



Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Countering extremism, HC 428

Tuesday 12 January 2016

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Members present: Keith Vaz (Chair); Victoria Atkins, James Berry, Mr David Burrowes, Nusrat Ghani, Mr Ranil Jayawardena, Tim Loughton, Stuart C. McDonald, Mr Chuka Umunna, Mr David Winnick.

Questions 723 - 832

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Zulfiqar Karim**, Senior Vice President, Bradford Council for Mosques, and **Fazal Dad**, Senior Imam, Abu Bakr Mosque Bradford, gave evidence.

Q723 Chair: Could I call the Committee to order and welcome everyone back from the Christmas recess and pass on my Happy New Year greetings to all present? We are currently undertaking our inquiry into counter-terrorism and we are delighted to welcome as part of that inquiry Mr Karim and Mr Dad from the Bradford Council for Mosques. I have an apology from Naz Shah, who very much wanted to be here for this evidence session as she had suggested both of you as witnesses.

Can I start with you, Mr Karim, and refer you to some comments the Prime Minister made about the Muslim community? As someone who believes very passionately in the one nation vision of Britain, he has said recently that the Muslim community needs to be more muscular, much stronger in dealing with terrorist elements abroad and those who might be radicalised in this country. He talked about some members—not the whole community—quietly condoning Daesh and its activities. Do you agree with what the Prime Minister says?

Zulfiqar Karim: Thank you, Chair. First, British values and being part of British society is something that people like me, third/fourth generation Brits now, have always signed up to. We have never had a problem with the identity of us showing allegiance to the country that has given me a home, my grandparents a home and now my children. We are very comfortable sitting with Britishness and being British as a Muslim community here in Britain.

There has been, I would say, a vacuum in leadership from the Muslim community over the years and I think what the Prime Minister is referring to now and where we are as a community is very much now about standing united against what IS is doing globally and the effect that is having on the Muslim community worldwide.

Q724 Chair: But do you take his point that some members might have sympathy for Daesh and support violence and it is important that the community as a whole basically turns against them, exposes them and stops them?

Zulfiqar Karim: Absolutely the community turns against them, united against ISIS and what they stand for, and we must do whatever we can to stop them.

Q725 Chair: Mr Dad, have you had examples? The Bradford Council for Mosques, of course, is known the world over because of the numbers of the British Pakistani community that live in Bradford and the number of mosques that there are in Bradford. There is no question it is quite a pivotal city as far as the community is concerned. In all your years of experience have you come across those who have come to the mosque or come to you or been to see imams who have said, “I do not want to live in this country any more. I want to go and fight in Syria” or, “I want to be part of the activities of proscribed groups because I do not share the values” that Mr Karim has so eloquently outlined?

Fazal Dad: Thank you, Chair. I have been the imam in the mosque where I am for approximately 19 years. I am also a third generation; my father, they came here in the early 1960s. I am British born and bred. I have been the imam for the last 19 years and born and bred here. I have extensive contacts with the youth especially, but to this day I have not come across a single person who has come across with that sort of mentality. At the same time as being the imam, I am also a principal at the madrasa and for the 19 years I have had about 400 children at the same time, so 19 times 400 is quite an extensive amount of people that I have come across, and at the same time an assistant head at a state primary school. But in my vast experience of meeting and speaking to people, as most of the members will know, as an imam you are not just speaking on the pulpit or the minbar, you are counselling people.

Q726 Chair: Sure, but you are saying something very profound to this Committee today. You are telling us that as the imam of one of the mosques in Bradford you have met thousands of members of the community over the last 19 years.

Fazal Dad: That is right.

Chair: You know them, you live within the community, but you have come across no one who has expressed the views that I have just expressed as being those that we need to condemn. That is extraordinary, isn't it? Is it that perhaps we are talking to the wrong people in Parliament?

Fazal Dad: I can only talk from my experience, Chair.

Q727 Chair: Of course, but are we communicating? When we say, “Let's talk to the community leaders”—you clearly are community leaders—you do not have your finger on the pulse of those who are trying to undermine our society. In one way it is good because they are not mainstream, they do not come to your mosque and indulge in these activities, but on the other side it is a worry because who are they talking to?

Fazal Dad: That is where the next point comes, and that is some research shows that those who do come to the masjids and those that do have affiliation with the madrasas and those that are practising Muslims are not the ones that we are to worry about. It is those who are

on the fringes, do not have affiliation with the faith itself or who are not practising Muslims, Chair. Those are the ones that we need to be worried about.

Q728 Chair: Yes. Mr Karim, as you walk around central Bradford—and this Committee will be visiting Bradford on 28 January as part of our big conversation with the Muslim community at the invitation of the three MPs—do you have a number of Dawah stalls, the stalls where literature and religious tracts are given out to people?

Zulfiqar Karim: In Bradford?

Chair: In Bradford.

Zulfiqar Karim: Do we have them working across? Absolutely not.

Q729 Chair: You do not have them anywhere?

Zulfiqar Karim: No, we do not have them anywhere.

Q730 Chair: But you have shops where literature of this kind is sold. I have them in Leicester where—

Zulfiqar Karim: We have bookshops, Islamic shops, and so on where the Qur'an and other Hadiths and books in different—

Q731 Chair: Because one of the points being made is those shops are sometimes being used to radicalise individuals. Do you have any evidence to give this Committee to that effect?

Zulfiqar Karim: No, we do not have any of that evidence but I also feel it necessary to point out that there is already enough legislation in place to counter that. I am looking forward to you coming to Bradford and I hope you get a chance to visit the wider community and go to some of those bookshops as well. What we find is that we are not being consulted. The Government have not been talking to the communities. I had to basically approach my MP, Naz Shah, and ask whether I could get down in front of you today just to give you the perspective of northerners as well. Because not all the Muslim communities are here in London and not all the organisations out there represent Muslims.

Chair: We accept that, which is why we are coming to see you in Bradford on 28 January.

Q732 Nusrat Ghani: Thank you, Mr Karim and Mr Dad, for coming today. You represent a large congregation spread out across the north of the country. You mentioned that you have not been consulted already, but when the Chairman asked you if you had any experience of any single individual coming forward at your mosques or at the madrasa or socially—because you are obviously social community leaders as well—you have no experience whatsoever of any individual coming forward and showing sympathies to Daesh. Is that correct?

Fazal Dad: That is true.

Q733 Nusrat Ghani: If that is true, what would the Government get from consulting with you on how young people are radicalised? You have no experience of young people being radicalised.

Fazal Dad: The Government will get the other side of the story because, as you rightly point, there are elements who might side with IS and Daesh but what the Government are doing is ignoring the majority and painting everybody with the same brush.

Q734 Nusrat Ghani: I would disagree with that. If you have no experience of people being radicalised, what can you offer the Committee or the Government on how to stop people being radicalised because you say you have no experience? I struggle to believe that you have not come across a single young or mature person that has come forward and said, “I sympathise with Daesh” or possibly, “I want to become a strict Wahhabi Muslim”. Would you not consider that to be some sort of concern and have a sit down conversation with them about it?

Fazal Dad: Of course, if anybody was to come. The next step is what could I offer the Prime Minister in advice. We could work together and set about strategies of in case that was to happen how we could tackle it. Secondly, just because nobody has come across it up until today, it does not necessarily mean nobody is going to come in the future in those areas. We could work with the Prime Minister and the Government to set about strategies of preventing such things to happen in future.

Q735 Nusrat Ghani: Back in June, three sisters—Khadija, Sugra and Zohra Dawood—disappeared with their nine children and allegedly fled to Syria where the brother fights with Daesh. Were they or their families ever practising or worshiping at the mosques that you are across?

Fazal Dad: Not at all. We have heard about them on the news. We have read about them in the papers but previously we had no affiliation. We did not know where they came from.

Q736 Nusrat Ghani: Even their extended families you would not have had any contact with? It is interesting when you have a structure of mosques and you are involved in your community there was no information among any of their extended relatives practising at the mosques or being involved in any of the community events. You did not come across them at all?

Fazal Dad: Here is the nice thing. As an imam who has extensive contacts, I did not know about them but neither did our security services, who have much better resources, much larger experience and much greater grip on these things.

Q737 Nusrat Ghani: But they live within your community and you were not aware of their brother potentially fighting for Daesh?

Fazal Dad: When you say living among the communities, London is a distance from where we are in the north, but I understand where you are coming from. The communities would have known this. A lot of these ideas are isolated in the sense that they are either on the internet, they are in very small pockets of community, and very less they come out into the open.

Q738 Nusrat Ghani: Maybe it would be quite useful if you would explain how these ideas differ from the faith that you practise in your mosque.

