Responding to non-ideological extreme violence: interim update

Strategic issues, action to date, further work required

22 May 2025
Cross-Government Violence Fixated Individuals Unit (VFIU)
Email: **T1**

Background

1. In January 2025, following the conclusion of the Southport attack trial, the Cabinet Secretary identified the requirement for a cross-government approach to addressing the response to non-ideological extreme violence. A small, temporary cross-government team, hosted in the Home Office has been established to scope out a systematic response to the challenge posed by VFIs.

2. This paper sets out the key strategic issues currently undermining an adequate response to non-ideological extreme violence. It identifies system weaknesses, outlines work underway across government to address this and provides the foundation for a co-ordinated reform effort across government, law enforcement and local services.

3. This team has developed a programme of activity up to the one-year anniversary of the Southport attack (29th July) covering five objectives spanning cross-government activity, which collectively cover the VFI-relevant actions from the March NSC. The objectives are:

1) Immediate activity to manage the risk posed by a known cohort of CT and VFI cases identified through the CT system
2) Ensure early intervention programmes across government are capable of reducing the pool of people vulnerable to becoming VFIs
3) Ambitious options to manage risk posed by VFIs including identification, assessment, early intervention and threat management
4) Reduce the exposure of vulnerable individuals to online content and online communities which can motivate them to extreme violence, and
5) Build public trust in HMG to communicate transparently following serious incidents.

Terminology

4. Non-ideological extreme violence or non-ideologically motivated extreme violence refers to the harm we are seeking to address. The term violence fixated individual (VFI) is used to describe an individual who has a fascination with extreme violence and intent to inflict extreme violence (i.e. a mass casualty attack in a public or private setting), where ideology is not the primary driver.

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*Cabinet Office Body

STRATEGIC ISSUES

Issue 1: Limited evidence on the scope and scale of the threat from non-ideological extreme violence

There is currently no systematic approach to identifying or assessing the scale, nature or evolution of non-ideological extreme violence over time. This limits opportunities for strategic planning, interventions and evaluation.

5. **The Cabinet Secretary commissioned a preliminary analytical assessment of the VFI cohort, which was provided in March by the** T1D* T1D* **) in the Cabinet Office.**

- The assessment defines VFIs as fascination with extreme violence and intent to inflict extreme violence, where ideology is not the primary driver.
- The cohort of people in the UK meeting this definition is assessed to be in the hundreds, based on Prevent data and some case study data.
- The trajectory is not known but the assessment notes that those referred to Prevent with conflicted ideology, no specific extremism issue, high terrorism risk (without any ideology present), or school massacre ideology have increased by 87% since March 2019.
- There is expert consensus that neurodivergence is not a risk factor for violence in the general population, but that in the VFI population it appears to have raised prevalence.
- It is a realistic possibility that social media platforms amplify pre-existing risks and normalise intended behaviours
- It is clear from case study analysis that VFI attacks are preceded by long periods of exploration, research and a growing fascination with violence for violence's sake. These types of preparatory behaviour can be identified with sufficient scrutiny.
- In terms of interventions, the assessment recommends accepting some risk, but not government failures to coordinate; interventions should be multi-agency, tailored to individuals, and ideally applied early.

6. TD1* **are conducting further analytical work and drawing together a second assessment update to complete in June.** This will consider:

- A sense of scale of the cohort identified from outside the CT system (i.e. force or local authority data);
- Cohort information based on international comparators;
- Effective interventions drawing on a workshop undertaken by Go Science; and
- The role of social media and the wider internet in inspiring, encouraging and facilitating VFIs.

7. **The Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) have undertaken a one-time assessment of non-ideological extreme violence.** In cases of extreme violence, JTAC play a central role in determining whether an incident was a terrorist attack. They are therefore well-placed to assess the volume, trajectory and characteristics of these attacks, even where they are not declared as terrorism. JTAC looked at Prevent datasets and concluded that:

- Add once have PTQ

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8. Acknowledging that many (most) VFIs are not referred to Prevent, and in the absence of wider dataset, JTAC also analysed 16 case studies of non-ideological extreme violence and concluded:

- Add once have PTQ

9. **While acknowledging the benefit of the analytical work undertaken, there are rich sources of data that we do not have the means or resources to exploit, and in most cases legal, technical and cultural barriers to accessing and evaluating it**. These include:

