

Tool five: Advice for managers briefing front-line staff

What kind of information should be reported? This tool gives some practical examples of some of the potential indicators of tension. It is designed to be copied and your local contact details added. You can reproduce it with your own logos and branding on it, just acknowledge iCoCo on the back. It includes some information from the first part of the guide for completeness as a Briefing Note.

1. Purpose

The purpose of this Briefing Note is to support managers of front-line staff to identify and report information that may be relevant to community tensions or indicate potential problems or difficulties which could threaten the peace and stability of the area.

Public services have a very large number of staff with face-to-face contact with the public and the local environment and their 'eyes and ears' are of great importance in keeping an up-to-date picture of what is happening in local communities and particularly where there are issues that might move from concern to conflict.

Community tensions may arise as a result of international, national or local events or activities. This Briefing Note is concerned with local events and activities and indicators in local neighbourhoods, estates or town centres. Some of these local issues could be in response to national and international incidents and as such are important in gauging the local impact.

The Briefing Note is also concerned about **identifying and reporting** information and not about deciding upon interventions – that is the job of the service manager or the Tension Monitoring Group.

2. What is community tension and why should we monitor it?

Our **definition** of community tension is:

Community tension is a state of community dynamics which may lead to disorder, threaten the peace and stability of communities, or raise the levels of fear and anxiety in the whole, or a part of, the local community

We monitor community tension because:

- Public bodies have general and specific legal duties with regard to the safety and well-being of communities and promoting 'good relations'
- Failure to respond may result in damage to property, injury and loss of life
- To prevent the serious impact of criminal activity
- To promote positive community relations and well-being where the whole community can feel safe and able to participate in everyday activities

- To understand potential conflict and minimise the risk of disorder, violence or crime, rather than to 'spy' on particular individuals and communities
- To keep a check on the 'temperature' in communities even when tensions are generally perceived as low – complacency and not listening are not responsible or accountable approaches
- To manage a community incident well, tensions need to be monitored and assessed to broker the best responses
- To enable effective problem solving and appropriate management and interventions
- **And**, to recognise that large disorder on any significant scale will severely damage the local reputation and could result in the curtailing of investment in jobs, housing and employment

In short, it is the duty of public bodies to keep their communities safe, harmonious and promote well-being.

Frequently the signals of community breakdown, conflict and disorder are apparent well before incidents occur. This process is about identifying those signals and seeking to anticipate and prevent problems before they escalate. It is about protecting and supporting communities and keeping them safe.

3. What kind of information should be reported?

It can be hard for staff to see how important seemingly trivial or 'common knowledge' information could be in preventing an escalation of tension into conflict. Many incidents may appear to be a 'one-off' and, though damaging, may not cause wider repercussions, tensions or lead to disorder. It can be a matter of judgement about what to report but it is better to err on the side of caution and report such issues rather than not to do so. Sometimes a piece of information may, in itself, seem to have limited relevance, but when put together with other pieces of information from other sources it may assume much greater significance. So, the system requires training and support to become common practice.

Below are a series of the kinds of signs or signals which may have relevance to community tensions which should be reported. They are illustrative only – you must use your own judgement to add other signs. They are grouped by service areas, though there are cross-overs between services. For example, many of the signs relevant to housing staff will also apply to environmental services. There may be other indicators specific to your local area which will need drawing out.

Housing

- Neighbour disputes that may have the potential to escalate and involve other families or groups
- Negative activity regarding a new tenant or resident, particularly where that person or family is from a 'different' community, race or nation
- Use of flags, posters or other symbols in individual houses or groups of houses, indicating particular allegiances, views or identities
- Bail hostels can be a source of tension, particularly where there are rumours that there are sex offenders in them – whether these rumours are founded or otherwise
- Houses in multiple occupancy, particularly where there are regular changes in tenancy, may a lack of ownership or sense of belonging
- High population turnover can be both a sign and a cause of tension. It can threaten cohesion where residents, who are transitory, have a lower sense of belonging to their neighbourhood. Other signals in such neighbourhoods – physical appearance of the neighbourhood and complaints from residents – are important to feed in to a wider picture of monitoring
- Physical signs could include deterioration of individual or groups of properties or streets, the build-up of rubbish, vehicles parked inconsiderately, graffiti, drugs paraphernalia or other detritus
- Feedback from residents could include complaints (informal as much as formal) about other residents, how they feel about what's happening in the neighbourhood, negative comments based on race or religion, hearsay, urban myths and rumours – perception is more important than reality
- Congregations of groups of people in public places - these may be perfectly permissible and legal, but if they represent potential for gang activity, competition, or territorial behaviour they need to be monitored
- Be alert to unreported hate crime – which can be gleaned from informal conversations to physical indicators

Education (schools, colleges and universities)

- Racial, religious or homophobic incidents that are potentially more than 'one-off' or isolated
- Evidence of groups forming strong identities and hostility towards other groups, including self-segregating into separate groups, 'badges' or symbols, name calling and 'lower level' physical aggression
- An increase in bullying, harassment and general intolerance towards others
- Increased exclusions of students in schools and colleges, based upon particular communities or groups
- Community complaints around access to the school and other public places, particularly where this is attributed to new communities in the area
- Information passed on by students about activity which is likely to affect the peace and stability of the area
- International students in areas unused to people from other cultures
- Issues or concerns within the student population and between the student population and local residents

