Stronger Together

A new approach to preventing violent extremism

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New Local Government Network (NLGN) is an independent think tank that seeks to transform public services, revitalise local political leadership and empower local communities. NLGN is publishing this report as part of its programme of research and innovative policy projects, which we hope will be of use to policy makers and practitioners. The views expressed are however those of the authors and not necessarily those of NLGN.

Contents

1 *Introduction*

Preventing Violent Extremism or 'Prevent' is one of the four key pillars of the Government's CONTEST plan – the UK's international counter-terrorism strategy developed in response to the 7 July 2005 terror attacks on London, and revised in March this year.

The purpose of Prevent is to s*top people becoming terrorists or supporting violent extremism.*[1] It began with a £6 million Pathfinder Fund in October 2006, funded by Communities and Local Government (CLG), to support priority local authorities in developing programmes of activity to tackle violent extremism at the local level.[2] It was, largely, welcomed by the local government community at the time, as recognition by central government of the importance of a community-based response to violent extremism and an understanding that an isolated security stance was insufficient.[3] It became mainstreamed in June 2008 with the publication of the Government's full Prevent Strategy[4] alongside £45 million distributed through the Area Based Grant for the 2008-2011 period. Ninety-four local authorities currently receive the money, with a mean of £85,000 per authority.[5]

'Too often in the past, Whitehall has tried to provide all the solutions. It cannot. It is local communities who understand their areas best. And it is local authorities and their local partners, including the police, who have the experience, expertise and tools to tackle the problems at local level.'
Ruth Kelly, Preventing Violent Extremism Pathfinder Fund, Guidance Note, 2007.

It is right that local authorities are at the heart of building safe, secure and cohesive communities. They have responsibilities as community representatives and as local leaders to help ensure public safety, to help people feel confident and get along well together, to protect the vulnerable

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[1] CONTEST, The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering International Terrorism, March 2009
[2] Preventing Violent Extremism Pathfinder Fund, 2007/8 Case Studies, CLG, April 2007
[3] LGA Office Holders, Item 2a, Strategic Issues – Preventing Violent Extremism, April 2008
[4] The Prevent Strategy: A Guide for Local Partners in England, HM Government, June 2008
[5] Leading the Preventing Violent Extremism Agenda: a role made for councillors, LGA, November 2008

and to limit harmful behaviours.

Yet at the moment their ability to perform these roles is being hampered by an approach under the 'Prevent' banner that is proscriptive from the centre, does not always support broader community cohesion objectives and which lacks sufficient integration with police and security services at local and national levels. This paper proposes a fundamental review of the Prevent agenda.

There are many good examples of innovative and worthwhile projects being funded under Prevent and there is no doubting the imperative of supporting, and indeed sometimes challenging, the Muslim community in tackling the difficult issues it faces. Some local authorities are clear that Prevent has played a key role as a catalyst for enabling them to engage with communities with which they had no previous contact.

There are good examples of where the money has been used to build capacity in communities. Birmingham, for example, has used Prevent money to fund projects with themes such as 'reclaiming Islam', and in Islington the Young Muslim Voices project won the Stephen Lawrence Award in 2008 for its youth engagement work.

However, questions that should be examined further include assessing how achievable the Prevent objective is? Do we know what success looks like and can we measure it? Do negative perceptions of Prevent that claim it unfairly stigmatises the Muslim community undermine its effectiveness? Does Prevent have the community buy-in it needs to be effective? And conversely, is there a danger that it is being used by elements within the community as a tool to stoke up perceptions of injustice and grievance? Is the level of funding fair and proportionate in the light of broader threats to community cohesion from other sectors of society? And is the threat of far-right extremism being sufficiently addressed and should Prevent be formally broadened to tackle this?

This paper debates some of these challenges and seeks an alternative local approach to preventing violent extremism that:

- is more closely integrated with wider approaches to building

community cohesion;

- targets all violent extremist ideologies within our local communities, not just Al Quaeda-inspired ideology;

- has a clearer working framework for engaging with local security and intelligence approaches linked to the Pursue aspect of CONTEST;

- has a clearer expression of the roles and expectations of local partners and front-line public service staff;

- better engages and trusts local government with security information and in developing intelligence-led approaches at the local level; and

- has a stronger place for local government at the national policy-making table

This is not an argument for relieving pressure on tackling violent extremism, nor is it a denial that there are elements who seek to distort the Islamic faith and radicalise the vulnerable within those communities. It simply seeks the most effective, proportionate, intelligence and risk-based approaches to preventing violent extremism that is consistent for those of all faiths and of none.

