

Meeting: Safer and Stronger Communities Board

Date: 23 March 2023



Independent Review of Prevent

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

The Independent Review of Prevent was published in February, alongside the Government's response and plans for implementing the report's recommendations. This paper provides a summary of some of the key elements of both documents, and some initial concerns from councils in response.

Is this report confidential? No

Recommendations

That the Board notes the update on the review report and Government response and considers whether the LGA should write to the Home Office to reflect councils' feedback.

Contact details

Contact officer: Rachel Duke

Position: Adviser

Phone no: 07464 652612

Email: rachel.duke@local.gov.uk

Background

1. The UK's counter terrorism strategy, CONTEST comprises four strands: Pursue (catching terrorists before they carry out an attack); Protect (making infrastructure and similar targets less vulnerable); Prepare (planning responses in the event of an attack) and Prevent (stopping people from becoming terrorists or support terrorism).
2. The overarching aim of the Prevent strand is to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism, with three core objectives to:
 - tackle the causes of radicalisation and respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism
 - safeguard and support those most at risk of radicalisation through early intervention, identifying them and offering support
 - enable those who have already engaged in terrorism to disengage and rehabilitate.
3. The Prevent strand is underpinned by a statutory Prevent duty under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, which places a duty on specific authorities, including councils, to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.
4. Alongside the legislative duty, statutory guidance outlines the responsibilities of local authorities in further detail. This includes:
 - risk assessment and action planning to address those risks
 - ensuring referral processes are in place for those at risk of radicalisation
 - establishing multi-agency Channel panels to produce and deliver a plan of support to individuals at risk of radicalisation (this might include theological support through an intervention provider, mental health provision or eg support in finding employment, housing, education etc)
 - training for staff to ensure those at risk can be identified and referred for support
 - policies to ensure local authority venues and IT networks are not used by radicalising influencers or to access extreme content
 - working alongside other partners and engaging with communities and civil society groups about the duty.

Independent Review of Prevent

5. An Independent Review of Prevent was announced as part of the Counter Terrorism and Border Security Act 2019. Its Chair, William Shawcross, was appointed in January 2021, after the original lead had to stand down, and a call for evidence ran until June 2021, which the LGA contributed to in December 2019.
6. After some significant delays throughout the course of the review and much media speculation on the findings, [both the review and Government's response](#) were published on 8 February. A summary of the recommendations of most relevance to councils, and the Government's response to them, is attached as an annex.
7. There is currently a separate Government review of the wider CONTEST strategy under way, which is expected to report this autumn.

Report findings and Government response

8. The report makes 34 recommendations, which the Government has accepted in full. The report is broadly positive about Prevent's overall objectives, endorsing the strategy overall, and recognises the crucial role of local partners in its delivery.
9. The recommendations fall broadly under the following main themes:
 - A refocusing of Prevent on the counter-terrorism space - ensuring that it deals with individuals who are 'susceptible' to radicalisation (changing from 'vulnerable'), rather than broader concerns which the report concludes should be managed elsewhere (eg as part of mental health service provision). Alongside this however there is a recognition of the importance of wider counter-extremism work, and the report proposes that more should be done in the counter-extremism and disruptions space, particularly in tackling Islamist extremism, to disrupt 'chronic radicalisers and influencers'.
 - The importance of ideology reaffirmed as a driver for terrorism - those being managed as part of Prevent must have some form of ideology, and a belief that terrorism is the means to achieve this. This includes consideration of whether Prevent is the most appropriate place to handle cases categorised as 'mixed, unclear and unstable' (which currently make up the majority of Prevent referrals). Government has committed to commissioning research to explore this further.
 - The report also proposes a reset of thresholds to ensure consistency across Prevent workstreams, and which is commensurate to the threat; more should be done to explore the ideological underpinning of Islamist extremism in particular. (Media coverage of the report's publication has largely focussed on Shawcross' conclusion that Prevent has a 'double standard' when dealing with the Extreme Right-Wing and Islamism).
 - Changes to Prevent delivery at local and national levels - the Government has committed to the further rolling out of a regional model of delivery, which will see

some councils lose direct funding for Prevent in favour of support and guidance being provided by Home Office regional advisers, and support surged into local areas when needed. A new hybrid model for Channel arrangements is also proposed, which picks up elements from the Dovetail model previously piloted, giving local authorities a larger role in handling referrals

- Proactive communications that rebut some of the criticisms of Prevent, particularly from ‘anti-Prevent’ campaign groups. The report also proposes a new standards and compliance unit which will consider accusations around the mishandling of Prevent referrals or cases, and failures to adhere to the Prevent Duty.

