

Mayor of London's Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Programme submission to Editors' Code of Practice Review 26/03/2020

The Mayor's CVE Programme welcomes the public consultation on the review of the Editor's Code of Practice. We consider that the review provides an opportunity for the press to improve professional editorial standards. In line with our remit, our submission focuses on media reporting extremism related stories (including reporting on terrorism).

In December 2017, in the aftermath of an unprecedented spate of perpetrated and foiled terrorist activity, the Mayor launched a CVE Programme to identify opportunities to improve and renew efforts to tackle violent extremism in the capital. The Programme had three core objectives: to identify opportunities to renew and improve work to strengthen communities against extremism, to safeguard vulnerable Londoners from radicalisation, and to stop the spread of extremist ideologies.

Throughout the Programme, we were determined to listen to those voices that have previously been unheard, hearing views which have previously been absent in countering violent extremism discussions and some that have been previously dismissed including minority and marginalised communities, disempowered women and young people. The Programme delivered the most comprehensive city-wide engagement and review exercise in this policy area ever. Hearing from such a diverse array of London's communities has meant that grassroots voices have been at the heart of our listening. This has ensured that the Programme has delivered effective and evidence-based findings and recommendations.

The programme has revealed that while there is much to be positive about, there are several key areas that require urgent improved and renewed action if we are to satisfy ourselves that all possible steps are being taken to effectively counter violent extremism. The full report and list of recommendations can be found at <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/mayors-office-policing-and-crime-mopac/countering-violent-extremism>

The CVE Programme makes three recommendations for IPSO to improve the system of self-regulation of the press in relation to reporting on extremism and to better reflect public attitudes. The key recommendation is that the Editor's Code of Practice looks to ensure that that media outlets do everything in their power to prevent the publication of extremist propaganda ensuring that responsible reporting stops the spread of extremist ideologies while maintaining the public's right to know and freedom of expression.

1. The importance of not spreading extremist propaganda sentiment or 'glorifying' violent extremists when reporting on terrorism

IPSO should encourage media outlets in the strongest terms to do everything in their power to prevent the publication of extremist propaganda.

Participants spoke to the Programme of the importance of mainstream media not spreading the sentiment of extremists or 'glorifying' violent extremists when reporting on terrorism. Examples cited initially included the murder of 92 people in Norway by a white supremacist in which media outlets ran excerpts of the terrorist's manifesto but also the murder of Lee Rigby in which the media ran videos of one of the perpetrators making a speech to camera.

Assistant Commissioner Specialist Operations, Neil Basu (Britain's most senior counter terrorism police officer) has criticised media outlets for continually publishing violent extremist content included DAESH propaganda videos and excerpts from terrorist attacks alongside making available the "manifesto" of the gunman in the Christchurch terror attack. Basu has said that "The same media companies who have lambasted social media platforms for not acting fast enough to remove extremist content are simultaneously publishing uncensored Daesh [Islamic State] propaganda on their websites or make the rambling 'manifestos' of crazed killers available for download. The reality is that every terrorist we have dealt with has sought inspiration from the propaganda of others, and when they can't find it on Facebook, YouTube, Telegram or Twitter they only have to turn on the TV, read the paper or go to one of a myriad of mainstream media websites struggling to compete with those platforms. A piece of extremist propaganda might reach tens of thousands of people naturally through their own channels or networks, but the moment a national newspaper publishes it in full then it has a potential reach of tens of millions. We must recognise this as harmful to our society and security."

We strongly agree that the media should not publish extremist propaganda as this extends its reach and is, to an extent, doing the work of extremists for them.

2. The importance of the use of language and balanced media reporting.

IPSO should create good practice guidance for the reporting of extremism related stories to ensure that this is balanced and not unintentionally giving support to extremist sentiment.

Many participants spoke to the Programme about the importance of the language used in relation to countering extremism work and most specifically in the way in which the media report news stories. There were complaints that violent attacks thought to be perpetrated by individuals from ethnic minority groups were quickly designated as potential terrorist incidents by the authorities and the media but not when the perpetrators were white.

Several also complained about their view that media representation of Muslims is often overly negative and could be fuelling anti-Muslim sentiment and right-wing extremism.

3. The importance of focusing on the victims of terrorism and not the perpetrators

IPSO should ensure that the Editor's Code of Practice encourages the media not to give terrorists the limelight and instead to place greater emphasis on their victims.

Programme participants paid tribute to the New Zealand authorities for their handling of the aftermath of the Christchurch attacks, particularly around not naming the attacker and instead focussing on the victims of the atrocity.

Whilst participants noted that upon occasion (such as the police seeking more information about a suspect or reporting on a trial or conviction) it was quite right to name potential and convicted terrorists, that where possible they should not be given any further limelight or attention and instead focus should be on the victims.