Moreover, it is right that we have a national and international approach to counter-terrorism, security and preventing violent extremism. Terrorism does not operate within local, regional, or indeed national boundaries, so it is important that our response is multi-layered and flexible, with the right partners involved, and the right information shared at the most appropriate spatial level. However, it is at the local level that radicalisation can take root and it is in the social fabric of our local communities and neighbourhoods that the strength and resilience to reject and condemn violent extremist ideologies can be found.[6]

The evolution of local government's role as 'place-shaper' means that it is no longer just a deliverer of services but has a key role to play in leading and shaping the way we live our lives with one another. Many of its local responsibilities have implications for the success of an agenda that seeks to

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[6] The Role of Muslim Politics in Radicalisation (a study in progress) CLG 2007

prevent violent extremism:

- building and shaping local identity;

- representing the community;

- regulating harmful and disruptive behaviours;

- maintaining the cohesiveness of the community and supporting debate within it, ensuring smaller voices are heard;

- helping to resolve disagreements;

- working with other bodies to respond to complex challenges such as natural disasters and other emergencies.[7]

These responsibilities can play a key role in the Prevent agenda, but this demands a new style of leadership from local government. A new and locally-led approach must drive determined and more sophisticated approaches than we have seen thus far to the complex and sensitive issues that surround preventing violent extremism.

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[7] Lyons Review of Local Government

CONTEST

Since 2003, the UK has had a comprehensive strategy in place to counter the threat to this country and to our interests overseas from international terrorism. The strategy is known as CONTEST and was updated in March 2009 with CONTEST II.

The aim of the strategy is 'to reduce the risk to the UK and its interests overseas from international terrorism, so that people can go about their lives freely and with confidence'.

Delivery of the strategy is organised around four workstreams:

- **Pursue:** to stop terrorist attacks

- **Prevent:** to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting violent extremism

- **Protect**: to strengthen our protection against terrorist attack

- **Prepare:** where an attack cannot be stopped, to mitigate its impact

2 *Prevent and cohesion: two sides of the same coin?*

The Government has always tried to be clear that the Prevent agenda and supporting community cohesion are separate, but linked approaches.

The key principles of Prevent are:

- **Challenging** violent extremist ideology and supporting mainstream voices;

- **Disrupting** those who promote violent extremism and supporting the otherwise peaceful institutions where they are active;

- **Supporting** individuals who are being targeted and recruited to the cause of violent extremism;

- **Increasing** the resilience of communities to violent extremism; and

- **Addressing** the grievances that ideologues are exploiting

  These principles are supported by two 'strategic enablers':

- **Developing** understanding, analysis and information; and

- Strategic **communications**

The origins of Prevent and much of the supporting guidance makes clear that this approach is clearly targeted as a direct response to the threat of Al Quaeda-inspired terrorism, rather than being a tool for enabling wider community cohesion. Indeed funding is allocated on the basis of the number of Muslim citizens in an area, and the Pathfinder guidance from CLG was explicit that the strategy is aimed at 'the more specific problem of a small minority of young Muslims being attracted to violent groups'.[8]

CLG has a separate approach to community cohesion, supported by £50

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[8] Preventing Violent Extremism Pathfinder Fund, DCLG 2007

million over three years, with separate aims, funding streams and targets.[9] However, the department acknowledges that cohesion can play a role in creating a stronger, more resilient environment, which makes radicalisation more difficult.

Experience has shown that violent extremism can emerge from even the most cohesive communities, but extremist messages are less likely to find support, and are more easily isolated in a cohesive environment.[10]

If this link is accepted, and if the ultimate aims of the Prevent agenda are to be achieved, then supporting community cohesion and tackling threats to this cohesion, wherever they come from, should play a fundamental role. For this reason, the Prevent agenda and community cohesion should support and foster one another. Many in local government fear that this is not currently the case.

There are currently two accusations levelled at Prevent on this front. The first is that by focusing on Al Quaeda-inspired extremism, it doesn't tackle other forms of extremism or hate-crime in our society, indeed, some maintain that it actively encourages prejudice towards Muslim communities.[11]

While Al Quaeda-inspired extremism remains a very real and serious threat to our security (since 2001 the police and security services have disrupted over a dozen attempted terrorist plots and over 1,450 terrorism-related arrests have taken place), it is not the only threat to the stability and security of our communities. The recent election of two BNP representatives to the European Parliament, as well as 55 local councillors around the country, underlines the fact that racial hatred and extremist ideology is not limited to any one faith or community. Animal rights activism, far-right extremists, anarchism and hate crime constitute a serious threat to the safety and security of our communities. Indeed, recent reports show that Scotland Yard have genuine fears of major right-wing terrorist attacks against Muslim communities.[12]

"Our own experience is that the intensity of the national attention to the

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9 The Government's Response to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, February 2008

10 CONTEST, The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering International Terrorism, March 2009

11 An Nisa Society 'Preventing Violent Extremism and Prevent – A Response from the Muslim Community', Feb 2009

12 http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/jul/06/far-right-terrorism-threat-police

Prevent agenda has distracted energy from the deeper seated and more complex cohesion issues."

