

BRIEFING PAPER FOR IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION

1.	Date of meeting:	17th September 2019
2.	Title:	Counter Extremism work with schools
3.	Directorate/Agency:	Assistant Chief Executive's

4. Introduction

- 4.1 This briefing paper highlights the work Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council are undertaking in schools and colleges across the Borough to counter extremist narratives and build the resilience of young people to reject extremism, intolerance and hatred.
- 4.2 The distinction between Counter Extremism (CE) and Counter terrorism (PREVENT) is a difficult one to make. They are however distinct policy areas. PREVENT is a safeguarding process for individuals vulnerable to radicalisation like any other safeguarding process whereas Counter Extremism is about working with communities rather than individuals, challenging extremist narratives and building resilience within communities to reject hatred.
- 4.3 Extremism is defined by government as the vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. Extremists seek to promote hatred of the other or “othering” as academics describe it, thereby undermining community cohesion. It is therefore important that the council are proactive in challenging extremism and promoting the values of mutual respect and tolerance in and between communities and that vulnerable young people and adults do not become radicalised to commit violent acts of terrorism. Counter extremism work is not counter terrorism as it is often mistaken but is about working with communities to promote community cohesion and to build resilience to the narratives that promote hatred.
- 4.4 The following are the key pieces of work being undertaken with schools and colleges to counter extremism. As a brief summary this includes:
- Holding the “Harms of Hate” event for schools and developing teaching resources which have been recognised nationally as good practice.
 - Delivery of assemblies on extremism in secondary schools.
 - Delivery staff training on the current far right threat.
 - Delivery of work with primary schools.
 - Work with partners to develop CE projects including some delivered in schools.
 - Development and sharing of teaching resources to challenge extremism.

Each area of business is covered in more detail later in this report.

5. Background and context

- 5.1 The Government published its Counter Extremism Strategy in 2015 and the Counter Extremism unit was set up within the Home Office. As a part of the strategy central government identified the local authorities most at risk from non-violent extremism and offered funding for Community Coordinators to support the delivery of counter extremism (CE) work locally. Rotherham was offered funding and Ian Stubbs was appointed in September 2017, employed by RMBC and based in the Assistant Chief Executive's department. There are a total of 40 Community Coordinators nationally each working in their own local authority areas to tackle the harms of extremism.
- 5.2 It should be noted that whilst there are overlaps, the work of CE is distinct from PREVENT which is a part of the government counter terrorism strategy and is governed by a separate department within the Home Office. Fulfilling obligations under PREVENT legislation is a statutory requirement managed within the council by Community Safety under the Head of Service, Sam Barstow and governed through the Safer Rotherham Partnership.
- 5.3 Nationally Counter Extremism work has become a priority for government. An independent commission has been established with Sara Khan appointed lead commissioner in 2018. A Special Interest Group on Counter Extremism (SIGCE) jointly funded by the Home Office and LGA and chaired jointly by Leeds and Luton councils has been established to share good practice and learning nationally. Rotherham's community coordinator is a member of the national delivery group of the SIGCE and also a member of a working group set up to look into the far right threat.
- 5.4 Delivery of the government Counter Extremism Strategy is managed through the local delivery team at the Home Office under the "Building a Stronger Britain Together" or BSBT programme. This includes grant funding opportunities for voluntary sector organisations as well as funding for the Community Coordinators. To date nationally over 230 VCF sector organisations have been funded to deliver CE work under the BSBT programme including three in Rotherham namely Rotherham United Community Sports Trust, Remedi and Stop Hate UK.
- 5.5 Nationally the overall threat from Islamist extremists remains high. However there has been a significant increase in the threat of far right terrorism with 40% of terrorism arrests in 2018 reported as being far right related. The murder of Jo Cox MP and the recent New Zealand attacks being the most high profile incidents. In 2016 National Action became the first ever far right group proscribed under counter terrorism legislation for promoting violent acts of terrorism in the UK.
- 5.6 There has been a mainstreaming of far right narratives in the past 12 to 18 months with increasing public support as highlighted in a recent "Hope not Hate" report entitled "Modernising and Mainstreaming: The Contemporary

British Far Right”. They report “By analysing the rhetoric espoused at a series of major far-right events across 2018 and comparing it to societal polling it becomes evident that large parts of the contemporary alt-right’s platform - namely anti-Muslim politics, co-option of the free speech debate and an anti-elite populism - has widespread public support.”