- **Police investigative data** in individual cases where the force has a detailed picture of the perpetrator, motivations and pre-attach behaviours including in many cases a detailed digital footprint. This data is not collated, analysed or disseminated for national learning and prevention.
- Extensive evidence is produced for **criminal proceedings**, not just by the police but also by the defence and in many cases through expert reports such as from psychologists or digital forensics. The analysis of this information, particularly in aggregate, could enable local agencies to identify early warning signs and patterns of behaviour and identify sources of online radicalisation.
- The outcomes of **local reviews** such as Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews. These are published in anonymised and redacted form for a short time on individual local authority websites but DfE have no mechanism to interrogate or evaluate at scale and there is uncertainty about legal powers to share outside the department to enable analysis by others.
- **Prevention of future deaths reports** from inquests where information similar to criminal proceedings is available. This is an alternate source of information where there has been no trial, either because a perpetrator has pleaded guilty or died before a case came to trial.
- Where the perpetrator has not died during his attack, there will be **information from the prison estate** including from psychiatrists or other behavioural specialists who seek to ensure compliance with prison life. Even if analysed in anonymised form this would provide information about characteristics, risk factors and motivations.

10. **The analytical work has been vital in underpinning work to provide assurance against a known cohort of VFIs (see issue 2). However it is only a snapshot in time and there is a need for an enduring threat assessment capability.** We consider there is a requirement for a single entity to collect and collate data and evidence about VFIs, analyse it and produce regular ongoing assessments. The absence of an overarching, current assessment of the threat will severely limit the ability of policymakers and practitioners to respond to it.

11. These assessments should be available beyond law enforcement and policy makers and capable of being used by local services, communities, parents, peers and workplaces to support identification, referral and early intervention. [Perhaps similar to NCSC or NPSA or the National Threat Assessment Centre in the US Secret Service]. There is a need to identify which body is best placed to do this. Options to consider include JTAC, the NCA National Assessment Centre, T2D or a new assessment body/team.

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Ongoing work and deadlines

i. **TD1*** to produce an additional assessment by 30 June [check] ***Cabinet Office Body**

ii. If not covered by the action above, draw together existing analytical work available to HMG, law enforcement and local services to disseminate to practitioners to support identification and intervention of VFIs by 30 July

iii. VFIU will consult on and scope options for Ministers for a national threat assessment model for non-ideological extreme violence by 15 July

Questions:

a) *Is there other research or analytical work that should be commissioned?*
b) *Are there other sources of data we have not tapped into?*
c) *Do you agree there is a need for ongoing assessment? What are the options for who could do this?*
d) *Do you agree this should be publicly available where possible? What are the barriers to this (classification, data protection, legal etc)?*
e) *Are there other strands of work that should be considered to resolve this issue?*

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Issue 2: There is a known cohort that present risk, T2A/T2D T2A/T2D

There is a known cohort identified through the CT system – in the hundreds - that are fascinated with extreme violence (e.g. school massacres) **T2A/T2D T2A/T2D**.

12. This may be because they do not meet existing Prevent thresholds, they do not meet thresholds for support within local services, there is insufficient support within local services to meet existing demand or certain services are not designed around public protection and the interventions do not address the risk to the public.

13. **T2A/T2D T2A/T2D** Ministers agreed that local services should prioritise individuals who represent a clear risk of violence to others across national security, social care, health, education, youth justice and law enforcement systems.

14. As a result, CTP and the Home Office Prevent Unit are conducting an exercise across recent referrals and live cases (back to April 2024) to reconsider whether they ought to be adopted to Channel and / or be re-referred to other local service for prioritised support. Where unaddressed vulnerabilities and risks are identified, cases will be flagged to local services using existing gateways for information sharing. This review is ongoing and is expected to complete by the end of May [DN: check with CTP whether June or September].

15. To give effect to the NSC action, departments with responsibility for local services - education, social services, health and justice – are designing policies and processes that will facilitate prioritisation of these cases and routes for monitoring and reporting back so an audit of action taken can be done.

