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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.

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Meetings with outside bodies

Member activity

Reducing re-offending

1. The Board's Chairman Cllr Khan gave evidence at the start of June to the Justice Select Committee which is holding an inquiry into the probation service. The inquiry is looking at probation in the context of the Ministry of Justice Green Paper "Breaking the Cycle" published at the end of last year. The committee has looked in particular at the government's proposals to reduce the costs associated with tackling re-offending through payment by results schemes. During the evidence session Cllr Khan highlighted the important role councils have in reducing re-offending, the need to encourage local partners to pool their budgets for activities that reduce re-offending, and our concerns that having too many bodies commissioning services will mean that efforts to reduce re-offending remain fragmented and uncoordinated.
2. In mid-February the Board's Deputy Chair, Cllr Duwayne Brooks spoke at the Westminster Legal Policy Forum on the government's rehabilitation revolution and the Ministry of Justice 'Breaking the Cycle' Green Paper. Cllr Brooks set out the LG Group's belief that reducing re-offending and rehabilitating offenders is best delivered through multi-agency partnerships, and that locally-led commissioning by partnerships was the best way of delivering better services in a time when funds to reduce re-offending had been cut.

Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill

3. At the LG Group Annual Conference Cllr Khan chaired a well attended workshop on police and crime panels which looked at the issues councils will have to consider when they come to setting them up. The workshop heard from Ed Hammond from the Centre for Public Scrutiny about the links that need to be made with existing scrutiny structures and the elements that will be crucial in ensuring a panel is successful in its role, and from Sarah Hopkins from Plymouth City Council about the preparations in Devon and Cornwall for setting up their panel.
4. Ahead of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill starting its committee stage in the House of Lords, Cllr Khan met Lord Hunt, the Shadow Deputy Leader of the House of Lords in mid-May and early June about amendments the LG Group has been looking to make to the policing and licensing sections of the Bill. Lord Beecham also attended the May meeting, which was a useful opportunity to discuss the amendments he had agreed to table for the Group

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around the appointment of deputy police and crime commissioners and the links between commissioners and community safety partnerships. The meeting in June with Lord Hunt concentrated on the licensing part of the Bill and the government's new clause allowing councils to set their own licensing fees.

5. Since mid-March the Board's Deputy Chair, Cllr Brooks, has represented the LG Group on the Home Office's Police and Crime Commissioners Transition Sponsorship Board. This is chaired by the Policing Minister, Nick Herbert MP, and includes representatives from the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Metropolitan Police and the Association of Police Authorities. The Board oversees twelve project groups looking at various elements of the transition that needs to be made from police authorities to police and crime commissioners. Cllr Brooks is also representing the Group on the transition project looking at the handling of complaints about police and crime commissioners as police and crime panels will have a role in handling minor complaints against the commissioners. In addition to this transition work Cllr Brooks met with Home Office officials in early June to discuss support for community safety partnerships over the next year as they prepare for the introduction of police and crime commissioners from May 2012.
6. At the start of March, Deputy Chairs Cllrs Goronwy Edwards and Duwayne Brooks attended a Home Office community safety event, which saw the Home Secretary setting out how the government sees crime being reduced in the future. The Home Secretary set out the government's case for change; what it means by a localist approach; reforming policing and accountability; work across government to prevent crime and what the national focus on crime will be including serious and organised crime, human trafficking and cyber crime.
7. The Board's Vice-Chair Cllr Lawrence spoke at the South East Employers Forum on scrutiny issues the police and crime panels. Cllr Lawrence explained what powers are proposed for the panels under the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill, how the LG Group believes these should be strengthened and then set out a number of practical issues around the setting up of the panels that the LG Group believes the Home Office needs to address.

Anti-social behaviour

8. Cllr Lower spoke at the start of June at a Westminster Briefing policy and practice seminar on the government's proposals to simplify the powers available for tackling anti-social behaviour. The seminar looked at the range of new powers the Home Office has proposed in place of the existing anti-social behaviour toolkit, and Cllr Lower looked at what the new powers and tools would mean in practice for tackling anti-social behaviour at a local level.

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9. The difficulty of tackling anti-social behaviour in social housing was one of the main topics for discussion at a meeting in mid-May between Cllr Khan as the Board's chair and Cllr Loakes, Vice-Chair of the Environment and Housing Board. This followed the discussion at the March Board about the difficulty councils and registered social landlords face in evicting those who persistently engage in anti-social behaviour. Also discussed at the meeting were the use of covert surveillance to tackle persistent flytipping and the seriousness with which courts treat enviocrimes.