- 5.7 Anti-Muslim sentiment is increasing nationally. Tell MAMA a national organisation founded to measure anti-Muslim hatred report a significant increase both online and offline. Between January and June 2018 Tell MAMA recorded 608 verified reports that were anti-muslim in nature and report an overall increase of 111% in just two years. The far right narrative has moved to a less overtly racist and more anti-muslim stance. “Punish a Muslim day” in 2018 is an example of the impact of this narrative and one that had a significant impact on Muslim Communities across the country. Far right groups seek to exploit issues for their own agenda including CSE in order to further their anti-muslim rhetoric.
- 5.8 A recent report “State of Hate 2019” by Hope Not Hate identified contact between people from different cultures as a key driver of acceptance. A recent (July 2019) academic paper identified three key components of challenging extremism: Dialogue, Education and exposure to alternative narratives. The work being undertaken across the Borough under the BSC strategy aims to address all these issues.
- 5.9 Working with young people and schools in particular to challenge extremism is a priority for RMBC and a key aspect of this work. Rotherham does not benefit from DfE funding for PREVENT education officers (PEO’s) who would ordinarily undertake a lot of the work described. Therefore this important work is being undertaken by a combination of the Community Coordinator, the Community Safety team and CYPS.
- 5.10 A recent case from Mexborough highlights the need for knowledge and confidence amongst staff to effectively safeguard young people at risk of radicalisation from the far right in our communities. This was a young man who lived in Mexborough and was 17 years old at the time of his arrest. His bedroom was wallpapered in Nazi memorabilia and he posted pictures online of himself wearing a Nazi SS uniform. During 2017 he built a viable pipe bomb in his bedroom and was arrested and convicted under counter terrorism legislation. He was a member of National Action and had been radicalised to hold white supremacist views. The point being that there may have been opportunities to safeguard this young man before he was radicalised to this point had professionals had the knowledge and confidence to have those difficult conversations needed. This case brings home the importance of this work locally.

6. Key issues

- 6.1 The Building Stronger Communities Strategy (BSC) was adopted by the Council in May 2017. It sets out the Council’s long term commitment to community cohesion and how it will work with residents and partners to deliver

better outcomes for Rotherham people and communities. The roll out of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy and improvements around community safety including hate crime reporting have helped to make Rotherham a safer and better place to live. Recent guidance from the Local Government Association cite both Rotherham's 'Building Stronger Communities Strategy' and 'Rotherham's Neighbourhood Strategy' as good practice as well as the Council's work to improve hate crime reporting. There is also a strong correlation between the BSC action plan and the actions covered in the government's Integrated Communities strategy. This would seem to indicate that the approach in Rotherham is in line with government thinking and national good practice. Effective communication, community engagement and protecting vulnerable people from extremism are all identified as priorities within the BSC strategy. The work aims to bring people together in order to build understanding and to raise awareness of different cultures and beliefs.

6.2 Over the past two years a key aspect of the work of the Community Coordinator has been developing relationships with schools and colleges as well as the voluntary sector and faith organisations. Internally strong links have been developed with the Community Safety team and Neighbourhood team as well as statutory partners through the Safer Rotherham Partnership.

6.3 Working with young people to develop critical thinking skills and build resilience to extremist narratives is important and key to challenging those narratives that seek to divide our communities. The aim of the work is to empower young people to think differently about some of the issues facing society today and to reject hatred and intolerance. One approach of the council is to work with schools and support the delivery of the British Values aspect of the national curriculum.

6.4 **Safeguarding**

6.4.1 PREVENT is a safeguarding process for those considered at risk of being radicalised and committing acts of violent extremism. The most recent figures show an increase of 36% nationally in the past year of far right referrals into PREVENT alongside a 14% reduction in Islamist referrals. There is no reason to suggest that the situation in Rotherham does not follow the national trend.

6.4.2 The safeguarding of vulnerable young people and adults at risk from exploitation by extremist narratives is a priority for the council. Where there are concerns about an individual they should be reported through the following referral pathways.

For young people this is the Rotherham Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) on 01709 336080 and for adults the Single Point of Access on 01709 822330.

6.4.3 If you see or hear anything that could be terrorist related you can report directly to the national confidential Anti-terrorist hotline on 0800 789321

There follows a more detailed report into each of the areas of work the council are undertaking with schools and colleges on the Counter Extremism agenda.

