work through the difficulties. Creating more ways for dialogue would be a positive way forward

“When there has been this history [track record] of dialogue with people of other faiths then these conversations have been possible. As human beings we have eaten together, talked together. When this happens, then we can discuss difficult issues. It is important not to break the dialogue or let it slip”.

“There has to be open and fair discussion. This has happened in Redbridge with Jews, Christians and Muslims. The 3FF had created a common bond; but this is less so between Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs about difficult topics, because no common bond has been established. But we are willing to talk with anyone.”

“At one 3FF meeting, the Bishop of Chelmsford himself chose to speak about the plight of Palestinians and the justice issues there. This created a big issue in the Jewish community, who did not want him to talk about it.”

Another leader in the context of the aftermath of the Gaza War by another Muslim leader spoke the following comments:

“We must use democratic processes. The Hamas rockets were not right. They were a disaster. The Israelis sending 20 rockets back are not right. Don’t use violence to

achieve your objectives. But our government itself uses the same violent means in their foreign policy. - The Americans even more so in Iraq, who had never even attacked them. Banning Khalifa talk will create a backlash. We can't curtail freedom of speech in the UK. We don't want to be demonised. That prevents community cohesion".

"We need all people of whatever origin all working together, and not polarising. I am willing to be honest, but Jews have to be honest too. International issues do contribute to tensions here. Jews and Muslims need to talk together. We need to understand each other's point of view and find a common ground. The current kind of talking leads to discrimination and 'putting the lid on' difficult topics. There is scope for multi faith conversation provided people accept each other".

"In this, the Council leaders have to be more open and fair. The Council got involved and should have stayed out of it. They were seen as leaning towards the Jewish community. The Council was trying to suppress the issues. After Mumbai, Hindus in Redbridge were blaming Muslims - but the lid was put down on that too. In Redbridge, people from India and Pakistan need to talk together about Kashmir. (Hindus and Muslims)."

11.8 Key issues in inter-faith understanding

"There are no real issues, except the importance of networking, but we are not good at networking! Taking part in discussions about PVE *with* other faith communities is difficult. Muslims are unsure of the reactions others will give. They are very hesitant to actually convey their true feelings."

"We need to talk together without fear. We should not get on the defensive about difficult texts in the different religions, which e.g. seem to support violence, but we must show it is not right from the Quran."

"We want to have dialogue with Churches and Synagogues. We want a good relationship with everybody."

"The government has created opportunities for Muslim people to communicate at every level, including through the Redbridge Safer Communities Partnership so communicate with each other!"

Section 12: The Impact of International events on people's lives in Redbridge

International events were regarded as having an impact on violent extremism in nearly every interview held.

One person whose work involved a lot of contact with women suggested that: "It does affect relations, different faith living together. Events in Mumbai do affect us, but it has not affected our women's work. We have not experienced this. People hold their feelings privately. Our ladies at the drop-in were upset, but did not talk about it. There is no obvious issue about this coming up in our women's work."

Most people expressed very strongly the significant impact of foreign policy and international events in generating the frustration and despair in which violent extremism can flourish as a way forward in a small minority of people. This included people who were most moderate in outlook.

"Over foreign policy, even the parents of our young people 'cringe'. They don't agree with what happened in 7/7, but they say what happens in Iraq and Palestine is far worse than 7/7 here in London. A comprehensive perspective is needed".

12.1 The effects of British foreign policy

A woman worker argued that the effects of British foreign policy had to be examined:

"Despite being a controversial issue, the role of governmental foreign policy and action in 'home-grown' extremism must be examined. History has demonstrated that newcomers to our shores maintain links with their home countries for at least a generation. These are social and economic ties that spring from familial responsibilities, allegiances, needs and love. In addition, shared religious values and the brotherhood of faith create strong sympathies between members of a common faith group whatever the location and other identities of its members. Injustices in Britain's actions abroad, particularly those involving invasion, killing and destruction, as well as those creating the conditions for extreme poverty, deprivation and disease, thus creates or fuels anger in members of communities and wider society sharing commonalities with those effected by the injustice."

"For most people, it was obvious that events happening elsewhere in the world had an impact on people living here in Redbridge. This included both events happening in the news day by day and also an awareness of history going back many generations. This was expressed clearly by the Chair of one Mosque in Redbridge who remarked clearly that British foreign policy is not just about the Iraq war, but goes back endemically in how Muslims have been treated in the world over the last 400 years".

