

7 December 2015

Counter-Extremism Strategy

Purpose

For discussion and direction.

Summary

In the summer the Prime Minister set out how the government would look to tackle the threat posed by extremism through a Counter Extremism Strategy. One strand outlined in the Prime Minister's speech was the need to build a more cohesive society so people were less vulnerable to extremist ideology. To identify what action needed to be taken the Prime Minister announced that Louise Casey has been commissioned to carry out a review of how to boost opportunity and integration. Since then the government has also published the Counter Extremism Strategy.

Neil O'Connor, Director of the Cross-Departmental Review, DCLG, is attending the Board to explain what the review will cover and how it is gathering evidence.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

1. Note the publication of the Counter Extremism Strategy Respond and the announcement about the review by Louise Casey; and
2. Discuss and direct any further activity.

Action

Officers to take note of and action members' comments and direction.

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Counter-Extremism Strategy

Background

1. In July this year, the Prime Minister set out the government's intention to publish a Counter Extremism Strategy in the autumn to address the threat posed by extremist ideology. This followed a year in which the number of people arrested for terrorism-related offences climbed to record levels, with 299 suspects detained in the twelve months to March 2015. This is the highest number since officials started to collect data in September 2001. More than three quarters of those detained considered themselves to be of British or dual British nationality, compared with a little over half in the 2010/11 figures.
2. The figures do not of themselves explain why there have been such an increase in the number of arrests. Various commentators however attribute it to the conflict in the Middle East and North Africa (and Syria and Iraq in particular), pointing out that the number of arrests has climbed steadily since the Arab Spring in 2010 and 2011. They also argue that this increase is in part the result of radicalisation, and the use of the internet to spread extremist ideology and to recruit people to extremist causes. The rise in the proportion of 18-20 year olds and women being arrested is cited as evidence for this, as are the recent attacks in Paris, where those so far identified as carrying them out have all been European Union nationals.
3. At the same time there has been an increase in Islamophobic attacks and religious hate crime. Figures from the Metropolitan Police showed that anti-Muslim attacks in London had increased by 70 per cent in the year to July, while those from the Home Office showed a 43 per cent increase in religiously motivated hate crimes in 2014/15 – though such crime remains rare. Tell MAMA, an organisation that monitors anti-Muslim attacks, reports these attacks spike after 'trigger' events such as the Charlie Hebdo shootings and the terrorist attacks in Tunisia. Following a government decision all police forces will adopt uniform recording mechanisms on anti-Muslim hate crimes to build up a more comprehensive picture of Islamophobic crime going forward.

The national context and role of councils

4. Councils have worked closely over the last decade with the police, schools, voluntary sector organisations, religious institutions and others such as prisons and probation on community cohesion and preventing violent extremism. Since the national counter-terrorism strategy, CONTEST, was updated by the government in 2011, this work has been shaped by the revised Prevent Strategy which aims 'to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism'. Local authorities' role in this area has been reinforced by the introduction of the Prevent duty since July, which requires councils to play their role in preventing people from being drawn into terrorism.
5. Until the general election councils' work around cohesion was influenced by the integration strategy 'Creating the Conditions for Integration', which was launched by DCLG in February 2012. Creating the Conditions recognised that integration is a vital local issue requiring a local response, with many references to localism and civic leadership, and it strongly encouraged local partners such as councils to take a lead.

DCLG's own focus over the same period was on championing British values, and it provided £50 million between 2011/12 and 2014/15 to fund a range of projects to contribute to this agenda. These projects were wide ranging, from promoting the Cornish language through to projects tackling female genital mutilation and honour based violence, to promoting the Big Iftar and remembering World War One.