Fazal Dad: It is down to the interpretation of extremists who take out the same verses from the Qur'an and from the Hadith, yet they interpret it into their ideology. The Qur'an tells us straight away. It says, "Min qatala l-nasa", the person who kills any person it is as though this person has killed humanity, and the person who saves one single person it is as though this person has saved humanity. These are the sermons and these are the teachings that the masjids and the madrasas are teaching. Those people who are day in, day out hearing these things, they will not get into this ideology. The problem is it is those people who are on the fringes and not listening to these sermons, not coming into the masjids, not getting within the imams, they are the ones that are being attacked by the external ideology.

Nusrat Ghani: Could I have two more very quick questions?

Chair: Sure.

Q739 Nusrat Ghani: The madrasas and the mosques that you help and work within, they are Sunni-based?

Fazal Dad: That is correct.

Nusrat Ghani: They are not Shi'a?

Fazal Dad: No.

Q740 Nusrat Ghani: And they are not Wahhabi. So you can quite easily identify someone who is Shi'a from the way that they practise their faith from someone that was a Wahhabi from the way that they practise their faith. If you had a member of your congregation that was getting attracted to the Wahhabi faith, would you consider that a threat to them being radicalised or not?

Fazal Dad: It is more about the ideology that is in the mind. Whether a person is a Shi'a, a Wahhabi or a Sunni, when you come in to pray all the three sections of the community pray exactly the same. Our attire is exactly the same. Their language is exactly the same. It is what is inside the mindset that matters. To be able to get to that a person needs to interact with those people. Going into Daesh, a person may be of a Sunni, a Wahhabi or a Shi'a background.

Q741 Mr Winnick: Mr Dad, would it be right to say that your interpretation—which most Muslims accept, certainly in the democracies and quite likely elsewhere, as the correct one—like all holy scriptures, be it Christian, Jewish, Sikh or Hindu, there are those extremists who can give a different interpretation of the Qur'an as the other religions can give of their holy books? The Old Testament is not necessarily in some aspects a pacifist document. There is a danger, is there not, especially with the mass murderers, of distorting the true meaning of Islam and that presents a danger at all times, doesn't it?

Fazal Dad: That is true, sir. You will always have elements of society or external forces who will take out the correct verse but take it out of context and interpret it according to

their own ideology. That happens around the world all the time. What is more important is that those who interpret the Qur'an, Islam and the previous textures find those who interpret it in the correct way, as it has been interpreted previously, and then deliver in the correct version.

Q742 Mr Winnick: I know, of course, of the work, as we all do, that both of you are undertaking and we have a great deal of respect for what you have been doing in Bradford. Can I ask you about terrorism? There is an argument—and I would be interested in your views—that says, in effect, “Yes, we condemn terrorism but we understand the reasons for it” because of British foreign policy or French foreign policy and the rest. What is your reaction to those who try to find some rationale for the murder of civilians?

Zulfiqar Karim: Where we are here today is we cannot influence foreign policy; that is down to the Government. What is happening within our shores is separate to what goes on in wars and we should, as a community, look at how we protect the country. How do we all stand up against IS? You have already said that the mosque and madrasas are not a place where extremists are being groomed, shall we say, but then at the same time the Government at the moment are putting through a consultation that is basically to go into mosques and madrasas, and go in very heavy-handedly, to find extremism. We are telling you it is not already there.

We have a lot of mixed messages here and it is also important that we put education and the teachings of Islam and what happens within the madrasa completely separate to what the Prevent agenda is. There is an issue here for the Department for Education and the educationalists and there is an issue here for the Home Office and the police and counter-terrorism. What we would like to do is look at the two things completely separate. We are representing mosques and madrasas. We are not Prevent or terrorism specialists. What we do know is our community and our young people and how we work together with the Government to make sure that we are inclusive and we all stand for the same thing, which is protecting our shores and protecting our borders against extremists.

Q743 Mr Winnick: You may remember, Mr Karim, the sickening note or video left by one of the mass murderers of 7/7—the horror that took place in 2005—when he said, “You voted for the Government that carried out the war in Iraq”. He made no mention of the fact that this country went to war in Kosovo—and should have gone earlier, in my view—over Bosnia, over the massacre of Muslims. Does that not demonstrate the absolute murderous distortion of those who carried out the atrocities when, of course, if they were against the war in Iraq, which they had every right to be, there is every possible means in a democracy such as ours to demonstrate peacefully and lawfully your opposition, as so many did?

Zulfiqar Karim: Sorry, what is your question?

Mr Winnick: What I am saying to you is: is that not an illustration of those who so distorted the situation in order to carry out the murder of 52 civilians and the serious injuries of so many others?

Zulfiqar Karim: Absolutely—and this is why we have to work together to make sure that we are targeting the right people, using the right channels to reach those individuals, rather than bringing the whole community into a situation where we all feel targeted,

marginalised and isolated by what is happening at the moment by the Prevent and Government agenda.

Q744 Mr Winnick: My last question: there is concern that people who go to prison are converted—obviously not Muslims in the first place—by other criminals who are of Muslim origin into the most distorted version. Perhaps, Mr Dad, this is more your area. Having been converted, such individuals consider it their duty to religion to carry out crimes and murders. Do you think more could be done by fellow clerics of yours in prisons to try to stop this happening?

Zulfiqar Karim: Is that not a breakdown in society, sir? This is fundamentally where we need to be. This is a breakdown in society. Once you are in prison, there is a reason why that person is in prison. We would go down as far and say the British values and the whole network of the family. No religion preaches hate, no religion endorses any act of criminality, so we need to be looking at the social issues as well here rather than just faith.

One very, very important point in my recent consultation with mosques across the north around the supplementary school consultation, which we have submitted yesterday to Parliament, is around moving from the civil rights of racism towards Islamophobia. Before 9/11 the world was a different place. There was no such thing as a Muslim criminal or a black Muslim. It was either somebody by the colour of their skin or by their name. There was never a target where there was a name next to the actual criminal or the activity. We have to search deep here to understand how we are going to fight the menace and, at the moment, I do not believe we have the right mechanisms or the right solutions.

Q745 Chair: Mr Berry is next. Before I call him, I am puzzled here about the fact that you know so little about radicalisation in your communities, even though you deal with a lot of British Muslims. Some figures that have come out suggest that of the 17 British children who are in Syria, 14 of them—90% of the so-called cubs of Caliphate, which they have been called—are from Bradford. The last group went in August 2015 and before that in June 2015, but you do not know any of these families and they have had no contact with you, even though 90% of the British children in Syria are from Bradford.

Zulfiqar Karim: With the figures, yes, from a marketing point of view, they are very high. We work very closely with our police force in Bradford and the local authority and the safeguarding board. That is one of the responsibilities that we have is to work in partnership. We found that both of the families—and this is what we are hearing; we do not have the full information because there is obviously protection around that—is these were breakdowns in families. There was no Islamic ideology. They did not belong to any one radical imam that has convinced them. Both of those families, our understanding is there was a breakdown of marriage and these families were looking for an alternative and they found an alternative overseas.

Q746 James Berry: We are going to come on to the Prevent agenda, but you already in your comments criticised the Prevent agenda. As far as I can tell, the Government would rather not be having to spend a huge amount of money and resources on the Prevent agenda and would rather police officers were doing other things, but they are having to because it is not being dealt with by anybody else. Picking up on the Chairman's question, could you

explain to the Committee in your group of mosques what procedures you have in place for identifying and tackling radicalisation? I am not saying it is taking place in the mosque, but within the community what procedures do you have in place?

Zulfiqar Karim: We will make sure that the mosques—I manage and am trustee for about 18 mosques in Bradford and I try to get across as many of them as possible to the sermons. We make sure that the imams, when they are giving their khutbahs, very much put the key topics and points across there, which is distancing themselves from radicalisation and extremism and anything relating to ISIS.

There is absolutely a narrative in the mainstream Muslim community and across all mosques that this should be preached to young people. The best opportunity we have is at sermons. Outside that there are individuals like Maulana Fazal Dad, who is very well respected within the young community, who can be approached. He does a regular TV and radio phone-in slot as well. They are accessible but, coming back, it is that these people are not on the radar.

Q747 James Berry: The proportion of people in the Muslim community in Bradford that attend mosque is probably higher than the proportion of Christian people who attend church and you are very much more in the community than the churches are, I would imagine. Can you tell us, then, as the trustee of 18 mosques, how many families or individuals you have concerns about maybe potentially being radicalised or are at risk of being radicalised or are having the kind of social problems you described? How many families would you say?

Zulfiqar Karim: That remit is not given to mosque and madrasas and imams. That remit is with the police, the local council, schools.

Chair: For the benefit of Mr Berry, who was not here at the beginning, you did tell the Committee that you had no examples.

Zulfiqar Karim: Yes, correct.

Q748 James Berry: You see the problem, though. You say that is not your remit. The Government are doing it because it is not your remit or you are not doing it, and then you criticise the way the Government are doing it.

Zulfiqar Karim: No. What we are looking at at the moment with the agenda, as I understand it, with the Channel programme, this is very much a top-down approach and it almost feels like every single one of us is being spied on.

