

# Building a bridge

## The Government's anti-terror initiative Prevent has had mixed results in Bristol

A controversial programme aimed at tackling Muslim fundamentalism in Bristol has had mixed results - but experts say it is expected to expand and become even more unaccountable.

The PREVENT programme has put hundreds of thousands of pounds into activities in Bristol in the last three years (see panel).

For Manzoor Hussain, from the Council of Bristol Mosques, this has been an opportunity for the Muslim community in the city to tackle myths and preconceptions which they have taken full advantage of

"I think Bristol is unique in the sophisticated way it has approached the problem," he said. "It has been recognised nationally."

The Government has adopted a four-pronged approach on tackling terrorism under the general programme heading of CONTEST 2.

The four objectives are to: Pursue, Prevent, Protect and Prepare. These four are self-explanatory but it is the Prevent element which has caused most concern.

It has been led by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) but

with a strong anti-terrorist element as well as key input from the Foreign Office, Home Office and the low-key Office for Security and Counter Terrorism and the Research, Information and Communication Unit.

government on extremism, says "It is morally right to give law enforcement agencies the best chance of stopping terrorists before they strike."

However The Guardian published allegations that the PRE-

people felt that the allegation had made their job much more difficult.

"There was a young chap in Bristol who was running a very, very successful PREVENT project and he was extremely frustrated and angry because, all of a sudden, something that he had been doing which he felt was making a real difference to the community in Bristol was tainted."

The select committee subsequently produced a damning report on the PREVENT programme.

Hussain, though, says he has found the police to be very helpful.

"It could have been all about the police but there is a strong community element to it as well," he said. "We have addressed problem areas, the police have been very co-operative and they have changed things on our recommendation."

"The police now come along to Friday prayers where previously they might just have stayed outside."

And he admits that there is ongoing work to use members of the community as gatherers of intelligence.

"We have projects running look-

### Some of the projects PREVENT has funded in Bristol

- Work the Muslim Women's Network
  - Support to Bristol Council of Mosques on various schemes including community leaders and PR training for Imams.
  - Targeting young people in Westbury in light of the Isa Ibrahim arrest.
  - A one month Building the Bridge radio station.
  - Getting creative industries to look at the lack of job opportunities for Muslim communities, particularly the Somalian one.
  - Targeting school with a programme aimed at demystifying Islam through theatre.
  - Research into the demographic make-up of the Muslim community.
  - University of the West of England to look at particular communities which have high levels of Islamophobia.
- (100 words)

The objectives of PREVENT are all about challenging and disrupting those who would use extremist ideology to recruit volunteers and support those combating the problem.

One particular strand, called CHANNEL, aims to develop better intelligence gathering in the Muslim community.

Ed Husain from the Quilliam Foundation, which advises the

VENT programme was being used as a vehicle for spying on Muslim communities.

Shami Chakrabarti, director of the human rights organisation Liberty, said the programme was "the biggest spying programme in Britain in modern times and an affront to civil liberties".

But former Labour minister Shahid Malik told a Commons select committee hearing: "Many

## The schoolboy radical who galvanised the community, council and police into action

The case which defines how Bristol has responded to the perceived threat of home-grown radicalised Muslim extremists is that of Isa Ibrahim.

In July last year the former public schoolboy was jailed for a minimum of ten years for plotting to blow himself up with a home-made suicide vest.

Ibrahim was arrested in 2008 following a tip-off from the Muslim community.

The prosecution said that he planned to set off the blast at the Broadmead shopping centre. The student denied charges of making explosives with intent and preparing terrorist acts but pleaded guilty to making an explosive substance.

Mr Justice Butterfield told Ibrahim: "Your preparation to inflict an atrocity on the innocent civilians of Bristol were advanced.

"You are a dangerous young man, well capable of acting on the views you held in the spring of 2008."

The judge described the former public schoolboy as "a lonely and angry young person at the time of these events, with a craving for attention".

Police found a quantity of home-made high explosive HMTD, in a container in the fridge of Ibrahim's home in Westbury-on-Trym.

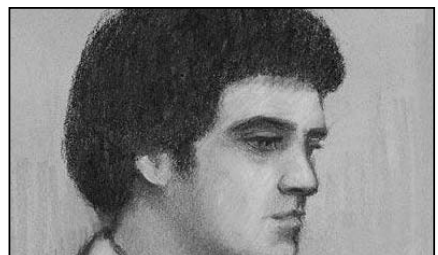
They also discovered an electrical circuit capable of detonating the explosive at short

range and a half-made 'suicide vest'.