12.2 How inter-community relations in Redbridge are being affected by what is happening in the wider world

"In February 2009, men from Burnley were arrested on terrorism charges, though they openly stated they were taking relief supplies to Gaza. The way the arrests were made on the motorway made them look like terrorists in the media - then 6 of them were later released. I am sure all these will prove to be false arrests - but the stigma sticks".

"It is hard to accept how the bombing of innocent people in Afghanistan is allowed to pass with full media fury, but suicide bombing is immediately condemned. Where are the Muslim armies invading 'Christian' lands? Don't ask me to defend UK [Christian] foreign policy."

"Foreign policy is a prime mover in people's radicalisation. This is part of the heritage of the colonial legacy between the UK and the Indian subcontinent), which still lingers on. We have a pride to be British if we are treated fairly. But Asians are not accepted equally with Europeans. There is no Obama factor here of Black Americans saying they are now proud to be American. Muslims are not portrayed well here."

"Many of the dictators in the history of the 'Muslim world from Morocco to Libya to Saudi Arabia were established with the support of Western foreign policy. We suffer from the legacy of colonial policy. The West likes westernised dictators. Saudi dictators use all their wealth for themselves - with western support."

"These long standing issues of foreign policy and the colonial legacy leave an impact on how Muslims are perceived in the UK. Westerners often say dictators rule all Muslim countries, but then overlook how often the dictators were imposed by western policy, whereas more socialist minded Muslims did not enjoy western support. The issue of foreign policy is much deeper than the war in Iraq/ Gaza, but underlies how Islam has been portrayed and treated over the last 400 years."

11.3 Relations between India and Pakistan

Although the Gaza war would seem to be the most obvious example of current international interest (January 2009), for another South Asian leader the situation between India and Pakistan served to be a constant reminder of how events in people's home land affects how they relate to people in Ilford.

"What happened between India and Pakistan affects relationships in this country. Whether we like it or not, it does affect us all here. We are British citizens here in Redbridge, but we are still affected by what happens in our motherland. There is the outstanding issue of Kashmir, over the last 60 years. As with the IRA, one person's *'freedom fighter'*, is another person's terrorist. How can we distinguish between these? They are the same thing. One person is seen as orthodox, but to another that is seen as a fundamentalist."

"Kashmir is still a key issue for both countries and both communities. The recent Mumbai bombings could have sparked a war. The Indian and Pakistani people want to get together, but somehow the hierarchies don't get together. We hope the new US government may help to resolve things".

“A ‘football’ is kicked between the powers. Community cohesion is affected. We try to reach the young people to prevent them getting to radicalisation by encouraging young people into gainful activities. The young people must be listened to.”

11.4 How foreign policy issues affected local political bi-elections in Valentines Ward

One worker observed that during January and February 2009,

“(Muslim) people are joining other political parties as a protest- eg the local Valentines Ward by-election. Three Muslim candidates were put up to fight the seat, for Tories, Lib Dems and Respect. But people don’t trust the Tories over their real attitudes to the community. Labour is not trusted on foreign policy. The Respect party in this borough is seen as too weak to be a major threat. The Lib Dems won, but they had no previous history of successful presence in Valentine’s Ward over the previous 20 years. Was this a protest vote by Muslims?”

“There is no trust of politicians, including the local MPs (of both parties). The political process is not addressing local Muslim issues. No one is standing for what we want. People move against non-violence when they feel everything is going against us.”

One Imam noted : “The interconnectedness of events everywhere. There are problems in the Middle East, in India and Pakistan. Everything that happens anywhere, affects all of us everywhere including here. - For example the recent cricket incident in Lahore will affect Pakistanis and Sri Lankans living here.”

11.5 We need to teach people how to react

He went on to say: “We need to teach people how to react, eg not by burning flags, raiding shops and breaking windows. This is not Islam. Over the Dutchman’s film or the Danish cartoons, the behaviour of some Muslims was disgusting and disgraceful, reflecting a violent approach.’

‘ The way to respond to religious attacks is by organising talks, conferences and debates on these topics. Attacks have been happening the whole time, since the day of the Messenger. We should produce good quality TV programmes, which can be shown over and over again. These things will all go on till judgement day. We must prepare ourselves.”

