National Audit Office

REPORT

Reducing radicalisation: the Prevent programme

Home Office

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Key facts

Prevent receives thousands of referrals each year; only some of these meet the threshold for support, and only some individuals consent to receiving support

10,293

number of Prevent referrals in year ending September 2025 – the highest number of referrals ever received in a single year

2,159

number of referrals (21% of 10,293) that met the threshold for further discussion at Channel panels in year ending September 2025

969

number of individuals recorded as consenting to support through Prevent (54% of 1,810 individuals offered support), in year ending September 2025

The annual cost of delivering Prevent is low, especially compared with the estimated economic and human costs of terrorist attacks

£4.11 billion Home Office estimate of the total indirect costs of the five terrorist attacks in 2017, with the total direct costs estimated at £208 million (both figures in 2025 prices)[1,2,3]

£23.4 million annual Home Office internal Prevent budget for 2025-26

Despite an increase in demand, the Home Office has underspent its budget and reduced priority funding to local authorities

£33.7 million total unspent budget, in real terms, from the Home Office's internal Prevent budget over six years from 2020-21 to 2025-26, with an average underspend of 17% per year

54% reduction from 2020-21 to 2026-27 (£9.5 million to £4.4 million, in real terms) in Home Office priority funding to high-risk local authority areas across England and Wales to support delivery of Prevent; other local authority areas do not receive priority funding and fund Prevent delivery exclusively from existing resources

The types of people being referred to and receiving support through Prevent have changed

30% percentage of referrals with a clear, dominant extremist ideology in year ending September 2025 compared with 73% in year ending September 2017[4]

14% percentage of individuals who met the threshold for further discussion at Channel panels who were categorised as having a fascination with extreme violence or mass-casualty attacks (FEVMCA) in year ending September 2025

1 The five attacks included in this analysis were: Westminster Bridge, Manchester Arena, London Bridge, Finsbury Park, and Parsons Green.

2 Indirect costs include secondary impacts that occur as a consequence of changes in public behaviour following an attack, for example, reduced investment, lower economic activity, and subsequent losses in economic growth.

3 Direct costs include the immediate costs arising from a terrorist attack and borne by the government, public services, victims, and wider society. This could include the emergency services response, funding prison spaces, or repairing damaged property.

4 Referrals with a 'clear dominant extremist ideology' include those categorised as Anarchist Extremism, Extreme Right-Wing, Incel, Islamist Extremism, Left-Wing Extremism and Northern Ireland-related Dissident Republican Extremism. Referral categories are initially assigned by a Counter Terrorism Policing Case Officer based on information provided by the referrer. This may change as more information becomes available at various stages of the referral process.

Summary

1 CONTEST is the UK's counter-terrorism strategy. It has four pillars.

- Prevent, which aims to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism.
- Pursue, which aims to stop terrorist attacks.
- Protect, which aims to strengthen protections against a terrorist attack.
- Prepare, which aims to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack.

2 The Home Office is the government department with overall responsibility for CONTEST, including responsibility for Prevent. The Prevent programme has existed in some form since 2003 but has changed over time. Its current objectives are:

- tackling the ideological causes of terrorism;
- intervening early to support people susceptible to radicalisation; and
- enabling people who have already engaged in terrorism to disengage and rehabilitate.

Prevent is delivered locally, and implementation varies across England, Scotland, and Wales. Prevent does not exist in Northern Ireland.

3 This report focuses on Prevent's objective of intervening early. The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 introduced the Prevent duty, requiring specified authorities to identify and refer individuals believed to be susceptible to radicalisation. The Act also requires local authorities to establish Channel panels. These are local multi-agency panels that assess cases and arrange support for people at risk of radicalisation. There are currently 159 Channel panels operating across England and Wales, each with members from Counter Terrorism Policing, local authorities, social care and health services.[1] Prevent referrals have increased significantly in recent years (see Figure 3).

