

The threat level is severe

What it means for event security this winter, and what to do at every level. Full report

- Operational
- Tactical
- Strategic

Correct as of	20 October 2026
Applies to	Event professionals planning or working at winter events anywhere in the UK
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Read this first. This report is general information for event professionals. It is not security or legal advice, and it is not a threat assessment for any event or place. It contains no detail about security arrangements at any site. Check the official MI5, ProtectUK and SIA pages, and use your own risk assessment, before you act.



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About this report. It expands OTAS Insight SC-001 with what the threat level means and does not mean, the official winter guidance for events, how Martyn's Law fits in before its duties start, actions for each level, a pre-season checklist and a briefing script. Section 10 lists what we could not confirm. To ask for this report in another format, use the contact details on the OTAS Insights page.

1 Summary

The UK national terrorism threat level is SEVERE, which means an attack is highly likely. The Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) raised it from SUBSTANTIAL on 30 April 2026, and MI5 still showed it at SEVERE when we checked on 20 October 2026 [1][2]. Winter brings Christmas markets, light trails, pantomimes, concerts and New Year events, and Counter Terrorism Policing says these events and venues can be an attractive target for terrorist activity [5].

The threat level is a national judgement, not a warning about any particular event. MI5 says changes to the level do not in themselves necessarily require specific responses from the public. They are a tool that security practitioners and the police use to decide what protective security response may be needed [2]. For event professionals, that means checking that your security planning is current, proportionate and understood by every team, rather than reacting with measures that do not fit the risk.

This report explains what SEVERE means and what it does not mean, what the official guidance asks of event organisers this winter, how the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025 (Martyn's Law) fits in before its duties start, and what to do at each level: Operational, Tactical and Strategic. It covers the whole of the UK. It is general information, not security advice. It deliberately contains no detail about security arrangements at any site.

At a glance. The UK national threat level is SEVERE: an attack is highly likely [1][2].

- It was raised on 30 April 2026. Threat levels have no set expiry date and are kept under regular review [2][3].
- It is a national judgement. It is not a warning about a particular event, and it does not by itself require a specific response [2].
- Counter Terrorism Policing runs a free winter vigilance campaign for events, with posters, screen and social media assets and audio announcements [5].
- The Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025 (Martyn's Law) became law on 3 April 2025, but its duties are not in force yet. The Security Industry Authority (SIA) expects them to start in spring 2027 and will confirm the date [10].
- Do this now: brief every team on how to report concerns, check your response procedures are current, and review your security risk assessment against SEVERE.

2 What happened

On 30 April 2026, the Home Office announced that JTAC had 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 the increase followed an attack in Golders Green, north London, the day before, but that it was not solely a result of that attack. It said the terrorist threat in the UK had been rising for some time, driven by an increase in the broader Islamist and extreme right-wing terrorist threat from individuals and small groups based in the UK [1].

The Home Secretary urged everyone to be vigilant as they go about their daily lives and to report any concerns to the police [1]. The Home Office noted that the UK was last at SEVERE in November 2021, before the level was lowered to SUBSTANTIAL in February 2022 [1]. MI5's threat level history records the change on 30 April 2026 [2].

When we checked the MI5 page on 20 October 2026, it said: "The threat to the UK (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) from all forms of terrorism is SEVERE" [2]. EPGN does not comment on the April attack beyond the official statement.



3 What the threat level means

3.1 The five levels

MI5 publishes five threat levels [2][3]:

Level	What it means
LOW	An attack is highly unlikely
MODERATE	An attack is possible, but not likely
SUBSTANTIAL	An attack is likely
SEVERE	An attack is highly likely
CRITICAL	An attack is highly likely in the near future

Table 1. UK terrorism threat levels, as published by MI5 [2]. The current national level is SEVERE.

3.2 Who sets it, and how

JTAC sets the national threat level. It considers available intelligence, terrorist capability, terrorist intentions and timescale [2][3]. MI5 says intelligence is only ever likely to reveal part of the picture [2]. ProtectUK says threat levels have no set expiry date but are regularly reviewed to make sure they remain current [3].

3.3 Two levels, and where they apply

There are two published threat levels [2]:

- **The national threat level** covers all forms of terrorism across the UK, apart from Northern Ireland-related terrorism in Northern Ireland. It is SEVERE.
- **The Northern Ireland-related terrorism threat level in Northern Ireland** is set separately. It is SUBSTANTIAL.

Events in Northern Ireland should check both levels [2].

3.4 What SEVERE does not mean

MI5 is clear about the limits of the threat level:

- **It is not about a particular event.** Threat levels indicate the likelihood of a terrorist attack in the UK [2].
- **It does not by itself require a specific response.** 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 required [2].
- **Vigilance does not depend on it.** MI5 says vigilance is vital regardless of the current national threat level [2].

In practice, a change of level is a prompt to review your plans. It is not, by itself, a reason to cancel an event or to add measures that do not fit your own risk assessment.

