

14 May 2007

Other business update - Decisions and Actions Required

Decisions

1. *For information, to note the update on current issues.*

Actions Required

2. *As noted within the update.*

Action by: *LGA officers*

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Other business update

Home Office – departmental changes

1. From 9 May, the Home Office is responsible for crime and crime reduction, policing, security and counter-terrorism, borders and immigration, passports and identity. The Ministry of Justice takes responsibility from the Home Office for criminal law and sentencing, for reducing re-offending and for prisons and probation; plus all the current responsibilities of the Department for Constitutional Affairs. The Office for Criminal Justice Reform (OCJR) will in future operate from the Ministry of Justice, but it will retain its current responsibilities and continue to report to the Home Secretary, the Secretary of State for Justice and the Attorney General. A new Office for Security and Counter-terrorism will be set up within the Home Office, responsible for developing and supporting the country's overall counter-terrorism strategy. Two new agencies have also been announced:

- The **National Policing Improvement Agency** will work for the police service, offering direct support to forces in order to help them do their jobs more effectively. To do that, it will work closely with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and the Association of Police Authorities (APA), as well as the Home Office. It is intended that having a single, national organisation in charge of this work will help to simplify the way police information is handled, and should remove layers of bureaucracy from day-to-day police work.
- The **Border and Immigration Agency** will replace the Home Office's Immigration and Nationality Directorate, and it is intended that it will have more flexibility to make decisions intended to improve its case working and enforcement, and give staff more control over their own work. The new agency will have a more visible presence at all UK ports, with uniformed immigration officers and signs, and more staff on the ground enforcing the rules and removing those with no right to live in this country. The Chief Executive of the Border and Immigration Agency is Lin Homer, formerly Chief Executive of Birmingham City Council.

Preventing Violent Extremism

2. On 5 April, Ruth Kelly formally launched the Government's Preventing Violent Extremism Action Plan. As part of its strategy, the Government acknowledges that a security response in isolation is not enough and emphasises the role of community-based approaches to tackling the growth of extremism.

3. The LGA agrees with this emphasis and as such accepts that at least part of the response to the threat of terrorism falls squarely within the core responsibilities of councils for community leadership and place-shaping. But in discussions with CLG, both between Ministers and elected Members and at official level, we have been keen to bring some clarity – and some boundaries – to the role of councils and what is expected of them in this area. Alongside the Ruth Kelly announcement, Paul Coen wrote to the Chief Execs of the councils involved in this work to set out how the LGA has been engaging in with CLG to agree a political framework for such engagement.

4. In terms of follow-up work, a joint IDeA/LGA seminar on 19 April provided a first opportunity for wider engagement with and feedback from the sector. It was particularly useful in helping to broaden the debate and engagement to elected Members – both to those who come from and represent Muslim communities and to the wider elected leadership of councils. The LGA will also look to develop a small group of Chief Executives to act as an informal sounding board for our policy development in this area (Andrew Kilburn, Chief Executive of Oldham, has agreed to assist us in taking this forward).

Engagement with the APA

5. LGA and APA officers have held a first meeting with officials in CLG and the Home Office to explore the scope for alignment of the provisions for Overview and Scrutiny and for the Community Call for Action as set out in the Local Government etc Bill and the Police and Justice Act 2006. An LGA/APA Members' meeting has been scheduled for late May to seek to agree some high political parameters within which this detailed work can be taken forward.

6. Work continues apace to finalise arrangements for a joint LGA/APA conference on 11 July. Its focus will be on the new national minimum standards and related guidance to help drive forward improved CDRP performance. It is intended that the event will be jointly chaired by Cllrs Hazel Harding and Mark Burns-Williamson.

Tackling Sexual Violence - Giving Victims More Support

7. The Government has outlined how it will further support for victims of sexual violence through better support facilities and improving the response from the justice system to such crimes. The Cross-Government Action Plan on Sexual Violence and Abuse is underlined by an immediate cash boost of £2million for support services for victims of sexual abuse. This is an addition to the £1million already announced to increase the Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) network. Key points that will be taken forward from the action plan include:

- expanding the network of Sexual Assault Referral Centres which provide medical care, forensic examination and counselling in the aftermath of a sexual assault;
- through the Victims of Violence and Abuse Prevention Programme, developing national service guidelines on responding to the needs of child victims of sexual abuse, adult survivors of child sexual abuse and adult victims of recent sexual violence;
- national rollout of sexual offences training for police officers and all barristers prosecuting in serious sexual offence cases;
- implementing a new vetting and barring scheme to make sure all those who work with children are safe to do so; and
- management of sex offenders through Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements and implementing new strategies for treating offenders

Gender equality

8. Representatives of the women's committee of the pan European version of the LGA, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), met to discuss how best to promote the European Charter on Equality of Women and Men in Local Life, which has been drawn up as part of a European Commission sponsored project. Cllrs Aspinall and Whelan attended on behalf of the LGA. Much of the content of the Charter will help local authorities reach the

required standards of the new Gender Duty, which came in to force on 6 April 2007. The detail of the Charter can be found at www.ccre.org/docs/charte_egalite_en.doc

