

LG Group Safer and Stronger Communities Programme Board – report by Cllr Mehboob Khan (Chair)

1. On 12 – 13 October, the Board held its third annual **Safer Communities Conference** in Brighton. In the opening session, which was chaired by Cllr Khan, the keynote speech was provided by the Minister for Crime Prevention, James Brokenshire MP, who outlined the Government's community safety priorities. The Minister confirmed the Government's view that councils have a crucial role in tackling crime and disorder and that community safety partnerships will remain important in the future. The Minister explained that this was in the context of a Government agenda which sees central government as being a catalyst for change rather than micromanaging what happens locally. On licensing, the Government is looking to introduce a levy for late night licences, ban the sale of alcohol below cost price and look to make the licensing fee structure reflect the costs of running it. In his speech, the Minister also made reference to the Government's plans for police and crime commissioners and most of the delegate questions to the minister were on this issue.
2. The conference also included a panel session that gave delegates the opportunity to hear different perspectives on making community safety activities more efficient and effective. The closing panel session focussed on what police and crime commissioners would mean in local areas and included contributions from Sir Hugh Orde, the President of the Association of Chief Police Officers and Cllr Rob Garnham, Chair of the Association of Police Authorities. During the rest of the conference delegates attended workshops on a range of topics, including what the Big Society idea could mean for community safety; the future of the community safety performance regime; reducing reoffending and tackling anti-social behaviour.
3. To coincide with the conference, the Board met in Brighton on 11 October. Board members received a presentation from the National Police Improvement Agency (NPIA) on their employer supported policing programme which looks to promote the role of **special constables**. The Police are looking to recruit more specials and the NPIA was seeking assistance from the LGA in encouraging councils to promote the idea amongst their staff and local communities they serve. The Board fully supported the work of special constables, but were concerned about councils encouraging staff to serve as specials at a time when they were in the process of reducing budgets and their workforces. The Board therefore decided to come back to the issue in March next year. .
4. The Board also discussed Health and Safety, ahead of the publication of Lord Young's report "**Common Sense, Common Safety**" – a review of health and safety <http://www.number10.gov.uk/wp->

content/uploads/402906_CommonSense_acc.pdf). The review puts forward a series of policies for improving the perception of health and safety, to ensure it is taken seriously by employers and the general public, while ensuring the burden on small business is kept to a minimum. The report also calls for restrictions on advertising for “no win, no fee” compensation claims and a revolution in the way personal injury claims are handled. Some of the other recommendations include raising standards of health and safety consultants and combining food safety and health and safety inspections. The report includes key milestones for delivery and LG Regulation are working with the Health and Safety Executive and the Food Standards Agency to ensure that local government contributes to all strands of work relevant to councils as regulators.

5. The House of Commons Justice Select Committee recently heard from the Ministry of Justice about the government’s **court closure plans**. The minister responsible, Jonathan Djanogly MP, told the committee that though there had been suggestions about using non-court buildings for holding magistrate and county court sessions, such as town halls, the Ministry was wary of moving in that direction because of security concerns amongst magistrates of doing so. As the Magistrates Association made a similar proposal to our own, Cllr Khan has written on the Board’s behalf to the Justice Select Committee on this issue and set out why we think it important to make use of other public buildings as courts, given the current pressure on public finances, so that we can maximise savings and maintain services for local communities. Although security is important especially for victims and witnesses a large proportion of the cases heard in county and magistrates courts do not involve violent offenders, and council buildings typically have security systems in place including security staff and limited access areas.
6. The abolition of the Chief Coroners Office was included in the Government announcement about the **reform of quangos and public bodies**. We had previously raised concerns with the new Minister about the lack of lines of accountability between the new Chief Coroners Office and councils who fund the coroners' service. We also welcomed the abolition of Firebuy, a CLG quango established in 2006 to procure equipment and services on behalf of English fire and rescue services, which the National Audit Office has recently described as providing poor value for money.

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