



Channel Good Practice Guide

Based on learning developed by Partner Agencies within
Blackburn with Darwen

June 2017

Introduction

In 2015, a Channel case became the subject of national and international media interest when the teenage subject was subsequently convicted of terrorism offences.

This summary highlights salient points from an internal debrief conducted with key staff from the statutory agencies involved in the case. It provides useful guidance on the practical delivery and management of complex Channel cases and is intended to be a point of reference to support local authorities and partners should they experience a high profile, dynamic incident of this nature.

Summary of case

Original concerns were reported to Channel when the individual was 13 years old. He told his teacher that he wanted to be a Jihadist, sympathized with Osama Bin Laden, talked about the Middle East and had issues with authority. He confirmed that he researched current affairs on the internet to seek the truth, had no friends due to moving areas and felt he was the 'man of the house' due to his father no longer living in the family home.

Channel consent was not provided so the case was referred to other statutory safeguarding processes.

A year later, a further Channel referral was submitted by staff at the new school the boy was then attending. They had concerns that his behaviour had escalated in terms of aggression, he was now fixated with Daesh and 'dying for the cause' and spoke of placing staff on a beheading list.

Consent was provided to share information with agencies and to engage with Channel. Significant support was given to the boy and his family, including access to an intervention provider specializing in ideology, a key worker within the school and mentoring. A Children's Social Care assessment was on-going but the case did not hit the Child Protection threshold as all his basic needs were being met.

A police Channel officer maintained daily contact with the school, which was supportive of the process throughout. They reported his desire to travel to Syria; vocalization of more extreme views and a belief that his opinions were right; and escalation from verbal abuse to intimidation of staff and students.

A further report was submitted by the school of physical aggression towards staff, including threats to kill and aggression towards teachers.

After an in-depth discussion, the Channel Panel made the unanimous decision that in view of the threat to staff, the line had been crossed in terms of potential criminality and that the case should be shared with the wider police family (i.e. non counter terrorism).

Concerns raised were assessed by the police in relation to the criminal threshold. It was determined there was sufficient evidence to justify an investigation around threats to kill members of school staff and a decision made to arrest.

Subsequently a decision was made to exit the case from the Channel Panel as further offences had come to light that identified that the case was no longer within the non-criminal space.

Enquiries revealed the extent to which the boy, now 14, was radicalised and potentially planning an attack through online contact. His phone, when examined by police, showed his screensaver was the Daesh flag, there were beheading videos stored on the handset and he had been using encrypted apps to communicate with an 18 year old man in Australia to plan an attack on Anzac Day.

Both boys were arrested by for Terrorism offences by their respective police forces.

In the immediate aftermath, a multi-agency consequence management plan was put in place for partners to discuss ongoing support for the individual, his family, staff working on the case, etc. This was in the backdrop to intense media scrutiny and reporting restrictions to protect the identity of the individual and his family.

In October 2015, the boy admitted inciting terrorism overseas and became Britain's youngest convicted terrorist.

Good Practice & Recommendations

Information Sharing

Consideration should be given to the complexities associated with the protection of sensitive data, which is further complicated by legal frameworks that restrict the sharing of such information with partner agencies responsible for the safeguarding of vulnerable individuals.

- Regular contact between the police and staff working with the Individual is crucial to ensure information is shared appropriately and acted upon in an effective manner. This is a key aspect of the daily management of cases of this nature and helps dynamic assessment of the ongoing threat and risk.
- Establish a “*Single Form of Words*” from the police which can be shared with all agencies involved in the case management, in order for clear and concise actions to be allocated.
- An early decision on which agency will take the administrative lead and responsibility for documenting actions is important
- Requests for the sharing of information need to be carefully managed.
- Only share information on a ‘need to know’ basis.

Media Handling

The media, including tabloid journalists, are highly likely to attempt to find information through a variety of means, for example phoning all the education establishments to identify where a pupil attended, ‘door stepping’ staff and family and attempting to gain statements from agencies and politicians.

- It is vital that all partners have clear guidelines in terms of media management to ensure a consistent approach which does not undermine both the legal or child protection processes whilst at the same time acknowledges the potential for case workers to be exposed to media scrutiny.
- Forward planning is essential. Establish a partnership media strategy and identify a lead agency, with a clear chain of command. This is usually the police in these circumstances.

There needs to a process for handling requests, guidance for anybody who is approached and key messages to inform both reactive and proactive PR.