1 Each local authority in England and Wales is required to be part of a Channel panel under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015. In some areas authorities have combined to create joint Channel panels. In Scotland there are a further 32 panels which are called Prevent Multi-Agency Panels.

Report scope

4 This report examines the extent to which the Prevent programme is meeting its objective to intervene early and support people susceptible to radicalisation. It looks at Prevent's operation in England and Wales only and examines:

- the Home Office's design and implementation of the programme in its current form;
- local delivery of Prevent; and
- the Home Office's oversight, monitoring and evaluation activities.

The Prevent system is complex, involving multiple stages and delivery partners (**Figure 1** on pages 7 and 8). We have created a data visualisation that maps Prevent's referral and support pathway. The data visualisation can be accessed here: *An Interactive View of the Prevent System*.

Key findings

Demand for Prevent

5 The annual number of referrals to the Prevent programme has increased each year since the year ending September 2020, reaching an all-time high of 10,293 in the year ending September 2025. Anyone can make a referral to Prevent. Referrals increased by 39% between year ending (YE) September 2024 and YE September 2025. The Home Office has not formally analysed the reasons for this increase, but its working understanding is that it may be due to heightened public and professional awareness of Prevent following the Southport Attack in July 2024.[2] As in other years, Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) officers assessed that a large majority of these referrals, 78% (8,079) in YE September 2025, were ineligible for support through local Channel panels. Usually, this was because officers assessed the individual as not being at risk of radicalisation. In the same year, CTP signposted 61% (4,944) of the referrals that did not progress to Channel panels to other safeguarding services. However, some referrals were escalated within CTP because the risk was already too high for Prevent. In 2026, CTP began to analyse referral quality. It found that out-of-scope referrals primarily relate to the consequences of poor mental health, the use of hateful or offensive language without an extremist framework, and broader criminality. The Home Office and CTP have planned work to address referral quality, but it is at an early stage and yet to have an impact (paragraphs 1.6 to 1.9 and Figures 3 and 4).

2 The July 2024 Southport attack was committed by an individual who had been referred to the Prevent programme three times but had not met the threshold for Channel support. There has been considerable public scrutiny of the programme following the attack, including the 2025 Lessons for Prevent report and the 2026 Southport Inquiry, discussed in paragraphs 1.30 and 1.31 of this report.

Figure 1

Overview of the Prevent referral process from initial concern to Channel support

Prevent referrals are triaged and assessed by Counter Terrorism Policing before reaching a multi-agency Channel panel

