

Notes of Decisions Taken and Action

Safer Communities Board

13 July 2009

Local Government House at 11.00

Present

Vice Chair: Cllr Sandra Barnes (South Northamptonshire DC) (Vice Chair, in the Chair)

Deputy Cllr Graham Brown (Powys CC)

Chairs:

Conservative: Cllr Roland Domleo (Cheshire East) Cllr Tom Fox (Scarborough BC), Cllr David Smith (Lichfield DC), Cllr Jason Stacey (Ealing LB), Cllr Val Smith (Monmouthshire CC)

Labour: Cllr Mehboob Khan (Kirklees MBC), Cllr Dave Lancaster (Salford City)

Apologies: Cllr Kevin Lynes (Kent CC), Cllr Steve Reed (Lambeth LB), Cllr Mark Burns-Williamson (Wakefield MDC), Cllr Allan Siao Ming Witherick (Hertfordshire CC), Cllr David Goddard (Stockport MBC)

Substitutes: Cllr Gillian Brown (Arun DC) (Conservative), Cllr Ann Lucas (Coventry City) (Labour), Cllr Barrie Taylor (Westminster LB) (Labour), Cllr Paul Porgess (Stockport MBC) (Liberal Democrat)

Cllr Sandra Barnes, taking the Chair, thanked Hazel Harding for all her work for the Safer Communities Board. The Board agreed that a letter be sent to Hazel to that effect.

Action: Officers to draft a letter of thanks to Hazel for her work on the Board.

1. Improving Police Accountability

Mark Norris introduced the item, stating officers' recommendations that the Board note the motion considered at the LGA General Assembly on police accountability, and note the work that the APA is doing on strengthening the relationship between police authorities and Councils.

Members noted the General Assembly motion and the LGA Executive's decision, but there was a broad consensus amongst Members that there was a case for looking at different models for police accountability dependent on the different structures of Local Authorities.

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Members also stated that while there should be a personal development review process for councillors sitting on police authorities, and that these councillors should receive adequate training for their roles and lines of accountability needed to be clearer, there was also a need for better communications between police authorities and councils. Members also felt there should be more training for the police on working with councillors and councils, and that developing local protocols would be a good way forward.

Actions

- **Officers to look at different models and structures of local police accountability to inform discussions with the political parties**
 - **Officers to ask political groups to nominate one member each to a working group to look at better working between Police Authorities and Local Authorities**
 - **Officers to look to obtain a model protocol on joint working**
- 2. Engaging Communities in Criminal Justice – the Office for Criminal Justice Reform Green Paper**

Mark Norris introduced the item, inviting Members to provide a steer on the Office for Criminal Justice Reform Green Paper, and advised that following the Board meeting, a draft LGA response would be circulated to Office Holders.

Members expressed the following opinions:

- Independence and consistency within the justice system was paramount. There was some concern that some of the measures proposed in the Green Paper, such as the community impact statement, might serve to compromise this independence and consistency. Concern was also expressed that citizens' panels may advocate for more draconian punitive measures for offenders;
- There was a need for the magistrates' role to be better communicated to, and engaged in, the community, but magistrates should not be seen as engaging in social work;
- Concern was expressed over publicising offenders and the sentences they received. This measure could potentially have knock-on effects for relatives of the offender.
- There was not a genuine, proven demand by local communities to be ever more engaged in the criminal justice system.
- The idea of Councillors serving as advocates on behalf of defendants was broadly dismissed, due to the cost in time and money to local government, and the additional pressures that Councillors would face as a result.

Action

Officers to draft a response on behalf of the LGA on the Green Paper based on views expressed at the Board meeting. This response would be circulated in due course to Board Office Holders.

3. Reducing re-offending: Changes to the local reducing re-offending landscape

The Board heard a presentation from Ian Fox, Probation Association. In his presentation, Ian touched upon the implications of the Policing & Crime Bill on the probation service, and examined how Councils can work strategically with partners to reduce re-offending. Ian noted that there was a real need for criteria to be identified that could successfully and accurately measure success on reducing re-offending.

Members thanked Ian for his presentation. A question was raised over the contribution that the probation service could make to wider social outcomes, and what capacity the service held to align itself with LAA targets. Ian responded that the Probation Association was looking to engage with offenders who had sentences of less than 12 months were likely to re-offend after having been released, though there was no statutory duty for the Association to do so. Ian added that the capacity issue raised was problematic, and would depend on the approach taken by the Ministry of Justice.

In response to a question over accurately measuring success on reducing re-offending, Ian stated that an assessment tool was in place called OASIS, which amongst other factors, identified risk of re-offending and dangerousness of the offender. Aggregated reports were available in probation areas, which could be further segmented into ward areas.

A query was raised over whether the underlying causes of offending and re-offending were being satisfactorily addressed, in particular the number of drug related offences and drug dependency among prisoners. Ian responded that there was a large number of underlying causes but that the range of services available to drug users had improved.

Members suggested that the probation service had an “image problem”, to which Ian responded that the service potentially had no image, partially caused by the fact that probation service outcomes took many years to come to fruition, and that the service was not sufficiently visible in local authority arenas.

Ian added that, in going forward, it was reasonable to expect the probation service to be subject to local indicators, and to certain scrutiny arrangements. The Probation Association was to shortly launch a discussion paper, and it was very much hoped that the LGA, as well as individual probation services, would respond to this.

4. End of year report

Members noted the report.

In response to a query raised over joint working between LGA Boards, Helen Murray stated that there was close working between the Boards on matters of joint interest. In relation to a specific query over domestic violence, Helen stated that business planning for next year's Board was ongoing, and that the issue of domestic violence would be considered as part of business planning.

A concern was also noted regarding the lack of items on the agenda of the Board on regulatory issues.

Action

Officers to invite LACORS representatives to update the Board meeting on current regulatory issues in September.

5. Swine flu update

Members noted LGA activity to date on swine flu.

Trish O'Flynn provided an update on swine flu, stating that numbers of people with swine flu was now above that of seasonal flu levels. The disease was expected to peak in terms of numbers in September or October, though it was difficult to predict with complete precision.

LGA activity to date was also outlined. Members noted the role of Councillors in communicating with their constituents on the risks of swine flu. The reputational risk of Councils in dealing effectively with a swine flu epidemic was also considered.

6. Meetings with outside bodies

The report was noted.

It was noted that a number of Board Members attended the Local Government Panel meeting with HSE Board Members.

7. Notes of the last meeting

The note of the last meeting was agreed.

Members raised a query on the note regarding dam inundation. Officers responded that Environment Agency maps would be circulated in due course.

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Members raised a query on progress on discussions regarding opt-outs for Councils experiencing particular problems with Temporary Event Notices. Councillor Stacey noted that he had met with Gerry Sutcliffe MP, DCMS, to follow up on this, and it was noted that tabled amendments were now being examined by Conservative frontbench Members in the House of Lords.