Draft – transcript of keynote – Hobart.[1]
The restorative city: Emperor's new clothes or achievable paradigm shift?
Chris Straker – 24 March 2015.

I will discuss the restorative journey of Hull, but Hull is only one place in the UK that is on this journey. Hull therefore needs to be set in a national, international and a historical context. There are, in fact, exciting innovations in restorative working going on all over the UK and, as this conference shows, internationally. This keynote will try to look through a critical lens at those developments.

Equally, this is not a keynote intended to stay on the side of 'comfortable' and not ask the questions I have been asking myself, and those I have been working with – from small community groups to Local Authorities. I acknowledge now in the room there will be a range of experience in developing a restorative city concept – some having started some time ago, others yet to start. Whether you agree with what I say or not, I hope that this keynote offers something to engage with.

I would suggest now, before we get any further that there is no city, institution or organisation that is completely non-restorative. Even in the most dysfunctional places groups of people still care, kindness happens, communities come together; they do this without any sense that what they are doing is 'restorative'. They generally do this in isolation though, and have no sense of a city-sized concept promoting the everyday behaviours that are already implicit and explicit in the way they behave with each other on an interpersonal level. Put simply, the restorative city looks to explicitly address this, so individuals, groups, communities and larger complex groupings of people use these positive behaviours and the development of relationships as a default position. The restorative city looks to create, not only the context for these positive relationships to thrive, but to also create opportunities for people to develop the skills and understanding to lead their own lives in a way that is considerate of both theirs and others' needs.

Or does it? What is it restorative city strategists want to leave behind or reject? What is it that drives their need for a restorative label? What do they think 'restorativeness' will give them that they don't have in their state of 'non-restorativeness'? Frankly, what the hell is going on?

I would like to frame this keynote…within the device of storytelling: The story of the restorative city. Well, beginnings and perspectives in stories are always important. If I told the story of Hull and the restorative city I would be implying a leadership role for it I don't believe it is justified in claiming. It would also be easy to retro-fit the story to appear to be a seamless narrative of progress from the non-restorative Hull to the new Hull: *a restorative city*. That I wont be doing!

In my case, to offer some context: In 2004 I was asked to take on a school that was described to me as 'the worst school in the UK'. I worked with staff and pupils for eighteen months to get us out of special measures but was constantly frustrated by the way we responded to behaviour (pupils and staff); and that all we seemed to do was react to events. I wanted to develop the culture of the school to be one of a shared responsibility for each other's learning and emotional and physical care.

I came upon restorative practice by chance and, along with some of the local schools that were part of our community, we started the implementation of restorative practice from the late spring and summer of 2007. The

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[1] Apologies to colleagues that this is not set out as a paper. It is the transcript of my script. The references to quotations are in the bibliography.

impact was immediate for the adults as well as the young people and their families and our surrounding community.

So, in 2007 I would have been talking about an imagined future where restorative would lead citywide transformation and the language of connections, doing WITH would be dominant. Between 2007 and 2010 I would have been telling the world we were sorted!

During that time we were lucky to have a Director of Children's Services who also *got* restorative practice as practice and not restorative justice. Who believed in building relationships, behaviours and language across the whole of Children's Services. As a result the Hull Centre for Restorative Practice was formed by practitioners and was a practitioner-led model. The rest, as they say, is history…or is it?

By late 2010 I was using a more critical language and had started using the analogy of the Emperor's new clothes. I started hearing us talking about numbers of professionals trained and was increasingly uneasy. I did hear a change in the language of professionals as we will hear the same language throughout this conference. I heard the words and wondered what they actually had become. Was restorative working really the panacea it was being sold as? What were we displacing and replacing as we forged our brave new future…and what had that felt like to those people we had imposed 'restorativeness' on? Added to that, the training model we had adopted was becoming depressingly restricting and monolithic – we were, I started to feel, missing something.

There was a mismatch between intent and methods – a theme we will return to – that produced increasingly smaller returns.

We had trained 5000 plus professionals and I was seeing positive data from schools and children's homes but not necessarily from across the wider Children's Services and neighbourhood policing; nor real changes in the way teams were working within and across the service. (All of our restorative implementation was set against catastrophic cuts to front line services in Hull – a context not to be ignored).

I was concerned, and still am, that we had trained professionals in the principles and practice of restorative practice and that we talked about working WITH our families and each other but all we had created was a TO way of working masked by a restorative smile and surface WITH. We engaged, directly, with very few families (though schools were sowing future seeds by the development of skills in young people) and I wondered what this new paradigm of Hull: *the restorative city* felt like to them. Had anything changed or was the positive data from certain outputs masking a lack of real change across the system?

