

Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP  
Chair, Home Affairs Select Committee

By email

18 June 2018

Dear Yvette,

## **PARSONS GREEN**

1. On 28 March the Home Secretary's predecessor committed to write to the Committee to provide further information on Ahmed Hassan's interaction with the police and Home Office prior to him detonating an explosive device on the London Underground at Parsons Green on 15 September 2017.
2. This letter sets out a timeline of key events of AH's case (agreed by the Home Office, police and Surrey County Council) and a summary of key recommendations and action taken on those recommendations coming out of an internal review into the case commissioned by the police and Surrey County Council (SCC).
3. The Home Secretary is confident that the measures outlined here, along with efforts already in train, will help to ensure that Channel panels around the country are equipped to address vulnerabilities and manage risk linked to the evolving terrorist threat.

## **Timeline of events**

4. In October 2015 Ahmed Hassan (AH), an Iraqi national, was identified by Surrey Police in Egham, Surrey as having entered the UK illegally. As he claimed to be 16 years old he was treated as an Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child (UASC) and taken into the care of SCC Social Services, who contacted the Home Office Asylum Intake Unit to request an appointment to register his claim. Although AH had previously travelled through Italy on his journey to the UK it was not possible to take Third Country action (through the Dublin Treaty) as he was a minor.
5. He failed to attend an initial screening interview in November 2015. In his rescheduled screening interview (18th January 2016), AH stated that he was taken by force by ISIS but that he was not told at any point to do anything in Europe in their name. Following this interview, the details were provided to SCC who, on assessing the risk, referred to local Police Prevent Officers from Counter-Terrorism Policing South East (CTPSE).

6. CTPSE conducted a gateway discussion including known intelligence and an assessment of the risks and vulnerability. This concluded that AH was suitable for Prevent support and in February 2016 AH was discussed at a Channel meeting following which a vulnerability assessment (using a standard tool known as the Vulnerability Assessment Framework, or VAF) was conducted.
7. In a statement in support of his application for asylum (dated 7th March 2016), AH stated that he was taken by ISIS who talked to him about his duty to fight against the non-believers, and that he was forced to watch executions. In his second asylum Interview (June 2016), AH claimed he had been subjected to intimidation in Iraq by way of threats towards his family. He also described exposure to acts of violence and murder, and disclosed details of ongoing mental health issues.
8. The first formal Channel Panel for AH took place in June 2016. Existing support / protective factors included stable foster care provision in Sunbury, mental health support and commencement on a Head Start Education Programme at college. The Channel Panel decided that these existing protective factors were likely to be sufficient, and agreed to monitor his progress.
9. Consent for AH to take part in the Channel process was given by Surrey County Council. This is usual practice for minors without a legal parent or guardian. Social workers made AH aware that he was in the Channel process.
10. There were a total of nine formal Channel Panel discussions of AH at varying intervals between June 2016 and September 2017, although no Channel Panel meeting took place between January 2017 and June 2017.
11. There were episodes of AH going missing from home in April, August and December 2016. 'Missing from home debriefs' were conducted to a professional standard. However, the police Prevent officers, and therefore the Channel Panel, did not fully consider these absences further in the context of AH's vulnerabilities.
12. The Channel Panel also did not clearly resolve questions they had over AH's mental health treatment / support plan, or the outstanding matter of whether all his suspected mental health conditions had been diagnosed. As such, the relationship between AH's mental health and other vulnerabilities was not clear to the Channel Panel.
13. There was positive support via SCC Children's Services and through the foster care provided; however, the Channel Panel was unable to establish routine Children's Services attendance and reporting to a satisfactory level at the Channel Panel in order to adequately understand any risks from this important aspect of his care.
14. There was positive support and involvement at Channel Panel meetings from key workers involved in his education and academic development.

