

Minutes of the Meeting of the Hidden and Extreme Harms Prevention Committee held on 23 June 2022 at 7.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Gary Collins (Chair), Qaisar Abbas, Daniel Chukwu, Shane Ralph and Sue Shinnick
- In attendance:** Les Billingham, Assistant Director Adult Social Care and Communities (*arrived 7.08pm*)
Michelle Cunningham, Thurrock Community Safety Partnership Manager
Janet Simon, Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help
Cheryl Wells, Strategic Lead Community Safety, Emergency Planning and Resilience
Lucy Tricker, Senior Democratic Services Officer
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Before the start of the meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being live streamed and recorded, with the video recording to be made available on the Council's webcast channel.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the Hidden and Extreme Harms Prevention Committee held on 17 February 2022 were approved as a correct record.

2. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared.

4. Unaccompanied Child Asylum Seekers: Verbal Update

The Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help stated that Unaccompanied Child Asylum Seekers (UCAS) were categorised as Looked After Children (LAC), and therefore subject to LAC procedures and policies, such as reviews and regular medicals. She stated that an area's UCAS population had to be 0.07% of the overall child population, which meant that Thurrock could receive a maximum of 31 UCAS. She added that Thurrock currently had 28 UCAS; 26 boys and 2 girls ranging from age 13 to 17. She stated that when a UCAS turned 18, they were entitled to a LAC plan and other help if they had been living in the UK for more than 13 weeks.

The Chair asked how UCAS came to England and their reasons for travelling. He queried if there was a commonality between UCAS. The Assistant Director

Children's Social Care and Early Help replied that many UCAS came via the ports in Thurrock, which meant that Thurrock was categorised as a receiving authority and had therefore signed-up the national transfer scheme to ensure that the borough did not exceed the maximum numbers of UCAS. She added that some UCAS came via lorries and were deposited at service stations in the borough. She explained that some UCAS did not have any family in their home countries and others had paid money to be brought to the UK, often embarking on a journey that could take many months.

The Assistant Director Adult Social Care and Communities joined the meeting at 7.08pm.

The Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help explained that many UCAS feared for their safety in their home countries, as many had come from war-stricken places such as Afghanistan, Eritrea, Sudan, and Syria. She summarised and stated that Thurrock had also received children from Ukraine, but these were handled under a different scheme.

Councillor Ralph queried how many UCAS received the Council's help between the ages of 18-25, and how much this cost the Council. The Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help replied that she would find this information after the meeting and send to the Committee. She added that after the age of 18 UCAS were classed as adults and many had access to benefits or the right to work, so therefore contributed to the cost of rent and living. Councillor Shinnick asked if the team tried to reunite UCAS with their parents or other family members. The Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help explained that the team did try to reunite families of UCAS, or tried to help the child contact their family at home. Councillor Chukwu asked how the team integrated UCAS into their local communities. The Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help explained that the team used interpreters and translated documents so the child could understand what was happening. She explained that UCAS were also enrolled in the appropriate education setting, which helped them improve their English, if English was a second language, and integrate with other local children. She stated that the team also tried to find support within existing communities that were like the child's background, for example the team reached out to different communities in London for support. The Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help summarised and stated that the UCAS was provided with legal advice and an advocate that spoke their first language if necessary.

Councillor Abbas questioned if there were currently any missing UCAS. The Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help replied that there was currently one missing UCAS in Thurrock. She explained that the team managed missing episodes well by having regular conversations with the child and ensuring they were receiving the right support. She stated that some missing episodes only lasted a few hours, but the team were able to contact the appropriate agencies to ensure the missing child was found.

The Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help left the meeting at 7.15pm.

5. Communications Strategy in Relation to Prevent (Counter Terrorism and Extremism)

The Community Safety Partnership Manager introduced the report and stated that it provided an update on the previous Prevent benchmarking exercise that had been presented to the Committee. She explained that the Home Office and Prevent professionals understood that local Councillors could provide the necessary leadership and scrutiny to help facilitate the Prevent agenda, and highlighted the Members handbook and online training listed as appendices to the report. She stated that the Prevent self-assessment highlighted ten key areas, which were relevant to both funded and non-funded areas, and had been agreed upon by the Home Office in February 2022. The Community Safety Partnership Manager explained that Thurrock had shown many strengths in the benchmarking exercise including risk assessments; training; and the multi-agency safeguarding board. She explained that there had also been two areas highlighted for development: communications and engagement. She stated that the team had therefore put together the Prevent Strategy, as outlined in appendix 3 of the report and Communications Plan, which had been tailored to Thurrock. She felt there was still more work to do to improve communications and engagement, for example broader communications with parents and families. She commented that the Home Office had scrutinised the proposed Communications Plan and had felt it was a good resource that made use of national events and national campaign materials. She stated that the team were working to improve proactive communications, for example through social media and newsletters. She asked how the team could support to engage with their networks.

The Chair queried why left-wing extremism was not mentioned in the Prevent Elected Members handbook, as this had been raised at a previous committee meeting. The Community Safety Partnership Manager replied that the Members handbook was produced by the Local Government Association, so Thurrock Council were not responsible for its content. She stated that Members could get in contact with the Local Government Association if they wished this to be amended. The Chair highlighted page 65 of the report and asked how Thurrock were tackling the problem of extremist speakers. The Community Safety Partnership Manager explained that Thurrock had produced a guide for hirers to fill in when hiring out a premises to ensure the team safeguarded against hate speech being delivered in the borough. She explained that this had been shared with PubWatch and would form part of the wider Communications Plan. She added that the Prevent Strategy had also had an Equality Impact Assessment carried out as part of the governance process. The Community Safety Partnership Manager added that the questionnaire could be shared with Members outside the meeting, but highlighted that although extremist speakers in Thurrock was not a high risk, the team remained conscious that it could happen.

