

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-060-2009/10
Date of meeting: 21 December 2009



Portfolio: Community Safety & Transport
Subject: The “Prevent” Strategy and Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) Action Plan
Responsible Officer: J Gilbert (01992 564062).
Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) That the content and intent of the government’s “Contest” and “Prevent” strategies be noted;
- (2) That the “Prevent” Action Plan be considered and adopted; and
- (3) That the Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership (“One Epping Forest”) be requested to establish a “Prevent” Partnership Group to oversee the delivery of the Action Plan

Executive Summary:

The “Prevent” agenda is a key part of the governments approach to managing violent extremism within communities. It sits within the overarching “Contest” policy which deals with all types of extremism and terrorist activities. A summary of the Contest strategy is attached to the agenda.

This report provides background information to the “Prevent” agenda and puts forward for consideration a local Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) Action Plan which sets out how the Council will seek to address the “Prevent” agenda

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

National Indicator 35, “Building Resilience to Violent Extremism” is one of the new suite of indicators which came into place with effect from March 2009. All local authorities are required to report against it and this recommended action plan sets out how the Council will address the key issues.

Other Options for Action:

Whilst all local authorities have to report, it is possible, subject to government consent, for authorities in two tier areas to develop joint action plans. However, to date, there has been no clear indication that this approach is deliverable within Essex and therefore the Council must develop an action plan of its own. Therefore, at this time, there are no alternatives available

Report:

Background

1. NI35, "Building Resilience to Violent Extremism", is one of the set of National Indicators and is unusual insofar as it places responsibility upon the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) for assessing the level of resilience for the area. However, the responsibility for reporting to government on the indicator remains with the Council. The LSP has recognised its role and has placed the responsibility for the indicator with the Safer Communities Partnership. The Corporate Executive Forum has, given the role of the Community Safety Team within the Environment & Street Scene Directorate, placed the responsibility for the reporting process with the Director of Environment & Street Scene.

2. The "Contest" strategy has four main strands:

- Pursue – to prevent terrorist attacks;
- Prevent – to stop people within communities becoming terrorists or supporting terrorist activities and beliefs;
- Protect – to strengthen the UK's resilience against terrorist attack; and
- Prepare – to be able to mitigate the effects of a terrorist attack

3. NI35 is the national indicator which deals with the "Prevent" part of the "Contest" strategy. It is measured against four main criteria, each of which attracts a score of between 1 and 5 and requires the Council to:

- (i) develop an understanding of and engagement with Muslim communities;
- (ii) develop knowledge and an understanding of the drivers and causes of violent extremism and the "Prevent" objectives;
- (iii) develop a risk based PVE Action Plan; and
- (iv) ensure the effective oversight, delivery and evaluation of projects and actions.

4. It can be seen from criteria 1 that the PVE agenda is primarily focussed on the Muslim community. However, more recent announcements from government have indicated a shift in approach to recognise that extremism can arise from a range of different community groups and it is important to recognise this mix of risks. In the light of this and the nature of the community of the Epping Forest District, the Action Plan which has been developed aims to tackle these issues from a broader community perspective.

5. Given the demographic makeup of Epping Forest District it would easy to form the view that such matters are of little concern. However, this District borders onto a number of London Boroughs where members of different religious and ethnic communities make up a much higher percentage of the population. This means that events or incidents which arise in this District can adversely affect local community cohesion in these adjoining London Boroughs.

Council activity and the PVE Action Plan

6. The Council has already established a successful Multi Faith Forum (MFF), which includes within its membership, the local Imam. The MFF is represented on the Epping Forest LSP. However, the Council has not specifically sought to directly engage with its own Muslim community beyond that contact within the MFF.

7. Since the events in Loughton, the Council has sought to commence this engagement, through for example discussions with the Essex Independent Advisory Group, which is an organisation which acts as a critical friend to the Essex Police in respect of all religious, disability and equality matters. Officers have also met with their Community Safety colleagues from the London Borough of Redbridge, and further meetings are scheduled on a regular basis.

8. The Essex Police have appointed a number of "Prevent" support staff whose role is to assist Safer Community Partnerships and local authorities in their understanding of the "Prevent" agenda and in the production of their PVE Action Plans. The Police officer allocated to this District has been in frequent contact with officers and presented an overview on the subject to the LSP Board at its last meeting in late September. The proposed PVE Action Plan which is attached to the agenda, has been produced on the basis of that officer's advice and guidance.

9. The PVE has the following sections:

- (a) an introduction;
- (b) aims & objectives;
- (c) an overview of NI35;
- (d) partnership working ; and
- (e) action plan tables.

10. One of the key suggestions in the partnership section of the PVE action plan is the creation of a Prevent Partnership Group, which should be comprised of organisations which are best placed to take the strategy forwards. Given the nature of this task and where the overarching responsibility lies, it is suggested that the task of setting up the Partnership Group should rest with the LSP.

Resource Implications

There are no immediate resource implications arising from the report and its recommendations. From this Council's perspective the initiative will be driven via the existing Safer Communities Unit, and the delivery of the action plan itself revolves around the enhancement of existing networks and partnerships. There may be costs associated with training and attendance at conferences etc but these will be accommodated within existing budgets.

Legal and Governance Implications:

As the report sets out, whilst the LSP is responsible for action plan, this Council holds the responsibility for reporting on NI35. The LSP has placed responsibility upon the Safer Communities Partnership for the delivery of the strategy whilst this Council has placed the Director of Environment & Street Scene in the role as Lead Officer for NI35.

Given this split of responsibilities it will be important to ensure on-going partnership between the Council and the LSP in the delivery of the strategy and the action plan.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

The "Prevent" strategy is seen as key in the maintenance of community stability. The

demographic makeup of the communities in the adjoining London Boroughs results in a need for this Council to remain vigilant and to be aware of any potential causes of religious or other tensions and to engage with the relevant communities accordingly

Consultation Undertaken:

Report to be considered by the LSP Steering Group and the LSP Board on 26 November and 17 December 2009 respectively. Any observations will be made available to Cabinet at the meeting.

Background Papers:

DCLG – “Preventing Violent Extremism: Next Steps for Communities”

HM Govt. – “Pursue, Prevent, Protect, Prepare: The United Kingdom’s Strategy for Countering International Terrorism”

HM Govt. – “The Prevent Strategy: A Guide for Local partners in England”

HM Govt. – “Preventing Violent Extremism: A Strategy for Delivery”

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

There are two main identified risks given the nature of the makeup of the District's community:

- (1) the Council does too little through its action plan or fails to be sufficiently alert to and respond to intelligence relating to tensions arising outside of our borders; or
- (2) the Council, through the best of intentions, does too much, and creates tensions within the community where none exist at present.

These risks will require a careful monitoring of the action plan and the maintenance of close partnership ties with the relevant communities and partner agencies

Equality and Diversity:

Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications?

No

Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken?

No

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?

Not relevant

How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group?

Not relevant