Louise Casey's review

6. During his speech in July the Prime Minister set out the four pillars of the Counter Extremism Strategy and how these would help defeat extremism and extremist ideology. He explained that the fourth strand in the Strategy would be about building a more cohesive society, and that Louise Casey had been commissioned to carry out a review of how to boost opportunity and integration of the most isolated communities.
7. The Prime Minister's announcement covered the issues Louise Casey's review would look at. These included how government can ensure people learn English; how employment outcomes can be boosted, especially for women; and how state agencies can work with isolated communities to properly promote integration and opportunity. The Prime Minister said an interim report would be provided early in 2016, and this would be used to inform plans for funding a major new Cohesive Communities Programme in 2016. In the Spending Review announcement the government said that current levels of funding for community integration programmes would be maintained, but would be targeted to support the recommendations of the review - this suggests that there will be £11-14 million a year available (based on spend over the last parliament).
8. Neil O'Connor, the Director of Louise Casey's review team has agreed to attend the Board meeting and explain in more detail the work the review is undertaking, how it is going about gathering evidence and views, and the timescales to which it is working.
9. Given the long standing work by councils around building community cohesion lines of inquiry that members may wish to explore with the Director include:
 - 9.1. What role does the review team see for local government in promoting integration and opportunity, and who are the key local partners councils should be working with to build cohesion?
 - 9.2. Will the review be looking to identify good practice in promoting integration and opportunity, and will it also be identifying issues that local areas have been less successful at addressing so far?
 - 9.3. How important does the review team see economic opportunities as compared to shared values in building a cohesive society? Are there any other key factors that promote integration and build cohesive communities?
 - 9.4. Is the emphasis on addressing economic opportunity and isolated communities the right one when those who have been radicalised have tended to be well educated and not necessarily from deprived backgrounds?
 - 9.5. How important is it for local areas to tackle religious motivated hate crime such as Islamophobia and anti-semitism, and forms of right wing extremism?

- 9.6. How can local authorities promote opportunities and integration when public spending will continue to reduce over the Spending Review period, and when they have fewer levers when it comes to working with key local partners like schools, colleges and universities?

Counter-Extremism Strategy

10. The [Counter Extremism Strategy](#) itself was published on 19 October, and sets out how the four strands will be implemented to protect people from the harm caused by extremism. It builds on the new statutory Prevent duty and defines extremism as:
- 'The vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also regard call for the death of members of our armed forces as extremist.'
11. The strategy's four pillars are:
- 11.1. Countering extremist ideology;
 - 11.2. Building a partnership with all those exposed to extremism;
 - 11.3. Disrupting extremism; and
 - 11.4. Building more cohesive communities – the strand Louise Casey's review forms part of.
12. Although the Strategy aims to cover all forms of extremism, both violent and non-violent, it is almost entirely focused on Islamic and right wing extremism. It reports that the government has established within the Home Office the Extremism Analysis Unit to support all government departments and the broader public sector to understand wider extremism issues.
13. In discussing the threat of extremism the strategy makes clear that local authorities have a key role to play in protecting communities against extremism, but quoting Birmingham, Tower Hamlets and Rotherham, states that in some areas more needs to be done to address concerns in a decisive and effective way.
14. Because Peter Clark's Birmingham Trojan Horse report highlighted that there is an inadequate understanding of the way institutions can be targeted by extremists, the government will carry out a full review to ensure all institutions are safeguarded from the risk posed by entryism. This is when extremist individuals, groups and organisations consciously seek to gain positions of influence to better enable them to promote their own extremist agendas. A report looking across the public sector, including schools, further education colleges, local authorities, the NHS and the civil service, will be published in 2016.
15. In order to counter extremist ideology, the government will implement a counter-ideology campaign focused on:
- 15.1. Contesting the online space;