By 2011 I had left the school and stopped working in Hull and was working as an independent consultant and trainer. Symbolically and physically separating myself from Hull. I started to develop restorative practice in schools, colleges, and children's homes etc. within a model that spent more time in dialogue with the organisation about what they wanted? Why they wanted it? What they did well already? How to plan for the change to become embedded? Where we would encounter barriers? And what we would do about that? How we would include key parties from the whole process? All this before even starting to show anyone a social discipline window or sit in a circle with a talking piece!

What worried me was that the requests for work from local authorities, to get them started on, and complete their restorative journey, felt like they wanted an off-the-shelf restorative model, a universal panacea. Repeat Hull or Bristol, or Norfolk or whoever was in the headlines at that moment, without really thinking about their own context.

I started to read more and more about the restorative city – in the UK and internationally. This, I say here and now is, in itself, a fantastic intent…but the intent alone is not enough to guarantee the final construct is what was intended at the start of the journey. Especially in a world of co-option and the risk of the reduction of a proactive restorative practice to a reactive, accountancy, restorative justice/criminal justice paradigm.

What was clear to me was dialogue, and the capturing of stories, was at the heart of the way I felt we needed to move forward. How could the story we all possess inform the development of restorative working across institutions? How could it generally become a WITH way of being where professionals asked the question or created the space to say: *Tell me what **you** need me to know, NOT tell me what **I** need to know.* And from that dialogue we would share in the creation of coherent action from the disparate strands of stories; action, that by implication, requires all parties to develop skills and ways of being which release potential and create WILFUL INDEPENDENCE – an independence that is contextualised by an understanding of the intrapersonal, interpersonal and the institutional; a reconfiguring of the power in the relationship between the individual and the state/city, and between the restorative practitioner/professional and the families with which they engage.

One thing I was absolutely convinced of was the expert model, sort of Eagles flying in to save the day training, was unsatisfactory. Too many policy makers and strategists, for a wide range of reasons (time, finance, political pressure) actually wanted to be saved, and as a result fell into the trap of thinking the families also needed that model. A model that still placed the power in the professional, through their training. Restorative practice at a systems level seemed to have become a practical and satisfying philosophical solution for the caring professional. But in a world dominated by neo-liberal agendas, it could easily be co-opted and have nothing to do with working WITH for restorative reasons.

So, I was worried about the growth in restorative cities – not for what that might signal about a new way of working, which I approved of and was advocating, but for what was, potentially, behind it. How was practice matching intent? Would the end result be some sort of *restorative–lite* growing in the shadow of co-option?

I felt we needed to be willing to be bold enough to start our restorative journey by looking at what we (professionals, practitioners *and* families) believe in and value. In doing so we would have to be ready to accept that dialogue would create tension, and we had to have a willingness to embrace that and be solutions-led. We needed to audit what was already good within the present status quo and consider how the new restorative working will mesh with that. Looking at what we want the restorative vision to become and what that will do to what already exists. We do not start in a vacuum

So let us look at the question of whether the choice of becoming a restorative city is at risk of simply being about dressing the established structures of local authorities in a fashionable new finery, whilst maintaining the structural and behavioural status quo; or whether it is possible to make a paradigm shift, and change, fundamentally, the way an organisation/city works.

Even before we create new restorative institutions, change policies, change the way we work with each other and families we need to establish the values that are shared across all parts of your cities. But even this seemingly positive activity, that often results in the wonderful design and creation of a shiny mission statement, is fraught with risk. It is too easy for professionals to come up with language that often doesn't deliver anything but a surface sense of values. We often create such policies in the sealed confines of a room of like-minded people, all with the best intentions for *other* people. Those *other* people are rarely there. The methods for drawing in all the partners, families and young people is, I admit, problematic – time consuming and costly. But it is a step that needs to be taken. A step to be planned for and not left to chance, or a despair that *they* just don't want to engage or get it!

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We must also go below the surface of these value words that we can all conjure at the drop of a hat. We can be prone to involuntary convulsions, producing and enshrining language from our professional/practitioner thesaurus. But the meaning is not transferable to our communities because they have never bought into the words, never mind the definitions they see imposed on them. A dialogue around language needs to take place and the dialogue needs to be framed in the language of behaviours. These definitions will, then, become our touchstones for everything we do. They will add to our repertoire of protective factors to ensure our intent matches our restorative behaviours.

