

THE SOUTHPORT PUBLIC INQUIRY

OPENING STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF COUNTER TERRORISM POLICING NORTH WEST

Introduction

1. This opening statement is made on behalf of Counter Terrorism Policing North West (“CTPNW”).
2. The profound condolences of all the officers and staff of CTPNW remain with the victims, families and those affected by the events of 29th July 2024. Those victims and families are rightly at the heart of this Inquiry. CTPNW will provide all possible assistance to the Chair and the Inquiry Team to support the discharge of the Inquiry’s terms of reference and, in particular, seek to identify where improvements can be made.
3. At the time of preparing this statement, a small proportion of the documents and none of the statements provided by CTPNW have been uploaded to the Inquiry’s disclosure system. CTPNW does not propose to take up the Inquiry’s time in rehearsing what is set out in this written opening statement with an oral opening statement. However, CTPNW will listen and reflect upon what others, particularly the victims of the attack and their families, will say.

The Counter Terrorism Policing network

4. Counter Terrorism (“CT”) policing consists of a network of operational units based regionally across the United Kingdom with a headquarters that provides specialised national and international capabilities. Forces collaborate through an operating model and chief officers vest authority in both the National Lead for Counter Terrorism (routinely the Assistant Commissioner in the Metropolitan Police for Specialist Operations) and the Senior National Coordinators, who have strategic and operational oversight of CT policing.
5. CTPNW was established as a CT policing unit in 2007. It provides support and assistance with terrorist investigations to Cheshire Police, Cumbria Constabulary, Greater Manchester Police, Lancashire Constabulary, Merseyside Police and The Isle of Man Constabulary.

6. The National CT Policing Headquarters (“**CTPHQ**”) aids the co-ordination and national governance of these CT policing units across England and Wales, and works in concert with CT command within the Metropolitan Police Service. This ensures that CT policing operates as a single entity whilst anchored and connected to the local communities they serve. Like the rest of policing, it is overseen by the National Police Chiefs’ Council (“**NPCC**”) under its Counter-Terrorism Coordination Committee.
7. Both central Government and CTPHQ have issued a range of policies and guidelines which underpin the CT functions and are carried out by CT policing nationwide, including CTPNW. These national policies and guidelines seek to drive a consistent approach nationwide.

The United Kingdom’s strategy for countering terrorism

8. The police approach and structure to CT during the relevant period reflected the UK Government’s Strategy for Countering Terrorism (known as CONTEST) dated June 2018 (which was updated in July 2023).¹ The aim of CONTEST (as described in the 2018 policy) was “to reduce the risk to the UK and its citizens and interests overseas from terrorism, so that our people could go about their lives freely and with confidence.” This strategy was built on four work strands, known as the ‘4Ps’ which were:
 - a. Prevent: to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism;
 - b. Pursue: to stop terrorist attacks;
 - c. Protect: to strengthen our protection against a terrorist attack; and
 - d. Prepare: to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack.
9. Each of these connected work strands sought to reduce an element of the risk from terrorism and collectively provide a balanced and comprehensive end-to-end response to that threat.
10. The Home Secretary was, and remains, responsible for CONTEST. During the relevant period the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (“**OSCT**”) in the Home Office led on supporting the Home Secretary in developing, coordinating and implementing CONTEST. This has also enabled oversight of CT policing and the coordination of responses to CT related crises.

¹ ‘Terrorism’ is defined by s.1 of the Terrorism Act 2000.

11. During the relevant period, the OSCT led on the management and delivery of the Prevent programme, it owned the policy on Pursue, was responsible for overseeing cross-government work on Protect and managed the Government's plans for responding to a terrorist act on Prepare.
12. The police contributed to all four work stands of CONTEST. With respect to:
 - a. Pursue - CT policing, worked jointly with MI5, to collect and develop intelligence, run CT investigations and disrupt terrorist activity;
 - b. Prevent - CT Policing worked with local forces to safeguard individuals and communities vulnerable to radicalisation. It supported Local Authorities and other partners in delivering their statutory duty under Prevent. Along with local forces, CT Policing sought to disrupt those who seek to radicalise;
 - c. Protect - CT Policing delivered protective security for the public, places, Royalty and VIPs; and
 - d. Prepare - CT Policing delivered specialist response capabilities to protect the public in the event of a terrorist attack.
13. Section 26 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (“**CTSA**”) places a duty on specified authorities listed in Schedule 6 of the Act, in the exercise of their functions to have “due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism”. This is referred to as ‘the Prevent Duty’. The specified authorities include the police, local government, criminal justice, education and childcare, and health and social care authorities and agencies.
14. Channel forms a key part of Prevent with section 36 of the CTSA setting out a duty on local authorities to establish panels to provide support for people vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism (this is known as ‘the Channel Duty’). In England and Wales, this Channel Duty occurs through Channel panels. Multi-Agency led or Channel cases are led by Local Authorities and involve multiple agencies. Participation by subjects in Channel was, and remains, voluntary and requires consent to be given by the individual (or their parent/guardian in the case of a child) in advance of support measures being put in place.
15. During the relevant period, Prevent was the subject of various policies and national guidance provided by CTPHQ. These included the *Policy for Prevent Practitioners: Management of CT/DE Risk within the Community* and the *Counter-Terrorism Case Officer Guide*. The policies and guidance were supplemented by other documents, including a joint letter from the

