

ACT for Local Authorities



Local Authorities Good Practice

Middlesbrough Council

Protect and Prepare Groups



ACT

ACTION
COUNTERS
TERRORISM

LOCAL AUTHORITIES



NATIONAL
COUNTER TERRORISM
SECURITY OFFICE

Good Practice: Establishing a Protect and Prepare Group (PaPG)

Learning from Middlesbrough Council's experience

1. Introduction

Effective protective security relies on strong partnership working. **Whilst Counter Terrorism Policing provides specialist protective security advice, local authorities have detailed knowledge of their communities, services, assets and local risks.** Bringing these together enables protective security and preparedness to become embedded across council functions rather than remaining the responsibility of a single department.

One way of achieving this is through the establishment of a Protect and Prepare Group (PaPG). A PaPG provides a dedicated forum where local authority departments and Counter Terrorism Policing can work together to coordinate activity, monitor progress, identify emerging risks and ensure protective security considerations are embedded across all local authority departments.

Middlesbrough Council has developed a mature Protect and Prepare Group which has become a central mechanism for delivering ACT for Local Authorities across the authority. Their experience demonstrates the value of early partnership working with Counter Terrorism Security Advisers (CTSAs), clear governance arrangements and shared ownership of protective security.

This document highlights Middlesbrough's approach to implementing a PaPG. It is **not intended to be a prescribed model**, as governance arrangements, resources and local priorities differ across authorities. Instead, it provides one example of how ACT for Local Authorities has been successfully embedded and offers practical considerations that other local authorities may wish to adapt.

Please note: Middlesbrough Council began developing its Protect and Prepare Group during the **Local Approach Pilot** in 2022, prior to the publication of ACT for Local Authorities. As a result, some governance arrangements and processes were originally developed under the pilot programme before being adapted to align with the ACT for Local Authorities framework. This demonstrates how existing partnership arrangements can evolve alongside national guidance rather than specific governance processes needing to be developed from scratch.

2. Why establish a Protect and Prepare Group?

ACT for Local Authorities identifies several council services that have an important role in improving protective security and preparedness. While individual departments can progress actions independently, Middlesbrough Council found that establishing a dedicated Protect and Prepare Group significantly improved coordination, accountability and communication.

The group provides a single forum to:

- coordinate delivery of ACT for Local Authorities across all service areas;
- monitor progress against agreed actions;
- identify opportunities for collaboration between departments;
- consider emerging terrorist threats and methodologies;
- discuss new developments, projects and local risks;
- share learning and good practice; and
- strengthen relationships with Counter Terrorism Policing.

Rather than protective security sitting within one service, the PaPG creates shared ownership across the organisation. This has enabled departments that may not traditionally consider counter terrorism, such as planning, highways, licensing or economic development, to understand how their everyday work contributes towards improving public safety. The council also recognised that protective security should not be viewed as a one-off project. By establishing a standing governance group with regular meetings and a live action plan, protective security has become part of routine business planning rather than an isolated activity.



3. Partnership with the Counter Terrorism Security Adviser (CTSA)

Throughout discussions, Middlesbrough Council consistently identified their relationship with their Counter Terrorism Security Advisers as the single biggest factor in the success of their Protect and Prepare Group.

The council describes the relationship as a genuine partnership built on trust, openness and mutual understanding.

Whilst local authorities possess extensive knowledge of their communities, local services, governance structures and stakeholders, CTSA's provide specialist expertise in protective security, threat methodologies and national guidance. Combining these two perspectives allows decisions to be informed by both local context and specialist counter terrorism advice.

Rather than only approaching the CTSA when advice was formally required, Middlesbrough Council involved the CTSA throughout implementation.

Their CTSAAs supported the council by:

- reviewing proposed action plans;
- recommending ProtectUK guidance and resources;
- identifying additional opportunities to improve protective security;
- supporting awareness raising activities;
- delivering training sessions;
- participating in Protect and Prepare meetings;
- advising on protective security communications; and
- acting as a trusted critical friend throughout implementation.

The PaPG lead explained that local authorities should not view CTSAAs simply as advisers, but as long-term partners.

"It's got to be a two-way relationship. We know our communities, but they have the knowledge."

The council also highlighted that strong relationships encourage wider engagement beyond a single officer. Whilst one individual may coordinate ACT for Local Authorities, departments across the authority are encouraged to build direct relationships with the CTSA where appropriate. This improves organisational resilience and avoids protective security becoming dependent upon one individual.

4. Developing the Protect and Prepare Group

a. Build from existing guidance / materials

As Middlesbrough Council began developing their group during the Pilot, there was no established model to follow. Initially, the council created its own governance arrangements and action plans before later adapting them to align with ACT for Local Authorities. Rather than starting with blank documents, the council recommends building directly from existing ProtectUK guidance.

Middlesbrough Council advise to develop:

- a Terms of Reference;
- a live action plan;
- agreed governance arrangements;
- departmental ownership of actions and
- regular reporting arrangements.

One of Middlesbrough's strongest recommendations is that councils should not attempt to write entirely new action plans. Instead, use the ACT for Local Authorities guidance documents as the foundation. The guidance already identifies the core priority areas within the council.

