

**Item 5**

**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](mailto:helen.murray@local.gov.uk)

## **Meetings with outside bodies**

### **Member activity**

#### **Court closures**

At the last Board meeting members agreed a submission to the Ministry of Justice about the proposals to close a number of county and magistrates courts, which suggested that council facilities including council chambers could be used for court sessions. The Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Thames Valley Courts Board has been in contact to support this proposal, which they had included in their response to court closures in the area covered by the Courts Board. Following submission of the LG Group response to the Ministry of Justice consultation a press release was put out on the Board's behalf to promote the suggestion that council chambers and other local authority facilities could be used to host court sessions so they continue to sit locally and potentially also provide councils with revenue. The press release was picked up by two broadsheet newspapers, BBC Breakfast and Radio 4 as well as BBC News Online and regional and local news.

### **Officer activity**

#### **Home Office's Community Safety Partnerships Steering Group**

Under the previous government the Home Office had a stakeholder steering group to help inform their activity to improve the performance of Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs). With the thrust of government activity now being to deregulate and abolish targets the Home Office partnership team consulted over the summer with councils on how the regulations currently governing the operations of CSPs can be reduced. The LG Group officers were invited to give our views on the regulations and the Home Office's future role in supporting partnerships. At the meeting in the middle of September we supported a reduction in the regulations around CSPs, and made the wider point that Home Office proposals in a number of areas threatened to reinforce delivery of public services in silos when they should be looking to ensure local partnerships were reinforced and encouraged to pool budgets as suggested by the LG Group's local budget proposals. There was also a discussion on what the Home Office would be looking to do to support improvement in CSPs. The Home Office indicated they were looking at how they could improve the capability of CSPs; how they could support them on the Big Society agenda; and how effective practice could be disseminated. The extent of Home Office activity in this area will be determined by the outcome of the spending review.

#### **VAWG Strategy Reference Group**

As reported to the last Board the Home Office will be publishing a strategy to reduce violence against women and girls in the spring. The LGA has been invited to sit on the Home Office reference group responsible for co-ordinating work on the strategy.

The first stage of work is to produce a strategic narrative by the winter, and there is also work around the coalition government commitment to fund new rape crisis centres. As a result of our involvement on the Reference Group the LGA has been asked to comment on early drafts of the narrative for the strategy which sets out the areas the government wishes to see activity around, and we have argued that local budgets to facilitate joint commissioning have a real role in keeping important services funded.

### **Probation Association Partnership Strategy Steering Group**

There was a further meeting of the Steering Group for the Probation Association's in September. Items discussed at the meeting included the House of Commons Justice Select Committee inquiry into probation, the Policing in the 21st century consultation, the forthcoming Ministry of Justice Green Paper on the government's rehabilitation revolution proposals and place-based budgets.

### **Drugs Strategy**

The Home Office has been in contact with the LG Group about the developing drugs strategy and in particular what can be done to enforce drugs laws. The strategy is expected to be published this winter. One area being considered is how the full range of powers available not just to the police, but other partners including councils' trading standards services, can be used to increase the costs and risks to those dealing drugs. The Home Office and police have been keen to see a role for councils in addressing 'legal highs', so the LG Group has made the point that police powers and banning the substances concerned is a much more effective approach. The government is also looking at use of payment by results to reduce drug addiction and is looking to explore with local government the co-design of services. We have also indicated that the Home Office's thoughts of including targets in the strategy for local authorities to deliver would not be appropriate.