

Oral statement to Parliament

Sir David Amess Prevent learning review

The Security Minister updated on the Prevent learning review – jointly commissioned with Counter Terrorism Policing following the murder of Sir David Amess.

From: [Home Office \(/government/organisations/home-office\)](/government/organisations/home-office) and [Dan Jarvis MBE MP \(/government/people/dan-jarvis\)](/government/people/dan-jarvis)

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With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will make a statement on the publication of the Prevent learning review into the perpetrator of the attack that tragically killed Sir David Amess on 15 October 2021.

Sir David Amess was a beloved member of this House.

A hugely respected parliamentarian, his popularity extended right across the political divide.

To win and keep the respect of those outside one's own party is, as we all know, a rare accomplishment.

Over nearly 40 years of service in this place, Sir David fought every day for his constituents.

He advanced numerous causes with compassion, persistence and skill and members on all sides of the House knew him as a warm, respectful and always fair parliamentarian.

His legacy lives on, not least in Southend, which now has the city status he campaigned so determinedly for. He will never be forgotten.

And the motto on Sir David's memorial shield behind us states, 'His Light Remains'.

While this House lost a valued member on that terrible day, Sir David's wife and children lost a loving husband and a devoted father. They are in our thoughts and prayers – today and always.

Together with the Home Secretary, who spoke with Sir David's family recently, I recognise the courage and persistence they have shown in seeking the answers they deserve.

As the House will know, it was a heinous act of violence on 15 October 2021 that took Sir David away from those who knew and loved him.

The killer, Ali Harbi Ali – I won't say his name again – was convicted of murder in April 2022 and received a whole life sentence.

The judge said that this was a "murder that struck at the heart of our democracy" and had "no doubt whatsoever" that the nature of this case meant that the perpetrator "must be kept in prison for the rest of his life".

The perpetrator had previously been referred to the Prevent programme and subsequently to the specialist Channel programme between 2014 and 2016, between 5 and 7 years before the attack took place.

Immediately after the attack, a Prevent learning review was jointly commissioned by the Home Office and Counter Terrorism Policing to examine what happened in the case and see whether lessons needed rapidly to be learned. It was completed in February 2022.

Last week, I made a statement to the House on the government's publication of the Prevent learning review concerning the perpetrator of the abhorrent attack in Southport.

Today, we are taking a further step to enable public scrutiny of Prevent, and in recognition of the seriousness of the attack on Sir David, by publishing the [Prevent learning review \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-learning-review-sir-david-amess-attack\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-learning-review-sir-david-amess-attack) conducted in this case too.

The perpetrator of the attack on Sir David became known to Prevent in October 2014 when he was referred by his school after teachers identified a change in his behaviour.

The case was adopted by the Channel multi-agency early intervention programme in November 2014. An intervention provider who specialised in tackling Islamist extremism was assigned to work with him.

The perpetrator was exited from Channel in April 2015, after his terrorism risk was assessed as 'low'.

A 12-month post-exit police review in 2016 also found no terrorism concerns. The case was closed to Prevent at that point.

There were no further Prevent referrals in the 5 years between the case being closed and the attack.

The Prevent learning review examined how Prevent dealt with the perpetrator's risk, and how far the improvements made to Prevent since he was referred 7 years prior, would have impacted his management.

The review considered both the handling of the case at the time, and also the changes that had been made to Prevent since the referral in 2014. It examined how far those changes addressed any problems identified, and then made a series of recommendations.

The reviewer found that "from the material reviewed, the assessment in terms of the perpetrator's vulnerabilities was problematic and this ultimately led to questionable decision making and sub-optimal handling of the case during the time he was engaged with Prevent and Channel". It identified that the vulnerability assessment framework was not followed with the perpetrator's symptoms being prioritised over addressing the underlying causes of his vulnerabilities. The reviewer ultimately found that while Prevent policy and guidance at the time was mostly followed, the case was exited from Prevent too quickly.

The reviewer identified 6 issues, namely that:

- the support given did not tackle all the vulnerabilities identified
- record keeping was problematic and the rationale for certain decisions was not explicit
- responsibilities between police and the local authority were blurred

- the tool used for identifying an individual's vulnerability to radicalisation was outdated
- the school that made the referral to Prevent should have been involved in discussions to help determine risk and appropriate support
- the tasking of the intervention provider was problematic, with a miscommunication leading to only one session being provided instead of two

The reviewer then examined how far changes in the Prevent programme since 2016 had addressed these issues.