15. Throughout this time there was an ongoing asylum process. The Channel Panel did not have full visibility of the asylum process, and did not directly contact the Home Office regarding their concerns about perceived delays in assessing his claim.
16. The VAF was updated in August 2016 with little increase in his vulnerability or potential risk.
17. Police Channel practitioners spoke with AH on two occasions, in August and November 2016. These meetings did not raise any additional concerns about AH's risk of becoming involved in terrorism. Police left the November meeting with the impression that AH was making positive progress. However, concerns were raised by a Channel Panel member in January 2017 based on AH's demeanour and behaviour.
18. There was an apparent lack of a formal, documented plan to manage and mitigate AH's vulnerabilities and associated risks. At no stage did the panel request support from a Home Office approved Intervention Provider (who exist to provide specialised mentoring to address the issues around an individual's radicalisation), as there was a greater emphasis on other forms of support, including provision of constructive activities.
19. AH's positive progress at college was the main focus of the Channel Panel, and was considered a significant protective factor. Other concerning events and behaviour involving AH (such as AH going missing from home, and ongoing mental health issues) in some instances were not clearly shared or picked up on by the wider Channel Panel members for further exploration, challenge or intervention. There was a consensus that the case should remain in Channel. However, no violent ideology was confirmed. The Channel Panel were unable to establish a holistic overview taking into account the entirety of AH's turbulent background, mental health concerns, and ongoing behaviour and remarks.
20. The final Channel Panel took place on the 5th September 2017. Considering the ongoing vulnerability assessment and intelligence update, the Channel Panel was in the process of considering closure of AH's case.

## **Recommendations**

21. The internal review commissioned by police and SCC identified a number of learning points and recommendations. Additional work, and information that came to light during the trial, has helped to develop some of the review findings and recommendations. A summary of the consolidated recommendations is provided below, grouped into themes, and with action taken in response. Following completion of the review at the end of December 2017, police, SCC, and the Home Office have followed up at local and national level to take forward recommendations alongside policy changes which were already in train. Taken together, these are designed to ensure that vulnerabilities and risks surrounding individuals such as AH are fully addressed in future.

## Recommendations around immigration and asylum cases within Channel

**Recommendations:** Relevant immigration staff should have appropriate understanding, skills and training around intelligence collection, security, and reporting protocols; and timelines for processing asylum applications in relation to UASCs who are engaged in Channel should be reviewed.

In addition, learning and understanding in relation to the particular issues of dealing with UASCs in Channel should be shared with all Channel Panel Chairs. This should cover, among other things: the role and remit of immigration interviews, intelligence sharing and timescales; an understanding of the asylum application process; the assessment of age; and the sharing of common or emerging 'back stories' or themes in the accounts of UASCs, including learning around 'disguised compliance'.

**Action taken:** A review of existing CT and Prevent training provision to staff in Asylum & Intake and casework (including the National Asylum Intake Unit) will take place to improve awareness of factors to identify in relation to radicalisation, and will emphasise the need for prompt referrals to CT police. Improved processes are being developed to support the identification of the immigration status of individuals referred to Channel. This will help identify where an immigration presence on the Channel Panel could help identify vulnerabilities, including mental health issues. This is particularly pertinent for Channel Panels seeking advice on managing the vulnerabilities of UASCs.

It is reasonable to observe in hindsight that uncertainty around AH's immigration status, combined with other events and developments, was not given due regard at several points along the Channel process. Part of the solution is the creation of a single point of contact for Prevent practitioners and immigration officials to contact Home Office Immigration teams regarding CT related enquires. This has been done and Channel Panel Chairs have been informed so they are able to access the immigration system directly, should an immigration issue arise.

## Recommendations around mental health representation at Channel Panels

**Recommendations:** A relevant mental health practitioner should attend all Channel Panels where mental health concerns have been identified, and steps should be taken to raise awareness of Prevent and Channel among mental health professionals (which should include guidance on what information can be shared whilst respecting the needs of patient confidentiality).

**Action taken:** Mental Health Guidance, published in November 2017, makes it clear that there is an expectation of mental health representation at Channel Panels either in a standing role or a care advisory role. It sets out processes to ensure timely access to mental health support where a suspected mental health need is identified by Channel Panels or Prevent police. Regional NHS Prevent Coordinators are working with local services to implement this. The Home Office funds regional health coordinators to provide support and facilitate engagement.

NHS England published an Information Governance policy in September 2017 for Prevent which includes up to date information sharing protocols and an agreed Prevent referral process.

The Office for Security & Counter Terrorism (OSCT), working with NHS England, has also produced specific e-learning for mental health practitioners. This was published in November 2017.

#### Recommendations around using Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs, and quality assurance of Prevent and Channel delivery

**Recommendations:** Where Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) exist, they should lead delivery of Channel across all local stakeholders. There should be quality assurance of how the Prevent duty and Channel are being delivered, and sharing of good practice. Quality assurance could include dip sampling or peer reviews. Exit interviews for subjects completing the Channel process should be considered.

