

Safer & Stronger Communities Board – Report from Councillor Mehboob Khan (Chairman)

Communications Data Bill

1. Following the initial Home Office decision to reject the business case for councils to retain access to communications data, the Board's Vice-Chair Councillor Joanna Spicer met James Brokenshire MP, the responsible minister at the Home Office, at the end of February. Councillor Spicer highlighted how access to communications data helped councils protect residents and taxpayers from fraud, loan sharks, commercial flytippers and counterfeit goods. She pointed out additional safeguards in place since November, meaning local authorities now have to apply to magistrates' courts to access communications data. The Board will continue to press local authorities' case as the draft Bill progresses.

Horsemeat

2. The Board became involved in the horsemeat scandal in mid-February when the Chairman and Chief Executive of Iceland sought to blame local authorities and the price they were willing to pay for food for the presence of horsemeat in beef products. In addition to the LGA Chairman's appearance on the BBC, I appeared on Channel Four news alongside Iceland's Chairman to discuss the issue. In the interview I highlighted the inaccuracies in Iceland's claims, the legal responsibility on retailers to ensure what they were selling matched the description and the need for all parties involved to work together to restore public faith in the food industry. I also gave evidence to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee on the role of councils in supporting businesses, enforcing food regulation, testing and the impact of financial pressures on these services.

Scrap Metal Dealers Act

3. With the Scrap Metal Dealers Act receiving Royal Assent at the end of February, I attended a reception hosted by Richard Ottaway MP at the beginning of March to mark the successful passage through parliament of his private member's bill, which became the Act. The reception was attended by a range of other organisations and bodies with an interest in reducing metal theft. The Home Office indicated that they plan to implement the new licensing regime the Act creates in October. LGA officers are already in discussion with civil servants over the implementation programme.

Better Regulation Delivery Office

4. I attended the Better Regulation Delivery Office (BRDO) Business Reference Panel to lead a discussion on the role of councils in promoting growth and supporting local businesses, in the specific context of regulation. These discussions link directly to work the LGA is doing to ensure that regulation is put at the core of the growth offering, with the aim of ensuring councils have the freedom and tools to respond to the unique needs of local businesses and target resources at the areas that are of most concern to residents.

Licensing and locally-set fees

5. The Board has continued to support peer-led improvement in the licensing system with a sold out conference on 5 February. Chaired by Councillor Spicer, and with speeches from Councillors Canver, Huddart, and Haines, the conference addressed key changes in the licensing system that will allow councils to take a strategic overview of the sale of alcohol in their areas, particularly linking it for the first time with their new public health responsibilities. The Board also took the opportunity to press the

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Government to deliver on its commitment to introducing locally-set fees, allowing councils to address the imbalance that has seen taxpayers subsidise the industry by over £100 million.

Peer Support

6. Councillor Shona Johnstone participated on a new peer challenge with Gloucestershire Office of the PCC and Gloucestershire Safer and Stronger Justice Commission from 20-22 February, resulting in a more efficient community safety delivery structure across the force area.
7. Councillor Kay Hammond attended a fire peer review in Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service from 26 February to 1 March. This identified new opportunities for the Fire Authority to develop its leadership role, engage in wider partnerships such as with the new Police and Crime Commissioner and Health and Wellbeing Boards, and streamline the Committee structure. It found notable practice around arson and restorative justice which will be shared more widely.

Fire Services College

8. Councillor Hammond, Chairman of the Fire Services Management Committee attended the formal signing of the sale of the Fire Service College to Capita. The sale follows recommendations from the Fire Services Management Committee to government on options for securing the future of the college.

Annual Fire Conference

9. Councillor Hammond will chair the LGA's Annual Fire Conference from 12-13 March in Brighton. This flagship event has attracted over 260 delegates, with all English Fire and Rescue Authorities attending. The Minister, Brandon Lewis is due to make a keynote speech on the second day. Other speakers and sessions include the new Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser, PCC David Lloyd talking about interoperability between the blue light services; the merger of the Scottish Fire Service; peer challenge; shared Chief Fire Officers; and shared control arrangements. Councillor Hammond will announce a new Leadership Academy for September as part of the LGA's strengthened fire offer; and publish a financial outlook for fire booklet.

Sir Ken Knight's Review

10. Councillor Hammond met Sir Ken Knight to discuss the emerging findings of his review into efficiencies in the fire service. He will attend the Fire Services Management Committee on 11 March to share thoughts in more detail. Recommendations are likely to focus on the need for sharing good practice; workforce; governance arrangements; and scrutiny.

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