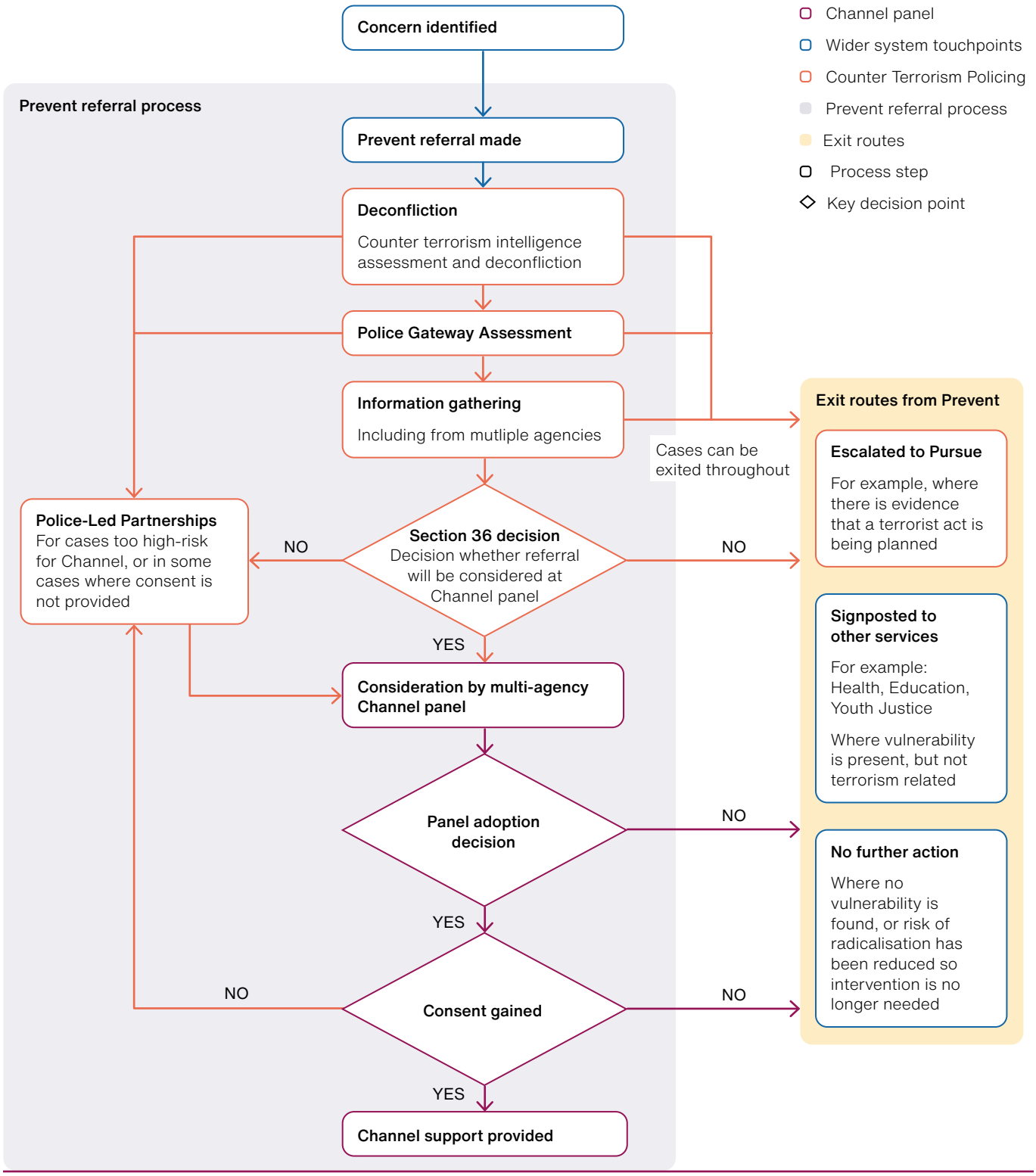


Figure 1 *continued*
Overview of the Prevent referral process from initial concern to Channel support

Notes

1 Counter Terrorism Policing are operationally independent, although the Home Office remains responsible for the Prevent programme.

2 Where a concern is identified, the Notice Check Share process should be followed – *Notice* if someone displays signs of radicalisation, *Check* what has been noticed such as with a designated safeguarding lead, and *Share* the concern if appropriate, typically through a Prevent referral.

3 The Counter Terrorism Policing Fixed Intelligence Management Unit deconflicts referrals against police records.

4 Police Gateway Assessment is an initial screening and triage phase, conducted by a Counter Terrorism Case Officer (CTCO).

5 The Prevent Assessment Framework is used from the Police Gateway Assessment and then throughout the rest of the process. It is broken into two sections, the Prevent Referral Screen, which supports decision-making from the Police Gateway Assessment until the Section 36 decision, and the Susceptibility Assessment, which is used while the case is in Channel.

6 Where cases are in a Police-Led Partnerships due to lack of consent, if consent is gained then the case can be considered for re-adoption at a Channel panel.

