

# LIBERTY

PROTECTING CIVIL LIBERTIES  
PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS

## **Summary of substantive policy discussions** **at Liberty Council meeting** **November 2015**

The Policy Director introduced the Home Office's Counter Extremism Strategy, published in October 2015. The Strategy defines extremism as "the vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance for different faiths and beliefs. We also regard calls for deaths of members of our armed forces as extremist". The Strategy involves four strands of work – countering the ideology, building the capacity of the mainstream, disrupting 'extremists' and building more cohesive communities. Parts 1, 2 and 4 are light on substance, theory and policy detail. Part 3 contains worrying proposals to ban 'extremist' organisations and restrict the activities of 'extremist' individuals. The latter is expected to form the basis of legislation in 2016.

Council expressed concern at the vague definition of extremism and the potentially life-changing consequences triggered by statements or activity deemed to fall within it. Council noted that the paper clumsily mixes violent extremism with nonviolent extremism and references a range of behaviours – such as FGM – which is already criminalised. The meeting noted that the Paper contained no evidence or reasoning to support its claims about radicalisation. Government has not commissioned any research nor identified any evidence on the causes of violent extremism nor measured the impact of existing counter-terrorism policy, law and practice on counter-terrorism.

Council noted the discriminatory potential of the Strategy Paper. Despite superficial references to the threat from far-right extremism, the strategy is clearly aimed at the Muslim community and has already served to further alienate and stigmatise (e.g. Muslim Council of Britain's response). The meeting discussed the link with the Prevent programme and heard reports about the distrust it has created in the teaching and university sector. Council expressed concern about the way in which Universities are supporting the Government's expansive counter-terrorism agenda.

The meeting noted that despite referencing a 'counter-narrative' the Paper contains no substantive suggestions as to the content of this narrative. Prisons are described as a hotbed of radicalisation, yet there was little discussion of how best to address this and there was little in the way of education and alternative ideas on offer.

Council agreed that Liberty should reject the strategy and campaign against it. Council further agreed that in campaigning against the strategy, Liberty should aim to show how respect for human rights values offers the best 'counter-narrative' to so-called extremism.