Local Authority Chief Executive

The second concern with Prevent's focus on Al Quaeda-inspired extremism is that it could actually be having a negative effect and could serve to further break down relations with the Muslim community. The concern is that the Prevent approach alienates many within the community who feel they are being stigmatised by association with violent extremism and that this undermines the relationship with the very community on whose support delivery of this agenda depends.

In several local authorities some Muslim communities have refused to engage with programmes or seek funding under the Prevent banner. In one area, the money has even been described as 'blood money'.[13]

However, it must be acknowledged that tackling this is a difficult and challenging agenda, and communities must bear their share of responsibility too, when intelligence has identified that there is a real and genuine danger within a particular community. Just because an agenda is challenging, doesn't mean it should be dropped.

Trust is key, though, and there is a danger that the levels of suspicion and mistrust around Prevent could be used as a tool by those elements who seek to undermine cohesion as a means of driving a further wedge between communities and stoking up feelings of grievance and persecution.

It is clear that community cohesion is a sensitive and complex issue, and that whilst the difficult decisions and action must not be shirked, failure to communicate properly, or work closely with the community, can undermine that trust and set back progress.

The LGA have voiced similar concerns, saying that they are keen to ensure there is 'a distinction between the efforts focused on dealing with terrorist threats and broader approaches to community cohesion'.[14] The tensions

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13 Local Authority Chief Executive
14 LGA Prevent website: http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pageId = 19022

inherent in this approach were brought out when negotiations took place last year between central and local government in choosing Local Area Agreements (LAA) priorities. The Home Office, via the Office for Security and Counter Terrorism (OSCT) produced a 'heat map' of 30 areas with a high risk of producing violent extremists and 'sought a good take up' of National Indicator 35: Building Resilience to Violent Extremism.

'The HO believed that local authorities that do not select NI35 are not prioritizing PVE and concluding that little or no PVE work is being undertaken. To persuade local authorities to select NI35, the HO is applying pressure via the Police, and senior officials during LAA negotiations which has had only limited success[15]*'.*

While it is too early to assess the success of the Prevent agenda in terms of outcomes, a lack of support from within the Muslim community, as well as the changing threat of wider extremist voices mean that it is time to review whether the separation of the Preventing Violent Extremism approach from wider community cohesion approaches is still relevant.

Recommendation 1: The Government should review whether to integrate the Prevent agenda more closely with wider approaches to building community cohesion. This should be with a view to its ultimate absorption into a single approach to, and funding stream for, community cohesion and supporting and enabling civic society.

Recommendation 2: Within this new community cohesion approach there should be a clear, proportionate and consistent approach which targets all violent extremist ideologies within our local communities, not just Islamist ideology, and supports and empowers mainstream views in opposing these ideologies.

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15 LGA Office Holders, Item 2a, Strategic Issues – Preventing Violent Extremism, April 2008

3 *Mainstreaming Prevent*

'By linking across the range of council services and departments, councillors can lead their local authorities, and their local partnerships, to regard Prevent as core business' **16**

Cited as a key priority for government,17 'mainstreaming' approaches to Prevent is also controversial. It is crucial for any policy to be successful that is understood and integrated throughout the local authority and its partners, and approaches to Preventing Violent Extremism and building community cohesion should be no different.

It is right, for example, that the drivers of exclusion are tackled as influential factors in creating vulnerability to radicalisation. This is an integral part of the Prevent strategy through one of its key objectives; 'addressing the grievances that ideologues are exploiting'. Councils have a key role to play in reducing social exclusion and health inequalities and improving life chances for all. These aims require a multitude of approaches and the support of various agencies, with partners such as housing, social services, PCTs, probation, education and youth offending teams playing key roles. Lambeth have a specific programme, Together As One, which aims to look at the way broader issues are affecting Muslim communities, such as employment, health, access to services and civic engagement.

This joined-up, integrated approach should be standard – legislation currently going through parliament will bring in a public sector duty to have due regard to the desirability of exercising functions in a way that is designed to reduce the inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage.**18**

However, there is scepticism about this approach from within the Muslim community,**19** perhaps signifying the extent to which relations have broken

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16 Margaret Eaton, LGA PVE Conference November 2008
17 CLG official, LGA conference fringe, The Prevent Strategy: One Year On, Harrogate July 2009
18 Equality Bill 2009, http://tinyurl.com/d6sk44
19 An Nisa Society 'Preventing Violent Extremism and Prevent – A Response from the Muslim Community', Feb 2009

down, and the level of mistrust around this agenda. The perception around 'mainstreaming Prevent' is seen more as extending the security and surveillance aspects into wider council roles.[20] This debate is not currently being held, and the argument needs to be made that this is not be about front-line workers 'spying' but taking the same precautions and vigilance that all of us as citizens undertake, and indeed, doing their job; reporting any perceived threat to an individual or the public.