6.5 Harms of Hate

6.5.1 In September 2018 RMBC organised a Harms of Hate event at Magna. The event reflected on Hate, Extremism and Terrorism through the lived experience of survivors. Its aims were to empower young people to challenge hate narratives and support them to think critically about important issues affecting society today. The event was attended by 400 young people from 10 schools and colleges across the Borough and was extremely well received.

6.5.2 A video was commissioned to cover the event which has been viewed over 55,000 times on Facebook. The video gives a real flavour of the event. Quotes from students on the day show the impact of the event and included;

“Today was such a powerful day”

“Educating young people on what is happening around the world will help them develop as a person in later life”

“It really hits home. Its spreads the message around the community”

A link to the video is here

<https://www.facebook.com/StrongerRotherham/videos/1979086985531526/>

6.5.2 A total of 20 students from Rawmarsh Community School attended a follow-up event at Manchester Metropolitan University in February where they took part in a workshop looking at the wider harms of extremism.

6.5.3 At the request of schools a further Harms of Hate event is planned for 15th October 2019 during hate crime awareness week. To date over 550 students from 15 schools and colleges are booked to attend. This event will focus on religious intolerance and extremism as well as hate.

6.5.4 The event has created an opportunity for RMBC to work with schools and colleges to challenge extremism. Feedback from those schools which took part was extremely positive and resulted in requests for the event to be repeated. M&C Saatchi were commissioned by the Home Office to film the event and also produce a series of educational resources linked to the national curriculum. These have been made available online to every school and college.

6.5.5 Harms of Hate has been recognised through the SIGCE network nationally as good practice. A number of other local authorities have or are following the lead of RMBC.

6.6 Assemblies

- 6.6.1 The Community Coordinator has developed two linked assemblies, the first on the harms of extremism and the second on fake news. These have been delivered at Oakwood, Thrybergh, Swinton, Maltby and Brinsworth with further sessions planned at St Bernards, Dinnington, Aston, Wingfield, Wales, Winterhill and Clifton schools.
- 6.6.2 South Yorkshire Police hate crime Coordinator, PC Chris Nicholson delivers assemblies across the Borough on a regular basis around the theme of hate crime.

6.7 Staff Training

- 6.7.1 The case highlighted in 5.11 shows the importance of recognising the threat extremists pose to young people and the need for effective safeguarding through the PREVENT programme.
- 6.7.2 The training the council has developed aims to raise awareness of current extremist threats and empower staff to recognise this and have the confidence to effectively challenge extremist narratives and thus safeguard young people more effectively.
- 6.7.3 The Community Coordinator has been delivering staff training workshops on the current far right threat. To date these have been delivered at Dinnington High School, Thomas Rotherham College, Eastwood Grange School, and Ferham Primary school as well as sessions for some voluntary and community sector organisations including RUCST and Target Housing who work with vulnerable young people. Further workshops are planned at Brinsworth Academy and for school safeguarding leads. The offer has been made to every school and college across the Borough.
- 6.7.4 Outside of schools these sessions have been delivered to the PREVENT partnership group as well as a session planned with South Yorkshire Police PREVENT champions and Rotherham CCG.
- 6.7.5 Small Steps training consultancy delivered a half day training event to over 100 Early Help staff and teachers at Rockingham centre in October 2018. This was jointly funded by the SRP and the Community Coordinator grant. Small Steps are a Home Office accredited specialist intervention provider for countering the far right.
- 6.7.6 CYPS through the Rotherham Safeguarding Childrens Partnership (RSCP) also provide WRAP (raising awareness of PREVENT) training for school staff.
- 6.7.7 CYPS run quarterly school safeguarding leads forum meetings where there is periodic input on extremism, challenging extremist narratives

and safeguarding young people/children who may be vulnerable to being drawn into extremism.

6.8 Work with primary schools

- 6.8.1 An offer of support around the CE agenda has been made to all primary schools via the periodic newsletter to head teachers.
- 6.8.2 Workshop sessions around culture, identity and extremism have been delivered to Y6 students at Wales and Ferham primary schools. These resources were developed with help from PREVENT education colleagues in other local authority areas through the coordinator network.

