



# A Shared Future: A Report of the Greater Manchester Tackling Hateful Extremism and Promoting Social Cohesion Commission

**MEND Response**

Muslim engagement  
& development

**mend**

# A Shared Future: A Report of the Greater Manchester Tackling Hateful Extremism and Promoting Social Cohesion Commission

## **A Response from Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND)**

On Monday 30<sup>th</sup> July 2018, the Greater Manchester Tackling Hateful Extremism and Promoting Social Cohesion Commission published a report exploring the findings of their review into tackling violent extremism and promoting social cohesion. While offering a number of valuable insights and policy recommendations, the report also exhibits certain key perspectives and conclusions that are cause for concern. The following brief discussion is MEND's initial analysis of the key findings of the report.

### Summary

The report highlights a number of valuable insights, including:

- A call for investing in youth in overcoming barriers to education, employment, training and socialising.
- Acknowledgement of the role of socio-economic inequalities as barriers to social cohesion.
- Committing to an audit of Hate Crime Reporting centres in encouraging awareness and reporting of hate crime.
- A criticism of reductions in public services as an obstacle to intercommunity interaction.
- A call for extending community engagement so all voices are heard and acknowledged within policy discourse.
- Rejecting a Greater Manchester Charter.
- Acknowledging that radicalisation is a complex social phenomenon driven by a multitude of factors beyond merely religion.

However, it also presents assumptions and conclusions that give cause for concern, including:

- Conflating security and social cohesion.
- Furthering the language of securitisation.
- Assuming an a priori position that PREVENT is a positive measure and, therefore, failing to objectively consider the lack of evidence underpinning PREVENT and thus relying on a flawed foundation.
- Suggesting that the problem is the existence of misunderstandings surrounding PREVENT and a false perception that it disproportionately targets Muslim

communities without considering a substantial field of evidence demonstrating that the strategy does indeed disproportionately target and affect Muslims.

- Suggesting that those who oppose PREVENT are the problem by maliciously communicating the aims of PREVENT and by spreading inaccurate information and propaganda to create fear in communities. Such a position serves only to actively shut down criticism of PREVENT and thereby limit democratic debate.
- Viewing PREVENT as safeguarding.
- Ignoring the opinions of a multitude of academics and community organisations who have opposed and criticised PREVENT and instead encouraging the expansion of PREVENT, despite the Joint Committee on Human Rights call for an independent review of PREVENT.

### A promise of fruitful socio-economic strategies

The commission makes a number of highly valuable reflections and recommendations regarding the impacts of socio-economic inequalities on cohesion and the manifestation of hatred. Amongst these beneficial observations and suggestions are:

**Investment in youth:** The call for “additional investment in young people and the services that they use”<sup>1</sup> through initiatives such as encouraging affordable transport as a mechanism for overcoming “barriers to education, employment, training and socialising”.<sup>2</sup> The report also recommends developing opportunities for mentoring and opportunities “for a wide range of ages and backgrounds to interact, exchange ideas, skills and knowledge, thus reducing social isolation, and making meaningful, mutually beneficial relationships.”<sup>3</sup>

**Socio-economic inequalities:** The acknowledgement that social and economic inequalities are likely to have a negative impact on social cohesion and the subsequent conclusion that addressing economic opportunity is key in promoting social cohesion and integration. One exemplar suggestion proffered by the commission to address these inequalities is to lobby the Government to mandate all employers publish employer demographic data, including the number of BAME employees and the number of BAME and female employees in senior management roles.

**Encouraging the reporting of hate crime:** A proposal to conduct a refresh of the 2016 audit into Hate Crime Reporting Centres combined with a campaign to promote awareness of the reporting centres and encourage the reporting of hate crime which is currently notoriously under-reported.