Councillor Ralph questioned how the team were working to reduce

radicalisation and extremism via social media, including through Xbox and PlayStation games. He asked if the team could do events in schools or for parents to highlight the risk of radicalisation online. The Community Safety Partnership Manager felt that this was a current gap in the Prevent Strategy. She stated that during the pandemic, advice had been published to schools and parents highlighting this issue, and the Let's Talk About It toolkit had been included in the Headteachers bulletin. She stated that this issue was not currently in the Prevent Communications Strategy, but she would work with the Communications team to see if this information could be added.

Councillor Abbas highlighted the issue of engagement that had been identified as requiring development in the benchmarking exercise. He asked how the team had previously engaged with different groups and if any new methods were being utilised, particularly when engaging hard to reach groups, such as faith groups. The Community Safety Partnership Manager explained that the team engaged with schools through the Let's Talk About It toolkit. She added that schools had recently undertaken their Section 11 Audit, and would respond to any identified areas of need. She stated that the Further Education Lead for the Department for Education sat on the Prevent Board, alongside the Assistant Director for Education and representatives from the two Thurrock colleges, who were very engaged with the Prevent agenda. She explained that schools also regularly received a Prevent briefing and risk-assessments were shared with the necessary groups. The Community Safety Partnership Manager added that the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership were currently working on a contextual safeguarding report that would be shared with headteachers and school safeguarding leads. She summarised and stated that there was still more work to be done, particularly engaging with faith groups, and the team were open to suggestions on how to engage more effectively with these groups.

Councillor Collins asked if the team could reach out to the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) to help promote Prevent within a religious education setting. Councillor Abbas agreed with this suggestion and felt that more needed to be done to engage with faith leaders, particularly as some groups had issues with Prevent. He asked if briefings could be provided to faith leaders to open communications and engagement. The Community Safety Partnership Manager stated that the team used the Act Early mechanism to reach out to faith leaders, but would look into the suggestion of utilising SACRE to promote Prevent. The Assistant Director Adult Social Care and Communities stated that the team were working with Essex Police to ensure that the Prevent agenda was promoted across Thurrock. He stated that hard to reach groups would be targeted through the communications plan, which would identify the current gaps.

Councillor Chukwu asked what the early signs of radicalisation could be. The Community Safety Partnership Manager stated that early signs of radicalisations could include increased secretiveness; change in attitudes and behaviour; changes in dress; or name changes. She explained that training was delivered to stakeholders which described the signs in detail, as lots of behaviour changes could be a sign of radicalisation. She mentioned that case

studies outlining the early signs of radicalisation could be found on the Act Early website. Councillor Chukwu asked what the difference was between a hate crime and extremism. The Community Safety Partnership Manager explained that a hate crime was when someone felt victimised due to a protected characteristic. She explained that hate crimes were covered in the Prevent training as victimisation could sometimes lead to extremism.

Councillor Shinnick felt pleased that representatives from Thurrock colleges sat on the Prevent board, and asked how they reached out to college students. The Community Safety Partnership Manager explained that the college representatives were very successful at explaining the Prevent agenda to college students, and Ofsted had recently found that college students were using appropriate language and understood the Prevent agenda. She explained that the safeguarding leads had a good understanding of Prevent and were able to foster conversations and explore problems with the students in a focussed way. The Assistant Director Adult Social Care and Communities added that low-level Prevent concepts were discussed in schools at a young age to raise awareness. He stated that when students reached college, they were therefore able to have a more mature conversations regarding radicalisation and extremism. He felt that colleges in Thurrock had a healthy relationship towards Prevent and freedom of speech in safe spaces.

Councillor Abbas highlighted that he had recently been chosen as Portfolio Holder for Communities and felt that the Council were not showcasing the good work that had been undertaken with communities. He stated that Thurrock was becoming a more diverse place to live and felt that the Council should be talking to different community groups. Councillor Chukwu asked what the current level of terrorism threat in the UK was. The Community Safety Partnership Manager stated that the current threat level was 'substantial', which meant that a threat was likely. She explained that this had been increased in November 2021 to 'severe' following the murder of Sir David Amess MP and the Liverpool Women's Hospital bombing, but this had been downgraded in February 2022. She explained that the threat level was constantly monitored and reviewed, and highlighted that the threat in Thurrock was no greater than anywhere else in the UK. She explained that a member of the Counter-Terrorism police for the Eastern region would be invited to December's meeting of the committee.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That Members noted the approach to improve engagement with communities in relation to Prevent.**
- 2. Members agreed to act as key stakeholders in advising the Council on improvements to engagement with our communities.**
- 3. Members agreed to be involved in development of any community projects.**

6. Work Programme

Members asked for the following items to be added to the Work Programme:

1. Department for Education Prevent lead to attend the Committee in December
2. A member of Essex Police or Border Force to attend the Committee to discuss immigration incursions
3. A report on Unaccompanied Child Asylum Seekers in December
4. A member of Essex Police to attend the committee to discuss children and local crime gangs, particularly children as drug runners
5. A report on the level of risk of COMAH sites in Thurrock in December

The meeting finished at 8.33 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**