So lets assume we have done this exercise and agreed, from a wide-ranging exercise in community involvement, that our restorative city believes in the following values… Let us apply them to an exercise I believe to be important at an institutional level *before* partnerships coalesce into fixed sets of relationships. Which they do very quickly. I am going to use Kay Harris' 'Possible Checklist for Restorative Working'. This I would suggest is a good activity to do within teams, across teams and with partners. Getting a congruence of thinking, having a test against which to check your journey from creation of intent and during its development. A checklist to keep going back to.

Keeping that exercise in mind let us look at the present state of restorative city concepts in the UK.   In 2007 Hull sought to develop a version of restorative working …The aim [was] to generate a common restorative language through which all children and young people experience education, criminal justice, social services…[it was] also intended to stretch into families and communities. Hull's original vision was an emancipatory one. Sadly, it got stuck in a training model – with a focus on professionals. That in itself was great improvement on previous practice, and continues to be so to this day, but as yet the development into the community has not been as effective.

Bristol is as ambitious as Hull to become the first city to be restorative, and says: We want to make Bristol the national leader for restorative approaches and become a city that sets the benchmark for their uses. We want to keep Bristol at the forefront of the implementation and development of innovative forms of restorative approach, building on the excellent systems already in place.

These ambitions are clearly grounded on a belief that Bristol thinks there is a standard of 'restorativeness' that can be achieved; and they can offer replicable models for other cities to 'cut and paste' into their own context.

Norfolk's restorative approaches strategy talks of: Restorative approaches support emotional, social development, literacy and equips people with the ability to manage conflicts when it occurs. Restorative approaches help build responsibility, resolution and reintegration.

All three cities are committed to achieving the status of being a restorative entity, and with that comes assumptions that such a state is possible, desirable and measurable as a new way of being. All of this is set within a context that still does not have a clear, quantifiable, evidence base to support the direction of travel.

In my MA dissertation I also focused on two case studies of cities I knew who were, not only be working restoratively, but who had also taken particular decisions about what that meant for working within their teams, and with their families. These two cities were Wokingham and Leeds.

In Wokingham Senior leaders had decided that they would not impose a prescriptive definition of restorative working on the staff, "We work collaboratively…I am unhappy with the word restorative…I was always

uncomfortable with the assumption that something that made sense in a justice context could simply be applied uniformly…"

There was seen to be a need to engage in dialogue with, not only teams within the local authority, but also with national organisations who inspect and set targets for local authorities. This was deemed to be essential as trust had to be built with front-line and middle-management staff; the inspectorate; and recognition taken of risk factors that were at the heart of concerns. This was a deliberate engagement and dialogue including talking to those who saw barriers to restorative working. These engagements were about listening to supposed barriers not as reasons for not working restoratively, but to look at all practice, including restorative working, and ensure risk was militated against, to move forward safely.

In terms of success Wokingham can show: 91% of our families have stopped offending and that includes offenders who were persistent and prolific offenders…we have 64% of our kids back into education attending, engaging and attaining, and 20% of our cohort last year were children who were missing from education for at least two years…41% of our families returned to work…
What is clear is that there is a view that services are working better together, as well as with families.

Finally, with regard to the question of whether Wokingham was a restorative city there was a consensus across the interviewees that the label was less important than the way of working it embodied: "[There] is [a] problem with the word restorative because it allows itself, or it is co-opted by almost any political persuasion or agenda? Is it a word that we should try to define the behaviours of rather than denote it into a tight definition?' There is something valuable about the vision of a restorative city but I wonder if there is something about context.

In Leeds the Director of Children's services had come from Hull where he had supported restorative working. In a sense he had had a chance to reflect on the positives and negatives of that experience, and so his vision for Leeds and restorative working reflects that. He feels there is a little bit that starts with the doing TO, by an explicit statement of how we will organise ourselves and behave. We started with a lot of 'what if' questions: if we agree on aims, then what shape do we need to be internally, in terms of structures, and then with the widest leadership team – what would happen if we started to behave like this?

The focus and emphasis of the training was seen to be as important to stop it being, "tokenism…and this is important…senior managers need to model behaviour or its just words"; and develop "learning sets [for leaders that are] very reflective…reflection is important as it allows them to relate what they are learning to risk their roles."

