

Wargame identifies key lessons for protecting public events from vehicle attacks

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A multi-agency wargame led by the National Counter Terrorism Security Office (NaCTSO) has identified important lessons for organisations responsible for protecting venues and public spaces from vehicle attacks.

Held in London in January 2026, the exercise brought together representatives from local authorities, event and venue organisers, policing, safety partners and independent legal specialists. Participants worked through a fictional three-day public event and responded to a simulated Vehicle as a Weapon (VAW) attack scenario.

The wargame examined how organisations assessed threats and made decisions about Hostile Vehicle Mitigation (HVM) measures, including the specification, funding and deployment of vehicle security barriers.

Key findings

The exercise identified several recurring challenges:

- Protective security advice was sometimes considered after operational or commercial decisions had already been made.
- Financial pressures influenced decision-making before threats and vulnerabilities were fully assessed.
- Decisions were sometimes delayed while organisations sought greater certainty.
- Residual risks were not always reviewed, challenged or escalated effectively.
- Responsibility for specifying, funding and approving HVM measures was not always clear.
- HVM was sometimes viewed as a procedural requirement rather than a life-saving protective measure.
- Recognised protective security standards were applied inconsistently across partner

organisations.

These findings highlight the importance of involving suitably qualified protective security specialists at an early stage of planning. Roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined, and any remaining risks should be recorded, assigned to an owner and kept under regular review.

Keep harm reduction at the centre of planning

Hostile Vehicle Mitigation is not simply a procurement or compliance exercise. It is a life-saving protective measure that can directly affect the number of people killed or injured during a vehicle attack.

Protective measures should be based on an assessment of:

- threat
- vulnerability
- potential consequences

Where vehicle security barriers are required, they should be selected and deployed in line with recognised guidance, their tested performance ratings and the specific conditions of the event or venue.

Budget and operational constraints are valid considerations. However, they should not determine security requirements before risks have been properly assessed. Where constraints prevent necessary measures from being implemented, the implications should be clearly understood, documented and escalated to the appropriate decision-makers.

The exercise showed that effective protection of venues and public spaces relies on:

- early engagement
- clear accountability
- timely decision-making
- consistent application of recognised standards

Further information

For more information, see:

- [Risk Management Guidance | ProtectUK](#)
- [Hostile Vehicle Mitigation \(HVM\) | ProtectUK](#)
- [HVM considerations for temporary Vehicle Security Barriers | ProtectUK](#)

KEYWORDS

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