

Safer Communities Board – report by Cllr Mehboob Khan (Chair)

1. At the last Board meeting, Members agreed a submission to the Ministry of Justice about the proposals to **close a number of county and magistrates courts**. The submission suggested that council facilities including council chambers could be used for court sessions. Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Thames Valley Courts Board has been in contact to support this proposal, which they had included in their response to court closures in the area covered by the Courts Board. Following submission of the LG Group response to the Ministry of Justice consultation, a press release was issued on the Board's behalf to promote the suggestion that Council chambers and other local authority facilities could be used to host court sessions so they continue to sit locally and potentially also provide councils with revenue. The press release was picked up by two broadsheet newspapers, BBC Breakfast and Radio 4 as well as BBC News Online and regional and local news.
2. The **House of Commons Justice Select Committee** announced at the end of July that it will be holding an inquiry into the probation service and invited the LGA to submit written evidence around some of the key questions it is looking into. These questions include the commissioning of probation services, how well community sentencing is working, whether there can be a move away from short custodial sentences, whether more use of restorative justice could be made, whether the probation service handles different offenders appropriately, and what scope there is for the delivery of probation services by the private or voluntary sectors. The Safer and Stronger Communities Programme Board submitted evidence to the Select Committee following its meeting this month, and will be providing oral evidence if invited to do so by the Committee.
3. The Home Office published details of the Government's plans to replace police authorities with elected police and crime commissioners in its document '**Policing in the 21st century**' which came out at the end of July. This provided greater information on how the government see commissioners working, with one Commission being elected for each force whose remit will include holding chief constables to account, setting priorities for the police, setting the force budget and precept and appointing and firing the chief constable. The paper also gave some detail of the Crime and Policing Panels which will provide a check on the commissioners and which will be made up of councillors and lay people. The Safer and Stronger Communities Programme Board agreed a response to the plans at its meeting in September, and will be seeing how the Government respond to these points in the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill due to be introduced in October.

4. Lead Members from the Fire Services Management Committee have been working with the Chief Fire Officers' Association to develop a strong partnership to take on a **number of national functions** which have previously been undertaken by central government and which we believe can be better delivered by the sector. A joint letter setting out the principal eight areas of business has been sent to the Fire Minister, Bob Neill, and we hope to meet the Minister shortly to take this forward.

5. Cllr Brenda Forster chaired the 4th **Fire Equality and Diversity network** in late September. Councillors from across the country heard from a range of speakers about equality work, an analysis of the culture in the fire service and the peer reviews which are currently taking place.

Contact officer: Liz Hobson

Position: Business Manager

Phone no: 020 7664 3229

E-mail: liz.hobson@local.gov.uk