

# UK 'Building Bridges' Programme

Community Roundtables: A report on the aftermath of  
the terrorist attacks in London and Manchester

July 2017

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## 1. Introduction

1.1 In May and June of 2017, Forward Thinking organised a series of roundtables for Max Hill QC, Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation<sup>1</sup>, with a diverse range of Muslim community organisations across the country.

1.2 Mr Hill was accompanied at these meetings by Hashi Mohamed, Advisor to the Independent Reviewer, and Jordan Morgan, UK Programme Manager at Forward Thinking.

1.3 These roundtables were always intended to provide a space in which representatives from communities which feel they have been greatly affected by terror legislation could freely share their perceptions and experiences of this legislation with the Independent Reviewer. However, in light of the tragic events of Westminster Bridge, Manchester Arena, London Bridge, and Finsbury Park Mosque, they inadvertently came to provide a window into the immediate consequences of terrorist attacks for British Muslim communities at a grassroots level. As such we felt it vital that a record of these meetings be made available as soon as possible, so that the views contained within can be heard more widely and perhaps help to prompt greater debate at a time when the question of how to respond to the challenge of terrorism seems more pertinent than ever.

1.3 The visits formed a part of Forward Thinking's 'Building Bridges' Programme which facilitates dialogue between UK Muslim communities and grassroots organisations, British authorities (local government, parliamentarians, policymakers), and the national media. Since 2004, we have facilitated community meetings with Ruth Kelly, the former Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, John Reid, former Home Secretary, David Anderson QC, former Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, in addition to over 400 civil servants. The ultimate aim of all such engagements is to promote greater understanding between communities and British authorities, and to develop shared approaches to common challenges.

1.4 This report is divided into a total of six sections (in addition to the introduction), each of which can stand alone as an independent report but which in combination provide a comprehensive overview of the challenges – and opportunities – that exist in the current context. Section two is comprised of a foreword by Max Hill in which he reflects on the meetings over the two months, highlighting what he felt were the key themes and issues to emerge. Sections three through seven outline the different roundtables that were held, summarising the main debates which emerged from the discussions.

1.5 All the roundtables were held under the Chatham House Rule in order to facilitate a genuine and frank exchange. Numerous recommendations emerged in each roundtable which we have attempted to faithfully record. However, it is important to note that these recommendations do not necessarily represent the joint conclusions of participants that were present. This report is Forward Thinking's record and representation of the discussions held. Any errors contained in the report are the responsibility of the author alone.

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<sup>1</sup> The Independent Reviewer's role is to monitor UK counter- terrorism legislation for its fairness, effectiveness and proportionality. Key concepts within the Reviewer's position include: complete independence from Government; unrestricted access to classified documents and national security personnel; and a statutory obligation on Government to lay the Independent Reviewer's reports before Parliament on receipt.' Read more here: <https://terrorismlegislationreviewer.independent.gov.uk/>

## 2. Foreword by Max Hill QC – July 2017

2.1 Writing at the beginning of July 2017, I share with every law-abiding British citizen the horror of experiencing four major terrorist incidents during the previous three months; the attacks on Westminster Bridge, Manchester Arena, London Bridge and Finsbury Park Mosque<sup>2</sup>.

2.2 There is a particular resonance to these recent events in my case, because I came into the role of Independent Reviewer on 1st March, three weeks before the murderous attack on Westminster Bridge. Whereas my two predecessors each dealt with at least one momentous terrorist incident<sup>3</sup>, the concentration of terrorist activity in England during my first three months in post was unprecedented<sup>4</sup>.

2.3 My terms of engagement as Independent Reviewer require that I produce one or more reports to Parliament concerning the annual operation of the relevant legislation, namely the Terrorism Acts 2000 and 2006, the Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures (TPIM) Act 2011 and the Terrorist Asset Freezing Act 2010. I shall fulfil this duty. However, the function of review necessitates time for reflection after the conclusion of the period under review, meaning that the annual report into the operation of the terrorism legislation in 2015 was duly produced by my predecessor in December 2016, and my report into the operation of the legislation in 2016 will be produced before the end of 2017. In consequence, any review of the legislation during and in response to the 2017 attacks will inevitably take until 2018 to complete. It seems to me, however, that the impact of events this year requires urgent attention to the degree possible, and that is why I am pleased to present and to commend this report by Forward Thinking.

2.4 There is a more powerful reason still for publishing this report now. The impact of events from Westminster Bridge to Finsbury Park is significant but indirect for many people in this country, myself included. I was not there to witness what happened first hand. For some - hundreds in the case of London Bridge, but thousands at Manchester Arena - the impact was direct because they were there. Moreover, the consequences of terrorism in 2017 are felt most keenly by those communities which are closest to the attacks, including communities from which the terrorists emerged. Urgent and necessary Police investigations have swept through these communities, and there has also been a perceptible rise in outbreaks of Islamophobia.

2.5 It is for these reasons that my role cannot be conducted from an office in London, nor exclusively from the South East corner of England. At this time of heightened concern on the part of all citizens towards the ongoing threat from terrorism, any true assessment of the operation of the terrorism legislation requires that we listen to as many segments of British society as possible.

2.6 During this period, I have travelled far and wide discussing very topical issues, often in raw and charged environments. These trips included,

- a. 2 May 2017: **Leicester**
- b. 8 May 2017: **Bradford**
- c. 9 June 2017: **Manchester**
- d. 23 June 2017: **London** (Finsbury Park Mosque)

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<sup>2</sup> At the time of writing, only the Finsbury Park attack has generated live criminal proceedings, the fairness of which dictates that little more can be said about that incident until the outcome of those proceedings is known.

<sup>3</sup> Lord Carlile of Berriew CBE QC was in post for the '9/11' attacks in New York and the '7/7' attacks in London. David Anderson QC was in post for the terrorist murders of Fusilier Lee Rigby and Jo Cox MP.

<sup>4</sup> However, it should be remembered that a further five terrorist attacks were successfully disrupted by the Police and intelligence services, during the same period.

2.7 These visits have been carefully facilitated by *Forward Thinking*, a non-governmental organisation which seeks to promote greater understanding and confidence between the diverse grassroots Muslim communities and wider society, including the Media and the British authorities. Through their networks I have visited mosques, community centres and people's homes. These travels have assisted me greatly in understanding the impact that terror legislation is having on daily lives, but my conversations within these communities were not limited to this area. I was able to receive a real-time picture of the immediate implications of terror attacks and responses of communities on the ground. *Forward Thinking* have collated detailed summaries of the meetings which took place under Chatham House Rule, which have sought to protect the identity of those present, essential if we were going to be able to have full and frank conversations around sensitive topics at a time of heightened tensions. The content of the *Forward Thinking* reports is not repeated in this Foreword, but I provide my own reflections on what I have seen and heard, with a view to sharing the real concerns, elevating them perhaps to a status where they may achieve more prominence in the eyes of Parliamentarians and policy makers<sup>5</sup>.

2.8 To be clear, the recommendations contained in the *Forward Thinking* reports are not mine, but reflect the thoughts of participants as expressed during these meetings. In this Foreword, I have sought to collate and highlight the key areas which were common across my travels. These areas are not in any particular order or prominence.

### **Disengagement of young Muslims**

2.9 Mosques and Muslim community centres feel under pressure to denounce terrorist attacks, even when the perpetrator/s come from entirely different parts of the country. Several participants expressed to me their sense that, were they to fail to issue messages denouncing every act of terrorism, they would be blamed for being complicit in those acts.

2.10 The consequence of this state of being is that young professional Muslims are ceasing to engage with their local mosque, for fear that association will somehow taint them personally. This is most unfortunate, because one of the strengths of a large, inner city mosque lies in its representative function for every generation within the community.

2.11 Alongside these problems, I found the strength of feeling around the lack of meaningful engagement from central or local government in the communities I visited was palpable. Admittedly this came at a time of high emotions, but many amongst those whom I met feel that the only engagement appears to be around security issues, whereas government and Police work in fighting extremism and radicalisation appears misunderstood or ignored.

2.12 Another matter worth highlighting here is the call to 'do more' to fight extremism. Many in the Muslims communities are already doing a great deal and if they could be doing 'more', no one appears to have made clear what that means. Failure to do so can lead to further alienation, frustration and perhaps even withdrawal for many in spheres where we all need to protect and preserve meaningful engagement. However, I found that the government response to the Finsbury Park attack was singularly highlighted as positive, with calls for similar steps to be replicated in the future.

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<sup>5</sup>In addition to the visits and meetings facilitated by Forward Thinking, I have continued my work as Independent Reviewer in every other way, including visits to Terrorism Act custody suites in Police facilities in London and elsewhere. I have been able to assess and to review the pre-charge custody environment, and have conducted my own cell visits to check on the welfare of detained persons, the majority of whom have subsequently been released without charge.

2.13 The need to address the feeling of lack of engagement with these communities needs urgent attention. A more proactive role ought to be taken by government at all levels to address wider concerns, and thereby to avoid the perception of engagement with these communities only when things have gone wrong. A wider net should be cast in the groups and communities engaged, even if that means you do not always agree with all of those with whom you are speaking. Many participants in my meetings have spoken about the failure to be seen as part of the solution rather than the problem.

#### **Giving local communities credit**

2.14 How society and government react to heinous criminal attacks can often be critical. A sense of measure and proportionality is always to be welcomed. During my visit to Manchester, not long after the murderous attack at the Arena, I met with one family whose home was raided by counter-terrorism officers in possession of a search warrant. I did not discuss the ongoing police investigations, but heard a distressing account affecting the mother and young children living in this home. They spoke of being taken away from their home and of how they felt that the police and authorities were heavy handed.

2.15 I was able to react to this by contacting Greater Manchester Police in order to ask my own questions about what happened to this family. I then put the Police in touch with a local Libyan community leader who continues to intercede with a view to helping this family. I hope for positive outcomes in such cases, but these matters are sensitive and the long-term welfare of Muslim families affected by Police investigations must always be uppermost in our minds.

2.16 These steps and conversations are important because they have the capacity to engender trust and confidence in our security apparatus. Despite this episode, I did not get a sense from those I met, from the Libyan community in particular, that the police and the security services ought not to be doing their work or indeed that they shouldn't proceed to wherever their leads and investigations take them. This was simply about taking the right steps, acting with proportionality, and following up with effective family and community engagement thereafter.

#### **Keeping an eye on the ball**

2.17 The focus on countering violent extremism, perhaps naturally the preoccupation for so many during this difficult year, nonetheless has ramifications when and if that focus allows attention to stray from other important matters where communities require support. Participants shared their view that support towards housing, health, education, employment and general crime remain significant concerns, yet they often feel that these are secondary to the preoccupation with countering violent extremism.

2.18 I recognise of course that these matters are beyond my direct remit as Independent Reviewer, but it is troubling to hear such concerns being voiced repeatedly.

#### **Schedule 7, Terrorism Act 2000**

2.19 Many participants were preoccupied with the legal provisions which empower officers to stop travellers at border controls nationwide. Views on these legal powers, necessary in order to exercise a measure of control over those who enter this country, are symptomatic of the general view often expressed to me, namely that there is 'one law for Muslims, and another for the rest'. In discussion, I found that many were confused as to the reach of our legislation, and found it hard to accept that legislation is intended for all citizens and not just for one segment of society.

2.20 This confusion extends to strong views on the use of the Terrorism Acts to bring criminal charges in some instances but not in others. Many felt that charging the killer of Jo Cox MP with Murder, rather than a specific terrorist offence, was evidence of ‘one law’, mentioned above. Of course I pointed out that the Muslim extremist killers of Fusilier Lee Rigby were also charged with Murder.

