

OTAS INSIGHT · SC-001

The threat level is severe: what it means for event security this winter

Operational

Tactical

Strategic

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Correct as of 20 October 2026

The UK national terrorism threat level is SEVERE, which means an attack is highly likely [1][2]. It is a national judgement, not a warning about any particular event, and it does not by itself require a specific response [2]. For winter events, it is a prompt to review your security risk assessment, brief every team on reporting and response, and use the free official campaign materials [5].

Key takeaways

- **The level:** SEVERE since 30 April 2026, still in place on 20 October 2026 [1][2].
- **What it is not:** a warning about your event, or a reason on its own to cancel [2].
- **Winter:** Counter Terrorism Policing says festive markets, pantomimes and concerts can be an attractive target, and offers free vigilance materials [5].
- **Martyn's Law:** the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025 became law on 3 April 2025, but its duties are not in force yet. The SIA expects them to start in spring 2027 [10].
- **Do this now:** review the risk assessment, brief every shift on reporting, and check your response procedures.

What changed

On 30 April 2026, the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) raised the UK national threat level from SUBSTANTIAL, meaning an attack is likely, to SEVERE, meaning an attack is highly likely [1]. The Home Office said it followed an attack in Golders Green, north London, the day before, but was not solely a result of it. The threat had been rising for some time [1]. MI5 still showed SEVERE on 20 October 2026 [2].

The national level covers the whole UK. Northern Ireland also has a separate level for Northern Ireland-related terrorism, which is SUBSTANTIAL [2]. Threat levels have no set expiry date and are kept under review [3].

What SEVERE means for events, and what it does not

MI5 says changes to threat levels do not necessarily require specific responses from the public. They are a tool for security practitioners and the police in deciding what protective security response may be needed [2]. It also says vigilance is vital whatever the level [2].

So SEVERE is not a warning about your event, and it is not a reason on its own to cancel. It is a reason to check that your plans are current, proportionate and understood by every team. ProtectUK says that if an attack happened in the UK, it is more likely to be by a single attacker using simple methods, at a venue or a publicly accessible location, and asks organisations to use that in their risk assessments [4]. We give no more detail than that.

Why winter matters

Counter Terrorism Policing says winter events such as festive markets, pantomimes and concerts can be an attractive target, and that with the change in threat level it is more important than ever for organisers to do their part [5]. Its free winter vigilance campaign carries one message: if you see something that does not feel right, report it [5]. The toolkit includes posters, screen and social media assets, audio announcements and staff guidance, with versions for Christmas markets, ice rinks and festive lights [5]. It also describes the campaign as a deterrent and a free extra layer of protective security [5].



Martyn's Law this winter

The Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025 (Martyn's Law) became law on 3 April 2025, but its duties are not in force yet [15]. The Security Industry Authority (SIA) expects them to start in spring 2027 and will confirm the date [10]. When it does, qualifying events of 800 or more people with entry checks will need public protection procedures and measures. The four procedures are evacuation, invacuation, lockdown and communication [10]. Those procedures are good practice now.

Where this applies

England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The national threat level covers all four nations, and Part 1 of the 2025 Act, which holds the duties, extends to all four [2][14]. Northern Ireland also has its own level for Northern Ireland-related terrorism, which is SUBSTANTIAL [2].

What to do

Operational: stewards, security and crew

- Report anything that does not feel right to your supervisor or event control straight away [5][8]. Do not confront anyone.
- Know RUN HIDE TELL and your part in the event's procedures [7].
- Keep security arrangements off social media [10].

Tactical: event, safety and security leads

- Brief every shift on reporting and response, including late starters.
- Use the winter campaign materials from arrival to departure, and in staff areas [5].
- Walk through evacuation, invacuation, lockdown and communication with the teams who will use them [10].

Strategic: organisers, directors and licence holders

- Record a review of your security risk assessment since 30 April 2026 [1].
- Resource in proportion to your own risk assessment, not the national level alone [2].
- Fund ACT Awareness e-learning and briefing time for staff and volunteers [5][6].
- Check whether you will be in scope of the 2025 Act, and at which tier [10][12].

Action box

Level	Do this
Operational	Report concerns straight away and do not confront anyone. Know RUN HIDE TELL. Keep security details off social media.
Tactical	Brief every shift, use the winter campaign materials and walk through the response procedures with the teams who will use them.
Strategic	Record a review since 30 April 2026, resource in proportion to your own risk assessment, fund training and check 2025 Act scope.

Frequently asked questions

What is the UK terrorism threat level now?

SEVERE, meaning an attack is highly likely. It was raised on 30 April 2026 and was still SEVERE on 20 October 2026 [1][2].

Does SEVERE mean I should cancel my winter event?

Not by itself. MI5 says a change of level does not necessarily require a specific response. Review your own risk assessment and plans [2].

Do Martyn's Law duties apply to Christmas events this year?

No. The 2025 Act became law on 3 April 2025, but its duties are not in force yet. The SIA expects them to start in spring 2027 [10][15].

Where can event organisers get free counter terrorism advice?

ProtectUK and the National Protective Security Authority (NPSA) publish free guidance, and the winter vigilance toolkit is free [2][5].

How do staff report something suspicious?

Tell a supervisor or event control straight away. Counter Terrorism Policing also takes reports online. In an emergency, call the emergency services [8].

What we don't know yet

How long SEVERE will last, the confirmed start date of the duties, and when the SIA's final guidance will appear. The full report sets these out.

This article is general information, not security or legal advice, and it is not a threat assessment for any event. It contains no detail about security arrangements at any site. Check the official sources below and your own risk assessment before acting.

Interest: OTAS Live Ltd, which publishes EPGN, sells event operations services.



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Work with OTAS

Is your winter event security plan up to date for a SEVERE threat level?

Request a call with OTAS to discuss how we can help

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All web sources were opened and checked on 20 October 2026.

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