16. In addition to recent and live cases a historical review of certain Prevent referrals going back three years [DN: check] is also being conducted to provide assurance that high-risk cases have not been missed. Due to the age of these cases and the time passed since receipt it is far less likely that these cases will meet the legal requirements for re-opening and sharing under existing Prevent processes. CTP and HO are identifying other information sharing pathways and the proportionality and necessity of refreshed checks on such cases. These cases will be shared via separate legal gateways and local services will require other mechanisms for receiving, monitoring and reporting back on these cases as activity will be carried out outside of the Channel programme. This aspect of the review will take a longer period due to a higher volume of cases and is expected to be carried out during the month of June [DN: check whether June or September].

17. This has been an important exercise to assure ourselves we are taking action to address known risk. However, law enforcement and local delivery partners will be only able to deliver their best-efforts taking account of significant increase in referrals, resulting resourcing pressures and operating in a system that is not designed for managing non-ideological extreme violence. Until a more appropriate and sustainable model is developed (see issue 3) there is a risk that prioritised

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interventions may be delivered in an uncoordinated way and that delivery of effective interventions at all will be limited.

18. In addition to providing assurance on cases identified through the CT system, NCA and CTP are also working to identify a cohort of high-risk cases (such as Com network cases) where interventions by local services would be appropriate. **T1B** **T1B** (**T2A/T2D**). It will be important that processes designed as part of the above work are capable of being used by NCA too. [DN: Further detail required on this point]

19. It is important to add that there has been a huge increase in referrals to Prevent in the first quarter of 2025. This surge in cases absent a commensurate increase in CTP resources to triage increases the risk that high-risk cases are missed and add to the urgency to design a more appropriate system. The monthly Prevent bulletin produced by Homeland Security Analysis and Insight reveals:

- [Add once have PTQ]

Ongoing work and deadlines:

i. CTP and HO Prevent Unit to complete operational and historical reviews to identify additional high-risk cases for intervention either by Channel or via other services by end June 2025 [DN: check]

ii. CTPHQ to conduct an analysis all the cases discussed in Prevent/Channel in 24/25 that have a concern of fascination with violence or mass casualty attacks by end of May 2025. [DN: Check with CTP/HSAI]

iii. Departments responsible for local services that can deliver prioritised interventions (education, health, justice and social services) to work with those services and law enforcement to design and implement a process to share information and deliver prioritised interventions to give effect to the NSC action to prioritise interventions for those posing threat to others by end July [DN: check]

iv. NCA to work with CTP and departments responsible for local interventions for options to manage existing NCA VFI cohort by end June 2025 [DN: Check with NCA]

Questions:

a) Have we correctly identified the issue?
b) Can we be more specific on some of the activity and risks?
c) The further work and deadlines could be more specific – we would welcome input on these.

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Issue 3: None of the wide range of multi-agency frameworks are adequate for managing cases of non-ideological extreme violence

Currently, no single organisation or framework has clear ownership of the problem. Current multi-agency frameworks were not designed for the complex and unpredictable nature of non-ideological extreme violence. Agencies often lack clarity, tools or authority to act. Various agencies and initiatives exist that could support threat identification and intervention of those at risk of committing acts of extreme violence, but they are poorly co-ordinated resulting in gaps, duplication and inefficiency.

20. **Responsibility is fragmented across multiple frameworks including Prevent, local police, NCA, mental health services and local authorities with no overarching duty to act, share information or co-ordinate in a timely and consistent manner.** With no cross-system case management, there is likely to be inconsistent practice across local areas and cases falling between the gaps of different frameworks.

21. We have undertaken a national systems mapping exercise for existing services and interventions to understand the breadth of services that exist across the state system and their eligibility criteria to identify services could be used by, or adapted for, the needs of the VFI cohort.

22. **While it is clear that Prevent, and specifically the multi-agency forum that Channel represents, is well suited to tackling complex cases, it is, in its current form, not able to identify and manage the full caseload of non-ideological extreme violence.** Non-ideological extreme violence cannot be adequately addressed by counter-terror programmes such as Prevent without changes to its statutory basis, given the current terrorism definition and thresholds.