Chair: We will come on to the rest of the Prevent agenda with Mr McDonald. Thank you for that.

Q749 Mr Burrowes: You said, quite obviously in a sense, that the role that you have is not just of preaching at community and members of your mosques but obviously working alongside and counselling, so you will have some understanding of their views and concerns and sympathies. Would you say this is reflected in your mosques? The survey commissioned by Sky News last year found that more than a quarter of British Muslims have some sympathy with those who left to join fighters in Syria. That was their survey. I am not giving

any comment either way on it, but do you see that at all reflected, that type of figure, in your mosques?

Zulfiqar Karim: I am a marketing man, I have a marketing background, and some of these figures that are out there, like the one in five that was brandished by a tabloid paper as well, is one that is very questionable. Sadly, we are where we are and the media does not help. If I went round the city or the district and did a straw poll of sympathisers, let me tell you there will always be sympathisers and there will be sympathisers who are non-Muslim as well.

Q750 Mr Burrowes: Yes, absolutely. The survey also looked at the views of non-Muslims as well. They also made the point that there seemed to be a great sympathy or concern or, indeed, maybe a risk of radicalisation among both Muslim women and also particularly those under the age of 35. That trend do you see reflected at all in your mosques?

Zulfiqar Karim: We do not. What we see as being an issue is isolation. When we were growing up, and we look at places like Leicester almost as a flagship of multicultural Britain, we grew up in that kind of era. Britain has always been multicultural and has always been inclusive. Where we are now with the younger generation, in some pockets of the community they do not feel inclusive. They feel isolated and that is where the biggest challenge is and that would be the recommendations back to this Committee.

Q751 Mr Ranil Jayawardena: Mr Karim, at the end of last year your organisation declined to give evidence to this Committee alongside representatives of the counter-extremism think tank Quilliam, stating that you had reservations about their integrity and legitimacy. Refusing to share a platform is quite a damning indictment of a group. Could you elaborate why you took that stance?

Zulfiqar Karim: We took that stance primarily because we feel that the organisations do not represent the wider Muslim community. Their views are not part of the mainstream community across all the different factors that we looked at: the Shi'as, the Sunnis, the Deobandis, and so on. They have their own ideas and views, which do not represent the majority of mainstream Muslims.

Q752 Mr Ranil Jayawardena: To what extent does your rejection of them stem from their willingness to work with the Government and support the Prevent programme?

Zulfiqar Karim: The team of advisers that are working with the Government and the different taskforce groups are very London-centric and do not represent the true Muslim community of this great nation.

Q753 Mr Ranil Jayawardena: That is interesting. Do you believe that any organisation that is seen to be working with the Government then will lose legitimacy among British Muslims? If that is what you are saying, what can be done to tackle that?

Zulfiqar Karim: The organisation is the Government and it should be the Government that drives the agenda but it can only do that by consulting with the wider community.

Q754 Mr Ranil Jayawardena: But are you saying that any organisation will lose their legitimacy if they work with the Government?

Zulfiqar Karim: No, not lose their legitimacy. It has to be the right organisation who have to take on board the views of—the Muslim community is very complex. There are so many different fragmentations of the Muslim community and you need to understand that, and not everybody does. Even people like myself sometimes have difficulty and we are always learning. Will one organisation that is London based be able to represent the views of the national Muslim community and basically advise the Government? I think it needs more than that.

Q755 Mr Ranil Jayawardena: Turning to the Government then, what assessment have you made of the Government's Prevent strategy?

Zulfiqar Karim: As far as the Home Office is concerned and putting together checks and measures to make sure that the country is safe, absolutely it has to do that. As far as reaching out to the mainstream and at grassroots level, the Government are not doing that. The consultation around the supplementary schools, I spoke to my local assistant chief constable, I spoke to the leader of the council, and none of them have been consulted by the Government. I know the leader of the council in Bradford wrote to the Home Secretary asking for a conversation and consultation; that has not happened. We wrote to the Prime Minister as well following the speech in October.

Chair: That is very helpful.

Q756 Tim Loughton: Can we come on to the subject of madrasas and supplementary schools, which you alluded to earlier, and the Government's plans to introduce a registration and inspection scheme? I take it from your comments already that you are opposed to that. What are the downsides of it as far as you see?

Zulfiqar Karim: We are not opposed to safeguarding. The safeguarding of children is absolutely paramount and there need to be more checks and measures in place around exploitation and any other kind of activity that may take place within mosques and madrasas. We need to improve governance. There need to be better systems in place. The majority of what is in that paper we agree with and we have put solutions together to the Secretary of State for Education, Nicky Morgan. I wrote to Nicky Morgan on 23 December giving evidence and asking for a consultation and some solutions, but to this date we have not been consulted. We have an issue with it being linked to Prevent and that is where we need to step away from. *[Interruption.]*

Chair: Thank you. We will adjourn until we are quorate and come back to that.

Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.

On resuming—

Q757 Stuart C. McDonald: As part of its counter-extremism strategy that was announced in October, the Government said that it would also look to put together a new hate crime strategy. Could you both tell us a little bit about the effect that hate crime has had on your communities and what you would hope to see in such a hate crime strategy?

Zulfiqar Karim: I am glad that the Prime Minister has brought Islamophobia into the fold and the reporting of hate crime now is more visible. There is more awareness and more hate crime is now being reported. The conversations that we are having with the local police in West Yorkshire, yes, the figures are up and I think the figures today talk about a 60% rise here in London. I am sure that is the same throughout the country and in some areas probably even more so. How did we get to this situation? That is the question mark.

Chair: Indeed.

Q758 Stuart C. McDonald: What would you like to see in a hate crime strategy? Do you have any particular ideas?

Zulfiqar Karim: I do not even think there should be a strategy. I think it is just a sad situation that we have come to a stage. This used to be a race issue. There used to be the whole Race Relations Act and the agenda there. It is no different whether it is Islam, now Islamophobia, or whether it is against somebody because of a particular ideology or sexual orientation.

Q759 Stuart C. McDonald: Mr Dad, have you any comments to make about how hate crime has affected the community and what you would like to see in any hate crime strategy?

Fazal Dad: I firmly believe that, just as racism is a crime in itself, religious hatred should also be a crime in itself. By bringing that about, I think we would have a more cohesive society. It would take away all the prejudices and we would be able to live in a more peaceful, harmony-filled atmosphere.

Q760 Stuart C. McDonald: One final question: you have made a number of criticisms of the Government's strategies, but I get the impression almost that it is not so much the detail of the strategy itself but it is who has ownership of that strategy. You used the words "top down" yourself. It is more—

Zulfiqar Karim: Sure. It is about a strategy, but I think you are putting the Muslim community on the spot here. How do you identify a terrorist or extremist or somebody who is getting ready to carry out a terrorist attack? The question here is: what can you associate this with? Terrorism extremism, you are radicalising somebody and it is a thought, a doctrine. How does that differ from paedophilia? If you are a paedophile, a paedophile will not go out there and tell his friends or the local church clergy that he is carrying out these kinds of acts. Or a rapist, how could you go about identifying somebody who is a rapist? It is very, very difficult.

Chair: Indeed, thank you. Final question—sorry, we are hurrying along for the next session—Mr Jayawardena.

Q761 Mr Ranil Jayawardena: A very quick question with a very quick answer, yes/no: you said that you believe that there should be a crime against religious hatred in this country. Would you also, therefore, criticise foreign Governments who persecute people of other faiths, where there is a majority Islamic population and they persecute Christian populations, for example?

Fazal Dad: Yes, absolutely.

Zulfiqar Karim: Yes.

Q762 Chair: Thank you very much. I am sorry we are short of time because of the Division that we have had, but if you would like to write to us it would be very helpful. There are a number of questions I know Mr Loughton wanted to put to you, but I will write to you with those questions. If you could let us have your response I would be most grateful, particularly on the counter-narrative. We would like to know how you think the counter-narrative should operate in dealing with these people who advocate violence. We are most grateful and we look forward to seeing you on the 28th when we can continue this dialogue.

Zulfiqar Karim: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for your time.

Examination of Witness

Witness: **Mark Rowley QPM**, Assistant Commissioner for Specialist Operations in the Metropolitan Police, gave evidence.

Q763 Chair: The head of counter-terrorism in the Metropolitan Police, Mr Rowley, thank you very much for coming in. I am sorry: we have had two votes that have delayed the start of this session. Can I begin where I ended the last time you came in, to pass on our thanks to all those in counter-terrorism command, those who work day in, day out to keep this country safe as a result of all those who seek to bring violence to our streets? As we have recognised, what has happened in Istanbul today could be anywhere in Europe.

