

**To: COMMUNITIES, HOUSING AND PLANNING POLICY BOARD**

**On: 29 AUGUST 2017**

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**Report by: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES**

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**Heading: COUNTER TERRORISM and PREVENT STRATEGY**

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**1. Summary**

- 1.1 The nature of terrorism and the threat that terrorist activities pose to communities has changed significantly over the past 10 years. A key focus of the work of public protection is to understand the changing nature of the threat and to work closely with key partners and communities to address these threats.
- 1.2 Much of this work is directed by guidance from UK and Scottish Governments and the Communities, Housing and Planning Policy Board has a specific oversight role for the Council.
- 1.3 This report provides an update for the Communities, Housing and Planning Policy Board on the background and activities of the Renfrewshire Multi Agency CONTEST (Prevent) Group, which has been established to take forward this work across Renfrewshire, including information on the:
- Background to the group and its links to wider governance structures;
  - Counter Terrorism Strategy;
  - Terror threat levels & analysis;
  - The Grey Space Community Group;
  - Training & awareness raising activity;
  - Exercise Agora Archway.
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## **2. Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Communities, Housing and Planning Policy Board:

- 2.1 Notes the progress achieved in understanding and responding to the threat posed by terrorism;
  - 2.2 Notes the steps taken to raise awareness of the prevent work and the steps taken to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism;
  - 2.3 Notes that regular progress reports on the work of Renfrewshire's Multi Agency Contest (Prevent) Group will be brought back to future meetings of this Policy Board.
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## **3. Background to the Renfrewshire Multi Agency CONTEST (Prevent) Group**

- 3.1 The Council hosts a Multi Agency Contest (Prevent) Group, which meets quarterly in order to meet the duties of the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015. The group is chaired by the Council's Head of Public Protection, reflecting in their role as the Council's Single Point of Contact for Counter Terrorism. Renfrewshire Multi Agency CONTEST (Prevent) Group includes membership from across key Council services, and partner agencies, which include the blue light agencies, the Prison Service and further education representatives.
  - 3.2 The role of the Group is to identify priorities and opportunities for tackling terrorism and associated criminal activity across Renfrewshire. The Group undertakes high level assessments to identify a clear understanding of the risks facing the area, ensuring that there is high awareness across the Council and its partners and that action is being taken to prevent radicalisation.
  - 3.3 The Renfrewshire Multi Agency Contest (Prevent) Group is well established. It reports through the Community Safety and Public Protection Steering Group to the Renfrewshire Community Protection Chief Officers Group, as chaired by the Chief Executive.
  - 3.4 The Communities, Housing and Planning Policy Board also has a key role to act as an oversight tasking committee for any work undertaken internally within the Council under the auspices of Contest (Prevent). Updates will be provided regularly, as required to this Policy Board.
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## **4 UK Counter Terrorism Strategy - CONTEST**

- 4.1 CONTEST is the UK Government's counter terrorism strategy – which the Scottish Government is committed to supporting in Scotland. It has four clear objectives:
  - Pursue – to stop terrorist attacks;

- Protect – to strengthen our protection against terrorist attack;
- Prepare – where an attack cannot be stopped, to mitigate its impact;
- Prevent – to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting violent extremism.

4.2 The Council's original approach to CONTEST was directly linked to the Civil Contingencies Service Joint Management Board and linked to the Council's strategic approach in preparing for emergencies. This approach worked well to allow the Council to consider the threat of terrorism from a civil contingencies perspective – primarily around the Protect and Prepare agenda. However, there is an increasingly important and wider aspect that Councils are expected to consider and address and this relates to the Prevent agenda, as referenced above.

4.3 The **Prevent** agenda has been highlighted within the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 and requires Councils and in turn, Community Planning partners to:

- Have a clear understanding of what radicalisation means and to raise awareness amongst staff – equipping them to challenge ideology that supports terrorism;
- Take action to prevent vulnerable people from being radicalised or exploited – providing them with appropriate advice and support;
- Be confident in responding effectively when risks or incidents are identified – with raised awareness that helps identify and address risks of radicalisation.

4.4 This has obvious implications for partner services, in particular those that deal with vulnerable people and children. A key challenge is that there is no single pathway towards radicalisation. Initial contact can:

- be through peers, families or friends (a social process);
- take place in our communities in unsupervised environments (gyms / leisure facilities / cafes / libraries);
- be in individuals' homes;
- be through internet and social media.

4.5 Vulnerability makes people susceptible to exploitation:

- young adults exploring issues of identity can distance themselves from family, culture or religious heritage;
- personal crisis can lead to a sense of injustice;
- changed circumstances in the family or events in a country of origin can all lead to increased vulnerability.

