

Tackling Extremism Taskforce Report

Purpose

For discussion and direction.

Summary

The Prime Minister's Taskforce on tackling radicalisation and extremism reported on 4 December. This report provides a summary of the report's conclusion and implications for local authorities.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

1. Note the publication of the Tackling Extremism Taskforce Report and its recommendations.
2. Consider whether the Board should write in response to ministers about the recommendations affecting local government.

Action

Officers to progress as directed.

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Tackling Extremism Taskforce Report

Background

1. The Prime Minister's Taskforce on Tackling Extremism was set up following the murder of Drummer Lee Rigby in Woolwich in May to look at whether the government was doing all it could to confront extremism and radicalisation. It met for the first time in June and concluded its work at the end of November. In its work the Taskforce considered a range of measures to confront extremism in communities, schools, prisons, faith institutions and universities.

The Taskforce's recommendations

2. The Taskforce looked at how the government could confront extremist ideology that leads to violence, divides communities and is used to recruit individuals to extremist causes, and which runs counter to fundamental values like freedom of speech, democracy and equal rights. The report from the Taskforce looks at a number of areas where there were gaps in the government's response. These include disrupting extremists; countering extremist narratives and ideology; preventing radicalisation; integration and stopping extremism in institutions.
3. Some of the key proposals are:
 - 3.1 Supporting organisations so they have the advice and support they need to confront and exclude extremists;
 - 3.2 Considering if there is a case for new types of order to ban groups which seek to undermine democracy or use hate speech, including new civil powers like those proposed for tackling ASB which could be used to target extremists;
 - 3.3 New powers for the Charity Commission to tackle abuse of charitable status and tax avoidance and fraud;
 - 3.4 Ensure the police properly log extremist dimensions in hate crime, and share information with other countries on right wing extremists;
 - 3.5 Building the capabilities of communities and civil society organisations to campaign against extremist material;
 - 3.6 Work with internet companies to restrict access to terrorist material online;
 - 3.7 Ensure people working on the front line to tackle extremism have the full support of their local authority by taking steps to intervene where councils are not taking the problem seriously; and make delivery of the Prevent strategy and the 'Channel' programme within it a legal requirement;
 - 3.8 Set up a dedicated public communications platform to allow communities to challenge extremist views;
 - 3.9 Support projects that demonstrate communities coming together such as celebrating the 'Big Iftar';
 - 3.10 Protect children from extremist views in schools by inspecting and assessing their measures to protect children from extremist material and improve oversight of religious supplementary schools by introducing a voluntary code of practice;
 - 3.11 Work with universities to find trained Muslim chaplains;
 - 3.12 Restrict the ability of extremist and terrorist prisoners to radicalise other prisoners, tighten the rules on legal correspondence so prisoners cannot use it to smuggle

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extremist material out of prison, and support prisoners with extremist views when released for example through the 'Channel' programme.

Implications for local authorities

4. The only recommendations directed at local government within the report are built around central intervention where councils are not taking the problem of tackling extremism seriously and to give statutory strength to the Prevent strategy and the 'Channel' programme within it. It is not clear at this stage on what basis the Taskforce took the view that there are areas where councils do not take seriously the need to address extremism, or what form central intervention would take.
5. There is significant evidence to suggest the importance councils attach to dealing with extremism. The national Special Interest Group (SIG) established by Blackburn with Darwen and Luton Borough Councils for tackling far right activity has 42 member authorities. The SIG has provided a forum for identifying and sharing best practice which has relevance to addressing extremism across the political spectrum, and has already started to consider what further work it could do to assist councils around the Prevent agenda. One of the areas of work the SIG identified going forward are issues within the government's approach that the Board has previously identified between DCLG's Integration work and the Home Office's Prevent Strategy as the lack of linkages between them presents real challenges at a local level due to the funding allocations and perceptions amongst communities about the Prevent agenda.
6. The usefulness of central intervention is also questioned by the proposals from the SIG for further work in 2014. In their examination of what more could be done the SIG also highlighted the need for greater flexibility to take a place-based approach as being important because the nature of extremism and the activity extremists engage in varies from community to community. With different local drivers for extremist activity, local partners are best placed to know what they are and how to go about addressing the particular issues in their area.
7. Officers have sought additional information about how government sees the intervention process working and what the introduction of a statutory duty to deliver the Prevent agenda would mean for councils – including whether there would be funding from councils for what would be a new duty. An oral update will be provided at the Board meeting on this. Subject to this update members may wish to consider writing to ministers in response to the report seeking clarification on what government envisages the intervention process to be, how the statutory duty would work, what new funding would be available to councils, what else partners in the police and security services think local authorities should be doing, and how the government envisages central intervention working when there are issues amongst local communities about the Prevent Strategy that mean central government direction is as likely to undermine work as drive productive activity.
8. Members are asked to:
 - 8.1 Note the publication of the Tackling Extremism Taskforce Report and its recommendations.
 - 8.2 Consider whether the Board should write in response to ministers about the recommendations affecting local government.



**Safer and Stronger
Communities Board Meeting**

13 January 2014

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Financial Implications

9 There are no financial implications arising from this report.