**Criticism of reductions in public services:** According to the report, reductions in public services have deprived communities of opportunities for people from both similar and different backgrounds to meet naturally and have conversations. This has led to the increased isolation and exacerbated fear and suspicion of different communities. In overcoming this challenge, the report recommends a variety of useful suggestions, including initiatives to

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<sup>1</sup> A Shared Future: Response from the Rt Hon Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, and the Rt Hon Baroness Beverley Hughes, Deputy Mayor for Policing & Crime.

<sup>2</sup> A Shared Future: A Report of the Greater Manchester Tackling Hateful Extremism and Promoting Social Cohesion Commission, p7. See [http://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/770/a\\_shared\\_future.pdf](http://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/770/a_shared_future.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p9.

encourage free or reduced-price accommodation for voluntary, community and social enterprises to hold regular activities and meetings that benefit the community.

**Fixing a broken relationship:** A key contribution of the report is its criticism of the manner in which community engagement has traditionally focused on a “minority of the population who are regularly called on to provide their views” and a subsequent feeling that “some people are being silenced and their views repressed.”<sup>4</sup> This is highly encouraging considering the Government’s current policy of disengagement from a large swathe of mainstream Muslim organisations. This policy of non-engagement creates a huge strain on Muslim communities who feel they are not properly represented nor acknowledged. As noted by Dominic Grieve in the Citizens UK report *The Missing Muslims*, “There is a broken relationship that needs to be resolved, and both parties need to be proactive in addressing this.”<sup>5</sup> In line with this analysis, the commission rightly calls for extending the networks and reach of community engagement.

**Rejecting a Greater Manchester Charter:** The report rejects the idea of a Greater Manchester Charter as a means to promote social cohesion. The report concludes that an “attempt to impose an identity on people that was not wanted, would have little impact... Identity is far more meaningful and authentic when it develops naturally and organically from within communities, rather than being driven by the public sector.”<sup>6</sup>

**Acknowledging that radicalisation is a complex social phenomenon:** Encouragingly, the report acknowledges that radicalisation is a complex social phenomenon with multiple motivations and drivers and without a simple solution. It refers to political and cultural influences rather than religion as the driving forces behind radicalisation, as well as noting the fact that political grievances towards Western foreign policy has a prominent role as a risk factor for radicalisation. The report also calls for greater transparency of statistics surrounding Channel referrals stemming from the Home Office.

### A dangerous conflation of security and social cohesion

Despite the highly valuable aforementioned contributions made by the report, the overarching premise of conflating security and social cohesion is ultimately incredibly dangerous and counter-productive for a number of reasons:

**Conflating security and social cohesion:** The recommendation that the commission’s report should be submitted as the Greater Manchester response to the Government’s Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper consultation is fundamentally flawed. Counter-terror strategies such as PREVENT have previously been widely condemned as hugely damaging to cohesion and inclusion of minorities. Therefore, it is imperative that strategies of community integration and of counter-terrorism do not overlap, as this can only result in the further securitisation of an already problematic tripartite relationship between government, society and minorities.

**Securitised language:** The report acknowledges that there are no agreed definitions for extremism nor radicalisation. However, it proceeds to shoehorn these ill-defined and

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p8.

<sup>5</sup> “The Missing Muslims: Unlocking British Muslim Potential for the Benefit of All”, Report by the Citizens Commission on Islam, Participation and Public Life, accessed 04.06.2018, [https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/newcitizens/pages/1261/attachments/original/1499106471/Missing\\_Muslims\\_Report\\_-\\_Electronic\\_copy.pdf?1499106471](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/newcitizens/pages/1261/attachments/original/1499106471/Missing_Muslims_Report_-_Electronic_copy.pdf?1499106471)

<sup>6</sup> A Shared Future: A Report of the Greater Manchester Tackling Hateful Extremism and Promoting Social Cohesion Commission, p10.

securitised terminologies into its analysis in a way that does not seem entirely necessarily. The report states that within its remit “‘hateful extremism’ is used to refer to both ideas and behaviours that are hateful towards specific ‘others’ and designed to undermine social cohesion”.<sup>7</sup> One must question why the terms such as “inter-community animosity”, “intolerance”, or simply “hatred”, or a plethora of other fitting vocabularies could not have been used. The impression is, therefore, that the choice of terminology is a calculated tool to further conflate integration and counter-terror strategies.

