

Have you got what it takes?

Counter-terrorism policing and Special Branch

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 sets out an expectation that the police will also maintain a cross-boundary response that supports the counter-terrorism structures and mechanisms through which forces already work together. These include the nationally coordinated network of regional police counter-terrorism hubs that work closely with police-force special branches and the Security Service (MI5) to identify and disrupt terrorist activity. Most of the costs of counter-terrorism policing are met by ring-fenced central government grants.

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 five main threat areas in the Strategic Policing Requirement. This sets out national arrangements to protect the public. PCCs and chief constables must 'have regard to' (take account of) them, making sure that their police force provide an effective contribution, alongside those of other partners. Special branch work is part of the Strategic Policing Requirement.

The Police Counter-Terrorism Network

The Police Counter-Terrorism Network comprises the Metropolitan Police's Counter-Terrorism Command and eight regional hubs located in the Avon and Somerset, Hertfordshire, Greater Manchester, Nottinghamshire, South Wales, Thames Valley, West Midlands, and West Yorkshire police areas. All police forces in England and Wales support the Network, and are, in turn, supported by it.