

# The Cambridge Sentinel

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## 1. Executive Summary

As the Cambridge region enters the festive hiatus, this week's edition of The Cambridge Sentinel provides critical guidance for security professionals and estate managers navigating the unique challenges of the Christmas and New Year period. The UK threat level remains at SUBSTANTIAL, with Counter Terrorism Policing emphasising the importance of vigilance during high-footfall festive events.

The festive period presents a convergence of security challenges that require heightened awareness and proactive measures. Acquisitive crime has reached unprecedented levels, with shoplifting losses hitting a record £2.2 billion in the year to August 2024. Organised retail crime gangs are actively targeting high streets and Christmas deliveries, whilst cyber-security threats continue to escalate with sophisticated phishing campaigns exploiting festive shopping themes.

Transport disruptions affecting the London-Cambridge corridor present significant operational challenges during the busiest travel period of the year. London Liverpool Street station will be closed from 27 December through 1 January for engineering works, forcing commuters onto alternative routes and increasing pressure on King's Cross and Cambridge North stations. Weather warnings for strong winds across Britain compound these challenges, with potential

disruption to road, rail, and air travel during the "big Christmas getaway".

New Year's Eve security preparedness takes centre stage this week, with guidance drawn from London's major event security model. High-capacity venues across the Cambridge region should review counter-terrorism preparedness plans, implement robust access controls, and coordinate with local policing to ensure public safety during celebrations. The night-time economy faces elevated risks from acquisitive crime and antisocial behaviour, requiring enhanced security presence and staff vigilance.

This edition provides actionable intelligence and practical checklists to support business continuity, protect assets, and ensure the safety of staff and visitors throughout the festive period and into the new year.

## 2. National Security Briefing

**CURRENT UK THREAT LEVEL: SUBSTANTIAL**

The Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) has maintained the UK's national threat level at SUBSTANTIAL, meaning a terrorist attack is considered likely. This assessment remains unchanged from our previous briefing and reflects the persistent and evolving nature of threats facing the UK during the festive period.

### Counter Terrorism Policing: Winter Campaign 2024/25

Counter Terrorism Policing has launched its annual winter campaign, encouraging the public to stay alert and report anything that doesn't feel right during the festive season. The campaign targets high-footfall venues including Christmas markets, shopping centres, pantomimes, and concerts.

## Key Campaign Messages:

- The terror threat hasn't gone away—an attack remains likely under the SUBSTANTIAL threat level
- Trust your instincts if something doesn't feel right and report concerns immediately
- You won't be wasting police time—research shows public reluctance to report due to fear of getting it wrong
- Stay alert whilst enjoying festive events and activities with family and friends
- Report suspicious behaviour via the confidential Anti-Terrorist Hotline: 0800 789 321

## Intelligence Priorities for Festive Period

The UK's intelligence and security agencies have identified the following priority areas for the Christmas and New Year period:

- **MI5 (Security Service) | Crowded Places Protection:** Enhanced focus on protecting high-capacity venues during the festive period, with particular attention to "Self-Initiated Lone Actors" (SILAs) who may exploit crowded Christmas markets and New Year's Eve celebrations. MI5 is working with venue operators to implement "See It. Say It. Sorted." protocols.
- **NPSA (National Protective Security Authority) | Hostile Reconnaissance Detection:** Increased briefings for business parks and retail environments on identifying pre-attack surveillance during low-occupancy periods. The festive hiatus presents opportunities for hostile actors to conduct reconnaissance when security staffing is reduced.
- **GCHQ | Festive Cyber Threats:** Heightened alert for seasonal phishing campaigns targeting finance departments, CEO fraud schemes, and ransomware attacks exploiting reduced IT staffing during the holiday period. Professional services and retail sectors are encouraged to maintain cyber-security vigilance despite skeleton staffing.
- **UK NACE | Technical Security During Low Occupancy:** Guidance on maintaining technical surveillance counter-measures (TSCM) during the festive period when premises may be unoccupied for extended periods.

Particular focus on protecting boardroom and laboratory environments from opportunistic eavesdropping.

## 3. Local Intelligence & Activity

### Assessment

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#### Cambridge Region: Festive Period Risk Assessment

The Cambridge region enters the festive period with a heightened security posture reflecting both seasonal opportunities and vulnerabilities. Whilst the broader "Silicon Fen" benefits from robust coordination between local authorities and private security partnerships, the unique characteristics of the Christmas hiatus introduce specific risks that require proactive management.

