

TOWARDS PREVENTING VIOLENT RADICALISATION

PRACTICE GUIDELINES

WORKING WITH VIOLENT EXTREMISTS



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1. Introduction

1.1 Context

These guidelines have been developed as a result of a two year research project, Towards Preventing Violent Radicalisation (TPVR), led by London Probation Trust (LPT) in partnership with the Violence Prevention Network (VPN) in Germany, Stockwell Green Community Services and the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) in the UK, part funded by the European Commission.

Both London Probation Trust and Violence Prevention Network have been working with offenders who have been convicted of offences motivated by violent extremist views. For example, in Germany VPN has been working primarily with those convicted of violent offences linked to right wing extremism, or neo-Nazis. They have developed a modular group-work intervention programme which is conducted in prison, but with some post-release follow up and support. In the UK, London Probation Trust is working with offenders convicted under anti-terrorist legislation, some of whom have now been released on licence back into the community. They are working on a one-to-one basis, and although they are accountable for compliance with the licence conditions, they are developing partnerships with local Muslim community groups which can have a greater influence on the offender's thinking and behaviour.

During the lifetime of this project there have been many research interviews conducted with offenders, practitioners, managers and policy makers. There have also been various events, conferences and workshops which have facilitated open discussion of the issues involved in working with these challenging groups. These guidelines are intended to reflect the comments, concerns and suggestions from all these meetings as a starting point to develop consistent and good practice.

These guidelines recognise that there are several stakeholders in the process of supervising violent extremist offenders and that these stakeholders will vary in different countries and contexts. However, it is likely that the concerns of each stakeholder group will be reflected in different environments, although their role and status may vary.

1.2 Purpose

i. To support all stakeholders involved

The purpose of these guidelines is to acknowledge the concerns of all stakeholders in the process and offer ways of working together which are likely to produce the most effective practice, based on mutual respect and recognition of the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder group. These stakeholders may include statutory agencies, community and voluntary organisations, family members and victims.

ii. To facilitate interagency co-operation

Through discussions with all the stakeholders concerned, the perceptions and concerns of each have been identified, which should enhance an open dialogue between partner organisations and address the relevant issues.

iii. To help manage risk

As a result of improved communication and a better understanding of the different roles, responsibilities and accountability of each stakeholder group, initial and on-going risk assessment should become a shared process. This should make a significant contribution to identifying and reducing the risk of reoffending.

iv. To be organic/evolve in response to experience

This is not intended to be a definitive set of guidelines, but rather a basis on which to build as experience develops. New stakeholders may emerge with different issues and support needs. It may also be the basis for good practice

guidelines in other countries, with a very different judicial environment and culture.

1.3 Intended Audience

These guidelines are intended to be of use to the following stakeholders:

- Probation and Prisons
- Police areas
- Community groups
- Security/intelligence services
- Local authorities
- Ministries

2. Organisational Issues & Guidelines

2.1 Agreed strategy

It is critical that organisations have a clear and agreed strategy for working with radicalised offenders, whether faith or politically motivated. The strategy may be amended in the light of experience, but this requires a systematic review of the effectiveness of the implementation and practice.

2.2 Funding

Whatever the strategic approach to working with this group of offenders, it is inevitably resource intensive. Organisations may have to consider their priorities in allocating resources or identify external sources of funding. Where an organisation has been commissioned to provide a service or share the supervision of these offenders, it is important that they should be adequately reimbursed, unless this would compromise their legitimacy with the offender.

2.3 Risk management

The process of assessing and managing risk must be clearly understood by all stakeholders, with regular and well documented reviews and clear lines of accountability. All stakeholders must take responsibility for their contribution to these reviews, with clear and robust risk assessment tools. Although there are various risks to consider, the risk of reoffending and public protection should always take precedence.

2.4 Information sharing

Within organisations there should be agreed protocols for sharing relevant information vertically and horizontally through the management structure.

Ideally this should be done through an electronic case file system where new information can be flagged and all relevant stakeholders alerted. Although a reluctance to report casual remarks may be understandable, they can reinforce or validate other sources of information. Too much information is better than too little.

2.5 Communications/Media

External communications need to be carefully managed and there should be no response to media enquiries until a statement (or position) has been agreed by all relevant stakeholders. A joint media strategy should be agreed with a Single Point of Contact for all enquiries. Some media interest can be anticipated, such as release dates, deportation and court hearings.

2.6 Assessment of Third Party (partner) Organisations

When engaging with a third party organisation, it is important to ensure that their values and ethics are consistent with those of the accountable agency. Some community groups may not have a formal constitution, but a statement of purpose should be available. It may also be useful to talk to any other organisations who have worked with them to determine reliability etc.

2.7 Reputational Risk

Working with violent extremists will create situations that make organisations vulnerable to criticism and exposure. All stakeholders must ensure that protocols and procedures are in place and followed to avoid the risk of damaging the reputation of the organisation.

3. Practitioner Issues & guidelines

3.1 Personal attributes

It is important that practitioners assigned to supervise violent extremist offenders have great confidence in their professional integrity and resilience. They should be non-judgemental, but prepared to challenge unacceptable language and behaviour. It is important to demonstrate respect for the person, their experiences and beliefs, without condoning their actions.