2.21 It is a feature of modern times that we have a raft of terrorism legislation, which sits alongside general statutory and common law offences. It would be the ideal, I suggest, to do away with specific terrorism laws, in order to deal with all cases and all offenders under general criminal laws. I do not envisage that happening in the near future. Meanwhile, more must be done to dispel the belief that our laws are deployed in an unequal fashion, whether for ‘port stops’ under Schedule 7, or for specific criminal offences.

### **Prevent**

2.22 Whilst all participants were either already aware, or made aware, that the role of the Independent Reviewer does not include the Prevent Strategy, this did not stop participants from raising this issue, without fail, at every meeting. As my predecessor previously raised, Prevent remains a source of grievance for many in the community as what some still believe to be a programme aimed at ‘spying’ or specifically targeting British Muslims.

2.23 This view is supported by the recent findings of the Citizens UK report on British Muslims in public life, chaired by former Attorney General, Dominic Grieve QC MP<sup>6</sup>.

2.24 Calls for a full review of Prevent similarly came up, again without fail at every meeting. I heard various examples of how it is having a chilling effect in different contexts and adds to a strong sense of grievance.

2.25 Whilst I always made clear that I do not accept that Prevent is a ‘spying’ programme, it was clear to me that these community concerns are deep, they are prevalent across the country and urgent attention is required to address them. Otherwise, to allow these feelings to fester may well prove counterproductive in the context where a programme like Prevent needs to succeed – and where our police and intelligence services need the full cooperation of communities in rooting out extremism and detecting nascent plots.

2.26 Throughout my travels and meetings to date, I have been struck by the willingness and openness displayed by so many in sitting with me to discuss and to reflect upon the issues which are of greatest concern to Muslim communities. I am grateful to every participant at each of my meetings around the country. It is apparent that many who sat with me have previously expressed their concerns to visitors in positions of authority, whether they be Police officers, politicians or civil servants. The constant refrain from the majority was that there is a feeling of ‘consultation fatigue’ in the minds of many. They mean to convey their sense of frustration that not enough has been done to listen to local voices, not enough done to allow local communities to play their part in providing solutions to the problem of terrorism emerging from within those communities.

2.27 It is perhaps difficult for me to judge whether and to what extent there have been previous failings to take into account the strong local voices which I have heard this year, my first in post. It is not for me to criticise what has happened before my time. However, it is of particular note that my predecessor David Anderson QC conducted roundtable meetings in 2016, meeting a proportion of those who have sat down with me during the past three months, and moreover that he presented findings from his roundtable meetings to Parliament when giving evidence to the Joint Committee on Human Rights.

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<sup>6</sup> Citizens UK, ‘The Missing Muslims’, published 3rd July 2017.



2.28 If too little has been done to listen to local voices, now is the time to put that right. I therefore urge all who read this report to act on what they find, and to encourage ever greater participation from the many local community representatives and leaders who have enabled *Forward Thinking* to write what follows in their reports.

2.29 *Forward Thinking* and I thought it right to publish this document without delay, notwithstanding that Parliament will soon recess for the summer, and the Parliamentary Committees will not be in a position to take evidence until September or later. If and when that happens, I hope that as many as possible of the local participants in my meetings, whose views are reflected in this report, will come to London to ensure that their voices are heard.

2.30 I cannot say whether the soundings taken by me are representative of every view held within the many Muslim communities of this country. If others are yet to be heard, they should come forward now. It is only by coming together that we can all stand strong in the face of the terrorism which has visited our streets this year. I commend the content of this report, and suggest that it is a significant step in the right direction.

**Max Hill QC**  
**INDEPENDENT REVIEWER OF TERRORISM LEGISLATION**

**11th July 2017.**

### **3. Summary of Leicester Roundtable – 2<sup>nd</sup> May**

*This section outlines discussions from two regional roundtables organised in Leicester on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May with participants drawn from a cross section of the city's diverse Muslim communities including youth, women, representatives from the local Somali, Salafi and Deobandi communities. It included community organisations who engage with the Prevent Strategy, and those who do not.*

#### **3.1. Executive Summary**

3.1.1 Attacks by violent extremists and the subsequent Government and media responses have inadvertently contributed to exacerbating fragmentation within and between diverse Muslim communities in the UK, and have negatively impacted their relationships with the British Establishment. Within this context, the Prevent Duty has also polarised Muslim communities in Leicester to those that work with it on a basis of critical engagement, and those that reject it. This deprives organisations the opportunities to fully explore the challenges and necessary practical steps needed to address those challenges together, e.g. alleviating socio-economic deprivation, building community cohesion and resilience, and empowering youth, in addition to preventing violent extremism. Despite the negative impact of Prevent, the feeling of misrepresentation in the Media and lack of sincere channels of communication with national decision makers, there is a desire within Muslim communities to work with authorities to keep all communities safe.

3.1.2 There are a large proportion of young people in Leicester described as a 'lost generation'; this is a structural obstacle to positive change in need of urgent redress. This isolation is characterised by the complete disengagement of young Muslims and young professionals from community and Islamic faith institutions, including those which take Prevent funding, for fear of being misrepresented or inadvertently linked with violent extremism, thereby decreasing the capacity of local community organisations to deal with local issues. It is often difficult for the older generation within communities to deal with these youth issues due to generational divisions, or when young people retreat to the less visible online world. Young people who no longer go to the mosques or faith organizations inevitably turn to the internet to find answers to questions of faith, identity and politics which increases their vulnerability to those at the extremes.

#### **3.2 Recommendations**

**3.2.1 Reviewing the disproportionate use of terrorism legislation on Muslim charities:** Driven by the fear of financing terrorism it was warned that the Charity Commission is disproportionately scrutinizing Muslim charities because of new terrorism legislation such as Section 19 of the Terrorism Act 2000. If a faith organization is best placed to deliver positive societal change, it should not be disadvantaged based on religious association.

**3.2.2 Supporting a 'lost generation' of Muslim youth:** Since 9/11 young Muslims in their early twenties have faced 15 years of negativity toward their faith identity. There are growing numbers of young Muslims who feel they have no voice and are increasingly adopting a victim mentality. Non-Muslim parents are prohibiting contact between their children and their Muslim peers 'citing security concerns'. Therefore, greater platforms for young Muslims must be established to enable them to develop a sense of belonging and to answer questions of identity, in addition to building links with the wider community.

**3.2.3 Independent Review of the Prevent Strategy and operation of the Prevent Duty:** Recognising that the role of the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation is not to review either, several aspects of the Prevent Duty and strategy remain problematic within grassroots Muslim organizations. A Prevent Officer from Leicester described the need for rigorous and transparent independent review of the Duty so issues can be resolved, myths dispelled and community confidence rebuilt in the State. A review would shed more light on the use of Prevent in education and health sectors, where the basis of referrals has been problematic in the past.

**3.2.4 Shared Challenges require shared responses:** There is need to ‘talk truth to power’. Government consultation must be sincere and should include those with whom it does not agree. Efforts must overcome the last ten years of consultation fatigue and London-centric conversations with a select few familiar faces, and be representative of the diversity of Britain’s Muslim communities. Government should be open for dialogue both when its policy approaches are going well, but also when it is recognised that policy is having negative consequences.

**3.2.5 Increasing the space for pluralism within the British democratic process:** The pluralistic character of British Muslim communities and young people is underrepresented within national consultations and decision-making bodies thereby limiting the space for meaningful channels of communication to develop with the UK’s Muslim communities. Greater pluralism would help stop the monopolisation of platforms by those at the extremes who are not representative of the Muslim majority, i.e. violent extremists and government ‘yes men’, and ensure that future strategies and policy do not miss crucial community insights.

**3.2.6 Responsible media reporting:** Whilst recognising that ‘bad news sells newspapers’ it is vital that the media are more responsible in their reporting. Alongside the government, the media should help to inform national discourse and challenge negative stereotypes, however, ‘a Muslim is more likely to be described with a negative adjective 20 times more than a positive adjective.’

### **3.3 Visit Summary**

3.3.1 The discussion focused on issues of community cohesion and the impact of terrorism legislation, enabling a holistic evaluation of the operation of the Prevent Strategy, the implementation of the Prevent Duty, and the ongoing challenges within the community since the Westminster attack.

### **3.4 Perspectives on Counter-terrorism legislation**

**3.4.1 New counter-terrorism legislation risks being counterproductive:** Calls for more counter-terrorism legislation should be heavily scrutinized. On evaluation, existing criminal law is usually sufficient, for example, had Khalid Masood survived the Westminster attacks he would have been likely charged with five counts of Murder under the Common Law of England and Wales; it would have been highly unlikely that the Terrorism Act 2006 would have been used to prosecute him. Michael Piggitt- the ‘Loughborough pipe bomber’<sup>7</sup> was charged under the Explosive Substances Act 1883 and not under terrorism legislation. It is difficult to convince a jury that an act is indeed an ‘Act of Terrorism’ due to the inherent difficulties in establishing an accepted definition of terrorism. Therefore, whilst public perception and media reporting create the framework of terrorism, e.g. the Westminster Attack as act of terrorism, sometimes it is more appropriate to prosecute an individual under Common Law. Some community members feel that there is a two-tier legal system in place, perceiving counter-terrorism legislation to be faith-targeted and disproportionately used against Muslim community members and organisations.

**3.4.2 Greater accountability and scrutiny for Schedule 7 powers:** It was felt that Muslims are being disproportionately profiled under Schedule 7 powers, with one Muslim man noting ‘he is nervous every time he sets foot in an airport’; Birmingham airport is reported as being particularly bad. In a context where security services already lack the trust and confidence of some community organisations, there was criticism levied towards the lack of oversight and scrutiny of Schedule 7 powers to ensure interventions are lawful and proportionate.

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<sup>7</sup> The Telegraph, (2014), Neo-Nazi sixth former ‘plotted new Columbine massacre in Loughborough’, 4 March. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/10677249/Neo-Nazi-sixth-former-plotted-new-Columbine-massacre-in-Loughborough.html>

(3.4.2 cont.) The British Government has shared personal information of those stopped under Schedule 7 with foreign governments, leading to unnecessary stops/searches abroad and limited recourse in British courts when issues have arisen abroad, e.g. Muslims have been stopped in Indian airports and cited humanitarian concerns over their treatment. Reportedly '75% of people stopped in British airports under Schedule 7 have been asked to spy on their communities', feeding into the narrative that the only relationship between communities and government is one based on surveillance.

**3.4.3 Counter-terrorism legislation and Restrictions for Muslim charities:** Muslims in the UK are the most generous religious group in terms of their charitable donations, giving up to £100 million in the month of Ramadan alone. However, under counter-terrorism legislation there is a Duty under Section 19 of the Terrorism Act 2000 to report certain terrorist financing offences. This relates to the fundraising and use of funds. It was said that under this legislation assets of Muslim charities have been unfairly frozen and that while Muslim charities make up just 1.21% of total number of UK Based charities, 38% of investigated charities are Islamic but only 3 Muslim charities have actually been prosecuted under terrorism legislation. Upon having their bank accounts frozen as part of investigations, charities subsequently cleared have been forced to adopt the often poorly regulated *Hawala* system<sup>8</sup>. This makes it difficult for charities to continue running and forces financing to go underground.

**3.4.5 Cuts to legal aid:** Introduced by the 'Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012', severe financial cuts limit access to justice and legal recourse for the poorest or most vulnerable in society. Those groups that are particularly affected include vulnerable young people, young migrants and refugees. This issue does not just affect the Muslim community, but the lack of legal support and advocacy to ensure fundamental rights and access to justice appears acute in Leicester, serving to disenchant the communities with the current status quo.