Reduced staffing levels across research facilities, data centres, and professional services create windows of vulnerability for hostile reconnaissance and opportunistic crime. Simultaneously, the night-time economy experiences peak demand, with elevated risks of acquisitive crime and antisocial behaviour in city centre venues. Transport disruptions affecting the London-Cambridge corridor compound these challenges, requiring flexible business continuity arrangements.

#### Risk Summary: Festive Period Threat Indicators

The following table presents an updated risk assessment for the festive period, reflecting seasonal variations in threat levels and mitigation requirements:

Sector / Theme	Risk Level	Festive Period Mitigation
Acquisitive Crime (Retail)	<b>RED</b>	Enhanced CCTV, visible security presence, coordination with police on organised retail crime

Cyber Security Threats	<b>RED</b>	Phishing awareness campaigns, MFA enforcement, incident response readiness during skeleton staffing
Transport Disruptions	<b>RED</b>	Remote working protocols, alternative routes via King's Cross, early travel planning
Life Sciences & Research	<b>AMBER</b>	24/7 security patrols during low-occupancy period, enhanced perimeter monitoring
Night-Time Economy (NYE)	<b>AMBER</b>	Heightened staff awareness, coordination with Cambridgeshire Constabulary, robust access controls
Counter-Terrorism (Crowded Places)	<b>AMBER</b>	Martyn's Law preparedness, "See It. Say It. Sorted." protocols, staff training
Civil Disorder / Protest	<b>GREEN</b>	Stable liaison with local policing, no significant protest activity anticipated

## 4. Festive Period Crime & Policing Response

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### Acquisitive Crime: Record Losses and Organised Gangs

The festive period has witnessed an unprecedented surge in acquisitive crime, with shoplifting losses reaching a record £2.2 billion in the year to August 2024 according to the British Retail Consortium. Organised retail crime gangs are conducting industrial-scale thefts across high streets, exploiting the seasonal increase in footfall and merchandise availability.

## Crime Trends:

- Shoplifting offences escalating across England and Wales during Christmas shopping season
- Theft from the person offences increasing in crowded shopping environments
- Parcel theft targeting Christmas deliveries to residential and business addresses
- Organised crime groups coordinating multi-site theft operations
- Juvenile involvement in shoplifting increasing (61% rise in 13-year-olds accused of theft)

**Police Response:** Thames Valley Police has launched its "Steal this Christmas? Yule regret it" campaign, with enhanced patrols in retail environments and coordination with neighbouring forces on known offenders. The British Retail Consortium advises shopkeepers not to engage directly with criminals, emphasising the role of professional security personnel and police coordination.

## Cyber Security: Festive Phishing and Ransomware Campaigns

December 2024 has seen a significant escalation in cyber-security threats, with email compromise emerging as the most commonly observed threat type of the year. Ransomware groups remain highly active, with 2024 described by industry analysts as "the most devastating year yet" for ransomware attacks.

### Active Threat Campaigns:

- Seasonal phishing campaigns exploiting Christmas shopping and delivery themes
- CEO fraud and business email compromise (BEC) targeting finance departments
- Malware delivery via festive-themed emails and attachments
- Ransomware attacks exploiting reduced IT staffing during holiday period

- Data poisoning attempts targeting professional services and data science sectors

**Sector-Specific Risks:** Professional services, financial institutions, and retail organisations face elevated risks during the festive period when skeleton IT staffing creates vulnerability windows. Multi-factor authentication, phishing awareness training, and incident response readiness are critical mitigations.

## Transport Disruptions: London-Cambridge Corridor

The festive period presents significant transport challenges affecting the Cambridge region, with planned engineering works coinciding with the busiest travel period of the year.

### Major Disruptions:

- **London Liverpool Street Closure:** No trains to or from Liverpool Street station from 27 December through 1 January (engineering works)
- **Christmas Day Services:** No trains operating on 25 December—only taxis, private hire, and Santander Cycles available
- **Reduced Services:** Most services end around 21:00 on Christmas Eve (24 December), restart 27 December
- **Weather Warnings:** Met Office yellow warning for strong winds across Britain (20-21 December), potential road/rail/air disruption
- **Alternative Routes:** King's Cross and Cambridge North stations under increased pressure; early travel planning essential

**Business Continuity Recommendations:** Organisations should activate remote working protocols, communicate alternative routes to staff, and maintain flexible arrangements for the period 27 December through 1 January when Liverpool Street remains closed.

# 5. New Year's Eve Security Preparedness

## High-Capacity Venue Guidance for NYE Celebrations

New Year's Eve presents unique security challenges for high-capacity venues across the Cambridge region. Drawing on best practices from London's major event security model (which manages up to 100,000 ticketed spectators), the following guidance supports venue operators in ensuring public safety during celebrations.

