

Living through change: The effects of global, national and local change on people and places in Bradford

Round-up

Reviewing the evidence

July 2011

The *Living through change* programme explored the effect of the economic downturn on people in Bradford and ways to deal with it. The impact of recession on Bradford has been detrimental, but not dramatic. People have more concern about the impact of the government's programme of deficit reduction and the effects of reduced public spending on local people and places, given the high levels of deprivation across the district. The city is not as divided and segregated as outsiders think, but residents want better civic leadership.

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This paper:

- summarises findings from research undertaken for the JRF *Bradford: Living through change* programme, as well as other relevant research, on the experiences and perceptions of people, communities and businesses in Bradford at a time of significant change.

Key points

- The **recession** has had a detrimental but not dramatic impact on Bradford. There was fear that the squeeze in **public spending** would have a much more damaging impact: reducing frontline services, increasing unemployment and potentially leading to rising tensions between neighbourhoods and groups.
- **Businesses** are cautiously optimistic about the future although this optimism is not shared by those seeking work. Economic growth is seen as crucial to Bradford's future. Concerns are mounting about **youth unemployment**, and the failure to attract and retain investment, jobs and skills.
- People across the city felt let down by their **leadership** – both local and national. **National policies** around counter-terrorism and community cohesion were highlighted as having been damaging at the local level.
- **Poverty** remains an aspect of daily life for large parts of Bradford's population. **Public services** were highly valued, but also criticised for being poorly co-ordinated.
- **Cohesion** remains a challenge in Bradford. Many respondents felt the focus on Muslim communities and the ethnic make-up of Bradford since the 2001 riots had been unhelpful and distracted attention away from the underlying issues of poverty, inequality and lack of access to jobs, housing and services.

Bradford: Some key facts

- More than 500,000 residents – the fourth largest metropolitan district in England.
- 22.5 per cent of the population are under 16-years-old, compared with 19 per cent nationally.
- 28.7 per cent of the district's population are from black and minority ethnic communities.
- The twenty-sixth most deprived local authority in England, and the second most deprived in the Yorkshire and Humber region.
- The widest gap between the most and least deprived areas of all local authorities in England.
- Third largest economy in the region, producing nearly 10 per cent of the region's wealth, and the fourth largest projected economic growth in the UK.
- Ranks 309th out of 379 localities in the UK Competitiveness Index 2010 and 37th of the UK's 43 largest cities.
- Self-employment has grown by more than 50 per cent over the last five years, rising to one in seven of the working population.
- In 2008 there were 1,765 enterprise start-ups, a start-up rate of 12.1 per cent compared to 11.8 per cent nationally.
- 28 per cent of JSA claimants are aged 18–24.
- One in three people of working age are out of work.
- One in three employees work in the public sector.

Source: Bradford Metropolitan District Council, 2011

Jobs, jobs, jobs

Employment is crucial to the economic and social well-being of Bradford (Akhtar *et al.*, 2011; Athwal *et al.*, 2011). The wider aims of promoting a more cohesive and prosperous city will not be realised unless employment in the area increases (Hudson *et al.*, 2011).

While Bradford's economy is large, it is also highly reliant upon public sector jobs, with the voluntary and community sector also highly dependent upon public funding. Local private sector jobs tend to be low-skilled and low-wage (Athwal *et al.*, 2011; Akhtar *et al.*, 2011). Common across the research was evidence that the recession exacerbated the economic problems in Bradford although unemployment was already high before 2008. Thus the impact of the economic downturn, while detrimental, was not dramatic. In fact, the casual nature of much of Bradford's labour market may have enabled businesses to cut hours or wages rather than engage in large-scale redundancies, and thus help them survive the downturn (Akhtar *et al.*, 2011).

However, this has had a negative impact upon many of those affected, with evidence of rising job insecurity and growing pessimism among those seeking work about the chances of securing employment (Akhtar *et al.*, 2011; Athwal *et al.*, 2011).

... [there's] no work in Bradford, it's like not good at all ... no one invests money in Bradford.

Interviewees spoke of increasing job insecurity and how this hinders their pathways out of poverty as well as their health (Giuntoli, 2011).

To be honest with you, after everything what's happened, there are no permanent jobs ... there's nothing there.

Participants in the study on poverty, debt and welfare spoke of their desire for and repeated efforts to secure work (Athwal *et al.*, 2011). They felt the job market was limited before the recession, and had now shrunk even further. In addition, any available work was often at very low wages and with no long-term security. In the study on local business and enterprise, participants talked of a relatively robust social enterprise culture in the city but voiced fears that this was under threat in the wider economic climate (Akhtar *et al.*, 2011). They were concerned that the institutional support given to social enterprise would be reduced by the forthcoming reductions in public spending. While some of the local business services had not been well received, there was praise for Yorkshire Forward (Akhtar *et al.* quote a 70 per cent approval rating) and therefore uncertainty about what the abolition of regional development agencies and the creation of local enterprise partnerships would mean.