7 This figure only shows the Prevent referral process from initial concern to Channel support. For the full process please refer to our data visualisation which can be accessed here: https://nao-mesh.shinyapps.io/Prevent_process/.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of the Home Office's *Channel Duty Guidance*, 2023, and other Home Office and Counter Terrorism Policing documents

6 The content of referrals has changed in recent years, with only 30% of initial referrals in the year ending September 2025 linked to a clear, dominant extremist ideology. Historically, most Prevent referrals related to defined ideologies, such as Islamist Extremism or Extreme Right-Wing terrorism. However, referrals increasingly concern people without a clear, dominant extremist ideology. The proportion of cases with a clear, dominant extremist ideology has decreased by 43 percentage points since YE September 2017, equivalent to an average decline of 5.3 percentage points per year over the period. Since April 2024, CTP has separately categorised referred individuals who exhibit a fascination with extreme violence or mass casualty attacks but do not exhibit a clear ideology.[3] In YE September 2025, 8% of referrals fell into this category. These shifts reflect broader changes in terrorism and the availability and consumption of extreme material, particularly online. A significant proportion of referrals also involve people with confirmed or suspected mental health or neurodiversity considerations (paragraphs 1.10 to 1.12 and 2.4 and 2.10, and Figure 5).

3 CTP's definition of individuals with a fascination with extreme violence or mass casualty attacks is as follows: "Where an individual does not appear to have an ideology, but seems to have an interest in committing extreme or mass violence, which makes them a concern for Prevent. This could include those interested in school massacres but also where violence is targeted at other settings or individuals and is not based on a specific ideological motivation. If an individual is interested in violence in order to further an ideological goal, this ideology should be recorded instead."

7 Prevent may not reach all individuals susceptible to radicalisation who require early intervention and support. The programme relies heavily on referrals from public services, particularly education, which accounted for 34% of referrals in YE September 2025 while only 1% came from family and friends. Individuals susceptible to radicalisation who are not engaged with mainstream services, or whose concerning behaviour is only visible at home or online, are therefore less likely to be referred to Prevent. As a voluntary programme, engagement with Channel support is not guaranteed. In YE September 2025, only 54% of those recommended for Channel support were recorded as having consented to receive support, including just 38% of adults. The Home Office has not analysed barriers to referral and has only recently begun analysing consent patterns. These knowledge gaps reduce its ability to understand whether some vulnerable groups are being missed or why many individuals do not consent to support (paragraphs 1.13 to 1.15 and Figure 4).

The cost of Prevent

8 The Home Office lacks a good understanding of Prevent's full cost and the extent to which delivery depends on funding from other organisations. Prevent makes up a small proportion of the government's overall counter-terrorism budget of over £3 billion per year. The programme is delivered by numerous organisations, including central government departments, CTP, local authorities, and education and health bodies. The Home Office does not routinely collect information on the programme's full costs, including spending by other bodies. Without this, the Home Office does not know the extent to which Prevent depends on funding outside its control or variations in local investment and capacity. In 2025-26, the Home Office undertook a capability-mapping exercise which identified around £38 million of spending on early intervention across the system. However, this excluded some important organisations, such as local authorities, and relied on self-reported data. The Home Office has recently commenced work to improve its understanding of local delivery costs. We conducted our own analysis of the cost of running a typical local Channel panel based on survey responses from the Channel panels we used as case studies. We estimate that the cost of running these Channel panels ranged from £25,484 to £61,386 per year[4] (paragraphs 1.18 to 1.28 and Figure 6).

4 We estimated the annual cost of operating Channel panels using self-reported salary and staff time data collected from 35 participants across our six Channel panel case studies. Average salaries and time spent preparing for, attending and following up Channel meetings were used to derive an indicative annual cost for a typical panel. The estimate is based on a small sample of local Channel panels and should be treated with caution. The estimate excludes police staff (including CTP case officers and sergeants) and Intervention Providers. It does not reflect variations in local operating models, caseloads, panel activity or wider Prevent-related work outside Channel meetings and excludes employer on-costs and overheads. As a result, it may understate the full cost of local delivery.

