

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

Police and Crime Commissioners

1. The LGA was represented at the Home Office's Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC) Transition Project on checks and balances in mid-July by Cllr Joanna Spicer. The project group received an update from the Home Office on councils' progress in setting up police and crime panels. The Home Office had requested that councils notify them about arrangements by 16 July so the Home Office could then consider whether they needed to set up the panels themselves. All but one area submitted the requested information and although the Home Office had to seek clarification from a small number of areas, the establishment of panels across England is on track, with many having already held the first meetings of the panel.
2. As the LGA's campaign to secure PCCs in membership has progressed the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC), the successor body to the Association of Police Authorities (APA), has been keen to discuss with the LGA the possibility of working together to put a joint offer PCCs at the national level. The Board's Chair Cllr Mehboob Khan has been involved in a series of meetings with the APCC and APA to explore a joint arrangement. These discussions have resulted in a proposal for a joint Strategic Partnership Board with the APCC going to the Leadership Board.
3. Following guidance issued by the Senior Presiding Judge, Lord Justice Goldring, that prohibited magistrates serving on police and crime panels, the Board's Chair Cllr Khan publicly questioned the grounds on which the decision was taken. This was followed by a letter to Lord Justice Goldring from the LGA's Chairman, and shortly after Lord Justice Goldring issued revised guidance allowing magistrates to serve on police and crime panels, meaning those councillors who were magistrates would not have to resign from the bench to serve on the panel. Cllr Khan welcomed the revised guidance in a further press notice.

Metal theft

4. Ahead of the second reading in mid-July of the Scrap Metal Dealers Bill introduced by Richard Ottaway MP, members of the Board contacted their MPs to urge them to attend the debate and support the bill. The Board's chair Cllr Khan was also quoted in the media ahead of the second reading debate stressing the importance of the bill, backed up by evidence from an LGA survey showing that nine out of ten councils had been hit by metal theft. The bill has now reached committee stage where the LGA will be raising concerns about conditions on licences and pressing for a flexible fee structure.

Anti-Social Behaviour

5. Publication of the most recent crime statistics in July was used in a press statement by the Board's Chair, Cllr Khan, to highlight the issue of anti-social behaviour and the

important role councils play in addressing it. A guide for councils to the anti-social behaviour case management pilots run last year was published in August with a foreword from the Board's anti-social behaviour champion, Cllr Anita Lower. The guide outlined what the councils involved in the pilots, in particular those in South Wales and Cambridgeshire had learnt from the experience.

Communications Data Bill Committee

6. Cllr Paul Bettison offered reassurance to the Communications Data Bill Committee that councils only access communications data when absolutely necessary to protect their communities. He emphasised that the powers are used to tackle crimes that present misery for residents and protect the most vulnerable against rogue traders, loan sharks and doorstep crime, and also to bring to justice those committing benefit fraud.

Street fundraisers

7. Cllr Nilgun Canver represented the LGA at the launch of Lord Hodgson's review of the Charities Act 2006. The review looked sympathetically on LGA proposals to strengthen the role of councils in tackling problem street fundraisers and Nick Hurd, Minister for Civil Society, has since written to Carolyn Downs asking for the LGA to support the Government Response to the review.

Fire

8. Cllr Maurice Heaster wrote to Bob Neill MP, on behalf of the Fire Services Management Committee expressing concerns at the government's proposals for the allocation of costs arising from the retrospective access for retained firefighters to the pension scheme. Discussions are ongoing. Following the meeting on 18 July, Cllr Heaster wrote to the Minister, drawing on our legal advice and setting out FSMC's strongly held view that the costs should be borne by government.

Council visits

9. Cllr Khan visited London authorities Haringey, Hackney and Lambeth in his role as Chair to look at areas of good practice, the challenges facing these councils and how the LGA can support and assist.

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