

# Scrutiny, counter-extremism and the Prevent duty



# Contents

Executive summary	4
Prevent and counter-extremism: background	5
Policy context	5
CONTEST, Prevent and Channel	7
Counter-extremism	9
Prevent, counter-extremism and safeguarding	11
Support for councils to deliver Prevent and counter-extremism	12
Four ways in which scrutiny practitioners can engage	13
Overview	13
1. Supporting and challenging the assessment of risk	14
2. Scrutinising Prevent and counter-extremism local action plans	19
3. Monitoring and managing partnerships and relationships	20
4. 'Mainstreaming' counter-extremism and Prevent	29

# Executive summary

This publication, produced by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) and the Local Government Association (LGA), is intended to help scrutiny practitioners (councillors who sit on overview and scrutiny committees or equivalents, and the officers who support them) to understand some of the key features of national and local policy on extremism and terrorism, and how they can support local efforts to combat these threats through their non-executive role. It explores the main policy context for strategies to combat terrorism (in – particular, the Government’s Prevent strategy and counter-extremism strategy) and suggests ways that non-executive councillors can contribute to improvements in how councils tackle these issues through good scrutiny and robust, constructive challenge.

There are a number of areas where we think scrutiny councillors and the work they do can add value:

- in general, providing public political oversight on what can be a sensitive local issue; involving councillors providing a different perspective on the way that partners consider, review and manage risk at a strategic level
- helping professionals within and outside the council to engage intelligently with local people, using scrutiny councillors’ unique credibility and legitimacy as elected members
- ensuring that partners are working together well, and that they understand their specific duties, and that there is consistency on priorities, expectations and goals across the partnership. Particularly important is the legal duty to “have regard to” the need to tackle the risk of terrorism in how services

are delivered, under Prevent – as well as the duties of individual members of staff to be aware of extremism and terrorism as issues in their day-to-day work.

This guide does not suggest that all councils should embark on scrutiny reviews of counter-extremism or Prevent work, but it does suggest that members may wish to maintain oversight of these important and sensitive issues. Much of this oversight will need to be informal in nature – but critical and high-risk issues, where identified, may need to be brought to scrutiny more formally for further discussion and recommendations.

# Prevent and counter-extremism: background

## Policy context

Tragic events in the UK, Europe and further afield in recent years, have ensured that the threat from attacks on people and property from those with extremist viewpoints has been at the top of the political, as well as police and security agencies', agendas for some time.

Nationally, the Government's counter-terrorism and counter-extremism strategies are aimed at taking a comprehensive approach to tackling both violent and non-violent extremism.

Action to tackle terrorism is covered by the Government's CONTEST strategy<sup>1</sup>, on which we focus in more detail below. Terrorism is defined by the Terrorism Act 2000; in brief, it means action, or threat of action, involving violence to the public and/or damage to property. This action must be focused on influencing the Government or intimidating the public, with the purpose of advancing a particular political cause. This guidance document is primarily concerned with councils' role in delivering one element of the CONTEST strategy: 'Prevent' – aimed at stopping people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism.

Action to counter extremism is framed by the Government's 2015 counter-extremism strategy.<sup>2</sup> Extremism is more difficult to define – it is identified in the counter-extremism strategy 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”. The definition also includes “calls for the death of members of our armed forces” as a form of extremism. We cover the meaning of the phrase in more detail later in this section.

More broadly, although not a specific focus for this guidance, a third element to the strategic context for work around Prevent and counter-extremism is integration and cohesion. Whilst the cohesion agenda covers a broad range of different issues, there are clear links across to counter-extremism work. Extremism is a threat to community cohesion and will grow as cohesion fails; fostering cohesion helps build resilience to rises in extremism and helps limit opportunities for extremists to exploit. The Government published its integrated communities strategy for consultation in March 2018, with its response to the consultation outcomes, including an integrated communities action plan, published in February 2019.<sup>3</sup>

The Government has been keen to emphasise that while these three strategies all play an important and complementary role, they each have distinct objectives in tackling terrorism, challenging extremism and fostering more cohesive communities. That said, while the focus for each of these strategies may be different, understanding, responding and building resilience to the threats from extremism and terrorism require a joined-up approach at both national and local levels.

1 [www.gov.uk/government/publications/counter-terrorism-strategy-contest-2018](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/counter-terrorism-strategy-contest-2018)

2 [www.gov.uk/government/publications/counter-extremism-strategy](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/counter-extremism-strategy)

3 [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/integrated-communities-strategy-green-paper](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/integrated-communities-strategy-green-paper)

## The role of local government

Terrorism and extremism cannot be easily tackled through the policing and criminal justice systems alone. It is the responsibility of a far wider range of individuals and groups to understand the challenges and the role they can play in combating them.

This guidance focuses on the role of local authorities, and those with whom they work directly. Their response to the threats from terrorism and extremism are driven in part by national policy, and in part by more local concerns – particularly around community cohesion and integration.

Over the years national government has developed a number of interventions to tackle the threats from terrorism and extremism, in the form both of legislation (and the creation of statutory duties) as well as strategies which cut across all local and national government business.

The main documents that set out the role of local authorities with regards to counter terrorism and counter-extremism are:

- the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015
- the counter-terrorism strategy – CONTEST<sup>4</sup>
- the Prevent strategy<sup>5</sup>
- statutory guidance<sup>6</sup> on the Prevent duty
- Prevent duty toolkit<sup>7</sup> and benchmarking tool for local authorities and partner agencies (supplementary information to the Prevent duty guidance)
- Channel duty<sup>8</sup> guidance (new guidance is expected to be published in Autumn 2020)
- the counter-extremism strategy (this strategy has no statutory duties, unlike

the duties associated with Prevent).<sup>9</sup>

For local authorities, a key element of the Prevent programme is on safeguarding and supporting individuals who might be vulnerable to radicalisation – the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and extremist ideologies associated with terrorist groups.

The counter-extremism strategy is aimed at protecting communities as a whole from a broader set of harms beyond terrorism, including hate crime and intolerance, and promoting ‘fundamental values’ including democracy, the rule of law and individual liberty.

Both the Prevent and counter-extremism strategies are united in risk-assessment: amongst their priorities they each identify Islamist extremism, the rise of Daesh and persistent threats from Al Qa’ida, plus growing threats from extreme right-wing and far-right groups; but both seek to cover extremism in all its forms.<sup>10</sup>

In their delivery, both the Prevent and counter-extremism strategies depend on multi-agency cooperation; are led nationally by the Home Office (with cross-departmental links); require partnerships across formal and informal civil groups; and can use a range of already-available legislative tools and mechanisms to combat all kinds of extremism. Both too recognise the key role local authorities have to play in their provision – and it is vital that councils’ work is subject to proportionate oversight and challenge by elected members. This guide sets out the ways in which effective scrutiny can lead to better policy and action in these areas.

4 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/716907/140618\\_CCS207\\_CCS0218929798-1\\_CONTEST\\_3.0\\_WEB.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/716907/140618_CCS207_CCS0218929798-1_CONTEST_3.0_WEB.pdf)

5 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf)

6 [www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance/revised-prevent-duty-guidance-for-england-and-wales](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance/revised-prevent-duty-guidance-for-england-and-wales)

7 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/736759/Prevent\\_Duty\\_Toolkit\\_for\\_Local\\_Authorities.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/736759/Prevent_Duty_Toolkit_for_Local_Authorities.pdf)

8 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/425189/Channel\\_Duty\\_Guidance\\_April\\_2015.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/425189/Channel_Duty_Guidance_April_2015.pdf)

9 [www.gov.uk/government/publications/counter-extremism-strategy](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/counter-extremism-strategy)

10 The CONTEST strategy references other groups and individuals that carry out criminal acts to achieve political goals which may be motivated by animal rights, the extreme left-wing or environmental issues. While it suggests that none of these groups are currently assessed as posing a national security threat, there remains the possibility that may change.

# CONTEST, Prevent and Channel

## Overview

CONTEST is the name of the Government's counter-terrorism strategy; its most recent iteration was published in 2018. The strategy identifies Islamist terrorism as the principal terrorist threat to the UK, with extreme right-wing terrorism a growing concern. CONTEST identifies four key elements in response.

These are:

- Pursue
- Prevent
- Protect
- Prepare.

Jointly they aim to identify terrorists, prevent people from becoming terrorists, protect society from terrorist attacks, and mitigate the impact of attacks when they occur. While local authorities may have a role in all these elements, the focus for this guidance is on the Prevent strand.