Leeds, like Wokingham, are guarded about overstating the relationship between working restoratively and direct impacts on outcomes, but they can equally celebrate where there have been positive impacts. One such area is that of Children in the Looked After System. In Leeds: Between April and June last year [2013] we had 106 children come into care… between April and June this year [2014] we have 54…what we first started seeing when we looked at the data is that the numbers of children in care went down quite significantly…but the trend of children coming into care didn't. That says we were just removing them from care…what started to happen in this second period is Family Group Conferences were offered [and that is having a positive impact].

What is deserving of a more detailed research project is looking at qualitative data to measure restorative impacts. One interviewee stated that: What is interesting, are the findings about the ways that social workers are working in practice. This involves looking within case files to see what sorts of narrative is being written…what I am seeing now as I audit files is more evidence that families are more involved in decisions about family/child protection plans *etc*…you can see the families are understanding why…this is a significant change…this is a long term change…the narratives of the visits tell the story…this shows that

the conditions for continuing improvement are becoming embedded…this is positive…this is starting to grip…

Such qualitative documents contextualise quantitative data and offer background to the relationship between restorative practice and quantifiable outcomes.

The way forward for Leeds is to continue the work they have been doing in a flexible and reflective way. A way that is structured by a set of restorative values and principles that feed into the practice used for working with other professionals and families. An interviewee said: "it has revolutionised the way teams are working…we hope that this culture is permeating but there will still be joyous spots and disappointing ones…we use restorative approaches in different ways and uses it to shape what the organisation stands for and the behaviours we expect…it is important that we don't impose a monolithic way of doing this on Leeds… which doesn't understand how a whole system operates and the complexity of relationships and connections…it is not by itself a panacea as some would have us believe.

So what does this mean for a way of working to develop a restorative city? The proliferation of restorative working since the 1990s has seen restorative practitioners lead the development of practice methodology and definition, through their actions. This has raised concerns in some quarters. There are training organisations who offer 'fixed' models of working – a 'this way or no way' methodology. In the UK we also have a very proactive Restorative Justice Council, who are the check and balance for restorative working. They have introduced standards for practitioners, trainers and in the last eighteen months have developed and implemented a Restorative Services Quality Mark to try to develop networks of services that meet a minimum standard for safety, recognise good practice and build public confidence. What appears to underlie the quest for prescription and homogeneity is a belief that these are desirable phenomena.

There is a clear implication, behind all of these initiatives, that restorative working can be reduced to a series of training slides, standards and indicators. But, Johnstone cautions, that "standardization will mean that certain powerful figures or agencies, especially western ones, will impose their preferred model of restorative justice practice on all others."

I would ask that we all reflect on Johnstone's warning that, restorative advocates "tend to confuse exhortations and expressions of ideals with useful models of intervention, and offer us the former as if they were the latter."

 I would suggest, even more, that we need to engage in what Harris describes as "an exercise in first stepping into a desired future in imagination, then consciously elaborating the structures needed to maintain it, and finally imagining the future history that would get [us] there, [to do so] is a very liberating experience for people who feel trapped in an unyielding present…" Both are asking us, at all stages, to turn a critical lens on intent and methodology. And not make assumptions about either.

As we have seen from the sample of current practice and the case studies the concept of the restorative city is *out there*. There is, though, no consistent definition of what a restorative city is. This is both a strength of the concept, but it also offers potential risks to the development of restorative working. It is a strength because it mirrors the story of restorative working moving from the, original justice paradigm, to a practice paradigm. All local authorities, examined, have a clear sense of their restorative direction and the principles and values they wish to promote. There is, though, still much to be said for further research in order to construct a coherent paradigm, which can serve as a frame of reference for practice, and to guide experimentation.

The intention of such research is not to restrict evolution, but to serve as a 'frame of reference' that would, not only focus practice-thinking to ensure it incorporates explicit values and principles in pursuit of its goals, but also ensures clarity regarding measures to evaluate its progress, ensuring that meaning and intent are clear.

It is also important that those embarking on this journey heed the advice of Crow and Semmens when they say, it is important to have information before the new policy or legislation is introduced, to compare it with the situation subsequently. You therefore have to decide which measures will be compared. You may also need to compare instances where changes have been made, with instances where they have not. The need for restorative working to evolve is important, but it cannot be done at the expense of rigorous quality assurance. It has already been noted that this is a complex task, but restorative working cannot expect to avoid such rigor when it is one of many competing paradigms that a local authority could choose.