Home Office and CTPHQ in June 2019: this letter concerned individuals with “unclear, mixed or unstable ideologies”.

16. The core purpose of Prevent is to divert individuals susceptible to or on the edge of being drawn into terrorism. However, the threat landscape is ever-evolving. As such there is ongoing consideration as to how to deal most effectively and appropriately with the emerging and relatively recent threat posed by what could be considered to be extreme views indicating a propensity towards violence, or even serious violence, but which do not involve terrorism in the way that is currently understood or defined. There is a high volume of such cases that carry considerable risks, but without a clear link to a CT risk. It is important that in due course there is a clear pathway for dealing with those cases, without unduly stretching the parameters of Prevent, and in turn Channel, which have a very specific set of objectives. This reinforces the particular significance of effective cross and multi-agency working and sharing, to ensure ownership of cases is carefully considered and dealt with appropriately.

CTPNW's involvement with AR

17. AR was referred to Prevent on three occasions: on 5th December 2019, 1st February 2021 and 22nd April 2021. Those referrals were received and assessed by officers and staff within CTPNW. All three referrals were closed without onward referrals to Channel or a then pilot project known as Dovetail.
18. Statements have been provided to the Inquiry from Detective Chief Superintendent Sarah Kenwright (the Head of CTPNW) and from those who had involvement in the three referrals. The Inquiry will scrutinise that evidence in due course. In doing so, the Inquiry will bear in mind the absence of specific or fixed thresholds for referral to Channel or Dovetail. Such decisions are necessarily subjective: officers conducting the necessary assessments must take an overall view on the risks attaching to the individual case and the person's susceptibility to being drawn into terrorism or being radicalised.
19. The Inquiry will consider the 2019 joint letter about “unclear, mixed or unstable ideologies”. The Inquiry will wish to examine the extent to which that letter was intended to alter the ambit of Prevent, bearing in mind the focus on terrorism and terrorist ideology within the legislation, policies and guidance. The Inquiry will explore the views expressed by others, including Jonathan Hall KC, Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation,

in his March 2025 report² and Sir William Shawcross' review of Prevent from February 2023.³

20. The involvement of CTPNW and in particular Prevent have been the focus of at least three significant reviews: the Prevent Learning Review, the Dignate Review both undertaken by CTPHQ, and the Lessons for Prevent review conducted by Lord Anderson. None of these reviews has had the benefit which this Inquiry will have of hearing directly from the individuals involved. This Inquiry has the opportunity to better understand the actions of CTPNW officers and staff, having received evidence from them. Those reviews were conducted at pace, were focused on the role of CT policing and did not consider the multi-agency handling of the risks which AR presented.
21. More broadly, this Inquiry presents an important opportunity to consider how best society can deal with individuals who may be vulnerable and present a risk to others who may not display or hold a terrorist ideology as typically understood.
22. The findings and recommendations made by the Prevent Learning Review and the Dignate Review have been addressed within Detective Chief Superintendent Kenwright's statement, which is provided on behalf of CTPNW.⁴ As Detective Chief Superintendent Kenwright explains, many of the issues identified within those reviews have already led to changes in policy and practice. Indeed, there had already been changes in policy and approach in the three years between the third Prevent referral and July 2024. By way of example, in March 2025 the *Multiple Referrals: Risks, Supervision and Accountability in PCM* interim policy was introduced. This updated an earlier version which was published in January 2023.
23. CT policing has already reflected, and continues to reflect, on the handling of AR's case: change has already started. However, CTPNW welcomes this Inquiry and the opportunity to contribute to identifying areas for improvement to better protect the people it serves.

5th September 2025

² <https://terrorismlegislationreviewer.independent.gov.uk/classification-of-extreme-violence-used-at-southport-in-july-2024/>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-of-prevents-report-and-government-response>

⁴ At the time of writing Detective Chief Superintendent Kenwright's statement, Lord Anderson's report had not been finalised.