### 3.5 The Prevent Duty

**3.5.1 Independent Review of the Prevent Strategy:** The basis on which referrals are made should be scrutinised as figures show that educational establishments are by far one of the biggest referral agencies to the Channel Programme, but that 80% of referrals lead to no further action. There is also a lack of transparency about the science behind the ERG 22+ tool, used as a basis for identifying signs of radicalization at the start of the referral process within Channel. Local and national differences in referrals should also be subject to scrutiny. At a national level around 75% and 25% of referrals to Channel are Muslim and extreme right wing respectively; in Leicester, the figures are roughly 50/50; by contrast, in Lincolnshire, almost 95% of referrals were said to be extreme right wing. After the Charlie Hebdo attacks, referrals to Channel in Leicester increased by 125% in health and 150% in schools, illustrating how suspicions were raised without basis because the profile of terrorism was raised. Greater transparency would serve to dispel myths and ultimately safeguard the balance between liberty and security. Whilst recognizing that the Prevent Strategy is very different to Stop and Search, the feeling of marginalisation it has created and sustained appear similar. Indeed, a review into Stop and Search found that whilst trying to protect the rights of the majority, the Police were infringing upon the rights of minorities, severely affecting community relationships. It found that there was a disproportionate use of the power on Black and Ethnic Minority communities; 'since 1995, per head of population in England and Wales, recorded stops and searches of Asian people have remained between 1.5 and 2.5 times the rate for white people, and for black people always between 4 and 8 times the rate for white people'<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> The Economist, (2015), 'How hawala money-transfer schemes are changing', 16 October. Available here: <https://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2015/10/economist-explains-12>

<sup>9</sup> Equality and Human Rights Commission, (2010) 'Stop and think: A critical review of the stop and search powers in England and Wales'. Available here: [https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/ehrc\\_stop\\_and\\_search\\_report.pdf](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/ehrc_stop_and_search_report.pdf)

**3.5.2 Prevent in Education:** There remains confusion and uncertainty within universities as they try to simultaneously promote free speech and protect students from extremist views. A Muslim lecturer from Leicester University noted that since the implementation of the Prevent Duty in the University free speech has been visibly curtailed. It has made students more insular, withdrawn and more likely to withdraw from discussions on areas perceived to be potentially contentious. Young people are more likely to become 'lone rangers' because they are made to feel that they are targeted because of their religion. The case of Mohammed Umar Farooq was cited, a student who was questioned under the remit of Prevent after reading a book on terrorism as part of his university course<sup>10</sup>.

**3.5.3 Polarised relationships between community organisations and the Prevent Duty:** Some prominent community organizations receive Prevent funding and enjoy communicative relationships with the local Police and its Prevent team. They deliver countering violent extremism workshops and training, engaging both those on the extreme right wing and those from a Muslim background. However, cooperation is based on a relationship of 'critical engagement', communicating both the positive and negative impact of the Duty, rather than advocating wholesale buy-in. Many other community organisations are suspicious of Prevent and will not take its funding for community work, feeling that the majority of those delivering Prevent Duty training work are on the fringes of the community, rather than being active stakeholders within it. This limits the trust the communities have in the trainers – the trust that is essential if they are to be successful.

### **3.6 Dialogue, the basis of effective policy making**

**3.6.1 Community consultation:** There remains a disconnect between how central government and local communities discuss, perceive and think about present community/national challenges, and opportunities to overcome those challenges. Discussions often begin at very different points of departure. For example, across Muslim community organizations Prevent has become a 'byword for wider criticisms' of Government policy and the countering violent extremism agenda. The Prevent Duty is often conflated with other onerous counter-terrorism legislation, such as Schedule 7. Similarly, frustrations in the community arise when the government conflates domestic violence, FGM and lack of fluency in English as issues related to terrorism, when in fact they are wholly cultural.

### **3.7. The Impact of violent extremism**

**3.7.1 The Westminster Attack:** Divisive rhetoric within national political and media spheres, the alarming rise in Islamophobia and suspicion directed at the Leicester's Muslim communities has served to disempower whole sections of the community and decrease spaces for young people to build cross-community understanding and relationships. Schemes such as the 'Visit my Mosque Day' have developed trust and understanding amongst diverse communities across faith and cultural lines. However, it is illustrative of the fragility of this cohesion that after the London attack non-Muslim parents in Leicester refused to send their children on a mosque visit, citing security concerns.

**3.7.2 The impact on young Muslim professionals:** Young professionals within Muslim communities are now reluctant to get involved with local Muslim community organizations, whether on trustee boards, or in non-executive positions, in case links with violent extremism emerge at a later date. This makes it difficult for community organisations to thrive because without young professionals, e.g. accountants, lawyers and businesspeople, the governance and capacity of community organisations are severely limited.

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<sup>10</sup> The Guardian, (2015), 'Student accused of being a terrorist for reading a book on terrorism', 24 September. Available here: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/sep/24/student-accused-being-terrorist-reading-book-terrorism>

(3.7.2 cont.) Young people are cancelling direct debits to local and international faith based charities, e.g. one young person cancelled a direct debit to a Palestinian orphanage, because they feel their banks may treat them with suspicion if they are linked to Muslim-associated charities, and in response to the case of HSBC unfairly closing down Finsbury Park Mosque's bank accounts<sup>11</sup>.

**3.7.3 The impact of Islamophobia on young Muslims: 'a lost generation':** Since 9/11 young people in their 20's have lived through 15 years of negativity directed toward their faith and so have adopted a 'victim mentality'. In the past youth committees of mosques have helped to build a network for young people within the community, developing leadership skills and the confidence and capacity to respond to some of these issues. However, whilst there is 'a huge potential to develop young people in Leicester' it is severely limited by wider issues around Islamophobia and racism. Extreme far right wing groups are a concern in Leicester, whose members make up around 50% of Channel referrals in Leicester, and 96% in surrounding Lincolnshire. It was reported that a heart specialist recently said to young person 'I don't want to treat you if you're going to become a suicide bomber'. It is often difficult for the older generation within communities to deal with these youth issues due to generational divisions, or when young people retreat to the less visible online world. Young people who no longer go to mosques or faith organizations inevitably turn to the internet to find answers to questions of faith, identity and politics which leave them vulnerable to those at the extremes.

**3.7.4 Condemning terrorist attacks:** Muslim groups are asked to apologise for incidents with which they have no links. Community organisations say they feel an increasing burden 'to condemn attacks because if we don't, we are accused of supporting attacks'. However, it was questioned as to what an act of an individual in London has to do with a community group from inner-city Leicester, or indeed the wider British Muslim population.

**3.7.5 How discourses of threat have shaped perceptions of Muslim:** The State has defined the threat from international terrorism as 'Critical, Severe or Substantial since 1st August 2006'<sup>12</sup>. The discourse of threat is set by the Government which in turn sets the tone to which local and national media respond. The persistent threat from terrorism has created a state of exceptionalism, whereby Muslim grassroots community organizations feel they are disproportionately considered threats to British domestic security. This serves only to isolate and marginalise the vast majority of law-abiding British Muslims and damage ongoing community cohesion efforts. There now exists a situation whereby 'Muslims are described in the media with a negative adjective around 20 times more than with a fair adjective'.

**3.7.6** In the past, former Prime Minister David Cameron, and Defense Minister Michael Fallon both claimed that Islamic scholar Suleiman Ghani had links with so-called Islamic State in the run up to London's mayoral election<sup>13</sup>. A formal apology was issued after links emerged to be false and David Cameron was protected from being sued by parliamentary privilege; Michael Fallon, who repeated the comments on the Radio, later had to settle outside of court. However, once such statements have been made it is very difficult for community organisations to pick up the pieces with limited time, resources and legal protections.

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<sup>11</sup> The Guardian, (2017), 'Finsbury Park Mosque wins apology and damages from Reuters', 1<sup>st</sup> Feb. Available here: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/feb/01/finsbury-park-mosque-wins-apology-and-damages-from-reuters>

<sup>12</sup> The Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre and the Security Service (MI5) sets likelihood of a terrorist attack from Low, Moderate, Substantial, Severe to Critical. The threat level at no time before or after the Westminster attack was the threat level raised to 'Critical', i.e. an attack is imminent.

<sup>13</sup> The Independent, (2016), Suliman Gani: David Cameron apologises to imam for Isis link as he faces pressure over Khan claims, 11 May. Available here: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/suliman-gani-michael-fallon-forced-apologise-imam-isis-link-david-cameron-pressure-sadiq-khan-claims-a7024656.html>

## 4. Summary of Bradford Roundtable – 8<sup>th</sup> May

*This section outlines discussions from a roundtable organized in Bradford on the 8<sup>th</sup> May 2017. Also present at the meeting was Martin Lennon, a representative from the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England who met with Muslim community partners, educationalists, youth and heads of open access youth service providers from: Batley, Bolton, Dewsbury, Manchester, Leeds and Bradford. Discussions also focused on the challenges facing young people and their communities as part of the Children's Commissioner's<sup>14</sup> 'Growing Up North' project which aims to better understand the factors inhibiting young people living full and successful lives in the North of England.*

### 4.1 Executive Summary

4.1.1 While grassroots community Muslim organisations work tirelessly with a diversity of local groups and individuals to drive positive social change within their communities, many of the needs of communities within the North of England remain unmet. Communities, particularly from inner-city areas, suffer from a combination of related and mutually reinforcing problems which impact and impede their development at multiple levels. The impact of foreign and domestic policy; the lack of opportunities for productive political engagement; education; housing; welfare and employment policies; and feelings of resentment generated by a perceived stigmatisation of Islamic faith identity have all contributed to feelings of exclusion, particularly amongst youth. The impact of this deprivation and feeling of exclusion is both cumulative and intergenerational. It is feared that the Westminster attack on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2017 will only compound this isolation and exclusion through a narrow focus on 'countering violent extremism' (CVE).

4.1.2 Communities believe that this focus on CVE has led to both themselves and successive Governments 'taking their eye off the ball' with regards to other key issues in the community. These issues include drug and alcohol abuse, poor health, crime, educational attainment and limited employment opportunities. This has created a context where many may feel trapped within a cycle of immobility. Current policy approaches to CVE, such as the Prevent Duty, are attracting resentment and suspicion to the point of being counterproductive. Participants noted that this is likely to be negatively impacting on the life chances, attitudes, aspirations and expectations of Muslim children and young people, which could lead to significant social unrest, and ultimately exacerbate the very problems that CVE policies seek to address.

### 4.2 Recommendations

**4.2.1 Addressing deprivation within the Muslim community:** The unmet political, social and economic needs within Muslim communities must be addressed holistically. This is essential to tackle community frustrations and prevent harmful messages of division espoused by the far right and Islamic State-inspired extremists alike from taking root. There is a great desire to see the government review its priorities and focus more on issues of employment, health, deprivation and lack of resources at the community level, issues outside of a traditional counter-terrorism lens.

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14 The Children's Commissioner for England is Anne Longfield OBE. She has a statutory duty to promote and protect the rights of all children in England in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Children and Families Act 2014 gives her special responsibility for the rights of children who are in or leaving care, living away from home or receiving social care services. She speaks for wider groups of children on non-devolved issues including immigration (for the whole of the UK) and youth justice (for England and Wales). It is her job to make life better for all children and young people by making sure their rights are respected and realised and that their views are taken seriously. Read more here: <http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/about-us>.

#### **4.2.2 Making the time and space for communities to attend national government consultations:**

Community organisations should be viewed as part of the solution not part of the problem and as 'gate openers' rather than 'gate keepers'. There is a perception that central Government deliberately organises community consultations during working hours and in London only so community figures with whom it does not agree cannot attend. Many feel frustrated that there is no feedback provided post-consultation. Furthermore consultations are often held under a CVE agenda, limiting the space for honest and frank conversations.

**4.2.3 Investing in youth services :** There is the need for greater financial and political investment in youth services which bring individuals and communities together, answering questions about identity and fostering a greater sense of belonging. Such efforts should not be conflated with a radicalisation or counter-terrorism agenda or they risk being counterproductive and ineffective.