Prosecutors said he became increasingly radicalised after converting to Islam and researched fundamentalism and bomb-making techniques on the internet.

Ibrahim had told the trial that he made explosives and 'suicide vests' because it was "fun" and he was trying to "occupy time" while he struggled to beat an addiction to drugs.

Det Supt Nigel Rock of Avon and Somerset Police, said it was a landmark case as the initial information came from the Muslim community. (280 words)



Isa Ibrahim in a video he posted himself (left), after he converted to Islam and at his court hearing.

Pix: Daily Telegraph, Bristol Evening Post, Daily Telegraph.

# idge to nowhere

ults in Bristol but looks set to expand operations. Phil Chamberlain reports

ing at just that area," he said. "We are training up individuals."

According to Arun Kundnani, from the Institute of Race Relations, this intelligence gathering aspect is set to grow.

"I think the emphasis is shifting from community development to working directly with individuals who are seen to be at risk of radicalisation," he said.

Kundnani, who has written a report on the PREVENT programme, says that the new Conservative administration is likely to withdraw funding from local authorities in this area especially as there has been little oversight on how it is spent.

"The police have massive influence because they have the intelligence and they refuse to share it. It is going to become less accountable and more secret."

According to Hussein the situation in Bristol is much better than that. He says that the case of Isa Ibrahim (see panel) set the tone for close co-operation.

"We were privy to a lot of information that the press were not," he said.

For Kundnani the Ibrahim case exposes a contradiction in the position of Avon and Somerset Police.

Officially the local police say they do not take part in CHANNEL and have given out no information in response to Freedom of Information requests. However they use the Ibrahim case as example of intelligence-led policing using CHANNEL techniques.

Kundnani believes that the police are deploying invasive intelligence gathering but have simply rebranded it and hidden it under a different heading.

This aspect is only part of the PREVENT programme.

A report from the iDea said that Bristol received an £80,000 grant for a pilot scheme from the Department for Communities and Local Government under the auspices of the Prevent programme in 2007/8.

This bought a myth-busting booklet; a survey of local Muslim communities;

grassroots project work and a one-day Building the Bridge conference for Muslims living in Bristol.

Building the Bridge subsequently became the banner under which much of the work has been carried out.

A report to the Bristol City Cabinet in July 2008 detailed greater funding.

It said that on 2008/9 the council would receive £125,000, the following financial year £150,000 and for 2010/2011 £165,000.

A large number of projects were funded (see panel) but the report did not have costings for any of them. It did say that a dedicated officer working in the Community Cohesion Team at the city council was costing £23,000 over nine

months. There was also £5,000 set aside for running costs.

More recently, in February 2010 a four-week exhibition of photographs of Muslims in Bristol was exhibited in the city under the Building the Bridge banner. It was put together by the PR company Brandon Hill Communications.

Apart from this report little has been fed back to Bristol City Council committees or voted on and there is no evidence of tendering processes for the many private companies which have been bought in to supply work.

According to Kundnani the PREVENT programme is here to stay. "These things do not stay stuck in one place. CHANNEL will be used against here Afro-Caribbean community and badged as tackling knife crime."

(1001 words)

## Secrecy behind the anti-terror programme

FOI request – February 2010

"Details on any meetings held between university staff and representatives from the National Public Order Intelligence Unit (NPOIU) or the National Extremism Tactical Coordination Unit (NETCU) or the National Domestic Extremism Team (NDET) since January 1 2006. By details I mean any records, minutes, emails, memos or diary records of such meetings which have involved university staff."

The University neither confirms nor denies whether it holds any information in relation to the above request under the following sections of the Freedom of Information Act.

- Section 24(2) National Security
- Section 31(3) Law Enforcement
- Section 38(2) Health and Safety
- Section 40(5) Personal Information

Whilst there is a public interest in the transparency of policing operations, in this case in providing assurance that the police service are appropriately engaging with the threat posed by domestic extremism and terrorist organisations, there is a public interest in safeguarding both national security and the integrity of investigations and operations in these highly sensitive areas.

Since radicalised students are seen as a key area of interest the author put in a Freedom of Information request to the University of Bristol for details on any meetings it has had with the various police anti-terror and extremist monitoring groups.

The university refused to even confirm or deny such information existed on grounds of national security, law enforcement, health and safety and personal information.

An internal appeal upheld the university's decision and the issue is currently being pursued through the Information Commissioner's Office.

Requests to other UK universities met with a similar response.

(100 words)