3.2 Skills

The ability to communicate at a sophisticated level is vital; critical listening, reasoning and dialogue are essential elements to undermining distorted thinking. The relationship between the practitioner and offender, based on trust and respect, is the critical element to creating a positive influence which enables the offender to reflect on their attitudes and behaviours without losing their self-respect. The VPN model describes this as critical attentiveness, which seeks out points of contention and conflict, at the same time observing the basic distinction between the person, which is accepted, and the offence, which is confronted.

3.3 Knowledge

Practitioners need to develop a good knowledge of the culture, environment and belief systems of the violent extremist offenders they are supervising. An ability to understand the history and current political issues are essential tools to being confident in their dialogue with offenders. When working with partners they need to be confident in working with them around specific faith and cultural issues. They also need to have a good knowledge of the local environment, family structures and experiences which will indicate positive and negative influences.

3.4 Techniques

Practitioners will develop individual approaches and techniques to working with violent extremists and these will vary according to the organisation and the nature of the offending. It may be appropriate to include a group-work approach, where the influence of peers and group dynamics may have a positive impact. This is considered critical to the success of the VPN model, where the group-dynamic relationships and “open process” approach form the vehicle for changes in attitudes and behaviour. Individual approaches which may include a “lifeline” or “personal journey” exploration may also be useful. The use of film clips or news stories to open a discussion may reveal more authentic responses than hypothetical questions.

3.5 Support

Identify other practitioners who are working with similar offenders to create a supportive network and share ideas, concerns and issues. Use line management supervision to raise practice issues and ensure the case remains in focus.

3.6 Developing practice

Creating a portfolio of case studies, techniques and experience can make a valuable contribution to developing good practice and sharing learning. Using the practitioner support networks to engage in reflective practice, identifying what did and did not work and why, will support continuing professional development.

4. Offender Manager Issues & Guidelines

4.1 Support network

Through your line manager and colleagues, create a network of offender managers who have responsibility for violent extremist offenders, to share concerns and effective practice. This will help alleviate stress.

4.2 Support for practitioners & community groups

Provide support to your practitioners and any community groups they are working in partnership with. This will improve communication and help identify issues before they become problems. It will also help alleviate their stress.

4.3 Clarity of role

Be clear about your role in the process and ensure that your practitioners and line manager share your understanding of the lines of accountability.

4.4 Information sharing

You may well be the channel for communication both from the practitioners and community groups, but also from senior management and external organisations. Ensure the right people have the right information.

4.5 Risk management

In order to manage the risk of harm to others, it is critical that all offender behaviours pertaining to security and/or protection issues are monitored and communicated to all stakeholders. Risk assessment tools should be shared between partners and regularly reviewed. Agree with your line manager and

interagency partners the consequences of increased risk, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for action.

4.6 Knowledge of local resources

Use your local contacts and networks to ensure you are aware of relevant local resources. Make contact with community groups and establish a positive relationship with them, finding out what they can and can't offer to support offenders in the local community.

4.7 Specialist knowledge of culture & history

Research the culture and history of the violent extremist offenders relevant to your area. Talk to relevant people to increase your understanding of the process of violent radicalisation, whether based on faith, ethnicity or politics.

5. Interagency Issues & Guidelines

5.1 Mutual respect

It is likely that several agencies or organisations will be involved in supervising violent extremist offenders, each with an important role to play. Each organisation needs to believe that they are respected and that their contribution is equally valuable. It is sometimes easy for large statutory agencies to disregard the importance of small local organisations.

5.2 Transparency

All negotiations, communications and commissioning should be conducted in an open and transparent way. This requires complete honesty on the part of all stakeholders, in order that any concerns may be raised and discussed in a positive way.

5.3 Boundaries

All organisations involved in supervising violent extremist offenders must be aware of the limits of their involvement as part of a statutory process. This should be explicit in the inter agency protocols and case management plan.

5.4 Roles & responsibilities

In a similar way all agencies or organisations involved must be very clear about not only their own role and responsibility, but also those of the other stakeholders in the process. The use of Service Level Agreements should provide the basis of a shared understanding of roles and expectations. They can also be helpful in monitoring and reviewing progress.

5.5 Confidentiality & security

All organisations involved must respect the confidentiality of the information which is shared between them and ensure that all records are securely stored. It is sometimes difficult for front line practitioners to share highly sensitive information with statutory agencies, but it is critical that they trust the interagency partnership to respond appropriately. The VPN model is prison based and considers that their practitioners must be external to the institution in order to provide a “secure and confidential space” for the participants.

5.6 Two-way information sharing

Similarly, it is vital that any relevant information is shared between agencies and front line practitioners, particularly if there any concerns about the offender’s behaviour.

5.7 Disparity of resources

It is important to acknowledge that inevitably there will be a disparity of resources between the different organisations involved, particularly if a small community group is part of the interagency partnership. However, smaller groups should not feel disadvantaged by a lack of resources and should be encouraged to participate fully in the process. This could be supported by an independent facilitator as suggested in 4.9 below.

5.8 Capacity building & training

Where smaller community groups demonstrate their ability to make a significant contribution to the supervision of violent extremists, managing risk and reducing reoffending, the statutory agencies might explore ways of building their capacity and supporting relevant training. Similarly, community groups with specialist knowledge may be well placed to offer training events to the statutory partners.

5.9 Shared outcome goals

Throughout the process of interagency working, it is important that the outcome goals are shared by all stakeholders and that they are clearly stated and reviewed at regular intervals. It may be useful to consider an independent facilitator at interagency meetings as a form of process supervision.

Appendices:

TPVR research report