Environmental services

- Leaflets containing controversial, offensive or inflammatory issues strewn about, flyposted, or even dumped
- Offensive graffiti – most councils have rapid response services for removal of certain types of graffiti. However it is important that it is not only removed but that the content, place, style and frequency are recorded. Some graffiti may not be overtly offensive but may be symbols of 'claiming' territory
- Accumulation of 'unusual' types of rubbish at homes or other venues, such as abnormal amounts of hydrogen peroxide bottles (bleaches – such as hair bleach), gas cylinders, chemicals, fertilizer bags, sugar and bottles. These could be indicators of destructive devices being prepared
- Damage to properties, particularly places of worship or pubs associated with a specific clientele, or minority businesses, which may indicate some form of attack but which may not have been reported
- Evidence of groups gathering in parks, wasteland or other places for drinking or drug taking

Youth and community work

- Debriefing from meetings and encounters in the community is a key tool. Questions to consider are:
 - How are people feeling? Or how are people feeling about...?
 - What are people concerned about at the moment?
 - How are relations between... and ...?
- Concerns in a community about an issue, situation or event should be passed on. Concerns which can lead to tensions can range from longer-term underlying issues such as the perception of the share of resources going to different communities, unemployment and racial, religious or intergenerational tensions, to specific events or circumstances, such as recent arrests or forthcoming trials, particular crimes or increase in anti-social behaviour, closing facilities or reduction in public services.
- Voluntary organisations such as the Citizens' Advice Bureau, Neighbourhood Watch, Victim Support and the Race Equality Council will have information on specific issues and trends. Community groups and faith leaders have insights into community concerns. Regular informal as well as formal contact is important.
- Rumours circulating in a community are as relevant as facts – rumours can increase tensions and have frequently been the cause of 'sparking off' incidents
- Sometimes relationships between men and women from different cultural backgrounds can spark tensions within and between those groups

Health and social care

- People presenting with injuries at local hospitals and surgeries, where there may appear to be potential that there are patterns of non-accidental injuries sustained by particular groups of people and these are unreported to the police
- Fire and rescue services will pick up on a range of community issues and signs through their activities
- The Supporting People team will pick up on potential harassment or targeting of vulnerable individuals who may become the focus of unwanted attention or activity
- Child protection issues are subject to other reporting routes. This is also the case for domestic violence and individual incidents of antisocial behaviour. So, when reporting it is helpful to refer back to the definition of community tension and consider whether the activity has the potential to affect community dynamics and lead to disorder, threaten the peace and stability of communities, or raise the levels of fear and anxiety in the whole, or a part of, the local community.

4. How should the information be passed on and what will happen to it?

- Information should be passed on the same day as it is heard or observed.
- It should be passed to your manager or supervisor – in person, by telephone or email – whichever is most used in your service area.
- Keep a record of the information passed on to your manager but otherwise treat it as confidential.
- There is also an email in the council for such issues which you can use if your manager is not available: (local details to be inserted)
- The information will be received by the manager, acknowledged, recorded and collated with other information that may be submitted to them from other staff in the service area. It will be fed into the 'Tension Monitoring Group' which is considering information from a range of partners and organisations including the police and local authority.
- From this and other sources of information, the Tension Monitoring Group will assess whether there are patterns or indicators of increasing tension and will make decisions on possible interventions.
- Where possible, managers will feed back to you what has happened regarding the information you have passed on. On occasions this may not be possible where Data Protection of personal information applies.
- If you have any doubts about anything you see or hear – report it. If you want to follow this up in any way, discuss it with your manager.

Appendix: Advice on how all communities can help police defeat extremist violence and terrorism

Remember – extremist violence and terrorism can come from any area or any community, it is important to keep an open mind and be alert to all possible threats.

Monitoring community tension is not the same as preventing extremist violence and terrorism but there are opportunities to involve staff and the public in knowing what might be regarded as suspicious and to use our collective resources to look out for these.

The following advice is provided by the Metropolitan Police for all members of the public. There may be a local equivalent version that you would like to substitute for this.

What suspicious activity should I be looking for?

We want to encourage the public to be aware of what is happening around them and think about anything or anybody that has struck them as unusual in their day-to-day lives. We would ask people to think carefully about anyone they know whose behaviour has changed suddenly. What has changed – could it be significant? What about the people they associate with? Have you noticed activity where you live which is not the norm? We want people to have the confidence to trust their instincts. If you suspect it, report it to the Anti-Terrorist Hotline on 0800 789 321. By doing this the public can help to make this a hostile place for terrorists.

Terrorists need storage – Lock-ups, garages and sheds can all be used by terrorists to store equipment. Are you suspicious of anyone renting commercial property?

Terrorists use chemicals – Do you know someone buying large or unusual quantities of chemicals for no obvious reason?

Terrorists use protective equipment – Handling chemicals is dangerous. Maybe you've seen goggles or masks dumped somewhere?

Terrorists need funding – Cheque and credit card fraud are ways of generating cash. Have you seen any suspicious transactions?

Terrorists use multiple identities – Do you know someone with documents in different names for no obvious reason?

Terrorists need information – Observation and surveillance help terrorists plan attacks. Have you seen anyone taking pictures of security arrangements?

Terrorists need transport – If you work in commercial vehicle hire or sales, has a sale or rental made you suspicious?

Terrorists need to travel – Meetings, training and planning can take place anywhere. Do you know someone who travels but is vague about where they're going?

Terrorists need communication – Anonymous, pay-as-you-go and stolen mobiles are typical. Have you seen someone with large quantities of mobiles? Has it made you suspicious?

Terrorists use computers – Do you know someone who visits terrorist-related websites?

If you notice suspicious bags, behaviour or vehicles which pose an imminent threat you should **call 999** immediately.