4.6 There is no profile for a typical UK based terrorist, however, vulnerable people can be persuaded to join groups that support terrorist activity through:

- a need to express or act on feelings of injustice or anger;
- a desire for friendship, common cause or adventure;

- a fascination with violence, weapons or uniforms; or
  - a need for belonging, status or identity.
- 4.7 Local authorities work with vulnerable people, visit homes and businesses on a regular basis and are therefore ideally placed to identify people at risk of radicalisation or see signs of radicalised behaviour. There is a need to ensure that material related to terrorism is stopped from being distributed in partners' facilities, particularly those used by vulnerable people and to stop inappropriate use of, or access to publicly provided intranet / internet or IT systems.
- 4.8 It is incumbent on all organisations to ensure that recruitment; vetting and induction processes are robust and are used to raise awareness amongst staff of the prevention strategy and approach.
- 4.9 There is also a need to consider how this agenda will impact on and relate to current arrangements for protecting vulnerable people including adult / child protection arrangements, as well as impact on equalities and human rights.

## **5. Threat Levels & Analysis**

- 5.1 Police Scotland provide regular updates to the Renfrewshire Multi Agency CONTEST (Prevent) Group on terrorism threat levels which are set in the UK by the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) and MI5.
- LOW means an attack is unlikely;
  - MODERATE means an attack is possible, but not likely;
  - SUBSTANTIAL means an attack is a strong possibility;
  - SEVERE means an attack is highly likely;
  - CRITICAL means an attack is expected imminently.
- 5.2 The threat level for the UK from international terrorism is set by JTAC. Currently the threat level is set at SEVERE meaning an attack is highly likely. The current working assumption is that it is a question of "when" and not "if" the next attack is carried out in Britain.
- 5.3 MI5 is responsible for setting the threat levels from Irish and other domestic terrorism both in Northern Ireland and in Great Britain. The threat level for Northern Irish related terrorism is set separately and is SUBSTANTIAL (an attack is a strong possibility) in Britain; and SEVERE in Northern Ireland.
- 5.4 In reaching a judgement on the appropriate terrorism threat level in any given circumstance several factors need to be taken into account. These include:
- Available intelligence - It is rare that reliable specific threat information is available. More often, judgements about the threat will be based on a wide range of information, which is often fragmented, including the level and nature of current terrorist activity, comparison with events in other countries and previous attacks.

Intelligence is only ever likely to reveal part of the picture.

- Terrorist capability - An examination of what is known about the capabilities of the terrorists in question and the method they may use based on previous attacks or from intelligence. This would analyse the potential scale of the attack.
- Terrorist intentions - Using intelligence and publicly available information to examine the overall aims of the terrorists and the ways they may achieve them including what sort of targets they would consider attacking.
- Timescale - The threat level expresses the likelihood of an attack in the near term. We know from past incidents that some attacks take years to plan, while others are put together more quickly. In the absence of specific intelligence, a judgement will be made about how close an attack might be to fruition. Threat levels do not have any set expiry date, but are regularly subject to review in order to ensure that they remain current.

5.5 The UK Threat Level has been raised to CRITICAL three times:

- 10 August 2006 (in response to a foiled airline attack plot to blow up 10 aircraft using liquid explosives), it remained at this level for 3 days;
- 30 June 2007 (at the time of the Glasgow Airport attack) when it remained at this level for 4 days.
- More recently the level was raised to CRITICAL following the Manchester attack in May 2017 and again remained at that level for 4 days.

5.6 When the threat level is raised to CRITICAL, this can have a significant impact on the deployment and availability of Police and other blue light services. The nature of any restrictions will relate to the specific intelligence and the perceived nature of the threat at a local level. The expectation on Renfrewshire Council and local service partners will be to comply with and continue to deliver services and facilities locally that are in line with the levels of expectation being set and communicated by the Government at a national level – working closely with the guidance of Police Scotland as the lead agency. When the Threat level moves to CRITICAL it moves at a UK level and is consistent across the UK. The response to the threat level might vary from region to region.

5.7 The Renfrewshire Multi Agency CONTEST (Prevent) Group, undertakes ongoing analysis of the ever evolving threat faced to prepare for and consider options that will help us to strengthen and protect Renfrewshire communities most effectively. Recent analysis has shown:

- There are strong and growing links between serious organised crime & terrorism;

- There are concerns around threats potentially posed by returnees from conflict areas such as Syria. While there is no local evidence of this currently, it requires continual review;
- Across Europe there is a growth in the number of “fixated individuals” – typically with mental health issues, with no real connection to a faith or ideology, but who are susceptible to radicalisation. This can be witnessed through the murder of Jo Cox in 2016;
- Extreme Right Wing groups pose a threat and are operating locally – signage has been found in Renfrewshire, additionally a “whites only” foodbank was found to be operating in Glasgow. Recent events have witnessed groups such as the Scottish Defence League (SDL) jumping on legitimate community problems to further their cause, as witnessed in Alloa; where the High Street was closed by the SDL and others protesting against housing concerns.