I want to start and the first focus of our questions is going to be in respect of those who leave the country, apparently with not the knowledge of but able to do so perfectly legally, and that is specifically those who might be on bail as a result of being arrested for terrorism-related offences. I know that you cannot talk about the case of Siddhartha Dhar because that is a matter that is still being investigated, but I am going to use this—and I think colleagues might use it—as a way of expressing our concern about the general policy in the area of giving bail to those who are involved in terrorist activities. As a matter of course in respect of police bail, why is it not possible when someone is suspected of being involved in a proscribed organisation and goes through the process of coming to a police station that it is a condition of bail that their passport be surrendered there and then at the police station?

Mark Rowley: I will talk generally about policy—and please do not link what I say to particular cases; I think that would be unhelpful—the whole way through this.

Chair: We are very happy to talk about policy because it affects other cases, I am sure.

Mark Rowley: Absolutely. It is worth starting off by thinking of two types of bail: bail after somebody has been charged with an offence, and that may be given by the police or by the courts but this is somebody who is going to be tried eventually; or bail that is during an investigation where we have made an arrest, there is a lot of work to do, there is not enough evidence for a prosecution and, therefore, at that stage we are bailing somebody to come back while we do further enquiries. In that latter case, which is the most relevant one to speak about, police bail is a weak provision. We are in conversation with the Home Office about whether there are ways to strengthen it.

Q764 Chair: You would like to see that tightened up?

Mark Rowley: I absolutely would.

Q765 Chair: Would you like part of the tightening up process to be the ability to retain a passport at a police station?

Mark Rowley: Yes, that would be one specific part but, most importantly, the only thing that is an offence in terms of breach of police bail is not coming back on the due date at the end. If conditions are put on somebody—which may be a curfew, it may be non-association, it may be surrendering passport immediately or in a short period of time—if that person breaches those conditions in a police bail process, we can arrest them but we cannot prosecute them for anything. They are back in police custody with a very tight timescale, so they just get bailed again with the same conditions. It is fairly toothless, whereas court bail when someone is charged, if someone breaches the conditions put down by a court, the court can take much stronger action.

Q766 Chair: Indeed, and the court presumably, in terms of an application for bail, can ask that the passport be surrendered?

Mark Rowley: Absolutely, and can hold somebody in custody until they are.

Q767 Chair: We have noted that five extremists have left the United Kingdom in the last 20 months despite monitoring by security services. What you are saying to us is that the provisions on bail at the moment, irrespective of this particular case but generally, need to be tightened up to enable the police to be able to seize a passport or get a passport given in when this person is given bail. Secondly, if bail is breached there is no criminal offence committed. You would like to see this as a criminal offence?

Mark Rowley: I absolutely would do and that would give a stronger purchase on people who are on bail, particularly for serious offences as in this case.

The other relevant matter is our intelligence coverage. Part of the inference of your question is: if you are worried about these people why weren't you following them? How were they able to get out of the country? Just to give a sense of an order of magnitude, there are several thousand people that we are concerned about from a terrorism and extremism perspective across the full spectrum. Constantly, across all the operations we are running, particularly in a weekly meeting, my team and Andrew Parker's team—as head of MI5—are prioritising the operations that get the most attention, whether that is about surveillance teams following them, whether that is about technical operations of monitoring phones and communications and so on, or whether that is about our deployment of undercover officers and agents. We are having to prioritise against the highest risk, which means there will be some people who are on bail who will not be the highest risk individuals because we are focused on those more intent on attack planning quite often.

Q768 Chair: But you would understand the concern of the public. Here you have an individual—not particularly Mr Dhar, but an individual who might have been part of a proscribed organisation—who has been arrested, who goes to the police station, who is asked to surrender their passport by 3 October in this particular case—it could be any other day—and then 36 days later a letter is sent, quite a pleasant letter, which I know you have a copy of, dated 7 November 2014 basically asking very politely, “Dear Mr Dhar” in this particular case—I know you are not talking about Mr Dhar—“Please confirm that you are still in the country. Please surrender all your travel documents as you promised to do on 3 October”, 36 days earlier, “Please do not attend or organise any Dawah stalls and please do not publish any messages, videos or communications”. It just sounds very weak as a follow-up to someone who has failed to produce a passport. I am sure you will have sent these letters out in other cases.

Mark Rowley: In general process terms, even if someone has skipped bail we will sometimes be in a situation where for the audit trail, for the legal process with solicitors and so on, we are laying down a trail of letters even though we will know this person has already skipped bail. In any individual case, I would not read too much into one piece of correspondence. The point here is that we—

Q769 Chair: Is it for public relations purposes or—

Mark Rowley: No, it is for legal process. It is not for public relations.

Q770 Chair: It is for legal process, so could you not have said, “You should have produced your passport on 3 October. You did not, so we are coming around to see you”?

Mark Rowley: I am not going to get into the detail of particular cases.

Chair: No, generally, not about this particular case but generally on a terrorism case as opposed to other cases.

Mark Rowley: If we feel on any case that somebody has skipped bail, as soon as we know that we are going to be doing everything possible to try to track them down. Alongside that, there may be some legal process that is worth dotting “i’s” and crossing “t’s” so if we do get hold of them that strengthens our position when we take them before a court. It is no more complex than that.

Q771 Chair: Focusing on the passport issue, which is the main focus of the start of this evidence, in your letter to us that you very kindly sent today, which is very detailed and we are very grateful, you talk about other agencies being involved and you talk about notifying other agencies. As far as this Committee is concerned—because we have followed these matters for many years—the most important agencies are the UK Border Force and the Passport Office. If you have concerns about someone leaving the country and you have asked for a passport to be surrendered, I would imagine that you would have the capacity to inform the Passport Office and UK Border Force immediately. But what you say in your letter is that it is done basically not as quickly as that. How long does it take to notify?

Mark Rowley: It depends on the particular case and exactly who we are informing of what, but the principle, if someone is put on a ports alert system, as soon as it is on that system it is there for anybody who might check it. It is basically instant information available to all partners.

Q772 Chair: Yes, but in terms of the custody sergeant who gives the bail, who then informs the Passport Office and alerts UKBA?

Mark Rowley: In a counter-terrorism case, the investigative team will have tasked one of their team to put the necessary markers on the right computer system so that that—

Q773 Chair: Is that immediate?

Mark Rowley: Yes, it will in pretty much every case be immediate.

Q774 Chair: In every case that somebody has been arrested in relation to counter-terrorism issues who is then released on bail, where there is a request for a surrender of a passport it would happen immediately that the Passport Office and the Border Force would be informed?

Mark Rowley: In every case where there is a terrorism arrest and we have sufficient concern about someone fleeing that we are seizing passports, if we are not putting the necessary markers on at or about the time they leave custody that would be a mistake.

Q775 Chair: You have made it very clear to this Committee—and I am very grateful to you—that the law is not strong enough on bail and passports, especially for counter-terrorism issues. You want to see it tightened up.

Mark Rowley: Absolutely, and if I was just to mention we made more arrests last year than ever before, 339. At the moment that cohort of 339, about a third are being prosecuted, a third no further action, and a third are ongoing investigations on bail. The control around that third would be stronger if police bail was a stronger provision.

Q776 Chair: If they breach the conditions you want that to be a criminal offence?

Mark Rowley: That would be part of it.

Q777 Chair: Otherwise at the moment what would happen in cases like this is you would just arrest them and then have to re-bail them?

Mark Rowley: We arrest them and their custody clock restarts. You know it is only 24 to 36 hours on a normal clock, so you keep them for another hour and then you bail them again on the same conditions, unless you happen to have gathered enough evidence there to be able to charge them.

Chair: Very helpful. Mr Burrowes has a quick supplementary.

Q778 Mr Burrowes: Yes, pushing the ball back in the legislators' court in relation to police bail being firmed up, but just pushing it back in your court, surely when someone has been arrested on terrorism-linked offences, police bail, and you want their passport to be surrendered and it has not happened or they have skipped police bail, they must come into the definition of an individual of concern that needs to be disrupted and the powers to seize their passport need to be executed.

Mark Rowley: Which powers to seize their passport are those?

Mr Burrowes: Under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act.

Mark Rowley: There are those powers but for that you have quite a high threshold in terms of intelligence to flee the country, but to do that you have to find the passport. In every one of these cases, if we have arrested somebody for a terrorist offence we will almost certainly be searching their address and several others in relation to seizing evidence. In that process, we will be keeping an eye out for passports. If they have hidden it away, given it to somebody else and we have not found it, then we cannot seize the document.

Q779 Mr Burrowes: That is practical and I am asking in principle would you not be using those powers, which have relatively recently been given to you, to treat those type of people who are on police bail who skip or do not return their passport as individuals of concern?

Mark Rowley: But you need the passport to be able to do that.

Q780 Mr Burrowes: No, I appreciate that. You do that, but you are saying you need further powers, are you, in relation to seizure or not?

Mark Rowley: To seize a passport you need to know where it is. That is the fundamental problem there.

Q781 Mr Burrowes: Since February 2015 passports have been seized about 20 times. Is that a sufficient number when on average there are 100 people per week being referred to counter-terrorism forces at the border?