If a member of staff did not act on intelligence that subsequently could have saved lives, this would be severe negligence. Where community tensions are at risk of overflowing, or an individual is vulnerable, it is right that the situation is monitored and appropriate action taken.

There is already an established police-led framework for monitoring tension, but the role of local authorities in this is not always clear. Local authorities have access to a vast amount of data and this comes with responsibilities both to the individual and the state. For example, the Government published guidance for local authorities on community cohesion contingency planning and tension monitoring which outlined some of the relevant pieces of intelligence that might enable a rapid response to tensions.

These include:

- quantitative data (eg police crime statistics and intelligence reports);

- qualitative community intelligence from neighbourhood wardens, community workers, casework by local councillors and feedback from local community meetings and organisations;

- racially or religiously motivated offences or incidents;

- details of new arrivals, refugees and asylum seekers, and Gypsy and Traveller communities in the local area;

- gang and turf conflicts;

- neighbour disputes;

- complaints of noise nuisance;

20 ibid

- examples of poor community/local authority relations, poor community/ police relations or low levels of trust in local politicians;

- surveys of community views on reassurance, cohesion and safety matters;

- state of local economic activity (decline or improvement);

- financial and social investment in the area;

- demand for housing and condition of the local housing stock;

- plans for renewal and the sustainability of planned or actual improvements;

- political extremism;

- media reports.[21]

Given the privileged access front-line workers have it is right that a balance should be struck and the importance of trust in relationships with, for example, health visitors or social workers must not be threatened nor must the rights of individuals be undermined.

Some local authorities have found that the language of their approach has been crucial to building this trust. Using concepts of cohesion and vulnerability when referring to the more interventionalist elements of Prevent has helped achieve this. Vulnerability is of course something which many workers in Children's and Adult Services recognise as being part of the safeguarding agenda and it can encourage a confident approach to the balance of freedoms and interventions, particularly when applied to young people.

Recommendation 3: Front-line workers should have sufficient support and training to ensure they are aware of their responsibilities and the rights of their clients. Expectations of staff should be clarified as more steps are taken to 'mainstream' Prevent.

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21 Guidance for local authorities on community cohesion contingency planning and tension monitoring, CLG May 2008

Recommendation 4: Local authorities should have a clear vision and strategic approach to community cohesion and to tackling inequality and socio-economic disadvantage throughout all service provision. This should be communicated effectively to all staff.

4 *Knowledge is Power*

While it is acknowledged that joint working with the police, the security services and local authorities has improved at local level as a result of Prevent (particularly in terms of knowing which groups to engage with and fund) local authority chief executives and officers have expressed frustration that there is still a long way to go.

National Indicator 35 (NI35) demands detailed intelligence and knowledge which many feel local Special Branch teams are unwilling to share[22]. While partnership working between police and local authorities is improving, there is still inconsistency around the quality and guidelines for sharing sensitive data at a local level.

"Police share very little real information about areas or individuals of concern, and the drivers to extremism that we already target are the very obvious ones, which apply to all residents and to that extent are already mainstreamed…We don't really have any information from the police which could help us identify any particular hotspots, communities or individuals which should be especially targeted. We don't even get any information about the nature of any threat the borough faces from terrorism."
Local Authority Executive Manager

"Local Prevent Action Plans have little in the way of a true evidence base regarding the level and nature of the local threat from violent extremism. NI35 requires detailed knowledge "i.e. a risk assessment of local vulnerabilities" - however there seems to be an unwillingness of SO15/CTC to either trust or share this information locally with practitioners."
Local Authority PVE/CT lead

If there was a better approach to sharing information at a local level between partners and the police and Special Branch, and a more integrated relationship between central and local government, there would be no need to demand or incentivise action on preventing extremism through central targets. Local authorities would be sufficiently aware of the threat in their

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22 Participant, LGA conference fringe, The Prevent Strategy: One Year On, Harrogate July 2009

area and empowered to take action on an intelligence-led basis.

Some areas are leading the way on this issue. Bristol for example, has established joint commissioning arrangements with the police, but there is far more integration that could be done.

Recommendation 5: Sharing of information is improved at local level with Special Branch and there are agreed exchanges of information between CLG, the Security Services and local authorities.

The level of security clearance required by local authority chief executives also remains inconsistent. Some have had Developed Vetting (DV) and get regular, informed briefings, while others have no clearance at all. There is no clear criteria, and many Chief Executives feel hampered in their ability to deliver this agenda without sufficient knowledge.

