

Radicalisation and Extremism – Guidance for Social Work Staff



SCOPE OF THIS CHAPTER

Walsall is a tier two local authority therefore carrying an increased risk of both radicalisation and terrorist related crime. The significant activity in Walsall is the draw to travel to Syria. Walsall is also an area of far right activity which also poses a potential risk of threat in Walsall.

This chapter is guidance for social work staff and should be read alongside the [West Midlands Safeguarding Children Procedures, Safeguarding Children and Young People Against Radicalisation and Violent Extremism Procedure](#).

RELATED GUIDANCE

[Legislation: The Terrorism Act \(2000\)](#)

[Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015](#)

[Guidance: Contest, the governments counter terrorism strategy](#)

This new chapter was introduced to the manual in February 2017.

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1. Introduction

The Joint Terrorism Assessment Centre (JTAC) is part of the Home Office and has responsibility for setting the national risk level for terrorism. Its current assessment is 'SEVERE,' which means a terrorist attack is highly likely. In addition, all local authority areas receive a comprehensive local risk assessment, the Counter Terrorism Local Profile (CTLP) prepared by the police that outlines the specific threats and risk to the area. Walsall Councils CTLP was briefed to all partners in October 2015 and the document was subsequently signed off in December 2015. Using this data the Home Office 'tier' local authorities with regard to risk, thereby ensuring all necessary support is provided.

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The Government's Prevent Agenda

The Office for Security and Counter Terrorism, in the Home Office, works to counter the threat from terrorism through the government's counter-terrorism strategy, **CONTEST**.

The strategy is based on four areas of work:

- **Pursue** (to stop terrorist attacks);
- **Prevent** (to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism);
- **Protect** (to strengthen our protection against a terrorist attack);
- **Prepare** (to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack).

The Prevent Strategy is the one that social workers will come in to contact with as it works with a wide range of sectors including education, criminal justice, faith, charities, the online world and health.

Prevent defines **radicalisation** as 'a process by which a person comes to support terrorism and forms of extremism leading to terrorism.'

Extremism is defined as a vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. 'Violent extremism' is seen as an 'endorsement of violence to achieve extreme ends' (HM Government, 2011).

The **Channel** process comes under the remit of the Prevent Strategy and is now a legislative requirement of the Terrorism and Securities Act 2015. This process is a multi-agency approach to identify and provide support to families and individuals who are at risk of being drawn into terrorism by providing access to services, including specialist mentoring and diversionary activities through the Channel Panel as appropriate. This is where the social work role is able to support the Prevent work and it is anticipated that this will usually be done jointly, in partnership with colleagues who coordinate the Prevent agenda, providing close working with the Counter Terrorist Unit who will advise and support around these matters. Close work with the police is also paramount and all partners have a part to play.

The risk of radicalisation faced by children and young people is an issue that all areas of Children's Social Care may have to address from mental health to child protection and criminal justice and this chapter provides guidance to social workers find their way around the practice issues in this area.

2. Recognition and Support

'Radicalisation' is a vague word without a specific definition and can mean different things to different people. A child who holds a strong religious belief or follows defined faith practices is not a

safeguarding concern. Only when these beliefs are coupled with associated hatred for a country or another religion is there a potential for concern.

Following receipt of a new referral that identifies concerns relating to radicalisation or violent extremism, consideration must be given to referring the child to Channel.

Where criteria are met for undertaking a Section 47 investigation, a joint strategy will be necessary with Safeguarding Police colleagues. This should be agreed as a strategy discussion and should also include health and education colleagues wherever possible. The usual S47 process should be followed, ensuring that Prevent colleagues are included in each step.

Where significant concerns exist but do not meet child protection threshold, the child should be referred to Channel. Here, close working with police, and other partner agencies, will develop a shared understanding of how and when information will be shared. Robust understanding around what information is shared, and why, needs to be explicit. It can be difficult and challenging when police colleagues have high levels of sensitive information which cannot be shared, but might change the outcome of a decision. Social workers also should work closely with partners to promote understanding amongst pivotal associated roles e.g. assisting independent reviewing officers and child protection chairs to understand thresholds, and how they are applied in cases of suspected radicalisation, or working with schools in identifying risk.

The Prevent Co-ordinator and Education Safeguarding Lead also undertake wider community work to raise awareness of what radicalisation looks like and what people should do when they suspect it is occurring, and to build community resilience.

Higher level intelligence and information held by Prevent / Police colleagues cannot always be shared freely, and it is imperative that the level and nature of information to be shared is agreed and recorded prior to any meeting with the family.

Consideration should always be given by Social Work managers as to the need to share, obtain a view of risk and information potentially already held by Prevent colleagues and consider this as part of the decision making process in these types of cases.

3. Assessment

Effective assessments are achieved through relationships with people that are being assessed. Violent extremism and radicalisation is evocative and highly charged, and the consequences can be deadly. Equally risk can be over exaggerated.

When children already within the service are identified as being at risk of violent extremism or radicalisation, or when they are newly referred through MASH our assessment needs to meaningfully engage with the family and keep the response proportionate.

In cases where it is suspected that a child or young person has been radicalised, and they are living in a household where other family members are known to hold extremist ideologies, it can be difficult to determine the proportionate social work response. It is not enough to live in a family where parents are associated with prescribed groups. The quality of information gathered is critical.

The child's social worker needs to know what it is like for the young person living in this family, to keep a real watching brief on whether compliance is genuine or disguised. This is about high quality assessment, meaningful understanding of the family, the voice of the child or young person and a comprehensive analysis to inform both the plan and the risk assessment.

The social workers role is to analyse the risk, consider existing strengths, current safety and protective factors to inform future safety, forming a professional judgement about the situation based on the information known at the time.

A risk assessment for social work staff visiting families identified as vulnerable to or considered to be actively involved in extremism should also be recorded prior to such a visit being completed and should be discussed in any strategy or planning meeting with other Agencies. Police colleagues will need to provide as much of a steer as possible in terms of any known direct threat or risk that may be associated with visiting the family home and consideration should also be given to alternative venues for meetings in the early stages, and may include meeting away from the family home at, for example, the social work offices.

Talking about the issues of extremism and radicalisation with individuals or families is not always easy and we may feel uncomfortable due to our lack of political and cultural understanding or a fear of false accusation.

As with all assessments, the relationship based approach is essential in building a trusting relationship and taking time to understand the child and their family. Asking the right questions in a supportive way is vital; it is important to keep questions open ended and then become a little bit more specific when the individual is beginning to share information. Practitioners should avoid leading questions; they can isolate the individual and lead to disengagement. However, if the person is engaging well, then it is sometimes appropriate to ask more closed questions so that the assessment is well informed.

The social work role is a safeguarding role which means we need to take a 'business as usual' approach, as with any safeguarding concern and remain proportionate in any response taken.

4. Other Family Members

Children and young people do not live in isolation and others members of the family can be a protective factor or increase the potential risk.

This means that when we are working with children and young people who are at risk of radicalisation the thinking needs to be risk needs to be orientated out, so that it is not just about at-risk children, but at-risk families and communities. Social workers need to reflect on what they are drawing on when they talk about risk and children and families in this area.

For some families the Family Group Conference model could be used, and in some cases, may prevent an escalation to child protection.