Section 13: Community Cohesion and issues at local levels

13.1 Thinking globally, acting locally

In other sections of this report, we noted how strong the Muslim perceptions of their situation are in relation to national and international events .

This part pays attention to ward and neighbourhood level work. It should be noted that Mosques are first and foremost local, ward level, grass roots responses, which have arisen to meet the needs for prayer and community life of those living in the streets near the Mosque. These have often emerged from smaller makeshift premises until funding and buildings become available.

13.2 Ward and neighbourhood level work

Mosque leaders are actually local community activists who are aware of what is happening at the grass roots level and of The importance of starting locally and working upwards and outwards from there. Sometimes this is frustrating position to be in with feelings bordering on cynicism. In one sense, in relation to PVE, they may be 'operational level staff that are not getting the whole picture', because they were never informed about the launch of a national programme, with significant resources at a borough level. They wait for the crumbs to drop down and get disappointed when other smart organisations get more resources. ??? As one person said 'But the damage has been done'

Other comments about Ward and neighbourhood level work are that:

"The Muslim community is embedded in the local community in Redbridge. We are *one* community in Redbridge, not separate from other faiths. We are happy for discussion to take place".

"We need to get each faith and ethnic group involved and talk to them. This needs to be done at ward level as well as borough level. There has not been a thorough attempt to reach these communities, at *Ward* level. They remain hard to reach. Things do happen in the schools to contact and set things up. But this does not happen at the neighbourhood level"

"The way LBR departments make contacts with the community is not joined up. 'Different LBR departments don't network and share information with each other- eg Schools Improvement and Social Services. One LBR department sends the Mosque a letter, (eg about Health and Safety) not knowing whom they are addressing".

"To get a stake in a programme, it is necessary to work locally and then work upwards- not to start nationally and cascade it down. And what has happened to the projects already taking place?"

"The best people are not sitting round the table. Good people refuse to co-operate because of frustration arising from previous reports, which remain sitting on shelves. What we need are people with real links to the local community, recognised by the community. Jobs get created in the name of the community."

”The right people do not get appointed. They do not have intimate knowledge of the local community. People (in well paid jobs) are trying to serve the community without understanding the community. For instance, there needs to be a proper understanding of Muslim culture and practises eg around death by the NHS - and this is not being done.”

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“What can we do locally... when foreign policy is an issue?”

“We need to think outside of the box- why do people become radicalised? How to deal with this? We need to deal with local issues first, especially what to do about education and unemployment. We have to decrease the number of unemployed. Set up apprenticeships. Create more facilities for young people/youth centres.”

13.3 Other community cohesion issues

In addition to the ward level issues mentioned above there are a number of other community cohesion issues that need to be considered.

13.4 PVE creates a difficult position for Muslim community leaders

One Mosque chairman described the difficult role he has to play as he tries to encourage people to control themselves and learn to deal with their frustrations:

“Leadership has a role to play. There has to be fairness and justice. As someone in a position of authority, I need to correct my brother, if he does wrong. Islam is against the blood tie if he is an oppressor. I have to be on the side of the victim.”

“We need to hold onto the ‘bigger picture’. There are faults in our community and what contributes to it. We can be short sighted, hot headed, and not knowing the system and how to carry out ‘due process’, or how to channel our energies.”

“However we can’t forget the grievances, but how can we move on when our government is allowing things to go on in Israel. Our government is acting contrary to what we are trying to do. This affects us here in Redbridge.”

“As leaders we are seen as selling out. We try to be logical, rational, not to be fiery. But we can’t take away people’s ‘human reactions’. This is not about religion, but about basic human values.”

13.5 Being caught up in civic politics- issues raised by the Gaza War

Another Muslim discussed ‘the double bind of being damned if I do and damned if I don’t’ and observed the pressure that attended an Imam who spoke at the Holocaust Memorial event in January 2009, during the height of the Gaza War.

In this report this came up frequently when participants described themselves as being ‘zipped up’, or ‘having to sweep issues under the carpet’ or ‘putting the lid on the steam’ or being ‘Gagged from speaking out’ or ‘People hold their feelings privately’. It is the issue of using our voices Vis a Vis being silenced.

In relation to community cohesion it is important to ask dispassionately what was affecting community tensions during the Gaza War. What pressure does civic politics

put Muslim and other clerics under? How to describe what is under the lid, when the rules are that the lid has to be kept on - which is community cohesion.