**4.2.4 Greater understanding of Islam and faith** is required at all levels to counter misunderstandings and negative stereotypes, for example the mistaken conflation of cultural issues such as Female Genital Mutilation, honour killings and forced marriages with religious practices intrinsic to Islam.

**4.2.5 Relevant public bodies should support young people to develop their internet literacy:** Training should include both young people, 'who increasingly feel invincible behind their keyboards', and their parents in order to 'bridge the growing generational gap'. Efforts should promote acceptable online behaviour and internet safety, to help young Muslims deal with Islamophobia, far right abuse and Islamic State inspired propaganda.

**4.2.6 Independent Review of the Prevent Strategy:** The Prevent Duty should be subject to a full and Independent Review to look at allegations that it is being misused to spy and gather intelligence on Muslim communities by security services. A review should consider: cases where existing safeguarding standards are reportedly not being met; allegations of cultural insensitivity of the part of Prevent trainers; as well as the basis upon which referrals are made.

### **4.3 The Prevent Duty**

**4.3.1 Bridging the gap between Prevent and safeguarding:** The core aim of safeguarding is to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm. However, this has become complicated in the context of Prevent, which draws in issues of counter-terrorism and security.

4.3.2 There is often uncertainty surrounding the implementation of Prevent in education institutions. A study by the University of Huddersfield, based on interviews with 225 educationalists, found that opposition to Prevent was more limited than had been hypothesised. The study also suggested that there was a lack of evidence for a 'chilling effect' by the Prevent Duty on discussions within the classroom and that there is a perception that many teachers are simply 'getting on with it' and making Prevent work as best they can. It was suggested that some educationalists have accepted the 'safeguarding paradigm' that Prevent has been packaged as by the government. However, this analysis was rejected by Muslim students, teachers and mothers who were under-represented in the study and who argued that there had been a chilling effect in the classroom. One mother noted how her son had been 'interrogated' under the Prevent Duty in Primary school after having written a poem on Palestine which read, 'in Palestine kids are surrounded by bullets, not toys'.

4.3.3 The delivery of Prevent training is perceived by some to be culturally insensitive and sincere concerns were expressed that, in practice, referrals are made where the weight of evidence does not fulfil that required by existing standards of safeguarding in schools. Schools are said to be rushing Prevent referrals and teachers err on the side of caution in referring young Muslims.



(4.3.3 cont.) The educational regulatory body, OFSTED, is felt to have contributed to increased numbers of pupils wrongly referred to Channel. As a regulator, it must ensure Prevent is adopted within education establishments and therefore this pressure is perceived to be a significant factor behind increasing referrals in schools.

**4.3.4 Potential consequences of immediate recourse to referral:** Education establishments have often rushed referrals and judgements, which is not conducive to the effective safeguarding of young people. In universities, Islamic societies are often treated with suspicion and ‘spied’ on by academic staff and chaplains; indeed, one university chaplain was suspended after threatening to refer a Muslim student to Channel for campaigning for more prayer spaces. The fear that results from this culture of referrals has created conditions where students feel forced to self-censor. This has become particularly problematic with the disbanding of safeguarding panels who would feed community perspectives back to local decision makers. There is therefore less scrutiny of referrals and other issues surrounding Prevent.

#### **4.4 Assessing channels of communication with communities**

4.4.1 There is a lack of meaningful dialogue on the British government’s counter-terrorism agenda and issues considered important to the British Muslim communities. Safe spaces for difficult conversations have been gradually restricted or been subsumed under the ‘counter-terrorism agenda’.

4.4.2 Foreign policy and events overseas are often contentious issues within British Muslim communities, yet they are subjects that are often actively avoided or dismissed as irrelevant in conversations with government authorities. One participant highlighted the particular importance of having these conversations with young Muslims. In 2012, a controversial film depicting the Prophet Mohammed was released in America, provoking violent protests. In a Dewsbury Muslim youth centre, this prompted some young people to suggest burning down the local police station or American flag in protest. Talking through their anger and challenging the youth on whether such actions would in fact move things forward was valuable. This empowered the young people, engaging them politically and enabling them to think critically, in turn mitigating potential social unrest. This highlights the value of keeping spaces open for honest, and at times difficult, conversations to take place outside of the counter-terrorism framework, where there is no risk of referral to Channel.

**4.4.3 The Gulf between Communities and the Government:** Muslim communities outside of London have ‘dialogue fatigue’. Over the last decade, communities have gone out of their way to engage with the government. However, there is the perception that the government actively designs consultations so that groups cannot attend; for example, meetings are held in London during working hours. Moreover, there is no feedback post-consultations, which leaves many feeling efforts at dialogue are insincere.

#### **4.5 Counter-terrorism legislation and Common Law**

**4.5.1 Distinguishing Criminal Law from Counter-terrorism Legislation: Two Tiers of Legislation?** It is felt that there are ‘two tiers of legislation’, one for non-Muslims and one for Muslims that deals with acts that can be perceived to be ‘terrorist’ in nature. Some perpetrators of violence or planned acts of violence, such as the murderer of Labour MP Jo Cox, have been tried under English Common Law rather than counter-terrorism law. With the trial of the ‘Loughborough Pipe Bomber’, Michael Piggan, the jury could not accept that he was a terrorist. That both were white, rather than Muslim, is considered significant.

(4.5.1 *cont.*) The broader discourse surrounding terrorism in the UK was considered unhelpful, influencing the jury's perception that he did not 'look' or 'feel' like a terrorist, arguably because he did not fit the common typecast of a terrorist presented in the media and politics. For some, this raises questions as to whether there can be a truly independent court system when juries are inevitably influenced by negative public and political discourse surrounding Muslims.

4.5.2 However, others suggested that broadening the use of counter-terrorism legislation would be dangerous and unnecessary. Criminal law can adequately deal with most acts of violence carried out in the UK; indeed, if Khalid Masood, who carried out the Westminster attack, had survived, he could have been tried under English Common Law. Calls to increase the power of counter-terrorism legislation should be heavily scrutinised, particularly since there is the risk that this could tip the liberty-security balance in favour of security, stepping on fundamental freedoms.

#### **4.6 Supporting communities and alleviating deprivation**

4.6.1 Many in inner-city Muslim communities feel neglected and marginalised. School standards are lower, transport links are poorer and there are fewer employment opportunities. The focus on Prevent and counter-terrorism has led to communities 'taking their eye off the ball', on other important challenges. The feeling of marginalisation is aggravated by the perception that integration is a 'one-way process', with only Muslims encouraged to integrate.

**4.6.2 Funding Cuts at the Community Level:** There is a perceived inconsistency between the national government's rhetoric and realities at the community level. Cuts to services, facilities and community centres are intensifying existing challenges. Community centres provide 'safe spaces' for conversations to take place, allowing young people to explore their faith, think critically, and pose questions about identity, politics and religion without fear of judgement or referral. However, such spaces are gradually being closed due to a lack of funding. This has put vital services out of reach from the poorest, most vulnerable, and most in need.

**4.6.3 Islamophobia and Suspicions Surrounding Islam:** Having grown up in a post-7/7 era, young Muslims often find themselves scrutinised because of their faith. The 'religious conveyor belt theory', whereby the more religious one is, the more likely one is to become a terrorist, has led to particular attention being paid to young people that express a strong or visible interest in Islam. This is particularly problematic for Muslim women, owing to the visibility of their faith due to their religious clothing (e.g. the hijab). Islamophobic discourses are felt to have become more prevalent, and to have been given insufficient attention; as Islam is a religion it was perceived by those in attendance to be 'free game' for abuse and criticism since it is not covered by race relations legislation. There is also the need for greater distinction between cultural issues, such as Female Genital Mutilation and so-called 'honour killings' and issues related to security and counter-terrorism, with all often subsumed in conversations about Islam, terrorism and security.

**4.6.4 Narratives Surrounding Acts of 'Terrorism' and Muslims in Britain:** British Muslims often feel like the new 'bogeymen' who have replaced other scapegoated communities - such as the Irish during the Troubles - in popular public opinion. This is felt to be exemplified by the double standards in media and politics where acts of terrorism are immediately linked to Islam and Muslims.

**4.6.5 Social Media - Toeing a Fine Line:** There needs to be a shift in young people's mind-sets and perceptions of how to act online if online behaviour is to fundamentally change. This requires work 'offline', including challenging youth perceptions of 'online invincibility'. Social media sites, such as Facebook, are also working to ensure young people can be adequately safeguarded online, including by building databases that mass-delete extremist material hosted on their websites. However, vigilance is required when it comes to policing social media to ensure that fundamental rights are maintained.

## **5. Summary of Manchester Roundtable – 9<sup>th</sup> June**

*This section outlines a discussion from a roundtable in Manchester on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June with a diverse range of representatives from Manchester's Muslim communities. The roundtable was organised in the aftermath of the Manchester Arena and London Bridge terror attacks, and sought to explore the perspectives and concerns within communities at this time. In particular, discussions focused on perceptions of existing counter-terrorism legislation; the government's broader counter-terrorism strategy, with a focus on Prevent; and concerns over how these might be adapted in the aftermath of the attacks.*

### **5.1 Executive summary**

5.1.1 In spite of calls from segments of the media and the political class for Muslim communities to 'do more' to counter violent extremism, it must be acknowledged that it was voices from within these communities that had repeatedly warned the authorities about Salman Abedi, the Manchester Arena bomber, demonstrating the clear commitment of these communities to keep British society safe. Community organisations feel this example is emblematic of a wider problem – that too much of the positive work they do is downplayed or ignored by commentators, especially in the aftermath of attacks. This generates enormous frustration and is particularly demoralising for individuals who dedicate an enormous amount of time and resources to try and build resilient communities.

5.1.2 The attacks have renewed attention on the British government's strategy on countering-violent extremism. Statements from Theresa May that these strategies may be reviewed were broadly welcomed, provided any review takes the form of a real dialogue that engages diverse constituencies and listens to their perspectives, rather than creating another set of policies that are perceived to be imposed from the top down. Communities would value the opportunity to debate elements of the existing approach, of which there are many criticisms. Policies such as Prevent are perceived to have disproportionately impacted upon Muslim communities; contributed to an environment of suspicion and tension within communities; and undermined the resilience of communities to extremism by inadvertently shutting down public spaces for dialogue and debate, pushing individuals to take their concerns into the less governed space of the internet.

### **5.2 Recommendations**

5.2.1 Establish greater avenues for dialogue between Muslim communities and the political establishment, so that community perspectives can better inform policymaking. A request was made for the role of the Independent Reviewer of Terrorist Legislation to be made more 'community facing' to help fulfil such a role. For this to occur participants' suggested that the office of the Independent Reviewer may require additional resources.

5.2.2 The government must engage more with voices that are constructive but critical of its counter-terrorism strategy, and that are perceived to be more representative of community perspectives. If the government does proceed with a review of existing strategies or bring forward new legislation, such as a Counter Extremism Bill, Muslim communities would greatly value the opportunity to be consulted and share insights.

5.2.3 The government should be wary of moving forward with any effort to criminalise non-violent extremism. It was felt this could risk criminalising thought – penalising individuals on the basis of subjective opinions perceived to be at odds with equally ill-defined concepts such as 'British values'. Furthermore, concerns were raised that it could limit the opportunity for critical debate within communities, crippling their ability to try and deal with the challenge of violent extremism. It could also contribute to driving individuals harbouring questions on contentious issues further underground where they may be at a greater risk of extremist narratives.

5.2.4 There is a need for greater transparency from the government on its definition of extremism and the individuals that are perceived to be extremist speakers who should not be engaged. If the government holds a list of extremist speakers and designated extremist materials, these should be published so that there can be greater clarity and discussion on such definitions.