The institutional context and culture will be different in each local authority and therefore an essential element of change will be the organisation 'knowing itself'. The paradox an institution faces is that, at the time that it starts something new, it also continues something…it must keep the memory of the past, while incorporating something absolutely new. This is a difficult balancing act.

This model meets the requirements of Pavlich, that, "it is mandatory that we establish reflective review practices to provide a constant vigil over ethical life. This takes seriously the contention that few decisions or course of action are free from dangerous possibilities." This also sits within the approach both case study local authorities have taken with regard to regularly reviewing strategy, through dialogue, with managers and front-line staff. Though, as yet, neither have strong mechanisms for involving families in this creation dialogue.

This strategic plan must be imbued with clear and explicit values understood and shared by all parties. As has already been noted the logistics of this are complex, but the intent should be to engage and develop participation in this process, wherever possible. Clarijs and Malmberg describe the ideal state to aspire to when they say: The next stage after the welfare state will be the participation state. In this state citizens take back their responsibilities, steer their own process, resolve with whom they want to cooperate and decide their own solutions…This transition implies a repositioning for governments and professional organisations…Self-management and self-government become more and more important.

Building this transformational aspect of the way a bureaucracy in a city works – building in its own demise – is a challenge. It is certainly more than a surface affectation and the insertion of *restorative-lite* language into documents!

I would like to share an approach to developing the restorative city paradigm. It is not a specific model, but instead offers a construct within which any model could be placed. The proposal is made to reflect the need to move "with *cautious* urgency…but with *cautious* knowledge that ill-considered change may be worse than no change at all"

At the heart of the proposal is the need to allow the evolutionary development of restorative working within the specific culture and context of any city; it is also intended to guard against co-optation and overzealous standardisation of a paradigm that has yet to reach maturity. It is a proposal made with the realisation that significant changes in social policies and in social institutions are unlikely to occur without prior changes to society's dominant values and that local authorities are situated in the real world of national and local agendas.

Finally, it takes heed of Erbe's warning, when he says, sometimes "[restorative practice] seemingly works to undermine the reforms it wishes to promote…[restorative practice] is bound to repeat institutional failures without strategies to guard against it." The proposed construct hopes to avoid this risk.

The construct this keynote promotes is that of scaffolding. The scaffolding image suggests that a local authority has made a deliberate decision to change the look and structures of their 'building'. What is required, though, is that they only do so after a detailed audit of their present position; a clear identification of where their strengths are, what they intend to keep the same, and what needs to change. Within the latter assessment is a decision to decide the extent of change – is it a subtle change to the outside appearance or more structural and internal, and in which areas and at what speed?

A key question is how will this change serve the purpose of the overall design considering we are not in the luxurious position of flattening everything and starting from scratch? For instance if we are going to offer FGC to every family as an entitlement when ever the state intervenes into the life of a child, *what do we need to dismantle*? It is not enough to overlay restorative working on top of existing practice without consideration of new structural tensions that may be created. We can't just keep adding to the building.

The amount and type of scaffolding that the building requires will be a decision based on need and not, solely, pre-set, prescribed, way of doing things. The local authority can therefore choose the pace of change, where to begin, the steps to be taken, and in which order. Some areas may need more support over the choice of direction than others but there will be clarity about who will do the work and why and how it all fits together. A generic model of training will not fit this construct.

The training model an authority chooses will be developed from the principles of restorative theory but reflect a specific context in how that theory can be implemented and reflect the local authority's principles and practice, clearly identified at the start. This is a model of implementation, of which training is an element. It is a model that takes cognisance of culture or context.

Regardless of model chosen there needs to be a consideration of protective factors to keep the journey guided by restorative principles and values. Good intentions often prevent reformers from critical self-evaluation of the meaning of their actions. Wonshé takes this further and says, (although talking about restorative justice, the same warning applies to restorative practice): I think it is imperative to evaluate programs on their understanding of fundamental restorative justice principles and not assume these programs are ideal because they exist. Restorative justice accepts ambiguity and paradox and requires diversity. Colonization begins to standardize restorative justice in a way that threatens its autonomy…[restorative justice must be] rooted in its context.

To avoid a mismatch between intent and outcome there needs to be a clear set of values related to the way restorative processes are introduced. The introduction must not fall into the trap, described by Dyck, of 'serving the ends of right relationship between individuals while simultaneously, perhaps unconsciously, buttressing the systemic wrongs that give rise to the problems between those individuals'.