23. **Other multi-agency frameworks are also unsuitable for tackling non-ideological extreme violence, given the differing purposes, remit and limitations of each multi-agency framework.** With a focus on convicted offenders, Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) limits interventions for those that are vulnerable but have not yet been convicted of violent offences. Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACS) focus on domestic abuse and Integrated Offender Management Forums (IOM) focus on prolific offenders. Beyond these partnerships, several different multi-agency frameworks exist across the social policy departments for specified purposes, such as Youth Offending Teams, MASHs/MACPTs, Community Safety Partnerships, Vanguard Sites and Turnaround. Whilst many of these frameworks or forums could be adapted, or offer insight on how to handle VFIs, they all have critical drawbacks including a lack of funding, poor national coverage, insufficient interventions for violence fixation and limited eligibility criteria and entry pathways.

24. Workshops with local practitioners make clear that local areas are struggling to deal with the increase in and complexity of non-ideological extreme violence and consider that, without changes to both law and guidance, they do not have adequate arrangements for multi-agency management or the means to deliver effective and enduring intervention to reduce risk to the public.

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Ongoing work and deadlines

i. We are developing options for reforming multi-agency systems so there is a strengthened framework for countering non-ideological extreme violence. This includes the NSC action to scope a national referral and case management service by 1st August. As part of this work, we are considering the following options:

   a. **Retain the existing multi-agency frameworks.** Accept that due to the wide range of criminality that could be captured by non-ideological extreme violence (physical and sexual abuse, animal torture, coerced self-harm and suicide and mass casualty attacks), a single overview is impractical and overly complex. Instead focus on strengthening existing arrangements to address gaps in coverage and eligibility through legislative and guidance changes and increasing powers and resources to deliver appropriate interventions. Continued risk of cases falling between gaps and a lack of clarity about risk ownership and responsibility to act.

   b. **Formally expand Prevent so it can unambiguously adopt cases where there is a risk of non-ideological extreme violence.** Acknowledge that Prevent is an established and effective multi-agency framework that is already receiving referrals for non-ideological extreme violence and (subject to adequate resourcing) this would be the simplest, quickest and most cost-effective way to create a single framework. Would require changes to the Prevent duty and guidance and significant uplift in resources. Also likely to need a broader set of professionals to triage cases (such as non-CT local policing and local authorities). Risk of mission creep, continued referral hesitancy due to law enforcement focus, incompatibility with Independent Prevent Review, overwhelm of CTP resources for matters that are not national security, and disconnect with wider CT system.

   c. **Creation a National Prevention Service, a broader multi-agency framework that can deal with extreme violence as well as violent extremism.** This new framework would likely replace some existing multi-agency frameworks, including Prevent. Key features would be a *single* referral and entry point, triage, risk assessment process and multi-agency convening powers. There could then be different intervention pathways depending on the behaviour of concern (for example de-radicalisation, violence fascination, sexual violence etc). Any new system would need to be capable of online discovery. This would meet the ask of the NSC to scope out a broader system, offering simplicity, clarity, case management and clear ownership of risk at a given point. However, it is likely to be complex, disruptive and expensive to implement and take a number of years to deliver. While not operational yet, we would also need to consider how a new national prevention service would interact with the proposed Prevention Partnerships which, while operating at a much lower level, are expected to at least become aware of more serious cases that would then need to be transferred. We understand Lord Anderson, the interim Prevent Commissioner, also favours this option.

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ii. Workshops and consultations with stakeholders are taking place across May and June to develop these options in more detail.

Questions

a) *Noting that significant further engagement will be taking place to develop these proposals, are there any key benefits or risks that are important to flag in this document, i.e. to Permanent Secretaries and the Cabinet Secretary?*
b) *Are there other options that should be considered beyond those set out above?*
c) *Is there further information we should add about Prevention Partnerships at this stage?*
d) *How would police-led partnerships and the ongoing review be dealt with under these options?*

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Issue 4: There is uncertainty about effective interventions to prevent non-ideological extreme violence

There is no clear evidence-based framework for what interventions reduce risk in individuals showing risk of committing non-ideological extreme violence. Unlike terrorism cases, there is no widely understood or agreed approach to changing behaviour or measuring impact over time. As a result, local professionals feel ill-equipped to act, referrals may stall or rely on generic safeguarding provisions and individuals may continue to escalate towards extreme violence.

25. **We do not yet have a sufficient understanding of the appropriate interventions for individuals at risk of being drawn into non-ideologically motivated extreme violence.** This is essential to identify how the state will divert individuals towards safer lifestyles and evaluate their use.