10. The Government has committed to reporting on progress with the recommendations within 12 months, with work against many of them already underway.

Councils’ response

11. Following the publication of the report and Government response, the Home Office has held a number of briefing sessions for local authority Prevent leads, Chief Executives and Channel Chairs (LGA officers have attended some of the sessions). We have also provided a briefing at the LGA’s Community Safety Advisers’ Network and held a SIGCE roundtable for practitioners in early March to hear further reflections.

12. Feedback from councils has included concerns on the following themes:

- The community impact of the report, including considerable concerns from Muslim communities that they have been unfairly targeted by the report; regarding the continued use of terminology such as “Islamist” extremism; that Islamophobia is not sufficiently recognised in the report alongside other forms of prejudice; and an indication some previously cooperative groups may no longer be willing to engage with councils around Prevent.
- Ideological concerns are complex and the threats will inevitably vary in different areas for a number of reasons; more needs to be done to understand this, including reflecting on the evolving threat picture, and with local flexibility retained in response.
- The change in language from ‘vulnerability’ to ‘susceptibility’ and how this contrasts with current framing and other safeguarding issues/language. There are further specific concerns about how neurodivergent individuals are managed.
- If cases currently managed within Prevent/Channel are no longer deemed appropriate for this space (for instance, those cases classed as having “Mixed, Unclear or Unstable” ideology, or where Prevent thresholds have not been met), this is likely to place an additional burden on already overstretched services elsewhere (for instance social care or mental health), and/or there is a risk that people who need support or intervention could fall through the gaps.
- Resource implications for undertaking additional work in the disruptions and counter-extremism space.

- The implications of the extended roll out of the regional model for Prevent delivery (particularly, but not only, from councils in London), which will see many boroughs lose dedicated funding, and could see a loss of local insight and expertise as local authority staff numbers are subsequently reduced.

Implications for Wales

13. Prevent and counter-terrorism are reserved issues, however some wider matters, which may form part of the solutions to the issues raised in the report, are devolved.

Financial implications

14. At present just over 40 areas receive dedicated funding for Prevent officers and local delivery, with further opportunities to bid for project funding for 'non-funded' areas. These (upper-tier) areas have been identified as having the highest risk and threat following an annual prioritisation exercise, with funding levels provided relative to risk. Posts funded may include Prevent Coordinators and Prevent Education Officers as a minimum in each area, with additional posts in higher risk areas (for instance specialist engagement or social work roles).
15. Areas which sit outside of the priority list do not receive any additional funding. Unfunded areas also have access to guidance and support from Home Office regional advisers (although this is an advisory rather than operational role).
16. The total number of unfunded areas is expected to reduce by around half for the year 2024-2025, with an ambition to reduce further in future years as the regionalisation model continues to be rolled out.

Equalities implications

17. As noted above, a key issue reported by councils has been around community perceptions about the report and how it has been reported on in the media – namely to provide greater focus on Islamist extremism.
18. Whether or not these are justified by the report and the response, the concern as noted in paragraph 12 is that perceptions about the report's content and response will impact on community relations, and deter Muslim communities from working with Prevent in future, including potentially impacting on Muslims' engagement in Channel (where participation is voluntary).

Next steps

19. Members are asked to note the update and concerns we have received from councils about the report's impact to date.
20. The review supports the importance of work in the counter-extremism space, and several of its recommendations dovetail with elements of our planned workplan for the

SIGCE, and wider counter-extremism/Prevent work (which sit alongside Government commitments in the review response for providing further training and guidance on several areas). We have already held a SIGCE roundtable on the review, with requests for further sessions to follow; and our future plans include proposals one or two leadership essentials courses; sessions at our three regional member networks, to support elected members to understand the outcomes of the review and how this will affect local delivery in future; and various workstreams on tackling extremism, including a dedicated workstream on Islamist extremism.