Recommendation 6: All Chief Executives and Leaders with relevant LAA priorities or receiving Prevent funding should have security clearance according to clear criteria and be permitted access to relevant secure information. Protocols should be established at the local level around information sharing and access to sensitive briefings.

Regarding the National Indicator, we would query the need for a central target on this issue at all. While it is of course vital that local authorities keep central government and security services informed of where funding is going, and which organisations they are working with, as well as the learning they are getting from the process, the question must be asked to what extent a central target supports or encourages an effective approach to tackling violent extremism.

Some local authorities have stated that NI35 has given them some guidance and focus on how they can engage with communities and strengthen their resilience, but using it as a benchmarking tool is inappropriate, as responses need to be proportionate to the level of risk and specific needs of a local area. Moreover, if the wording were less stigmatising, more appropriate, and focused, perhaps on 'resilience to community tension' or something similar, it might have more buy-in at local level;

Recommendation 7: That there are no National Indicators on Prevent issues. Future indicators on wider 'resilience to community tension' should be considered.

5 *A Local Contest: Pursue Vs Prevent*

Much of the inconsistency in the sharing of security and intelligence data comes from the fact that a lack of clarity remains over local government's role in this agenda.

While this paper has argued for closer integration of Prevent with community cohesion to detoxify the brand and support broader cohesion issues, it is vital that the security and intelligence approach to *stopping terrorist attacks (Pursue)*[23], is able to operate with maximum effectiveness.

Some local tension currently exists between Prevent and Pursue - the security service and police led strand of CONTEST. It is currently unclear in some areas what local government's role is in the police-led Pursue aspect of CONTEST and the extent to which it does, or ought to, cross-over with Prevent.

It is right that local authorities support this crucial work in appropriate ways, and some have established clear working frameworks, but the debate must be had about defining clear working practices at the local level.

At the forefront of this is the extent to which local authorities and the partners can gather intelligence for the security services. Conversely there is a lack of clarity over what intelligence can be shared with local authorities by the security community, and for what purpose.

The Channel project, which works with vulnerable young people in a number of specific areas has played a key role in clarifying the agenda, and pilot areas have been able to develop clearer protocols. It has a clear emphasis that it is not an intelligence-gathering exercise, but one which aims to provide a community-based early intervention. This approach should be more widespread.

Frustration grows from this lack of communication. Security services, police and the Home Office need to adequately convey the nature of the threat,

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[23] CONTEST, The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering International Terrorism, March 2009

and then trust local government to take a proactive response within its appropriate role and capability. For example, the national threat level has recently gone from Severe to Substantial yet local authorities say they have received no intelligence to help them develop their strategies in response on a firm evidence base.

But local government must face up to its responsibilities in this agenda as well:

'What they (the government) said is if we were willing to go out and monitor the Muslim community and use the resources of the local councils to do that, they would release an amount of money to us. The local council should be there to promote education, caring for elderly people, making sure we're living in a safe place. And not become a wing of the security service'.
Kris Hopkins, Leader of Bradford Council, Sept 08, Newsnight, BBC 2

This agenda is not about 'monitoring a community' but about local government accepting its rightful responsibilities in an area of critical importance to the safety and security of its people. As long as there is a genuine, intelligence-led, specific threat, which has been properly shared with and explained to the local authority. Special Branch should recognise the competence and trustworthiness of councils and engage them properly in their response.

The importance of a consistent intelligence-led approach should not be underestimated. Councils and their staff may benefit from shared assessment tools such as the Common Assessment Framework used in children's services to support them in identifying risk and vulnerability.

Allowing local authorities to move away from the Prevent approach which is perceived as unfairly targeting one community, towards an approach focused on community cohesion, would create the space and legitimacy for a more sophisticated, intelligence-led approach to tackling specific local threats as and when they occur, rather than a broad-brush, central government-driven approach which we see now.

Recommendation 8: There should be greater clarity of the role of local government in Pursue approaches and clearer working relations and

understanding of expectations between police, the security community, the local authority and other partners.

Recommendation 9: There should be a clearer distinction between local security and intelligence approaches to specific terrorist threats, and wider community cohesion issues and capacity building, so that actions are legitimised and clearly communicated as intelligence-led and proportionate.

6 *National Policy-Making*

This paper is not arguing that it is appropriate to localise everything. The threat of terrorism is national, indeed, international, and different decisions must be made at the right special level. However, if the role of local government at the forefront of this agenda is acknowledged, and the learning and intelligence gathered at local level is of importance, then it ought to have more influence at the centre where decisions are made on funding and policy direction, and where threat assessments are made.