- Look at possible key milestones and ensure a communications professional is at court. Have the content the media will want ready and regularly review it.
- Careful consideration should be given when choosing a spokesperson. Anyone undertaking media interviews needs to be fully supported by a Communications professional.
- Monitor social media and respond where appropriate.
- Ensure Communications professionals are included as a key stakeholder in information sharing protocols. The stakeholder list for both media handling and information sharing could likely look as diverse as police (regional and local), LA, NHS, school/educational establishment, GP, voluntary sector services, charities, drug and alcohol services, specialist teams, housing providers etc.

Safeguarding the Individual & Family

For all Counter Terrorism cases, consideration must be given to the safeguarding of family and/or associates of the subject and to mitigate any wider repercussions from the community in which they live.

- A multi-agency assessment of needs should be conducted, led by the LA and taking into account the impact on health, wellbeing and general family life (particularly if there are other minors, siblings, children or vulnerable adults within the immediate family circle).
- Temporary accommodation may need to be considered i.e. moving to another borough or a community where the family will not be identified and are able to live cohesively.
- Availability of corporate credit cards in the event of making purchases/booking accommodation to ensure safety of individual and their families is an important consideration.

Wellbeing of Professionals

Consideration must be given to the wellbeing of all professionals involved in high profile cases. Reassurance from colleagues and senior managers is important to ensure anxieties are kept to a minimum.

- It is recommended that case workers have contact details for colleagues and managers who are able to offer support and reassurance (this should also include out of hours).
- Senior managers should have oversight of the case and maintain regular contact with key staff.
- The Channel Panel chair should have an overarching view of the case and the actions undertaken by staff and should be the point of contact for professionals if the matter is escalated i.e. police decision to arrest. This is to ensure that communication is consistent, well-coordinated and any concerns are considered and allayed from the outset.
- Police should provide briefings in relation to personal protection issues to staff involved in such cases

Case management

There is an expectation that there will be different approaches to managing cases, based upon the nature of the case and the services around the subject and/or family. It is important that all actions are agreed and that there are funds available where needed (in the instance of relocating families etc.)

- An open and honest approach to managing the case is crucial in order to coordinating it effectively. Any disagreements should be structured and worked through in order to achieve the best outcome.
- Development of a 'Consequence Management Plan' to provide all agencies guidance and support should be considered.
- Establishing a cohort of staff with specific specialisms who could take the lead on cases of this nature is advised. Providing workshops/training to enhance their knowledge and develop their skills and confidence within this complex area of work is also recommended.

Acknowledgements

Headteacher

This was a new situation we found ourselves in as a school and although we had received full training, to be part of an enquiry of this severity was at times overwhelming.

The impact on the school was immense and cannot be underestimated; we were immersed into a full police investigation which involved daily conversations with Counter Terrorism police, the Channel Team and the local authority, discussions with staff about managing the boy in class and supporting his family and the wider school. These conversations did not stop at the end of the school day; they spanned over weekends and involved key personnel from school.

As the situation became more serious with potential risks to staff, their welfare, personal safety and wellbeing became a priority. The level of confidentiality, media scrutiny, reporting restrictions, impact on other students and parents were all issues that had to be dealt with. This case was unique, so as a school, trust in multi-agency work was essential. To have the support from senior colleagues within the police and local authority ensured decision making was a joint agency process and as a school we felt safe in this.

As a Headteacher the case challenged me not just professionally but personally; ensuring all of my staff felt supported and safe along with the wider school community. My school team was outstanding; they understood the need for confidentiality and that I was working with agencies and could not always give the full picture but yet trusted the decisions I made.

My Chair and Vice Chair of Governors, whilst supporting the whole process, also ensured my emotional wellbeing was looked after, reflecting back this was very important as was the support from police and senior leaders within the local authority. The school was fully involved in the whole process, and I knew I could pick up the phone, at any time, if I needed additional support.

Channel Panel Chair

This was a uniquely complex case which had no precedent to refer to and was a steep learning curve for all involved.

As a local authority we have an established framework for multi-agency working and when it came to handling this case, we took the same approach. There was a high level of trust and confidence, working in partnership with the police, school and other key stakeholders which led to effective information sharing between the various agencies involved.

As the circumstances evolved, the challenges increased and the risk heightened, we had a *'we're in this together'* approach which meant that despite not always agreeing, we were able to hold open, honest and transparent discussions. We never lost sight of the key priority to safeguard the individual, his family, other students, staff and the wider public.

Director of Children's Services

I am extremely proud of the hard work, professionalism and dedication shown by staff from the school, local authority and partners who worked together to manage the risk and support each other until the outcome of the court case.

It was a situation no one expected to be in. It is a sign of the strength and courage of our staff, the strategic leadership of the Headteacher and the partnership working of the Channel Panel that ultimately the work done resulted in disrupting a terrorist plot and saving lives on the other side of the world

If you have any enquiries, please contact Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council's Prevent Team on 01254 585 263.