

26 June 2017

## **Prevent and counter extremism**

### **Purpose**

For discussion and direction.

### **Summary**

This paper is to update the Board on recent work around Prevent and counter-extremism and set out proposals for future work.

### **Recommendations**

That the Board:

1. Note the work already underway around Prevent and counter extremism set out in paragraphs 12, 13 and 16; and
2. Approve the proposed programme of work set out in paragraph 17 subject to any views expressed in discussion.

### **Actions**

Officers to take forward the programme as amended in light of members' comments.

**Contact officer:** Charles Loft  
**Position:** Senior Adviser  
**Phone no:** 020 7665 3874  
**Email:** Charles.loft@local.gov.uk

26 June 2017

## **Prevent and Counter Extremism**

### **Background**

1. Since March there have been four terrorist attacks (Westminster, Manchester, London Bridge and Finsbury Park). In addition to the appalling impact on the victims and their families, such incidents have a wider impact on community cohesion with a reported increase in hate crimes in the wake of the Manchester and London Bridge attacks.
2. As two of the attacks occurred during the general election campaign they also raised counter terrorism and counter extremism work further up the political agenda. The debate during the election campaign immediately after the London Bridge attack covered resources for the police and security services, including the powers available to them to identify those on the path to becoming violent extremists, and how to reduce the funding available to those spreading extremist ideology.

### **Contest, Prevent and Counter Extremism**

3. Part of the debate also centred around the effectiveness of work to prevent people being radicalised to the point they are willing to commit acts of violence. The UK's counter terrorism strategy is called Contest. First developed in 2003 the latest version was published in 2011, and it has four strands: Pursue (catching terrorists before they can carry out an attack); Protect (ensuring infrastructure and crowded places are less vulnerable to attack); Prepare (planning on how to respond when an attack occurs); and Prevent (stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism).
4. The Prevent strategy is the most controversial element of Contest. A number of the general election manifestos made commitments about Prevent, while the Government had intended to publish a review of the Contest strategy had the election not intervened. We anticipated that this would include changes to the Prevent programme.
5. Councils, along with a number of other bodies, are under a statutory duty, through provisions in the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act, to prevent people being drawn into terrorism. The Home Office has identified around 50 priority areas to work with, and these are supported with funding for Prevent coordinator posts and their related work.
6. As well as the Contest and Prevent strategies there is also a Counter-Extremism strategy, which was published in October 2015, and followed on from an examination of what was being done to confront extremism and radicalisation following the murder of Lee Rigby in 2013.
7. Under the Counter-Extremism strategy funding has been made available to a number of counter extremism priority areas – there is a degree of overlap between these and the Prevent priority areas. As of April 2017, 39 councils had accepted Home Office support (made to 45 councils) to fund a community coordinator to lead their counter-extremism work (15 coordinators were in post and 12 more were proceeding through pre-employment checks. Three local authorities had decided not to proceed).

26 June 2017

### **The new government's approach**

8. The Conservative manifesto promised a number of counter-extremist measures that would mirror the way in which 'civil society and the state took on racism in the twentieth century'. These measures included introducing new offences and new aggravated offences, and by establishing 'a Commission for Countering Extremism to identify examples of extremism and expose them, to support the public sector and civil society, and help the government to identify policies to defeat extremism and promote pluralistic values'.
9. Following the London Bridge and Finsbury Park attacks the Prime Minister set out some specific priorities for the government. In her speech on 4 June the Prime Minister identified four things that needed to change: the extremist ideology needed to be defeated; there needed to be greater regulation of cyberspace to prevent the spread of extremism and terrorist planning including through international agreements; more robust action was needed to identify and stamp out extremism in the UK, which would entail difficult and often embarrassing conversations and a move away from living in a series of separated, segregated communities; and finally there needed to be a review of Britain's counter-terrorism strategy.
10. After the attack at Finsbury Park, the Prime Minister has explicitly stated that counter extremist efforts would target the far right and islamophobia as well as Islamic extremists. One in four of those referred to the government's Prevent anti-radicalisation programme are now far-right radicals and in some areas, far-right extremists outnumber Islamist extremist suspects.
11. The government's approach will therefore build on what has gone before, rather than being a radical departure from previous policies.