Prevent places a statutory duty on certain specified authorities, including councils, to "have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism" as per the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015. The phrase "due regard to" has a specific legal meaning which deserves explanation. It is not an administrative requirement or tickbox exercise – having "due regard" to this duty is fundamental to the role of a decision-maker. As such, clear evidence must be available that regard was given, and

## The Prevent duty: what the statutory guidance says

The full guidance can be found at: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance/revised-prevent-duty-guidance-for-england-and-wales](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance/revised-prevent-duty-guidance-for-england-and-wales)

The statutory guidance provides detailed information about the exact nature of the Prevent, duty, and the organisations to which it applies.

S26 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 places a duty on certain bodies to have "due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism". Bodies subject to the Prevent duty are expected to take a risk-based approach to how they do so.

The Government's strategy to meet this duty focuses on all forms of terrorism and extremism.

The guidance identifies best practice for each of the sectors subject to the duty, and sets out ways in which they can comply with it. The relevant sectors and organisations are:

- local government (including all councils, but not combined authorities)
- criminal justice (including probation providers, and prison and Young Offender Institution (YOI) governors)
- education and childcare (including education providers)
- health and social care (including NHS trusts)
- police (including chief officers of police and police and crime commissioners).

In relation to local government, the guidance notes the statutory requirements under the legislation for establishing a Channel panel to offer support to those at risk of radicalisation and sets out that risk assessment, planning, collaboration and training are important activities for councils to undertake with a mind to fulfilling their responsibilities under the Prevent duty. These activities are all discussed in more detail in the sections which follow.

that the decision-maker was properly aware of their duty to do so (so the duty cannot be delegated away to other people). Overall, the duty to pay “due regard” to an issue is a duty to take active steps to look into a matter to inform oneself about an issue and its facets before reaching an informed decision.

In the specific context of Prevent, the Prevent guidance suggests that the way in which decision-makers must pay “due regard” to the Prevent duty needs to reflect a risk-averse approach. The Prevent duty should therefore play a significant role in how the council and its partners make decisions on a wide range of local public policy issues – and it will require councils to take action to seek to mitigate and eliminate even risks that might seem on balance to be remote.

Managing that duty may be a challenge when it comes into contact with other public duties (such as the public sector equality duty), people’s rights (as provided for in the Human Rights Act) and, potentially, other legal duties (such as the requirement in the Children Act that the best interests of the child be “paramount” – an issue relevant to the intersection between counter-extremism and safeguarding, which we cover below). It also has implications for partnership working. Local authorities are not the only institutions that are at the centre of this work: similar duties are put on health care providers, education providers, prisons, and other institutions as outlined in the Prevent Strategy.

The Prevent duty requires all eligible authorities to come up with strategies and action plans proportionate to the local risk in order to be able to achieve the three objectives set in the Prevent strategy – namely, to:

- provide a response to the ideological threats of terrorism
- prevent people from being drawn to terrorism, and
- assist organisations, sectors, and institutions that may face risks of radicalisation.

A central part of the Prevent duty is taking a risk-based approach – understanding local terrorism-related threats, whilst acknowledging that both risks and responses will vary across areas. Resources and funding should be prioritised based on the risks, which makes risk assessment a key part of any further Prevent actions in local authorities. Currently, on a countrywide level, CONTEST identifies terrorist organisations affiliated to Daesh and Al-Qa’ida as the main threats, alongside growing threats from extreme right-wing terrorism.

According to the Prevent strategy and Prevent duty toolkit<sup>11</sup>, the following provide overarching themes for authorities in fulfilling the Prevent duty:

- effective leadership that will be able to assess risks of radicalisation, and create and deliver successful action plans to combat terrorism
- working in partnership with police, local Prevent Coordinators (see below), criminal justice agencies, education, health, and third sector, formal and informal civil groups to ensure the success of Prevent programmes
- appropriate capabilities, eg appropriate understanding of extremism, pathways to radicalisation, and measures to counter radicalisation by staff members.

### **Role of councils**

In addition to the requirements set out above for all specified authorities, there are a number of duties specific to councils. These include establishing or making use of existing multi-agency groups to assess the local picture, coordinate activity, and put in place arrangements to monitor the impact of safeguarding work.

In practice, the Prevent strategy and duty should translate into the following:

- giving due consideration to the risks of radicalisation
- getting an understanding, and assessing

<sup>11</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-toolkit-for-local-authorities-and-partner-agencies](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-toolkit-for-local-authorities-and-partner-agencies)



the risks, of people being drawn into terrorism in local areas

- building a strategic Prevent board to oversee Prevent delivery (or CONTEST delivery more broadly) – or using existing multi-agency partnerships/forums to fulfil this role, such as community safety partnerships
- developing an action plan to prevent people from being drawn into or supporting terrorism, if necessary (see section 1, below) – an action plan can include projects, training, activities, measures, or interventions that help address local risk
- subsequently monitoring the implementation of the action plan, and measuring the impact of the work that follows
- supporting the Channel process and making appropriate referrals.

The legislative implications of the Prevent duty for local authorities are set out in detail in the Prevent statutory guidance and supplementary toolkit.

To help support and coordinate this activity some local authorities have received central government funding for dedicated Prevent coordinator posts (see below) and, in some cases, additional funding for further posts or Prevent activity.

### **Channel**

A key element of Prevent delivery for local authorities is Channel; a multi-agency approach to provide support to those who are vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. Some aspects of Channel are discussed in more detail in the section on safeguarding below. In general, it aims to identify individuals at risk of radicalisation, assess the nature and extent of that risk and then develop the most appropriate support plan for those individuals. It operates in the non-criminal space and support is only provided where there is consent from the individual concerned (or parental consent where appropriate).

This process is managed by a statutory ‘Channel panel’, a body chaired by a local authority (in a two-tier area, this will be the county council) with representation from relevant sectors including police, health, safeguarding, housing, probation providers and others. Combined panels, covering multiple authorities, can be established. Statutory guidance provides a detailed framework for panels to follow in carrying out their duties<sup>12</sup>.

## **Counter-extremism**

### **Overview**

Taking action against the direct threat of terrorism is work that, in the view of the Government, needs to be bolstered by broader work to tackle extremism beyond terrorism, including challenging extremist ideology, promoting ‘fundamental values’, and addressing wider harms, such as hate crime or harmful illegal cultural practices.

Recent years have seen extremists increasingly exploiting apparently mainstream issues (for example around western military action, ‘freedom of speech’ or ‘justice’ campaigns associated with criminal investigations) to garner support, especially using online forums to encourage readers to visit websites or receive regular messages which promote explicitly extreme views – for example justifying terrorism as a response to western military action or blaming all members of a particular religious or ethnic group for specific problems or acts. Extremists are also using increasingly complex social media strategies to spread their ideologies and attract followers.

The national counter-extremism strategy was developed in 2015 to tackle extremism that may not always lead directly to terrorism, but which is harmful to individuals, communities, and the country.

<sup>12</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/425189/Channel\\_Duty\\_Guidance\\_April\\_2015.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/425189/Channel_Duty_Guidance_April_2015.pdf)

The strategy defines extremism as:

“...a vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs.”<sup>13</sup>

The definition of extremism also includes calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas.

The counter-extremism strategy identifies two main immediate threats: the global rise of Islamist extremism, and violent and non-violent extremism of far-right and Neo-Nazi groups. Since the counter-extremism strategy was published in 2015, there has been an upward trend in the prevalence of far and extreme right-wing groups operating in the UK.

Considering the broad definition of extremism, the strategy offers several examples of the forms that non-violent extremism can take:

- creating a setting in which the harms associated with extremism can occur, eg justifying violence and promoting hatred and division
- inciting violence and hatred against others based on protected characteristics such as religion, race, attitudes, or sexual orientation
- creating an unchallenged environment enabling various sorts of discrimination, including discrimination against women
- supporting various illegal cultural practices
- promoting community segregation
- supporting alternative systems of law that run contrary to British laws and practices
- promoting non-participation in Britain's democratic institutions and processes and encouraging community isolation.

This list is not exhaustive.

As can be seen from these examples, extremism can occur on many levels and in various settings – many of which have a significant impact on local areas. Recognising this pattern, the strategy offers the following four ways (referred to as ‘pillars’) to challenge extremism:

- countering extremist ideology
- building partnerships with those who oppose extremists
- disrupting extremist activities
- building more cohesive communities.

### **Role of councils**

While there are no specific statutory duties for local authorities around countering extremism, there are clear implications for local areas in terms of the harms extremism can cause. The strategy identifies local authorities as key partners for national government in responding to extremism and building resilience locally, in particular in developing links with individuals, groups and organisations already standing up to extremists in their communities, and in acting to address community isolation and segregation.

