

## Note of decisions taken and actions required

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<b>Title:</b>	Safer and Stronger Communities Board
<b>Date and time:</b>	Monday 12 March 2012, 11.00am
<b>Venue:</b>	Smith Square rooms 3 & 4 (Ground Floor), Local Government House

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### Attendance

Position	Councillor	Council
Chair	Cllr Mehboob Khan	Kirklees MBC
Deputy Chair	Cllr Les Lawrence (Vice Chair)	Birmingham City Council
	Cllr Duwayne Brooks (Deputy Chair)	Lewisham LB
	Cllr Goronwy Edwards (Deputy Chair)	Conwy
Members	Cllr Joanna Spicer	Suffolk CC
	Cllr Brian Coleman	Barnet LB / LFEP A
	Cllr Nilgun Canver	Haringey LB
	Cllr Lisa Brett	Bath & NE Somerset Council
	Cllr Paul Bettison	Bracknell Forest
	Cllr Tom Fox	Scarborough BC
	Cllr Robert Gordon	Hertfordshire CC
	Cllr Jim Harker OBE	Northamptonshire CC
	Cllr Ann Lucas	Coventry City
Substitutes	Cllr Crada Onuegbu	Lewisham LB
	Cllr Henri Murison	Newcastle City
Apologies	None	

**Officers:** Helen Murray, Mark Norris, Ian Leete, Stephen Service (all LGA)

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Cllr Mehboob Khan welcomed Members to the meeting. He introduced Mr Javed Khan and Ms Susannah Hancock, Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive of Victim Support and thanked them for attending.

**1. Victims' Services**

Mr Khan expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to talk to the Board. He summarised the role of Victim Support as a charity and said that its work was heavily reliant on volunteers to support victims of crime at every level.

Ms Hancock spoke about the introduction of PCCs and the need to ensure that the views of victims were taken into account by them. She emphasised that PCCs now have a statutory duty to get the views of crime victims when commissioning services.

Ms Hancock outlined a project to map victim services nationally which worked with victims to identify gaps in provision. Victim Support is now in the process of finalising maps for both LAs and PCC candidates.

Mr Khan spoke about the changes proposed by the Government to victims' services with the introduction of PCCs. He expressed Victim Support's view that dismantling a nationally commissioned service and replacing it with 42 local versions was "nonsensical" as the duplication involved would lead to a service which costed more and potentially provided less. He voiced his concern that money for helping victims was not ring-fenced, so a PCC could potentially fund vote-winning causes such as extra police officers on the streets rather than support services.

Mr Khan pointed out that if victims are not supported well they are less keen to report crime as they don't have confidence in getting a response. This could potentially lead to less convictions and ultimately, more crime.

Cllr Khan took questions from the board.

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On the charity's visibility, Members agreed that Victim Support demonstrated clear passion for their cause but has not always engaged enough with Community Safety Partnerships in local areas. The service provided was perceived as "patchy" as a result, with other, more specialist organisations taking over some of the core areas like rape and hate crime. Members advocated training volunteers in strategic matters as well as delivery to ensure they involved local partnerships.

In response, Javed acknowledged Members' comments as a "helpful challenge". He contended that many services rely on police referring victims to them and that Victim Support needs to know about cases to act on them. The charity is negotiating with the police to improve communication, which often comes down to individual police officers.

On specialised victims' organisations, he argued that there was plenty of space in which these could operate, but Victim Support had always claimed to be for victims in general rather than focused on one specific group. While he accepted that performance had not always been perfect, Mr Khan said that it was much improved from previously and pointed out that less than one pence in every policing pound currently went to victims.

On Police and Crime Commissioners, Members emphasised that Victim Support need to acknowledge the political reality of Police and Crime panels and the likely priority of PCCs to deliver services which are popular with the public, as these changes were now almost certain to come into effect.

Members felt that PCCs will find the range of victims difficult to understand. Some were concerned that domestic violence victims did not bring votes and could be neglected as a result. If PCCs were obliged to appoint a champion for victims in their local area, this could safeguard their interests as a priority.

Some Members proposed advocating for more money from government for victims and agreed that Victim Support has reached out to victims more effectively in the last few years. However, they cited the image problem of victim services among young people as well as fear of reprisals as a reason for many not taking up their offer.