### Counter-Terrorism Preparedness:

- Review and test counter-terrorism preparedness plans ahead of 31 December
- Implement "See It. Say It. Sorted." protocols with all staff trained on reporting suspicious behaviour
- Conduct security briefings for door supervisors and security personnel on hostile reconnaissance indicators
- Coordinate with Cambridgeshire Constabulary on intelligence sharing and emergency response procedures
- Ensure Martyn's Law compliance for venues with 200+ capacity (Standard Tier) or 800+ capacity (Enhanced Tier)

### Access Control and Crowd Management:

- Implement robust ticketing and access control systems to manage capacity limits
- Deploy security checkpoints with bag searches at entry points
- Maintain visible security presence throughout the venue
- Establish clear evacuation routes and ensure staff are briefed on emergency procedures
- Monitor CCTV coverage of all public areas and entry/exit points

### **Acquisitive Crime Prevention:**

- Enhanced vigilance for pickpocketing and theft from the person in crowded environments
- Secure storage facilities for guests' coats and belongings
- Staff training on identifying and reporting suspicious behaviour
- Coordination with neighbouring venues on known offenders and crime patterns

### **Antisocial Behaviour Management:**

- Clear alcohol service policies and staff training on responsible service
- Visible security presence to deter antisocial behaviour
- Coordination with local police on known individuals and potential flashpoints
- Incident reporting procedures for violence, aggression, or disorder

## **Cambridge NYE Events: Local Intelligence**

Cambridge city centre will host multiple New Year's Eve celebrations across pubs, restaurants, and entertainment venues. Whilst the city does not host a major public fireworks display comparable to London, the night-time economy will experience peak demand with elevated security considerations.

### **Local Event Profile:**

- Multiple licensed premises hosting ticketed NYE events
- Smaller-scale celebrations compared to major cities (typically 100-500 capacity per venue)
- Coordination with Cambridgeshire Constabulary on city centre patrols
- Enhanced British Transport Police presence at Cambridge North station
- No significant public order concerns anticipated, but standard vigilance required

# 6. Sector-Specific Insights

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The following sector-specific guidance provides actionable intelligence for business leaders and security professionals during the festive period:

## 1. Retail & Shopping Environments

1. Deploy enhanced CCTV coverage and visible security presence during peak trading hours
2. Coordinate with local police on organised retail crime networks and known offenders
3. Implement robust inventory management systems to detect shrinkage early
4. Staff training on recognising and reporting shoplifting without direct engagement
5. Secure Christmas deliveries and implement parcel theft prevention measures
6. Martyn's Law compliance for shopping centres with 800+ capacity (Enhanced Tier)

## 2. Life Sciences & Biotech

1. Maintain 24/7 security patrols during low-occupancy festive period
2. Enhanced perimeter monitoring and CCTV coverage of entry points
3. Review and test emergency lockdown procedures before skeleton staffing period
4. Implement "out-of-office" verification protocols for all access requests
5. Coordinate with on-site security on hostile reconnaissance indicators

## 3. Data Science & Technology

1. Implement mandatory phishing awareness training before festive period
2. Enforce multi-factor authentication across all systems and remote access infrastructure

3. Maintain incident response capability despite skeleton IT staffing
4. Review and test data backup and disaster recovery procedures
5. Monitor for CEO fraud and business email compromise attempts targeting finance teams
6. Implement email filtering for festive-themed phishing campaigns

#### **4. Professional Services**

1. Enforce "Clear Desk" policies to prevent visual espionage during low-occupancy periods
2. Review data protection protocols and ensure GDPR compliance
3. Cyber-security awareness training on seasonal phishing and CEO fraud
4. Secure client information and implement robust access controls
5. Coordinate with building security on out-of-hours access procedures

#### **5. Night-Time Economy (Pubs, Restaurants, Entertainment Venues)**

1. Review counter-terrorism preparedness plans for New Year's Eve events
2. Implement robust access controls and capacity management systems
3. Security checkpoints with bag searches for high-capacity events
4. Staff training on identifying suspicious behaviour and reporting procedures
5. Coordination with Cambridgeshire Constabulary on city centre patrols
6. Antisocial behaviour management protocols and responsible alcohol service
7. Martyn's Law compliance for venues with 200+ capacity

#### **6. Property Asset Management**

1. Verify all "out-of-office" protocols across managed estates
2. Coordinate with on-site security teams on enhanced patrols during low-occupancy periods

3. Review Martyn's Law compliance for premises with 200+ capacity
4. Implement business continuity plans for transport disruptions
5. Maintain liaison with tenants on security arrangements during festive period