9 The Home Office has consistently underspent its own Prevent budget while reducing its funding to local authorities. In 2025-26, the Home Office had a budget for Prevent of £23.4 million. At year end it had underspent this by 28%, continuing a pattern of annual underspends that dates to 2020-21. On average, it underspent by £5.6 million (17%) in real terms annually over the last six years. The Home Office attributed some underspends to weaknesses in financial management and forecasting. Over the same period, the Home Office reduced the number of local authorities receiving priority area funding, and the total value of the funding provided. This funding targets areas that, in its assessment, face the highest Prevent-related risk. Priority area funding fell from £9.5 million in 2020-21, across 45 local authorities, to £4.4 million in 2026-27, across 27 local authorities, in real terms. The reduction was partly in response to the Home Office's interpretation of performance monitoring data, which found no notable difference in performance between funded and non-funded local authorities. Additionally, in both 2025-26 and 2026-27, the Home Office allocated just under £2 million to fund projects to reduce radicalisation. The Home Office told us that it is currently reviewing the priority area funding structure for 2028-29 onwards (paragraphs 1.18 to 1.26 and Figures 6 and 7).

Delivering Prevent

10 Channel panels demonstrate strong multi-agency working as they coordinate support for individuals susceptible to radicalisation, although access to wider services is increasingly constrained. Channel panels bring together organisations that provide tailored support to individuals at risk. Across the six panels that we observed, representatives from policing, health, education, social care, housing and other services worked together to assess individuals' circumstances and design support that might make a positive difference. Cases often involved a combination of radicalisation risks, safeguarding concerns, mental health issues and family difficulties. Panels we attended carefully scrutinised available evidence, sought additional information where necessary, and maintained clear accountability for agreed actions. In some cases, closure was considered due to a lack of terrorism risk but not agreed due to fear of the case not being picked up by wider safeguarding agencies. Keeping cases open despite the absence of a terrorism risk could unnecessarily stretch Prevent resources and reduce the capacity available to manage higher-risk cases (paragraphs 2.12 to 2.17).

11 Higher caseloads place pressure on CTP and Channel panels, increasing the risk of cases not being scrutinised consistently. The number of cases discussed at Channel panels increased by 117% between YE September 2024 and 2025. Practitioners reported growing workloads, with some regularly working evenings and weekends. We observed that monthly Channel panels typically last between two and seven hours but sometimes extended over two days. Panels sometimes adopted cases despite important outstanding information requests, creating a risk that decisions are taken without a complete understanding of an individual's circumstances. Practitioners also reported shortages of registered Intervention Providers. If caseloads continue to rise, demand may outstrip panels' capacity, increasing the risk that cases cannot be scrutinised as consistently or as thoroughly as intended (paragraphs 2.7 to 2.10 and Figures 3 and 9).

12 The Home Office's online Prevent training for front-line professionals does not cover new types of cases without a clear, dominant extremist ideology, nor does the Home Office have meaningful data on completion rates. The Home Office provides online training courses available to potential referrers subject to the Prevent duty.[5] The training does not address recent developments such as the growth in cases involving mixed or unclear ideologies, and the case studies included in the course have not been updated in four years. While the Home Office is able to collect data on the total number of training completions of its online courses broken down by region and sector, it cannot link these to individual participants or employers. In a dispersed system, the Home Office relies on training to maintain fidelity to Prevent's aims and approaches and to reduce ineligible referrals. The Home Office also provides training for Channel panel chairs and deputy chairs. Despite it being mandatory, as of October 2026, only 80% of Channel chairs and 60% of deputy chairs had completed the training. The Home Office told us this was due to high turnover within those roles (paragraphs 3.9 to 3.14).

5 Specified authorities are set out in Part 1 of Schedule 6 in the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 and include local authorities; prison and probation services; schools and providers of education or training; NHS trusts, Local Health Boards, and the Board of Community Health Councils in Wales; and the police. The Prevent duty guidance states that specified authorities are expected to ensure appropriate front-line staff have a good understanding of Prevent, are trained to recognise where a person might be susceptible to becoming radicalised into terrorism, and are aware of available programmes to provide support.