- 15.2. Strengthening our institutions;
 - 15.3. Supporting individuals at particular risk of radicalisation; and
 - 15.4. Building partnership with all those opposed to extremism.
16. As part of the strengthening institutions agenda the government will keep under review those institutions that have a duty under the new Prevent agenda and expand the list if necessary. Because of the Trojan Horse issue in Birmingham, the Department of Education has strengthened the government's ability to identify extremism and entryism into schools. This includes major reform of the regulations on governor appointments, so that all appointments must now be made on the basis of skill. Governing bodies can take action to suspend or potentially remove governors if they are not upholding the ethos of the school, including fundamental British values. The Department of Education will also introduce a new system to enable intervention in unregulated education settings.
17. The strategy recognises that councils have a powerful role to play in combating extremism, but again quoting Birmingham states that some authorities have failed to encounter extremism as fully as they could have done. The government intends to ensure that local authorities have clear guidance on the full range of tools available to them to tackle extremism. The government will also review the powers available to enable it to intervene where councils fail.
18. Following on from the Channel programme the Home office will develop by spring 2016, a new de-radicalisation programme for individuals further down the path of extremism.
19. The strategy makes clear the government's determination to support individuals and groups, who have credibility and experience of fighting extremism within their communities, by amplifying their voices and helping them where required. As part of this the Home Office will develop a new network, linking individuals and groups around Britain, who are already standing up to extremists in their communities. Working with local partners, including councils, the government plans to identify the most impactful and relevant groups already doing important work to protect communities. In so doing, they will set out publicly the principles that will guide the whole of government when deciding whether to engage with individuals and groups in this country.
20. In order to disrupt extremists the government will amongst other things introduce new powers to:
- 20.1. Ban extremist organisations that promote hatred and draw people into extremism;
 - 20.2. Restrict the most harmful activities of the most dangerous extremist individuals;
 - 20.3. Restrict access to premises which are repeatedly used to support extremism.
21. They will also produce guidance for the police, prosecutors and local authorities which will clearly set out the exceptional nature of the powers and the circumstances in which they can be used.
22. In order to help the public report extremism, the government will introduce a new Extremism Community Trigger, similar to the anti-social behaviour trigger introduced last

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year, to guarantee that concerns about local extremism will be taken seriously. A new legal duty will ensure that the police and local authorities fully review any complaints about extremism. They will be expected to work in partnership to tackle local extremist issues and keep the public informed about their actions.

23. To protect vulnerable people the role of the Disclosure and Barring Service will be strengthened to enable employers to identify extremists and stop them working with children and other vulnerable groups. This will mean that it will be possible to bar the most harmful extremists from working with vulnerable people.

13 November Paris attacks

24. The attacks in Paris on 13 November have emphasised the importance of building community cohesion and integration, as well as in preventing people being radicalised and drawn into terrorism. There is clearly an increasingly important role for ward councillors, using their knowledge and relationships in a local area to promote inclusion, particularly in those areas where isolated and vulnerable communities are most concentrated. Councillors can also use their authority and legitimacy to challenge the narratives of radicalisers and extremists and put forward positive alternatives, working with the wider community to condemn the activities of extremists who misrepresent local community views.

Next steps

25. Work is already underway to assist councils implement the Prevent duty. We have commissioned a number of case studies that highlight how councils have engaged with their communities to address the threat posed by radicalisation, and these will be published at the annual Safer Communities conference. Other areas that have been identified by practitioners as areas where councils would benefit from assistance include building the capacity and skills of frontline staff such as around tension monitoring; assistance and support around engaging with schools, colleges, and universities; and how can councils support communities address extremist ideology and prevent people being radicalised.
26. It has also been pointed out that councils have developed and delivered programmes to make people and communities aware of the threat from extremist ideology, and also to safeguard individuals once they are identified as being vulnerable to radicalisation. However councils and other partners have less understanding of the pathways that individuals follow that lead them into extremist activity. It is therefore proposed that we look at the pathways into radicalisation and what makes one individual vulnerable to extremist messages and another more resilient to them. This would then assist councils in intervening earlier in the journey individuals undertake to becoming extremists.
27. In addition officers have been in discussion with Home Office officials about the support package that will be provided to councils, and how the LGA might compliment it this rather than duplicate it. The Home Office is for example looking to provide a peer support team to advise councils around Prevent related matters. An area where it was thought the LGA would be able to add value was in supporting councillors around this agenda. It would therefore be helpful to have members' views on what they would find most useful in carrying out their role in their wards and within their authority around preventing terrorism and preventing extremism.

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28. Following the discussion with Neil O'Connor the Board's views will be submitted to the Casey Review team on how the government could facilitate integration and community cohesion, based on the points raised by members. Alongside this a programme to assist councils to counter extremism and which links into the support to prevent terrorism will be drawn up.

29. Members are asked to:

- 29.1. Note the publication of the Counter Extremism Strategy Respond and the announcement about the review by Louise Casey; and
- 29.2. Discuss and direct any further activity.

Financial Implications

30. The work set out in this paper will be carried out using existing resources and budgets.