

Note of Decisions Taken and Action Required

Safer Communities Board

17 July 2006

at Local Government House

Present

Chair:	<i>Cllr Bryony Rudkin (Suffolk CC) (Labour).</i>
Vice Chair:	<i>Cllr Andy Sutton (Isle of Wight UA) (Conservative)</i>
Deputy Chairs:	<i>Cllr Caroline Seymour (Hambleton DC) (Liberal Democrat) and Cllr Graham Brown (Powys CC) (Independent).</i>
Conservative	<i>Cllr Roland Domleo (Congleton BC), Cllr Clare Whelan (Lambeth LB), Cllr David Smith (Lichfield DC), Cllr Audrey Lewis (Westminster City Council), Cllr Les Byrom (Sefton MBC)</i>
Labour	<i>Cllr Ann Lucas (Coventry City Council), Cllr Mark Burns-Williamson (Wakefield MDC).</i>
Liberal Democrats	<i>Cllr Paul Forgess (Stockport MBC), Cllr Christina Jebb (Staffordshire CC).</i>
Substitutes	<i>Cllr David Lancaster (City of Salford).</i>

Apologies *Cllr Milkinder Jaspal (Wolverhampton City), Cllr Audrey Jones (Gtr Manchester FCDA), Cllr Mehboob Khan (Kirklees MBC) Cllr Robert Light (Kirklees MBC), Cllr David Smith (Lichfield),*

Cllr Bryony Rudkin (Chair) advised members that she would be standing down as Chair and member of the Safer Communities Board at the end of July. Cllr Rudkin informed members that issues around the membership of the Board should be resolved by the political groups by week ending 21 July and that officers would report back to the Board when information is available.

Action: Member Support

Cllr Rudkin informed members that she and the Vice-Chair, Councillor Andy Sutton, had recently met with Harriet Harman QC MP, Ministers for Constitutional Affairs, prior to giving evidence at the Constitutional Affairs Select Committee. The Minister had expressed an interest in discussing with the Board matters relating to the Draft Coroners Bill and arrangements were made for the Minister to address the Board. The Minister was particularly interested in the use of Local Area Agreements as a tool to engage with partners. Subsequently, the Minister's office informed the LGA that the Minister also intended to address the Board on matters relating to burial law reform.

Burial Reform

A briefing was circulated, based upon the LGA's response to the Home Office consultation, on burial law reform and reflecting emerging issues relating to excess deaths in a human flu pandemic.

Councillor Andy Sutton reported back to the Board on his attendance at a recent meeting of the Government's COBR committee during the National Exercise Shared Goal, an exercise designed to test a range of planning assumptions and the current state of preparedness for a national emergency, in the form of a Human Flu Pandemic. This was the first time that local government had taken part in such an exercise.

The Minister thanked the Board for inviting her to attend its meeting and stressed that both the issues of burial law reform and the Coroner's Bill should be regarded as national/local endeavours and that central and local government should work together to resolve any issues around them in open dialogue.

The Minister set out some significant issues which need to be considered in deliberations on the issue of burial law reform:

- *the shortage of burial space;*
- *the sensitivities and concerns of relatives and other local people; relating to eg. the re-use of graves, reinterment and war graves;*
- *the influence of the media in fuelling the concerns of local people;*
- *health and safety implications relating to cemeteries, in particular the use of topple testing and the laying down of memorials, and the need to balance risk against causing distress to the bereaved.*

The Minister stressed that any changes to current burial practice, including the delegation of power to council to re-use graves, could be brought about without the need for primary legislation. The Minister suggested that a joint letter from herself and the Chair of the Board could be sent to councils urging a commonsense approach to health and safety in cemeteries.

Following the Minister's presentation Board members made a number of comments

- *consideration should be given to the development and use of new technology for the disposal of human remains, such as freeze drying*
- *the role of cemeteries as cultural heritage sites;*
- *the need to maintain heritage memorials (history rather than sentiment);*
- *memorials and headstones are private property and the burden of maintenance falls to councils if the family is not around;*
- *the cost of a grave must be affordable but will not cover all costs for the life of the grave;*
- *the extent of costs pressures and the need for change to the 75 year rule to allow reuse;*
- *the environmental implications of cremations and the increasing costs of managing those impacts;*
- *the different rules applying to council cemeteries and churchyards;*
- *issues for faith communities and the need for local consultation;*
- *the problem of land use for burials is as much a rural issue as an urban one.*

The Minister said that the DCA would work closely with, in addition to the LGA: CRE, DEFRA and HSE on this issue.

