

Safer & Stronger Communities Board – report from Councillor Simon Blackburn (Chair)

The annual Safer & Stronger Communities conference

1. On 9 December the Safer and Stronger Communities Board held its Annual Safer Communities Conference. Cllr Morris Bright, Vice Chairman of the Board, chaired the morning session. Karen Bradley MP, Minister for Preventing Abuse and Exploitation, spoke at the conference outlining the key role of Community Safety Partnerships and I responded for the LGA.

Prevent case studies publication

2. The LGA has produced a set of case studies which look at the diverse range of activities underway in six councils to tackle extremism. The councils are Birmingham, Bristol, Calderdale, Cornwall, the Royal Borough of Greenwich and London Borough of Waltham Forest. The councils have been involved in a range of activities including working with schools, looking at taxi licensing and using football to bring communities together.

LGA trading standards review workshop

3. Cllr Anita Lower attended a stakeholder group workshop held as part of the LGA's trading standards review, alongside councillors, chief executives and senior offices, Lord Harris (Chair of the National Trading Standards), the Association of Chief Trading Standards Officers and Chartered Trading Standards Institute.

LGA Selector Panel – Sustainable Communities Act hearing (Newham council's FOBT stakes application)

4. Cllr Tony Page gave evidence to the LGA Selector Panel hearing convened to consider whether to resubmit to government Newham council's application to reduce maximum stakes on B2 gaming machines(referred to as Fixed Odds Betting Terminals) to £2. The Selector Panel reached a view that the application met the SCA criteria to be resubmitted, and has written to government to advise them of this.

Westminster eForum event – the future of gambling legislation

5. Councillor Page also spoke at a Westminster eForum event on gambling. Cllr Page outlined the LGA's view that councils and the gambling industry should work together more to tackle specific local issues linked to gambling premises, but that councils also need stronger powers to enable them to respond to residents' concerns about betting shop clustering.

National Operational Guidelines

6. Councillor Kay Hammond, attended the National Operational Guidance Programme's Parliamentary Seminar. Councillor Hammond spoke about the pressures and challenges facing fire and rescue services as we look to the future.

National FGM Centre

7. The Board's Deputy Chair Cllr Lisa Brett, spoke at the first conference held by the National FGM Centre. Cllr Brett also spoke at a Westminster Briefing event on FGM in November and highlighted the work of the Centre. Along with Cllr Brett and Cllr Roy Perry from the Children and Young People Board I also wrote to the Minister for Children and Families about the National FGM Centre's future shortly before Christmas.

The role of Fire and Rescue Authorities

8. The Chair and Deputy Chair of the Fire Services Management Committee, Cllrs Jeremy Hilton and Kay Hammond, spoke at a Public Policy Exchange conference on the role of Fire and Rescue Authorities in building safe and healthy communities.

Financial Sustainability of the Fire Service

9. Following the publication of the two National Audit Office reports in early November on the impact of funding reductions on the fire service and the financial sustainability of the fire service, Cllr Jeremy Hilton gave evidence at a pre-panel session to the Public Accounts Select Committee.

Advisory Board for Female Offenders

10. In early December Cllr Janet Daby attended the Ministry of Justice's Advisory Board for Female Offenders, which is chaired by the Parliamentary Under Secretary for Women, Equalities and Family Justice.

HMIC PEEL Effectiveness and Legitimacy Reference Group

11. Cllr Sophie Linden attended the Reference Group Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary have established to support the assessment of police forces' performance.

Emergency Planning, Response and Recovery

12. The Ministers for Housing and Planning and Local Government contacted the LGA and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (Solace) at the end of November about local authorities' preparedness for winter weather and meeting their civil contingencies responsibilities. I wrote back with Cllr Peter Box, Chair of the EEHT Board before Christmas to set out what the LGA had done to help councils prepare and respond to civil emergencies, and raised the issue of funding for flood protection infrastructure.

Trading Standards

13. Cllr Nick Worth, the Board's lead on regulatory matters, warned of the risks of purchasing puppies from illegal dealers ahead of Christmas, which have often been bred on puppy farms abroad before being brought into the country illegally. The LGA urged people to buy pets from reputable breeders or rehoming centres.

Domestic Abuse

14. With concerns being expressed about the funding of refuge services for victims of domestic abuse I highlighted the support councils provide victims alongside other partners including the use of sanctuary schemes and panic rooms and the provision of counselling. I also highlighted the work councils are doing to raise awareness of the issue.

Fake Alcohol

15. In the run up to the New Year celebrations I warned of the risks the public faced if they bought fake alcohol, including the serious risks to health from counterfeit goods that could contain chemicals such as chloroform and methanol. The media release also highlighted recent work by trading standards teams to tackle the sale of illegal alcohol including the seizure of 130,000 litres of counterfeit vodka from a factory.

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