Intelligence from secret sources is used to support the Government's policies by providing information on relevant activities and developments which could not be adequately monitored from regular or overt sources. If this information is used to direct central government policy, there is no reason why it cannot be used to influence local government policy making too, provided sufficient security clearance is in place.

The collection, analysis and assessment of this secret intelligence is guided nationally by the Joint Intelligence Committee in the Cabinet Office, which each year establishes requirements and priorities for the work of the intelligence community. These are put to the Ministerial Committee for the Intelligence Services for approval, with advice provided by the Permanent Secretaries' Committee on the Intelligence Services.

Intelligence collected by the three Security Agencies; the Secret Intelligence Service (known colloquially as MI6), the Securiy Service (MI5) and the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) is passed directly in the form of reports to customer departments in Government, where it informs and assists decision-making. It contributes, with other sources of information, to threat assessment work and other longer-term analysis and assessment.

The JIC's members are senior officials in the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Ministry of Defence (including the Chief of Defence Intelligence), Home Office, Department of Trade and Industry, Department for International Development, Treasury and Cabinet Office, the Heads of the three intelligence Agencies and the Chief of the Assessments Staff. Other Departments attend as necessary.

The JIC is supported by the Assessments Staff, which consists of a range of analytical staff seconded from various departments, services and disciplines. It is responsible for drafting assessments of situations and issues of current concern, for providing warnings of threats to British interests, and for identifying and monitoring countries at risk of instability. Its staff draw on a range of reporting, primarily from the Agencies but also including UK diplomatic reporting and open source material.[23]

Local government should be able to bolster the advice and support that is currently only fed up through the police and security services with their knowledge and insight into front line shifts, trends and tension monitoring within their communities.

For the last few months CLG has hosted a Local Delivery Advisery Group for Prevent which brings together a number of key chief executives, councillors and practitioners. This is important progress but there should be more systematic processes for feeding-back findings from policy implementation.

Recommendation 10: Given the threat of 'home-grown' terrorism, CLG officials should have a permanent seat on JIC. There should be a local government team comprising experienced local authority Chief Executives on the Assessments staff.

Recommendation 11: CLG should engage Chief Executives and Leaders better in its community cohesion policy formulation at national level by consulting them throughout the policy-making process. The local experience and expertise, and the practical understanding of the impact of policy at the local level, should be taken into account in central government approaches.

23 ibid

7 *A Debating Society*

Recent furore surrounding political expenses and subsequent calls for democratic reform has served to highlight the inadequacies of our political system in sufficiently engaging citizens, and there has been much debate about the need for new approaches to politics. There is no doubt that many individuals and communities feel excluded from political debate and action in this country, and further research into the impact that political exclusion has on vulnerability to radicalisation (whether it's right-wing extremism, anti-capitalism, anarchism, or religious extremism) would be welcome.

National issues such as foreign policy, immigration policy, housing and employment continue to be of great significance to many parts of our communities (the white working class as much as Muslim communities), and can provoke feelings of grievance and resentment, and provide a challenge to individual and community identities.

There are currently no very clear mechanisms for open debate at local level on national issues. While some local authorities reported that providing forums for debates on issues such as Gaza in the summer of 2008 have been very successful at engaging difficult-to-reach communities, local councillors and officers find it difficult to represent national policy-making or access to central government decision-making in a way which provides a sufficient sense of direct contact for local people.

Recommendation 12: Local MPs and councillors, as well as central government ministers and civil servants should prioritise more direct debate and discussion on national and international issues of concern to their local communities, and ensure a more accessible and responsive approach to local debate. Local authorities should play a key role in creating the space and environment for healthy, constructive political debate.

8 *Conclusion*

The Preventing Violent Extremism agenda is undoubtedly doing much good work around the country. However, not only is this currently difficult to quantify, there are concerns it may be doing more harm than good to the relationships it seeks to strengthen. The question is whether the Prevent 'brand' is irretrievably damaged and whether a new, more sophisticated approach is required to build bridges with a Muslim community that feels bruised and victimised, whilst maintaining a firm line on critical issues of national security. Other marginalised communities have also begun to express their discontent more loudly. It is clear that only a local response will ensure the complex and sensitive approach that community cohesion demands.

A new relationship between central and local government on this issue, with a clearer and more defined role for local government including a broader, more inclusive approach to community cohesion is essential. Combined with a more open and constructive relationship with the security services that is intelligence-led, local government could oversee the start of a new approach to tackling violent extremism in our communities.

Annex

N.I. 35 – BUILDING COMMUNITIES RESILIENT TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM

ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

Understanding of, and engagement with, Muslim communities.

Score Description

1. Community engaged on an ad hoc basis and through wider faith/ minority groups. Mechanisms and engagement is/are not self sustaining or productive. Understanding of the make-up of the local Muslim community is limited and superficial.

