

Note of last Safer & Stronger Communities Board meeting

Title:	Safer & Stronger Communities Board
Date:	Monday 13 January 2020
Venue:	Westminster Room, 8th Floor, 18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note

Item	Decisions and actions	Action
1	Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest The Chair welcomed members to the meeting, and noted apologies received (which can be found at Appendix A). No declarations of interest were received.	
2	The Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales Dame Vera Baird, Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales, introduced item two. Noting that she had a criminal justice background as a barrister, Minister and Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), she set out the Commissioner's duties to promote the role of victims and witnesses in the criminal justice system, encourage good practice in the treatment of victims and witnesses, and keep under review the victims code. Dame Vera noted that the powers of the Commissioner are limited, and that she is seeking a requirement for organisations to respond to her reports. She explained that within the scope of her current remit, her small office works in two ways; through undertaking a programme of research and analysis and disseminating the findings of this; and by responding to issues that arise through developing alliances and advocating to drive activity by government, the judiciary and local government. She added that she intends to work closely with the Commissioners for children, anti-slavery and domestic abuse, and emphasised that she was keen to work with councils, and saw this meeting as the start of a relationship. Dame Vera sought the Board's help regarding the role councils play in tackling anti-social behaviour (ASB), specifically the use of the community trigger. She outlined the findings of a 2019 report which highlighted how ASB can make peoples' lives a living nightmare, with victims pushed from pillar to post and the cumulative effect on people of persistent ASB often disregarded. She noted that although the police often see ASB as a sub-crime, it can have more of an impact on people than lower level crime, with sometimes appalling physical and psychological consequences. The Commissioner noted that Government has previously tried to address	

the impact of ASB, with legislation in 2014 having rationalised ASB tools and introduced the community trigger to empower victims. Victims of ASB who have three qualifying complaints of ASB causing harassment, alarm or distress can trigger/require an ASB case review bringing together relevant bodies to develop action plan to address. However, Dame Vera stated that the trigger is not working or being used enough; only 3% have heard of it, and councils and PCCs do not appear to advertise it. There is evidence that different thresholds for the trigger are being applied, when legally this could only be lower than the three complaints set out in legislation, and a sense that that the few people who've had trigger meetings haven't found them useful. In some cases, she noted, the victim has not always been invited to the trigger meeting.

Dame Vera noted the report's recommendations to:

- Make victims of ASB victims of crime.
- Introduce a legal requirement to display guidelines about the trigger and to tell victims about it after two complaints.
- Take a pragmatic approach to the threshold.
- Have an independent chair for trigger meetings, not someone from an organisation that arguably hasn't tackled the problem to start with. The Commissioner suggested ward councillors could fulfil this role.
- Enable victims to attend resolution meetings.

The Commissioner concluded her session by highlighting a number of other issues on the horizon, including:

- The Victim's Bill the Government has committed to. Dame Vera stated that she has written to the Lord Chancellor setting out what she would like to see in this: stronger powers for the Commissioner; representatives being able to give evidence for vulnerable victims; an annual audit of compliance with the Victim's Code; and a requirement for PCCs to have a local victims commissioner or report annually on their work on victims.
- The need to develop the Domestic Abuse Bill beyond its current format. Again, the Commissioner has drawn up a list of 20 things she would like to see in it. She criticised the fact that children are not current seen as victims, and the idea that someone can be a perpetrator of domestic abuse but still seen as a good parent because children are not seen as victims. She stated that the treatment of immigrant victims of domestic abuse, and orders for perpetrator programmes, could be better. Dame Vera noted that councils will be under statutory duty created by the Act, but observed that it was not clear that there is enough resources to support this or why there should be a duty on councils but not anyone else.

In the question and answer session following Dame Vera's presentation, the Board expressed willingness to work with the Commissioner's office and that councils have a number of overlapping asks.

A number of members reflected that they were unaware of the community trigger, but had used other ASB tools including dispersal orders, and asked whether there were examples of good practice by any councils in

using the process, which Dame Vera agreed to look into, suggesting Bristol council. One member noted that their council did use the trigger, but that they had had a case where a victim would only speak to the councillor and no one else, meaning that the victim was effectively a silent witness; it was suggested that it might be helpful in those cases for someone else to be able to issue the community trigger on their behalf.

The Board also questioned why the Home Office are not promoting the trigger, and emphasised the importance of including this within PCC plans and involving town and parish councils where they exist. The issue of information sharing, where complaints are made to different organisations was also highlighted. It was suggested that some councils are not appreciating the correct legal position and believe that there has to be alarm, distress and harassment in each complaint, suggesting that a toolkit may help support greater understanding.