5.2.5 Where possible, police and authorities should work with communities to intervene prior to pursuing prosecution. This is especially relevant for young people considering to travel to Syria, where it was felt more could be done earlier to make prosecution unnecessary.

5.2.6 While outside the current role of the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, there is a strong desire for an independent review of the Prevent Duty. Such a review would demonstrate that the government is listening to community perspectives and would present an opportunity to discuss long-standing frustrations with elements of the Prevent Duty. It was suggested that a review could be conducted by a new independent reviewer, or through extending the role of the Independent Reviewer of Terrorist Legislation to cover the operation of S.26 CTS 2015.

5.2.7 The statutory footing of Prevent within health and education is a particular source of concern, and was felt to be in urgent need of review. Preventing individuals from being drawn into terrorism could instead be placed alongside, and framed as part of, other existing safeguarding duties, and support increased for existing specialist and designated safeguarding leads.

5.2.8 Review the legal framework for British citizens going overseas to fight with foreign organisations to ensure it is applied equally and indiscriminately. Suggestions included either setting out a clear list of organisations that British citizens may fight for; banning any British citizen fighting for a foreign organisation; or introducing a statutory defence that would permit British citizens to fight overseas for a 'just cause' (although it was acknowledged that this was a subjective term).

5.2.9 The relationship between communities and local authorities is often stronger than the relationship with national authorities. Accordingly, local authorities could be well placed to guide and shape consultations with Muslim communities due their more developed relationships. Good community policing is an effective means of generating trust and could provide a mechanism for regular dialogue between the authorities and individuals within the community.

5.2.10 One individual called for the office of the Independent Reviewer to be strengthened through the appointment of a Defence Counsel as a Special Advisor who could help offer alternative perspectives.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Upon receiving this recommendation, the Independent Reviewer requested the right to respond: 'This participant failed to recognise that the Independent Reviewer has three Special Advisers, of whom two are practising barristers and one is an academic lawyer and honorary QC. Furthermore, professional lawyers understand that self-employed barristers act for the party instructing them, without fear or favour and in strict accordance with the Bar Standards Board Handbook, which regulates conduct by barristers. The current Independent Reviewer has considerable experience defending individuals charged with the most serious criminal offences.'

### **5.3. Fears within mosques in the current climate**

5.3.1 The recent attacks have intensified concerns within communities, especially amongst community organisations that fear the potential consequences of any association with the attacker, no matter how inadvertent. Trustees of a Manchester mosque described their concerns when, in the aftermath of the attacks, commentators were immediately calling for the mosques Salman Abedi attended to be investigated for their potential links encouraging extremism. It was suggested that such calls, while understandable, ultimately misunderstood the role of mosques in Muslim communities. In contrast to churches, mosques have a less regular congregation and many individuals will simply attend the nearest mosque when it is time for prayers. On busy days, hundreds or thousands of people can attend a mosque for prayers and it is not feasible for the mosque's leaders to keep track of who is attending. Accordingly, were a potential or future terrorist attacker to attend a mosque, it is quite possible that the leadership of a mosque would be unaware. However, the discovery of any link would be devastating for any mosque: damaging its image in wider society, and attracting government suspicion and potential condemnation for not having 'done more' to prevent extremism.

5.3.2 Suggestions were also made that the focusing upon mosques as a principal site where extremist narratives were circulated, was mistaken, and partly driven by organisations that had little understanding of the realities within Muslim communities. Any individual espousing extremist ideas at a mosque is likely to be quickly confronted and, if appropriate, reported to the authorities. Indeed, this allegedly occurred to Salman Abedi after he confronted an Imam at a Manchester mosque.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, the main challenge does not come from individuals who regularly attend mosque, but rather from those who seek to disengage from the wider community and retreat into spaces where their views will not be challenged.

### **5.4 Reflections on the impact and effectiveness of Prevent and the Prevent Duty**

5.4.1 Muslim community leaders who have witnessed the Prevent strategy in action not only question its effectiveness but also suggest that it may be counterproductive, shutting down spaces for dialogue on potentially controversial topics. Within mosques, community organisations, or university societies, Prevent has limited the parameters for debate, with organisers avoiding topics, such as foreign policy, out of fear they may feel obliged to report young people if they ask questions or express views that could be perceived as supporting violent extremism. Conversely, over the past decade young people have learned not to raise certain topics if they want to avoid suspicion. Accordingly, it was suggested that rather than facilitating 'safe conversations at a mosque' where individuals could be engaged, debated and challenged, Prevent had pushed young people into the 'unsafe' space of the internet in their search for answers, ultimately leaving them more at risk of encountering extremist narratives.

5.4.2 Particular frustration was expressed over the Prevent Duty, which places a legal duty upon specified authorities – including local authorities, the NHS and schools – to refer individuals that they fear are at risk of violent extremism. While such authorities undoubtedly have a role to play in identifying individuals 'at risk' – and there have been cases where the concerns raised by authorities prevented terrorist attacks – it was felt that the statutory requirement creates numerous problems.

5.4.3 The training given to teachers and doctors was described as a limited 'tick box exercise', that fails to equip individuals with the necessary expertise to make effective judgement calls. As a result, and out of a fear of 'getting it wrong' many feel obliged to make a referral over even minor issues, which leads to many inappropriate referrals – often causing considerable trauma to those that are referred – and absorbing police resources that could be more effectively targeted.

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<sup>16</sup> The Telegraph, (2017), 'Security Services missed five opportunities to stop Manchester', 24 April. Available here: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/05/24/security-services-missed-five-opportunities-stop-manchester/>

(5.4.3 *Cont.*) An example was cited of a health worker who, after receiving the Home Office WRAP Training, raised concerns over a young Muslim with mental health issues who they perceived to be at risk of radicalisation because they displayed basic signs of piety. In the words of one participant this demonstrated ‘how a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing.’

5.4.4 Concerns were also raised that the duty could contribute to the erosion of trust between teachers and their pupils, or doctors and their patients, undermining important relationships at a considerable cost to wider society. Some felt that this erosion had already begun, with ‘communities looking at officials with fear and officials looking at communities with suspicion.’

5.4.5 Authorities should not ‘bury their heads in the sand’ and pretend that the problem of violent extremism does not exist, but it was felt that existing safeguarding frameworks within these professions and outside of the Prevent Duty were sufficient to ensure that the most troubling cases would still be referred, whilst relieving individuals from the pressures to over-refer and act disproportionately.

## **5.5 The need for greater community consultation and establishing avenues for dialogue**

5.5.1 The government’s strategy for countering violent extremism has a considerable impact upon British Muslim communities at multiple levels. However, within these communities there exists the strong belief that such strategies are designed without wider consultation, that there is insufficient dialogue on how existing policies and legislation affect the lived experience of many British Muslims, and that successive governments have not seriously engaged with the concerns and recommendations of communities. Many argue that this top down approach has not only generated enormous frustrations within communities, but that it undermines the effectiveness of policymaking by limiting access to important insights at the grassroots level. Indeed, one participant stated that they felt that the Independent Reviewer was the only conduit that was accessible to reach policy makers in Whitehall.

5.5.2 Where the government and officials do seek to engage, there are concerns over how interlocutors are chosen, and how representative of community perspectives they truly are. Certain organisations, and individuals were said to have ‘zero credibility...[and] are seen as fraudsters’ amongst many British Muslims, but have been given access to prominent platforms to expound their views and shape policy. It was suggested that these groups did little to challenge the thinking or approach of government, but instead had sought to use the real need to prevent violent-extremism as a means of gaining personal influence and prominence.

5.5.3 In this context, there is an enormous desire amongst communities to establish avenues for dialogue, not just to convey frustrations, but also to help authorities to ‘sound out’ ideas and find more effective responses. One hope expressed by individuals present was for the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation to become one such avenue, assuming a more ‘community facing’ role to help channel a wider range of perspectives into government and Whitehall.

5.5.4 It was acknowledged that this would require adapting and expanding the role of the Independent Reviewer, but it was suggested that having a trusted institutional mechanism that could act as a ‘bridgehead’ for community perspectives on terrorism legislation and the broader counter-terrorism strategy would be invaluable, and help address concerns over a lack of consultation.

5.5.5 Dialogue between community leaders and local officials – such as the police, teachers, and local authorities – was recognised to be more developed than the relationship at the national level, and to be built upon a level of trust and understanding that has developed over years of regular interaction. Finding ways to feed the conversations that occur at the local level to the national authorities, for example in Whitehall, could present another opportunity to help input community perspectives into policymaking circles.

## **5.6 Feelings of double standards and the singling out of Muslim communities**

5.6.1 Counter-terrorism legislation when passed by Parliament is intended to apply equally to all elements of society. However, the reality is that many figures in British Muslim communities feel that a double standard exists, and that laws are disproportionately applied to Muslims over other groups. In particular, some feel that white, right-wing, criminals are less likely to be charged with terrorism offences than their Muslim counterparts. While this may represent a perception more than the reality<sup>17</sup>, that this perception exists reflects how current government strategies have failed to generate trust.

5.6.2 Another area where the law was argued to be unequally applied was in the area of British citizens travelling overseas to fight in foreign organisations. Young British Muslims travelling to Syria to fight against the government of Assad are highly likely to be perceived and prosecuted as terrorists, whereas individuals fighting with Kurdish forces are not. Some argued that currently the Attorney General has too much authority to designate which foreign organisations are terrorist, in nature, and thus the decision is vulnerable to being politicised. To introduce consistency, it was suggested that either there should be a blanket prohibition on British citizens fighting for foreign organisations (although it was recognised this could create challenges for dual citizens) or there needed to be a clearer set of legal principles of when it was acceptable for citizens to fight overseas.

5.6.3 Beyond specific legislation, the government's Prevent strategy was also accused of singling out Muslims. Although meant to counter all forms of extremism, including right-wing extremism, Prevent was described by some as 'racist and discriminatory', overwhelmingly targeting Muslim communities. Many Prevent officers were said to lack the necessary cultural and religious understanding to distinguish real threats from normal behaviour, making many Muslims feel they are under suspicion because of their faith background. Indeed, one participant argued 'it took me thirty years to understand my own community... I don't understand how two hours of Prevent training is meant to.' With limited understanding of complex issues, some felt that any display of piety could appear threatening to Prevent officers – the example was cited of someone who had received Prevent training claiming that if they saw an individual with the Shuhada (the Muslim declaration of faith that is common in many Muslim households), they would suspect potential extremism.

## **5.7 A new strategy from the government? Suggestions from within the community**

5.7.1 In spite of the media and political narratives that argue Muslim communities need to do more to combat violent extremism which have emerged in the aftermath of the recent attacks, British Muslims have played a vital role in combatting extremism. It was noted that Salman Abedi the Manchester Arena bomber, had been reported on five separate occasions over concerns that he harboured extremist views, highlighting that figures in British Muslim communities do raise the alarm when they perceive a real threat. While frustrations over the current approach to countering violent extremism are real, there is an almost universal desire to improve the working relationship with authorities and inform policies in order to keep all Britons safe.

5.7.2 The recent speech by the Prime Minister indicating a review of Britain's approach to counter-terrorism strategy was broadly welcomed as a potential opportunity for Muslim communities to share their perspectives and engage in a robust debate on the successes, failures and missed opportunities of the past decade. However, for this to occur, genuine efforts must be made by the government to consult widely and reach out beyond those who have been traditionally engaged (see 5.2 above). Indeed, fears were raised that such a review could turn into another top down and limited affair, that would not cover the most controversial areas of the government's current strategy, such as Prevent.

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<sup>17</sup> For example, while it is well known that Jo Cox's killer was charged with murder as opposed to a terrorist offence, so were the killers of Lee Rigby in 2013. In both cases this was seen as the most effective offence under which to pursue prosecution but should not imply that the killings were not acts of terrorism.)