The impact of Prevent

13 Available information suggests Prevent has a positive impact on many who receive support, but it is inherently difficult to demonstrate that the programme is preventing individuals from becoming terrorists. CTP data show that, in 2024-25, 58% of individuals exited Channel with no further counter-terrorism concerns after receiving support. The proportion of Prevent referrals involving individuals previously referred has fallen from 34% in 2015-16 to 21% in 2025-26. This may indicate that Prevent is having more success with individuals when it first encounters them. Meanwhile, only a small proportion of people with a Prevent history have committed terrorist offences: 67 out of 32,588 individuals, according to CTP data, between April 2022 and July 2026.[6] This includes 20 individuals who were in contact with Prevent at the time of offending. In our Channel panel observations, we heard of positive progress individuals had made. However, the Home Office has undertaken limited work to evaluate the effectiveness of Channel interventions and has not done enough to communicate where Prevent is having a positive impact, which contributes to ongoing scepticism about the programme (paragraphs 2.17 and 2.19 to 2.24, and Figure 11).

The scope of Prevent

14 Changing referral patterns have led the Home Office to confirm that individuals referred to Prevent without a clear extremist ideology may fall within the programme's scope. This, in part, may explain the increased number of borderline cases being discussed by Channel panels. In YE September 2025, 45% of the 2,159 cases discussed at a Channel panel did not have a clear, dominant extremist ideology. In YE September 2025, 14% of cases discussed involved individuals categorised as having a fascination with extreme violence or mass-casualty attacks, but no clear extremist ideology. The Home Office issued guidance in February 2026 confirming that Channel support should be available to individuals without a clear extremist ideology. In our observations, these cases often generated the lengthiest discussions as panel members debated whether they were giving sufficient weight to terrorism risk alongside wider safeguarding needs. The confusion is not helped by a disagreement between the Home Office and CTP on when cases with a fascination with extreme violence or mass-casualty attacks should be supported by Prevent. The complex, borderline nature of these cases means there continues to be a risk of inconsistent referral and adoption practices across local areas (paragraphs 3.2 to 3.8 and Figure 12).

6 Terrorist offences or TACT offences (offences under the Terrorism Act 2000) include those offences connected to the preparation, encouragement, support, financing or commission of terrorism, including membership of proscribed organisations, possession of terrorist materials, and collecting information useful for terrorism.

National oversight

15 The Home Office's performance monitoring and operational risk management processes are immature, given how long the Prevent programme has existed. Despite the Prevent duty being in place since 2015, the Home Office has only recently begun to introduce some standard elements of effective performance and risk management. Oversight of local delivery has historically focused on compliance rather than impact and relied on self-reporting. The Home Office does not have a complete view of delivery risks across the Prevent system, including whether delivery partners have enough people, skills and capacity to manage increasing demand. It also has not fully assessed whether it has the capability to mitigate some of Prevent's most significant risks. As a result, it has limited assurance that emerging issues are identified early, managed consistently, and used to inform decisions about priorities, resources and programme delivery (paragraphs 3.23 to 3.27).

16 There are limitations in the quality of data, the sharing of findings from learning reviews, and evaluation work, which reduce the Home Office's ability to identify emerging risks. While the introduction of the joint Prevent Case Management Tracker in 2024 has improved information sharing between the Home Office and CTP, significant issues remain.

- The quality of the data available to measure key indicators of performance across the system is poor. For example, the Home Office has only recently started collecting reliable data on consent rates and outcomes for individuals following Channel support, limiting its ability to understand performance.
- The Home Office and CTP undertake separate learning reviews when individuals previously engaged with Prevent commit or attempt to commit terrorist or other serious offences.[7] CTP has established arrangements for implementing learning among its own staff; however, there is no shared system-wide approach to disseminating learning or assuring that recommendations are implemented across the Prevent system. The Home Office, with support from CTP, is working to develop a process to strengthen cross-system learning, but this is yet to be implemented.
- Multiple teams across the Prevent system conduct research and evaluation work, but there is no shared strategy to coordinate these activities. This risks research gaps, duplication of effort and inconsistent dissemination of learning and effective practice (paragraphs 1.15, 2.20 to 2.21, 3.19 to 3.22, and, 3.28 to 3.33, and Figure 13).