Members raised the issue of supporting female offenders who are victims and offending because of this. Dame Vera noted that 60% women in prison have been victims of domestic abuse or sexual exploitation, explaining that she would be proposing an amendment to the Domestic Abuse Bill to provide equivalent provision to the Modern Slavery Act defence that you committed a crime because of abuse.

Finally, the Commissioner was asked whether victims of terror are a distinct group. The Commissioner noted that these victims need appropriate specialist provision. She commented that psychologists have been used more effectively following some terrorist incidents than in others, and that if you can get that in place quickly it can prevent a lot of adverse effects. She also agreed that representation at inquests has been an issue, stating that it was completely unacceptable that families can't get legal aid and be legally represented at inquests.

She suggested that a levy on all public authorities to support representation for families of victims could be an option.

3 Multi-Agency Centre (to be sent as a supplemental agenda item)

Confidential item.

4 Queen's Speech

The Board noted the paper on the Queen's Speech, which set out Bills and announcements relevant to the safer and stronger communities agenda, as well as the Government's manifesto commitments in this area. There was a short discussion about the commitment to strengthen police powers for dealing with unauthorised encampments, and the Chair noted that the LGA's draft response to this consultation would be shared with the Board once lead members had reviewed it.

5 Building Safety update

Mark Norris, Principal Policy Adviser, introduced item five, updating

members on building safety developments since its last meeting. Mark noted that work has been picking up pace after the election. A written Ministerial statement was expected that week, and was likely to cover the issue of fire doors, and height issues regarding ACM cladding, with the thresholds for looking at issues expected to be lowered from 18 metres to 11 meters, and to remove any height thresholds for buildings with ACM Category 3 cladding.

Regarding private sector remediation, the funding deadline for bids had closed at the end of December. Officials have received a number of applications, but there are some question marks about how serious some owners are about undertaking the work, despite having submitted bids.

The Joint Inspection Team had completed its sixth inspection the previous week, with five out of six focusing of the buildings identified as having category one hazards. Mark noted how the inspections have highlighted the intersection with building safety legislation, and how to ensure that designers and others working on a building don't impact on compartmentalisation of it.

Mark informed the Board that the Government has asked councils to find out what is on the side of every high rise residential building in England. Government recognised that this would be challenging for councils, with an estimated 11,500 such buildings in England and some London boroughs having as many as 1,000. The LGA has suggested ways that Government could support councils on this, for example including a clause within the Fire Safety Order requiring building owners to inform the fire service or council what is on the side of their buildings, including safeguards to force owners to do so.

The Board noted the case where a council had decided to instil sprinklers on all council properties but failed in its attempts to charge leaseholders for this, after a tribunal ruled that this was improvement rather than repair so couldn't be recharged, and asked what implication this has if Government decides to legislate on this? Mark responded that the government is currently consulting on the issue of a height threshold for installing sprinklers on new build properties, with a view to potentially reducing this from 30m to 18m. However, this would only apply to new builds or major refurbishments.

6 Update Paper

The Board noted the paper updating members on recent activity. Councillor Joy highlighted the recent training event for councillors in the Hampshire-Isle of Wight Local Resilience Forum area, commenting that it was a first class event which had been very beneficial.

7 LGA Business Plan for 2019 – 2022

The Board noted the LGA's business plan for 2019-2022.

8 Note of last Safer & Stronger Communities Board meeting

The minutes were agreed subject to attendance by Labour group members being checked.

Members asked whether it was possible for minutes to be circulated more quickly following meetings, rather than at the next meeting. Officers agreed this was possible; although staff illness prevented this following the January meeting, this will be introduced for the March meeting.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr Simon Blackburn	Blackpool Council
Vice-Chairman	Cllr Katrina Wood	Wycombe District Council
Deputy-chairman	Cllr Bridget Smith	South Cambridgeshire District Council
Members	Cllr Eric Allen	London Borough of Sutton
	Cllr Mohan Iyengar	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council
	Cllr Andrew Joy	Hampshire County Council
	Cllr John Pennington	Bradford Metropolitan District Council
	Cllr Dave Stewart	Isle of Wight Council
	Cllr Kate Haigh	Gloucester City Council
	Cllr James Dawson	Erewash Borough Council
	Cllr Farah Hussain	Redbridge London Borough Council
	Cllr Jeremy Hilton	Gloucestershire County Council
	Cllr Philip Evans JP	Conwy County Borough Council
Apologies	Cllr Alan Rhodes	Nottinghamshire County Council
	Cllr Jim Beall	Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
	Cllr Hannah Dalton	Epsom and Ewell Borough Council
In Attendance		
LGA Officers		