**A flawed foundation regarding PREVENT:** The commission’s examination of PREVENT is built upon the erroneous a priori assumption that PREVENT is fit for purpose. Indeed, in responding to the report, Rt Hon Andy Burnham and the Rt Hon Baroness Beverley Hughes observe that “Prevent is the right mechanism and is working well in many areas”.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, all key lines of inquiry concerning PREVENT stem from a flawed foundation and focus on the problems surrounding the public perception of PREVENT, thereby failing to account for the challenges that emanate directly from the strategy itself. For example, while the report acknowledges that there is a significant lack of safe spaces to have difficult conversations, it simultaneously provides but a passing and dismissive comment and severe lack of analysis to the chilling effects of PREVENT in prohibiting discussions.<sup>9</sup>

**Ignoring the criticisms of hundreds of academics, experts, and community organisations:** PREVENT has been criticised by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. These critics include (but are not limited to) three special rapporteurs to the UN,<sup>10</sup> the Joint Committee on Human Rights, the NUT, the NUS, the former Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, Rights Watch UK, the Open Society Justice Initiative, and more than 140 academics, politicians and experts in a single letter alone. The weight of this expert opposition to the strategy makes the commission’s a priori assumption that PREVENT is fit for purpose of great concern.

**Failing to acknowledge the impacts of PREVENT and shutting down criticism of the strategy:** The report suggests that there is are misunderstandings surrounding PREVENT and a false perception that it disproportionately targets Muslim communities without considering a substantial field of evidence demonstrating that the strategy does indeed disproportionately target and affect Muslims. Furthermore, the report states that, “if the perception of the Prevent Strategy is different from the reality, then that can be exploited by those seeking to undermine any form of counter-terrorism strategy.”<sup>11</sup> The report positions those whom oppose PREVENT as the problem by maliciously communicating the aims of PREVENT and by spreading inaccurate information and propaganda to create fear in communities This is a highly dangerous precedent to set. Such a position automatically infers that anyone who legitimately criticises the current PREVENT strategy are actively and nefariously attempting to subvert and undermine counter-terror efforts. This is a damaging accusation that is often used as a mechanism for shutting down Muslim voices in particular and is thus severely limiting to democratic debate and contributes to the public and political exclusion of Muslims. Such a limitation is clearly in direct conflict with any attempt to encourage social cohesion.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p22.

<sup>8</sup> A Shared Future: Response from the Rt Hon Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, and the Rt Hon Baroness Beverley Hughes, Deputy Mayor for Policing & Crime.

<sup>9</sup> A Shared Future: A Report of the Greater Manchester Tackling Hateful Extremism and Promoting Social Cohesion Commission, p81-82.

<sup>10</sup> Maina Kiai (UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of assembly and association), Ben Emmerson (UN Special Rapporteur on the protection and promotion of human rights while countering terrorism), and Tendayi Achiume (UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance).

<sup>11</sup> A Shared Future: Response from the Rt Hon Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, and the Rt Hon Baroness Beverley Hughes, Deputy Mayor for Policing & Crime.