3.5 What the official guidance says about the threat

ProtectUK says that if a terrorist attack happened in the UK, it is more likely to be carried out by a single attacker, using a simple method or combination of methods, at a venue or a publicly accessible location [4]. It advises organisations to use its threat information as part of their risk assessment, to build meaningful risk scenarios [4]. We do not repeat any more detail here. For specialist advice, MI5 points businesses and sites to the National Protective Security Authority (NPSA) and ProtectUK [2].

3.6 Where this applies, nation by nation

England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The national threat level covers all four nations [2]. Part 1 of the 2025 Act, which holds the duties, extends to England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland [14]. The one difference we found is that Northern Ireland also has a separate threat level for Northern Ireland-related terrorism, which is SUBSTANTIAL [2]. Licensing and local safety arrangements differ between the nations, but this report does not depend on them.

4 Why this matters for winter events

Counter Terrorism Policing has run a winter vigilance campaign under the Action Counters Terrorism (ACT) name since 2020 [5]. It says that with a winter season full of events, such as Christmas shopping, festive markets, pantomimes and concerts, these events and venues can be an attractive target for terrorist activity [5]. It says that with the recent change to the UK's threat level, it is more important than ever that event organisers and businesses do their part to keep visitors safe this winter [5].

Winter events share features that make planning matter: large numbers of people in public spaces, early darkness, crowded queues at ingress and egress, temporary sites and a temporary workforce. The official advice is not to work alone: use the free guidance, brief your teams, and give the public a clear way to report concerns.

5 What the official guidance asks of event organisers this winter

5.1 Use the winter vigilance campaign

The campaign's message is simple: if you see something that does not feel right, report it [5]. The free toolkit includes social media images and video, printable posters, audio announcements for public address systems, website messaging and guidance for staff and volunteers. Some assets are designed for Christmas markets, ice rinks and festive lights, and Welsh language versions are available [5].

Counter Terrorism Policing says research shows proactive vigilance messaging helps to reassure the public and increases their willingness to report suspicious activity [5]. It also describes the campaign as a deterrent to hostile actors and an additional free layer of protective security [5]. It suggests placing messages where they will be seen across the visitor journey, from arrival to departure, and in staff areas [5].

5.2 Brief and train your people

The campaign asks organisations to make sure staff understand the campaign message, to support staff to report concerns, and to promote ACT Awareness e-learning and related training [5]. The live music campaign toolkit also encourages organisers to share the free online ACT Awareness e-learning with staff [6].

5.3 Know how to report, and how to respond

- **Reporting.** Suspicious activity can be reported to Counter Terrorism Policing online through the ACT reporting page, which also gives its confidential hotline. In an emergency, always call the emergency services [8].
- **Responding to an attack.** RUN HIDE TELL is the official guidance for members of the public on what to do in a firearms or weapons attack [7]. Make sure your teams know it, and that your own procedures tell staff how to help the public to follow it.

5.4 Start with the roadmap

ProtectUK published a Roadmap to improved security and preparedness on 16 June 2026. It is a step-by-step guide to understanding your vulnerabilities, considering risk and taking proportionate, reasonable steps to improve your security and response [9]. It is a sensible starting point for smaller organisers.

6 Martyn's Law: what applies now and what comes later

6.1 Law now, duties later

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]. Its duties extend to England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland [11][13][14]. The SIA expects them to start in spring 2027. The SIA, which will regulate them, says it will confirm the exact date ahead of time [10]. The Home Office published statutory guidance on 15 April 2026 and guidance on the notification requirement on 14 July 2026 [11][12].

So the duties under the 2025 Act do not apply this winter. But the threat is current, and the procedures the 2025 Act will require are good practice now.

6.2 What it will require

The SIA summarises the scope as follows [10]:

- **Standard tier premises** are those where 200 to 799 people may be present at the same time. The responsible person will need to notify the SIA and have appropriate public protection procedures in place, so far as is reasonably practicable.
- **Enhanced tier premises** are those where 800 or more people may be present at the same time. **Qualifying events** have the same requirements. These include events that are accessible to the public, have entry checks, and where it is reasonable to expect 800 or more people at the same time, staff included. The responsible person will also need public protection measures, and must document them and send that document to the SIA.

The four public protection procedures are evacuation, invacuation, lockdown and communication. The four public protection measures are monitoring, movement, physical security and security of information [10]. "Reasonably practicable" means weighing what can be done against its cost, time and difficulty, taking into account the nature of the premises or event and the resources available [10].

6.3 What to do before the duties start

Use this winter to work out whether your premises or events will be in scope, and at which tier. The Home Office guidance and the ProtectUK flowcharts help with this [10][12]. If you will be in scope, write and test your procedures now. The SIA says it will publish its final guidance and a consultation report in autumn 2026 [10].

7 What to do

Operational

- Know how to report anything that does not feel right: tell your supervisor or event control straight away, and know the ACT reporting route [5][8].
- Do not confront or follow anyone you are worried about. Report it instead.
- Know RUN HIDE TELL, and know your part in the event's evacuation, invacuation and lockdown procedures [7][10].
- Complete the free ACT Awareness e-learning if your employer offers it [5][6].
- Do not post about security arrangements, staff positions or procedures online. This is part of keeping information about the event secure [10].