Overall, businesses appeared cautiously optimistic about future economic prospects (Akhtar *et al.*, 2011), but this optimism was not shared by those seeking work.

Research participants talked of high levels of frustration with job-seeking services where they alleged that the focus was too much on the process of applying for jobs and not on identifying skills gaps and providing appropriate training or retraining options (Akhtar *et al.*, 2011; Athwal *et al.*, 2011). Respondents spoke well of the Future Jobs Fund and the way in which it had been used to support new training (this scheme, since closed by the Coalition Government, was still operating at the time of the research).

Unemployment carries a huge stigma for individuals and communities and respondents in the study on mental health and well-being felt keenly that this was not properly understood or addressed (Giuntoli *et al.*, 2011). In particular, health services need to be more receptive and proactive, working alongside job-seeking services. People who had been made unemployed as a result of the recession complained about excessive waiting lists and a lack of support in dealing with their situation. The research team concluded that people need to be able to 'keep well' during periods of worklessness and this will often require outreach as many may be reluctant to ask for help or unsure of what might be available (Giuntoli *et al.*, 2011).

... it gets to the point where you think, suck it man. What's the point?

Giuntoli *et al.*'s study draws upon a strong body of existing academic research which shows that unemployment has a particularly profound effect upon young men, attacking their sense of identity and worth. These findings were born out in the interviews and focus groups in Bradford, raising concerns about wider effects such as drug and alcohol abuse, impacts on behaviours, neighbourhoods and social cohesion (Giuntoli *et al.*, 2011).

There was a sense that Bradford is now experiencing the tough times without having benefited from the good times (Athwal *et al.*, 2011; Hudson *et al.*, 2011). This formed part of a wider resentment: people felt they were paying for the decisions and mistakes of others, particularly banks and national government.

Leadership

A common refrain across all four projects in the *Living through Change* programme (Recession, poverty and sustainable livelihoods in Bradford; Recession and cohesion in Bradford; Mental health, resilience and the recession in Bradford; and Weathering recession and surviving the upturn in Bradford) as well as wider JRF research on Bradford (Pearce and Milne, 2010; Samad, 2010), was that Bradford has not been well served by its leaders over a number of years, at both local and national levels.

In part defined by outsiders as a 'problem city', individuals, businesses and groups who took part in the research often argued that Bradford's leaders had not done enough to counter these negative images. They felt this had discouraged investment in the area and damaged the confidence and perceptions of people within the city and district.

You usually have to try twice as hard as any other city for people to even seriously consider Bradford as an option for most things.

Both Hudson *et al.* (2011) and Giuntoli *et al.* (2011) argue that the way in which Bradford is seen has generated a sense of stigma about being from or living in Bradford, even to the extent that job-seekers felt a Bradford postcode reduced their chances of gaining employment outside the city. Akhtar *et al.* (2011) reported that local businesses felt these negative perceptions were a barrier to investment, and that Bradford had benefited less than other cities in the UK from national government support for regeneration.

It's a shame because in terms of the people, the cultures, the countryside, it's got so much going for it: the art, Saltaire and around there is beautiful, the media museum. Yet that's not the perception of people outside Bradford. It's got a dingy negative reputation which is most unfortunate.

It was felt that 'good news stories' were not capitalised upon by the city's leaders or picked up by national media (Akhtar *et al.*, 2011). For instance, the way in which Manningham had been rebuilt since the 2001 riots was very positive, yet not conveyed outside Bradford.

The marketing of the city isn't really done well enough in terms of being able to sell the positives about the city and so I don't think the council is really geared up to sell the city for what it is.

These criticisms of local leadership extended to public services. Services were valued, but also criticised by participants who felt that services (from business support services to health outreach services) could be formulaic, unresponsive, inadequately communicated or poorly co-ordinated (Akhtar *et al.*, 2011; Giuntoli *et al.*, 2011). This was seen as symptomatic of a broad cadre of leadership that was not sufficiently connected to the communities it served.

Local leadership also came under criticism about the stalled regeneration of Bradford's city centre and the non-arrival of Westfield. This has had a significant impact upon perceptions of Bradford (Akhtar *et al.*, 2011; Athwal *et al.*, 2011, Giuntoli *et al.*, 2011; Hudson *et al.*, 2011).

