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Meetings with outside bodies

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

This paper is to inform Members of the activities that have been undertaken since the last meeting by Members of the Board, and LG Group officers, on behalf of the Board.

Recommendation

Board Members are asked to note the report.

Action

Officers to progress as appropriate.

Contact officer:

Helen Murray

Position:

Programme Director, LGA

Phone no:

020 7664 3266

E-mail:

helen.murray@local.gov.uk

Meetings with outside bodies

Member activity

Meeting with James Brokenshire MP

At the end of July, Cllr Lawrence met the Home Office minister for crime reduction, James Brokenshire MP. The meeting with the Minister had been requested to discuss the Government's plans to restrict councils' abilities to use covert surveillance under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA), the coalition agreement commitment to regulate CCTV and the future of Community Safety Partnerships. Discussions centred on the use of covert surveillance by councils, and the proposal that councils should have to apply to magistrates courts to conduct surveillance and only in cases of serious crime. The Minister understood local authorities' concerns that too tight a definition of serious crime would prevent councils from investigating a range of crimes with a serious impact on the public, and would similarly prevent councils from conducting test purchasing to tackle sales of alcohol and tobacco to children. It was agreed that the Safer and Stronger Communities Programme Board would write back to the Minister on whether test purchasing could be conducted on any other basis.

Meeting with Nick Herbert MP

Cllr Lawrence was also able to raise the LG Group's concerns about the government's proposals to replace police authorities with directly elected police and crime commissioners at a lunch with Nick Herbert MP, the Policing Minister, hosted by Policy Exchange at the end of July. A range of bodies including the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Spectator and Guardian were represented at the meeting, as were the Home office and Number 10, which provided the LGA with an opportunity to outline its alternative proposals for improving police accountability, and where the government's proposals had weaknesses.

Learning from the best conference

LG Improvement and Development held a successful one day conference in late July to provide an opportunity for councils to learn from those authorities which had been awarded a green flag in relation to community safety in the December 2009 Comprehensive Area Assessment. Cllr Lawrence chaired the event and spoke about the future of policing.

Meeting with the APA

In the second half of July the chair of the Board, Cllr Lawrence, met with the Deputy Chair of the Association of Police Authorities Cllr Mark Burns-Williamson to discuss the Government's proposals to replace police authorities with directly elected police

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and crime commissioners. The meeting discussed the relevant positions of both associations in relation to the Home Office's plans and how a response to the government proposals when further detail was known would be developed by the APA and LGA. Cllr Burns-Williamson outlined the meetings the APA planned in August and early September with their member authorities to agree their response to the government.

Officer activity

Licensing consultation

In July the Government moved responsibility for alcohol licensing from the DCMS and Home Office jointly to the Home Office on its own. As a result the Culture, Tourism and Sport and the Safer and Stronger Communities Programme Boards agreed that responsibility in the LG Group for alcohol licensing should move to the Safer and Stronger Communities Programme Board. The Safer and Stronger Communities Programme Board therefore approved the LG Group's response to the Home Office's 'Rebalancing the Licensing Act' consultation, which closed on 8 September.

Following on from the launch of the consultation, the Magistrates' Association has this summer been calling for licensing to be handed back to magistrates courts. Ministers asked Home Office civil servants to investigate this possibility and to report back after the end of the parliamentary recess. LG Group officers therefore attended a meeting in late August called by the Home Office and at which there were in addition representatives from the Ministry of Justice, Her Majesty's Court Service, the Justice's Clerks Society, DCMS, the Magistrates Association and the National Bench Chair's Forum. After discussing the issue and considering the LG Group's arguments there was broad agreement with the suggestion that the proposals in 'Rebalancing the Licensing Act' addressed the fundamental reason behind the call for magistrates to be handed back responsibility for licensing, which is a concern about the level of alcohol related crime and disorder.

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) strategy

The Home Secretary is also the Equalities Minister, and one of her priorities is reducing violence against women and girls. The Home Office will therefore be developing a VAWG strategy to reduce violence against women and girls with the intention of publishing the strategy next spring. It is understood that one of the main focuses will be on prevention and ensuring that the strategy fits with the government's localism and Big Society agendas. Given that much of the support for women who have suffered violence is provided by charitable or voluntary sector organisations, Big Society and the sustainability of the sector will be important. The LGA will be looking to engage with the Home Office in the development of the strategy.

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Employer supported policing

The National Police Improvement Agency (NPIA) is looking to promote the role of special constables, which they see as being particularly important in a time of cuts in police numbers. The NPIA regards councils as having an important role in encouraging people to volunteer to be specials both within the communities they serve and as employers with their staff. To this end they are seeking the support of the LG Group in promoting special constables amongst councils through inclusion of them in leave policies alongside staff serving as magistrates, in the Territorial Army, and as school governors.

Interim appointment of police authority members

The LGA along with the Association of Police Authorities (APA) was consulted in July about proposed changes to the regulations for the appointment of independent police authority members to cover the transition to police and crime commissioners. The points members raised were incorporated into the joint response from the LGA and APA, including extending the term of independent members. Comments were also made about the abbreviated two-stage process for appointments suggested by the Home Office. The Home Office wrote back at the start of August to confirming that they intended to proceed with the abbreviated appointments process as outlined in their consultation letter as this was they wanted to keep changes to a minimum and as simple from a legislative point of view as possible.

Public Confidence and Satisfaction Delivery Board

The Home Office's Public Confidence and Satisfaction Delivery Board met in late July following the Home Secretary's decision to abolish the confidence target and the Policing Pledge. The Home Office civil servants outlined the government's policy of reducing central performance management. There was general agreement from policing representatives at the meeting that it was important to keep working on improving confidence, and that there needed to be a fresh look at complaint handling and redress. There was also discussion of the Policing in the 21st Century consultation and the importance of local partnerships.

Probation Association

Officers continue to meet with the Probation Association (PA) through the PA's Partnership Strategy Steering Group around the government's emerging re-offending and rehabilitation agenda and the delivery of the PA's strategy to assist probation in becoming a responsible authority in Community Safety Partnerships. A priority was for more examples of working in partnership by probation, including ones to include on the discussion forum on the PA website. Consideration is also being given to what Social Investment Bonds will mean for re-offending and moves to place-based budgets.