

20 June 2005

Delivering on our post election pledges: cutting crime and the fear of crime

Decisions

1. The Board is asked to consider this report and agree whether to pursue plans for a community safety project.

Actions Required

2. Officers to pursue action agreed.

Action by LGA Secretariat

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Delivering on our post election pledges: cutting crime and the fear of crime

Introduction

1. In its post election briefing to Ministers, the LGA has asked the government to acknowledge the key role played by local government in reducing crime and anti social behaviour.
2. Leading members of the LGA are strongly supportive of this assertion, and have suggested that there is a convincing argument for the issue of community safety to be given greater prominence within the Association's work programme. There are two strands to this argument:
 - Community safety is a crucial component of the thriving and sustainable local communities we seek to achieve; and
 - Examples of the strategic leadership that local authorities can exercise in this area support our broader vision for local governance.
3. Earlier this year members agreed priorities for the Board's work in the area of community safety and the reduction of crime and anti-social behaviour. These focussed on local government's role in reducing offending and reoffending, in tackling youth offending, and strengthening the input of local government and local communities into the work of the police service. The high political profile of crime and community safety issues during and following the election and the renewed commitment of the LGA to prioritising this work suggests that this is now the ideal time for members to refocus these objectives to ensure that the Association's lobbying is as effective as possible. This paper is intended to prompt discussion between members on our future work in the area of community safety. It outlines the existing role of local government in community safety and makes links between our ambition to reduce crime and the fear of crime and other council work streams, before suggesting a number of potential issues which could form the basis of an LGA community safety project. A number of opportunities for future lobbying activity are also highlighted.

Background

Local government

4. Local authorities' role in community safety is already substantial:
 - Local authorities are key partners in Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRP's) and DA(A)Ts (Drug and Alcohol Action Teams);
 - In these forums, local authorities and fire authorities work in partnership with the police service, primary care teams (PCTs), and the Probation Service to identify and tackle local crime and community safety concerns. These might include

acquisitive crimes, such as vehicle crime, theft or burglary, violent crimes, including domestic violence, anti social behaviour, or fear of crime, for example;

- Dedicated government funding streams for community safety, from 2005, are being incorporated into the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund. Local authorities lead negotiations amongst local partners over the distribution of this funding and local outcomes and targets, via their local strategic partnership and in conjunction with their CDRPs. In pilot areas, this is one block of Local Area Agreements (LAAs). These new arrangement present a new opportunity for local authorities to tackle crime in their local area according to targets and objectives set by local communities;
 - Through the programme of LPSAs (local public service agreements), many local authorities have led the way in setting stretch targets for specific crime types for their local area; and
 - Local councillors (currently from County and unitary councils only) sit upon police authorities. These bodies are responsible for the governance of local police services and ensure that local planning for policing is joined up with national and local agendas for crime reduction and community safety.
5. Community safety also features in local authority performance management. “Safer and stronger communities” is a strand of the 2005 CPA framework and focuses in particular on the extent to which local authorities listen and respond to the community safety priorities of their local community. The Home Office have also established their own performance management frameworks for local areas.
6. Local authorities do not, however, contribute to safer communities only through specific crime reduction activity. Their most significant contribution to a preventative approach to crime and disorder will be through the many services they deliver. For example:
- Education;
 - Social Services;
 - Children’s Services;
 - Housing;
 - Environmental services, including trading standards and licensing;
 - Planning;
 - Youth services; and
 - Leisure
7. This major role is acknowledged and underpinned by section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 which sets out a duty for local authorities to consider community safety concerns in all that they do:

“without prejudice to any other obligation imposed on it, it shall be the duty of each authority to which this section applies to exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effects of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area.”

8. However, success in developing a response to Section 17 responsibilities has been only limited, in part because of delays in developing clear guidelines and support mechanisms by the government. Yet it is in this area of work that the key to making the most significant impact on the levels of offending, reoffending and anti-social behaviour lies.