26. We have conducted a mapping exercise of all relevant interventions and services currently available that this cohort may be able to access. Operational experiences from managing similar cohorts means that successful intervention is likely to involve a) interventions that challenge an individual's thoughts, b) mentoring and/or c) providing for a gap in an individual's life that can change their quality of life. [DN: Can we add to this based on what we currently know?]

Ongoing work and deadlines

i. The interventions mapping work is being evaluated by Go Science who convened an expert roundtable to identify and evaluate the best interventions (across all sectors) for tackling non-ideological extreme violence including behavioural scientists and expert practitioners in late May. This roundtable also identified where there are gaps in existing research into interventions for the VFI cohort, where further research may be required. [DN: to review after the roundtable has taken place next week]

ii. Scope out the feasibility of local multi-agency intervention pilots.

iii. Longer-term, there is likely to be a need for further research to develop a broader evidence base for interventions, including commissioning a national research and evaluation programme to build long-term evidence-based data on interventions, risk factors and outcomes. This will form part of an ongoing threat assessment framework.

Questions:

a) *Is there more we need to say about the problem?*
b) *Can we be more reassuring that there are adequate interventions that can deliver an enduring effect?*
c) *Should there be a further strand of work that seeks to disseminate a national catalogue of interventions with a menu of options for local practitioners? Is this feasible / necessary? Who would be best-placed to do this?*
d) *Should we also consider scoping out local multi-agency interventions pilots? Expand Prevent pilots post July?*
e) *Is there scope for direct interventions with individuals online?*

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Issue 5: There is no clear ownership across the law enforcement for non-ideologically motivated extreme violence.

Within UK law enforcement, no single agency or operational command is responsible for identifying, assessing or managing the threat posed by individuals likely to commit non-ideologically motivated extreme violence e.g. school massacres, incel-inspired attacks, grievance-based mass casualty attacks.

27. CTP handles ideologically driven threats, NCA handle cases where there is an organised element and local forces respond to crimes such as murder but there is limited proactive investigation ahead of a serious incident. There is no defined operational lead for:

a) Preventing mass casualty attacks with no clear ideological basis;
b) Online radicalisation into non-terrorism but highly violent subcultures where there is no organised element; and/or
c) Preventing incidents of extreme violence driven by personal grievance, violence fixation or misogyny.

28. **Lack of law enforcement ownership creates a range of issues in managing the risk from individuals on the cusp of offending and those who go on to offend.** Individuals may fall through gaps of CT, serious crime and community safety teams. Local services may be unsure which law enforcement body to report concerns to. Intelligence may not be acted on due to unclear remit or ownership. Opportunities to prevent extreme violence may be missed, especially those that are equivalent in seriousness to terrorism (i.e school or other mass casualty attacks) but fall outside of terrorism definitions. Moreover, no clear organisation is responsible for developing profiles, identifying early warning signs or leading preventative investigations.

29. **Some forces may act proactively but there is no consistent model.** Police often only become involved after a serious incident has occurred even though many incidents are assessed to follow lengthy periods of planning and preparation, often using online resources which offers the opportunity for detection and disruption. Lack of ownership means there is no process or other mechanism in place to require or enable law enforcement agencies to identify cases and proactively consider and manage the risk posed by such individuals in aggregate.

30. **Non-ideologically motivated extreme violence is likely to require a law enforcement body that is able to use or access a combination of online, intrusive and/or international capabilities, with a crime prevention and crime response mandate.** This is likely to indicate that a national law enforcement agency is required, or a model where significant capabilities are housed within a national agency in order to provide support to territorial forces.

31. **Separately, the Home Office and law enforcement are currently considering substantive Police Reform that may in the medium to long term present opportunities for greater system coordination for non-ideological extreme violence, but this work is still at an early stage.** The Home Office is currently developing a series of proposals for police reform, including a new national

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centre of policing (NCoP), which could (subject to a business case) merge certain functions of CTP and NCA. This could present a long-term opportunity for law enforcement management of non-ideological extreme violence. However, the vast majority of the Policing reform work being undertaken has statutory underpinnings and will require new primary legislation in a second session Bill. The estimated implementation timeline for any of these reforms is, at the earliest, 2030. Therefore, interim law enforcement arrangements will need to be established for the short to medium term.