## 7. University & Academic Sector

1. Implement layered access controls during holiday period when supervision is reduced
2. Maintain security presence in partially occupied student residences
3. Review heritage asset protection measures for historic buildings
4. Cyber-security measures to protect university IT systems during skeleton staffing
5. Coordination with university police and local constabularies

## 7. Site Manager's Checklist: Festive Period & NYE Preparedness

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The following checklist provides a practical framework for site managers and security professionals to enhance their security posture during the festive period and New Year's Eve:

- **Counter Terrorism Policing Priority:** Implement "See It. Say It. Sorted." protocols and train all staff on reporting suspicious behaviour during festive events
- **Acquisitive Crime Prevention:** Deploy enhanced CCTV coverage, visible security presence, and coordinate with local police on organised retail crime networks
- **Cyber Security:** Enforce multi-factor authentication, conduct phishing awareness training, and maintain incident response capability during skeleton IT staffing

- **Transport Disruptions:** Activate remote working protocols, communicate alternative routes (King's Cross recommended), and maintain flexible arrangements 27 December - 1 January
- **Low-Occupancy Security:** Maintain 24/7 security patrols, implement "out-of-office" verification protocols, and enhance perimeter monitoring during festive hiatus
- **NYE High-Capacity Venues:** Review counter-terrorism preparedness plans, implement robust access controls, conduct security briefings, and coordinate with Cambridgeshire Constabulary
- **Martyn's Law Compliance:** Verify compliance for premises with 200+ capacity (Standard Tier) or 800+ capacity (Enhanced Tier), update counter-terrorism preparedness plans
- **Security Industry Authority (SIA) Compliance:** Verify all door supervisors, security guards, and CCTV operatives hold valid SIA licences, particularly important for NYE events
- **Emergency Procedures:** Review and test evacuation procedures, ensure staff are briefed on emergency response protocols, and maintain liaison with local emergency services
- **Business Continuity:** Implement flexible working arrangements, review data backup procedures, and maintain communication channels with key stakeholders throughout festive period

## 8. Looking Ahead: The 4-Week Horizon

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As we transition from the festive period into the new year, the following events and developments will shape the security landscape for the Cambridge region:

- **Week of 24 December 2024:** Christmas period begins with reduced staffing and enhanced security patrols recommended for low-occupancy facilities. Transport disruptions commence with most services ending 21:00 on Christmas Eve.

- **Week of 31 December 2024:** New Year's Eve presents elevated risks for high-capacity venues. London Liverpool Street closure begins 27 December, forcing alternative routes via King's Cross. Enhanced security measures for NYE celebrations across Cambridge night-time economy.
- **Week of 7 January 2025:** Return to normal operations with potential for industrial action as union negotiations resume. Monitor transport disruptions affecting London-Cambridge corridor. Liverpool Street reopens 2 January.
- **Week of 14 January 2025:** Martyn's Law implementation timeline progresses with Royal Assent anticipated Q1 2025. Begin compliance assessments for premises with 200+ capacity. Review counter-terrorism preparedness plans and security risk assessments.

## 9. Call-to-Action & Resources

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For further guidance on protective security and resilience during the festive period, the following resources are recommended:

- **Counter Terrorism Policing:** Winter Campaign Toolkit available at [www.protectuk.police.uk/wintertoolkit](http://www.protectuk.police.uk/wintertoolkit)
- **Anti-Terrorist Hotline:** 0800 789 321 (confidential reporting line for suspicious behaviour)
- **Protect UK:** [www.protectuk.police.uk](http://www.protectuk.police.uk) - Free counter-terrorism protective security advice
- **NPSA (National Protective Security Authority):** [www.npsa.gov.uk](http://www.npsa.gov.uk) - Protective security guidance for critical national infrastructure
- **British Transport Police:** Text 61016 for non-emergency reporting | [www.btp.police.uk](http://www.btp.police.uk)
- **Cambridgeshire Constabulary:** 101 (non-emergency) | 999 (emergency)
- **Action Fraud:** 0300 123 2040 - National fraud and cyber crime reporting centre

- **National Rail:** [www.nationalrail.co.uk/travel-information/christmas/](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/travel-information/christmas/) - Christmas and New Year travel information

**For bespoke security consultancy, counter-terrorism preparedness planning, and technical surveillance counter-measures (TSCM), contact Rittel Consulting at [terry.hanley@rittelconsulting.co.uk](mailto:terry.hanley@rittelconsulting.co.uk)**

The Cambridge Sentinel will return with Issue #3 in the New Year. We wish all our readers a safe and secure festive period.

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