

Safer Communities Board – Current issues

This note highlights some of the key recent developments relating to the work of the Board.

Licensing Act Fees

We have been in discussion with Ministers and senior officials on licensing fees. We welcome the shift in control over licensing from magistrates to councils, but have emphasised that fee income must cover all local authorities' additional costs for administration, inspection and enforcement. We have made a strong case, supported by evidence from our survey and a jointly commissioned report from independent consultants. Government has indicated that there will be a substantial increase in fees over and above the figures in the consultation document, which were announced on Friday 21 January. Whether these increases cover all of the estimated £41 million deficit remains to be seen.

Gambling

A briefing for the Commons report stage of the Bill was published on 20 January. This will shortly be placed on the LGA website.

Police Reform and review of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

The Board is working on its response to the White Paper on police reform 'Building Communities: Beating Crime' to be submitted at the end of January. The Board has broadly welcomed the proposals in the White Paper that incorporate many of the issues for which LGA has been lobbying for some time. The response will concentrate on reinforcing the need for community control, looking particularly at the need for local authorities to:

- take the lead on crime reduction activities;
- for police and crime reduction priorities to be set locally; and
- for local authority representation on police authorities to be strengthened.

Review of the Crime and Disorder Act

The Board made its submission to the review at the end of January. Copies have been circulated to all members of the Board. The submission highlighted the following points:

- the need for partnerships to continue as the main vehicles for planning the delivery of community safety objectives operating at both district and county level and linked to local strategic partnerships and children's trusts;
- opposed any suggestion of compulsory merging of partnerships, arguing that this should be a matter for local decision; and
- the need for a more coordinated approach between government departments to community safety issues.

These responses are being closely coordinated with the Association of Police Authorities and the Improvement and Development Agency

New CLP Sub Group on Crime

The meeting of the Central/Local Partnership held on 18 January agreed to set up a sub group on crime. A meeting is now being arranged between LGA and Home Office officials to discuss terms of reference.

Home Affairs Select Committee

Cllr Chris Clarke, leader of the LGA Liberal Democrat Group, gave evidence for the LGA on anti-social behaviour to the Parliamentary Home Affairs Select Committee on 18 January. Written evidence had been submitted in autumn 2004 <http://www.lga.gov.uk/Briefing.asp?Section=0&id=SX967F-A78282F2>. Our evidence has emphasised the need to find sustainable solutions for anti-social behaviour, concentrating on long term prevention with local government services playing a key role.

Building Regulations

Leading members of the Board and the lead member on building control, Cllr Peter Kent, are to meet Phil Hope, ODPM minister with responsibility for building regulations on 25 January. Main points to be raised include:

- Means of improving enforcement of building regulation;
- Performance indicators. Pressing for the development of performance indicators applied to local government and approved inspector; and
- Power to trade consistent approach across.

Fire issues

A meeting of the Central/Local Partnership Sub-Group on Fire was held on 11 January with the Minister and Phil Hope both attending. This was seen by both central government and the LGA as a successful meeting, covering the main topics of current mutual interest with no areas of discord. It was followed by a separate detailed meeting to discuss some issues with FiReControl.

ODPM consultation papers on the Regional Control Centres FiReControl Project were circulated with comments required back at the end of January. These consultation papers included the outline business case and governance issues for the regional control centres. The Governance issues consider the advantages and disadvantages of using a Local Authority Company or nominating a Lead Authority to run each of the Regional Control Centres.

The LGA has circulated to all local authorities a letter in support of raising the awareness of the benefits of using fire sprinklers in schools.

LACORS' Members Focus Panel

LACORS has been proactively improving communications with elected members. Its Members Focus Panel met in November to discuss and identify successful strategies and ideas for improving communication with councillors. The Panel consists of high profile elected members including several members of the LACORS Management Committee. At its November meeting a very constructive discussion took place regarding methods to better engage and communicate with local government, a proposal to identify a member champion in each local authority and other initiatives to raise the profile of regulatory services.

IDeA Leadership Academy Community Safety Module

The first IDeA Leadership Academy module designed for councillors who are community safety portfolio holders was held at Warwick Conference Centre on 10 and 11 January. The module examined case studies and examples of good practice and give participants an opportunity to exchange experiences with peers from other authorities and develop their own plans. One of the main aims of the session was to help participants develop their thinking on their council's draft Crime and Disorder strategy in time for signing off in March 2005.

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