

Council Meeting: 21 January 2015

Briefing Note

Subject: Counter Terrorism Strategy

Background

The Government's Counter-Terrorism strategy (CONTEST) seeks 'to reduce the risk to the UK and its interests overseas from terrorism, so that people can go about their lives freely and with confidence'. The CONTEST strategy was first published in 2004 but was most recently revised in 2011. Contest is made up of four strands:

- Pursue - stop terrorist attacks
- Prepare - mitigate the impact of an attack where it cannot be avoided
- Protect - strengthen protection against terrorist attack
- Prevent - stop people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism

Responsibility for the Council's counter-terrorism and civil contingency work fall across the full range of Council services, but principally within the Prevent, Prepare and Protect strands.

Governance

The Council's Executive Management Team (EMT) oversees the Council's CONTEST strategy, setting operational priorities, removing blockages, identifying resources in order to support and influence delivery, and ensuring that CONTEST objectives are incorporated into the day-to-day work of the Council.

The Council's CONTEST objectives are delivered through three working groups (Prevent, Protect and Prepare & Contingency), each group having members from all relevant departments and partner agencies. The Prepare & Contingency subgroup works with the Westminster Resilience Forum and maintains links to the London Local Resilience Forum structure. The Prevent Steering Group reflects the Tri-borough nature of some delivery units.

Threat

At the time of writing (January 2015), the level of threat the UK faces from international terrorism is SEVERE; meaning that a terrorist attack is highly likely. The threat of international terrorism comes from a diverse range of sources, and this threat is not just from large organised networks. International events in 2014 and 2015 have highlighted that a threat can manifest itself from a lone individual or small group. Westminster is considered vulnerable to a terrorist attack by virtue of its crowded places, iconic sites, commercial centres and night-time economy.

As well as being a potential terrorist target, Westminster is a Prevent priority area which emphasises its importance for the local delivery of Prevent. Prevent works across a range of issues and ideologies, and addresses all kinds of terrorist threats to the UK. But the local delivery of Prevent will always be tailored to the most significant of those threats locally. A threat assessment produced by the Metropolitan Police Service identifies areas in which this work should be targeted. On an annual basis this is used to inform and review a local partnership Prevent delivery plan.

Protect

Through the Council's activity under the Protect strand, it is:

- Contributing to plans to improve the protective security, reducing the risks and potential impact of a terrorist attack around any identified sites within the City

- Considering protective security within the Council's mainstream activity, for example planning policy
- Providing appropriate awareness training to staff and the wider business community.

Prepare

The Council's civil contingency work is driven by the *Civil Contingencies Act 2004* which requires local authorities to develop and implement emergency plans, business continuity management arrangements and maintain an ability to warn, inform and advise the public in an emergency. Work in this area is focused on:

- Helping residents to be prepared
- Assessing risks to Westminster resilience
- Working together to prepare, respond & recover
- Building resilience through prevention & mitigation

Prevent

While this is a national Strategy, the focus in Westminster is on delivering work to tackle the threats that are faced locally and that supports our residents, businesses and institutions. Therefore the local Prevent Delivery Plan delivers across three key areas:

- Responding to the ideological challenge of terrorism by empowering communities to challenge extremist ideas and denying platforms to extremist speakers
- Working with institutions where there are risks of radicalisation
- Safeguarding individuals who are at risk of radicalisation and ensuring that they are given appropriate advice and support

CONTEST and Social Cohesion

Of the four strands, Prevent has always been the most controversial and has attracted the most criticism, with some accusing it of stigmatising and alienating minority communities. A revised national Prevent Strategy 2011 acknowledged the short-comings of the previous strategy, including a tendency to confuse the delivery of Government policy to promote integration with counter-terrorism. The 2011 strategy refocused attention on counter-terrorism and counter-extremism and away from "unfocused community cohesion activities".

While community cohesion per se is no longer an explicit focus of the Prevent Strategy, strong community engagement remains necessary for effective local delivery. Relationship building with key community groups is mutually beneficial; it affords Prevent officers direct exposure to the views, thoughts and opinions of the communities that they work to safeguard, and provides community members with an opportunity to gain an understanding of what the work of Prevent is really about, and of the roles they can play working in partnership with Prevent to empower their communities.

National and international events will continue to impact upon the City; we are host to a large number of protests and embassies which inevitably means that global events are reflected locally. Furthermore, many of these events are ones that our communities are emotionally and politically engaged with.

The police and Council, alongside our work on Prevent and counter-terrorism generally, regularly monitor community tensions that might develop so that we can respond accordingly. To this end, elected members can play a key role in the monitoring of community tensions, highlighting to officers any community tensions as they emerge and conveying messages of reassurance back to the community.