### **LGA work on counter-extremism and Prevent**

12. Over the last eighteen months the LGA has worked closely with the Prevent and Counter-Extremism teams in the Office of Security and Counter Terrorism (OSCT) and the Counter Extremism Unit (CEU) in the Home Office, as well as officials in the Department of Communities and Local Government, about how councillors and councils can be supported across the Prevent and counter-extremism agendas.
13. The LGA has engaged in a number of projects around counter-extremism:
  - 13.1. The Home Office, DCLG, the LGA and Luton Council have worked to re-established the special interest group (SIG) originally set up in 2013 to help councils deal with English Defence League (EDL) activity. Coventry University has been commissioned to assist in establishing the SIG, and has produced a guide to the existing resources available to councils around this agenda joint badged with the LGA.
  - 13.2. Further work was delayed by the change of government but by March this year Leeds had agreed to co-chair the SIGCE. The launch has been postponed by the election, and the steering group (LGA, Leeds, Luton and the Home Office) have

26 June 2017

been unable to formally meet during that period. However the two councils and LGA have met and are establishing a relationship. The SIGCE will deliver a programme of work aimed at improving the delivery of counter extremism activity by councils, in particular, but not only, through the Home Office-funded community coordinators available to the 45 priority areas.

- 13.3. A Knowledge Hub group has been set up to serve the SIGCE to share information quickly, hold webinars, share documents and discuss relevant topics. The work of the SIG and the LGA's Knowledge Hub group offer a means for the CEU to reach out to councils outside the priority areas already identified.
- 13.4. The LGA has co-chaired, with the relevant Minister, two Home Office round tables on counter-extremism for councils.
14. LGA has also worked closely with the OSCT to establish the Prevent Champions Network (PCN). This is a network of councillors supporting and advising other elected members on Prevent, championing Prevent in local communications and leading sessions in a series of regional events for elected members organised by the Home Office. This programme of events is now likely to be dovetailed with a series of LGA Leadership Essentials events on Prevent.

#### **Publications pending and proposed future work**

15. The LGA received funding for community cohesion and counter extremism work last financial year. A further £130,000 (approximately) is available for the current financial year. Some of this year's funding could be used to pay for a dedicated officer to deliver the proposed programme of work.
16. In 2016-17 funding supported the following projects:
  - 16.1. A Leadership Essentials programme on counter-extremism in February 2017. The programme covered understanding extremism, assessing national and local risks, distinctions with delivering the Prevent duty, effective approaches to tackling extremism, scrutiny of local strategies and how to challenge extremist ideologies.
  - 16.2. A scrutiny guide for councillors, drafted by the Centre for Public Scrutiny covering both Prevent and counter-extremism, due to be available online shortly. This will:
    - 16.2.1. provide councillors with the tools to diagnose issues and recognise opportunities for their area to improve the way it tackles Prevent and counter-extremism;
    - 16.2.2. identify practical solutions for councils wishing to rethink and redesign their approach, including ways of working, methods and techniques to adopt, and issues and factors to consider;
    - 16.2.3. include examples of effective leadership and how it is displayed in relation to these council functions; and

26 June 2017

- 16.2.4. include a set of suggested questions that might be used through the scrutiny process.
- 16.3. An update of the Managing Far Right Activity toolkit commissioned by the SIGCE's predecessor in 2013. The updated toolkit will provide councillors and council officers (as well as civil servants and others) with an understanding of recent developments in the far right and anti-minority activist scene, and will enhance the capacity of local authorities to effectively respond to their activities. It will consist of an overview and a number of case-studies. This work should start to come online over the summer.
- 16.4. The LGA has also commissioned work aimed at providing councillors and officers with background on the communities that make up the UK's Muslim population, the historical backgrounds to their migration and a guide to faith subdivisions as well as a range of other information. It is intended to raise awareness and enhance basic literacy around the subject of Islam in Britain. It is inevitable that some office holders or officers will serve or engage with communities different from those in which they have grown up or in which they reside. This publication is aimed at those who feel there may be gaps in their knowledge. It will also help those who wish to challenge myths and explain basic facts.

#### **Future work**

17. Given the funding now available we are proposing a programme of work on counter extremism and community cohesion for the current year that will include:
- 17.1. Five further Leadership Essentials events. Two of these will cover counter-extremism and three will cover Prevent. Further Prevent sessions may be held subject to discussion and funding from OSCT. One counter extremism and one Prevent event will be held in Leeds. The remainder will be at our usual Warwick venue.
- 17.2. A conference on counter extremism and community cohesion for councillors and officers. This will feature sessions on some of the work below, in particular around revised government strategies.
- 17.3. A study of the exploitation of criminal allegations against minority ethnic groups by extremists who use social media and the internet to mount campaigns around allegations as a way of broadening their appeal. Preliminary work on this has started.
- 17.4. Islamist extremism toolkit. This is envisaged as being an equivalent to the far right toolkit referred to above. In particular it will assist councils in identifying and tackling front organisations and other groups that may seek to work with councils but pose reputational risks, threaten community cohesion, and promote extremist views. This could be commissioned from academia and either LGA-published or issued through the SIGCE.
- 17.5. Guidance on any new programmes that emerge from the policy reviews promised before or during the election campaign.

