

Foreign and Commonwealth Office Meeting on Contest 2 Strategy and the Prevent Agenda.



Pendle District Consultation

Building Bridges Pendle in partnership with
Pendle Borough Council

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Introduction

Building Bridges Pendle and Pendle Borough Council welcome the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as part of their campaign of touring the Country in order to be actively involved in debates on the Contest 2 and Prevent Strategies; their links to British Foreign policy and the impact of British Foreign policy on communities in the UK.

On Tuesday 14th July 2009, a first time visit to Pendle by senior officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office took place.

Arthur Snell - Head of the whole the Prevent Team and Assistant Director of the Counter Terrorism Department, along with Mockbul Ali who is Head of Prevent, Counter Ideology and also Islamic Advisor to the Foreign Secretary, took part in a series of important meetings with a variety of audiences throughout the day. Four specific meeting were organised with the general aim of promoting dialogue and understanding on British Foreign Policy and its impact on Community Cohesion, the Contest 2 Strategy and the Prevent agenda.

All four meetings began with an introduction into the role of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in International operations and the link of the Department to the Contest 2 and Prevent strategies. This was followed by information on the local approach to the Prevent agenda by Angela Ansell (Principle Policy Officer at Pendle Borough Council).

This report is a joint response from Building Bridges Pendle and Pendle Borough Council to the four consultation meetings which took place.

Recommendations

Foreign and Commonwealth Office and other Government Departments;

1. On the whole, the community perception is that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is only associated with British Foreign Policy and international operations of the British Army. Foreign and Commonwealth Office needs to increase resources for outreach projects and initiate a coordinated campaign of accessing grassroots communities more frequently than it is at present. This will present a clearer message of what the Foreign and Commonwealth Office actually stands for and its relationship to Contest 2 and Prevent.
2. National Foreign Policy plays a key role in shaping local communities response to the Governments Prevent agenda. It is therefore essential that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office continues to explain the rationale underpinning Foreign policy decisions to local communities.
3. Foreign and Commonwealth Office factsheets to be posted out to all local authorities and projects working on the Prevent agenda for distribution amongst communities. Young people, Schools and Colleges to be a targeted focus in this distribution.
4. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and other Government Departments such as Communities and Local Government and the Home Office (Office of Security and Counter Terrorism) to take a partnership role with the Department for International Development and provide information and guidance to local authorities; on how to present a counter narrative to the BNP and any other groups, who have misused Foreign Policy and donations to Muslim Countries to forward their political agendas.
5. At a basic level, the definitions, context and concepts of violent Extremism, Counter Ideology and Terrorism need to be debated amongst professionals, communities and young people. Clarity is also needed on root causes and processes of radicalisation.
6. The counter narrative message is not clear, especially for young people. A campaign to highlight the 'counter narrative' message to violent extremists to be made a target for local authorities. This campaign can also address negative stereotypes.
7. Trust and respect needs to be built up with the general public and professional bodies as to the benefit of talking with communities. Foreign and Commonwealth Office must demonstrate how dialogue with communities is having an impact on the development of strategies such as Contest 2 and Prevent. Similarly, local authorities must also adopt this practice of feeding information back into communities within an acceptable timescale as to the impact of community consultations. Projects also have a responsibility to work in partnership with others and deliver consultation responsibly.
8. Central Government Departments must be clearer in communicating their partnership approach to Contest 2 and Prevent. Local authorities and key stakeholders do not necessarily experience or see the relationships at a National level and the joint approach to tackling these agendas.
9. The media has a major influence on fuelling misunderstanding of Islam and further developing Islamophobia. There are many cases of inaccurate reporting of National and International incidents which are negatively impacting on relationships between Muslim communities with Government and local authorities. A mechanism to have an influence on media reporting at a local level to be integrated into local authority structures. At a National level, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and other Government Departments need to better communicate examples as to how they are challenging inaccurate media reporting.

10. At a National level, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and other Government Departments need to better communicate examples as to how they are challenging inaccurate media reporting.