5.7.3 Concerns were also raised about rumoured proposals to criminalise so-called non-violent extremism, which although not currently on the government's agenda, may gain renewed impetus in the aftermath of the recent terrorist attacks. It was questioned how terms such as extremism or British values could be legally defined, with the argument made that these concepts would always be, to some degree, subjective and therefore vulnerable to being politicised. It was further suggested that any such action would be seen to create 'thought-crimes', and exacerbate the chilling effect of current government strategies. Such legislation would actually undermine the resilience of communities by driving contentious conversations underground or online, and therefore limit the ability of wider society to challenge and debate such views early on.

5.7.4 One recommendation that emerged was for greater transparency over who the government currently defines as extremists. This was felt to be important, both in terms of rule of law (allowing individuals or organisations who were defined as such to perhaps challenge this definition) but also in allowing other parts of the community to make informed decisions about who they engage, as it was suggested that in the current system an organisation might inadvertently invite a speaker who was defined by the government as extremist. Questions were raised as to whether the Home Office currently has a list of organisations defined as extremist and, if so, if such a list could be made public.

5.7.5 A further recommendation was for community and neighbourhood policing to be prioritised, arguing that a trusted relationship with the local police that was not focused through the lens of counter-terrorism, could be invaluable in preventing 'lone wolf' attacks, increasing the likelihood that individuals would feel comfortable going to police they knew and with whom they had a good working relationship. There were also calls for the police to adopt a more preventative and less punitive approach, with some arguing that if the police were aware that a young person was considering travelling to Syria that they should work with the community to intervene earlier, as opposed to waiting to arrest them when they attempted to board a plane.

5.7.6 Requests were also made for increased resources for community and youth centres to ensure there were spaces for young people to be engaged with their peers and wider society and thereby combat marginalisation and isolation that may increase vulnerability to radicalisation.



## **6. Summary of Roundtable with the Libyan Community in Manchester – 9<sup>th</sup> June**

*This section outlines a roundtable organized with representatives from within Manchester's diverse British-Libyan community, including students, teachers, businessmen and other community partners, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June. The roundtable was organised in the aftermath of the Manchester Arena and London Bridge terror attacks and focused on two main themes: The implications of the attacks for the British-Libyan community in light of the background of the Manchester attacker, Salman Abedi; and exploring how this community perceives both the government's immediate response to the attacks and its wider strategy for countering terrorism, identifying successes, failures and potential recommendations.*

### **6.1 Executive summary**

6.1.1 The aftermath of the Manchester Arena attack has left many in the British-Libyan community suffering a sense of anger and hopelessness. Feelings of stigmatisation and marginalisation were also widespread, with a perceived lack of support from the authorities to deal with some of the consequences of the state's response. One area of particular frustration for the community is with elements of the police response, with allegations of unnecessarily heavy-handed measures, and of a lack of communication and support – both in practical terms and with regards to counselling – for individuals affected by police operations. This was seen to be especially problematic for young children, who may be traumatised and struggling to understand the reasons behind police actions. Unless they are given support from the community and by the authorities, it was feared that there could be permanent, negative, legacies for these families and children.

6.1.2 In the absence of sincere dialogue with the diversity of Britain's Libyan community, some of the state's response is felt to be shaped by an inadequate understanding of the political situation within Libya and its implications for the diaspora in the UK. It was argued that travel to Libya should be seen as quite distinct from travel to Syria or Iraq and should not place an individual under suspicion in the eyes of the authorities. While some had travelled to the country to join or support proscribed organisations, the vast majority of British-Libyan travel was legitimate and was the result of individuals seizing the opportunity presented by the fall of Muammar Qaddafi in 2011 to reconnect with friends and family.

6.1.3 Concerns were raised over aspects of the government's broader strategy for countering violent extremism, and rumoured proposals for new legislation. The reputation of Prevent was very negative, believed to treat any displays of Islamic identity with suspicion and seen as a mechanism for 'spying' on individuals. The government and civil service were encouraged to engage more with communities to listen to these concerns, respond to the criticism and develop new responses of which communities feel they have joint ownership.

### **6.2 Recommendations**

6.2.1 Individuals and families, especially those with young children, affected by police operations in the aftermath of major terrorist attacks should have support made available to them to deal with potential consequences, including stigmatisation and trauma. Schools, community organisations, the police and the local authorities all have a role to play. Such support is essential to ensure children and the wider community are not left with unintended, but unresolved, grievances and frustrations.

6.2.2 Police-community dialogue at a time of fast moving operations is vital. Communities need a space to raise legitimate concerns, for example over the nature of tactics being used, and to ask questions. Police could also benefit from having a space to explain their actions and offer assurances. Channels of communication between the police and communities need to be proactive as opposed to reactive in response to events.

6.2.3 Understanding the situation within Libya is essential for the police to understand dynamics within the British-Libyan community and their potential implications for police operations. Regular engagement with individuals, acting in an advisory role, from the community could help to develop this understanding.

6.2.3 Establish greater avenues for dialogue between Muslim communities and the political establishment, so that community perspectives can better inform policymaking. The opportunity to engage with the Independent Reviewer of Terrorist Legislation was seen as a positive development and further opportunities would be welcome.

6.2.4 Conduct an independent review of the Prevent Strategy in response to widespread community concerns over how the strategy operates. Such a review would demonstrate that community perspectives have been listened to and provide an opportunity to restore confidence.

### **6.3 The aftermath of the attacks for the British-Libyan community**

6.3.1 Throughout the meeting, almost all participants articulated a profound sense of anger and frustration at the consequences of extensive police raids within the community and a perceived lack of support to deal with these consequences, including the fear of being ostracised and targeted by wider society. This frustration has been exacerbated by a general sense that legitimate concerns within the community are being either ignored or dismissed. Individuals - particularly children and teenagers - who have been directly affected were said to have been left traumatised and humiliated, creating a sense of alienation that it was warned could have profoundly damaging consequences for the UK unless urgently addressed.

6.3.2 The attacks have opened divisions between and within communities, with many British-Libyans feeling that the wider Muslim community in Manchester has withdrawn from them in the immediate aftermath. The causes for this perceived marginalisation are multifaceted, but were suggested to stem partially from a desire not to be seen to be associated with the community from which Salman Abedi had come, especially at a time when the security investigation was still ongoing.

6.3.3 Engagement by the national and local authorities was also suggested to have been disappointing, with some stating that they believed 'political reasons' might contribute to politicians or other national figures not wanting to be seen to associate with the community. The primary interaction with authorities at this time has been through the police, who for obvious reasons are primarily focused on the investigation, which has left little space for discussions about other community concerns.

6.3.4 Narratives within segments of the media, partially reinforced by the impact of police raids on public perceptions, have contributed to a sense of isolation. One individual spoke of their concern that their non-Muslim neighbours would now see them as a 'criminal' and ostracise them after the police visited their home. Such incidents have contributed to a real sense of fear, frustration and isolation amongst elements of Manchester's British-Libyan community, which authorities were felt to have done too little to assuage. It was felt that damaging narratives around the responsibility of the wider community were particularly unjust, given that individuals from within the community had not stayed silent but had tried to warn authorities of their concerns that Salman Abedi was a potential threat. Specific concerns were raised about the potential for a rise in Islamophobic attacks in the current context and it was hoped that the authorities would take such a threat seriously and offer increased support to communities.

#### **6.4. Concerns over the police response and inadequate community support**

6.4.1 A primary source of frustration for the representatives present was the perceived heavy handedness of the immediate police response and the failure to offer reasonable support to those who had been affected, especially young children. It was accepted that in a fast moving situation and in response to a genuine threat, the police had to have the right to carry out raids on homes without giving advance warning. However, many felt that in certain circumstances the police tactics that had been used were overly aggressive, particularly in dealing with families. While accepting that such tactics are sometimes necessary, many stated that they felt the police had resorted to such an approach indiscriminately and had not considered when alternatives would be appropriate. For some, this was especially exasperating as they had sought to convey these concerns to the police in the past, especially when a previous round of police raids had been carried out in 2006/2007. Stories of aggressive police actions and their consequences for women and children were said to have circulated widely amongst the community via social media, spreading feelings of frustration.

6.4.2 Limited communication from the police was felt to have exacerbated many of these tensions. It was alleged that families who had experienced raids were sometimes uncertain as to why they were targeted by the police – feelings that were entrenched within the community if individuals were ultimately not placed under arrest or released without charge. When computers or phones were taken, individuals had questions over what happened to their personal data and wanted assurances that their data would be safe and not shared.<sup>18</sup> There was also uncertainty over the avenues that were open to individuals to make formal complaints about the actions of police<sup>19</sup>, and concerns that cuts to legal aid would make it more difficult for individuals to pursue legal options if they felt they were necessary.

6.4.3 Following an operation, aspects of the police's efforts to support and engage with the individuals and communities involved was also seen to be insufficient. The experience of going through a police raid was recognised to be traumatic for many of the individuals involved, especially teenagers and young children. One family, who had to leave home for six days while their property was searched, claimed to have been given limited support to ensure their basic financial needs were met, causing considerable anxiety and strain for the duration. Children who had experienced raids were said to fear ostracism from their peers – in one example that was discussed, a young girl is now refusing to attend school – and to be suffering from heightened anxiety. It was also claimed that families had not received any offer of support or counselling to from the authorities, leaving individuals to deal with the emotional consequences alone, resulting in some feeling 'fragmented and broken.' If unaddressed and unsupported, the fear was raised that these children could become part of a 'lost generation', struggling to come to terms with what had happened to their families and, potentially, nursing anger and a sense of injustice.<sup>20</sup>

6.4.4 However, the response of authorities has not been universally negative and some local initiatives were seen to have been successful, with potential lessons for the rest of the UK. A local school was praised for supporting children whose homes had been subject to police searches, with the headmaster taking steps to ensure that pupils had the context explained to them in order to prevent potential bullying. The headmaster also made sure to meet the affected children when they arrived at school on a daily basis, greeting and speaking to them. This sent an important message both to the school that their children should not be stigmatised, and to the children that they were being supported and there was someone with whom they could talk. This simple, low cost, initiative could be easily replicated in other parts of Manchester and the United Kingdom to help individuals and communities address the potential consequences of police action.

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<sup>18</sup> Forward Thinking will share this concern with representatives of the Information Commissioners Office (ICO)

<sup>19</sup> The role of the Independent Police Complaints Commission was highlighted in discussions and how complaints can be made: <https://www.ipcc.gov.uk/complaints>

<sup>20</sup> Forward Thinking will seek to share these findings with the office of the Children's Rights Commissioner.

## **6.5 The implications of the situation within Libya for the British-Libyan community**

6.5.1 Police interactions with the British-Libyan community were said to be further complicated by the situation within Libya itself. It was alleged that the intelligence within the police and public authorities on the political situation in Libya was very limited, and that this could contribute to the police adopting flawed strategies as a result. The claim was made that the intelligence passed to the police on members of the British-Libyan community was at risk of being tainted by the Libyan conflict, with individuals passing information on political rivals to try and discredit or harm them. The fragmentation caused by the conflict within Libya has also exacerbated divisions within the British-Libyan community in the UK; the police would benefit from greater awareness of this in their operational work.