Mark Rowley: We are using the power to seize passports as often as we think we can make it stand up based on the legislation. It is about 20 at the moment.

Q782 Mr Burrowes: Do you think that is enough, in practical terms, given the risks that you see? I appreciate you have some caution about the legislation but is it enough?

Mark Rowley: We have to have grounds for an individual. Parliament has not decided to write legislation on the basis that anybody who is an extremist or associated with terrorism automatically loses their passport. There are legal thresholds that are much higher than that, which I think are perfectly reasonable. There are a whole range of reasons why you would not want to go that far. But that means on every case it has to be necessary and proportionate.

Q783 Mr Burrowes: I appreciate that, but now it has been in operation since February 2015—and you have asked us to look at the issue of police bail—do you think we need to relook at the issue of seizures given that about 100 people per week are being referred to counter-terrorism forces at the border?

Mark Rowley: There is nothing that I have been briefed on or I have come across at the moment that says that power needs to be reviewed.

Q784 Mr Winnick: I have not seen the letter—I do not think the rest of us have—that the Chair has referred to, but hopefully that will not be a disadvantage in asking and answering your questions. The Chair mentioned the case about the passport being requested. I wonder if I could ask you a related matter. It has come out in the public domain that one of the ringleaders of the massacre in Paris in November came to this country. There were no difficulties, apparently, in his arriving and then leaving the country. I understand, of course, Assistant Commissioner, that you are not in any way responsible for border security in that respect, but does it not come as somewhat of a shock to you that an individual who presumably was on some sort of list can come freely into Britain, do whatever he did and then go back to Paris and be a ringleader in that horrifying massacre?

Mark Rowley: I am sorry but I think there are lots of assumptions in that and I do not think we can take at face value every titbit that is in the media suggesting UK links to what has been going on in Belgium and France recently. It is not all without foundation, but there are a lot of articles being written that are putting two and two together and making five. Because these are live issues and investigations and because we are not confirming or denying what is going on it is dangerous to take it all as read.

In terms of the general policy issue of border security and data sharing across Europe, data sharing across Europe has been strengthened over the last year. Obviously, ourselves and MI5 have a completely joined-up system and jointly that is shared across Europe as part of a counter-terrorism network to make sure we have common data. Those relationships are improving all the time.

In terms of the specific about border security, the Home Office are the right people to answer in terms of the detail but they have been working very hard over the last 18 months to reflect the changing terrorist threat in terms of changing border policy. For example, we are now more worried about people leaving the country for terrorist purposes than we would have been a couple of years ago, so that has affected their regime around exit checks. There are still things that can be improved and they are working on that, but I think they should answer on that rather than me.

Q785 Mr Winnick: It leaves a question mark, if I may say so with respect, Assistant Commissioner, in the minds of many, including myself, but I have obviously noted the explanation you have given. In response to the atrocities that did occur in Paris, the Met announced an urgent review of its tactics for dealing with a major terrorist attack. We know, of course, what has happened in Istanbul today; I think 10 have been murdered. Could you give any sort of briefing, a few sentences, about what is being done as a result of the atrocities?

Mark Rowley: There are two components to that: one is about tactics and one is about the amount of resource we have. In terms of the detailed evidence and material we now have of exactly how the attacks were perpetrated, what went on and what policing tactics would be required against it, there has been nothing in what we have discovered that has caused us a fundamental concern in terms of the nature of our resources and training that we have built up over recent years. Tactically, we think we are in a decent position.

The thing that it has changed in our perspective—and I have talked about this publicly, as have some other senior officers, and it was reflected in the spending review settlement from the Government—is the amount of firearms officers we have. Because of the number of parallel attacks and the nature of what went on in Paris, which would require a large number of officers at speed who have advanced skills to be able to go forward and confront this threat, we feel we need to increase the amount of firearms officers. You will have seen the Chancellor and the Home Secretary announce more money for police firearms

officers. The national policing lead on firearms has been commissioned by Deputy Chief Constable Simon Chesterman and he is doing a piece of work now based on the threat across the country and looking at how to best organise resources nationally, with some growth in firearms, to be stronger and better placed to confront such an attack if it took place in London or indeed elsewhere.

Q786 Mr Winnick: The Government constantly state—the Home Secretary certainly—that there are sufficient police personnel in view of the constant threat from terrorists. Would you say, Assistant Commissioner—it could always be said, obviously, and I anticipate you will say we could always have more—as it stands at the moment you feel you have adequate numbers, bearing in mind the threat obviously in the capital but not confined to the capital by any means?

Mark Rowley: As you say, almost whatever I had I would always like to have twice as much because you could be more confident. In terms of the national counter-terrorism network that we co-ordinate from London, it is a collaboration across the country based in the regional hubs. We had a detailed conversation in the spending round and I think we have a reasonable settlement in terms of the uplift in resources over the next year or two. There is also an expectation that we have to follow through on continuing reform and savings plans, so while there is a big surge of cash in the first couple of years we still have an expectation on us to generate efficiencies to claw most of that back over the five-year period. In terms of the prospect for the next couple of years, I think we have had a reasonable settlement.

Q787 Mr Winnick: The final question, if I may: a figure was given at some stage about the number who are considered to be terror suspects. I think the figure at the time was 2,000. Would you have any further information or would you stand by that figure?

Mark Rowley: As I said at the start, there are a few thousand people of concern. Those range from extremists on the edge of counter-terrorism networks or facilitators, people maybe generating money through fraud that is implementing counter-terrorism, all the way through to tens of operations that we are involved with where people have at least an aspiration to conduct attacks.

Q788 Chair: Just clarifying: you are not confirming or denying whether Abdel Abaaoud came into this country and went to visit Birmingham by getting a ferry over to Dover? You are not confirming or denying this?

Mark Rowley: I am not confirming or denying that. I was saying, though, that there have been several different stories over the last few weeks about people coming and going, different hypotheses, different ideas, and I was saying that in there is some nonsense.

Chair: Yes, but some truth?

Mark Rowley: Some truth, but I am not going to go any further.

Chair: You are not telling us which is which?

Mark Rowley: No, I cannot do. I am sorry.

Q789 Chair: No, I understand. Sir Charles Montgomery confirmed to this Committee in November 2015 that 6,064 people had been referred to the police by Border Force on suspicion of involvement in terrorism activity. Mr Burrowes talked about it being 100 a week. Would you be able to know whether any of these suspects were one of those people? We do not want you to tell us now, but presumably as you trawl through these numbers, there are huge numbers involved?

Mark Rowley: We have a joint system. We have a data centre that is constantly looking at ports data of what people have booked, what travel is happening, and matching it against various sets of indices such as ports warnings, indexes and so on. Our port policing activity is prioritised based on that data and those are the flags that I think Sir Charles is talking about.

Q790 Chair: Those referrals would come to you, the CT unit at the Met? Because 6,000 sounds like an awful lot of people.

Mark Rowley: They are coming to the national counter-terrorism network, into the ports, and the activity of the police officers at the ports who provide particular scrutiny of certain passengers is based on those warnings that are coming in.

Q791 Chair: Of course, but how long would that take? You see, if somebody comes on a day trip who is on an international warning index—

Mark Rowley: It is immediate. They only stop them at the border.

Chair: Immediate?

Mark Rowley: Not every single person gets intercepted but they only stop them at the border. I would also point out that these warnings range from things done on rule sets, so it is not so much about the individual, it might be about the pattern of travel. If we have discovered information about a particular circuitous route of travel that people are using to try to get to Syria and we have evidence that three people on this flight have booked that route, we are going to stop and speak to them, knowing nothing about them beforehand. Conversely, at the other end of the spectrum, it might be about an individual who is known to be a concern. Our activity at the ports is prioritised based on that sort of data.

Q792 Chair: In respect of the Dhar case, which you cannot talk about but the general principle that it produces, before the investigation is completed are you going to ensure that your officers are more robust in dealing with the issue of passports rather than waiting, for example, the 36 days before they write a letter? Is this something that could be flagged up immediately or are you going to continue with the practice of producing letters for legal reasons?

Mark Rowley: I am not going to talk about what practice did or did not happen on a particular case. The general expectation is that if we can get hold of a passport of course we will do, albeit our powers to do so are limited, as I have discussed. When we put people on bail we put the strongest conditions around them that will stand up in a court process.

Q793 Chair: You are not changing anything as a result of what has happened so far? You are waiting for Parliament to change the law, obviously, which we will look at.

Mark Rowley: There are always things you can learn from individual cases, but I am not going to go into the details of that individual one because that gets into discussing the practicalities and the issues.

Q794 Tim Loughton: Just to come back on the passport-owning hypothetical terrorist, why this obsession with ownership of the passport and finding the passport? The passport is a meaningless document in itself unless it affords safe passage. Surely somebody who has been arrested and released on police bail, a condition of which is giving up their passport and whatever other documents and has failed to do so, automatically there must be notification to the border authorities at all the points of exit in the UK and close points of entry at neighbouring countries. Is that not automatically done?