Recommendations

Local Authorities and Partners:

1. A greater depth of understanding of Islam, roots causes of violent extremism and critical thinking amongst communities needs to be coordinated into work plans of organisations working towards the local Prevent agenda at a local level. Activities at any level must take place within informative settings. Such points to be stated as guidelines within the local Prevent delivery plan and be relevant to the needs identified.
2. Work on tackling Prevent objectives must be balanced with tackling other forms of political ideologies including the BNP for a more balanced approach. This broader engagement will bring in a wider range of partners to tackle groups intent on dividing communities on the lines of Race and Religion. As this balance does not exist, key partners are not fully engaged on Prevent.
3. Greater awareness is needed within Local Authorities of the impact on local communities as a result of Prevent and Contest. For example, given the attention on Faith communities and particularly the Muslim community; the development of new Islamic schools can have a negative impact on Community Cohesion. Local authorities can proactively engage with institutions which are embarking on major projects in their areas and work together on communications to the wider community in order to help ease tensions.
4. Reporting of intimidation and violence due to Racism, Islamophobia and a backlash as a result of the Prevent agenda to the Police to be promoted. Further encouragement of effective third-party reporting.
5. Training is required for all Councillors, Community leaders, practitioners and project officers to help better understand the Prevent agenda, its relationship to the Islamic Faith and the diverse cultural links. At a local authority level, this training should be conditional on decision makers, policy advisers and delivery agents of the Prevent delivery plan.
6. Education must remain a priority at National and local level. Education projects targeted towards the objectives of the Prevent agenda must become broader so that they can link into community Cohesion and Interfaith agendas. This approach will be a more productive in having the wider community involved; especially young people. Focused interventions for young people must include projects to raise awareness on democracy, equal opportunities, shared values and a common identity. Factors of freedom of speech and freedom of Religious expression in the U.K. contrasting with other parts of Europe and the World to be highlighted in these projects.
7. In respect of community development agendas and making links into grassroots communities; statutory bodies, institutions and the community sector must make further inroads into reaching a broader audience. To add value to traditional 'gate keepers' and community leaders, a new tool-kit can be created and adopted as conditional to local authority grant schemes. Winning the 'hearts and minds' of people is key to having productive engagement with grassroots communities and making a lasting difference. Soft approaches are required and a long-term strategy that is stable and consistent must be adopted.
8. A sensitive and well thought-out approach that will develop successful partnerships between local authorities and community groups is essential to addressing issues over the longer-term. Approaches should be mindful of not stigmatising or stereotyping any particular sections of the community.

Appendix 1

1. Pendle Imams and Mosque Committee Members Forum

There are ten Mosques in Pendle that represent the Brailvi, Deobandi, Tablighi-Jamaat and Ahla-Hadith traditions within Islam, the Brailvi tradition being by far the largest percentage wise. Seven Mosques were represented at this consultation event by both the head Imam and Mosque Committee members.

Aims of meeting:

- To increase knowledge base of forum members on Contest 2 and Prevent.
- To have dialogue on Prevent / Foreign policy and its impact on the UK Muslim community and UK Mosques.
- For Foreign Office to have a first-hand insight and consultation into Muslim community views on Prevent.

Key points of discussions:

- a. The Prevent aspect of the Contest 2 strategy is acknowledging that Violent Extremism cannot be defeated by Police actions and the Intelligence services alone. Action is needed to stop young people taking on extremist ideas. In the battle of ideas, Imams and Mosques have a crucial role to play and this is the same overseas. Mosques in this country have close links with other countries such as Pakistan. This close relationship is crucial as Pakistan is facing its own big challenges of militancy.
- b. Information on role of British Government in Pakistan, Building of infrastructure, development of public services and training with the Pakistan Army.
- c. Support for institutions and voices countering extremist ideology. There are many people in Pakistan challenging negative ideas of extremist organisation; these people may not be as well resourced to offer a counter narrative whilst extremists are making contact through media and other mechanisms. The challengers have not been able to confront the issues. The FCO have been supporting these groups.
- d. Discussion on operations of the Pakistan army in the SWAT valley in order to push back the illegal rule of the Taliban in that region. The British Government had an advisory role in these operations to help with movement of the civilian population caught in the line of fire.
- e. Importance of sending out a clear message from British Foreign Policy in relation to the promotion of Democracy in Governing a Country whilst at the same time, supporting non-democratic Governments. Specific reference to elections in the Republic of Iran, Bangladesh, the controversy surrounding elections that took place in Algeria in 1991 and support for non-democratic Arab nations. There have unfortunately been some poor decisions that have been made in the past.
- f. British Government is not against Islamic Governments. U.K. has a rich history of supporting Muslim countries. U.K is greatest supporter of Turkey becoming a member of the E.U.
- g. Clarification sought on the relationship between British and American Foreign Policy where joint operations are taking place in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan. Each operation has its own complexities, whilst British Foreign Policy may offer support to other Countries, policies are independent. Specific reference to drone attacks carried out by the U.S.A. in Afghanistan.

- h. U.K. policy in Afghanistan has clear objectives. It is not based on points raised through conspiracy theories. British soldiers are being killed in action and the Government is facing National pressure on the perceived lack of adequate equipment for the armed forces operations in Afghanistan. No Government would be willing to suffer such losses over operations not based on clear strategies to make a lasting difference.
- i. The mass media and its portrayal of Islam has a major effect on fuelling misunderstanding, the stigmatisation and marginalisation of the Muslim community, as well as creating anti-Government views in the Muslim community. Young people are greatly affected by this.
- j. The U.K. media industry is independent but is regulated. Media must be pressured and challenged by Government but also by local authorities and community groups. There is a need to build local capacity to counter the media and its negative portrayal of the Muslim community around Islamophobia and the violent extremism.
- k. There are limits to what Imams can do to challenge anti-Government rhetoric within the Mosque as there are mixed messages being received through the use of military action and non-military means to counter extremist ideology. Tax payer's money is going into funding local community work to tackle extremism and radicalisation, and at the same time tax payer's money is going into military operations abroad. Where operations go wrong; specific reference to a drone attack in Afghanistan where over 100 men, women and children were killed, it is difficult to challenge views. On the one-hand resources are being placed into winning hearts and minds, whilst at the same time resources are being put into joint operations abroad that are fuelling the view to not engage with the Government Prevent agenda. A vicious cycle has developed.
- l. Education is needed at an early age in Schools and Mosques to encourage integration and challenge divisive attitudes / ideologies.
- m. Critical thinking must be encouraged amongst all sections of the community. Those who are propagating the extremist message have absolute belief in their views. The source of this ideology is the concept of 'Takfir' which creates an 'us' and 'them' dynamic that has no bounds in what groups can do for their perceived cause.
- n. There needs to be clarity for all members of the community on root causes of violent extremism and for all people in their communities to have a role to tackle the issues. There are those who are 'active terrorists' and are being tracked or monitored by Police and the Secret services, and there are those who support movements and create the 'enabling environment'.
- o. There are training issues around level of knowledge within each organisation/location. The impact of terrorism affects everyone. The long-term solution is to improve people's understanding of Islam and work together.
- p. The Government perspective needs to be clearer. Ideology that is a threat to us all and is a complex issue which preaches violence made up of a minority of a minority – stark reality 'Jihadi'. The majority of victims of terrorist incidents are Muslim.
- q. Further 'fact sheets' providing information on the work of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Palestine and Democracy in the Middle East are available from the department.
- r. What is a terrorist? Someone who is willing to indiscriminately kill innocent men, women and children, and cause damage to infrastructure for a political or Religious cause.
- s. Difficulties are being faced by Imams as result of added security at airports, with some Imams having been questioned on more than one occasion. There should be a system

where information on non-suspect Imams and role model Imams should be available for airport security. This will help to alienate Imams who are supporting Prevent agenda in their communities.