Comprehensive Area Assessment

9. *The Audit Commission has published a consultation paper on the transition from Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) to the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) which will be discussed by the Improvement Board at its next meeting.*

10. *In terms of its overall approach the Commission is clear that CAA can only be developed in close consultation with local public services. Moreover the Commission is keen to avoid disruption during the transition period and to maintain the focus on improvement.*

11. *The LGA will want to ensure that the White Paper ambition with regard to the overall burden of inspection and regulation is realised, that any remaining regular inspection activity is genuinely focussed on areas of high risk and where the impact of failure is high - and that there is clarity about how the CAA aligns with other regimes focusing on partner activities such as the Assessment of Policing and Community Safety and the new Joint Assessment of Health and Social Care. An LGA response to the consultation will be submitted by the deadline of 14 June.*

Fire and Rescue Performance Assessment

12. *The Audit Commission published new performance assessment scores for fire and rescue authorities in England in April which showed that the majority are improving well. More than a quarter achieve top marks for how well they respond to emergencies and prevent fires, deaths and injuries. Over two-thirds of fire services are performing strongly or well in planning for and responding to emergencies. The rest are performing adequately. According to the Commission, this is an encouraging picture, but the service assessment also shows that services' prevention and protection activities tend to be more effective than their emergency response. The assessments are made up of three ratings that build a clear picture of the standard of service people are receiving. As well as blue light services, fire prevention and emergency response procedures, they judge how well services are improving and whether they provide value for money.*

Emergency Responders - telecommunications

13. *The Civil Contingencies Secretariat is undertaking a project to review existing arrangements for communications between emergency responders and to develop a strategy setting out how resilience could be improved. The Strategy comprises four broad strands:*

a. Working with providers and responders to enhance the resilience of every-day commercially-available telecommunications

b. Improving the management, take-up and resilience of privileged telecommunications schemes that are accessible only to emergency responders

c. Delivering a high-integrity telecommunications backbone infrastructure providing connectivity and services between the main multi-agency co-ordination centres at the UK, national, regional and local levels

d. Developing a means for securely sharing information between all local, regional and national responders both in preparing for and in response to a major emergency.

Detail of how the project is progressing, including a draft strategy, is available at:

Beacon Councils

14. *The Beacon Scheme identifies excellence and innovation in local government. The scheme exists to share good practice so that authorities and their partners can learn from each other and deliver high quality services to all. The awards for the latest round of Beacon Councils were announced on 20 March 2007 and they included two safer communities themes, as follows:*

- **Emergency Planning:**

Authorities awarded beacon status for 'Emergency planning' were East Riding of Yorkshire Council, Essex County Council, Gloucestershire County Council (jointly with Districts), Hartlepool Borough Council (jointly with partners), Hertfordshire County Council, Nottinghamshire County Council and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council. (Round eight)

- **Anti-social Behaviour:**

Authorities awarded beacon status for 'Preventing and tackling anti-social behaviour' were Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council, Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council, Bristol City Council and Portsmouth City Council.

15. *The beacon authorities will be supporting others to learn and share their good practice in a range of ways and the IDeA will be working with them successful authorities to organise learning events and activities throughout the year. Details of these events are listed on the IDeA website.*

The Future of Building Control

16. *The DCLG is undertaking a comprehensive and wide ranging review of the principles and requirements for building standards. A paper entitled "The Future of Building Control" was published in March 2007 in which ideas and suggestions on how the system can be revitalised are outlined. The message in the paper is that the building control system has some serious failings and weaknesses that must be tackled if it is to remain fit for purpose in today's world and in the future. This is not a formal consultation; a full consultation paper on the way forward will be published later in the year.*

Alcohol Consumption in Designated Public Places

17. *The Home Office have issued a Circular which sets out the new procedures that local authorities must follow in designating a public place with a Designated Public Places Order (DPFO) to deal with the problems of alcohol misuse in the public space. This follows from the coming into force of new regulations ([The Local Authorities \(Alcohol Consumption in Designated Public Places\) Regulations 2007](#)) following the commencement of section 26 of the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006 on the 6th April 2007.*

Smokefree Legislation

18. *LACORS in partnership with CIEH have developed guidance for regulatory officers to assist with the implementation of smokefree legislation in England. The smokefree legislation comes into force on 1st July 2007. The guidance, available from 23 March, covers evidence to support smokefree, the legislation and application, the approach which LACORS believes councils should take in respect of this legislation i.e. educational and non-confrontational and information about working with the media. The guidance also covers information about the impact that smokefree may have on other associated issues such as noise, litter, planning and licensing.*

Environmental protection services for sustainable communities

19. On 22 March 2007, LACORS launched a handbook, entitled *Environmental protection services for sustainable communities*. A joint initiative by LACORS, the Environment Agency and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) it aims to give councillors in England, and the public, a better understanding of how these services in district and unitary councils make a difference for people. It focuses on contributions to key Local Area Agreement themes and councils' corporate priorities – healthier, safer and stronger communities, regeneration and economic vitality, and climate change and sustainability. The handbook also gives councillors some suggested actions to help ensure that the service realises maximum benefit in all these areas. LACORS plans to publish an environmental protection handbook for councillors in Wales this summer.

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