

3 March 2014

Tackling Extremism Taskforce Report

Purpose

For information.

Summary

At its meeting in January the Board discussed the report by the Prime Minister's task force on tackling radicalisation and extremism and agreed there should be a response from the Board. Following the Board meeting officers have been in contact with the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT) about the task force's work. This report provides an update on how the OSCT is planning to implement the recommendations from the task force report.

Recommendations

Members:

- i. Note the update on how the OSCT is planning to implement the recommendations from the task force report.
- ii. Endorse Lead Members proposals to seek a cross-party meeting with the Minister for Security and Immigration to raise the issues with the proposed approach to working with councils on tackling extremism and radicalisation.

Action

Officers to progress as directed.

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Tackling Extremism Taskforce Report

Background

1. The Prime Minister's task force on Tackling Extremism was set up following the murder of Drummer Lee Rigby in Woolwich in May 2013 to look at whether the government was doing all it could to confront extremism and radicalisation. The task force reported at the end of November. One of the report's recommendations proposed that there would be intervention where councils were not taking the tackling of extremism seriously, and also that delivery of the Prevent strategy, along with the 'Channel' programme, would be a statutory requirement for councils.

Issues

2. The Safer and Stronger Communities Board considered the task force's report at its meeting in January, and decided that the LGA should respond to the report, highlighting the work local government has been doing around Prevent and to have a clearer understanding about the recommendations. Officers met OSCT officials on 14 February to discuss how the Home Office will be implementing the task force recommendations.
3. It remains unclear what evidence has led the Government to propose this course of action. It also remains unclear which, if any, authorities are not taking tackling extremism seriously and what, in this context, a high performing local authority would look like. We would favour an approach which places Prevent in the wider context of other work at local level such as closer integration with early intervention programmes and troubled families work. Although we commend the Channel project and its achievements, it is the strength of sharing information and strong partnerships which may mean councils taking different approaches in different localities and this is the key to making progress and embedding the work of Prevent in councils, rather than new statutory duties.
4. Placing delivery of the 'Channel' programme on a statutory footing as recommended in the task force report will require new legislation and funding to follow under the new burdens doctrine. The Home Office is therefore considering whether provisions could be included in a bill in the Queen's Speech. They are also looking at the options around making delivery of the Prevent strategy a statutory requirement. This need not involve new legislation, but could be achieved for example through the issuing of guidance to local partnerships.
5. The task force report has also discussed with the Board's Community Safety advisers at their meeting in January. The advisers from authorities where there was a Prevent co-ordinator noted there was pressure from the Home Office to standardise their job descriptions and reporting structures. There did not appear to be a recognition from the OSCT that different councils had different communities and therefore a different response was needed for example in Greenwich than in other London boroughs like Newham. The advisers also felt there were issues around information sharing and the effectiveness of counter-terrorism local profiles. In some areas, the police and security services did not appear to appreciate the information that local authorities had and the restrictions placed on who was briefed made it difficult to work up an action plan. We may therefore assume that some of this feedback has influenced the Home Office in their thinking. We are also

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taking soundings from ACPO and Police and Crime Commissioners to understand their perspective on this issue.

Next steps

6. Lead members considered the task force report at their meeting in February and agreed that new legislation and duties was disproportionate to the issue and that a meeting with the Minister for Security and Immigration should be sought on a cross-party basis to discuss the task force recommendations and to explore how their concerns might be addressed. A letter seeking this meeting has already been sent. Lead members also recommended that other ministerial channels for influencing the government's position were explored.
7. Members are asked to:
 - 7.1. Note the update on how the OSCT is planning to implement the recommendations from the task force report.
 - 7.2. Endorse Lead Members proposals to seek a cross-party meeting with the Minister for Security and Immigration to raise concerns about the proposed approach to working with councils on tackling extremism and radicalisation.

Financial Implications

8. There are no financial implications arising from this report.