To support local activity, the Home Office currently provides funding for a number of counter-extremism coordinators in certain areas (selected according to an assessment of the scale and nature of the threat) – usually known as community coordinators. These are in addition to Prevent coordinators mentioned above and in a similar number – but not necessarily in the same areas. Community coordinators' role includes improving local understanding of extremism, engaging with and helping to capacity-build local community groups, and coordinating local cohesion and counter-extremism projects and disruption activity.

More detail about both community coordinators and Prevent coordinators and their roles can be found in section 3 below.

<sup>13</sup> Home Office (2015) Counter-Extremism Strategy [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/470088/51859\\_Cm9148\\_Accessible.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/470088/51859_Cm9148_Accessible.pdf)

## Prevent, counter-extremism and safeguarding

This guidance will, in the next section, cover the importance of ‘mainstreaming’ counter-extremism and counter-terrorism policy in everything that public bodies do. This is about recognising that these issues do not sit in a discrete box – that the risks and threats of extremism and radicalisation, and helping to counter those threats through building strong and resilient communities, need to be considered by policymakers in everything they do.

An example of this in practice relates to safeguarding. Safeguarding is about supporting people’s welfare, as well as protecting them from harm. The Government has put in place a range of duties on both public bodies and other organisations to ensure that the welfare of children and vulnerable adults is protected.<sup>14</sup>

Beyond the requirements for protecting children and vulnerable adults, safeguarding intersects with a wide range of other local services – the vulnerability of an individual can be profoundly affected by the social and cultural circumstances in which they are brought up, their general health, their housing conditions, their educational environment and so on.

Combating extremism and the threat of terrorism is, in this way, also an intrinsic part of the safeguarding agenda. In terms of identifying and managing risks, the response is similar to that which public bodies take when tackling things such as child sexual exploitation and grooming for gang membership.

### Safeguarding children: law and practice

The law relating to safeguarding children needs to be seen alongside the Prevent duty, and the other roles and responsibilities around counter-extremism discussed above.

The way that these duties intersect demonstrates both the potential for complexity, but also the opportunities for scrutiny councillors to positively influence the way that partners work together – covered in more detail in the sections below.

The general framework for safeguarding children is set out by the Children Act 1989 and the Children Act 2004, as amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017, requiring local authorities, police and clinical commissioning groups to work together with other partners locally to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in the local area. This includes threats from extremism influences leading to radicalisation. Government guidance on Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018<sup>15</sup> sets out that when assessing Channel referrals, local authorities and their partners should consider how best to align these with assessments undertaken under the Children Act 1989.

It should be noted in this context that referrals into the Prevent process and Channel are not reliant on meeting statutory safeguarding thresholds for safeguarding proceedings. However, scrutiny practitioners will want to be satisfied that Channel procedures are effectively aligned with other statutory safeguarding provision and that referral pathways for Channel are clear and well communicated to both front-line council staff and partner agencies. This will also be an intrinsic part of the training that should be offered to relevant personnel.

<sup>14</sup> Including the Children Act 2004, the Care Act 2014 and the Children and Social Work Act 2017

<sup>15</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2)

## Support for councils to deliver Prevent and counter-extremism

In addition to the strategy documents and toolkits outlined above, further resources and support have been made available by the Home Office to tackle extremism and terrorism in local areas. This has included training, financial assistance, advice and communication support on Prevent and Counter-Extremism work, and meeting with colleagues from local authorities to discuss various approaches to counter extremism.

At a local authority level, there is the Special Interest Group on Countering Extremism (SIGCE)<sup>16</sup>, set up to provide support and develop good practice across local authorities in England and Wales. Co-chaired by Luton and Leeds councils, the SIGCE's work has included developing networks for sharing learning, collating guidance and case studies and running a series of thematic seminars. It has a dedicated group on the Knowledge Hub<sup>17</sup> (the online discussion and information-sharing space for local authority employees), which hosts a range of case studies and resources on countering extremism, and also provides regular updates and forums for sharing learning amongst elected members. A similar online forum has been set up to help facilitate sharing of learning about Prevent<sup>18</sup> delivery across local authorities.

The LGA has developed a support package for councils around counter-extremism, Prevent and cohesion. This includes leadership essentials training courses<sup>19</sup> for councillors to develop their leadership skills in these areas, share learning with peers and give members the opportunity to explore some of the sensitivities around these policy areas in a safe space. The LGA has also published guidance on Building cohesive communities and on community engagement<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> [www.local.gov.uk/sigce](http://www.local.gov.uk/sigce)

<sup>17</sup> [www.khub.net/group/special-interest-group-on-countering-extremism](http://www.khub.net/group/special-interest-group-on-countering-extremism)

<sup>18</sup> [www.khub.net/group/prevent1](http://www.khub.net/group/prevent1)

<sup>19</sup> [www.local.gov.uk/our-support/highlighting-political-leadership/leadership-essentials](http://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/highlighting-political-leadership/leadership-essentials)

<sup>20</sup> [www.local.gov.uk/building-cohesive-communities](http://www.local.gov.uk/building-cohesive-communities)

# Four ways in which scrutiny practitioners can engage

## Overview

Scrutiny has an important role in supporting, challenging and informing the work that councils do with their partners both in countering extremism, and in fulfilling statutory duties under Prevent. Extremism, with both its potential to draw individuals into terrorist activity and its impact on communities more broadly, is a complex threat and requires that a number of individuals and groups work together in response – raising challenges for governance and responsibility, not to mention substantive control and prioritisation of day-to-day activity.

The main responsibility for counter-extremism and Prevent work, insofar as the council itself goes, sits with Cabinet (or equivalent). However, because this work is not something which is easily compartmentalised, responsibility will often be shared across multiple parts of the council, may be split across different Cabinet portfolios, and involve a number of other partners. The relationships between these different actors is something to which we will return in the sections below – it has important implications for effective scrutiny and governance.

## **Managing the logistics of scrutiny work: getting the structures right and maintaining a focus on strategy**

Structurally, there is no “right way” to carry out this work, and councils have used different approaches to date. For some, it may be difficult for scrutiny to look at policy in this area as something entirely discrete that can be “scrutinised” on its own. For this reason, councils may find it challenging to conduct standalone “scrutiny reviews on counter-extremism”, or similar.

The sensitive nature of much information relating to terrorism and extremism means that it is unlikely that scrutiny committees will be able to discuss even some strategic issues in public (for example, see our comments in the section below on Counter Terrorism Local Profile reports). Where sensitivity is likely, scrutiny and officers should speak together about the best way to facilitate members’ oversight of these issues. It may be that more informal approaches are thought more appropriate, or that a way can be found to manage some discussion of these issues as confidential agenda items, where the requirements of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972<sup>21</sup> (on confidential and exempt information) are satisfied.

<sup>21</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1972/70/schedule/12A](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1972/70/schedule/12A)

A flexible approach to the structures scrutiny uses to engage in this subject will make it easier for scrutiny's interventions to be more proportionate, and strategic. A strategic approach is about engaging intelligently in the planning and policy development process, in a proportionate and relevant way. Scrutiny can engage in conversations around the key elements of Prevent and counter-extremism approaches at an early stage. These elements act as the framework within which policy on these areas is developed and are explained in more detail below. As we have noted above, early discussion may be best carried out informally.

We have identified four main routes through which the overview and scrutiny function can make its contribution. These are:

1. supporting and challenging the assessment of risk
2. scrutinising Prevent and counter-extremism action plans in general
3. monitoring and managing the authority's partnerships and relationships with formal and informal civil groups, and the public
4. 'mainstreaming' counter-extremism and Prevent work.

## 1. Supporting and challenging the assessment of risk

Both counter-extremism and Prevent strategies depend on risk assessment – both of the threats from extremism and terrorism themselves, and of the risks of people being drawn into extremism and terrorism. Proper risk assessment is seen as the first step in tackling the risks and threats from extremism in a local area, and hence it can be also a starting point for scrutiny. There are two elements to this:

- understanding the risks (eg to vulnerable individuals and communities, including their probability – this may include risks to individuals from online influences) and threats (eg the presence of extremist

groups or radicalisers and the presence of those who may be exploited) and how they have been assessed

- providing challenge based on councillors' own understanding of local issues, and the gathering of independent evidence where appropriate.

### Understanding

An honest discussion about examples and incidences of extremism and radicalisation can set a foundation for understanding the extremism landscape in the local area and for ensuring that the cabinet and scrutiny committee members are on the same spot in response.

Local examples of extremism are useful in ensuring that councillors have a similar understanding of what "extremism" is to that held by both officers and those on the executive side (as well as partners). It will also help in explaining the risk assessment process that the council and its partners undertake.

If scrutiny wants to better understand the local threats of violent and non-violent extremism, there are several available ways of gathering information about extremism in the area.