26 June 2017

17.6. Prevent support strategy. This will encompass several elements:

- 17.6.1. The Europe-wide Strong Cities Network has emphasised the key role trust plays between the public and public authorities in tackling extremism. In Denmark communities seem happier than in the UK about council and police intervention, and contacting authorities with concerns. A key factor in this is working with the extended families of those vulnerable to radicalisation. The Home Affairs select committee report refers to the shortcomings of UK policy on this. This will look to explore whether similar approaches could be used in the UK.
- 17.6.2. Providing members with accounts of the successes of Prevent and also the stories behind its supposed failures. This would challenge critics to explain 'if you got rid of Prevent, how would you deliver the positive aspects' and also aim to bust myths about the programme.
- 17.6.3. Prevent communications toolkit. There are several potential elements to this - promoting policy and responding to criticism, counter-narratives, improving digital literacy, how to communicate during events or in response to media stories etc. It may be combined with the previous item.
- 17.6.4. Digital literacy toolkit – this could involve promoting existing Australian work or commissioning new work. Improving digital literacy is key to providing counter-narratives and challenge. This work could draw on existing LGA work on online scams and could also consider legal issues around gathering evidence about activities of groups.
- 17.6.5. Working with mental health in a Prevent context. A significant proportion of radicalised individuals have mental health issues. We can work on joining this up with other lobbying around resourcing mental health provision and on a guide for council staff to improve coordination. The starting point will be research about likely extent of the issue to inform lobbying.
- 17.6.6. Dovetail toolkit. Dovetail is a series of pilots in which councils have delivered the Channel programme. Before the election, the Government's intention was to roll this out to all councils. Assuming it does so, we will provide a guide for councils based on the experience of the early adopters. The pilots are due to complete in July and September, followed by formal evaluation and recommendations to Ministers. This may need to be resourced separately as a new burden.
- 17.6.7. Lessons learned from dealing with incidents. Case studies on lessons learned from recent events in Manchester and London about councils' role in dealing with attacks and their aftermath. This could cover emergency planning responses or just broad principles such as the role of communications and social media. This will need scoping with the relevant authorities, which it is still too soon to do.

26 June 2017

17.6.8. Stronger Cities Network. Launched at the United Nations in September 2015, the Strong Cities Network (SCN) is the first ever global network of mayors, municipal-level policy makers and practitioners united in building social cohesion and community resilience to counter violent extremism in all its forms, with the rationale that local governments are often better placed to lead on these issues. This project will promote SCN guidance and promote relevant work by UK cities to the SCN, establishing relationships and information exchange channels that can survive post-Brexit. The starting point will be to meet SCN and discuss how we can build these links.

17.6.9. Promoting and disseminating deradicalisation and exit strategies. This approach is likely to become a growing issue with returnees from Syria, but could also cover holistic support and effective interventions. The Home Office may already be aware of good examples. The Children's and Young People's team has already done some work with the Home office around returnees and we anticipate it will be contacting councils shortly setting out a support offer around this. Our work may therefore be either around ensuring funding or ensuring dissemination of materials.

17.6.10. Counter demonstrations to far right marches. The ritual of anti-far right demonstrations does little to prevent such demonstrations and arguably these counter-demonstrations serve chiefly to increase the disruption to residents lives caused by far right demonstrations. Community-based alternatives could be more effective. This would be a research project on the impact of counter demonstrations and alternative approaches. This could be carried out as part of the SIGCE's work programme.

17.6.11. Inclusive cities. An American approach to welcoming refugees. The LGA could collate case studies for members. This could also feature as part of the leadership courses and could link up with other LGA work around welcoming refugees.

18. The proposed programme of work will leave the LGA better informed and better placed to lobby on behalf of councils in regards to any legislative changes in these policy areas.

### **Implications for Wales**

19. The WLGA does not commission the LGA to work on wider improvement issues. This service is provide directly by WLGA, and the funding for this work is provided by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG). This work will therefore be directed at supporting English authorities.

### **Financial Implications**

20. The proposed work is funded by the memorandum of understanding between the LGA and DCLG.

26 June 2017

**Next steps**

21. Members are asked to:

21.1. Note the work already underway around Prevent and counter extremism set out in paragraphs 12, 13 and 16; and

21.2. Approve the proposed programme of work set out in paragraph 17 subject to any views expressed in discussion.