

Independent Review of Prevent

Purpose of report

For direction.

Summary

Lord Carlile is leading an independent review of Prevent, which is due to report to the Secretary of State in June 2020. A recent call for evidence was launched inviting responses around a number of themes. This paper explores some of the issues for local authorities in Prevent delivery and seeks members' views in order to inform the LGA's submission.

Recommendation/s

That the Board considers the issues raised in the paper.

Action/s

Officers to follow up as directed.

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Independent Review of Prevent

Background

1. In February 2019, the government committed to carrying out an independent review of Prevent. The review must be completed, together with a government response to it, by 12 August 2020. Over the summer, Lord Alex Carlile was appointed to lead the review.
2. The review will be carried out in four phases: information gathering; listening and engagement; analysis and testing findings; report and recommendations. It will report to the Home Secretary by the end of June 2020.
3. As part of the second phase, a recent call for evidence has been published setting out a number of questions for response under the following themes:
 - 3.1. Is Prevent achieving its objectives?
 - 3.2. How effectively is Prevent being delivered at national and local levels?
 - 3.3. How effectively does Prevent interact with other safeguarding and vulnerability strategies?
 - 3.4. How effective is the statutory duty and how effectively is it being implemented?
 - 3.5. How could Prevent be improved to respond to justified criticisms and complaints?
 - 3.6. What should the government consider in the development of Prevent over the next 5 years as the threats evolve, to best engage and support those vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism?
4. As well as feeding in views in response to the above themes, this call for evidence also provides an opportunity to feed in examples of good practice from across local authorities, and to highlight some of the work the LGA has been doing to support councils in delivering both the Prevent duty and work on related policy areas.
5. This paper suggests some broad themes on which the Board may wish to comment, to inform the LGA's response to the call.

Prevent background

6. Prevent forms one part of the UK's counter terrorism strategy, CONTEST; the latest version of which was published in June 2018, partially in response to the terrorist attacks in 2017. The overarching aim of the Prevent strand is to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. It sits alongside three other strands in the CONTEST strategy: Pursue (catching terrorists before they can carry out an attack); Protect (ensuring infrastructure and crowded places are less vulnerable to attack); and Prepare (planning on how to respond when an attack occurs) – these other strands are not being examined as part of Lord Carlile's review.

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7. The CONTEST strategy describes three objectives for Prevent:
 - 7.1. Tackle the causes of radicalisation and respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism
 - 7.2. Safeguard and support those most at risk of radicalisation through early intervention, identifying them and offering support
 - 7.3. Enable those who have already engaged in terrorism to disengage and rehabilitate.
8. The Prevent strand is often regarded as the most controversial element of CONTEST. Operating in the non-criminal space, it has a number of implications for local authorities and partners. Underpinned by a statutory duty under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, specific authorities (including all councils, schools, further and higher education, health, prisons and probation, police) are required to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. In the main this involves frontline staff in these sectors being aware of radicalisation as a safeguarding issue within their wider safeguarding responsibilities, with a duty to act appropriately on any concerns.
9. CONTEST and Prevent are separate from the government's Counter-Extremism Strategy and Integrated Communities strategy (the former is currently under review, with a new Counter-Extremism Strategy anticipated next year, likely to be informed by the work of the Commission for Countering Extremism).

Councils and Prevent

10. Councils' role in Prevent delivery generally covers the first two objectives listed under paragraph 7, above (with disengagement and rehabilitation work primarily of concern for probation and prison services).
11. The Prevent duty requires local authorities to establish or make use of existing multi-agency groups to assess the local counter-terrorism risk picture, coordinate activity and to put in place arrangements to monitor the impact of safeguarding work.
12. Statutory Prevent duty guidance was published alongside the 2015 Act setting out detailed responsibilities for different sectors, followed by a supplementary toolkit published in 2018 for local authorities and partners. The toolkit and self-assessment benchmark cover: risk assessment processes; establishing a multi-agency partnership board; producing a Prevent action plan; referral processes; Channel; training; venue hire and IT policies; community engagement; problem-solving/disruption activity; communications (the latter two are regarded as 'good practice activity'; for the others the guidance sets out outcomes which the Home Office regards as 'expectation of compliance' with the duty).
13. One of the key elements of the Prevent strategy for local authorities is Channel. Section 36 of the 2015 Act requires local authorities and others to provide support for people who are vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. This process, known as Channel, aims to provide support to individuals at an early stage and help protect them from radicalisation. It uses a multi-agency approach to identify those at risk, assess the nature and extent of that risk and

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develop a plan for support. Participation in the Channel programme is voluntary and confidential. Many types of support are available, addressing educational, vocational, mental health, and other vulnerabilities; ideological mentoring is common. Statutory Channel guidance (which is currently being updated) sets out how partners, including councils and the police, should work within this process.

14. Government has been keen to emphasise that Prevent sits alongside wider safeguarding responsibilities for local authorities. This approach underpins the roll out of the 'Dovetail' programme, which will transfer responsibilities for some elements of Channel from the police to local government.
15. The Home Office has identified around 40 priority areas which they deem particularly at risk, which are supported with funding for dedicated Prevent coordinator posts and their related work. Coordinators are employed by local authorities and are responsible for building partnerships in communities, overseeing the delivery of local action plans to respond to the risk of radicalisation, and working with partners to embed safeguarding activity in statutory services including social care, health and education. These areas are reviewed annually, which has funding implications for authorities who drop out of the top 40 list. Funding may be used for specialist posts (such as Prevent engagement officers, or Prevent education officers), and to commission local projects.
16. Non-priority areas do not receive any specialist funding from the Home Office to support work around Prevent (although accessing training, such as WRAP (Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent) and Hydra simulation training for Channel, is free for local authorities). While the roll out of Dovetail may help support this with new cross-authority coordinators managing the Channel process, there is no specific resource to develop local projects, or build capacity or resilience.