5.8 Through the Renfrewshire Multi Agency CONTEST (Prevent) Group, it is now understood that the nature of the threat has evolved considerably, even in recent times. There has been a distinct move away from organised groups committing attacks, to rudimentary everyday items being used by lone actors to commit as much harm as possible. The desire to Prevent persons from being radicalised has become more and more crucial, as targeting vulnerable people and persuading them to act alone is being recognised as a recurring factor in many of those who have committed more recent attacks across the globe.

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## 6. **Grey Space Group – Building Community Capacity and Cohesion**

6.1 As set out in section 4 of this report there are many reasons why individuals might become vulnerable to being radicalised. However, it is becoming well recognised that strong communities that are tolerant and understanding of others can play a significant role in identifying and preventing individuals at risk and supporting them to more positive outcomes. The Grey Space Group is unique in Scotland to Renfrewshire and Inverclyde. This Community Group was established and is led by Police Scotland and contains representation from across the various community groups in the area. Representation includes religious groups, the LGBT+ community, student groups and national groups. Locally the group has proven usefully in providing reassurance against concerns where significant events have taken place, e.g. the Brexit vote, recent terror attacks.

6.2 Grey Space acts as a forum for the associated community groups to raise their concerns to the Police, Council and other public agencies and gain an understanding of the actions taken locally. The group meets locally with the intention of fostering strong ties, understanding and trust within our community. This positive, existing relationship deepens understanding and tolerance across communities and is likely to be of significance were any large scale incidents to occur that impact on Renfrewshire communities.

## **7. Training and Awareness Raising**

- 7.1 The Renfrewshire Multi Agency CONTEST (Prevent) Group approach to training and awareness raising is firstly to act as a conduit for sharing best practice along with offering specific localised training.
  - 7.2 Currently local dedicated training has been delivered to over one hundred key officers from across the Council. The aim of these briefings has been to highlight the responsibilities of the Council and employees to safeguard vulnerable people within our area and to provide information on warning signs that they might be vulnerable to radicalisation or linked with groups or organisations that are a concern.
  - 7.3 These face to face sessions will be complimented by the Council's Public Protection I-Learn package that is currently being developed and will be made available to all staff later this year.
  - 7.4 The raising of the UK Threat Level to CRITICAL in May 2017 triggered a great deal of information sharing. Key messages on security measures were circulated to all staff within Renfrewshire Council, reminding them of key policies such as badge wearing and security. The overriding theme of the messaging was to provide reassurance. Additionally, regular updates and briefings were circulated to the Renfrewshire Multi Agency CONTEST (Prevent) Group membership – through the circulation of information by Police Scotland and to the Chief Executive and Senior Managers across the Council and partner agencies.
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## **8. Exercise Agora Archway**

- 8.1 The most recent major training exercise in Renfrewshire was the design and delivery of “Exercise Agora Archway”, which took place in June 2017. This exercise was the first of its kind nationally and brought together the Council’s Corporate Management Team (CMT) and Council Resilience Management Team (CRMT), as well as key blue light partners and the Grey Space Group. The exercise was delivered as a pilot by the Scottish Multi Agency Training and Exercising Unit (SMARTEU) (linked to Police Scotland, the Scottish Government and the Home Office), with planning input and facilitation from the Council’s Civil Contingencies Service.
- 8.2 The aim of Exercise Agora Archway was to examine the role and responsibilities of both public organisations and the community in response to an immediate threat of a terrorist incident. Its objectives were to:
  - Examine the business continuity plans of the public organisations in response of a “move to critical” in the UK terror threat level;
  - Explore how partner organisations will work together in the response to a critical incident following a “move to critical” and during heightened community tensions;

- Investigate the potential impact of public messaging on community tension;
- Ascertain if the utilisation of a community tension monitoring group can provide effective support to the public organisations, prior, during or following a crisis situation.

8.3 Agora Archway highlighted the community response and expectations of public bodies. It gave responding agencies an awareness of the Grey Space Group, whilst exercising against a challenging scenario. As the first exercise of its kind and a pilot, there were undoubtedly areas for improvement. SMARTEU will be taking cognisance of the learning in the pilot in the development of future exercising.

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### **Implications of the Report**

1. **Financial** – none
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – none
3. **Community Planning** - none
4. **Legal** – none
5. **Property/Assets**-none
6. **Information Technology** - none
7. **Equality & Human Rights**- none
8. **Health & Safety** – none
9. **Procurement** – none
10. **Risk** – none
11. **Privacy Impact** – none
12. **Cosla Policy Position** - none

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### **List of Background Papers** - None

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