

Safer & Stronger Communities Board – report from Cllr Mehboob Khan (Chairman)

Transition to Police and Crime Commissioners

1. Board members have been speaking to both local and central government about the transition to police and crime commissioners. The Board's Deputy Chair Cllr Duwayne Brooks attended a stakeholder event held by Hampshire Police Authority in mid-February to talk about what is involved in setting up a police and crime panel. Later in the month Cllr Henri Murison represented the Board at the Home Office's Transition Sponsorship Board, which is chaired by the Policing Minister, the Rt. Hon. Nick Herbert MP, and oversees all the work being undertaken to make the transition to Police and Crime Commissioners. Cllr Murison raised the lack of progress in providing councils with a definitive list of the funding to be transferred to commissioners, and urged the government to rethink their decision not to use a free-post delivery of election material.

Metal Theft

2. The Board's chair Cllr Mehboob Khan, along with Cllr David Parsons CBE, Chair of the Environment and Housing Board, and Cllrs Richard Stay and Budge Wells from Central Bedfordshire met Lord Henley, the Minister responsible for addressing metal theft at the Home Office. There was a discussion with the Minister about providing councils with the power to make their own bye-laws regulating scrap metal dealers. The Minister was supportive of this in principle although he wanted to take further advice. Since then LGA officers have been in discussion with Home Office officials about finding a possible legislative vehicle.

Burial and Bereavement Conference

3. The Board's Vice-Chair, Cllr Les Lawrence, chaired a successful Deaths, Funerals and Coroners Conference in early March which looked at ways of improving burial and bereavement services, maintaining cemeteries, the impact of the Government's decision not to abolish the post of chief coroner, and need for councils to appoint medical examiners as part of the reforms introduced to death certification after the Harold Shipman case. As well as a range of local government speakers delegates heard from the Ministry of Justice, the Department of Health, and the Coroners' Society.

CCTV

4. Cllr Mehboob Khan as the Board's Chair appeared on Sky News in February opposite the TaxPayer's Alliance to defend council expenditure on CCTV, following a press release from Big Brother Watch on how much councils had

spent on cameras over a four year period. Cllr Khan was able to point out that compared to Big Brother Watch's own figures, the number of cameras operated by councils has declined by 13 per cent from 2009. He also highlighted the important role CCTV plays in tracking down offenders and securing convictions while making the point that councils consult with residents and partners on whether it is the most effective tool for tackling crime in an area.

Tackling 'legal highs'

5. During 2010 there were a number of high profile incidents where individuals, usually young adults, died or were injured as a result of taking 'legal highs'. The LGA have now responded to a request from the All Party Parliamentary Policy Group for Drug Policy Reform to recognise the devastating impact that 'legal highs' can have on individuals and their families. We have also highlighted the limitations on action that can currently be taken by Trading Standards services. The LGA response goes on to acknowledge the potential role that councils could have in the regulation of 'legal highs', but only where specific tools are provided along with resource and training to implement these. Regulation of 'legal highs' is complicated by the large number of emerging products, high levels of internet sales, the potential for sellers to be located abroad and the ability of those developing new products to exploit loopholes in the law.

Protecting council's powers to respond to concerns about businesses

6. The LGA is urging Government to overturn an amendment to the Freedoms Bill which would mean environmental health and trading standards officers have to seek a warrant through the courts to carry out basic inspections, unless given permission to enter by the business owner. If passed it would mean an end to on-the-spot-inspections and delays of hours or even days before council officers can respond to complaints made by residents in relation to food hygiene, product safety, animal welfare, licensing and environmental protection.

Fire

7. Cllr Kay Hammond spoke at the Retained Duty System conference on 1 March. Cllr Hammond reiterated the LGA's support for the retained duty system and the work that we have done with the Fire Minister Bob Neill MP to address the practical issues that affect recruitment and retention. Cllr Hammond also spoke about the extensive work that the LGA has and will be doing to lobby in Europe for the retention the Working time Directive 48hr opt out, which is essential for the retained duty system.

Contact officer: Helen Murray
Position: Head of Programmes
Phone no: 020 7664 3266
E-mail: helen.murray@local.gov.uk