

Considerations on System Change

Responding to the Phase 1 recommendations — where the problems sit across identification, assessment, intervention and closure, and where answers might be found

Four Themes, One Thread

1

Case Identification

How cases come to attention

2

Case Assessment

How identified cases are assessed

3

Interventions

What's available, and what's required

4

Deselection / Closure

How cases can be safely closed

RUNNING THROUGH ALL FOUR THEMES

A Persistent Data Problem

Needs-based empirical data is missing across the system — so ideology-based data tends to win 'evidence-based' discussions in the absence of alternatives.

Case Identification

“The radar works?”

- The history of terrorist (and non-terrorist) atrocities in the UK since 2017 demonstrates the public and professionals are well attuned to spotting ‘risk’
- Ideology or not? Whether ideology is required for a case to count, or whether “violence-fascinated” individuals without a clear ideology should be included
- Does it matter if the outcome of getting it wrong is the same (loss of life)?
- ‘CT’ relevance is a significant legacy and cultural issue to unpick in the Prevent operational space

WIDER DOOR

Lord Anderson’s MASH recommendation — based on Prevent-related referrals

Bingham review – use a local authority MA setting for all violence risk

Betts & Wilson (2026, in peer review) – consider the role of Violence Reduction Units and the Serious Violence Duty

NARROWER DOOR

Framing in Shawcross (accepted in full by Home Office) to refocus Prevent on ideology – what to do with the lacuna created for violence risk?

“Radar works, system doesn’t?”

- Case identification appears to function at the referral stage — and some potential improvements in ‘tooling’ for assessment (e.g. EGR-R) but ...
- The ‘state-of-the-art’ favours structured **professional** judgement (SPJ) over tick-box actuarial approaches – 3 major issues
 1. Ergo whomever assesses cases needs to be appropriately qualified, skilled, trained and experienced **professionals** — a job for police officers and staff?
 2. Volume / screening v ongoing dynamic risk assessment of ‘selected cases’ problem?
 3. Confidence in your judgement to close / deselect a case
- One x-agency RA tool feels an unrealistic ambition (having led this operational space previously)
- One tool tricky to develop (in the SPJ paradigm) for screening (10K referrals), case planning and intervention, and case closure
- The data gap is most acute here: assessment must answer not just whether risk exists, but risk of what — and why
- Issues with professional competence – multi-disciplinary teams tend to reduce errors
- **Information sharing problem 1** (exacerbated in NS space with secret and open data) – a need for CTP
- **PreInformation sharing problem 2** – information sharing required at all three stages beyond referral... when can you have confidence to stop?
- Data is not recorded on needs — making it difficult to understand nature of the risk, drivers, protective factors and craft an appropriately sequenced mitigation response

3

Interventions

“Radar works, system doesn’t?”

1

What’s structurally behind the door?

- Lord Anderson flags improvements underway, including Channel evaluation – enhanced Channel?
- MASH, VRU, YOTs, MAPPA, IOM all options?
- Something new?
- Who leads / coordinates where already open to services (e.g. YOT, CAMHS)?

2

Relationship with Pursue

- Can government accept Prevent work happening simultaneously with Pursue-strand activity?
- How you deconflict NS information with overt intervention work, and ensure continuous information sharing?

FOR DISCUSSION

- IOM's seven (re)offending pathways offer a useful reference point for VFI-related need (NOMS, 2005): accommodation; education, training and employment; physical and mental health; drugs and alcohol; finance, benefit and debt; children and families; attitudes, thinking and behaviour — some local models extend to nine, adding gender-specific pathways
- Linked question: the state of public, private and third-sector provision against those pathways at local level in every local authority?
- As volume of referrals grows, and remits are potentially extended into VFIs, and understanding of effective risk mitigation increases, what future for centrally commissioned services versus more flexible budgets for MA panels to buy services locally as needed? (e.g. Channel IP's)

4

Deselection / Closure

- Relationship with the CJS — community sentences and post-release management – and other services individuals may remain open to
- An absence of ideology does not equate to the resolution of future risk
- Without big improvements in needs-based data, and understanding of drivers and protective factors on future violence, then closure decisions rest on the same absent information as identification, assessment and intervention planning
- Ongoing monitoring of closed cases is potentially unnecessary if confidence in closure can be improved
- Should closed cases be subject to periodic review? If yes, what are practitioners looking for and how should they obtain information lawfully balancing human rights and privacy concerns?