Tactical

- Brief every shift on how to report concerns and on the event's response procedures. Repeat it for late starters and new crew.
- Use the free winter campaign materials across the visitor journey: arrival, queues, screens, the public address system, the website and staff areas [5].
- Check that evacuation, invacuation, lockdown and communication procedures exist for the site, fit the layout and have been walked through with the teams who will use them [10].
- Review the security risk assessment against the current threat level, using the official threat information and the ProtectUK roadmap [4][9].
- Keep security information on a need-to-know basis. Brief teams without publishing details [10].

Strategic

- Confirm that your security risk assessment and plans have been reviewed since 30 April 2026, and record what you decided and why [1][2].
- Decide on resources in proportion to your own risk assessment. Do not cancel or add measures on the national level alone [2].
- Fund briefing time and training for staff and volunteers, including ACT Awareness e-learning [5][6].
- Work out whether your premises or events will be in scope of the 2025 Act, at which tier, and who the responsible person will be [10][12].
- Subscribe to MI5's threat level alert feed and sign up for SIA updates, so you hear about changes on the day [2][10].

Action box

Level	Do this
Operational	Know how to report concerns and do it straight away. Know RUN HIDE TELL and your part in the event's procedures. Keep security details off social media.
Tactical	Brief every shift, use the winter campaign materials, walk through the response procedures and review the risk assessment against SEVERE.
Strategic	Record a review of plans since 30 April 2026, resource in proportion to your own risk assessment, fund training and prepare for the 2025 Act.

8 Tools

8.1 Winter pre-season checklist

- ☐ Security risk assessment reviewed against the current threat level, and the review recorded
- ☐ Evacuation, invacuation, lockdown and communication procedures written for this site
- ☐ Procedures walked through with the teams who will use them
- ☐ Every team briefed on how to report concerns, including late starters
- ☐ Winter campaign materials placed across the visitor journey and in staff areas
- ☐ ACT Awareness e-learning offered to staff and volunteers
- ☐ Security information shared on a need-to-know basis
- ☐ MI5 threat level alert feed and SIA updates set up
- ☐ 2025 Act scope and tier checked, and the responsible person identified

8.2 Briefing script for stewards and crew (about 1 minute)

"Before we start: the UK threat level is SEVERE. That is a national judgement, not a warning about tonight, but it means we all stay alert. If you see something or someone that does not feel right, do not confront them. Tell your supervisor or event control straight away, with what you saw, where and when. If you are told to move people out, keep them in, or hold the doors, follow the instructions from event control and help the public to do the same. If there is an attack, remember RUN HIDE TELL. Please do not post anything about our security arrangements online. Any questions?"

9 Frequently asked questions

What is the UK terrorism threat level now?

SEVERE, meaning an attack is highly likely. It was raised from SUBSTANTIAL on 30 April 2026, and MI5 still showed SEVERE on 20 October 2026 [1][2].

Does SEVERE mean I should cancel my winter event?

Not by itself. MI5 says changes to the threat level do not necessarily require specific responses from the public. They help security practitioners and the police decide what protective security is needed [2]. Review your own risk assessment and plans.

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 and will confirm the date [10][15]. Its procedures are still good practice now.

Where can event organisers get free counter terrorism advice?

ProtectUK and the NPSA publish free guidance, and MI5 points businesses and sites to them [2]. Counter Terrorism Policing's winter vigilance toolkit gives free materials for events [5].

How do staff report something suspicious?

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

Does the threat level apply in Northern Ireland?

Yes. The national level covers the whole UK. Northern Ireland also has a separate level for Northern Ireland-related terrorism, which is SUBSTANTIAL [2].

10 What we don't know yet

- **How long SEVERE will last.** Threat levels have no set expiry date and are kept under review [3]. Check the MI5 page before each event.
- **The start date of the duties.** The SIA expects them to start in spring 2027 but has not confirmed a date [10].
- **The SIA's final guidance.** On 17 July 2026 the SIA said it would publish its final guidance and a consultation report in autumn 2026 [10]. Check for it before you plan for 2027.
- **The level of risk at your event.** That depends on your own risk assessment. This report gives no view on any particular event or place.

11 Sources

All web sources were opened and checked on 20 October 2026. The MI5 page blocks automated access, so it was read with a browser-grade fetch on the day.

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2. MI5, the Security Service, 'Threat levels' (current national threat level, Northern Ireland-related threat level and threat level history). <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/threats-and-advice/terrorism-threat-levels>
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13. Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025, 2025 c. 10 (legislation.gov.uk). <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2025/10/contents>
14. Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025, section 36 (extent). <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2025/10/section/36>
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12 About this report

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Interest: OTAS Live Ltd, which publishes EPGN, sells event operations services, including event control and event operations planning.

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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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