21. Members are invited to consider whether the LGA should write to the Home Office reflecting councils' feedback and concerns.

Annex: Summary of IRP recommendations and Government Response

Recommendation 1: Revise Prevent objective to clarify and emphasise the importance of tackling extremist ideology as a terrorism driver.

Gov response: We will change the first objective of Prevent to clearly specify the need to tackle the ideological causes of terrorism. We will ensure that the revised first Prevent objective is clearly reflected in the updated Prevent Duty Guidance and, where necessary, in legislation. We will also ensure that the training on ideology currently being developed by the CCE is mandatory for all Prevent staff and the frontline sectors.

Recommendation 2: Move away from 'vulnerability' language and towards 'susceptibility'. The Vulnerability Assessment Framework should become the Prevent Assessment Framework.

Gov response: We recognise that Prevent should be focused on tackling radicalising influences themselves, to which some are susceptible, rather than wider issues such as mental health. Prevent work must always be aware of the risk presented by the individual or group in question and recognise the agency of individuals in aligning with extremist groups. We commit to using the term 'susceptibility to becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism' where relevant and defining this language more clearly.

Recommendation 3: Reset thresholds to ensure proportionality across Prevent workstreams. Prevent must work to one bar across ideological threats. The bar should not be set so high as to only include concerns related to the most established terrorist organisations, nor so low as to capture mainstream politicians, commentators or publications.

Gov response: We accept this recommendation and agree it is important to have one, consistent and proportionate threshold across all extremist ideologies and workstreams. We will ensure designated Prevent leads have the training and support they need to provide effective advice on the threshold for referrals. Through our work to develop the new Prevent Assessment Framework, we will better define the criteria used to determine whether a case should be considered for Channel. We will also set out rigorous criteria to ensure that the proportion of funding allocated to civil society organisations to tackle specific ideologies is fully reflective of the threat we face.

Recommendation 4: Improve understanding of 'blasphemy' as part of the wider Islamist threat. HSG should conduct research into understanding and countering Islamist violence, incitement and intimidation linked to 'blasphemy'.

Gov response: DLUHC will lead on tackling blasphemy-related incidents and Prevent will focus on where this contributes to radicalisation or terrorism. We have requested that the CCE conduct research on violence associated with blasphemy and will then consider with partners how Prevent should adapt to address this.

Recommendation 5: Explore the prevalence of antisemitism in Channel cases and whether this is reflected in a breakdown of Channel referrals more widely. Feed these findings into work to disrupt radicalisers and counter extremist narratives.

Gov response: We will improve our understanding of ideologies that spread antisemitic narratives and take direct action to address this including taking steps to disrupt radicalisers that spread harmful views which explicitly target the Jewish community. We will continue to support DLUHC's work to counter other forms of racial and religious hatred and increase our pool of intervention providers that specialise in tackling antisemitism.

Recommendation 7: Keep current terminology to describe Islamist and extreme right wing (XRW) ideology and ensure use of terminology is consistent across products, guidance, and training materials.

Gov response: The government assesses that the existing terminology around Islamist and XRW ideology is accurate and fit for purpose and we will continue to use it.

Recommendation 9: Restrict Prevent funding to groups and projects which challenge extremist and terrorist ideology via counter-narratives and activities and not towards general youth work or community initiatives that do not meet these criteria.

Gov response: We recognise that Prevent project funding has focused too broadly and insufficient checks have been conducted. We also acknowledge the review's finding that there was limited evidence that Prevent and RICU-funded projects countered extremist ideology. We will refocus on projects that explicitly counter radicalisation and challenge extremist and terrorist ideology; strengthen our approach to moderating funding bids from local authorities for civil society projects; and provide clear communications to local authorities on the need for projects to challenge extremist and terrorist ideology and ensure appropriate oversight.

