

Civil Disorder

Purpose of report

For discussion.

Summary

This paper updates members on the actions taken by central and local government following the civil disorder in early August and outlines how the LG Group will be shaping and influencing national discussions about how to prevent further civil disorder in the future.

Recommendations

Members are invited to:

1. Commend the work of councils in responding to the civil disorder in August and the short-term measures put in place to help councils and communities recover from the affects of the disturbances; and
2. In the context of the wider policy response to underlying long-term issues, agree the importance of council-led community budgets in addressing the needs of problem families and agree the LG Group's role in promoting that.

Action

As directed by the LG Group Executive.

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Background

1. Between 6–10 August there were widespread civil disturbances in London, the West Midlands and Greater Manchester, as well as areas like Merseyside, Nottingham, Bristol, Gloucester, and Wiltshire. This disorder affected over 1,800 businesses, and a significant number of residential properties in those authorities that experienced disturbances.
2. Local authorities played a vital role in responding to the disturbances, both at the time they took place and immediately afterwards, and this fantastic example of community leadership has been commended and congratulated by Ministers and the media. Activity has been wide-ranging and included providing financial and other support to local businesses, assisting residents left homeless, printing CCTV images of looters to aid investigation, intensive work by trading standards to recover stolen property, making buildings safe, and leading the clear up of their streets. Mobilising and organising residents to help in the aftermath has also been important.
3. The Local Government Group has been involved at a national level in response to the disturbances in Cabinet Office Briefing Room meetings, and has been in contact with authorities (including fire authorities) to offer support. This involvement is on-going through the LG Group Chairman's place on the Ministerial Recovery Board chaired by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. In addition to the Secretary of State's Leaders' Summit on 8 September, the LG Group will be hosting a Chairman's Summit on 27 October.

Short-term assistance for affected communities and their councils

4. In the aftermath of the disturbances, in addition to local recovery activity, Whitehall's efforts have concentrated on helping affected residents and businesses, in particular providing them with financial support. A one-off package of measures has been put together to help rebuild communities, open shops, rebuild damaged buildings, re-house those made homeless and assist councils in returning their areas to normality. The Government is also keen to harness the enthusiasm of communities that turned out to clean up their local areas. Our work here has focused on ensuring councils' needs are championed in Government and that central Government effort is channelled to best effect; and ensuring swift and communications advice to councils about the various support packages.

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5. The measures include:
 - 5.1. A £10 million recovery fund to help councils with the immediate costs of making their areas safe, clear and clean. As well as being used to make repair damage such as that to pavements and roads it can also be used to cover the costs of offering council tax discounts or relief to homes that have been damaged but are habitable.
 - 5.2. Homelessness Support funding to meet the immediate costs of emergency accommodation for homeless families with the funding provided by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG).
 - 5.3. A £20 million High Street Support scheme, administered by councils, which is designed to help businesses start trading again and to meet short term costs. It can be used to reduce business rates, finance building repairs, and encourage customers back to affected areas.
 - 5.4. In London the Mayor of London's Fund will provide £50 million to make major long-term improvements to the capital's town centres and high streets damaged by the disturbances, while the London Enterprise Fund will provide specific, targeted support for Tottenham and Croydon to reverse economic decline and boost the local economies.
6. Individuals, homeowners or small businesses (whether or not they are insured) that have suffered damage to or loss of their building or property as a result of rioting are also able to seek compensation under the Riot Damages Act from police authorities, with the government stating they will ensure police authorities have the funds they need to meet the cost of claims.
7. For councils themselves the long-standing Bellwin scheme is available to meet immediate and sizeable recovery costs, although the thresholds in the scheme mean that most councils would only receive assistance above costs in excess of around £1 million.