32. **Finally, linked to the issue 1, the absence of an operational lead means the national threat picture is incomplete, with no data collection or threat analysis which prevents resource allocation or evidence-based reform.**

Ongoing work and deadlines:

i. Law enforcement with Home Office to develop options for strengthened ownership of non-ideological violence by mid-July. Options could include:
    a. Creating an additional national portfolio holder within the NPCC for non-ideological extreme violence (distinct from sexual violence);
    b. A single law enforcement agency is named to lead on non-ideological extreme violence [DN: realistically would have to be CTP or NCA]
    c. Territorial forces are better equipped (either through an uplift in capability, or capability housed within a national agency) and tasked with a mandate to proactively investigate non-ideological extreme violence when it is in the planning stage. The creation of a new offence of acts preparatory to mass casualty attacks could support this.

Questions:

a) Welcome views on whether a law enforcement lead is necessary or desirable
b) Are there additional options to consider?
c) Do you agree with the assessment of the problem?
d) Are there benefits or risks that should be flagged here, again noting additional engagement will be required?

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Issue 6: The online environment is increasingly acting as an accelerant and enabler of non-ideological extreme violence.

While much attention has been given to online radicalisation into terrorism, there is less clarity or policy about how to address non-ideological harms

33. Individuals have much greater access to material and encouragement that desensitises and legitimises violence. Non-ideological content may not breach terrorism laws, reducing the need for platforms to take action, and making it harder for law enforcement to intervene. Examples of the way non-ideological extreme violence can be exacerbated online include:

a) Grievance-fuelled extremism (e.g glorification of school massacres or incel-motivated violence);
b) Online echo chambers that reinforce entitlement, misogyny or retribution narratives;
c) DIY weapon-making or attack planning forums on fringe platforms of encrypted channels such as Telegram or discord that can be instructional.

34. This online activity can replace real-world pathways to violence meaning individuals can become radicalised in private, closed or anonymous systems, making it harder to detect with traditional safeguarding frameworks.

35. The NSC tasked the Home Office to consider creating a new offence relating to extreme violence content online and T1B T1B [DN: Set out specific actions]

36. **A new offence** T1B **will not address these problems in its entirety.** Much of the extreme content is hosted in other jurisdictions, which can make it difficult or impossible to apply restrictions or fines. Even if restrictions are in place, users can usually circumvent these easily by using a VPN, which are increasingly easy to use and built into new technology. We therefore need to consider a wider range of online interventions to address this type of content alongside legislation.

37. T2D

T2D

38. T2D

T2D

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39. **There is growing appetite in the Home Office for a cross-harms takedown power for illegal material, which is not unique to extreme violent material.** This includes a broader range of harms such as terrorism, state threats, and CSEA.

40. T1B

T1B

41. T1B

T1B

Ongoing work and deadlines:

i. Consider creating a new offence relating to extreme violent material online by 1 August.

ii. T1B

iii. Explore options for a wider suite of online interventions to limit the availability and ease of accessing violent content online by 1 August

iv. T2D

Questions:

a) *Is there more we can say about the role the internet plays in non-ideological extreme violence? In every case study we are aware of, online activity has played a significant role in inspiring, encouraging or enabling the crime.*

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Issue 7: There is ineffective information-sharing, both operationally and post-incident, including communications with the public

Efforts to prevent extreme violence – and to learn from it when it occurs – are severely hampered by poor information sharing. Multiple relevant bodies, particularly at local level, operate independently and often do not share critical information due to resource constraints, a culture of siloed working and risk aversion in sharing personal data due to uncertainty on legal thresholds.

42. T1B

Ongoing work and deadlines

i. Consider commissioning a team/organisation to re-issue or re-write national statutory guidance about sharing of information to prevent and respond to cases involving serious violence (not limited to non-ideological) by mid-July.

ii. The Home Office commissioned the Law Commission to expedite their review of post-incident Contempt of Court legislation to review what information could be shared publicly post-incident but before criminal proceedings were complete by November 2025.

iii. CTP have undertaken review of the existing process for publicly communicating the declaration of a terrorism incident. *[CTP to confirm whether we want this here]*

Questions:

a) Who would be best-placed to write any new guidance? Home Office? ICO? NPCC, CoP? Joint by OGDs?
b) Are there other strands of work we should highlight here?

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