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On nationally versus locally delivered services, some Members argued that it was right to have a balance. However, others warned that LAs could not champion a localist agenda and then press for a national service to be provided in this area. Some argued that PCCs should make very specific plans for service delivery, including what victims could expect as a “minimal entitlement”, with police and crime panels scrutinising what PCCs do in this area.

Members emphasised that members of the public suffering from anti-social behaviour were also victims and needed support. Mr Khan agreed, saying that these cases risked falling “under the radar” with the new proposals as they would not be seen as a priority.

On funding, Members felt there was an argument for deferring the transfer of funding to PCCs until after PCCs had become embedded, and for the current funding from the Ministry of Justice to be regarded as a floor. Members also suggested the need for local victims’ champions. Mr Khan said that a transitional period where funding was staggered rather than given to PCCs all in one go would be helpful.

Some Councillors argued that it was not necessary for every victim of crime to have a standard letter from Victim Support and that the service needed to be more focused. Mr Khan responded that unless support was offered there was no way of telling if people needed the service. He argued that low level crime victims would now often receive a text or email rather than a letter, making the service much more cost effective.

Mr Khan concluded by saying that he would share Victim Support’s response to the Government’s consultation as it developed.

**Action**

Officers to draft consultation response on victim support to Ministry of Justice

**LGA Officers**

**2. Alcohol Strategy**

Members received a comparator of current unit prices at Tesco with the effect of a proposed minimum price per unit to aid

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their discussion for this item. Ian Leete, LGA Policy Advisor, introduced the report, explaining that information on minimum pricing had come from 3 separate research studies on its effects. Ian emphasised that the minimum price proposed was 50p per unit, rather than 50p on top of the minimum price already set by the retailer, so would only have an impact in a limited number of stores. In the case of Tesco, it already sells above the minimum price, so will remain largely unaffected.

While a few councillors thought a minimum price could make some difference to reducing dependency, comments reflected that:

- A more robust approach to licensing would be preferable. This could involve including health objectives in the Licensing Act.
- Whatever the minimum price is, alcoholics are likely to find a way of paying it. One piece of legislation is unlikely to solve what is a deeply rooted social problem in British society.
- Any profits resulting from a minimum price would go directly to the seller, such as supermarkets. Given the purpose of the pricing, this money might be better diverted to Local Authority health services and/or campaigns advocating moderate drinking.
- Conversely, any losses resulting from the public not buying alcohol due to price minimums could result in loss of trade and possible closure for local pubs and corner shops.
- Previous attempts to interfere with the market, such as a minimum price on cider have not worked.
- Minimum pricing could lead to a black market for cheap illegal alcohol alternatives which are a danger to human consumption.
- Drop-in centres could do more to record where alcohol dependents are buying alcohol, although it can be difficult to show that health impacts lead back to one specific premises.

**Action**

Officers to develop LGA key lines on this issue, using Members' comments.

**Ian Leete**

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**3. Integration, community cohesion and preventing violent extremism**

The Chairman welcomed Andrew Stunell MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at CLG to offer his views on the Government's strategic plan "Creating the Conditions for Integration", which was released on 21 February 2012.

Mr Stunell began by saying that it was his responsibility to ensure the strategy was joined up with the various strands of Government activity in England while the Welsh Assembly Government had responsibility for the issue in Wales. As part of the localism agenda, the command structure proposed is not top down but bottom up.

He defined the strategy as being about celebrating common values, building responsibility for wider society, recognising potential and identifying how people in communities can be brought together. At the extreme end, it also looks to tackle extremism and disorder, including Islamophobia and hate crime.

Mr Stunell emphasised that the document was not intended to suggest that there is a single common understanding of integration or that it represented the "last word" on the issue. Rather, it is an overall framework to allow the right conditions for integration. He stressed that the Government is keen to engage with partners on the issue.

Mr Stunell cited the diamond jubilee and the Olympics/Paralympics as opportunities for building a common identity in communities this year. The Government is also working with further education colleges on providing English lessons for those furthest from employment.

In response to Mr Stunell's address, Members reported a rise in low level anti-semitic hate crime and argued that this was in part due to a demonising of the state of Israel. Mr Stunell said that better reporting of such incidents needed to be ensured.

While Members advocated handing powers to communities, they argued that funding was needed to resource this proposal. Furthermore, they cautioned that care needs to be taken to join up this approach with other strands of

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government policy such as devolving powers to the community and setting up free schools. Members argued that some of these other policies could undermine cohesion and local work by councils, for example by allowing schools that promoted a radical agenda. Government departments need to communicate with each other to ensure cohesion outcomes are as intended.