They've become symbolic haven't they? You know, rather than just the real value of the land and what might be there. They're a constant sore now almost like a wound really, seeping and everyone's always irritated and agitated about them.

The reality of poverty

Bradford has high levels of poverty and deprivation. The study by Athwal *et al.* found that many people in Bradford felt marginalised and ignored in discussions of poverty, cohesion and segregation (Athwal *et al.*, 2011). The same messages emerged through the research by Hudson *et al.* (2011) on community relations.

People talked about simply not having enough to live on, relying on public services or family networks for support, and falling into a vicious cycle of low incomes and worklessness. Many spoke of lives that are characterised by debt, being the victims of crime and anti-social behaviour, living in poor housing, having chronic mental and physical ill-health, and feeling hopelessness (Athwal *et al.*, 2011, Giuntoli *et al.*, 2011). Some talked about how being out of work made them feel more isolated and less likely to engage in community activity.

You're existing, you're not living.

You're actually thinking every day, have I got enough to last me two weeks?

The recession had led to reduced income, whether through redundancy or reduced hours, greater insecurity, the highest number of mortgage repossession claims and the highest rate of negative equity in the Yorkshire and Humber region (Bradford MDC, 2010).

Poverty is becoming more acute. It used to be a myth about having to make a choice between having your house warm, or having a hot meal; it's becoming a fact now. If you're on £60 per week and you're feeding £20 into the gas meter and £10 into the electric meter, the water rates and everything else, you can only eat beans on toast so many times.

Many people cited rising inflation as having had a more detrimental effect than the recession (Athwal *et al.*, 2011). The research consistently identified rising prices, particularly in terms of fuel and food, as leading more people into poverty and reducing economic competitiveness (bearing in mind that this research was undertaken *before* the rise in VAT to 20 per cent in January 2011) (Athwal *et al.*, 2011; Akhtar *et al.*, 2011). This was reported as particularly harsh for those on benefits where levels did not keep up with inflation.

Well raw material costs, energy costs are all going through the roof and of course that in itself creates a costs issue because if we can't put our prices up then we just lose money and we'll just close the place down.

In Bradford the recession has increased unemployment. The fear now is that unless new and better jobs (with some job security and decent pay) are created, more people will fall into long-term poverty. This is made more pressing by the fact that businesses in the most deprived areas of the city appear to have been the hardest hit by the economic downturn (Akhtar *et al.*, 2011).

These findings from Bradford resonate with those from JRF research on the impact of globalisation on UK poverty and on UK communities (Hanley, 2011). In particular:

- People on low incomes in case study areas across the UK were anxious about work and future job security – for themselves and for the next generation. Recession had exacerbated this, but the underlying causes were due more generally to shifts in types of employment practice (associated with globalisation), such as increased contract and agency work, and increased movement of jobs to other countries and employment of migrant workers in the UK.
- Rises in global food and fuel prices had increased living costs in the UK – and these have affected people on low incomes (and may continue to have great impact in future). Subsequent coping measures have meant a heavy reliance on family and local support.

Social cohesion

Cohesion isn't an activity in itself; it is a sum response or the sum total of lots of different activities and lots of different people doing different things.

The 2001 riots and the way in which the concept of 'parallel lives' has subsequently dominated national policy still loom large in Bradford. While not dismissing concerns about ethnic and religious tensions, many have argued that the focus on these issues in Bradford has been excessive and counter-productive. In research on community cohesion and counter-terrorism in West Yorkshire, Husband and Alam (2011a) concluded that national policies and the way in which the *Preventing Violent Extremism* programme was developed, with its focus upon Muslim communities, had deeply damaging impacts at the local level. These included harming attempts to pursue community cohesion, and placing significant strains on Muslim communities and on local authority personnel – particularly Muslim staff. On the positive side, their research found clear evidence of 'everyday cohesion' playing out in the lives of ordinary people, regardless of background, in Bradford and across West Yorkshire (Alam, 2011). Earlier research on Muslims and community cohesion also challenged the extent to which Bradford is perceived as being an acutely, and problematically, ethnically and religiously segregated city (Samad, 2010).

The national image of Bradford as a divided and segregated city was seen as untrue and unhelpful in the research on local business and enterprise (Akhtar *et al.*, 2011). Employers and business leaders felt that stereotyping of the city was a barrier to both public and private investment. Indeed, many said that the diversity of the city made it easier to work in a more global market and identify new markets and opportunities.

... the multicultural nature of the workforce we have here and the skills people have and the connections that they have with the outside world.