Recommendation 10: Ensure Prevent disruptions takes action to limit the influence of 'chronic' radicalisers and networks which sit below the terrorism threshold, that promote narratives legitimising terrorism and terrorists without breaking the law.

Gov response: We will commit to accelerating and strengthening our work to disrupt chronic radicalisers who seek to radicalise others into terrorism but operate below legal thresholds, by introducing a new partnership approach with local, regional and national partners, law enforcement agencies, other government departments, and wider counter-extremism experts. We will provide specialist training on the activities and harmful narratives of such radicalisers. We will work with DLUHC and the CCE to establish a cross-government mechanism to co-ordinate work on tackling non-violent extremism.

Recommendation 11: Move national Prevent delivery to a regionalised model that has consistent lines with the centre of Prevent in the Home Office.

Gov response: We will move to a regional Prevent delivery model directly overseen by the Home Office and significantly reduce the number of local authority areas of highest threat that we fund. This will increase join-up with CTP and other regional partners, ensure each local authority has access to expert Prevent support from Home Office regional Prevent advisers, and enable resource to be surged into areas to meet radicalisation risks.

Recommendation 12: Ensure high level decision-making within Prevent is informed by proper consideration of the terrorism threat picture to ensure that any action taken is proportionate.

Gov response: We acknowledge that Islamist terrorism is currently the primary terrorist threat and that this is not currently reflected in Prevent caseloads. We will introduce a security threat check process that is informed by the latest assessments from the JTAC, CTP, Home Office analysts, the CCE, DLUHC, and counterterrorism local profiles and ensure the process is outlined in the refreshed Prevent Duty Guidance.

Recommendation 13: Lengthen the Prevent funding cycle to between two and five years in order to better sustain positive local work

Gov response: We will explore options with HM Treasury for developing a multi-year plan for Prevent funding. This approach must be implemented in a way which provides value for money and complements our commitment to move to a regional delivery model and be accompanied by a comprehensive and robust evaluation plan.

Recommendation 15: Develop a plan to improve the quality of referrals around revised core objectives. Referrals should have an identifiable ideological element that is consistent across ideologies.

Gov response: We will clearly communicate that Prevent referrals should only be made where there are genuine concerns of radicalisation and that ideology is a critical consideration. We are also working to strengthen referral pathways and improve information sharing, through the rollout of a national Prevent referral form. We are improving the Prevent case management system to better record ideology.

Recommendation 16: Improve Prevent datasets by revising how referrals are categorised. HSG should consider all options, including delineating and/or removing the 'Mixed, Unstable or Unclear' and 'Other' strands, against Prevent objectives.

Gov response: We agree that we need to improve our understanding of the categorisation of referrals and have commissioned independent research to understand the types of MUU referrals and cases and use the findings to improve the categorisation of cases. We will also delineate MUU categories in annual published statistics.

Recommendation 17: The government should launch new initiatives to encourage referrals from friends, family and community cohorts.

Gov response: We will continue to test and develop our new accessible GOV.UK resource, which activity complements CTP's Act Early campaign and online resources. We will also increase work with non-statutory partners, the third sector, and with communities to build awareness of the signs of radicalisation and how to get support.

Recommendation 19: Streamline Channel case management process by testing a hybrid model for referrals, risk assessment and information gathering. The Police and local authorities would handle referrals simultaneously. Initial discussions with the referee would be carried out by either of these authorities, while the Police would complete risk assessments and information gathering.

Gov response: We will move to this model of delivery over the next 18 months.

Recommendation 20: The Home Office should investigate whether there is an imbalance, or disparity, in thresholds applied to Islamist and XRW Channel cases, and if so why. Examine whether Islamist referrals tend to be individuals much further along the trajectory towards violence compared to referrals where individuals present a susceptibility to radicalising influences or extremist exploitation.

Gov response: We recognise the need to ensure there is no disparity in thresholds and have commissioned an independent outcome evaluation of Channel that to increase understanding of the nature of the cohort, including across ideologies, how they progress through the Channel process, and of the impact that Channel has on counter-terrorism risk, and review the process by which cases are adopted by Channel.