Mark Rowley: Yes.

Q795 Tim Loughton: In which case, why does it matter if you have not physically found the passport?

Mark Rowley: Yes, that happens. That does not deal with every eventuality in terms of the situation at ports. There are many different ways in and out of the country. There are different degrees of exit checks. Obviously, the strongest checking regime we all see at airports because airport security has been such a big issue for so long. There are other ports and other routes that are less robust and the Home Office is constantly working on how to tighten those up. They are better placed to speak on the detail of those challenges than I am, and while I have some detail on those issues here I am not going to discuss publicly the frailties with the system.

Q796 Tim Loughton: I am talking about generalities here, and of course there are people who will leave the country in a rowing boat; that does not require a passport. But for all conventional points of exit, you will be required to present a passport at a check-in desk at

an airport or at a ferry or Channel tunnel terminal. Instantly that passport is presented and checked it would come up with a warning sign that would alert that person to be detained and then whatever action needs to take place. Is that not the case?

Mark Rowley: As I understand it, some travel to Europe can be done on ID cards, not necessarily on passports, for example. It is more complex than you are suggesting.

Q797 Tim Loughton: Okay, but again you would have knowledge of an ID card, would you not?

Mark Rowley: If we had flagged up the name of Mark Rowley then that would still be—

Q798 Tim Loughton: But surely you are not saying that if somebody has not handed in their passport they could use an ID card with impunity? Surely the identity of the person is the same whether it is in a passport with a passport number or an ID card. The name and everything is the same. Surely a border post would be able to detect that person on the basis of their identity. How soon after they have failed to present their documents would you then alert all Border Force to detain that person?

Mark Rowley: The intention is that if we are concerned about somebody fleeing, we are seizing their passport, regardless of whether they have surrendered it or not, regardless of any other factor—at that stage we will still be putting them on a ports warning. That is an extra level of security in case they use an ID card or anything else. We are not going to wait to see whether we have the passport. We should be—

Q799 Tim Loughton: So those people cannot get out of the country on an ID card?

Mark Rowley: If there was an automatic check against all the databases for that exit. We are going to get too much into detail. I think you need a private briefing from borders experts on this matter.

Chair: Which we will be getting. Thank you very much for that.

Q800 Mr Burrowes: Dealing with the Leytonstone tube attack, would you categorise that as a terrorist attack?

Mark Rowley: I think it is right on the margins and the prosecutor who opened the case in summary when the charged individual appeared before the court indicated that it was going to be prosecuted on the basis that it was terrorist motivated, so let us work that through. I think we have to accept—

Mr Burrowes: It is all very well saying, “Work that through”—

Mark Rowley: Stepping back at the moment, we have a range of terrorist possibilities, don't we, from the most sophisticated organised attacks such as the things we have seen in

Paris, through to the lone inspired individual who—and this is not that particular case—may have mental health issues. You have that range.

Q801 Mr Burrowes: Exactly. In Edmonton last year, there was another case involving someone who was mentally ill who decapitated a civilian and was saying lots of things. It is interesting how the categorisation from the police will obviously then have consequences, not least in terms of the public's perception of issues and then their responses, not least in a tube attack. Does there need to be some greater care in terms of early categorisation of cases?

Mark Rowley: In the heat of the moment at the start, we have to make a judgment on how we are going to investigate and what resources we are going to put into something. I expect my team to lean on the side of caution. The additional resources and powers that come with a counter-terrorism investigation—you need to have those tools open to you from early on. We make a spot judgment. In due course, sending it through the court process can make some decisions, can't it, but we should not be too cautious because that just creates confusion in who is going to lead. I think we should pick it up and get on with it.

Q802 Mr Burrowes: But also that categorisation causes fear among the public?

Mark Rowley: It is wrong to talk about a particular case that is going to go through the courts, but I think the public can see things for what they are. If a case is planned and organised like Paris, that is very clearly at one end of the spectrum; if a case involves an individual and there are signs of mental health issues, that is at the other end of the spectrum.

Q803 Mr Burrowes: Can I ask you about police operations rather than the actual prosecution side of a case? Would you share the concerns of former Commander John O'Connor of the Flying Squad, who shared his concern of being alarmed that armed officers were not first at the scene in that particular case?

Mark Rowley: No. Again, I think—

Q804 Mr Burrowes: You said that more resources are deployed when it is categorised as a terrorist case and this was one that was categorised, so why were armed forces not out there?

Mark Rowley: The phone call that first came in did not lead to that conclusion. It was a man with a knife and a sensible decision was made and Taser officers, who are trained to deal with a man with a knife, were deployed and dealt with it very, very successfully. If you followed social media and the reaction of Londoners and beyond, people were massively impressed and grateful for the response. Within a few minutes of the incident starting, a further decision was made then to send firearms officers as well, but the incident had been

resolved before the firearms officers got there. It was a success and it shows the benefit of Taser in dealing with dangerous people with knives.

Chair: Thank you. I think we were all very impressed with the response that was made and grateful for all the work that has been done. I have to vacate the Chair slightly earlier because we have the Liaison Committee session with the Prime Minister and the Committee needs to be represented, so apologies for leaving earlier.

Q805 Stuart C. McDonald: Assistant Commissioner, from what you say, you are obviously an avid reader of newspaper stories so you will be aware of the comments of the former Home Office counter-terrorism adviser, Mr Mahmood. He recently claimed that UK authorities are radicalising young Muslims by tackling the terror threat the wrong way and arresting too many people, the majority of whom are then not charged and not convicted. How would you respond to those comments?

Mark Rowley: That is a bit more armchair nonsense, to be honest. If you look at the general arrests—I have looked at the Metropolitan Police; you would not see something different across the country—in mainstream policing, away from counter-terrorism, about 40% of arrests end up in a prosecution. If we look at the track record for counter-terrorism policing over the last year or two, making some sensible assumptions for the people currently on bail and a proportion that will end up being charged, it is about half. We are prosecuting more people who we arrest, a higher proportion, than in day to day policing. Some of that is not surprising because day-to-day policing, of course, is dealing with the chaos of fast situations on a regular basis so there is more uncertainty there. The suggestion that there are the vast majority not being charged is just wrong.

Q806 Stuart C. McDonald: That is very helpful, thanks. More generally, in the current atmosphere there must be a slight apprehension among your officers that they do not want to be the one who failed to make that arrest or took that particular action that ended up causing a tragedy. Is there a danger of defensive policing in that way and how do you guard against it?

Mark Rowley: Do you mean that leads to making too many arrests or too few? I am not sure I understand the question.

Stuart C. McDonald: Too many, possibly. They must feel under enormous pressure if there is any sort of suspicion at all to take some sort of action. It might be short of arrest, but you have not detected any sort of—

Mark Rowley: No, and, as I say, if we are generating a higher charge rate than day to day policing—different subject matter, but that is probably quite a good benchmark to indicate that we are not casting the net too wide. I also think the public expect us to be very assertive in tackling risk and if people are terrorists, aspiring terrorists—we have tens of operations of people who have at least an aspiration to carry out attacks; we have thousands

of people we are concerned about. Anything we can do to disrupt them, whether that is about criminal prosecution because they are living off fraud or whether that is using terrorist legislation, we are going to take that opportunity. I think the public would expect us to.

Q807 Chair: I am going to put some of these points directly to the Prime Minister now when he appears before the Liaison Committee, but just for the benefit of those who have come in late I will summarise what you have said. You regard bail powers at the moment as being toothless; they need to be tougher. This includes making passport collection a condition of bail, it includes making bail breaches a criminal offence, and it is standard procedure for other agencies to be informed when a terrorism suspect is bailed immediately. Is that right?

Mark Rowley: The last point: if there is a reason to do so. If we are concerned about them fleeing the country, then yes. Not every single case would merit lots of sharing of information, but if it is necessary then we should do it immediately.

Chair: I will now leave you in the hands of five other lawyers, starting with Mr Umunna.

Mark Rowley: What a privilege!

In the absence of the Chair, Mr David Winnick was called to the Chair.

Q808 Mr Umunna: Can I start by asking you about the threat level? The Prime Minister in the wake of the Paris attack said that an attack of that order was highly likely—please do correct me if I am using the wrong description here—on UK soil. More specifically—and you referred earlier to the parallel multiple incidents that occurred in Paris—how likely do you think it is that we may be subject to that kind of multiple parallel attack here in London, which would be the comparator to Paris?

Mark Rowley: The threat level at the moment is graded at severe. That is the second highest level on the national ladder and means an attack is highly likely. That is catching the range of possibilities. The only level above that is critical, meaning something is imminent, which it would be unlikely to be at for anything other than a short period. It is the highest level it could be for a sustained period and it has been there for 18 months or so and I think for the foreseeable future.