Overall, the four recent projects of *Living through Change* confirm previous evidence that the underlying issues are material – poverty and deprivation, inequality, the lack of jobs, and the absence of good and affordable housing – rather than Bradford's ethnic or religious make-up. However, what is also apparent is that many people felt that tensions have been rising on the ground as a result of growing competition for resources, compounded by the recent recession and anticipated effects of public spending reductions (Hudson *et al.*, 2011, Athwal *et al.*, 2011).

Some tensions have found expression in relation to ethnicity or religion, with different communities and neighbourhoods tending to blame one another or believe that others are getting better treatment. Some people talked of rising crime and anti-social behaviour, and their feeling that casual racial abuse was increasing (Giuntoli *et al.*, 2011, Hudson *et al.*, 2011). There was evidence that established communities harboured resentment to newcomers, particularly European Union migrants who they feel have lowered wages and taken jobs that might otherwise have gone to established communities (Hudson *et al.*, 2011).

There have been changes for us due to more people coming from Eastern Europe. Jobs have been affected ... Eastern Europeans are taking most jobs now as people hire them on low rates ... their lifestyle is also very different from our lifestyle. We have been living in the UK for quite some time.

Such tensions were apparent in earlier research on community and participation in 'traditionally white' estates where many residents felt regarded as 'the lowest of the low', and where, as estates have been opened up to minority ethnic groups and other newcomers, these 'others' have sometimes become the focus of existing residents' frustrations (Pearce and Milne, 2010). Long-standing white communities appear to have fewer social networks on which to draw for support, a diminished sense of identity, and growing feelings of alienation, resentment, persecution and hopelessness (Hudson *et al.*, 2011, Pearce and Milne, 2011). These are feelings that Bradford's ethnic minority communities have traditionally felt and that many continue to feel (Hudson *et al.*, 2011; Samad 2010; Farnell 2009). Indeed, local policy-makers and practitioners have questioned the narrow focus in community cohesion policies on Muslim communities, to the exclusion of others (Husband and Alam, 2011a; Samad 2010).

Looking ahead, many participants were concerned that some effective and important work is at risk of being set back by reduced public spending (Hudson *et al.*, 2011, Phillips *et al.*, 2010; Mir *et al.*, 2010). There is a fear that growing inequalities between neighbourhoods and public spending reductions may undermine the delivery capacity that makes neighbourhood working effective, and it is positive here that Bradford MDC has reinforced its commitment to neighbourhood working in its budget decisions (Richardson, 2011).

‘Austerity Britain’

With the *Living through Change* programme being conducted at a time when there was national and local debate about how to reduce the budget deficit (before and after the 2010 general election), many of those spoken to voiced a sense of fear and vulnerability. Across all four projects, respondents expressed concern that there would be further job losses, reductions in vital services, the removal of community and neighbourhood infrastructure and the end to Bradford’s hopes for physical and economic regeneration.

They’re already talking about, like, 25 per cent cuts in some areas that will mean loss of jobs, it will also mean loss of infrastructure, the idea of the welfare state being without a safety net that catches people is going to be lost, we’re going to see a lot more people living in very, very, very poor conditions.

The research of Akhtar *et al.* identified the importance of regeneration and business support and advice as key infrastructure to enable economic recovery. There is a paradox that while recession has increased demand on many services – be they job-seeking support, GPs or education and training – it is these very resources that people claimed were now most at risk. For example, some cited how libraries and work clubs had helped support them in periods of worklessness, providing a routine to their lives and a place where they could keep their minds occupied and, in some cases, learn new skills (Giuntoli *et al.*, 2011). Athwal *et al.* show that while people wanted public services to become more receptive to their needs, they valued the services nonetheless.

Respondents across all four projects talked of the need for continued investment in the physical and economic regeneration of the city, particularly the city centre. Businesses voiced concern that schemes and initiatives such as the Bradford Kickstart programme (funded through the Local Enterprise Growth Initiative) had been crucial in helping the area through tough times and were now under threat (Akhtar *et al.*, 2011).

There were concerns across the project for the future of the voluntary and community sector, and the possibility that progress on cohesion and neighbourhood working would be undermined – whether as a result of projects and initiatives closing, or a growing sense of competition between places and between communities about who is getting what.

I think the danger is we’re called the voluntary and community sector so people think we do it for nothing.

People feared being asked to do more for less when the need for investment and building capacity and capability was so great.

There is arguably a need – extremely difficult to achieve – for a more transparent debate over who gets what, and what citizens accept as being fair between places with different needs (Richardson, 2011). As Richardson notes, elected members find it challenging to manage these debates on such complex and often controversial questions in their wards.

