

Human Rights City

This briefing note is in response to the Chair's request for more information about what a Human Rights City is, drawing on the experience of the City of York, and what the potential might be for Swansea to adopt a similar approach in its work.

What is a Human Rights City

There are a number of organisations working to promote the idea of a Human Rights City. The main one – the World Human Rights Forum <http://www.whrf.org/> – identifies as its mission:

To unite the human rights activists and organizations around the globe to protect and to promote human rights, values and global wellbeing necessary for the creation of a better world order.

It further highlights its objectives as follows:

- *To unite human rights activists, lovers of peace and NGOs worldwide for the protection and promotion of human rights as enshrined in UDHR and other international documents.*
- *To assist its members in accomplishing their tasks for the creation of a better society and world.*
- *To empower its members around the world by acting as one strong and unified voice in the protection of political, economic and cultural rights at global, national and local levels.*
- *To serve its members by acting as their advocate and spokesman at the international level on issues of human rights*
- *To give greater voice to human rights activists and NGOs beyond their national borders.*
- *To recognize individuals and organizations by giving awards and recognitions for their contribution to the protection and promotion of human rights and values.*
- *To provide international conferences and symposia as for the promotion of human rights and values.*

Wikipedia identifies a Human Rights City as:

*A **Human Rights City** is a municipality that refers explicitly to the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) and other international human rights standards and/or law in their policies, statements, and programs. Analysts have observed growing numbers of such cities since 2000... The Human Rights City initiative emerged from the global [human rights movement](#), and it reflects efforts of activist groups to improve respect for human rights principles by governments and other powerful actors who operate at the local/community level. Because of their focus on local contexts, Human Rights Cities tend to emphasize [economic, social, and cultural rights](#) as they affect the lives of*

residents of cities and other communities and their ability to enjoy [civil and political human rights](#).

Human rights advocates describe a Human Rights City as “One whose residents and local authorities, through learning about the relevance of human rights to their daily lives (guided by a steering committee), join in ongoing learning, discussions, systematic analysis and critical thinking at the community level, to pursue a creative exchange of ideas and the joint planning of actions to realize their economic, social, political, civil and cultural human rights.” Human rights cities were defined at the 2011 World Human Rights Cities Forum as “both a local community and a [socio-political](#) process in a local context where human rights play a key role as fundamental values and guiding principles.” This framework has generated various practices in different cities.

Wikipedia provides the background to the UDHR as follows:

All [international human rights law](#) is based in the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), which was adopted in 1948. This document outlines the inalienable and fundamental rights of humankind that are protected regardless of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, religion, or any other social, economic, or political factor. The articles in the UDHR are not legally binding, but they are recognized as part of customary international law, and they authorize the development of binding international treaties, which countries may choose to sign and ratify. International human rights treaties and monitoring processes, however, privileges national governments and limits the role of local officials, whose cooperation in the implementation of international law is critical. The day-to-day work of implementing human rights standards often rests on the shoulders of local and regional authorities. They too are bound by these agreements. Local and regional authorities are often directly responsible for services related to health care, education, housing, water supply, environment, policing and also, in many cases, taxation-

There are now more than 100 cities worldwide reporting as Human Rights Cities, with the City of York being the only one in the UK at the time of writing, having adopted their declaration in April 2017. For a full list of cities, see the appendix at the end of this document.

What all of the cities’ approaches have at their heart is embedding human rights in a way that makes sense for their city. It is different in each city and relates to how partners in the city will prioritise areas of human rights, based on what is important to their local populations. They are marked by a partnership that makes a formal declaration about their approach and then a series of actions to implement them. The intentions relate to both improving the situation of some disadvantaged citizens, and also making the concepts of human rights more accessible and meaningful to local people.

The Declaration for the City of York is as follows:

York Human Rights City Declaration

York, in becoming a Human Rights City, embraces a vision of a vibrant, diverse, fair and safe community built on the foundations of universal human rights. This vision is shared by citizens and institutions in our city, including the City Council, North Yorkshire Police, voluntary organisations and faith communities.