One tool to use for this purpose is the Counter Terrorism Local Profile (CTLP) assessment. These are strategic assessments which outline the threat and vulnerability from terrorism-related activity within a specific area. They are used to develop a shared understanding between partners of risks and vulnerabilities and to provide an evidence base for local Prevent activity, including helping to inform areas' assessment of risk (and the mainstreaming of that activity into day-to-day multi-agency work).

These reports are prepared by Counter Terrorism Policing as strategic documents, rather than detailed and complete assessments of activity in an area. CTLPs are to be shared with the local authority (for instance with chief executives or Prevent leads), but its use and wider dissemination may be subject to restrictions, as set out

in the national CTLP guidance.<sup>22</sup> Regional police Counter Terrorism Units (CTUs) should provide a version of the CTLP to local authorities which can be considered at a scrutiny committee meeting.

Another important resource which may be useful for assessing the risk of extremism is data collected by council departments and local partners on appropriate issues. The frequency of hate crimes (which target a victim's race, religion, transgender identity, sexual orientation or disability), CPS data on Terrorism Act (TACT) offenders, the prevalence of harmful illegal cultural practices, data related to radicalisation in schools or to which schoolchildren are subject – are all examples of information that local authorities and partners will already possess. Some authorities publish yearly reports detailing socio-economic, crime, and demographic changes in their wards (eg London Boroughs of Hackney, and Tower Hamlets<sup>23</sup>). Importantly, looking at these issues through the lens of risk assessment means considering why, where and how these activities may contribute to increased risks from segregation and extremism; on the basis of that understanding of the risk they pose, the council (and scrutiny) can take a more informed approach to prioritising those challenges and dealing with them appropriately on a substantive basis.

Local authorities can also operate a more systematic Community Tension Monitoring (CTM) system – a system that can record all extremism-related incidents. Cabinet and scrutiny members may find it useful to receive tension monitoring reports, where appropriate. The scrutiny committee should agree a process for receiving this information – for example, sharing relevant information privately with the chair or an identified member of the committee so that they can influence the scrutiny work programme when a matter arises. Police submit CTM reports weekly to a central national team, and

councils should ask for access to this – and for an opportunity to input.

In Dudley, the council developed its own reporting tool to measure community tensions<sup>24</sup>. It defines community tension as a “situation arising from acts or events that cause people to feel negative toward one another and/or services provided, putting at risk public order or threatening the peace and stability of local communities”, and asks anyone who has witnessed something that could be construed as contributing to community tension to report it by submitting an online form giving the account of the problem and its root cause. This mechanism allows Dudley Council to receive information about incidents that are not at times reported to the police and enables the council to enhance its understanding of community tensions and potential risks of extremism and radicalisation.

Other partners have a big stake in tackling extremism, and hold their own data relating to risk. NHS, Ofsted/Estyn, and the police might be the most useful sources of information, but other local partners (in particular, voluntary and community bodies) may also have some insight. For example, Ofsted has some information about potential radicalisation at schools and in other educational places which may be of use, and the police have intelligence reports on a wide range of extremism related issues (in some cases, information may be more difficult to access – it will require liaison with council officers, and those working in outside organisations, to understand what information can be shared with members).

<sup>22</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/118203/counter-terrorism-local-profiles.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/118203/counter-terrorism-local-profiles.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Tower Hamlets Borough Statistics.

Available from: [www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ignl/community\\_and\\_living/borough\\_statistics/borough\\_statistics.aspx](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ignl/community_and_living/borough_statistics/borough_statistics.aspx)

<sup>24</sup> Dudley Community Safety Partnership: Identification of Community Tension form.

Available from: [www.dudleysafeandsound.org/communitycohesion](http://www.dudleysafeandsound.org/communitycohesion)

## Case Study

### LB Merton Prevent duty task group

LB Merton's Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel recognised the importance of the role schools play in their implementation of the Prevent duty to help keep children and young people safe from the risks of radicalisation. It commissioned a Prevent Duty Task Group to highlight, collate and share Prevent practice as well as support the Merton community to work collectively to prevent radicalisation.

The review, completed in 2018, examined the full range of Prevent practice being delivered in Merton's schools including primary, secondary and special settings; explored effective and innovative practice, as well as any specific challenges faced in delivery (including perceptions); considered the support provided by partners; and sought to celebrate and disseminate Prevent practice happening in Merton's schools.<sup>25</sup>

There are other mechanisms available for scrutiny to help define local threats. At a national level, there are bodies producing information which could provide context to making assessments of local risk easier. For example, Government and parliamentary bodies might include:

- the Home Office Extremism Analysis Unit, established to support central government and the public sector to understand extremism
- a cross-departmental body called Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU) that was created to provide informational support on terrorism and extremism issues

- the Home Affairs Select Committee<sup>26</sup> whose work can be a source of relevant information – particularly because it provides a political dimension to risk management
- a range of other Government reports and publications that can be a source of useful information, such as the Counter-Terrorism Unit reports<sup>27</sup> or LG Inform<sup>28</sup> databases which allow you to find customised data
- the independent Commission for Countering Extremism, which has commissioned and published a number of academic papers on extremism and its initial report, Challenging Hateful Extremism<sup>29</sup>, was published in October 2019.

Several non-government organisations and think-tanks also issue reports that may assist with the understanding of what the threats from extremism are and what are the potential ways of combatting those. The following are examples of bodies that produce research and publications around these and related themes, which may be useful:

- British Future
- Radicalisation Awareness Network
- Royal United Services Institute
- The Institute for Public Policy Research
- The Institute for Strategic Dialogue.

A big part of understanding the risks from extremism and radicalisation also lie in understanding the work and priorities of those in the council that hold a primary responsibility for coordinating Prevent and counter-extremism work. Most commonly, counter-extremism and Prevent work are placed alongside community safety, but other departments (particularly children's services) play an important role, especially in relation to preventing the radicalisation of young people. Where the focus lies may depend on local context and the nature of extremism threats.

<sup>25</sup> London Borough of Merton (2018) Prevent duty task group report <https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/documents/s21182/Prevent%20report%20ver%203.pdf>, with a further update report published in 2019 <https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/documents/s26214/Prevent%20task%20group%20update%20report.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> [www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/home-affairs-committee/publications](http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/home-affairs-committee/publications)

<sup>27</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/national-counter-terrorism-security-office](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/national-counter-terrorism-security-office)

<sup>28</sup> <https://lginform.local.gov.uk>

<sup>29</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/challenging-hateful-extremism](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/challenging-hateful-extremism)



Scrutineers, in turn, can explore whether this choice of coordinating department is the most suitable and relevant – and whether appropriate links are being made with other departments to ensure that work is joined up.

It is important however to emphasise that understanding risk is not a one-off process – particularly as the local, national, and international picture for extremism and radicalisation continue to evolve.

## Case study

### Wolverhampton Council task and finish review of Prevent and counter-extremism

In 2012/13 Wolverhampton Council's scrutiny committee established a task and finish group to undertake a review of Prevent and counter-extremism measures<sup>30</sup>. As part of its recommendations, it suggested that all councillors should be annually briefed on extremism threats, raising awareness, and building links with community groups – but this approach will not necessarily be appropriate for all areas. It was also agreed that Prevent issues should form part of the induction process, to help build new councillors' knowledge of the subject. This briefing is regularly updated in the light of changed risks and threats.

This kind of review allows members to keep a 'watching brief' over the changing risk landscape – but as we have noted above, it is important to ensure that standalone reviews of counter-extremism do not lead to a sense that the subject is discrete from the council's other duties.

## Challenging

Scrutiny may debate the methods and data used by the council's executive to reach its assessment of risk (eg to vulnerable people), or the prioritisation of threats (eg the presence of extremists or radicalisers in the area) – essentially, scrutiny has the right to examine and challenge the cabinet's risk

assessment and can use a range of options to do so. For example:

- establish a task and finish review panel to focus specifically on risks and threats
- consider risk and threat as part of the process for deciding how and when issues should be added to the work programme
- discuss 'risks and threats' itself as an agenda item for the committee
- task scrutiny or democratic services officers to obtain more information, or request more data on the subject from senior officers or executive.

Elected councillors who sit on scrutiny committees can bring a unique perspective on extremism-related issues from their wards and communities. Being elected representatives of their communities, councillors have insight into local perceptions of extremism and Prevent, and can use this different perspective to exert challenge on the way that cabinet, senior officers, and others have assessed and managed associated risks.

Scrutiny may wish to explore (and make effective recommendations on) whether assessments of risk and threats have been adequate – including, for example:

- if the causes of extremism locally are understood
- if the threats assessed in the CTLP are meaningful, high quality and have been shared with decision makers
- whether protective services are in place to manage the risks to vulnerable individuals or communities
- whether the right people are involved in partnership approaches to these.