Conclusion

The four *Living through Change* projects tell a story of how the recession has impacted upon different aspects of life in Bradford. Overall, the picture is of a city and its people who have felt under pressure for some time, and this has been exacerbated by the economic downturn in 2008.

At the same time, several of the research projects also highlight the strong sense of local pride and belonging that many still hold in Bradford, the realities of ‘everyday cohesion’, regardless of background (Alam, 2011; Pearce and Milne 2010; Samad, 2010), and the significant ways in which different communities and representatives across all Bradford’s sectors (public, private, voluntary and community) came together around the presence of the English Defence League in August 2010 (Lachman, 2010).

High levels of poverty and deprivation remain, and these make the task of supporting social cohesion more difficult. So also do national policies that work against, rather than with, real local experience (Husband and Alam, 2011b).

Local businesses reported that they have weathered the downturn relatively well and are cautiously optimistic about the future, although this is not shared by many of those who are either out of work or working for low wages. The research found a strong social enterprise sector and potential for greater access to global markets, linked to the ethnic diversity within Bradford. These offer a platform for economic recovery and regeneration. As Hanley (2011) notes, many local councils and regional government bodies are exploring how such global links can benefit their areas. The more difficult question is: how can these strategies best benefit disadvantaged places and people on low incomes? Job creation – and the creation of the right kind of jobs, with investment in local skills and training – will be essential if Bradford is to have a future labour market that is associated with reduced, not increased, poverty and inequality.

Across the *Living through Change* projects, many participants also argued strongly for sustained investment in mediation, dialogue and interaction, and continued investment in the places and public spaces where people can come together in a meaningful way (Hudson *et al.*, 2011; Giuntoli *et al.*, 2011; Samad, 2010), and where people can develop the knowledge and capacities that support them to make bridges and links to other groups and communities (Mir *et al.*, 2010). These include workplaces, children's centres, job clubs, day centres, libraries, social clubs and open spaces such as parks and playgrounds.

To take advantage of the potential for recovery, Bradford needs a confident leadership which promotes the strengths of the city, the wider district and its people – challenging what are widely felt to be out-of-date and unhelpful perceptions.

The biggest cloud on Bradford's horizon for many of the research participants was less about recovering from the 2008 recession (there was a feeling that Bradford still hadn't recovered from earlier recessions), and more about the anticipated (in 2010) effects of reduced public spending. Bradford's vibrant voluntary and community sector, as well as many of Bradford's jobs and business support services, have been reliant on public funding. What impact public spending decisions will have on Bradford's indices of deprivation, well-being, employment and cohesion, will need to be closely monitored in the months to come.

Key recommendations

- Bradford needs its new strategy – Big Plan 2 – to deliver economic growth and meaningful job creation, especially for young people. This includes:
 - secure and decently paid jobs;
 - completing city-centre regeneration – vital economically and symbolically;
 - job-seeking support that focuses much more on skills needs and training requirements, and much less on the process of applying for jobs;
 - continuing support for Bradford's strong social enterprise culture;
 - enforcing national employment legislation, especially the minimum wage;
 - support and advice to businesses, including accessing finance from banks.
- Bradford requires confident and assertive local leadership which sets out a bold and positive vision for Bradford and its people. This includes:
 - emphasising ethnic and social diversity of the city as a strength in a global and changing society and economy;
 - Improving trust and the quality of engagement between the local authority, the voluntary sector, and local communities, including through small-scale and informal activities (which are the most attractive to the majority of people);
 - using local authority powers, and seeking greater powers, to borrow and invest;
 - improving co-ordination between service providers at all levels such as job-seeking services and health providers;
 - building on the positive example of Bradford's *Total Place* pilot.
- The enduring poverty of Bradford needs to be tackled. This includes:
 - health services playing a more pro-active outreach role to support people during short and long periods of worklessness;
 - working with young people and providing support and opportunities;
 - tackling crime and anti-social behaviour;
 - greater investment in new affordable and social housing;
 - national welfare and benefits provision taking better account of the increasing costs of fuel, food and clothing on people living in or near poverty.

- Informed and progressive decisions about where restricted resources should be targeted need to be made. This includes:
 - rigorous assessments of the impact on equality and deprivation of public spending reductions, and using these to guide decisions;
 - regard to the real and perceived impacts in relation to different places and also ethnic and religious demographics, so as not to increase tensions;
 - sustaining activities that promote meaningful interaction, community infrastructure (including public spaces) and neighbourhood working;
 - more transparent debate over who gets what, and what citizens accept as fair between places with different needs, and between groups and generations;
 - taking into account that the significant improvements in cohesion since 2001 are potentially undermined by competition for resources – real or perceived.

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