6.5.2 The perceived lack of understanding about the situation in Libya was said to extend to how the police treated the information regarding individuals who had travelled to Libya in recent years. The representatives that were present believed the police treated this information as equivalent as having travelled to Syria or Iraq, and this therefore placed an individual under enormous suspicion. It was felt that this was a mischaracterisation of the situation within Libya, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the overthrow of Qaddafi when travelling to Libya was more readily accessible. 'Almost every' member of the Libyan diaspora had availed themselves of the opportunity to return to Libya after 2012 in order to reconnect with friends and family, and many had continued to do so even as the political situation had deteriorated. Accordingly, it was suggested that travel to Libya should not automatically cause an individual to be cast in a suspicious light and worthy of police investigation. However, it was acknowledged that some individuals undoubtedly travelled to Libya to support or join terrorist organisations and that the police faced the difficult task of singling these individuals out from legitimate journeys to Libya.

6.5.3 To help mitigate these two risks, it was suggested that police must ensure they had advisors who were aware of the situation in North Africa to enable them to make more informed decisions. Individuals from within the British-Libyan community could be well placed to fulfil such a role if the authorities engage them.

## **6.6. Reflections on the government's counter-terrorism strategy: the desire for greater dialogue**

6.6.1 Looking beyond the immediate response to the two recent terror attacks, concerns were raised over aspects of the government's current approach to countering terrorism and violent extremism. The Prevent strategy was singled out for criticism, with the claim made that it had a chilling effect on free speech, and limiting the space for important debates. One example of this was provided by a representative from a university's Islamic society, who described how he felt his organisation was not treated as a partner or equal part of the university community but rather was placed automatically under suspicion and closely monitored. Furthermore, the training offered to Prevent officers was seen as inadequate for the complexity of the issues they were being asked to grapple with, with one individual stating that their perception of Prevent training was that it viewed anything Islamic as a potential indicator of extremism.

6.6.2 The question was raised as to whether the government was doing all it could to ensure there was sufficient resilience in communities to prevent individuals from being attracted by extremist organisations. While community organisations 'are doing a good job', the limited financial resources made available for community centres or other 'youth-facing' spaces has restricted the activities of some grassroots bodies and forced others to close. Such bodies were seen as essential tools for empowering youth and increasing their confidence, outside of the dominant countering violent extremism agenda. In turn, this was seen as a means of addressing not only the challenge of radicalisation, but broader issues such as encouraging political engagement, deterring gang violence, and preventing individuals from becoming involved in drugs and petty crime. Addressing these issues in their own right has the potential to help prevent harmful messages from taking root within communities that suffer disproportionately from challenges associated with socio-economic deprivation.

6.6.3 However, the challenge of resources was said to be exacerbated and complicated by a reluctance on the part of some organisations to approach the government or local authority for resources out of concerns that they would be asked to spy on members. Indeed, even if the authorities made no such requests in reality, one individual claimed that any community organisation taking government money would deter some members of the community from engaging out of the fears that they would be used for surveillance – a reflection of how the current government strategy has undermined trust in some quarters.

6.6.4 Indications that the government may be bringing forward a new counter-extremism bill were greeted with concern, and questions were raised over what new powers the government felt it needed. Rumoured moves towards criminalising ‘non violent extremism’ were seen to be especially problematic, in part because the nature of extremism was so ill defined. An individual affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood stated his fears that the Brotherhood could yet find itself defined as an ‘extremist’ organisation, ‘not in the interests of keeping the UK safe but to appease outside interests.’

6.6.5 There is a deep desire for a broader and more sustained dialogue with national authorities within the British-Libyan community in order to share concerns and insights from a grassroots perspective. It was felt this could help address the perceived tendency of the government to devise and implement their counter-extremism strategies from the top down, and to only consult selectively with uncritical voices. The opportunity to meet with the Independent Reviewer of Terrorist Legislation was welcomed, and the desire for further such meetings was expressed. It was noted that to be productive, the discussion had to go beyond identifying challenges but to also propose concrete recommendations and alternative approaches that policymakers could enact. The individuals present expressed their hope that it would prove possible to develop spaces for such a conversation to occur.

## **7. Summary of Roundtable in London (Finsbury Park Mosque) – 23<sup>rd</sup> June**

*This section outlines a roundtable organised at Finsbury Park Mosque with a number of individuals from London's Muslim communities, including members of the Mosque's leadership; civil society organisers; and student activists, which took place on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June. The discussion took place in the aftermath of the terrorist attack at Finsbury Park on the 19<sup>th</sup> of June, with participants discussing three main themes: the immediate response to the recent attacks; the government's broader strategy for countering violent extremism; how this strategy has impacted upon British Muslim communities.*

### **7.1 Executive summary**

7.1.1 The attack at Finsbury Park was seen to have occurred in a context of heightened tensions between communities and growing Islamophobia. These tensions have been inflamed by recent attacks – Westminster, the Manchester Arena, and London Bridge – but are also a product of longer-term trends, such as the language used by parts of the media. Many British Muslims were said to experience the recent wave of attacks as a double blow. The first is comprised of the fear and grief that all British citizens feel in the aftermath of a terrorist attack. The second comes in the form of heightened suspicion and hostility towards Muslims from parts of society in the following months. A perceived tendency to portray terrorists of Muslim heritage as somehow representative of wider trends within the community was seen as an important factor in generating this backlash against British Muslims. Accordingly, it was suggested that the discourse around terrorist attacks carried out by British Muslims needed to change and to emphasise that they are the actions of a specific individual rather than broader communities.

7.1.2 The immediate response of the government and the wider establishment to the attack, in terms of outreach and support, was praised. However, it was felt that there was a lack of regular dialogue between communities and the government, and that when the government does engage it is only to justify its current approach to countering violent extremism rather than to genuinely discuss and listen to community concerns. The government was also said to view too many parts of the community as a potential problem, rather than a potential partner and ally against violent extremism. It was suggested that this stemmed from a flawed analysis which frames many Muslim community organisations as a threat to be contained and isolated.

7.1.3 Specific concerns were raised about elements of the government's approach to countering violent extremism, including Schedule 7; the long-term implications of police raids; and the use of language by public officials. Prevent was particularly criticised, and was seen by some to have constrained the ability of British Muslims to participate fully in the political and civic life of the United Kingdom. Many felt that this was especially counterproductive if the government hoped to support communities in becoming robust and resilient to extremist narratives.

### **7.2 Recommendations**

7.2.1 Inclusive government outreach in the aftermath of the attack at Finsbury Park should be acknowledged and welcomed. It should be used to start a new process of greater engagement and dialogue between grassroots Muslim organisations and local and national authorities.

7.2.2 Greater engagement should be part of a wider shift in the government's approach to countering violent extremism, whereby Muslim communities are not perceived as a problem to be managed but an essential part of the solution. The experience of cooperation between the authorities and community leaders in the early 2000s in managing the challenges emanating from Finsbury Park Mosque provides just one example of potential benefits that can stem from such cooperation.

7.2.3 Policymakers and journalists should draw lessons from the portrayal of the Finsbury Park attacker in how they respond to terrorist attacks conducted by individuals of Muslim heritage. Terrorist attackers should be treated as individual criminals or members of specific organisations. They should not be held up as representatives of a wider community, that the community are held responsible for and expected to explain.

7.2.4 The use of Schedule 7 of the Terrorist Act 2000 should be reviewed. The threshold for using Schedule 7 is seen by some to be too low in light of the extensive powers it grants authorities. It is also perceived to disproportionately target British Muslims. It should also be explored if specific safeguards from Schedule 7 powers are required for journalists and NGO workers in light of the confidential information they may carry.

7.2.5 The authorities and civil society should offer support to individuals and families affected by police raids in the course of an investigation into a case relating to terrorism, to help them manage potential consequences. This is especially pertinent for those individuals who are released without charge. Support may include counselling or help managing ostracism from neighbours, colleagues and wider society. The police should be alert to these potential consequences and, where possible, consider alternatives to conducting raids of homes.

7.2.6 Greater care should be used in the language selected to describe terrorist attacks. Where relevant, rather than describing them as 'Islamist attacks', they should be described as 'Daesh or Al Qaeda inspired attacks'. This may help to challenge the public perception that Islam and terrorism are linked, and to distinguish between Islamists (a broad term that covers many different forms of political engagement) and the specific organisations that advocate violence.

7.2.7 More should be done to recognise and acknowledge the rise of Islamophobia and right-wing terrorism. There should be a wider debate over the language and portrayal of British Muslims by some politicians and media outlets and how these might contribute to an environment that facilitates racism towards Muslims.

7.2.8 The Prevent Strategy should be reviewed. As a central pillar of the government's approach to countering violent extremism, a review is necessary to explore Prevent's effectiveness and to respond to the concerns of the many British Muslims who perceive Prevent to be problematic. One focus of a review should be on its potential impact on the civic and political engagement of British Muslims.

### **7.3. Reflections on the Finsbury Park Van Attack**

7.3.1 Elements of the response of the authorities to the attack at Finsbury Park were praised. It was noted that national figures – including the Prime Minister, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and other government ministers – had visited Finsbury Park Mosque, met with local communities and listened to their concerns. While this engagement was welcomed, it was hoped that it would represent the beginning of a process of regular dialogue between communities and the wider British establishment, as opposed to merely being a 'one off' in response to a tragic event. There is a real, and currently unmet, desire amongst communities to engage in frank conversations over challenges confronting communities, of which the government's approach to countering violent extremism is only one part.

7.3.2 Not all aspects of the response were seen as positive, however. Some portrayals of Finsbury Park Mosque were felt to have unduly focused on the mosque's past association with Abu Hamza and to have downplayed that the leadership had changed over a decade ago. This emphasis on the past was felt to marginalise the positive work of the Mosque in building community cohesion and was described as deeply demoralising. Frustrations were voiced over how the past was used as a means of casting aspersions on the Mosque today, portraying the Mosque as a source of suspicion rather than a positive pillar within the community.

(7.3.2 cont.) It was noted that many organisations had controversies in their history – with the example given that political parties within the UK had once supported the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela – but that they were recognised as past positions that no longer had relevance. It was hoped that this distinction could also be extended to Muslim organisations, and that when genuine changes were made they would be recognised and accepted.

7.3.3 Reflecting on the portrayal of the suspect in the attack at Finsbury Park, some felt there were important insights that could be applied when attacks are carried out by individuals with a Muslim heritage. It was noted that the alleged attacker, Darren Osborne, had been treated by the press as an individual as opposed to a representative of a wider community. No community had been asked to apologise on his behalf. This was seen as a positive and appropriate approach – situating the attack as a crime carried out by an individual citizen that was their responsibility alone. However, some expressed disappointment that the media was yet to spark a broader debate about the rise in right-wing terrorism and Islamophobia in the UK, arguing that programmes such as BBC's Question Time should have sought to grapple with these issues in the aftermath of the attack.

7.3.4 It was said that attacks carried by Muslims came as a 'double blow' for Muslim communities. Like every other member of society, such attacks leave British Muslims frightened and concerned for their loved ones. Yet British Muslims are simultaneously seen as a potential threat, both held to be responsible for the attacker by wider society and told to 'do more' to prevent such attacks. Such a response was felt to unfairly treat British Muslim communities as a monolith, thereby contributing to the alienation of some individuals who feel unfairly targeted. Accordingly, it was suggested that the nuance shown towards the alleged Finsbury Park attacker should be applied to terrorist suspects from all backgrounds – treating them on an individual basis and not holding them up as emblematic of their wider community.

#### **7.4. The need for a mindset shift: viewing communities as part of the solution, not the problem.**

7.4.1 Aspects of the government's approach to countering violent extremism came under criticism for treating large parts of Muslim communities 'as part of the problem... not part of the solution.' This was felt to be exemplified by a strategy which approaches Muslim communities through the lens of security, and which is perceived to focus on recruiting 'spies' within communities as opposed to developing channels of open and honest exchange. Several participants felt that the government was fundamentally uninterested in hearing constructive criticism from the community, engaging in dialogue not to listen but to 'explain why community concerns... are wrong'; the example was cited of a recent meeting with Sarah Newton, Parliamentary under-secretary of State at the Home Office, as emblematic of this approach.

