

Bringing The United Synagogue Strategic Review to Life



Building Vibrant and Engaged Communities at the Forefront of British Jewry

United Synagogue: Change in Progress

The United Synagogue Strategic Review report 'Building Vibrant and Engaged Communities at the Forefront of British Jewry' was published in February 2015. Commissioned by the US Trustees, the review set out to address the challenges of increasing disaffiliation and declining synagogue membership in the UK. It aimed to articulate a guiding policy for The US and to determine its future direction.

Its key messages are: to focus on building communities where Jews live now and where they are going to live; to transform communities into vibrant hubs of Jewish life; to continue to provide a strong Jewish infrastructure; and to seek to position The US at the forefront of the UK Jewry.



Children enjoying a 'colour war' at Tribe camp

This strategy is encapsulated in 40 wide-ranging recommendations. Some recommendations require a change in process, others are only achievable as a result of systemic change.

Successful implementation of the review has required us to address these recommendations head on. We have had to embrace change, take risks, make difficult decisions, challenge the status quo and move quickly, whilst, at the same time, being in constant consultation with our stakeholders. We have also had to prioritise and accept that we could not address all recommendations simultaneously.



Local lay leaders working together at the Inspired Jewish Leadership conference

This report outlines our progress, listing some of the changes, strategic work and innovations that have taken place in the last 18 months.

There is still a long way to go. Many questions have yet to be answered. However, it is my belief that if we remain unwavering in our commitment to putting communities at the heart of what we do, we have a strong chance of success.


Stephen Pack, President

Our Progress So Far

The Strategic Review made 40 recommendations, clustered into 12 key areas. The following is a brief summary of activity in each of these areas:



Mill Hill East Jewish Community hosted a family-friendly winter wonderland event.

1. Invest in growing Jewish areas across the UK

- Established the Communities of Potential (COP) Board to track Jewish growth, research opportunities and fund and nurture emerging communities
- Worked closely with local team to build the new Mill Hill East community
- Supporting the development of Ahavas Yisrael in Edgware
- Spearheaded the development of Jewish Hatfield and surrounding area
- Identified and connected with young Jewish population in East London and Colindale
- Launched the Community Development Fund (CDF) to encourage innovation and growth in existing communities.

Developing Jewish Hatfield at a public consultation through our COP Board

2. Renovate and reconfigure US properties as Jewish destinations

- Outstanding redevelopment projects completed, with several communities about to embark on new projects
- Communities undertaking new building projects are planning for spaces that are flexible, accessible and suited to use as community centres.



The redeveloped Highgate US interior

3. Develop varied and exciting offerings

- With a renewed central focus on Community Engagement, communities are supported in developing creative, original and segmented programming ideas
- More and more communities are enjoying Living and Learning's community Shabbatonim and heritage trips overseas and in the UK

- 'Living and Learning' newly-produced publications and online resources have been designed to enrich lifecycle events and inspire meaningful prayer, learning and experiences.

Enfield US have a whale of a time at their annual Tashlich Cruise



4. Prioritise engagement with Youth

- Tribe report 'Engaging the Next Generation' was commissioned and published. With a mission to create a future for our communities through engaging, educating and inspiring the next generation, the report defined clear objectives for Tribe's future work.
- In 2016 Tribe's share of the summer programme 'market' increased to its highest ever level
- Understanding the need to bring its schools and synagogues closer to each other, Tribe staff and communal Rabbis and Rebbetzins have been running increasing numbers of informal education programmes in US schools

Tribe's annual Purim party



- The commitment to Jewish schools has grown with three Scopus schools joining The US family of schools.
- An expanded 'Young US' offering is in place for those aged 21–35 including Minyan on the Move, regular Friday night dinners, social events and Cholent Fest.

5. Develop exceptional Rabbis

- A Rabbinic Careers Panel was established and has been working with stakeholders to address the challenges relating to rabbinic recruitment, development and conditions.
- A new Rabbinic Induction process has been introduced, the rabbinic recruitment process has been updated and initiatives related to development are scheduled to be rolled out over the next 12 months.
- The panel is currently addressing the issues of rabbinic salaries, housing and benefits and the long term financial security of rabbinic families

6. Attract strong and professional lay leadership

- The inaugural Inspired Jewish Leadership conference was held in July 2016 for current and future community leaders.
- Attracting over 100 participants, and with a wide-ranging programme including opportunities for consultations with keynote speakers, professionals and trustees, the conference was the launchpad for a broad and ongoing programme of support for HOs and lay leaders.
- The rolling programme includes small communities conferences and a mentoring programme for new chairs.

7. Improve member experience at important formal touch points



Delivering inspirational messages at the Inspired Jewish Leadership conference

- Wide range of engagement initiatives introduced or in development relating to:
 - New members and welcoming
 - Marriage authorisation and connecting couples to their communities
 - Families and children attending for CRP points
 - Formal and informal communications to members
 - Preventing default and retaining members

8. Codify and share best practice in community building

- 'Think Tank' emails share best practice and with follow-up support provided by team
- Annual regional forums: HO meetings and consultations encourage sharing of ideas and networking
- Synagogue performance barometer in development for launch later in the year

9. Represent the community's voice in society

- The US is now a regular contributor to mainstream media and is increasingly sought out as a commentator on faith matters. A number of media-trained spokesmen and spokeswomen have participated in a range of broadcasts including two US Rabbis who appear as regular speakers on Radio 2's Pause for Thought

Rabbi Hughes at BBC Radio 2



- The US social media presence in combination with You & US (sent to approximately 18,000 recipients) provides a way both to influence debate on matters of communal importance and to solicit grass roots responses.

10. Continue to provide best in-class religious infrastructure

- KLBD initiatives and campaigns in development for 2017 include:
 - Free supervision for functions for up to 175 people that are held at US halls
 - Appointment of a Simcha Co-ordinator to proactively encourage simcha families to use Kosher caterers

Members of the KLBD team showcasing products at one of many roadshows

11. Governance

- US Council approved change in Statutes to introduce rolling elections to the trustee body



- US Council working group has embarked on a review of local governance byelaws and structures

12. Interactions between Communities and the Centre

- A transparent payover (SCC) model has been introduced for 2017
- ‘At a glance’ data available to communities on a new online dashboard to support administration, pastoral work and strategic planning
- Communities can access marketing support including:
 - Building a communications plan
 - Using design software
 - E-newsletter software
 - Social media training

Other Headlines

Some areas were not covered by Strategic Review but remained strategic priorities. These include:

- Continuing to provide high quality support to our Community Care professionals and volunteers
- Broadening our social action agenda, including for example, the Tribe partnership with Tzedek
- Introducing a new safeguarding strategy to protect young people and vulnerable adults
- Working in partnership with Koren Publishers Jerusalem and, publishing the Weinstein Koren Machzor commemorating Yom Hashoah, Yom Hazikaron, Yom Haatzmaut and Yom Yerushalayim.
- Welcoming communities from other regions to join the US



Attendees engaging with a thought-provoking workshop at the US Community Cares conference



The redeveloped Birmingham Central Synagogue, the latest regional community to join The US (January 2017)

Let us know what you think

Implementation is well under way. However, there is still much more for us to do. For the change to be lasting and impactful, it is critical that we continue to consult with members and build your feedback into our plans.

If you would like to:

- comment on this update,
- be involved in any future consultation
- find out how you can get involved in your local community

Please contact Jo Grose at jgrose@theus.org.uk

Yellow is the colour at Tribe camp!



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www.theus.org.uk/strategicreview

E info@theus.org.uk
T 0208 343 8989