Longer-term recovery for communities

8. Now that the immediate consequences of the disturbances are being addressed, the focus for councils and government is on addressing the underlying societal issues which led to the disorder. As a first phase, the Cabinet Office has set up a Ministerial Recovery Group to develop a Recovery Plan, starting to look at why riots took place in some areas, but not others, to analyse differences and make evidenced decisions about future work.
9. The Prime Minister is considering which Cabinet Committees should be established to address particular longer term policy issues such as tackling gangs, further legislation, the impact of social media, implications for policing and the treatment of young people in the criminal justice system. We also have the independent Communities and Victims Panel announced at the end of August, which will be chaired by Darra Singh, and will look at the causes of the

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riots and what can be done to prevent future problems. This will publish interim findings in November and a final report in March. The LG Group has a place on the Ministerial Recovery Group and members of Programme Boards will play an important role in influencing specific workstreams as they are established.

10. The Home Secretary and Secretary of State for Work and Pensions will head a cross-government group to develop a plan of action for dealing with gang culture, and which will report to Parliament in October. We are already involved in the Home Office's Ending Gang Violence team which feeds in to this, and are pressing for implementation of injunction measures for under 18s. This is also an opportunity to highlight the existing good practice and experience of councils in tackling gangs and violence among young people.
11. There is wide recognition that a locally-led response to the wide and differing issues communities face is the most effective and efficient in these types of circumstances. It is important to continue to register with Ministers the excellent work done to date; how important it is that local democratically elected representatives continue to address the deep seated problems in their communities; and how a localist central Government can ensure local authorities have the freedom, flexibility and tools to do this. The challenge will be to persuade the Government to take community budgets to a much more ambitious operational level, e.g. full roll out and the inclusion of significant funding streams which have previously been resisted.
12. In order to influence the developing national agenda, there are a number of issues which will help councils build community relations, ensure communities are more resilient and reduce the likelihood of further public disorder. Councils have already built up a range of innovative good practice often in partnership with a number of different local bodies, and key changes in government policy could make the work of councils more effective.
13. At the core of the Group's narrative is the fundamental point that the best placed people to address underlying social problems, which resulted in disorder in some places, are local democratically elected representatives, and the legitimacy of this should be uppermost. Stronger, more resilient communities will only be created if everyone in the community feels they have opportunities, that they have a stake in their community, but are also accountable to their community for what they do.
14. Central and local government's declared ambition to turn round the lives of the worst problem families is even more pressing after the events of early August. We already know the approaches that work best – for example, the Family Recovery Programme in Westminster and the LIFE programme in Swindon – are local ones tailored to the circumstances of the families and communities they live in. This is an opportunity for the LG Group to challenge Whitehall to

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embrace council-led community budgets, including making real progress with funding streams and action, rather than process.

15. The LG Group has made an offer to Government to take a sector-owned approach to the roll out of community budgets to ensure better outcomes for families with complex needs. In parallel we have identified a range of measures to build social capital and harness community spirit, some of which require changes in Whitehall. Initial thoughts include:
 - 15.1. Giving councils the tools they need to invest in both existing and new housing stock.
 - 15.2. Establishing a genuinely local planning system that provides flexibility for councils, including a lighter touch approach to neighbourhood planning.
 - 15.3. Providing councils with the means to grow their local economies by getting the localisation of business rates right, and developing a market for municipal bonds to provide councils with the investment needed to generate growth.
 - 15.4. Making a better public service offer to young people by bringing together services and funding and making them more locally accountable with young people having a greater say in the services they receive.
 - 15.5. Explore volunteering as both a route into experience of adult life and building a stake in local life for young people by making it easier for young people on benefits to volunteer.
 - 15.6. Ensuring offenders take responsibility for their actions and give back to local people, and also ensuring councils and the police have the tools to tackle gangs and anti-social behaviour.

Conclusion and next steps

16. The LG Group Executive's views are sought both on the response to the public disorder; and on the proposed way forward from paragraph 11 onwards.

Financial Implications

17. Any work on around the national discussions on the civil disturbances will be met from existing resources and budgets.