Recommendation 21: CCE to review all Prevent advisory boards and panels to ensure membership includes necessary, credible and impartial expertise on extremist ideology. The relevant government minister should sign off all membership and terms of reference.

Gov response: We will seek the expertise of the CCE, DLUHC and wider government partners to ensure the membership and terms of reference of current and future Prevent advisory groups are robust and ensure products developed by advisory boards are rigorous. We will continue to ensure the membership and terms of reference of all Prevent advisory boards is agreed by ministers.

Recommendation 22: Develop a new training and induction package for all government and public sector staff working in counter-extremism and counter-terrorism, focussing on improving understanding of the ideological nature of terrorism, including: worldviews, objectives and methodologies of violent and non-violent extremist groups, grievance narratives and issues exploited by terrorist recruiters and extremists.

Gov response: We have recently launched updated training packages on GOV.UK on Prevent awareness, referrals, Channel, and a Prevent refresher course. We are also currently developing new courses that will allow users to improve their understanding of Prevent, terrorism, and extremism, and a new Prevent face-to-face training course for public sector workers will be rolled out nationwide in 2023. DLUHC are also developing and delivering wider counter-extremism training for government and stakeholders on the ideologies and harms which affect our communities.

Recommendation 23: Ensure Prevent training upholds a consistent and proportionate threshold across ideological threats.

Gov response: Accepted. Prevent training materials will clearly reflect the threat from both violent extremism and non-violent extremism.

Recommendation 24: Training for Prevent, Channel, and public sector staff subject to the Prevent Duty should include clear guidance on how and when to make appropriate referral decisions and clearly specify the requirement to ensure referrals have an identifiable ideological element and terrorism risk.

Gov response: We recognise that a more informed and muscular approach is needed to tackle the hesitancy and cultural timidity among some when considering referrals into Prevent. Significant work is already underway to overhaul and improve the training offer. We will also roll out a new face-to-face training package to frontline public sector workers.

Recommendation 25: Ensure Prevent does not fund, work with, or consult with extremism-linked groups or individuals, and applies the same thresholds for non-engagement across ideologies. Training should include engagement process and principles, and a due diligence function to assess risk attached to engagement decisions.

Gov response: Since April 2022, due diligence has been conducted through our team of internal expert analysts and we will work with partners to strengthen this. As part of updating training for Prevent staff, we will set out the requirement to not fund/work with extremist linked groups or individuals and will take further steps to ensure that organisations with whom we partner are aware of the behaviours and conduct expected.

Recommendation 29: The Home Office should implement a further due diligence procedure around the recruitment of intervention providers.

Gov response: We commit to further strengthening due diligence processes and to bolstering annual checks conducted on each intervention provider. This will include a more robust and extensive assessment of social media accounts and other public platforms. We will also issue new guidance for intervention providers to ensure there are clear expectations of the behaviours and conduct we expect.

Recommendation 30: Establish a dedicated unit within HSG to rapidly rebut misinformation about Prevent and challenge inaccuracies.

Gov response: We agree we need to take a more muscular approach to rebutting misinformation and disinformation. We will tackle inaccurate claims through a dedicated Prevent communications team and equip our partners and stakeholders, including civil society organisations, to challenge Prevent myths and related extremist narratives. We will create a standards and compliance unit which will fully consider accusations around the mishandling of Prevent referrals or cases, and failures to adhere to the Prevent Duty.

Recommendation 31: RICU should equip Prevent practitioners with better information about extremism-linked campaigns to undermine their work.

Gov response: We agree we must provide practitioners with the information they need to effectively challenge misinformation about Prevent. We will strengthen current work on this by providing additional analysis that outlines the activities of non-violent extremism-linked individuals, groups or organisations seeking to undermine the work of Prevent.

Recommendation 32: Prevent-funded civil society organisations and counter-narrative projects should take on extremism-linked activists who seek to demonise the scheme. Civil society organisations should be ready and able to challenge and expose groups which promote disinformation about Prevent.

Gov response: We agree we must support civil society organisations to better tackle misinformation and disinformation about Prevent, through additional support, resources and training.