13.6 The root causes and Muslim discomfort

'PVE deals with the issues, but not with the root causes. Not dealing with the root causes is like putting a lid on the steam - it will explode. The real issues are less about local events; but rather it is the international issues, which encourage extremism. The Muslim community are feeling they are not getting justice: eg over Kashmir, Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan.'

'The Gaza war as an example of the real issues that are swept under the carpet. Don't demonise us for speaking out about 'Jewish problems'. I feel I am demonised if I speak out. I feel I am gagged. If I say something, people say I am inciting and my words get twisted.'

13.7 Using our voices Vis a Vis being silenced

'Muslim leaders should come out in the open and highlight the key issues, such as relations with the police, unemployment, and with education. Unemployed young people have too much time on their hands and get involved in illegal activities. It is no good for Muslim leaders not to face up to these issues and just hide them under the carpet, saying everything is fine, when it is not fine.'

'Why is only the Muslim community being targeted with PVE? This winds us up. We try to raise our voices as faith leaders. But the government is trying to put a lid on the issues. International issues can't be addressed until politicians realise their importance. No matter how much hard work you do, one statement by a politician can destroy a lot of work in race relations.'

'Local government has got to realise the same thing. Local council leaders have got to be more open and fair, not suppressing things, and putting the lid on them. Let people say what they have got to say.'

APPENDIX 1

The Chair of Redbridge Faith Forum, Cllr. Filly K. Maravala, held an interview with two Muslim Councillors of Redbridge Council in the Members Room which started at 19.50 and ended at 21.45 on the 5th February 2009.

The 2 individual responses are indicated in **Red** and **Blue**. In total 6 questions were asked of each Councillor.

OPENING REMARKS.

We at Redbridge Faith Forum have been requested to hold a dialogue with Faith Leaders and Local Councillors in Redbridge to ascertain their views on "how to make Redbridge a Safer Place to live".

Question 1.

Do you think violent extremism is an issue in Redbridge and if so, to what extent ?

Yes to some extent and as a Councillor I have experienced this and I have to combat this.

My view is not too a great extent, but there are certain isolated incidents, which no doubt, each Borough would have to deal with from time to time.

Question 2.

Do you think violent extremists distort the teachings of Islam ?

Yes, it is totally against the teachings of Islam, violence has no place in Islam. As a Muslim a person should look after everybody's welfare and that is the correct teachings of Islam.

Yes. Islam is not a religion, it is a way of life and Islam teaches Peace and Harmony, the Prophet Mohammed PBUH, has taught me to "love thy neighbour", which does not mean the neighbour living besides you, but means wherever you may be. The message is be polite, be courteous and live harmoniously and this should be the practice of a good Muslim.

Question 3.

Do you think Mosques and Imams have a role to play in denouncing violent extremism and extremists and if so, what would the role be ?

Yes to some extent. Mosques should serve as community centres and not just prayer halls. They should welcome everyone and give support to individuals with individual problems. An Imam should be well trained to communicate with the local Muslim community and understand their problems and social issues. However, the main onus for denouncing violent extremism should fall on the family and the community.

Yes. Whilst Muslim children are acquiring knowledge at their local mosque, it becomes the moral duty and responsibility of the mosque and its teachers to guide and educate the children according to the tenets and beliefs of Islam.

Question 4.

Would you personally be willing to attend a conference by a Muslim Scholar and a Key Note Speaker, especially geared towards young people, to discuss and debate issues around aspects of faith, identity, citizenship and social cohesion ?

Yes, with pleasure.

Yes, with pleasure.

Question 5.

Would you say that deprivation and discrimination are factors in people turning to violent extremism ?

They both are certainly contributory factors, but the main causes are global issues affecting the Muslim community, a very biased Western media, propaganda and injustice.

Generally speaking NO. A knowledgeable and educated Muslim will not be swayed in his views and will be able to distinguish between right and wrong, and good and evil. Although you will come across some isolated incidents where certain misguided and misinformed persons may resort to extremism.

Question 6.

Do you think debating and discussion forums on violent extremism are a good idea? If not, why not.

Yes, dialogue of all sorts is always welcome and beneficial, but the person leading the debate should be knowledgeable and trained to carry out an educated and informed debate.

Yes, I would always welcome any forum where an exchange of ideas is encouraged and where young and possibly vulnerable people are free to air their views with the fear of being branded.