6.9 Work with partners

- 6.9.1 SRP funding has been secured to commission Small Steps Training to deliver two intensive courses in schools for a cohort of young people vulnerable to far right narratives. The first course will be delivered in September and October.
- 6.9.2 Rotherham United Community Sports trust obtained £50K funding through the Building a Stronger Britain Together (BSBT) programme, which was also partly match funded by the English Football League to run a CE project bringing young people together as part of the Peace Jam international programme. Through sport the young people complete a social action project in their own community exploring issues of culture and identity and challenging extremist narratives.
- 6.9.3 Remedi obtained BSBT funding to deliver 50 Counter Extremism workshops in schools across South Yorkshire. The Community Coordinator has supported them to develop the resources and a number of these workshops will be delivered in schools in Rotherham.
- 6.9.4 Stop Hate UK obtained BSBT funding to deliver a hate crime ambassador programme in two schools in Rotherham. These will be delivered in the new school year.

6.10 On-Line and other resources

- 6.10.1 The SRP have developed a section of their website where educational resources are maintained linked to PREVENT, extremism and hate crime making resources easily accessible for schools and colleges. The link to the site is here <https://www.rotherham.gov.uk/srp/resources>
- 6.10.2 In the past 12 months Rotherham Creative Learning Centre has engaged with 1885 families sharing educate against hate's leaflet "protecting your child against extremism."

- 6.10.3 The Safer Rotherham Partnership is developing a hate crime strategy and an element of this will be joint work with schools. For example, the Head teacher of Coleridge Primary school is developing and implementing an innovative policy, inclusive of staff, parents, pupils and curriculum resources, aimed at promoting integration and preventing hate. The policy will be offered as a model to other schools.
- 6.10.4 The Police and Crime Commissioner YOYO project delivered in schools also includes hate crime as a theme. YOYO (You're only young once) utilises videos and podcasts produced by school students in South Yorkshire to educate young people on the consequences of getting involved in activities that could cause them harm. Themes include alcohol awareness, bullying, county lines, CSE, domestic abuse, drug abuse, fire safety, guns, gangs and knives, hate crimes, healthy relationships, road safety, safe strangers, sexting.

7. Next steps

7.1 Planned Activity

- 7.1.1 Harms of Hate 2019 event will be held at Magna on 15th October 2019.
- 7.1.2 The Community Coordinator will continue to deliver assemblies and staff training workshops on the far right threat.
- 7.1.3 The Community Coordinator will develop links with the DfE PREVENT Education Officer regional network to ensure that Rotherham benefits from the collective knowledge and good practice of PEO's around the region.
- 7.1.4 CYPS and the Community Coordinator will deliver a far right awareness workshop for school safeguarding leads at Rockingham Centre.

7.2 Challenges/Risks

- 7.2.1 The council have a hate incident reporting process with schools which is non-statutory. A number of the reports relate directly to incidents of racism and extremism. Whilst some schools engage with the process and report incidents others do not with some never reporting an incident. One of the challenges is to improve engagement of schools with this process in order to ensure that we have a representative picture.
- 7.2.2 The Community Coordinator is actively engaged with 13 of 16 secondary schools. Three schools have to date not utilised the support available.

7.2.3 The Community Coordinator post is currently funded until March 2020. The council is awaiting a decision from the Home office on further funding for 2020/21.

8. Conclusions

- 8.2 Rotherham Council is in a strong position to lead on CE work. There is a strong correlation between the council BSC action plan and actions covered in the government integrated communities strategy indicating that the approach in Rotherham is in line with government thinking. The BSC and thriving neighbourhoods strategies are both recognised in recent LGA reports as good practice.
- 8.3 The current national climate is such that the extremism risk, especially from the far right is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. Anti-Muslim sentiment is increasing and becoming more mainstream and accepted. It is therefore increasingly important to educate young people and provide them with the resilience and critical thinking skills to reject the extremist narratives.
- 8.4 The council is in a strong position to continue the work that has been started with schools. In the main positive relationships have been developed with schools and colleges across the Borough. Further investment needs to be made where this is not the case. There is a programme of work which is effectively challenging extremism and being recognised as good practice nationally in the case of "Harms of Hate". Partners are also delivering against this agenda and will continue to do so.
- 8.5 Countering extremism is a key priority for national government with significant investment being made through both the Building a Stronger Britain together programme which includes funding for Community Coordinators as well as the development of the SIGCE network and the establishment of an independent commission led by Sara Khan.

9. Actions arising

10. Name and contact details

Report Author(s) Shokat Lal
Assistant Chief Executive
01709 822773
Shokat.lal@rotherham.gov.uk

Ian Stubbs
Community Engagement Coordinator
Assistant Chief Executives Directorate
01709 823087
ian.stubbs@rotherham.gov.uk