7.4.2 The government's strategy was suggested to be founded in a flawed analysis, one which framed some Muslim organisations as potential threats to be monitored and treated with suspicion rather than as allies in the fight against violent extremism. Several prominent organisations in the UK have been portrayed by some analysts as 'entryist' organisations, who, although not espousing violence themselves, introduce individuals to 'extremist' ideas and therefore contribute to an environment where some become attracted terrorism. This argument was vigorously rejected by those present, who suggested that many organisations – especially those that explicitly referenced religion – had been deliberately mischaracterised and their work in the community distorted to appear threatening.

7.4.3 Indeed, if one component of defeating violent extremism is 'winning the war of ideas' it was suggested that these organisations would be uniquely placed to counter extremist ideologies, as they possess both the experience and language to credibly undermine those who justify violence. It was said that these organisations already 'prevent [violent extremism] better than Prevent.' As such, it was argued that rather than being a gateway to violent extremism, many Muslim organisations act as a bulwark against it.



(7.4.3 cont.) By not engaging these organisations, the government was therefore seen to be cutting itself off from valuable allies and a wealth of knowledge. The Prevent strategy was seen to only compound this error by limiting the public space for any organisation to talk about potentially contentious issues, including understandings of Sharia or Jihad, and thereby driving those curious about these concepts into ungoverned spaces such as the internet.

7.4.4 The history of Finsbury Park Mosque was itself said to demonstrate the positive impact of the government and Muslim community organisations working together. In the early 2000s the government repeatedly tried to confront the problem presented by those who had taken over the mosque and used it as a space to facilitate terrorism and spread messages of hate. The government's efforts included police raids, temporarily closing the mosque, and subjecting it to intensive surveillance, none of which proved more than temporarily effective. It was only when the police reached out to the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) and other community leaders to recruit their help that the situation changed permanently. When the community responded, 'in a single afternoon' they were able to confront those who had taken over the mosque, drive them away and then ensure that they were unable to return. The new leadership subsequently worked to transform the mosque and integrate it into the local community, and are regarded as having made it a model for inter-community relations.

7.4.5 However, while the police were said to have recognised the value and impact that the co-operation had brought, successive governments were accused of failing to build on the successes that had been achieved. Instead they were seen to have distanced themselves from the very community organisations they had relied on to resolve the challenge. It was hoped that politicians might eventually re-examine the experience of Finsbury Park Mosque and reflect on the lessons it might contain for the wider approach for countering violent extremism.

## **7.5 Reduced spaces for Muslim's public engagement**

7.5.1 It was widely felt that a consequence of the current approach to countering violent extremism has been to limit the civic and political engagement of British Muslims. After years of conflating Muslims and Islam with terrorism, it was felt that many would see a young, politically engaged Muslim not as something to be celebrated but as a potential security threat. Prevent was seen to have created an environment where many British Muslims were afraid to speak out for fear that their comments could be misconstrued and lead to a referral. Several participants described their personal experiences of feeling silenced by Prevent, including a young politics student who spoke of the absurdity of feeling unable to be critical of the UK's foreign policy in a university lecture because of their concern that a lecturer might feel obliged to refer them under the Prevent Duty. Similarly, an individual described how they had been approached by a parent concerned that their child had been speaking out vocally on the Grenfell disaster and if this would attract too much attention from the authorities.

7.5.2 In other communities it was suggested that young professionals – accountants, lawyers, engineers, doctors – often play a leading role in the life of a community, acting as trustees or community organisers. But within British Muslim communities it was suggested that these individuals would be afraid to play such a role, out of fears that even a hint of suspicion from the government with regards to any organisation they were involved in could have devastating implications for their careers. Accordingly, many choose not to be involved, denying the community positive role models and the benefits of their participation in the civic life of the country.

7.5.3 Recent terrorist attacks have exacerbated these challenges of marginalisation, with participants reporting a rise in public hostility and Islamophobia. Some described how they were increasingly conscious that wearing Islamic clothing (such as a headscarf) attracted hostile attention in public. These tensions are driven by elements of the media, which are perceived to stir up fears of Muslims by portraying them as a source of danger (see section 7.6).

7.5.4 The cumulative effect of these trends has been to leave some British Muslims feeling that they are 'under a cloud' and 'trapped' by public and official suspicion. The government's focus on counter-terrorism has created profound feelings of alienation and contributed to a perception that the state is only interested in British Muslims as they relate to security issues - not viewing them as full and equal citizens in the country. It was felt this was a dangerous place for the country to be and it was hoped that the British establishment would recognise the need to start listening to community perspectives. The recent commission chaired by Dominic Grieve MP on the participation of British Muslim's in public life was welcomed and seen as a positive step in this direction in providing a platform to spark a wider conversation about these issues.

## **7.6 The importance of language**

7.6.1 In the fight against violent extremism, the language used by the media and public figures matters. Care needs to be exercised over the terms that are used because they shape both the public's understanding of terrorism and policymaker's analysis of how to respond. It was strongly recommended that the term 'Islamist terrorism' be replaced by Daesh or Al Qaeda-inspired terrorism. The reasons given for this shift were twofold. Firstly, it was feared use of the word 'Islamist' could contribute further to the tendency to conflate the wider religion of Islam with terrorism, exacerbating community tensions and potentially contributing to an environment of Islamophobia. Secondly, 'Islamist' is a broad term that has been applied to many organisations who are explicitly non-violent and who seek to implement their agendas through political engagement and democratic channels. Indeed, it was suggested that this had been the original definition of the word, which had contributed to individuals actively adopting the label Islamist. However, the subsequent rise of the phrase 'Islamist terrorism' was said to have unfairly associated many organisations with violence in the minds of politicians and the public, contributing to a flawed analysis and misinformed policymaking.

7.6.2 Accordingly, associating acts of terrorism with the specific organisations or ideologies (where appropriate) that inspired them as opposed to utilising broader language, was seen as a vitally important distinction to make. It was noted that previous governments, such as Gordon Brown's, had shown awareness of the importance of language, suggesting that it was something that could be changed provided political will was applied.

7.6.3 Concerns were also raised about the language that elements of the media used to describe Muslim communities and how this might contribute to Islamophobia. The language used by Katie Hopkins in a recent article calling for a 'final solution' for Muslim communities was specifically cited as a particularly egregious example, with some participants stating that they felt it had incited hatred. It was questioned what authorities' reactions would have been if such terms had been used against other communities, and some suggested that the laws relating to inciting religious hatred may need to be reviewed to ensure they offer adequate protections, equal to those for inciting racial hatred.

## **7.7 The consequences of police tactics**

7.7.1 It was recognised that police require broad powers – including the ability to conduct unannounced raids on homes and utilising aggressive tactics – in order to respond to the threat posed by individuals potentially planning terrorist attacks. These powers have been especially evident in the UK in recent months, as the police have responded to terrorist attacks and sought to discover if the attacker acted alone or was part of a wider network.

7.7.2 However, while safeguards exist to prevent the abuse of these powers, it was felt there are inadequate structures in place to help individuals affected by these raids deal with their long-term consequences. 'Lives can be destroyed' by police raids it was suggested, with individuals suffering emotional trauma, potentially facing ostracism from their neighbours and wider society, sometimes having to manage press intrusion and, it was alleged, sometimes losing their jobs as a result.

(7.7.2 cont.) This is particularly problematic for those who are released without charge who, although legally exonerated, still have to manage many of these consequences, often leaving them isolated and frustrated.

7.7.3 While accepting it was difficult to envision legislation that could address these issues, it was suggested that the authorities needed to ensure resources, such as counselling, were made available to families and individuals to help them manage and process the experience. There were further suggestions that statements of support or apologies – drawing on the experience of press retractions – could be given to individuals that had been released without charge to help to ‘restore their dignity’ and to demonstrate their innocence to wider society. Finally, it was said that the police should be made aware of these potential consequences and, where possible, be encouraged to explore alternatives to ‘storming houses’, instead pursuing less visible forms of intervention.

7.7.4 Separately, some participants alleged that the security services may utilise tactics that could be viewed as ‘entrapment’ – encouraging or pushing individuals to make statements or develop ideas that later leads to their arrest. While it was noted that entrapment could not lead to a conviction in a UK court, the issue was held up as an example of how the current approach of government had fostered mistrust. Similarly, claims were made that MI5 had sought to recruit ‘spies’ widely amongst Muslim communities in Britain, allegedly applying considerable pressure on individuals to coerce them into providing intelligence. This perception has also contributed to feelings of marginalisation, tensions within the community and a sense that the government fails to treat Muslims as full citizens.

## **7.8 Concerns over the use of Schedule 7**

8.1 Reflecting on current terrorism legislation, several individuals raised concerns over Schedule 7.<sup>21</sup> It was felt that the threshold for being stopped and searched under Schedule 7 was unclear, especially in light of the extensive powers it grants. The ability of police to hold someone on only a ‘1%’ general suspicion was felt to impinge heavily on civil liberties, particularly on those of Muslim men who were felt to be overwhelmingly targeted. Further concerns related to privacy and the ability of the police to view and download all data on a phone or laptop. This was seen to be excessively intrusive in light of the low bar of suspicion required to use the power, granting full access to someone’s professional and personal life. For cultural reasons, such as sensitivity around pictures of a wife without their headscarf, it was said that there were additional reasons why handing over devices containing personal data to the authorities could be distressing for some British Muslims.

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<sup>21</sup> Under Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000, ‘UK police can stop, examine and search passengers at ports, airports and international rail terminals. There is no requirement for an officer to have a ‘reasonable suspicion’ that someone is involved with terrorism before they are stopped. A passenger can be held for questioning for up to nine hours and those detained must ‘give the examining officer any information in his possession which the officer requests.’ Any property seized must be returned after seven days, but data from mobile phones and laptops may be downloaded and retained by the police for longer. Those detained are compelled to answer questions from the police and must not ‘obstruct’ or ‘frustrate’ any police searches. If someone fails to co-operate they are deemed to have committed a criminal offence and could face up to three months in prison, a fine or both. Read more here: BBC News (2013), ‘David Miranda row: What is schedule 7?’, 19<sup>th</sup> August. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-23757133>

7.8.2 The purpose of Schedule 7 was also questioned. As a tool to prevent terrorism, it was seen as a blunt instrument that was disproportionate and of questionable effectiveness. Some alleged that the power was also open to being misused by the authorities, targeting journalists or NGOs who work in sensitive areas and who may be critical of the government. Accordingly, some felt that additional legal safeguards should be put in place for these professions to ensure that the information they hold is adequately protected and to oblige the government to demonstrate a clearer need for accessing private data.

#### **7.8.9 Is terrorist legislation necessary?**

7.9.1 While participants agreed that additional resources may be required by the police and local authorities to ensure an effective response, many were sceptical of the case for new legislation. Concerns were already voiced over the government's current approach to non-violent extremism – with claims made that websites with no association with violent extremism were already being blocked on questionable grounds, and that some individuals were failing Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks, not because of any criminal activity but on the grounds that information previously accessed was disapproved of by the government. It was felt that any moves to introduce additional legislation to limit non-violent extremism would only prove counterproductive, driving legitimate debates underground.

7.9.2 Some participants even raised questions over the need for specific legislation relating to terrorism, arguing that existing laws were sufficient to respond to all crimes, including terrorist offences. It was noted that previous Independent Reviewers of Terrorist Legislation had expressed a similar perspective and suggested that legislation which had originally been intended to respond to emergency situations had become too normalised. However, it was accepted that it was extremely unlikely that these laws would be repealed in the near future. Instead, it was suggested that the emphasis should be on ensuring that these laws were not abused; that they are seen to be legitimate by all segments of society; and that no community feels that it is disproportionately and unfairly targeted by the law.



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