Central government

9. The lead department for the crime reduction the Home Office. The LGA has recently been engaged in a selection of Home Office activity, as it relates to local authorities role in community safety. This has focused on:
 - Reviewing the Crime and Disorder Act 1998;
 - Developing a new strategy and service for the management of offenders (establishment of NOMs); and
 - Policing policy – a greater focus on community engagement, accountability, neighbourhood policing and modernisation.
10. Meanwhile, work continues within the Home Office to support the delivery of national crime reduction objectives. Vehicle crime and violent crime have attracted significant profile.
11. A Violent Crime Bill was announced in the recent Queen's Speech, and the LGA will lobby the Government on this as appropriate as proposals and legislation progress.
12. For sometime, we have been encouraging the Home Office to develop guidance on section 17 that would assist local authorities in implementing this duty effectively.
13. As part of the objective of developing the role and profile of local government in reducing offending we have been seeking to encourage greater involvement of and coordination between government departments in this area of work – particularly the ODPM. A recent LGA success was in securing the establishment of a Central Local Partnership (CLP) Safer Communities sub-group, which should assist the development of cross-departmental activity.

A potential lobbying position and project for the LGA

14. Looking to the future, there are a number of areas in which local authorities capacity to contribute to community safety could be strengthened:

Resources

- Including mainstream funding for community safety within the RSG (Revenue Support Grant) (environmental, protective and cultural services block).
- The Safer and Stronger Communities fund (mini LAA) has transformed the way local authorities receive funding. Whilst this is a positive change, we may wish to oversee the fund's development. The terms of the fund will be adjusted as it enters its second year.

Local flexibility

- Making sure that local areas have the freedom and flexibility to set local priorities and develop innovative approaches to building safer communities.
- Local Area Agreements (LAAs) and the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund are new opportunities for local authorities to contribute to the community safety agenda locally. However, appropriate targets must be negotiated between local authorities and the Government Offices if the full value of this initiative is to be achieved.

Local accountability

- The governance of policing at a local level is changing (e.g. through the introduction of neighbourhood policing teams) and may be subject to future development. This will have implications for local authorities.
- Improving community input into community safety priorities, objectives and targets .

Local authority activity/Section 17

- There are many good examples of the implementation of local government's section 17 responsibilities. However, this needs to be strengthened with better central support both from central government and the local government family.

A new lobbying strategy

15. In order to achieve these objectives the LGA should both develop a high profile lobbying strategy, and at the same time seek to ensure that strands of mainstream work within the Association (such as housing, education and social services) fully take account of community safety considerations. This will greatly strengthen the Association's leadership and lobbying capacity in this area. Specifically our lobbying objectives would be:

Central government

- Applying section 17 principles to central government – if implemented, all departments would be required to take into account the impact that any legislation or procedures they develop would have on the safety of local communities.
- Demonstrating to central government the key role that can be played by local government in achieving sustainable reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour.
- Broadening central government focus on community safety issues away from the relatively narrow Home Office focus on the criminal justice system and a recognition that this system is only one element in the range of measures that will reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.

16. Activity in these areas could be developed into the objectives of a new LGA Community Safety Project, owned by the Safer Communities Board. If this were agreed by the Board, a full project plan would be developed by officers.
17. The project could include:
 - Working with other LGA policy boards to identify areas of their activity that directly contribute to reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour.
 - Contribution to the LGA's submission on the Spending Review 2006.
 - Response to new Safer and Stronger Communities Fund guidance and lobbying of Home Office officials as necessary.
 - Collection and dissemination of good practice in some of the areas outlined above, e.g. implementation of section 17 and target setting.
 - Contribution to the government's agenda on policing reform
18. The desired outcomes of a project might include:
 - A stronger (LGA) vision of local authorities' community leadership role in this field, and recognition by Government;
 - Mainstream funding for local authority community safety function;
 - A more flexible approach adopted consistently by all Government Offices; and
 - Effective guidance and support for local authorities in meeting their Section 17 responsibilities
19. It is envisaged that the IDeA would be closely involved in this project, particularly in relation to the collection and dissemination of good practice.

Conclusion

20. A community safety project would give coherence and profile to the LGA's work in the field of community safety and allow us to pursue some specific lobbying objectives. A project could be designed so as also to develop the strength of our argument around the role of local authorities in strategic local leadership. The project would then also be of value to the LGA corporately.
21. The Board is asked to consider and discuss these issues, providing guidance to officers as to whether they wish to pursue a major area of corporate project activity in this area.

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