<sup>30</sup> Wolverhampton City Council (2013). Prevent strategy task and finish group/final report.

## Potential questions

- What is the council's assessment of the risks associated with violent and non-violent extremism?
- How are risks identified, managed and assessed? Who is involved?
- How are risks reviewed and revised over time? Is this consistent?
- What are the most significant risks, and what steps are being taken to mitigate them?
- When is this assessment undertaken, and how and when is it updated?
- Which methods/reports has the council used to identify threats? (for example, the CTLP).
- What are the focus areas of local action plans to respond to the risks and threats?

**In relation to specific risks and threats**, scrutiny councillors might want to ask about who is leading on them and who in the wider partnership is involved. This is discussed in more detail in section 3, below.

Some more generic questions which can be asked to understand and address risk can be found in the CfPS guide 'Risk and resilience'<sup>31</sup> (2016).

Other questions might include:

- How are incidents which have extremist elements to them identified in the local area? Have there been any such incidents recently?
- To what extent are risks around radicalisation and extremism linked to the council's public sector equality duty, and in particular the experience of those local people's 'protected characteristics' under the Equality Act?
- How – if they are an issue – are tensions in the local community identified and tackled?
- Are there attempts by extremist groups or activists to stage local activity (eg protest/march or hold events) or cause any other divisions?
- Is there support for extreme views in the local area, and if so what steps are being taken to challenge this?
- Is there any ground or need for scrutiny to challenge the risk assessment that has been made, and to add new risks?
- How should scrutiny's ongoing oversight of this issue be organised?

Getting answers to these questions will give scrutiny a baseline of understanding about local extremism and terrorism threats. This will make it easier to draw out specific operational and strategic issues relating to extremism when looking at other related subjects as part of their more general scrutiny work, and will also allow scrutiny to focus in on particular risks in more detail where necessary.

<sup>31</sup> [www.cfps.org.uk/?publication=risk-and-resilience](http://www.cfps.org.uk/?publication=risk-and-resilience)

## 2. Scrutinising Prevent and counter extremism local action plans

According to the Prevent duty, any authority that assesses there is a risk of violent or non-violent extremism will need to produce an action plan; in practice, this will mean that all local authorities should produce some form of plan – either a stand-alone document, or, particularly in areas with lower threat, these may be incorporated into a broader plan or strategy (eg the community safety strategy). All the activities we consider below arise from those action plans, and any other actions/plans which have been drafted to counter the threat of extremism, under the 2015 counter-extremism strategy.

### Action plans

Action plans are likely to look different depending on the area to which they relate, and each area will have its own challenges. Both the statutory duties around Prevent and the national counter-extremism strategy provide a framework within which the risk of different eventualities can be considered, and hence to establish what the priorities in an action plan(s) might be.

In general, the common contents of action plans will include:

- the establishment of a framework and system for assessing risk, and the detail on how those risks will be mitigated, which can be used both by the council and its partners (including, for example, schools and contractors) – we deal with this in more detail in section 1
- the establishment and maintenance of arrangements for partnership working, and the development of closer partnerships with other bodies, including governance arrangements, and setting out ownership and accountability for agreed actions – we deal with this in more detail in section 3
- plans for training and awareness-raising

- plans for how organisations, both individually and collectively, will ensure that they are not providing funding or support for extremism by making public facilities (eg libraries, community centres, other services) available for these purposes, even if only inadvertently
- plans for directly engaging with the public to develop and engage in narratives that challenge extremist ideologies.

Where such actions are part of a Prevent strategy, or relate to Prevent duties, they will naturally require that the bodies involved pay “due regard to” the Prevent duty in delivering local public services more generally.

Of course, many Prevent and counter-extremism strategies will contain a range of locally-inspired measures, and scrutiny councillors will want to find out more about those in order to understand if they could do work to support and challenge the council and its partners as it delivers against those commitments.

### Case study

#### Wolverhampton Council safer communities panel

In 2012/13 the Safer Communities Scrutiny Panel in Wolverhampton established a task and finish group to review the city council’s Prevent arrangements and actions<sup>32</sup>.

Some of the recommendations included adding detailed activities and projects into Prevent action plans, delivering Prevent training to community-based organisations, launching mandatory Prevent e-learning training, targeting training to service providers working with vulnerable individuals, and including a range of partners in designing further Prevent action plans.

32 Wolverhampton City Council (2013). Prevent Strategy Task and Finish group report

A general review of an action plan is something that scrutiny should undertake in order to understand more about the issues and local priorities. This may act as a springboard into more detailed scrutiny of individual elements of the plan, or scrutiny may decide to undertake lighter touch scrutiny of the implementation of the plan on an ongoing basis.

### **More generally**

Beyond the action plan, scrutiny can engage cabinet and the council's partners in a more general conversation about the work that is done to prevent radicalisation and tackle extremism.

For instance, scrutiny committees can ask for a narrative on the council's work across the four 'pillars' in the counter-extremism strategy, which are:

- countering extremist ideology
- building partnerships with those who oppose extremists
- disrupting extremist activities
- building more cohesive communities.

Committees can ask what is being done in relation to each of these pillars, what the proposals are for the future, and can provide recommendations based on the answers. Similar questions can be asked of the way that the council is engaging with its Prevent duties.

Scrutiny can also use its links with the area's police and crime panel to engage with the police and crime commissioner (and by extension the police) on these issues – something on which we comment in more detail in the section below on partnerships.

## Potential questions

- Is there a Prevent and/or counter-extremism action plan in the authority? If there are both, how do they relate to each other?
- How does an action plan(s) address the national Prevent and counter-extremism duties/strategies?
- What kinds of activities has the council planned to tackle extremism? What local evidence underpins the need for these activities and how do they mitigate against identified risks and threats (see also section 1)?
- What systems are in place in the action plan to ensure that responsibilities and duties are appropriate, well-understood (and consistent) across a local area? (This links to the questions we suggest might be asked in relation to partnership working, discussed below).
- What evidence is there that measures to tackle extremism and radicalisation are successful and effective?

## 3. Monitoring and managing partnerships and relationships

Both Prevent and counter-extremism work depends on effective multi-agency partnerships and on having working relationships with a range of formal and informal civil groups, for instance:

- police
- local safeguarding partners
- housing associations
- probation services
- community cohesion groups
- community safety partnership
- schools
- faith-based organisations

- civil society organisations
- community representatives and activists
- other key local partners, such as the military.

Scrutiny can play a major role in identifying relevant and appropriate groups and organisations, and in developing, and managing working relationships with them.

There are statutory requirements for some of these partners relating to Prevent; many will also be expected to sit on Channel panels to provide support to individuals at risk of radicalisation. In order to ensure that each partner is delivering against these duties effectively, existing partnerships (for example, the community safety partnership) need to be used – as well as new partners brought in as the need arises. This has led some councils to create specific prevent partnership groups or strategic boards (where proportionate) – the starting point for multi-agency working – to provide strategic governance and oversight of Prevent delivery.

There are two tasks for scrutiny here:

- Monitoring and managing existing relationships. Scrutiny can map and understand how different partners and partnerships intersect with each other on this policy agenda; by doing so, members can identify gaps and areas of confused accountability and responsibility, if they exist.
- Developing new relationships and ensuring that partners benefit from the input of scrutiny as a partner itself.

### **Monitoring and managing existing relationships**

A large range of local bodies have a stake in tackling extremism and radicalisation. Scrutiny has a role in understanding how those bodies work together, the way they set priorities and the way that accountability flows between them.

A group of partners who work together effectively can also help to understand and respond to any local public scepticism or

resistance to Prevent or counter-extremism activity. Civil society and advocacy groups – brought together as part of a partnership – can help to identify where there is the risk of this, and can also help to mitigate and amend the approach that professionals may take if appropriate – an approach with which scrutiny can assist, given members' local representative roles. This should be about entering into a local dialogue about Prevent and counter-extremism policy – where concerns lie, where public bodies might need to change their approach and where misunderstandings or misconceptions about these policy areas have the potential to cause further problems, and should be countered.

For statutory partners, scrutiny might look at consistency in responding to extremism incidents. It might also look at ensuring partners have a shared understanding of referral pathways for Prevent and of the relationship between the police and safeguarding in supporting vulnerable people. Partners should use the same systems – and the same risk assessment methods – to refer people onto these pathways. Usually, this will be because a risk has been identified of them being drawn into extremist ideologies. It might also examine how effectively partners share information and the contribution each partner makes to the overall partnership approach.

Overall, scrutiny will need to be aware of current partnerships that work on counter-extremism and Prevent, assess how representative and effective these partnerships are, and determine whether they would benefit from adding new organisations. There may be other ways of holding that work to account in line with the need to 'mainstream' Prevent and counter-extremism, which we discuss below.