**PREVENT as safeguarding:** The report states that, “Prevent needs to be about safeguarding, not criminalizing”.<sup>12</sup> However, there are severe dangers in framing PREVENT as safeguarding. Ordinarily within safeguarding, it is the welfare of the individual person in question that is of concern because you're trying to protect that person; whereas, with PREVENT, you're protecting the state from that person. This creates confusion in how to approach safeguarding needs. As concluded by the civil rights campaigners, Liberty, “while everyone in society has moral and ethical obligations to report suspected criminality, requiring teachers and others in sensitive positions of trust to report those with dissenting views risks undermining professional obligations of confidentiality, sowing mistrust and pushing those with grievances further underground.”<sup>13</sup>

**Expanding the remit of PREVENT:** According to the report, “the Commission endorses a second pilot of Operation Dovetail (the transferring of safeguarding responsibilities under Prevent from the police to the Local Authority).”<sup>14</sup> There are a series of major concerns regarding this statement, including (but not limited to):

- **Who is qualified to determine signs of radicalisation?:** A serious question needs to be asked as to whom (if anyone) is qualified to determine signs of radicalisation, especially considering that it is in no way a science, rather it is a multifaceted process unique to every individual (as the commission itself rightly observes). Meanwhile, the Government presently has no clear working definitions of extremism, non-violent extremism, British Values, nor radicalisation. With roughly 600,000 WRAP-trained staff attempting to identify radicalisation with a view to tackling extremism, this lack of objective understanding causes confusion in PREVENT’s application. Indeed, a severe lack of effective training was highlighted by the Home Affairs Committee who noted, “We are concerned about a lack of sufficient and appropriate training in an area that is complex and unfamiliar to many education and other professionals, compounded by a lack of clarity about what is required of them.”<sup>15</sup> The result is that those tasked with carrying out the PREVENT duty become reliant upon personal perceptions, bias, and popular stereotypes when assessing those considered to be at risk of radicalisation. If the duty were to be further extended amongst local authorities without suitable re-evaluation of the training procedures, this confusion will only be compounded. This severe inadequacy of training is an issue that is even acknowledged by the commission itself.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, recommendations to extend the duty are doubly surprising and concerning.
- **PREVENT is in conflict with fundamental Human Rights:** MEND firmly believes that PREVENT is in direct conflict with Article 9 (freedom of thought, belief and religion), Article 10 (freedom of expression), and Article 11 (freedom of association) of the Human Rights Act 1998 and the European Convention on Human Rights, as well as Article 2 of the First Protocol (the right to education). The report’s suggestion is particularly concerning considering it comes in the wake of the Joint Committee on

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<sup>12</sup> A Shared Future: A Report of the Greater Manchester Tackling Hateful Extremism and Promoting Social Cohesion Commission, p84.

<sup>13</sup> “Liberty’s Second Reading briefing on the Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill...” p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> A Shared Future: A Report of the Greater Manchester Tackling Hateful Extremism and Promoting Social Cohesion Commission, p94.

<sup>15</sup> House of Commons, “Radicalisation: the counter-narrative and identifying the tipping point - Eighth report of Session 2016-17”, August 25, 2016, accessed June 20, 2018, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmhaaff/135/135.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> A Shared Future: A Report of the Greater Manchester Tackling Hateful Extremism and Promoting Social Cohesion Commission, p86.

Human Rights' condemnation of the current Counter-Terror Bill's intention to expand PREVENT and their unequivocal support of MEND's call for an independent review of PREVENT. See MEND's full analysis and submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights [here](#).

## Conclusion

Despite offering valuable recommendations regarding tackling the inequalities that contribute barriers to social cohesion and inclusion, the commission's report is ultimately fundamentally flawed for the following reasons:

- It conflates security and social cohesion.
- It furthers the language of securitisation.
- It assumes an a priori position that PREVENT is a positive measure and fails to objectively consider the lack of evidence underpinning PREVENT.
- It ignores the weight of the body of evidence against PREVENT and instead encourages the expansion of PREVENT, despite the Joint Committee on Human Rights' recent call for an independent review of PREVENT.
- Whilst ignoring this body of evidence, it also suggests that the problem is misunderstandings surrounding PREVENT that are deliberately fuelled by those whom oppose the strategy.
- It views PREVENT as safeguarding.

Considering the commission's disappointingly unnuanced approach to the PREVENT strategy, MEND cannot support the report as a whole, despite the significant and valuable contributions it makes in other areas.