In terms of the marauding terrorist firearms attacks such as we saw in Paris, it is a possibility, it is an aspiration. There are some differences in context. The fact that we have a counter-terrorism infrastructure and the way the police and the security service work together, locally spread police resources that can work closely with communities, I think we have some advantages built over 40 years of countering terrorism. I also think the channel and the border controls and the much lower availability of firearms, particularly automatic

weapons, in the UK is a better starting point. There are some different starting conditions, but it must be a possibility.

Mr Umunna: It is a possibility?

Mark Rowley: It is a possibility. One of the things we have done is we have for some time been working hard, as you would expect us to, on any possible route for firearms to get in the hands of terrorists, being particularly vigilant about that. Since the Paris attacks, we have stepped up that approach even further with an operation called Operation Endeavour, which we are working hard on co-ordinating with the National Crime Agency, Borders and other partners.

Q809 Mr Umunna: Moving away from the kind of armchair commentary you referred to of the former Flying Squad Commander, John O'Connor, in respect of the response time of armed officers, first of all, what is the average response time of armed officers in London, if you are able to give it? How is that different from the response time of a car that is not carrying arms? In the Leytonstone situation, for example, if you had a perpetrator of an offence carrying a firearm, if you are a member of the public at the Leytonstone tube station—just using it as an example—how soon would you expect to see that red car come?

Mark Rowley: I would have to double check this to give you a confident number. I think the average is 10 to 12 minutes for firearms, which is only a bit longer than normal response times. That I think is very quick. If we do increase the number of firearms officers—there is a piece of national work going on to respond to that, extra money that is coming in also—we were having a conversation chaired by the commissioner this morning in the Metropolitan Police in terms of what we are going to do there.

Q810 Mr Umunna: How does that compare to response times in other European capitals like Paris? Do we know?

Mark Rowley: I think it is better in this context, but I will need to explain that. If you have a terrorist with an automatic or semi-automatic weapon, what you want to turn up is not an armed officer full stop; you want an armed officer with the right amount of weaponry and training to be able to confront that. If you look at some of the European countries where everyone has a weapon but it is a basic amount of training and it is a pistol, it is a handgun on the hip, frankly they have very little prospect of success against such a threat. While they will get people there quicker because all their officers are armed, their ability to tackle the threat is very limited. Our armed response vehicles, if the Committee wants to have a private viewing of what that entails and the amount of weaponry and training, we could show you what that is.

Chair: It would be more for a private Committee.

Mark Rowley: Yes, exactly. It is very impressive and they are trained and able to confront exactly the sort of awful events we have seen in Paris.

Q811 Mr Umunna: So pistols are simply inadequate?

Mark Rowley: Pistols are inadequate. You need powerful weapons that can confront automatic weapons. We do not use automatic weapons because we do not want to kill lots of innocent members of the public spraying rounds around. Some people have suggested we should have that, which we are absolutely sure we should not. You need powerful weapons. You need the training to be able to go forward and deal with these people. You need distraction devices. You need an awful lot of ammunition and you need people trained in these very, very frightening and difficult situations. Being able to deliver that capability, having it on the streets of London permanently, not having to wait for some specialist resource to turn out: that is the important thing, which we can deliver in 10 or 15 minutes.

Q812 Mr Umunna: Can I ask one final question, which is on a slightly different track but is informed by some of the debates we have had in Parliament, principally the Syria debate, since you last appeared in front of us on 24 November? Part of that debate that we had in the House of Commons Chamber touched on the financing of Daesh. I appreciate that the City of London Police is a slightly different entity to yourselves, but to what extent—and I am asking you quite a general question, but I would appreciate it if you can at least give to some extent a pointed answer—is the square mile, our financial services sector in the UK, being used directly or indirectly to finance the activities of Daesh?

Mark Rowley: I have not seen any evidence of that. Potential finance for terrorism and extremism in the UK and beyond is one of the things we are heavily involved with. The City of London co-ordinate fraud nationally. Fraud is one of the powers we use most often to disrupt extremists and terrorists. The last time I checked the data, about a third of our arrests were fraud related. Often we cannot definitely prove that is going towards terrorism but we have suspicion. We have done “cash for crash” type investigations, some of the online scams, some of the over the phone scams of vulnerable people. Any case that touches on terrorism we grab hold of it into the counter-terrorism network in London, Birmingham, Manchester and so on, and we throw our resources at those cases to make sure we can disrupt it.

Q813 Mr Umunna: Just to be clear, you are saying that you have not seen any direct evidence or intelligence that would suggest that the City of London is being used indirectly or directly to finance Daesh operations?

Mark Rowley: I have not seen that at all, no.

Q814 James Berry: First, I should say that, prior to being elected I did represent the Metropolitan Police as a barrister. Just going back to the bail letter, that letter was produced theatrically in the House of Commons but without any proper explanation, and I very much understand why you are not willing to go into the explanation today. I am sure we will get that some time in the future. Would you be able to confirm whether these propositions are correct just based on what you have said so far? First, the tone of that bail letter is very much standard form and nothing to be particularly concerned about?

Mark Rowley: Absolutely.

Q815 James Berry: Secondly, that every bail case is dealt with on a case by case basis by the custody sergeant and then the court?

Mark Rowley: That is absolutely right.

Q816 James Berry: Thirdly, that even in terrorism cases there will be a range of risks and, therefore, a range of proportionate bail measures?

Mark Rowley: Absolutely. The reason why that is important is that some of what has been in the papers suggests every terrorist should automatically have bail refused and have everything taken off them, like there should be some carte blanche rule. The law is written that every case needs to be decided on its own merits: necessity and proportionality. Some of the rhetoric that has been bouncing around is not where the law currently stands.

Q817 James Berry: Thank you. Fourthly, that even where the police are physically able to seize a passport there may not be the legal grounds to do so?

Mark Rowley: Possibly, but the practicalities of getting hold of it are the challenge.

Q818 Mr Winnick: Could you write to us on that because you seem to be rather ambiguous in your reply? It is a rather important point, the question that Mr Berry has made. You could write to us?

Mark Rowley: Yes. The things we have discussed in detail—I will just lay out in detail exactly the gaps in the bail legislation, the areas that could be strengthened.

Chair: I think that would be useful.

Q819 James Berry: Yes. Finally, is it right that it does not follow from the fact that an arrestee has been asked to surrender their passport that they will automatically be placed on an all ports warning?

Mark Rowley: It should do. I cannot think of an exception where it would not. We are asking for a passport to be surrendered because we are worried about them fleeing; therefore,

we want to put a ports warning on. It does not automatically follow that just because somebody has been arrested and bailed we are going to put a warning on.

James Berry: Of course, yes.

Mark Rowley: But once we are worried about them fleeing and we are taking the passport, or looking to do so, we would also be looking to put the warning on.

James Berry: Yes. I think it would be helpful if you could clarify that point as well in your response.

Mark Rowley: Yes.

Q820 James Berry: Finally, turning to firearms officers, we have been very clear from your evidence on the previous occasion and today that the CT-trained firearms officers in the capital are being beefed up, having extra funding for that.

Mark Rowley: And across the country. The funding is national funding.

James Berry: Yes, that is what I wanted to ask about. We have had clarity on what is happening in London and the commissioner has given evidence on that. I have been privileged to see the excellent work our regional force firearms units do, but I think the concern is that the capability is smaller and more spread out outside London. Have your representations personally in your position to Deputy Chief Constable Chesterman's review been that firearms resources should be increased across the country and particularly in areas where there is a threat of terrorism?

Mark Rowley: Absolutely. We did some very rapid work after the Paris event. By the end of that week we had done a tabletop looking at the Paris events occurring in four different conurbations in the UK, different degrees of scale and remoteness. Building on that, a proposition was put in. The Government notionally awarded extra funding and Simon Chesterman is doing the final piece of work over the next few weeks to finalise, based on the threat picture, how the threat is laid out across the country, how that resource should be spread out or brigaded for best effect. That thinking is being done at the moment. It is not about London, it is about the whole country. Of course, London is going to be a more attractive target than many other places and the resource needs to be laid out accordingly, and that is the work we are doing at the moment.

Q821 James Berry: The final question: any time it has taken to put these extra officers in place is partly due to the fact you are conducting a review, which is the proper way to do it, and partly, of course, for additional firearms officers that have to go through the College of Police accredited training, the active shooter course and be carefully identified as appropriate officers?

Mark Rowley: They all have to be properly trained. That said, several forces, including the Met, that have particular concern have made some temporary measures to strengthen the number by more overtime, fewer rest days, and so on. You can stretch your existing resources a little further but to have sustained growth you need to train more people, as you say.

Q822 Mr Ranil Jayawardena: Assistant Commissioner, just following on from Mr Berry's point on the greater number of armed officers on the streets, would such a measure be helpful in dealing with these lone wolf type attacks like at Leytonstone?