Appendix 2

2. Stakeholders

Key responsibility towards the Prevent strategy at a local level lies with the People's and Communities group which is linked into the Management group of the LSP. Officers from this group, along with representatives from the Police, Young People's Service and organisation involved in project delivery of the Prevent agenda, formed the audience for this meeting.

Aims of meeting:

- To help further develop awareness of the national and international aspects of Prevent, its relationship to the Foreign office, and how it impacts at a local level.
- For agencies and partners with the key responsibilities in developing local Cohesion and Prevent policy, to better understand local priorities.

Key points of discussions:

- a. Terrorism does not respect borders, this is international and issues are similar across the UK and other countries.
- b. The U.K. has a clear interest in supporting the Pakistan Government; destabilisation in Pakistan will have an impact on the Pakistani heritage population and the wider society in the U.K. Work includes supporting local societies and mainstream Imams and Mosques.
- c. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office are working in 20 countries where people in the UK can trace ancestry or influence. The work involves supporting development of public services. This can be seen as controversial with the current economic crisis.
- d. U.K. support for foreign countries can be used by parties like the BNP to cause division in communities. The U.K. is one of the biggest aid donors in the World to foreign countries. The money used by Foreign and Commonwealth Office is to deliver specific outcomes, at present 0.07% of GDP is spent on Foreign Aid – not a large proportion of the government budget. Each case needs to be researched individually, most information can be found from the Department of International Development.
- e. There is a need to better communicate U.K. policy on aid donation to the local community. Government can carry out more outreach on this area. For example, one of the impacts on immigration is lack of opportunities in home countries; if these opportunities are improved we will incur less immigration.
- f. British Foreign policy is a major factor that is influencing young people. Extremist political organisations create space to discuss Foreign policy and use this as part of their radicalisation methodology.
- g. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has initiated a National campaign to take the message of the Department to communities across the U.K. This meeting is a part of that drive. All people including the Foreign Secretary are involved in this. Recently the Foreign minister attended a Jumah prayer gathering at a Mosque in Bradford and addressed the congregation. Other aspects of the campaign include use of internet and email alerts, attending youth clubs and community centres. In all encounters, views are invited that critical of the Government approach.
- h. There are those who are silent and are not standing up or opposing negative views. We need to reach out to communities via new contacts and not just usual suspects in order to get more people engaging with community agendas. Strategies need to be out into place to achieve this.

- i. Better use needs to be made of the Internet and websites to provide a counter narrative to extremist ideology, as well as grassroots groups and youth groups. The media is also linked into this. People need to use a wider range of sources for information. The counter narrative message is not as clear as it should be.
- j. Impact of negative portrayal of Muslims in the media as a result of terrorism and the focus on Islam includes intimidation and violence at a community level.
- k. Definition of what are 'National interests' when mobilising British troops for International operations along with how decisions are made as to when objectives have been achieved in international campaigns and projects.
- l. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is not understood as well as it should be. This is one of the reasons for reaching out to communities to bust myths and create a more accurate understanding. Especially when it comes to conspiracy arguments, in Iraq for example, there have been no deals struck with U.K. companies for oil or gas stock. Debates need to be brought into more informative settings.
- m. Joined up working is required to address issues raised. Partnerships with grassroots communities with clear objectives will help to branch out to wider groups.

Appendix 3

3. Young people

Young people are a major focal point of both the Contest 2 Strategy and the Prevent agenda. In relation to the British Foreign Policy and its impact on young people, it was essential that an opportunity was presented to young people to have a separate meeting with our visiting delegation. Two groups of young people were brought together for this discussion; a group of Muslim girls from a local Islamic Girls Schools and a mixed gender group who had been involved in a local youth leadership programme.

Aims of meeting:

- To help further develop awareness of the national and international aspects of Prevent, its relationship to the Foreign office, and how it impacts at a local level on young people.
- For young people to directly challenge the Government approach, make recommendations and a critical analysis of the Prevent agenda.