We are building on York's own particular history of democratic innovation, philanthropy and an international outlook, all of which have shaped our commitment to social justice.

This declaration marks an ambition. A significant point in a journey, not a final destination. As the UK's first Human Rights City we are committed to making our vision real, putting fundamental rights at the heart of our policies, hopes and dreams for the future.

Who is involved

In each city, there is a local partnership that drives the participation and development of the Human Rights City approach. Membership varies from one city to the next, but in general they appear to have the municipal (local) government, voluntary and community organisations, educational institutions and faith-based organisations.

In York they have representatives from: the City of Sanctuary movement, York Citizens Advice, Explore York, York CVS (Centre for Voluntary Service), North Yorkshire Police, International Service, City of York Council, Friends of the Human Rights Defenders and the Centre for Applied Human Rights at the University of York.

York Human Rights City is funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and they have received funding from the Economic and Social Research Council in the past.

What they do

City of York has determined that they will have five priority areas and these are:

1. Education
2. Housing
3. Health
4. An adequate standard of living
5. Equality and non-discrimination.

They have developed a partnership performance framework that provides a baseline and regular reporting on indicators such as (the list is not exhaustive):

- Hate crime
- Educational attainment gap
- Foodbank usage
- Earnings gap between the 25th percentile and the median

- Statutory homelessness per 1000 households
- Life expectancy by ward

The full Indicator Baseline Report is available here

https://www.york.ac.uk/media/cahr/documents/York%20Human%20Rights%20Indicator%20Report_2016.pdf

York also has a focus on Pledges – both from an organisational perspective as well as individual. As at end of September, their website showed that 279 pledges have been made. The purpose is to ensure awareness is raised about human rights, and creates an atmosphere where rights are discussed on a regular basis, whether at work, home or school.

York identify four key elements to their strategy:

Advocacy

- *York: Human Rights City sits on the Fairness and Equalities Board and other relevant bodies at the City of York Council (CYC). We advise on current issues, and help provide trainings for staff at CYC and at other relevant local agencies. Please note that we do not provide an individual casework service.*

Networking

- *We act as a network for organisations, individuals and businesses concerned with human rights in York. If you have an event you would like to promote, help or advice with an issue or something raised through our advocacy work, please get in touch.*

Events

- *We hold a range of public events, from our annual Human Rights Culture and Film Festival, annual Human Rights Indicator meeting to public talks and workshops. Take a look at our events section for more details.*

Research

- *York: Human Rights City helps facilitate research on human rights issues in York and beyond. Past projects include improving hate crime reporting processes and assessing the North Yorkshire Police's rights based approach. We continue our work on human rights indicators for York.*

Considerations for Swansea

In considering whether Swansea can or should become a Human Rights City, the following considerations should be borne in mind.

Leadership and Passion – It is clear that adopting this kind of approach requires clear leadership and an individual or individuals who will champion it with a great deal of passion and commitment. It will not be meaningful nor impactful without this and therefore unlikely to provide added value. The model can provide for a new range of individuals to become involved in supporting a wider ideological agenda with the right leadership.

University involvement and leadership – Clearly in York's case it appears that York University has provided strong leadership to gain agreement on this approach, keep

it going and to provide the data and analysis that is fundamental to the performance framework. Swansea University has the Observatory, and to date this has focused on Children's Rights, rather than the wider Human Rights agenda, and it is hard to find on their website whether UWTSD have a similar focus. Within York University, there is a specific school that has developed expertise in this area. Having said this, there are more than 100 cities with Human Rights City status, and most of them do not have similar higher education involvement.

Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (WFGA) – The approach outlined in the weblinks and papers considered above show strong linkages to the approach as outlined in the WFGA. There are many similarities to the five ways of working and such an approach is likely to be well received by the Commissioner's Office.