### **Understanding the links between policy and operation**

While partners will set the strategic direction, there are certain groups and individuals with the direct responsibility of turning that direction into action. Scrutiny can help by understanding who these individuals are and

ensuring that the priorities set for their work are clear and unambiguous, and their lines of accountability well understood.

In particular, scrutiny can assist with:

- ensuring governance structures and lines of accountability are appropriate and effective, both within the council and amongst wider partners
- ensuring that Prevent is a part of the work of the local community safety partnership
- ensuring the accountability of Prevent and community coordinators, where these exist
- mapping responsibilities in two-tier areas
- mapping responsibilities among the main Prevent and counter-extremism delivery partners.

### **Community safety**

The Government's counter-extremism strategy specifies that building more cohesive communities and maintaining effective partnerships is one of the four main ways of challenging extremism. Ensuring community cohesion and safety is also a significant part of Prevent work.

Statutory partnerships to tackle crime and community safety were first established in the late 1990s. All local authority areas have these partnerships, called community safety partnerships (CSPs), in place.<sup>33</sup> In England, in two-tier areas, the statutory partnerships sit at district level, with county-level structures, known as county strategy groups, complementing them.

Some areas have written community cohesion strategies. Depending on the scrutiny landscape, some authorities have communities' scrutiny committees, which may consider a range of issues including oversight of community safety.

These partnerships, and the strategies they work on together, provide important mechanisms for tackling extremism and terrorism, often setting the broad framework

for counter-extremism work, which scrutiny need to understand.

Scrutiny of CSPs is on a statutory footing. The Police and Justice Act 2006 sets out the details, and was supplemented by statutory guidance in 2009 – this guidance provides more information on the generalities of CSP scrutiny.

A later section of this document highlights the importance of 'mainstreaming' awareness of extremism and associated issues into all council and partnership business. This will be a consideration for the CSP, and for CSP scrutiny as well.

Mapping and understanding the complementary roles of CSP partners is something which scrutiny should be doing anyway; understanding too, the funding and other relationships between the CSP and the police and crime commissioner (or mayor, where applicable) is also a general aspect of this work.

In relation to counter-extremism and Prevent, scrutiny can specifically investigate the PCC's police and crime priorities, the CSP's priorities for tackling crime and disorder, and consequent actions, to ensure that a focus and consideration of counter-extremism is central to what the CSP is doing. Scrutiny councillors will also need to be aware of the role of police and crime panels here. Panels have a duty to hold the PCC to account; scrutiny at a local level can support that process but how this happens will depend on what local agreement might exist between local scrutiny and the panel.

<sup>33</sup> comprising the local authority, police, fire and rescue service, national probation service, community rehabilitation company and clinical commissioning group

## Case study

### Leeds' forced marriage and honour based abused pledge of intention

Leeds City Council has worked with local partners to establish Leeds as a beacon city for tackling 'honour-based' abuse and forced marriage. The council, police, police and crime commissioner and health partners all signed a pledge to work collectively to tackle these issues through a coordinated city-wide response, under the direction of a multi-agency steering group

Working closely with Karma Nirvana, a human rights charity based in Leeds which supports victims of 'honour-based' abuse and forced marriage, the pledge includes initiatives to promote ways of safeguarding children and adults at risk, increase public awareness, influence social change, develop effective support and responses for victims, and develop workforce capacity and capability. The work saw calls to local support services increase by 40 per cent in a year.

## Coordinators

A useful first step for any scrutiny function exploring counter-extremism for the first time might be to map the various duties, relationships, and responsibilities of different partners for three reasons:

- to better understand local planning and delivery
- to identify any gaps, duplications or other shortcomings in governance
- to identify the most appropriate places in the system for scrutiny to be carried out.

In councils, much of the local work on Prevent and counter-extremism will be carried out on the ground by dedicated coordinators – nationally or locally funded individuals with specific responsibility to bring together partners to tackle these issues.

Prevent coordinators' role includes:

- working with partners, including local community groups – both to ensure that they are aware of their own responsibilities under Prevent, and to share intelligence
- specifically, working with partners to interpret and act on the Counter Terrorism Local Profile (CTLP)
- developing and leading on local Prevent action plans and projects to address local risks
- in general, providing a coordinating role between the council and other specified partners.

Counter-extremism coordinators, often called community coordinators, may have the following core objectives:

- improving understanding of extremism locally, including the drivers, prevalence and wider harms of extremism in that area
- sharing local and national insights and using these to help shape the local strategy and interventions, including disrupting extremist groups, countering harmful ideology and building community cohesion
- identifying, supporting and capacity-building local mainstream voices (eg civil society groups) who are doing positive work to challenge extremism and create more resilient communities
- amplifying the reach of civil society groups by signposting them to support opportunities.

In some local authorities, additional staff may be employed in related roles, for instance as Prevent education officers, in engagement roles or as community cohesion officers.

Scrutiny may be interested in looking at:

- whether their authority is a Prevent or counter-extremism supported/partnership (priority) area, as identified at national level
- whether the authority has been offered and/or has an appointed coordinator, or other related roles, and how these officers work together

- a councillor from the executive who would be a dedicated portfolio holder – or more than one executive member where responsibilities may be split across portfolios (for instance, community safety and children’s services or safeguarding).

If a position of community coordinator or Prevent coordinator exists, scrutiny should be able to work with that/those person/people (alongside cabinet and the responsible chief officer) to understand exactly what value scrutiny might be able to add to their role(s). While some dedicated Prevent and community coordinator posts may be Home Office funded, technically these individuals are local authority employees and can still be held accountable by scrutiny.

In terms of general background and oversight, scrutiny can ask for report updates about the main challenges in the authority, and about potential partnerships that coordinators are interested in building. Information from these conversations can be used to identify particular areas in which scrutiny might find it productive to involve itself in more detail – digging into particular issues or risks, and strategic issues where a coordinator might be struggling to gain traction. Of course, the focus of such scrutiny will need to avoid direct operational issues – this includes, for instance, any details of Channel referrals, or specific cases/ interventions.

As coordinators continue to develop and deliver their roles, the opportunity is there for scrutiny to support them, building relationships as national and local policy on extremism and terrorism continues to evolve. Many councillors and local government officers and employees with whom we talked about scrutiny stated that they would prefer scrutiny’s input into the issues that they are dealing with as early as possible, to ensure that scrutiny and officers are on the same page and have a shared understanding of issues.

If an authority operates without a dedicated coordinator(s), scrutiny should be able to identify or recommend a person within a council who will be responsible for local operational delivery of the Prevent duty, for instance, and/or gathering information and providing updates on Prevent and counter-extremism. There may be a plan in place which involves the council alongside its community safety partners, and which will give scrutiny a start in understanding where responsibility lies.

Apart from coordinators, scrutineers can start building a relationship with relevant portfolio holders in their authorities, to better understand where links and mutual accountabilities lie. Informal discussions (with portfolio holders and senior officers, for example) will help scrutiny to make better judgments about where it might add value. By creating positive working relationships with relevant portfolio holders, scrutiny will be able to have access to information, and will be able to contribute to the debate around extremism at a much earlier stage.

### **Two-tier accountability**

The second big accountability issue relates to counter extremism and Prevent work in two-tier authorities. According to the Prevent duty, responsibilities for risk-assessment and action planning should be shared “proportionally” between authorities. The supplementary national guidance<sup>34</sup> suggests that arrangements should take account of patterns of risk and will vary, however it also suggests that a county-wide Prevent board should take responsibility for ensuring key activities are underway in each area. Scrutiny committees in two-tier authorities can explore, debate, and recommend how responsibilities should be split – ensuring that a sense of collective responsibility exists alongside individual, clear accountability for actions.

<sup>34</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/736759/Prevent\\_Duty\\_Toolkit\\_for\\_Local\\_Authorities.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/736759/Prevent_Duty_Toolkit_for_Local_Authorities.pdf)



## Case study

### Worcestershire County Council

In its 2016 Annual Community Safety Report, Worcestershire specified that as a two-tier authority, the County is held responsible for strategic oversight, prioritisation, and overseeing the work of Prevent and other related community safety issues.<sup>35</sup> The district council level was, in turn, pronounced responsible for local threat analysis and the delivery of local action plans. In addition to that, action plans were to be developed at a district level, but should be in line with strategic priorities outlined at a county level.

The example of Worcestershire does not indicate that all two-tier authorities should share responsibilities in the same way, rather it is an example of a clear discussion and a formal follow-up about engagement and the division of roles in two-tier authorities. There are also particular consequences in two-tier areas around the safeguarding agenda.

Other authorities and scrutiny committees may recommend different ways of separating responsibilities.