Key points of discussions:

- a. How to counter the stereotype of all Muslims been viewed as terrorists.
- b. Foreign and Commonwealth Office objectives and the role of consular services across the World.
- c. Perceived Government anti-Islamic focus on issues such as terrorism and the wearing of the Niqab. The U.K. has some of the strongest legislation against Religious discrimination in the World, a debate instigated by politicians or any other personalities may not necessarily be negative and discriminatory. Each case has to be viewed separately.
- d. The role of the Foreign Office in Israel and Palestine. The recent Gaza conflict and the response from the UK. The U.K. is part of the quartet who are committed to bringing peace to the region. The U.K. are the biggest aid donors to Palestine from the E.U.
- e. The development of effective international institutions, above all the European Union and the United Nations.
- f. Similarities between the BNP and political extremist ideologies in the Muslim world that operate in the U.K.

Appendix 4

4. Community Seminar

Having organised three meetings with a specific target audience in mind, an open meeting for any community members to attend, in a personal or professional capacity was the final meeting of this day. From previous engagement with the general community sector, it was clear that strong views existed in relation to the Contest 2 Strategy and the Prevent agenda at a local level. The link of British Foreign Policy to the agendas was a discussion which people had not yet had a chance to engage in with the appropriate people. The audience for this meeting proved to be the case, with a wide range of people from different backgrounds being present.

Aims of meeting:

- To help further develop awareness of the national and international aspects of Prevent, its relationship to the Foreign office, and how it impacts at a local level on communities.
- For people to directly challenge the Government approach, make recommendations and a critical analysis of the Prevent agenda.

Key points of discussions:

- a. What is Prevent? Is part of a broader approach to counter terrorism, Prevent is the long term approach. In the short term it is about improving security of government buildings, airports etc. In the longer term it is about looking at what makes young people Connect with extremist views. Prevent within the international context is thinking about countries such as Pakistan where there is an increase in suicide bombings. What are the reasons this and what is the potential impact in the U.K.
- b. What is counter ideology? Ideology which allows people to go out to indiscriminately kill and commit acts of terror and violence.
- c. Double standards of supporting action against countries as a result of breaking U.N. resolutions such as Iraq but not taking same action against others. Each case has its own complexities; it is important but not easy to challenge the view that the West is anti-Islamic. As far as the Israel and Palestine conflict is concerned, U.K. policy is to support a two-state solution.
- d. First generation Pakistani immigrants into the U.K. have settled and feel that this is their home. There is some uncertainty as to how this agenda has come into being and how strategy has developed. What are the sources of radicalisation and extremism? Evidence is there that people are following extremist groups. Whole range of factors that are used to radicalise people including; Ideological reasons, socio-economic backgrounds, sense of exclusion and a variety of other reasons.
- e. Political activism has a great history in the U.K. and the Prevent agenda is not looking to break that tradition. Where activism leads to violent extremism is where the line is drawn, there are no freedoms to promote violence in the U.K.
- f. Important to work directly with young people as not all young people go to Mosques. Prevent projects need to reach a wider audience and provide adequate education on definition of terrorism.
- g. Muslim communities are facing a backlash and have become alienated / stereotyped as a result of the Prevent agenda. Specific examples stated of inappropriate interviewing and

difficulties experienced at airports. In terrorist incidents within a Global context, the majority of victims are Muslim.