Coroner's Bill

DCA officials circulated a copy of Ipsos MOR's findings on Users' Experience of the Coroner's Courts to members

The Minister commenced by saying that the Coroners' Service was a very important public service to local people, in particular those who have cause to use the service, and that there are major public safety issues involved. Therefore it was vital that the service worked well and it would only do so by local government working together in partnership with the police and the coroner's

office. The Minister emphasised the importance of not losing the local focus and that a centralised system was not the answer. The Minister said the government's proposals were not a cost cutting exercise and that she was willing to discuss amendments to the bill but that the proposed structure was not going to change.

Decision

Following the Minister's presentation to the Board, members **agreed** that the following issues should be taken into account and used as key lobbying lines for use in negotiations with government and briefings on the draft Coroner's Bill.

- that the Bill should include a duty (for all agencies) to co-operate;
- the need for good customer service and relations with other stakeholders;
- the Coroner must be integrated with other local services;
- joint governance arrangements between councils and the Lord Chancellor
- the Chief Coroner to be jointly appointed by DCA and DCLG
- council scrutiny committees to have the power to review coroner's performance, send a report to the Lord Chancellors; and request a response within 28 days;
- coroners to be subject to the same terms, conditions and employment practices as other local government officers;
- a 'trigger' mechanism for the bereaved that will lead to a review of the coroner's investigative process (not the decision) by the DCA
- mechanisms to ensure that councils can keep costs under control;
- new coronial districts co-terminus with councils, police, criminal justice and health services.
- recognition that there are calls on other resources eg. administrative staff and the media in high profile cases;
- that coroners' and related costs should be shared between eg. the police authority and the local authority.

The Minister also said that the process of appointments of coroners needed proper standards and guidelines and succession planning.

The Chair, on behalf of the Board, thanked the Minister for coming to the Board meeting and suggested she return when the bill is further along the legislative process.

The Minister asked to receive a copy of the Stockport Scrutiny Report.

Action

Officers to invite Minister to return to the Board. LH

Officers to ensure that burial issues are taken forward with DCA by LGA advisers. LH

Officers to take forward lobbying lines, including members' comments, as set out above. LH

Officers to ensure that the Stockport Scrutiny Report is sent to the Minister. LH/DH

2. Board Priority Interventions

The Board discussed how the work programme might be developed and focussed to reflect the local delivery landscape and the messages of the LGA's 'People and Places' campaign.

Decision

The Board noted the list of interventions set out in report and agreed:

- that all Board members and substitutes be canvassed for dates for a 24 hour awayday in

November;

- *that an exit strategy for the Ahead of the Game (AOTG) Task Group should be developed to include lobbying the Home Office on the implications for communities of decriminalising brothels and the need to remove the stigma of soliciting convictions;*
- *to request that a Task Group be established take forward work on promoting the installation of sprinklers in all public buildings and how building control powers could be used to make buildings more sustainable;*
- *that consideration should be given to the remits of the individual Boards and cross boarding working, particularly in the light of the establishment of the new Culture, Leisure and Sport Board.*

Action

Officers to organise awayday for November.

JB/Member services

Officers to develop an exit strategy for the AOTG Task Group.

TO'F

Officers to take forward the establishment of a member task group on sprinklers/

JB/CC

Officers would do further work on refining the suggested priorities and to look at cross board working and the remits of the individual Boards and bring a paper to the September Board meeting.

Programme Directors/Business Managers

3. Update on Live Issues

The Board received and noted an update on live issues in the remit of the Board.

Councillor Mark Burns-Williamson reported back from an LGA conference on police reform which he had attended the previous week. He informed members that, following the abandonment of proposals for a major structuring of the police service, that it was unlikely that further proposals would emerge before the next General Election.

Minutes of the Fire Service Management Committee

Councillor Les Byrom (Sefton) updated members on the last meeting of the Fire Services Management Committee on 15 June.

The Chair asked that the Board's appreciation of Councillor Byrom's chairmanship of the Fire Services Management Committee be recorded.

The Board noted the minutes of the Fire Services Management Committee on 15 May 2006.

AOB

Cllr Brown led the members in expressing their thanks to Cllr Rudkin for her chairing of the Board in the last year