When the mandate for restorative working has been made we should also ask whether we supervise and manage others in a way that muffles their voices, thereby excluding them from participating in decisions that affect their physical and emotional well-being. As Harris says, the "means you use will become part of the ends you achieve" It is important, then, that it is understood that to achieve a restorative paradigm requires more than overlaying a new cloak over the old. It requires a fundamental examination of all that the organisation stands for, at every level within the organisation's hierarchy, and in every relationship it has with others.

Clear asks how we avoid a world where, the greatness of intentions is not matched by the reality of experience, where the perversity of incentives undermines the chance of achieving good, and where coalitions have distorted the very aims they have proclaimed. A starting point is to facilitate the forming of the partnerships around a

checklist, like Harris', and then use that as the lens to examine all aspects of what you do as you travel on the journey towards a restorative city.

This keynote says that restorative working should continue to develop in an innovative way led by practitioners. Whilst, as has been shown, there is no consistency on what this will finally *be* like, there are pioneers who are trying to infuse restorative principles into the lives of professionals and the families. They are constantly forming and reforming new paradigms as they move away from the traditional paradigm of local authority working.

Concluding remarks

This keynote has tried to show that there is, presently, no consensus on what a restorative city is, but that there is dissatisfaction with the "dysfunctions" within the traditional paradigm of local authority working. Zehr goes on to describe the steps by which he believes paradigm change occurs: [e]ventually, though, the sense of dysfunction becomes so great that the model breaks down and is replaced by another...a variety of building blocks must be in place before a new synthesis is possible and a new common sense emerges.

In these early days of the development of the concept of the restorative city this is the place the local authorities find themselves– striving for a 'new common sense'.

The concept of the restorative city is a courageous aspiration. The process by which local authorities move away from the existing paternalistic paradigm, and create their own 'building blocks' has to be done with clear principles and values guiding their practice; with a strategy that embraces all tiers of the organisation; with engaging and empowering the participation of families; and with the identification and analysis of quantitative, as well as qualitative, data. If they do not do these things they will not achieve a paradigm shift, merely the adoption of the 'gloss' of the paradigm without any of the real practice and principle implications that such a change would require.

The development and understanding of evidence within this field is still unformed but requires a synthesis of the quantitative and qualitative, to take the debate further. The balance of academic rigor informed by, and informing, practice in the field needs to be done by cultivating, in the words of Berger and Quinney: "a writing that reaches a broader audience, not just a writing that impresses colleagues with our ability to master theoretical abstraction or mathematical technique. We need a writing that avoids esoteric language, that appeals to both intellect and emotions, seeking to inform and inspire…"

Nigel Richardson – Director of Children's services, Leeds said during the interview process:
…children live in families (however you define family) families create communities and communities create cities…in all the current conversations about 21st century infrastructures for cities…i.e. high speed rail, low carbon, super fast broadband etc. the idea of 'family' must be seen as the most important utility - yet it is currently the most undervalued and underused…that must change if we are serious about understanding the importance of relationships in how children grow up… Families will create communities and communities will create cities and those connections are the things that you need to invest in…Investing in those connections has to be about relationships, language and values, how I want to treat you and how you expect me to treat you…

The restorative city can deliver this vision. We must look with a critical lens at each step, engage in professional dialogue, empower families with the skills to develop **wilful independence** and be explicit and forceful about the vision we have.

Think about the elements of fair process:
Engagement

Explanation and
Expectation Clarity.

Especially expectation clarity – how clear are we in ensuring all parties know that as a result of us doing something different, something different will happen and that will change behaviours? *And that includes yours!* The frustration suffered by all parties because of a lack of expectation clarity is at the heart of a lot of dissatisfaction with change.

Let's not leave the agenda to be led by referencing constantly to present systems or let others co-opt the idea. The restorative city won't happen because it is a good thing to be. Conferences like this are a good starting point, or if you have started, a place from which to reflect. It is connections like those generated in this room that make the restorative movement stronger; but always remember the families we work with are rarely present in these gatherings, and for them to be engaged we really have to have a serious look at our practice and what that feels like to be on the receiving end.

I hope you don't stop striving to achieve the goal but beware semi-naked leaders proclaiming a brave new world.

Finally, when considering becoming a restorative city, or beginning the journey towards embedding restorative working within all aspects of the work of the local authority, I leave you with this question: does what you intend, "translate into practice guided by compassion, understanding, healing or recognition of our common humanity?" If so, the journey toward the concept of the city will be built on equality, relationships and restorative principles; and as such could be more rewarding than actually achieving it…and maybe that is all we can ask.

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