- h. Further negative impact as a result of the prevent agenda on the wider community due to other extremist groups like the BNP not being challenged on an equal footing. Project work needs to be broader.
- i. Due to the Prevent agenda being focused entirely on the Muslim community, not all potential partners are engaging in the agenda. Challenging extremism and building cohesion is not only related to Islam and the Muslim community. With a broader agenda, more partners will come forward at a local level and get involved.
- j. Media does not pick up on positive stories.
- k. Debate on Muslim institutions that are being built, especially the large projects taking place in Pendle linked into agenda of whether faith Schools promote cohesion or a barrier towards bringing people together.
- l. Winning hearts and minds of people are at the 'heart' of this agenda. Are the consultations taking place having an impact on policy, do consultation events such as this meeting actually have an impact on decisions on Government strategy, does the Government actually listen?
- m. Need to ensure that people who are being consulted do actually connect with the grassroots community. Need to move-on from traditional gatekeepers. Foreign and Commonwealth Office is currently working at grass roots doing direct engagement in Mosques, community groups and through organisations that are linked to grass roots. The department will look favourably at invitations to come and talk with community groups.
- n. There must be sensitivity in not using labels to target people or sections of the Muslim community. For example, people use Wahabism as a target for propagating of ideology supporting violent extremism, Quilliam Foundation uses such assumptions.
- o. Future Government line, whether or not Labour remain in power is that Prevent will remain a major issue. There may be some changes within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.
- p. What emphasis is there on democracy to encourage young people to get involved in politics? Why are you so poor about getting message across? Young people are growing up believing that the British are a tool of the USA. Message does not transfer well to local people. All of our children need to be educated on this.
- q. Policies and how media report changes and do not give a balanced view. Media has a complex interaction with Government, the actual message is different and complex so never resonates with wider community.
- r. Message from Government needs to be clear that all departments, Communities and Local Government, Home Office, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and others are joined up on this agenda. Confidence must be put into communities that people in Government are taking to each other.
- s. We are influenced by the USA in our Foreign Policy and are not willing to have open conversation. There are gatekeepers in Government who are making 'fools' out of the general public. Example given on U.K. stance on settlements in Palestine which is different to that of the USA.

- t. Is the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in contact with Al Qaida? After thirty years of fighting in Northern Ireland, it was negotiations which eventually brought a resolution to the armed conflicts. The key issue is that you have to be able to negotiate with trusted organisations.
- u. Foreign operations in countries such as Iraq seem to be well thought out in comparison to Afghanistan. Example of lack of equipment for soldiers in Afghanistan, not the same debate for troops in Iraq. A fallen Taliban fighter believes he is going to die a martyr and all his children will be martyrs. Need to talk to the Taliban and also the people of this country.
- v. Perception is that it is mainly the U.K. forces doing all the work in Afghanistan when in fact there are a number of countries involved in operations there.
- w. We need to be proud of our common British identity. Tolerance and support are needed to bring people together.
- x. There are new conspiracies theories that 7/7 was activated by the British Government. These conspiracy theories need to be countered by the Muslim community.
- y. What is definition of extremism / terrorism? There is a shift of focus from Equality and Diversity to culture and values, it is important to keep agendas balanced within priority areas.
- z. Importance of all sections of local communities being involved in community agendas, namely the Pakistani Christian community. Do people know that they exist in Pendle?

Photo Gallery

Pendle Imams and Mosque Committee Members Forum



Stakeholders



Young people



Community Seminar



Acknowledgements;

Our visitors from Foreign and Commonwealth Office:

- Mr Arthur Snell
- Mr Mockbul Ali

The hosts and organisers: Building Bridges Pendle;

- Dr Ikram Malik MBE FRSA
- Mr Brian Astin
- Mr Rauf Bashir
- Mr Mohammed Ali

The hosts and organisers: Pendle Borough Council;

- Mrs Sam Plum
- Mrs Angela Ansell

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- Brierfield Sultania Jamia Mosque
- Nelson Central Ghausia Mosque
- Minhaj-ul-Quran
- Taleem-ul-Quran Madrassah
- Madina Masjid
- Al-Hira Education Centre
- Muhammadi Mosque

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- Pendle Partnership and LSP
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- Lancashire Fire Service
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- Government Office Northwest
- Young Peoples Service
- Inward House Projects
- Burnley and Pendle Faith Centre
- Brierfield Cyber Cafe
- Conservative Party Councillor
- Liberal Party Councillor and portfolio holder for Community Cohesion

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