**Action taken:** While SCC's positive experience of transferring responsibility for Channel to its MASH will be shared with other Channel Panel Chairs, we note that not all MASHs operate in the same way, and we will continue to allow individual local authorities flexibility to determine the most appropriate governance structure for Channel in their area. OSCT is currently considering, alongside its partners in the police, options for quality assurance of Channel processes to support the improvement of Channel delivery, in addition to the current programme of peer reviews.

#### Recommendations around police management of risks within Channel cases

**Recommendations:** All risks and vulnerabilities relating to a live Channel case must be properly assessed, with outcomes clearly recorded on the Channel case management information system. Guidance and training should reflect, in particular, the need for awareness of how CT risks can escalate within Channel cases. CTPSE should review its processes around handling Prevent Case Management information, and their staff should have the highest collective understanding of the vulnerability and risk information which Prevent staff managing cases need to be aware of. VAFs should be regularly updated and Channel Panel members updated with changes in CT risk. National guidance should be refreshed to ensure that key areas are understood, particularly in relation to: the timeliness of meetings; the roles of police Channel practitioner, supervisors and line managers, intelligence management, assessment and review; information sharing; proactive management of actions, enquiries and interventions; and completion of VAFs.

**Action taken:** Police play a vital role in identifying changes to terrorism-related risk posed by individuals and advising Channel stakeholders where risk has escalated. Additional measures to support police in this role are being delivered this year. As part of a wider effort to standardise Prevent Case Management (incorporating learning from this case), the police have introduced new information handling and case management processes, as well as training for the entire police

network. Additional training on vulnerability assessments will be given to all police officers with responsibility for managing Channel cases. New case management guidance and training reflect all the learning points coming out of this case. Within CTPSE, a regional learning review workshop will help to develop standard operating procedures in CTPSE regarding the referral, assessment and information sharing process as identified within the learning review.

#### Recommendations around awareness and training of social workers in Surrey

**Recommendations:** All social care staff and managers should fully understand their role in relation to the Prevent statutory duty (under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015); the purpose and remit of Channel; and the need for full support and involvement at Channel Panels. Training should include the signs of radicalisation, issues around UASCs, and should increase confidence to make constructive challenge at Panels.

**Action taken:** Surrey County Council have implemented changes to manage Channel cases within the existing MASH structure, which includes social services.

#### Recommendations around training for Channel Panel Chairs

**Recommendations:** Tailored induction and training for Channel Panel Chairs should include minimum standards for Panel meetings, with templates for agendas, and sharing of successful case studies. The roles of Intervention Providers should be clarified and chairs should gain a greater understanding of the usefulness of interventions even where a clear ideological theme may not always be entirely clear. Good practice and experience should be shared, including in dealing with suspected 'disguised compliance'.

**Action taken:** National Channel Practitioners Guidance was not fully followed in this case with regard to record keeping, frequency of vulnerability assessments and intelligence developments along with the regular Channel Panel meetings. Channel Panels will be reminded of the need for structured support plans in each case, and the need to regularly review progress in open cases. The Home Office has issued templates for Channel Panel meeting agendas and minutes to assist in more consistent record keeping. A new e-learning package has been designed to enhance training on offer for Channel Panels. This includes detail around support required from partners, and expectations of sharing of information around the vulnerable individual in question to ensure they receive appropriate support. An ongoing programme of work to pass some Channel functions from police to local authorities will incorporate this training.

This case emphasises the need to manage Channel cases in a timely fashion. Statutory Channel guidance suggests that good practice is for:

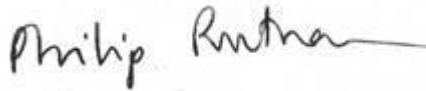
- a) Statutory partners to provide relevant information to police within ten working days of receiving a request;
- b) Channel Panels to discuss ongoing cases on a monthly basis;
- c) Cases to be reassessed at least every three months.

Additional police guidance recommends that the first Channel Panel to discuss a case should take place within 20 working days from receipt by the relevant police team.

OSCT are considering whether a checklist could be developed to assist Channel Panel Chairs manage the exit process and ensure that identified vulnerabilities have been addressed successfully.

OSCT will make clear to Channel Panel Chairs that mentoring from approved Intervention Providers can have clear benefits even when it is difficult to identify a distinctive ideological theme, and that they should err on the side of caution when deciding whether or not to appoint one.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Philip Rutnam". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**Sir Philip Rutnam**  
**Permanent Secretary**