Mark Rowley: Anybody with a dangerous intent, then a firearms officer is helpful in that. It should be borne in mind that firearms officers also carry less lethal options like Tasers and other devices, so it is not simply about deploying firearms. Many forces have also looked at their number of Taser-trained officers and some are extending that to some degree as well. Of course, a Taser is useful against somebody with a knife; it does not work, clearly, against somebody with a firearm.

Q823 Mr Ranil Jayawardena: It is clear it is not all about firearms officers and it is part of a broader package of measures in terms of the right funding for the right officers.

Mark Rowley: Absolutely.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena: To that end, when you appeared before the Committee in November you argued that the security and intelligence agencies had been awarded a significant uplift and that you needed a proportionate uplift because of the contribution you make in investigation, prosecution, and indeed working with communities themselves. Have you received any confirmation yet of what your funding level will be?

Mark Rowley: There is still some detail being worked out, but as I said earlier we have had a reasonable settlement. I was looking for the number so I do not trip myself up. As of last year, the counter-terrorism policing budget is £594 million and next year will be £670 million, so that is a sizeable jump in one year. In addition to that, separately, this extra firearms money will be dealt with. As I said earlier, that is a big jump. We then have to generate efficiencies because it is going to be pulled back. That is part of the efficiency programmes we have running and that covers a range of initiatives.

The key things it is going to be spent on: I would highlight looking at the core of our investigative activity, so across the country more CT investigative capacity. Secondly, the amount of online work, digital work and the digital evidence is something that has stretched us and a big investment programme to strengthen our ability there. Thirdly, internationally. In the last year we have made 12 significant deployments internationally to various countries. Obviously, Belgium, Paris, Tunisia and Egypt are very clear but there have been several others as well. Then, looking at the local end of the spectrum, we are doing some further

work to strengthen our Prevent policing in certain areas. We are trying to put a better wrap around prisons and the risk of extremism there. Those are some of the headlines of how it is going to get spent.

Q824 Mr Ranil Jayawardena: Thank you. Clearly, that is quite a material uplift, as you say. The commissioner has appeared before us previously and talked about the clear ability for the Met to make further efficiencies in the years ahead as part of an ongoing programme. On that basis, are you now happy with the level of funding that has been provided for your team?

Mark Rowley: Yes, I think it is a reasonable settlement. As we said earlier, if you gave me twice as much money I could make good use of that as well, but I think this is reasonable.

Chair: “Reasonable” has many interpretations.

Q825 Mr Ranil Jayawardena: One further question, and it is a slightly different point. You talked earlier about collaboration between the security forces, both European and otherwise. Do you believe there has been sufficient collaboration and, if not, what further steps would you take or recommend the Government take?

Mark Rowley: I think the history is that our terrorist threats have not been as joined up or as agile as they obviously are now, and we have seen that particularly in northern Europe, haven’t we? I think it is reasonable to say we are on a journey from where we have been, where there was not so much need to share a high degree of detailed information at speed, and we have to make a lot of progress on that. A lot of progress has been made but there is still more we can do. The European counter-terrorism network in terms of sharing information is improving all the time and we have some English partners across the world, America, et cetera. We have very long established relationships, which are very effective.

Q826 Mr Ranil Jayawardena: Are there any specific initiatives that you believe we should be taking as Government?

Mark Rowley: Not beyond the ones that are currently being pushed.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena: You are content with the current position?

Mark Rowley: I am content that we are pushing on the right agenda now. There is a lot of progress to make but we are pushing the right issues.

Q827 Mr David Winnick: Presumably, Assistant Commissioner, what happened in Paris has been the opportunity to co-ordinate over what did occur and to learn lessons. Would that be right?

Mark Rowley: I think that is largely right. It is illustrative of the degree of fast time co-operation we need after an incident like that because our officers that we have in places like Belgium and France, the relationships they build, our ability to get hold of a high volume of detailed information immediately after an attack is critical because you would expect us to be doing everything possible, ourselves and the security service, to look at are there any links from that network to anything in the UK that we have missed. To do that you want investigative partners in France and Belgium to be sharing a lot of their material very quickly. We are making good progress in that respect.

Q828 Chair: Have you received any further representations from, say, a community, the Jewish community, who, arising from what occurred in Paris, would feel very much in danger from the murderous psychopaths? Obviously, what occurred in Paris was that the Jewish market was immediately attacked or was on the following day after the massacre of the journalists.

Mark Rowley: I think it is fair to say that certain communities, particularly Muslim and Jewish communities, are anxious about the terrorist threat and how it impacts on them and their communities. The Jewish communities worry about the threat of terrorism and some of the extreme protest groups and things that can use this as a lever, and Muslim communities worry about extremist groups and backlash. There is a significant growth in hate crime but they are small numbers and that is the challenge here. There is understandably quite a growth in anxiety and nervousness in those communities.

Q829 Mr David Winnick: Particularly the Jewish and Muslim communities—that is what you are saying?

Mark Rowley: Yes. Whether it is about the more extreme and very rare attacks where the counter-terrorism network gets involved or the day to day response of local officers in being extra speedy and vigilant in dealing with these issues, I think is critical because we have to maintain the trust of those communities, don't we, and the cohesion? If we let the fear of terrorism drive wedges, then that is going to make the situation worse, not better. We recognise the hate crime end of the spectrum is a really important piece of work.

Q830 Victoria Atkins: Assistant Commissioner, as you know, the draft Investigatory Powers Bill is being scrutinised at the moment by the Joint Committee. No doubt this Committee at some stage will look at the Bill when it is presented to the House of

Commons. Can you help us? Give us a taster of why that Bill is so essential in your work countering terrorism.

Mark Rowley: Yes, I can. It is essential across policing, but that includes counter-terrorism. To investigate people who are planning crime or terrorism you need to be able to work out who they are communicating with, how they are moving their money around, how they are booking travel. Those sorts of things have always been part of those investigations. Before mobile phones, following somebody around you would see them go to the bank or if you were intercepting the phone you would work with British Telecom and you would intercept the home phone. It would be quite simple—or you would intercept the mail. As we went towards mobile communications, that transferred into the phone world.

Now we are in a much more complex environment where communications are taking place through applications, so things like Snapchat and Telegram and a million and one other messenger applications. The problem with that from our perspective is that the data is not routinely stored. If there was evidence that you were doing something inappropriate and we wanted to find out who you had been telephoning with your mobile phone, with the right legal authorities we could go to Vodafone and they would have your phone bill. We would have that data and find out on the day in question who you phoned. In respect of many of these applications, if you are using them to communicate, that data does not exist after the fact. That means that evidence is lost for good.

In intelligence and surveillance, sometimes you can get the data if it is live but you cannot go back historically. Whether you are looking at a terrorist attack and very quickly working out what has gone on the network and you need to be able to look back in time, or whether away from counter-terrorism you have a 14-year-old who has gone missing and you think they have been groomed online, if you cannot get the historic data you are completely snookered on that investigation. Increasingly, that historic data is not available.

The critical part of the Bill—internet connection records is the phrase that has been used—that will help the police is about asking companies to store a bit more data. It is not about the content of messages. It is the front door, it is the address equivalent, so that we can make those sorts of inquiries. If people are communicating via an application, we can find out from Vodafone they were using Snapchat or WhatsApp and then we have the power to expect Snapchat or WhatsApp to hold on to data so we can go to them and find out who they were communicating with, which may be about finding out who has been grooming that 14-year-old girl or finding out who that terrorist who has just attacked somebody has been communicating with leading up to the event.

Does that make sense? On the one hand they are new powers, but I would not want to overstate their newness. They are really preserving a capability that we have always had but bringing that capability into a different age. I hope that makes sense. It is quite a complex area.

Q831 Victoria Atkins: Perhaps to put this in context, and I appreciate this would be an estimate, but in the last decade how many prosecutions of terrorism and serious organised crime have involved the sorts of data you have been talking about—namely, mobile phone data?

Mark Rowley: Communications data. It is give or take 100% for terrorism and it is over 90% for organised crime. It is that powerful. Then if you look at missing people, so looking at saving lives of vulnerable people, it is a big percentage there as well. This has been our bread and butter because if people are conspirators you need to get into their communications. If people are moving money around, you need to know they are using an online banking application to be able to go to the bank with the right judicial order to get the data. This is the bread and butter investigative techniques and it is updating legislation to operate in this new digital environment. We are losing that capability; it is slowly degrading.

Q832 Chair: It will not surprise you, Assistant Commissioner, that a lot of that will be the subject of a good deal of controversy and debate because that is what we are here for, the pros and cons.

Mark Rowley: Of course.

Chair: Assistant Commissioner, before he left the Chair summarised what you have stated and it has been very useful indeed. On behalf of the Committee, can I thank you, as he has done, for coming along, giving us your insight and answering our questions? I would be most surprised if in the next few months we did not invite you again to give an update on what has been happening, hopefully without any terrorist offence having taken place. Thank you very much indeed and we are grateful again for you answering our questions.

Mark Rowley: Thank you.