The reviewer recognised the significant changes that had been made to Prevent since the perpetrator was managed.

In particular, the introduction of the statutory Prevent and Channel duties under the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015.

The reviewer concluded that over the intervening period there have been considerable changes to policy and guidance for both the police and the wider Prevent arena including Channel.

Whilst a number of the issues in the perpetrator's case would most likely not be repeated today there were still a number of areas which could be considered as requiring further work in order to mitigate against future failures.

The reviewer made 4 recommendations for action to further strengthen Prevent. These were to:

- improve the referral process
- strengthen the initial intelligence assessment process
- update the tool used to identify vulnerability to being drawn into terrorism
- not reduce data retention periods

Since the report, the Home Office and Counter Terrorism Policing have fully implemented all 4 recommendations.

1. First, a single national referral form was launched, to encourage a consistent approach to referrals, building this into new training packages and mandating its use via statutory guidance.
2. Second, training has been delivered to police staff to strengthen the initial intelligence check stage, ensuring their understanding of Prevent is robust.
3. Third, a new Prevent assessment framework was rolled out in September 2024. This replaces the tools previously used to assess all referrals and cases in the Prevent system.

4. Fourth, data retention periods were fully reviewed in 2023. A joint decision was taken by the Home Office and Counter Terrorism Policing to maintain retention review periods at 6 years or 6 years after the 12-month review for Channel cases.

In addition to the publication of the Prevent learning review, we recognise the significant concerns that remain over the way in which Prevent dealt with the perpetrator – as well as the need to ensure that the recommendations it suggested for improving the scheme have properly been implemented.

Last week I set out to the House a series of new reforms instituted by this government to strengthen the Prevent programme, recognising the vital work done by officers across the country to keep people safe. That included the creation of a new independent Prevent commissioner.

I can today inform the House that the Home Secretary has asked the Prevent Commissioner to review the Prevent programme's interactions with the perpetrator in this case and ensure the implementation of relevant recommendations. We will ensure that the Amess family have the support they need to engage with the Prevent Commissioner in this work, so that they can have confidence that it will get to the truth about any failings in the scheme.

Madam Deputy Speaker, 2 further important issues have been raised which are relevant to this case – local policing, and members' security,

On local policing, concerns have been raised by the Amess family about the way in which Essex Police handled this case.

A complaint has been made, and referred back to the local force by the IOPC [Independent Office for Police Conduct] for consideration. That process must be allowed to follow its course. However, I can inform the House that the Home Secretary has written to the Chief Constable and Police and Crime Commissioner of Essex Police asking them to set out how the investigation will be conducted, and to be kept updated as the investigation progresses.

Secondly, on members' security. This is something the Home Secretary and I care deeply about, and I know that it is a matter to which Mr Speaker attaches the utmost importance, as will all members right across this House.

A review of security measures for MPs commissioned under the previous government has concluded, and all the recommendations have been implemented.

We must ensure that the learnings from this case have been properly implemented and I want to take this opportunity to thank Mr Speaker for his continued leadership on these matters – the Speaker's Conference is

considering what reforms are necessary to further improve MPs' safety and security – this is another important step.

The Leader of the House, Home Secretary and myself look forward to working closely with the Speaker and all members to ensure the facts of Sir David's murder are properly considered as part of the Speaker's Conference work and that the Parliamentary Security Department implements the recommendations of the review it conducted in the aftermath of Sir David's death.

I am also grateful to previous home secretaries and security ministers for their efforts in this area.

Our democracy is precious, and this government will defend it against any and all threats.

Not least, through the Defending Democracy Taskforce, where we are mounting a whole-of-government response to combat such threats including ensuring elected representatives can perform their duties safely and without fear.

Before I finish, I will pay tribute once more to Sir David.

He was a giant of this House and we miss him dearly.

In all that he did, Sir David epitomised public service at its best. It is beyond a tragedy that we can no longer seek his advice or rely on his wisdom.

We can, though, follow his example and devote ourselves every day to the task of building a better and safer Britain.

That is our shared challenge, Mr Speaker, and under this government, nothing will matter more.

I commend this statement to the House.

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