2. Regular mechanisms for consulting and working with Muslim community, but attendence and reach not wide. Tendency to engage with individuals and interest groups rather than communities. Basic knowledge of structure of local Muslim community in terms of ethnicity and geographical extent.

3. Regular and reliable mechanisms for frequent contact with whole communities, as well as individuals within communities. Strong knowledge of the make-up of the Muslim communities, including different ethnic groups, denominations, social and economic status, elected representatives and community leaders, knowledge of location and denomination of mosques, awareness of community groups. Knowledge of partner agencies appropriately utilised.

4. Regular and reliable mechanisms which include all communities and under-represented groups such as women and youth in an ongoing dialogue. That dialogue influences and informs policy. Sophisticated and segmented understanding of Muslim communities, the structures within them, and the cultures which make them up.

5.   A self sustaining, dynamic and community driven engagement which takes place on a number of different levels and in a number of different

ways, with innovative approaches to communication and engagement of all groups. Sophisticated understanding of local Muslim communities is used to drive policy development and engagement.

Knowledge and understanding of the drivers and causes of violent extremism and the Prevent objectives

Score Description

1. Awareness of the issues, but no thinking about what it means for the locality or how to engage fully with the agenda. Poor understanding of causes of violent extremism and the Government's Prevent strategy objectives.

2. Basic understanding of what is required from local partners, and familiarity with key documents and guidance material. Attempts to draw together an evidence base and to analyse the underlying causes of violent extremism.

3. Good understanding of the Prevent objectives and drivers of violent extremism among partners. Established evidence base draws on a number of sources, including evidence from a number of local partners about violent extremism within the local area. Awareness of appropriate research. Attempt to take into account specific local circumstances and build evidence of strength of drivers locally, including sharing of information between partners.

4. Strong understanding of the Prevent objectives and the drivers of violent extremism, as well as of the interfaces with related policy areas. Full use of local, national and international research, guidance and expertise on the agenda, including good information sharing between partners. Good understanding of local circumstances and drivers.

5. Sophisticated understanding of the Prevent objectives and the drivers of violent extremism. Full use of local, national and international research, guidance and expertise on the agenda to build a wide-ranging and sophisticated evidence base. Clearly strong information interchanges between local partners across delivery organisations and strands of ctivity. Strong understanding of local circumstances and drivers.

Development of a risk-based preventing violent extremism action plan, in support of delivery of the Prevent objectives

Score Description

1. Basic, narrowly focused action plan in place.

2. Action plan with clear resource allocations and timeframes attached to actions. Some linkages to Government's 'Prevent' strategy objectives and to the drivers of violent extremism. Some links to feedback from community engagement.

3. Risk-based comprehensive and clear action plan which makes clear links to the 'Prevent' strategy. Links to community engagement and knowledge and understanding of the drivers of violent extremism. Range of activity covering different strands of the 'Prevent' strategy.

4. Risk based and strategically focused action plan with clear links to the knowledge and understanding of the drivers of violent extremism, the 'Prevent' strategy and to extensive consultation with communities. Clear buy-in from senior officers and strategic partners. Necessary actions, capabilities, policies and projects clearly identified. Strong focus on multi-agency partnership working, including synergies with CDRPs and other bodies. Broad range of activity delivering all strands of the 'Prevent' strategy, including through a range of mainstream services.

5. Risk based and strategically focused action plan with strong links to the knowledge and understanding of the drivers of violent extremism, the 'Prevent' strategy and to extensive consultation with communities and local partner agencies. Agenda effectively 'mainstreamed' through consideration of existing service delivery and policies, alongside the development of specific actions, projects and capabilities. Awareness of agenda throughout partner organisations. Full range of activities across all strands of the 'Prevent' strategy. Innovative actions, projects and capabilities clearly identified. Strong evidence of multi-agency approach to deliver across a broad range of partners and agencies, including synergies with CDRPs and other bodies.

**Effective oversight, delivery and evaluation of projects and actions.**

Score Description

1. Loose and informal monitoring of projects, leading to haphazard delivery and frequent overruns and changes of scope. Evaluation is informal and haphazard. Audit arrangements in place.

2. Clear plans for delivery and oversight. Some level of formal evaluation, but no clear mechanism for follow-up. Audit arrangements and risk management in place.

3. Monitoring mechanisms in place with regular reviews to ensure delivery. Oversight group in place. Formal evaluation but which has no real effect on developing future projects and actions. Strong audit arrangements and risk management in place.

4. Proven monitoring mechanisms in place which help ensure regular delivery of projects within timescale, to the required standard and budget constraints. Oversight group with range of skills and representing appropriate range of interests. Formal evaluation using appropriate methodology which has some impact on the development of future projects. Strong audit arrangements and risk management in place.