Issues

17. The following themes are suggested as the key areas on which to focus our response:
 - 17.1. Addressing reputational issues.
 - 17.2. Local implementation and implications for councils.
 - 17.3. Ensuring a joined-up approach across related policy areas.

Reputation

18. Prevent remains a sensitive issue with different views about the policy area amongst councils, other sectors, and communities more widely.
19. Prevent is regarded with suspicion by some and continues to be divisive. A number of campaign groups have voiced particular opposition to Prevent - most prominently, these include concerns that some, predominantly Muslim, communities feel disproportionately and unfairly 'targeted' by the approach. Government has been keen to stress how the strategy

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covers all forms of extremism, but a sense of distrust remains for communities in some areas.

20. The Home Office has acknowledged that there have been problems with the strategy in the past, but have argued that some of the ongoing concerns around Prevent are based on myths or deliberate misrepresentation, and that improved practices and training, for example on referrals and spotting warning signs, has improved the quality of referrals and programme delivery.
21. The Casey review in 2016 observed work being delivered under the Prevent programme, commenting that much of it was impressive and heartening and that staff across the public sector who were engaged and confident in delivering Prevent, “should be proud and unapologetic about the important work they do to keep us safe”.
22. Following the Manchester Arena terror attack in 2017, Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham announced his own review of the region’s counter-terror strategy, criticising Prevent for being “too top-down”. The outcomes of the review were broadly supportive of Prevent, but found that further work needed to be done to sell the benefits of the Prevent approach, address inaccurate information about it, and to persuade communities to make referrals when they have concerns.
23. The Home Office has been keen to encourage local areas to develop positive and proactive communications around Prevent, but some are reluctant to do so – and, for obvious reasons, there are difficulties in persuading individuals who have successfully engaged in the Prevent process to tell their story. That said, while there remain sensitivities around this subject, it is clear that promoting positive stories and addressing popular ‘myths’ around Prevent have persuaded some to change their minds.
24. Whether or not negatives perceptions about Prevent are justified, ultimately this is likely to have impacted on the success of the approach - in some areas advocacy groups have worked to dissuade individuals and families from actively engaging with the programme or with wider counter-extremism work. Channel statistics suggest that the majority of case referrals continue to relate to concerns around Islamist extremism, however the number of individuals consenting to receive support via Channel is proportionally much lower for this group than for others such as extreme right-wing referrals. More broadly, many argue that building a more community-led approach to Prevent is vital to ensuring its success.
25. One of the criticisms of Prevent is that it is not regarded as sufficiently transparent - adding to suspicions about how it operates. There have been calls for greater transparency to include establishing a broader set of evidence-based approaches and interventions to help further good practice and increase clarity around decision-making processes.

Local delivery

26. In our response to the Commission for Countering Extremism’s call for evidence earlier this year we set out how councils, working with local partners and communities, are best placed to understand the complexities and context of local extremism issues and determine what works in response.

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27. That said, the Home Office has been undertaking recent work to support consistency in approaches across areas through producing a Prevent toolkit, peer reviews, and additional training on for example managing extremists and radicalisation. Additional investment in national training might further support the understanding and consistent use of language in Prevent and better understanding of terminology.
28. Councils have reported concerns around increasing responsibilities around Prevent (particularly when viewed alongside wider CONTEST delivery). This comes both in the context of limited resourcing for local authorities (particularly those not in receipt of national Prevent funding) – and, where councils are anticipating they will receive resources, some have reported that uncertainties over funding and delays in awarding grants have presented difficulties, including breakdowns in relationships with community groups with whom councils were hoping to work.
29. We have previously commented on the importance of local leaders in this policy space, of the vital need for effective engagement with local communities on sensitive issues, and acknowledged the need to be both braver around difficult cohesion and extremism issues. Supporting councillors' leadership role in particular has been the focus for much of our work on Prevent, counter-extremism and cohesion over recent years, notably though the delivery of our Leadership Essentials courses and our support for the work of the Special Interest Group on Countering Extremism (SIGCE).

Policy approach

30. We have long argued that a joined-up approach across Prevent, other elements of Contest, counter-extremism and cohesion and integration is needed at both local and national levels (while recognising that the focus for related policy areas may differ) to ensure work streams are effectively aligned, and areas are supported (locally, and regionally, across authority boundaries) in a coherent and strategic way. Investing in a long-term and holistic approach is vital in order to address some of the broader issues that may contribute to individuals becoming radicalised (as well as tackling the wider harms and challenges that counter-extremism and integration policies cover). It is worth noting here that many councils view social inclusion as the starting point in their strategic approaches to tackling extremism and radicalisation concerns. This approach, with its emphasis on prevention, chimes with a public health approach to preventing violent extremism, which is advocated by some.
31. Furthermore, the Prevent review should consider the outcomes of the Commission for Countering Extremism's work; the anticipated new counter-extremism strategy; and the ongoing work being undertaken as part of the Integration Area pilots.

Implications for Wales

32. Welsh authorities are subject to the Prevent duty, and the remit for the review covers delivery in England, Wales and Scotland.
33. Officers will liaise with the WLGA to ensure any views are collated.

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Financial Implications

34. The planned focus group for councils in November will involve a small cost, which will be met from existing budgets.

Next steps

35. Officers to collate feedback from Board members in order to inform the LGA's response. The LGA will also be hosting a roundtable for councils on 19 November to gauge further views and examples of good practice, ahead of the deadline for submissions on 9 December.