Public Service Board (PSB) and wellbeing assessment, performance framework – Swansea PSB is in the process of defining its wellbeing objectives and actions. Given the emphasis in the Human Rights City literature on partnership working, the development of the local objectives, which have already been widely discussed with partners and the public, could provide a platform for agreement of the objectives for a Swansea Human Rights City approach. It would not make sense to have a separate range of objectives, so a conversation with the PSB about appetite would be appropriate.

Swansea's existing agenda/s – The idea and vision of a Human Rights City fits with Swansea's agenda very well. Indeed, York's website specifically highlights that it is also a City of Sanctuary and is Dementia Friendly. In Swansea, we can add our robust commitments to children's rights, Child Friendly and Age Friendly as well as these. The Human Rights City approach has the opportunity to put all of these under a single banner. A question may arise as to whether or not this agenda is already very crowded and a further initiative may not be received well by some. This is worthy of consideration and discussion.

Added value – Whilst there is a strong fit with Swansea's existing commitments, a question for further research is the extent to which adopting a Human Rights City approach will provide us with added value, and if so, what is that. We already have strong partnerships in key areas so unless the approach brings in additional resources, additional partners or a significant improvement in outcomes, it is unlikely to receive the strong support it would need to progress.

Resourcing – As highlighted in the text above, York receives funding from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and has previously had funding from other sources. It may be possible for Swansea to receive similar levels of external support, but dedicated resources will be needed to ensure that an initiative of this nature has the traction it needs.

Recommendations

Initial contact has been made with the York Human Rights City and a proposal that they present to a future meeting of the Swansea Public Service Board. PSB

members are requested to provide feedback on this approach and identify any particular questions that they would like to see covered in those conversations.

Chris Sivers
Director of People
10 November 2017

Appendix

Further information

York Human Rights City

<http://www.yorkhumanrights.org/>

Centre for Applied Human Rights, York University
Centre for Applied Human Rights (CAHR)

University of York

The Centre for Applied Human Rights (CAHR) is an interdisciplinary research and teaching centre. It is a friendly community of scholars and visiting practitioners who have a shared focus on the real world challenges of putting human rights into practice and protecting human rights defenders at risk. A focus on human rights defending and defenders shapes all the Centre's work.

www.york.ac.uk/cahr

<https://rightsinfo.org/york-human-rights-city-and-yours-could-be-next/>

The following cities have been formally designated as Human Rights Cities (list not yet updated to include York):

Africa

- [Walewale](#), Ghana
- [Korogocho](#), Kenya
- [Thies](#), Senegal
- [Timbuktu](#), Mali
- [Musha](#), Rwanda
- [Mogale](#), South Africa

Asia

- [Gwangju](#), South Korea (2003)
- Bucuy Municipality, Philippines
- [Nagpur](#), India
- [Kaohsiung](#), Taiwan
- [Wonosobo District](#), Indonesia
- [Bojonegoro District](#), Indonesia
- [Bandung](#), Indonesia (2015)

Europe

- [Graz](#), Austria (2001)
- [Bihac](#), Bosnia
- [Vienna](#), Austria (2014)
- [Utrecht](#), Netherlands (2015)

North America

- [Edmonton](#), AB, Canada (2003)

- [Winnipeg, MB, Canada](#) (2003) The [Canadian Museum for Human Rights](#) opened in this city on September 19, 2014
- [Washington D.C., United States](#) (2008)
- [Carrboro, NC, United States](#) (2009)
- [Chapel Hill, NC, United States](#) (2009)
- [Richmond, CA, United States](#) (2009)
- [Eugene, OR, United States](#) (2011)
- [Boston, MA, United States](#) (2011)
- [Pittsburgh, PA, United States](#) (2011)
- [Seattle, WA, United States](#) (2012)
- [Jackson, MS, United States](#) (2014)
- [Edina, MN, United States](#) (2016)
- [Mountain View, CA, United States](#) (2016)

South America

- [Rosario, Argentina](#) (1997)
- [Santa Cruz, Bolivia](#)
- [Porto Alegre, Brazil](#)
- [Temuco, Chile](#)