For example, the action plans Middlesbrough Council created included the ACT for Local Authorities themes:

- Community Safety;
- Emergency Planning;
- Licensing;
- Planning and Development;
- Transport and Highways.

Departments then:

- adopt the recommended actions;
- tailor them to local circumstances;
- add local priorities;
- include emerging risks and
- develop additional actions relevant to their communities.

It was noted that giving departments ownership significantly increases engagement because actions become part of normal business rather than additional work imposed by another team.

The PaPG Lead described this as giving authorities a "starter for ten" rather than expecting every council to reinvent the process independently.

b. Strategic actions

Although departmental action plans are fundamental, Middlesbrough Council also recommends including actions that apply across the whole organisation. This ensures cross council strategic delivery and alignment.

Examples include:

- embedding ACT Awareness training within staff induction through the ACT e-learning SCORM package;
- delivering SCan awareness for line managers;
- promoting ProtectUK as the primary source of protective security guidance;
- increasing organisational awareness of protective security responsibilities.

These actions help develop a consistent protective security culture rather than limiting activity to individual departments. Therefore, ensuring a top down and bottom-up approach.

c. Membership

Although ACT for Local Authorities identifies the five principal service areas, Middlesbrough Council found significant benefit in widening membership.

Current membership includes:

- Neighbourhoods (Chair);
- Community Safety (Co- Chair);
- Licensing;
- Planning;
- Emergency Planning;
- Highways and Transportation;
- Counter Terrorism Security Adviser;
- CT Security Coordinator;
- Designing Out Crime Officer;
- Events Planning;
- Economic Regeneration;
- Chair of the Retail Crime Partnership.

They also recommend considering:

- Communications and Engagement;
- HR;
- Local Authority Training Leads;
- Building Management representatives.

Each additional member brings a different perspective and extends protective security into areas that might otherwise not engage with ACT for Local Authorities.

d. Lessons learnt

Reflecting on several years of operating the PaPG, Middlesbrough Council highlighted several key lessons:

- Relationships are more important than governance documents;
- Use existing guidance as the starting point;
- Keep action plans live and regularly updated;
- Give departments ownership of their actions;
- Complete the Maturity Matrix early to identify priorities;
- Adapt actions to local risks rather than treating guidance as a checklist;
- Ensure Protect and Prepare remains distinct from Prevent;
- Clearly explain the difference between ACT for Local Authorities and Martyn's Law, as many partners mistakenly assume they are the same.

It was emphasised that councils should build upon existing governance wherever possible rather than creating unnecessary duplication.

e. Developing Local Authority Capability Through the PaPGS

An example of this approach in practice is the development of resources to support the pavement licensing process, which emerged through discussions within the Protect and Prepare Group (PaPG). Through regular engagement between local authority partners and CT policing representatives, a common challenge was identified: CTSA's were routinely being asked to review individual pavement café licence applications to assess vulnerability and risk. While this provided valuable assurance, it also created a significant demand on CTSA resources and limited opportunities for local authorities to develop their own capability in this area.

Through the PaPG, partners explored how this process could be improved and agreed that a more sustainable approach would be to provide local authorities with the knowledge, guidance and tools required to undertake initial assessments themselves, while ensuring that CTSA's remained available to provide advice on higher-risk or more complex cases. The collaborative discussions within the group created the environment for innovation, enabling a North East CTSA colleague to develop a suite of products to support local authorities in embedding Protect and Prepare considerations within their pavement café licensing arrangements.

Rather than requiring local authorities to refer every pavement café licence application to CTSA's, the initiative sought to equip local authority officers with the knowledge and tools to assess risks, vulnerabilities and understand when CTSA's may be necessary. This approach increased local authority confidence, capability and capacity to make informed decisions in line with their own risk appetite, local context

and competing priorities, while allowing CTSA resources to be focused where they could add the greatest value.

The initiative included:

1. A CTSA-delivered briefing for local authority officers responsible for issuing licences, outlining the recommended assessment process;
2. A guidance document detailing the end-to-end process and providing practical advice on incorporating Protect and Prepare considerations into pavement licensing decisions;
3. A risk assessment spreadsheet tool containing suggested application questions, guidance on interpreting responses, and indicative thresholds for acceptable levels of risk and vulnerability. The tool also incorporates a Red, Amber, Green (RAG) rating system to support consistent and proportionate decision-making.

This initiative demonstrates how effective partnership working through the PaPG can identify shared challenges, generate practical solutions and build local capability. By providing a forum for discussion, problem-solving and the sharing of good practice, the PaPG enabled the development of a sustainable approach that empowered local authorities, improved decision-making and reduced reliance on specialist CT resources while maintaining appropriate consideration of protective security and preparedness.

Finally, Middlesbrough's experience demonstrates that the success of a PaPG is not determined by the number of meetings held or the volume of actions recorded, but by the strength of the relationships between local authority services and Counter Terrorism Policing. Where those relationships are strong, protective security becomes embedded across the organisation, departments begin to work collaboratively, and councils are better placed to identify vulnerabilities, respond to emerging threats and build safer, more resilient communities.