

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

Home Office issues

1. The Board discussed Home Office matters at its March meeting with the Minister for Criminal Information, Lord Taylor, who is also responsible for all Home Office business in the House of Lords, and links with local government and communities. Lord Taylor spoke about metal theft and implementing the Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013, the ability of councils to access communications data under the draft Communications Data Bill, and alcohol licensing. He also highlighted the important role local authorities have in assisting with the implementation of policies, and the need for on-going conversation between the Home Office and the LGA about issues faced by councils. The Board stressed the importance of councils continuing to access communications data. Lord Taylor emphasised that councils needed to make their case not just to ministers, but also to parliamentarians and more widely.
2. Following the meeting, the Home Office was in contact to seek LGA support for the draft Bill. The Board indicated that its priority was to preserve the ability of councils to access communications data, and not add councils' powers in this area. Without knowing whether the Bill retained councils' access to the communications data, the Board indicated that it could not comment on it at this stage. It now seems that the draft Bill will not be included in the Queen's Speech, meaning that the current position will be maintained and councils will continue to be able to access communications data.

Police and Crime Panels

3. At the end of March the Board's chair Cllr Mehboob Khan chaired a conference specifically for police and crime panels. Delegates from over two-thirds of panels in England and Wales heard from other panels about their experiences since November 2012 and how panels can provide good scrutiny of police and crime commissioners. Delegates discussed learning drawn from conducting confirmation hearings for chief constable and chief executive appointments, handling complaints and scrutinising police and crime plans and commissioners' precepts. Conference attendees identified what future support police and crime panels would need in the year ahead, and how the LGA could continue to assist panels in their first year in operation.

PCC working group

4. A PCC working group made up of members from the LGA's Safer Communities Board and Fire Services Management Committee met on 19 March. The group seeks to draw on emerging good practice from Fire and Rescue Services which members can use in their discussions with PCCs to highlight the important work of the sector in areas such as reducing reoffending and emergency planning. Cllr Rebecca Knox, Chairman of Dorset Fire Authority sent a letter and survey on the group's behalf to all Chief Fire Officers and Chairs in England and Wales, seeking information on learning gained so far in their relationships with PCCs.

Council regulatory services are 'open for business'

5. Both the LGA Executive and the Stronger and Safer Communities Board met in March to discuss the future of local regulation and how regulation can be put at the centre of

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work by councils on economic growth. The LGA recognises that while local regulatory services provide advice to businesses on a daily basis to cut through red tape and help them comply with the law, regulation is still perceived as a barrier. Against a backdrop of economic uncertainty and continuing concern about the negative impact of regulation, councils are working to ensure that local regulation becomes intrinsically linked to work on economic growth. As a result of discussions at board meetings and member feedback, the LGA is beginning a piece of work to help businesses recognise how local regulation can contribute to economic success, increase accessibility of regulatory support for businesses, promote collaborative working and identify barriers to our shared objectives on growth. The LGA will engage with members and business representatives as this work area continues to develop.

6. As part of this engagement, Cllr Mehboob Khan attended a meeting of the Better Regulation Delivery Office Representative Steering Group at the end of April. The meeting, chaired by the Minister for Business and Enterprise, Michael Fallon MP, includes representatives from the Welsh government, the Health and Safety Executive, the Food Standards Agency, the British Retail Consortium, the Federation of Small Businesses and the TUC. It discusses a range of regulatory issues and advises government on regulatory matters.

Late-night levy workshop

7. 10 councils actively giving consideration to the introduction of a late-night levy joined Councillor Nilgun Canver, LGA Licensing Champion, to discuss the key issues facing them as they seek to manage their night-time economies. Representatives agreed that this gives an excellent opportunity to take a step back and consider how the tools available to councils and the police can work together, and to reassess what is appropriate for their area. It is not an exercise that is fundamentally about raising income for councils or the police, but a tool that will provide additional services or secure the future of services identified by businesses as important to operating a safe and vibrant night-time economy. Councils present agreed to work together to develop robust proposals that will stand up to challenges from industry.

Annual Fire Conference

8. The LGA Fire Conference on 12-13 March was a significant success drawing nearly 300 delegates despite challenging weather conditions. Nearly all Fire and Rescue Authorities in England and Wales were represented. Cllr Kay Hammond and other members of the Fire Services Management Committee chaired a range of plenary and workshop sessions. Funding was a key theme for the conference. Delegates heard from several authorities, including Cllr Mehboob Khan representing West Yorkshire, on the transformation taking place in the sector. One outcome of the conference, referenced in both the Minister's and Shadow Minister's speeches, was the need for a more in-depth understanding of increased commercialisation in the sector and the importance of the fire sector highlighting its relevance to social care, children and young people and growth agendas.

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