Protection of Freedoms bill

10. The Vice-Chair of the Board, Cllr Les Lawrence, and Dave Holland, Operational Manager for Consumer Protection at Cardiff City Council, gave evidence to the Bill Committee considering the Protection of Freedoms Bill in the third week in March on behalf of the Group and the WLGA. The Bill covers a range of issues of interest to councils, including the changes being made by the Home Office to local authorities' use of directed surveillance under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act, the introduction of a new statutory code of practice for CCTV systems and a new Surveillance Camera Commissioner, limiting or adding safeguards to powers of entry, limiting when vehicles can be clamped and towed away, and the release and publication of data by public authorities. The evidence session focused on councils' use of surveillance, CCTV and powers of entry, and was followed up by written evidence submitted by the Group and the WLGA.

Domestic violence

11. The Board ran a fringe event at the LG Group's Annual Conference about the costs of domestic violence and the benefits councils receive from investing in preventative work. Cllr Khan chaired the well received event where those attending heard from Cllr Lucas and Annalise Elliot, the Head of Safer Merton at the London Borough of Merton, and then engaged in an informative discussion of the issues.
12. Cllr Lucas, the Board's domestic violence champion attended a roundtable meeting with voluntary sector organisations in mid-May to discuss the future of services to reduce violence against women and girls. The meeting was hosted by Baroness Hanham, part of the ministerial team at DCLG, to take forward some of the work arising from the government's violence against women and girls strategy. A key concern from the voluntary sector is the availability of funding in the future. Cllr Lucas highlighted some of the work the Group had been doing to improve the commissioning of services from the voluntary sector

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and the impact the move to giving police and crime commissioners responsibility for commissioning services would have.

13. In the European Union, domestic violence against women remains the most consistent and pervasive human rights violation across the region. Cllr Lucas took part in an International Symposium on 3 March 2011 to discuss a proposed EU-wide strategy on violence against women and opportunities for local authorities from the UK to gain access European funding for projects to protect women and girls from all forms of violence.

Regulation

14. The Chair of the LG Regulation Board Cllr Bettison and the Board's Licensing Champion Cllr Canver met James Brokenshire MP, the then minister responsible for licensing at the start of March. The meeting discussed the licensing changes the government is making through the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill and focused on the introduction of a late night levy and what councils could use the additional funding from this for, as well as the government's commitment to introduce a locally set flexible fees regime for licensing applications.

Women's justice

15. The Prison Reform Trust established a taskforce looking at women's justice issues and how to ensure that women in trouble are a priority for the government earlier in the year. It looked at how the 2007 report by Baroness Corston into vulnerable women in prison could be built on in the changed economic and political times. The Taskforce was keen to engage with the LG Group about this work and the role of local authorities in this area. Cllr Brooks met the members of the taskforce in early February for a constructive discussion about the work of the Board and local government's role in this area.

Emergency Planning

16. Cllr Tom Fox represented the LGA at the COBR Ministerial meeting as part of Exercise Watermark which tested the national, sub-regional and local response capability to a major national flooding scenario and the extent to which the lessons from the 2007 floods had been learnt. During the exercise, Cllr Fox made clear the role of the LG Group in representing the issues and challenges being faced by councils on the ground. Cllr Fox also highlighted the role that local government would play as part of the response and recovery phases and the need for consistent local and national media messages to inform the public.

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Officer activity

Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill

17. In addition to the meetings Cllr Khan has had with leading peers officers met government and opposition Peers (including Baronesses Hamwee, Harris and Henig) ahead of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill entering its committee stage in the House of Lords. As a result the alternative model the LG Group developed last summer for improving police accountability informed the new police commission model the House of Lords inserted into the Bill at the end of the first day of the committee stage.
18. LG Group officers have also participated in several of the police and crime commissioner transition projects established by the Home Office. These include the projects looking at the checks and balances on police and crime commissioners, and capacity building and induction of police and crime commissioners. The project group on checks and balances will be looking at the issues around establishing police and crime panels as well as the links between the panels and for example crime and disorder overview and scrutiny committees, while the capacity building group will look at what improvement support will be needed by commissioners and their staff.
19. During the course of the Bill through the Commons and the Lords officers have kept in close contact with staff at the Association of Police Authorities to ensure that the two Association's activities are complimentary where appropriate rather than contradictory. Meetings have also been held with the Metropolitan Police Authority around future support at a national level for police and crime commissioners, and with the Local Government Ombudsman about complaints following the introduction of police and crime commissioners.

Engagement with stakeholders

20. Officers have continued to engage with a range of stakeholders including the Prime Minister's Policy Unit having met Susan Acland-Hood, Senior Adviser to the Prime Minister for Home Affairs and Justice to discuss policing and community safety issues, the Home Office through the CSP Reference Group and the 101 Non-Emergency Number Strategic Board, with the Probation Association through their Partnership Strategy Steering Group, and also with Neighbourhood Watch and Home Watch.
21. The Board's officers have also spoken at a number of workshops and seminars on various elements of the Board's work including reducing re-offending, partnership working and CCTV.