

Notes of Previous Meeting

Safer Communities Board

12 March 2007

at Local Government House

Present

In the Chair:	Cllr Hazel Harding CBE (Lancashire CC)
Vice Chair:	Cllr Andy Sutton (Isle of Wight UA) (Conservative)
Deputy Chairs:	Cllr Caroline Seymour (Hambleton DC) (Liberal Democrat) and Cllr Graham Brown (Powys CC) (Independent).
Conservative:	Cllr Les Byrom (Sefton MBC); Cllr David Smith (Lichfield); Cllr Clare Whelan (Lambeth LB); Cllr Roland Domleo (Congleton BC); Cllr Robert Light (Kirklees MBC); Cllr Audrey Lewis (Westminster City Council).
Labour:	Cllr Mehboob Khan (Kirklees MBC); Cllr Ann Lucas (Coventry City Council); Cllr Milkinder Jaspal (Wolverhampton City Council).
Liberal Democrat:	Cllr Paul Porgess (Stockport MBC).
Apologies:	Cllr Mark Burns-Williamson (Wakefield MDC); Cllr Audrey Jones (Gtr Manchester FCDA)
Substitute	Cllr David Lancaster (Salford City Council) (Labour)

1. Safer Communities Intervention: Reducing Re-offending and CDRP Reform

Emma Varley (Policy Consultant) introduced the item, focusing first on the area of CDRP reform. She told the group that the Home Office and other stakeholders were working together to develop national standards, but that concerns have been raised, particularly surrounding the balance between local flexibility and national prescription. The LGA is drafting a chapter on Empowered and Effective Leadership, and Members were asked to comment on the role of the elected member as the CDRP portfolio holder.

Members noted that a variety of approaches had been taken to chairmanship of CDRPs; some were chaired by elected members, some by police officers whilst the chairmanship was rotated on others. It was agreed that it was necessary to re-emphasise the role of elected members on CDRPs given their unique position in being democratically accountable to communities, but that a flexible approach should be preserved where other options for chairing CDRP was more appropriate.

Members agreed that there was confusion surrounding the two different Community Calls for Action, and that further lobbying was required to develop a single set of guidance. There was concern that CCfAs could become bogged down in dealing with vexatious complaints, and that a clear, robust system needed to be put in place to combat this.

David Williams (Programme Director) told Members that the LGA was working with the Home Office and CLG to develop a single set of guidance on the Community Call for Action

The group was told that the profile of work undertaken by local authorities on reducing re-offending needed to be raised. As well as this, local authorities also need to be encouraged to adopt new practices.

The LGA is undertaking a significant amount of lobbying on the Offender Management Bill, and has concerns surrounding issues such as centralisation and a lack of local accountability. Despite these concerns, the Bill provides a framework for local authorities and criminal justice agencies to work within.

On anti-social behaviour, the 40 Respect action areas have been announced, and discussions with the Home Office on this are ongoing.

On the subject of reducing re-offending, Members agreed that local authorities needed to do more, but that this would only be possible if communication improved between authorities and the National Offender Management Service and other stakeholders. It was suggested that authorities should undertake an audit of their achievements in this area, to show the significant amount of work undertaken.

Decisions

LGA officers to reflect Members views in further input to Home Office guidance on CDRP reform. A discussion on Salford's experience in tying probation services into overview and scrutiny arrangements and of community-based justice, to be programmed for a future Board meeting.

2. Transforming Regulatory Services Intervention - LACORS report

Geoffrey Theobald (Chairman, LACORS) spoke to the group about the delivery of LACORS' 'Transforming Regulatory Services' policy intervention. LACORS has worked hard to ensure there is resonance between both it's and the LGA's corporate goals. LACORS policies have been aligned alongside the People and Places interventions.

The Hampton Review is central to LACORS work, and following criticism of the regulatory functions of local government, major initiatives have been undertaken to address these. It was anticipated that through working with partner organisations such as the Health and Safety Executive and the Food Standards Agency, no additional burdens would be placed on local authorities.

LACORS plans to expand the peer review programme, which currently only looks at trading standards, but this could look at other regulatory areas.

There is an on-going debate on the competing demands of national and local priorities; LACORS has requested a reduced number of national priorities, and partner organisations are discussing who should have priority on these.

Members thanked Geoffrey Theobald for his presentation, and it was suggested that regular updates from LACORS would be of use to the Safer Communities Board.

Members also noted that there was an increasing need for joined-up working between regulatory bodies on both sides of the English/Welsh boarder. There are an increasing number of differing regulatory approaches between the two countries as the Welsh Assembly looks toward devolution.

Decisions

Members decided that they wished to have a regular update of relevant LACORS work for future Safer Communities Board meetings. Officers agreed to reflect on suggestions from Members for changing the format and duration of Board meetings as part of any wider LGA response to Lord Best's review of relationships.

3. Fire Suppression Systems Intervention

Cllr Caroline Seymour (Hambleton DC) explained that the task group had met twice, and had agreed to follow the remit laid out by the Board, which would see the focus being put on fire suppression systems being installed in all new and existing schools that undergo major refurbishment.

At a Parliamentary meeting, at which Cllr Harding had spoken, the Department for Education and Skills Minister, Jim Knight MP, gave his endorsement to this proposals relating to schools (although he had stopped short of making the fitting of such systems madatory); the progress was nevertheless welcomed by the LGA. Having reached some agreement with the government on fire suppression systems in schools, buildings that house vulnerable people should be the next focus of the group's efforts.

Cllr Les Byrom (Sefton MBC) told the group that this initiative was welcomed by both the Fire Services Management Committee and the fire industry in general. However continued lobbying would be needed to alter the fact that financial, and not risk assessments are currently the main driver behind the implementation of fire suppression systems.

4. Community Cohesion

David Williams (Programme Director) told the group that the Commission on Integration and Cohesion will report in June 2007, but that an initial report had already been released. This included an acknowledgement of the work of local authorities and their Members in place-shaping and encouraging minority groups to participate. The Commission also understands that crime and the fear of crime has an impact on community cohesion. The LGA was considering a further, short, input to the Commission in May, and Members

were asked whether there were any particular areas that should be focused on.

Cllr Mehboob Khan (Kirklees MBC) told the group that the work of the Commission provided an opportunity to address issues such as immigration and changing demographics in both urban and rural areas. A shared national identity is needed, and local authorities have an opportunity to shape communities and mainstream community cohesion. This is a grass-root up approach, with Members being ideally placed to engage with communities and lead in this area.

Members agreed that cohesion and diversity were not inherently linked to race; they were simply focused on diverse communities living together.

5. Business Update

Members questioned where money would be found to pay for the implementation of the raising of the age for the purchase of tobacco, and were told that no additional funding would be available. There were still outstanding issues surrounding enforcement and compliance on this issue.

5a. Actions arising from last meeting

David Williams (Programme Director) told the group that Officer Holders had been advised on options for a Safer Communities Board away day, and providing support to Member Champions. It was agreed that LGA officers liaise with individual Member Champions and discuss how they can assist in carrying out their role effectively.

Reflecting members continuing concerns about the handling of licensing issues, it was agreed to hold a meeting between Safer Communities, Culture, Tourism and Sport Board and LACORS officers to discuss how Safer Communities Board Members could be kept up to date on licensing issues.

6. Notes of last meeting

The note of the previous meeting was agreed.

Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Safer Communities Board will be held at Local Government House on Monday 14th May 2007.