### Partners' accountability

Finally, another task scrutiny can undertake is responsibility mapping, ie identifying who is responsible for what kind of actions in those partnerships.

An example of this work comes from Surrey County Council, which sent out Prevent packs to all its key partners with a questionnaire to fill in.<sup>36</sup> The questionnaire included a range of questions aimed at understanding what projects were being delivered, the status update, and who owned responsibility for that activity. All responses were consolidated and assessed by a Prevent partnership group with further recommendations to follow.

### Engaging with the local community, countering narratives around extremism and managing criticism

The counter-extremism strategy highlights that contesting the online space, and providing a narrative to counter extremism, is key to ensuring “that the extremist voice is not the only one heard”<sup>37</sup>. Similarly, the Prevent strategy states that one of its objectives is to respond to the “ideological challenge of terrorism and the threat we face from those who promote it”.

There are different means by which this goal might be achieved at a local level:

- countering extremist narratives via online publications, press releases or blog posts and on social media
- working with partners to enhance dialogue about these issues, including openness about the risks and threats from extremism, and their implications, and about the responses to them
- running events and discussions on extremism-related issues and/or with vulnerable groups
- engaging with and supporting specific individuals at risk of being drawn into terrorist activity through the Channel process
- engaging in conversations with residents about their issues and areas of concern, which can support broader efforts on community cohesion.

35 Worcestershire County Council (2016). Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board, 13 September 2016, Agenda Item 5: Annual Worcestershire County Council Community Safety Report

36 Surrey County Council (2015) Prevent Strategy

37 Home Office (2015) Counter Extremism Strategy

## Case studies

### Councils engaging with the community

In 2015, Luton launched a website called 'Let's talk about it'.<sup>38</sup> The website's purpose is to raise awareness about extremism and terrorism-related issues and to facilitate dialogue on that topic. Some London boroughs and the city of Luton have developed information campaigns and leaflets around extremism-related issues and distributed them widely.

Another example comes from Tower Hamlets' scrutiny committee, which recommended in 2016 that the Cabinet engage the council's communication service in delivering a borough-wide campaign on promoting community cohesion.<sup>39</sup>

Manchester's response to the Arena attack in May 2017 built on and benefitted from the council's earlier engagement with the community in order to promote community cohesion. The council's communities and equalities scrutiny committee had recently reviewed the city's approach to community cohesion, but this work was subsequently reviewed, and in some places supplemented, after the attack. Perhaps the key learning from Manchester's experience was not to wait for a trigger event before developing a local approach and building community links. In the days after the attack the council made an effort to promote information about how hate crimes could be reported. Alongside getting messages about this into the media, council staff visited local high schools to emphasise the message that hate crimes should be reported, and to promote the True Vision<sup>40</sup> website as a way in which crimes could be simply reported using a smart phone, without the need for victims to go to a third party.

Numerous councils have also hosted various discussions with community representatives, religious leaders, and activists on the importance of social cohesion, the need for integration, and intolerance of all kinds of extremism.

Some critics of Government policy on counter-terrorism and counter extremism, particularly around the Prevent duty, have portrayed it as targeting and 'spying upon' certain communities, leading to a sense of persecution – and disengagement. These perceptions can cause real problems as local partners try to build resilience, manage extremism threats and provide support to vulnerable people at risk.

Concerns have also been raised that religious observance has been interpreted as extremism. Counter-extremism work is vulnerable to similar suspicions, along with concerns over the restriction of free speech. Where such concerns exist in communities or are brought to councillors as individual cases, councillors have an important role to play both in raising legitimate concerns over the delivery of Prevent and counter-extremism work locally, but also in clearing up misunderstandings and clarifying the distinction between the legitimate aims of policy and shortcomings in its delivery. They also play an important role in supporting partners to address some of these issues.

Extremist groups and activists will exploit concerns about these policies in general and specific failings in their delivery in order to feed extremist narratives – for example that the British state is persecuting Muslims. This may involve misrepresenting the actions of Government, local authorities and other partners. Members – and scrutiny – need to take care to avoid amplifying such attempts at misrepresentation while at the same time avoiding the temptation to dismiss any criticism or examples of poor practice as 'troublemaking'.

<sup>38</sup> [http://m.luton.gov.uk/Page/Show/Community\\_and\\_living/crime-and-community-safety/letstalkaboutit/Pages/default.aspx](http://m.luton.gov.uk/Page/Show/Community_and_living/crime-and-community-safety/letstalkaboutit/Pages/default.aspx)

<sup>39</sup> London Borough of Tower Hamlets (2016). Scrutiny Review Report: Delivering the Prevent Duty; Promoting Safeguarding in Tower Hamlets

<sup>40</sup> [www.report-it.org.uk/home](http://www.report-it.org.uk/home)

Key to achieving this difficult balance will be:

- developing relationships based on mutual trust with appropriate community groups and other key figures, including internally (hence, why understanding which groups and organisations are involved in local policy-making is so crucial)
- establishing the facts at an early stage in as much detail as possible
- taking care to ensure that public statements are accurate, defensible and worded to avoid misrepresentation or misunderstanding
- demonstrating that concerns are being listened to and acted upon, mistakes acknowledged and corrected, and deliberate falsehoods rebutted effectively.

There may also be a role for scrutiny in exploring whether training provision is adequate for frontline workers – to ensure they recognise when, and how, they should respond to any extremism concerns. It may well be a factor in how partners work together to deliver the objectives of Channel, in drawing people away from terrorism on an individual basis. The opportunities for scrutiny to look at risk assessment, and the referral process for those at risk of radicalisation, has been covered above; and training provision is explored further, below.

Elected members might have more credibility and legitimacy with local people – not to lead this work, but to explain and rationalise it to local people, and to investigate its end goals to ensure that local strategies and plans are properly scoped. These plans are likely to involve a range of partners, particularly where they relate to the Prevent duty.

Looking at those plans will help to provide important political insight and perspectives when officers are planning such engagement work – which may well be sensitive.

Members can look at partnership plans for Prevent and counter-extremism and determine whether:

- the council has accurately assessed the risks and threats from extremism, and focused campaigns around these
- any particular local narratives around extremism are properly understood, so they can be countered effectively
- the right people and partnerships are on board, meaning that counter-extremism narratives can be intelligently tailored to their target audience
- the council and its partners are ‘broadcasting’ those counter-extremism narratives – or whether a more fundamental local conversation is happening to address local concerns about complex issues around cohesion, integration and radicalisation.

### **Developing new relationships**

Mapping of relationships can help to identify gaps – particularly in the links that are made to local community groups, and their role in countering extremism. As part of its work to support partnerships, scrutiny can start identifying other organisations who could usefully be involved – and exploring whether those claiming to speak on behalf of communities are genuinely representative.

One way of doing this is through the building of community directories. Community directories are an overview of all available organisations that can assist counter-extremism work, including: faith-based organisations, youth centres, non-for-profit groups that work against hate crimes or discrimination, projects aimed at community cohesion, organisations that can facilitate community dialogue events, and so on.

## Case study

### Lancashire County Council

Here, the scrutiny committee asked the Executive to review its partnerships and to address the fact that some minority groups felt marginalised by the Prevent and counter-extremism actions.<sup>41</sup> It also asked for Executive's account of actions to ensure that counter-extremism measures were treated with trust across the area.

As well as identifying individual organisations, scrutiny councillors can facilitate the creation of forums, community dialogue events, multi-faith discussions and partnerships, and various community activist networks, using the insight from their community representative role. Scrutiny can also both support and provide critical friend challenge to the type of work that those partnerships or individual organisations are undertaking – ensuring that it aligns with the Prevent and counter-extremism duties and priorities of the partnership as a whole. This might involve scrutiny:

- simply facilitating dialogue (using scrutiny as a forum to draw in disparate organisations and understand how and where links arise)
- raising awareness of Prevent and counter-extremism (by conducting business in public).

## Case study

### Bristol City Council

Rather than building new partnerships, Bristol took the decision to use existing Prevent networks and relationships and expand their scope to tackle a wider range of extremism threats. In 2015/16, Bristol Council invited representatives from the voluntary sector, community service providers, police, health and education sector, and other practitioners to join its successful Building the Bridge partnership. This enabled participants to raise awareness of community concerns and help facilitate the engagement of young people, women and faith communities in particular.

## Potential questions

- Who are the current partners and partnerships working together to deliver under both the Prevent duty and the counter-extremism strategy?
- On what work are they engaged, and how is it monitored?
- How are counter-extremism and Prevent responsibilities shared between all participants of those partnerships?
- Where do gaps in responsibility arise? Who is responsible for identifying those gaps, and ensuring that lines of responsibility and accountability are otherwise clear?
- Are there specially-appointed coordinators (Home Office grant posts) to assist with counter-extremism and/or Prevent work in the local authority?
- If a funded post has been offered, but turned down by the authority, why has this happened?
- Are there any other organisations that can be involved with Prevent and counter-extremism work?