7 Terrorist offences (or TACT offences) include offences connected to the preparation, encouragement, support, financing or commission of terrorism, including membership of proscribed organisations, possession of terrorist materials, and collecting information useful for terrorism. Serious offences include murder, attempted murder, serious violence, other violence, public order offences, grievous bodily harm, arson, sexual offences and offences involving weapons, firearms or explosives.

Conclusion

17 Prevent plays an important role in the UK's counter-terrorism system by seeking to identify and support individuals susceptible to radicalisation before they become involved in terrorism. We found evidence that the programme has a positive impact on those who receive support, and Channel panels demonstrate strong multi-agency collaboration and accountability. However, rising referral volumes and an increasing proportion of referrals without a clear, dominant extremist ideology, are placing growing pressure on the system. Workloads are increasing with more borderline cases being discussed by panels, increasing the risk of inconsistent decision-making between local authorities. The Home Office has not done enough to understand or respond to these pressures, jeopardising the sustainability of the programme.

18 Prevent is not an expensive programme, particularly compared with the economic and human costs of a terrorist attack. However, it is inherently difficult to prove that it reduces the incidence of terrorism. For this reason, it is not possible to conclude in the conventional way on value for money. We have identified clear opportunities for the Home Office to increase Prevent's impact. These include enhancing its own performance monitoring and risk management, agreeing a unified view of case thresholds, and increasing its knowledge of how the costs of Prevent fall on local authorities and other delivery partners. There is little justification for the level of underspending Prevent has seen in recent years, in a context in which the Home Office acknowledges local workload pressures and has delayed some of its own research.

19 As the Home Office considers the future scope and eligibility criteria of Prevent, it must recognise that the programme is already supporting many individuals who do not fit traditional conceptions of a terrorist threat. If any of these individuals are to be supported elsewhere in future, it will need to ensure that alternative services have the capacity, skills and resources to support them.

Recommendations

a The Home Office should continue to work with Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) to agree and communicate a unified view of the current thresholds for progressing cases with a fascination with extreme violence or mass-casualty attacks to Channel support. The Home Office should provide guidance and training to local practitioners when sharing the outcome of this work.

b To make effective use of the resources available to it, the Home Office should continue its work to strengthen its financial management, to avoid significant underspends on its Prevent budget in future.

c To improve its understanding of Prevent's financial dependence on other partners, the Home Office should continue its work estimating the cost to local authorities of delivering multi-agency Channel panels.

d To improve its oversight of Prevent and strengthen its ability to manage threats to the programme's delivery and operational effectiveness, the Home Office should further develop and embed a mature performance oversight and risk management framework. This should include:

- **i.** developing a more comprehensive view of delivery risks across the wider Prevent system by working with CTP and others to understand risks arising from the capability, capacity and resilience of key delivery partners, using relevant workforce, budget and operational delivery data;
- **ii.** developing stronger performance reporting by working with CTP and other partners to improve the quality, coverage and consistency of performance data, including data on outcomes, consent rates and training completion rates, and establishing clear targets for performance indicators so that success can be measured consistently;
- **iii.** ensuring that delivery risk and performance information provides insights into programme outcomes, emerging risks and delivery pressures, and is routinely reviewed by senior decision-makers and used systematically to inform programme governance, prioritisation, resource allocation and delivery decisions; and
- **iv.** assessing whether the programme has the capabilities and plans in place to mitigate its most significant risks and maintain operational resilience, including risks associated with increasing referral volumes, low consent rates, evolving patterns of radicalisation and other foreseeable delivery pressures.

e The Home Office should establish a more coordinated approach to sharing and applying learning between delivering partners. This should include:

- **i.** disseminating relevant findings from learning reviews to all Prevent delivery partners in a timely manner and obtaining assurance that recommendations and lessons identified have been appropriately implemented and embedded in practice; and
- **ii.** operating a single Prevent research and evaluation strategy in future between Home Office and CTP, ending any duplication of effort and ensuring that key priorities are addressed, such as research into consent and the impact of different intervention types.