

Have you got what it takes?

Counter terrorism policing and Special Branch



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Important Facts

Terrorism remains one of the highest priority risks to national security. The aim of the Government's counter-terrorism strategy is to reduce this risk so that people can go about their lives freely and with confidence. The police service play a vital role in making this happen.

Within each force, this role includes: working locally to prevent radicalisation; protecting public places, transport systems, key infrastructure and other sites from terrorist attack; and being prepared to coordinate the response of the emergency services during or after a terrorist attack.

An important part, primarily by acquiring and developing intelligence on individuals of national security interest, is also played by each force's Special Branch, the department within police forces that plays a leading role in countering threats to national security.

The Strategic Policing Requirement (SPR) articulates the Home Secretary's views of the national threats that the police must address and the policing capabilities required to counter those threats. In relation to counter terrorism, PCCs and chief constables must consider the areas set out in the SPR and must satisfy themselves that they:

- understand their respective roles in preparing for and tackling shared threats, risks and harm;

- Agree, where appropriate in agreement and collaboration with other forces or partners, the contribution that is expected of them; and
- have the capacity to meet that expectation, taking properly into account the remit and contribution of other bodies (particularly national agencies) with responsibilities in the areas set out in the SPR.

In doing so, they must demonstrate that they have taken into account the need for appropriate capacity to:

- **Contribute to CONTEST by working with partners to:**
 - **Pursue:** identify, disrupt, and investigate terrorist activity, and prosecute terrorist suspects;
 - **Prevent:** identify and divert those involved in or vulnerable to radicalisation;
 - **Protect:** protect the UK border, the critical national infrastructure, civil nuclear sites, transport systems, and the public; and
 - **Prepare:** lead the immediate response after or during a terrorist attack, including responding to incidents involving chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear (CBRN), firearms and explosive material.

More Information

The Government's counter-terrorism strategy

The United Kingdom's strategy for countering terrorism is known as CONTEST. You can find out more on the Home Office's website at: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/counter-terrorism/counter-terrorism-strategy

Community Engagement

Police interaction with the public through neighbourhood policing and other initiatives (including media campaigns) reassure communities about the risk from terrorism and remind the public to remain vigilant. The police also play a key role in local resilience forums as the agency that leads the immediate response to a terrorist incident or attack. "Prevent" is the strand of the Government's counter-terrorism strategy that seeks to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism, and the police contribute to this by working in communities with their partners (including local authorities) to identify and divert those involved in, or vulnerable to, radicalisation.

The work of Special Branch

Special Branches, which in some police forces are now known as counter-terrorism branches because of the focus in recent years on counter-

terrorism work, concentrate on acquiring and developing intelligence on individuals of national security interest. They also continue to play important roles in policing extremist activity and in the provision of personal protection for VIPs.

The Strategic Policing Requirement

Terrorism is listed as one of the six national threats covered in the SPR. PCCs are required to 'have regard to' this SPR when issuing or varying their police and crime plans. They must keep the police and crime plan under review in light of any changes made to the SPR by the Home Secretary. Chief constables must have regard to both the police and crime plan and the SPR when exercising their functions.

The Police Counter-Terrorism Network

The Police Counter-Terrorism Network comprises the Metropolitan Police's Counter Terrorism Command and eight regional hubs located across England and Wales. All police forces in England and Wales support the Network, and are, in turn, supported by it.