<sup>41</sup> Lancashire County Council (2016). Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 23 September 2016

- Is there a common understanding among partners about counter-extremism work?
- Does scrutiny believe that the right people are being engaged at the right time in those partnerships in a way that encourages engagement and dialogue?

## 4. 'Mainstreaming' counter-extremism and Prevent

The priorities of Prevent and the counter-extremism strategy need to be reflected in how the council and its partners engage in their business across the board.

There are two principal elements to this:

- ensuring that council activity (for example, the funding of outside bodies) does not inadvertently support extremism
- ensuring that the need to tackle extremism and prevent people from being drawn into terrorism is a feature in the council, and the council's partners, responses to a range of other public policy issues ('mainstreaming').

### Eliminating inadvertent support

Both Prevent and the national counter-extremism strategy emphasise the need to counter extremist ideology, to limit the dissemination of such ideology, and to ensure that local authorities' space and/or money is not used to promote any kind of extremism.

Four of the more common issues that councils may need to review to ensure they do not support the propagation of extremism include:

- responsible booking and hire policies and guidance for local venues (ie not providing facilities for extremism to be propagated)
- responsible funding of external organisations. Local authorities can develop guidelines that allow them to withdraw the

funding from organisations and charities that are inciting violence or are promoting extremist views. Local authorities will need to review their procedures here with care – freedom of speech is a fundamental right and, as we have discussed, interpreting extremism is sometimes a matter of degree

- responsible IT filtering that does not allow access to extremist-related materials (for example in libraries)
- other more formal measures to prevent or restrict individuals or groups from promoting extremism. Scrutiny can ensure that the council is using the legal tools at its disposal to do this, for example. Licensing and planning provisions can also help to manage this. The range of orders and injunctions available to councils to limit certain activity is significant but needs to be overseen and managed properly. Scrutiny can speak to the council's monitoring officer to understand more about how these tools can be used.

### Case study

#### London Borough of Waltham Forest

As part of its work to disrupt extremist activity, the London Borough of Waltham Forest developed a community premises protocol<sup>42</sup> that supports community venues with their hall hire procedures, to help prevent venues being used by extremists. The protocol sets out a four-stage process to ensure that hiring processes are safe and managed accordingly, to safeguard premises, staff and residents, and ensure that publicly owned venues and resources do not provide a platform for extremists.

### Mainstreaming

The council and its partners will be mindful of the need to mainstream an awareness of extremism, and the risks of its propagation, across their work. There will be areas (the agreement of service level agreements for the delivery of children's services, or services

42 [www.walthamforest.gov.uk/node/2336](http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/node/2336)

for vulnerable adults, for example) where an awareness of extremism and radicalisation will form an important part of service design.

There are many formal and informal spaces where work may intersect. Rather than covering those intersections in detail or attempting to provide a broad-brush overview of the issue, this section will focus on one area where Prevent and counter-extremism activity is likely to be particularly important, if not necessarily the overriding focus. That area is safeguarding. We will also look in more depth at the use of training to help officers across the council, and partners, to understand their responsibilities, even where their primary duties might not relate to extremism.

### **Safeguarding**

Children and young adults are especially prone to radicalisation. There is a special need to ensure that safeguarding policies incorporate a recognition of the risks of extremism and radicalisation, and that scrutiny work on this issue also involves consideration of these threats. Some of this work will involve engaging with the principles and requirements of Channel, the part of Prevent which attempts to divert people (including young people) away from terrorism. However, much of it is more likely to focus on extremism in its broader sense.

In recent years there have been reports that certain schools or supplementary education settings might be introducing extremist views to pupils and encouraging segregation. Scrutiny councillors will need the confidence that local authorities and partner agencies have put in place multi-agency policies and plans to help tackle this activity – or to mitigate the risk of it occurring in the first place. This might include ensuring that complaint and whistleblowing data is both accurate and available – again, something where scrutiny can provide oversight.

On safeguarding in particular it is important to bear in mind that councils now have limited powers to oversee the work of schools in their

area – and hence scrutiny will need to work to ensure that those with whom it wants to speak about this issue understand the purpose of scrutiny's work. This is an issue which goes to the heart of 'mainstreaming' – it is not purely an issue of compulsion, but more one of building relationships with multiple partners and partnerships, that will include schools and governing bodies. This builds on some of the themes discussed in the section above on developing partnerships.

### **Case study**

#### **Sheffield City Council Prevent Task Group**

Sheffield City Council has established a specialised Prevent Task Group under the Children, Young People and Family Support Scrutiny Committee to review current practices around embedding counter-extremism work.<sup>43</sup> The committee offered several recommendations including regular reviews, improving data collection and data-sharing across partnerships, and increasing councillors' participation in issues related to safeguarding extremism. Similar scrutiny reviews have taken place in numerous other councils: Camden, Merton, Tower Hamlets, Wolverhampton, Harrow, Manchester, Birmingham, among many others.

### **Training**

The Prevent duty statutory guidance identifies the importance of raising awareness on extremism-related issues amongst professional staff through formal training and requires that areas have a Prevent training strategy in place. Training may not need to be formally accredited, but members and staff will need to have the confidence that it is of high quality. Training needs tend to focus on frontline staff, who will have direct contact with people at risk of radicalisation – but training is also required by managers, particularly where services provided to vulnerable children, young people and adults are managed through risk-based systems which are owned

<sup>43</sup> Sheffield City Council (2016). Children, Young People & Family Support Scrutiny Committee: Prevent Task Group Report

and designed by more senior professionals. Such systems need to have triggers relating to concerns about extremism. As such, a large number of professionals in a variety of different organisations – including contractors – are likely to require training. This is the responsibility of those organisations, not the council although a coordinator may play some part in offering the training and ensuring that it is taken up.

In general, the aim of this training is to:

- help staff fully understand the definition of extremism
- help recognise the early signs of radicalisation
- explain which measures and steps should be taken if someone is suspected of conducting extremist activities, or is at risk of becoming radicalised.

Scrutiny can be actively involved in this process, particularly in the following capacity:

- assessing what has been done to raise awareness of extremism-related issues in the council and among the council partners
- ensuring that systems exist across the council and its partners to identify gaps in knowledge
- ensuring that systems exist to identify staff that may need training and at appropriate levels
- ensuring that training needs are adequately addressed and that there is a plan for making sure all who need training will receive it.

## Case studies

### Training on counter-extremism

Tower Hamlets 2016 scrutiny report put forward a recommendation that all commissioned and council grant funded organisations undertake mandatory counter-extremism and safeguarding training to ensure that they understand extremism along with their duties and responsibilities to counter it.<sup>44</sup>

Calderdale Council used a creative approach to raising awareness on violent and non-violent extremism, and as part of its Prevent work started conducting training for licensed taxi drivers on safeguarding issues, Prevent, and spotting early signs of radicalisation or extremism. The rationale behind this approach was that taxi drivers have a wider reach into society and communicate with hundreds of people daily, hence their support will assist in raising awareness greatly. Calderdale lately ensured that prior to receiving a license all taxi drivers have to participate in a four-hour training session.

### Potential questions

- Does the local authority have relevant hiring and booking procedures that do not provide a space for extremist views?
- Are there procedures allowing the withdrawal of local authority grants from organisations involved in promoting extremism?
- Are third sector organisations that receive local authority grants aware of their counter-extremism and Prevent responsibilities (and are their staff trained accordingly)?

<sup>44</sup> London Borough of Tower Hamlets (2016). Scrutiny Review Report: Delivering the Prevent Duty; Promoting Safeguarding in Tower Hamlets

- How do the council's plans to counter extremism explicitly dovetail with plans for other services, mainstreaming counter-extremism and Prevent policy across the area?
- How are the council and its partners working together to ensure that this mainstreaming happens? How is training made a part of this?
- Has Ofsted/Estyn or another inspection mechanism raised a threat of radicalisation in schools?
- Are there relevant procedures and processes to ensure safeguarding partners and school governors can trace early signs of extremism in schools?
- Do school governors and teachers have enough training to determine the early signs of radicalisation, and are they aware of the Channel referral programme?
- Is there a need for procedures ensuring that all grant-funded organisations working with children should undertake safeguarding training?
- Do all safeguarding partners and relevant committees consider extremism and radicalisation threats regularly?
- Which safeguarding methods against violent and non-violent extremism and radicalisation are currently used in the council? Should these methods be expanded?
- How is scrutiny working with the governance systems for other key partners (for example, school governing bodies, police and crime panels) to ensure that its own work is mainstreamed?









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