

Report to Communities Select Committee

Date of meeting: 7th November 2017

Subject: EFDC Prevent Strategy

Officer contact for further information: C Wiggins (01992 564122)

Committee Secretary: A. Hendry (01992 564246)



Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That the Communities Select Committee receives a presentation on the Council's response to 'Prevent', which is a strand of the Government's Counter –Terrorism Strategy.

Report:

Following issues of terrorism and terrorist activity in the UK, the Government developed a new, Counter-Terrorism Strategy in 2011, which consists of four main elements of work under the title of 'CONTEST', which includes;

Pursue: the investigation and disruption of terrorist attacks;

Prevent: work to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism;

Protect: improving our protective security to stop a terrorist attack; and

Prepare: working to minimise the impact of an attack and to recover as quickly as possible.

CONTEST covers all forms of terrorism and aims to reduce the risk to the UK and its interests overseas from terrorism, so that people can go about their lives freely and with confidence.

Local authorities have a role to play within CONTEST under the Prevent element, which aims to safeguard people and communities from being radicalised, supportive of radical ideology or, recruited into terrorism. Where necessary, Councils are involved in Prevent Channel Panels, which are County based forums that include a range of partners that are established to address an identified terrorism or radicalisation concern. To date, a large number of referrals to the Prevent Channel Panel have not met the Counter Terrorism threshold and in many cases, other issues have been highlighted including mental health concerns, safeguarding and criminality.

The current threat to Essex from both Islamist and domestic extremism however remains low and in the period March 2016 to February 2017, Essex encountered fewer threats than other parts of the Eastern Region. Hence, Prevent work is not currently a priority for the District Community Safety Partnership (CSP) or the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC). However, the fact that Epping Forest and all other local authorities in Essex have vulnerable residents who could be targeted for radicalisation (and other criminality) remains to be an underlying concern and as such, this is addressed through priorities relating to 'Hidden Harm'.

To ensure that EFDC staff who work with the public in a face to face role or in provision of community activity are aware of these potential risks within our communities, an 'e' learning Prevent Training package is available for all key staff and reference is made to Hidden Harm within the safeguarding training package that is provided.

EFDC Prevent Strategy

The Council has produced a Prevent Strategy which sets out how it will support CONTEST and this contains the overarching themes of work that would be applied, should there be issues of radicalisation identified in the district. These include;

- Response to the ideological challenge faced from terrorism and aspects of extremism, and the threat faced from those who promote these views;
- Provision of practical help to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism and ensure they are given appropriate advice and support;
- Work with a wide range of sectors (including education, criminal justice, faith, charities, online and health)
- Supporting people who are at risk of being drawn into terrorist or extremist activity through the Channel process,
- Working with and supporting community groups and social enterprise projects who provide services and support to vulnerable people;
- Working with faith groups and institutions to assist them in providing support and guidance to people who may be vulnerable; and
- Supporting local schools, local industry and partner agencies through engagement, advice and training.

Prevent - Home Office Funding

In 2015/16, the Home Office made available a sum of £10,000 for each local authority to apply for, which could be used for Prevent work, both within the Council and its' local communities.

Community Safety were successful in securing this funding, based on a business plan which included use of funding for improvement of EFDC ICT security across the office environment and for home workers, and a plan to provide Prevent training to schools across the district.

In regard to improved IT security, the purchase of new branch routers enabled the use of GCSX secure email using EFDC equipment in remote locations, which greatly improved email security, compared to use of previous email via a VPN connection.

The remainder of the funding was used to deliver a very successful programme of Prevent Training in local schools, provided by an experienced and very knowledgeable trainer and this was match funded by the schools, for both pupils and teachers. This was organised by the Council's Community, Health and Wellbeing team and 7 out of the 8 district secondary schools engaged with the programme.

Prevent Training was also offered to Epping Forest College for students in all years, but at the time, the College declined to engage with the programme. However, since the appointment of the new Principal, the Community Safety Manager has been in discussion with the Safeguarding Lead at the College to highlight the importance of Prevent Training for students and it is hoped that the training will be rolled out in the near future.

Reason for decision: Although the threat of terrorism remains low in Essex, it is known that vulnerable people and particularly young people are at risk of being drawn into radicalisation and therefore all local authorities need an awareness of the risks.

Options considered and rejected: N/A

Consultation undertaken: N/A

Service review: N/A

Resource implications: The initial Home Office Funding of £10,000 allowed the roll out of prevent awareness training across all local schools and enabled the Council to improve the security features of its IT systems. However, going forward, funding for any Prevent training including the planned training at Epping Forest College, will be funded from the Community Safety budget.

Personnel: N/A

Land: N/A

Community Plan/BVPP reference: Prevent awareness forms part of the Council's Corporate Plan under the scope of Community Safety.

Relevant statutory powers: N/A

Background papers: N/A

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: N/A

Key Decision reference: (if required) N/A