THE OPEN QUESTION

When do we know the risk is resolved?

Cross-Cutting Thread Data: The Changing Threat Picture

2017

Post-Syria inflection point in the threat profile

- Coincides with the rise of social media and proliferation of internet usage
- Result: more individualised actors — far less connected in the real world than historically
- The existing system was designed around an older, more networked threat model than the more democratised ability to conduct acts of violence

MULTIPLE AND COMPLEX NEEDS (Knudsen & Betts, 2025)

- People have multiple areas of vulnerability, which combine in complex ways over time and space
- The data is missing, but those affected by MCN appear regularly in cases involving the perpetration of violence – deemed terrorist or not
- The system has been too slow to adapt to these changes

The Data Problem: We rely on anecdote, not data

- To discuss these shifts, we rely on individual cases and reports — not on positive empirical data
- Jonathan Hall KC, Lord Anderson, and the academic work all aggregate reported cases to identify themes – the data is absent
- The data is not published, and was not captured by government or any PVE-linked agency – I don't know if this remains the case
- Important questions that would help to redesign a risk mitigation approached cannot be answered
- As examples - what outcomes arise from those referred to Prevent? (serious offending, violent offending, self harm and suicide, prevalence of poor mental health, neurodiversity, homelessness, looked after children, etc.)

WHY IT'S MISSING

- The system still looks for ideology to define a “terrorism” case
- That classification unlocks special powers — in the Pursue (investigative/prosecutorial) space
- No part of the system is required to capture ‘needs data’ on which you could begin to understand the problem and design solutions
- CONTEST arguably remains “Pursue-flavoured” in its underlying logic defining the success of the system – ‘escalating risky Prevent cases to Pursue’, convictions, arrests, disrupted plots, lengthy sentences (Knudsen and Betts, 2025)

Barriers to Fixing the Data Gap

1

Allocating responsibility

- Police prioritise prosecution / disruption and don't own Prevent policy
- Channel sits with local authorities who sit outside of the national security tent
- Who should collate and analyse needs data?

2

Hyper-local data

- The absent needs data potentially sits with schools, local authorities and health providers — there is no operational remit to acquire it
- Nobody collates or analyses the data centrally to inform the systems iteration and improvement

3

Legality & proportionality

- A referral to Prevent doesn't licence a “fishing expedition” across government-held data — and maybe it shouldn't?
- Many referrals are children and schools tend to know a lot about their pupils
- The ‘secrecy’ culture of NS work makes staff unsure / reluctant about triangulation / feedback

What Better Data Could Change?

- Better understanding of the risks in the system — across those who go on to harm others, and those who harm themselves
- Who is more likely to go onto commit harm and why?
- Directly strengthens all four themes:
 1. Enhanced guidance and training to produce better informed referrals,
 2. More effective assessment tools,
 3. Smarter commissioning of interventions, and
 4. More confident deselection decisions

TRANSPARENCY

Linked to the current Prevent Commissioner's priorities

- Currently published data is thin — referral agency, age and ideological classification over time
- Better data exposes who is drawn into violence, and potentially why
- Opens Prevent — and government — to scrutiny, academic inquiry and journalistic investigation: a democratic benefit

Where Answers Might Be Found

- Local, multi-agency delivery, multi-disciplinary teams seem to have worked well in other complex areas of public sector risk since the late 1990s (e.g. YOTs, IOM, MAPPA)
- A senior chair who is drawn from and understands the local partnership delivery landscape and resource availability (the Channel template) — is the strongest available model on the table regarding accountability
- Structural options worth weighing: MASH, MAPPA, IOM, YOTs, Violence Reduction Units — each with trade-offs
- A new or augmented system needs to be underpinned by version-controlled SOPs (MAPPA-style), clear leadership and accountability at each case stage, robust governance at senior / executive levels locally, and ongoing training / professional development for practitioners – all tied to a genuine data picture

A POSSIBLE DIRECTION

A properly governed, resourced and consulted change programme

One route worth testing that proved effective in response to OIR (2018) and delivering recommendations after 2019-20 terror attacks: a change programme capable of designing and delivering a response to violence-fixated individuals — and others at risk of harming themselves or others — that reduces harm.

N.B. – solutions are likely to remain imperfect unless / until the data issues can be resolved – and this will take time.