5. Strong tried and tested monitoring mechanisms which allow highlighting and resolution of issues, track progress and ensure consistent delivery of projects and actions within timescale, to the required standard and budget constraints. Oversight group with appropriate skills and seniority in place and actively involved in monitoring. Professional and extensive evaluation of project against agreed objectives, which has real impact on development of future projects. Strong audit arrangements and sophisticated risk management in place.
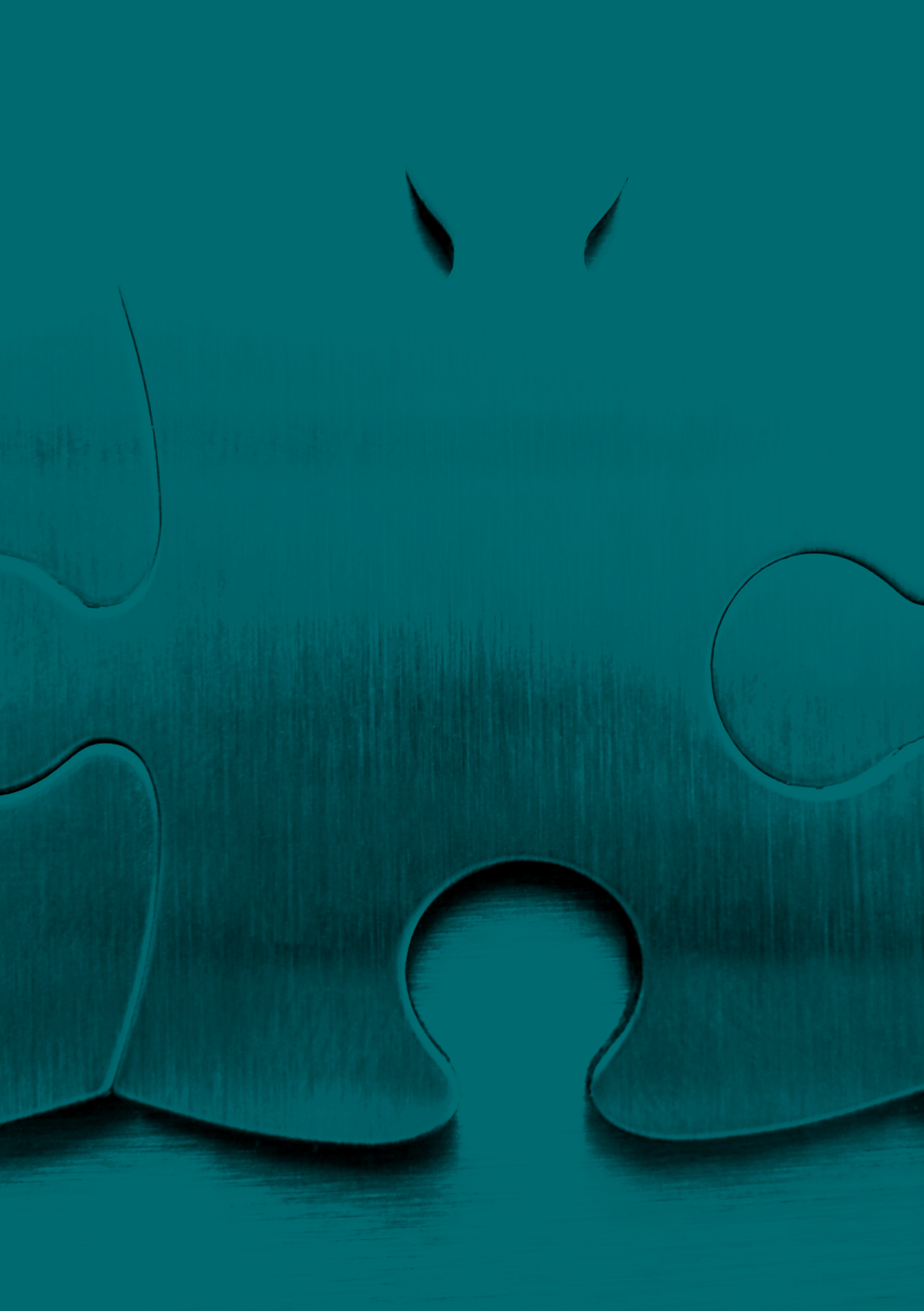
![NLGN - New Local Government Network logo]

It is right that we have a national and international approach to counter-terrorism, security and preventing violent extremism. Terrorism does not operate within local, regional, or indeed national boundaries, so it is important that our response is multi-layered and flexible, and that the right approach is taken, the right partners involved, and the right information shared at the most appropriate spatial level.

However, it is at local level that radicalisation can take root, and it is in the social fabric of our local communities and neighbourhoods that the strength and resilience to reject and condemn violence and extremist ideologies can be found**.**