Some Members worried that a focus on integration could desensitise people to their culture rather than celebrate difference. Mr Stunell stressed that the strategy was about bringing people together to develop common values rather than telling them how to be.

Members argued that youth unemployment meant that young people did not feel that they had a stake in the society in which they lived. However, they were sceptical about the benefits gained from throwing money at cohesion projects.

Mr Stunell acknowledged that lack of opportunities was a key factor in increasing cultural alienation, and the Government are currently looking to tackle this. He said that the Government did not have the resources to fund multiple local social projects in the current climate, so the emphasis will firmly be on encouraging other groups within the community to make a local impact.

Some Members were anxious about the risks of community cohesion breakdown posed by the amount of big sporting events in the summer, including the Olympics and the European football. Mr Stunell disagreed that this was necessarily cause for concern as sporting events were often an opportunity for friendly rivalry between nations.

Councillors pointed out that many LA posts formerly involved with cohesion have been cut in recent years as they were not seen as frontline. They said that how tension was dealt with was often crucial to avoiding problems and agreed that retaining focus and ensuring that LA's contribution to building bridges within the community would be vital. This was seen as a broader focus than just BME communities, including also how to get young people in general out of poverty, as there was a perception that some groups were treated better than others.

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On tensions, Mr Stunell said that there was a consistent line of reporting from LAs to the DCLG. While he acknowledged this could be improved, it offered a mechanism for dealing with potentially volatile situations.

In conclusion, Mr Stunell was asked by Cllr Khan what the Board could do to assist on this agenda. He urged the LGA to continue to provide a challenge to the government on its policies, for it to help its member authorities recognise the importance of this area and reinforce the view that it is a frontline service. On community leadership, he asked the Board to work with CLG to ensure the right people are being talked to.

***Decision***

Members noted the report.

**4. Metal Theft Update**

Mark Norris, LGA Senior Advisor said that the LGA had been in discussion with the Home Office to table an amendment to a government bill to allow councils to introduced their own bye-laws on licensing scrap metal dealers. However due to the late stage remaining government bills were at, this was unlikely to happen in the current parliament. He said that there may be something included in the Queen's speech on the issue.

Members expressed frustration that LAs appear to be paralysed to achieve something on what has fast become a very significant crime issue.

Mark assured the Board that if metal theft is not included in specific legislation, the LGA will look to move it into a package of Government amendments in the Autumn.

**Action**

Officers to progress this issue as outlined in the report.

**Mark Norris**

Cllr Canver to forward to the Board LB Haringey's work on tackling Metal Theft.

**Cllr Canver /  
LGA Officers**

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**5. Update on Regulatory Services issues**

Helen Murray, LGA Head of Programme asked Members to note that the next Safer Communities conference would be on 7 November and **not** in October as stated in the Board paper.

The Board noted the activities outlined in the report.

**6. Meetings with Outside Bodies**

On **PCCs**, Helen Murray said that the Home Office had decided to provide the APA with funding so it could support a national representative body for PCCs, but the LGA would continue to put itself forward as the national body for PCC's although there would be discussions with the APA on how the two associations could collaborate.

The Chairman announced that Cllr Mark Burns Williamson has resigned from the Board as he identified a strong conflict of interest between his role on the board and his chairmanship of the APA. Cllr Khan proposed that the Board write to Cllr Burns Williamson thanking him for his contribution.

Cllr Khan also asked for his thanks to be recorded for the extensive work Cllr Nilgun Canver has done on licensing.

On **Clare's law**, Cllr Ann Lucas asked if an item could go in First magazine as soon as possible to ensure that the LGA was seen to reflect current issues. Officers agreed to liaise with the Communications team to make this a priority.

**7. Action**

Officers to draft letter for the Chairman thanking Cllr Burns Williamson for his contribution to the Board.

**Mark Norris**

Officers to liaise with the Communications team on getting Clare's Law issue into First magazine.

**LGA Officers**

**8. Notes of the last meeting**

The notes of the last meeting were agreed as a correct record.

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**9. AOB**

**West Midlands and Surrey Police Business Partnering Programme**

Cllr Duwayne Brooks noted the extensive media coverage on this issue over the previous week and announced that he had requested that this item be included as it presented issues over the accountability of any private firms who would be involved.

Members agreed that there needed to be adequate safeguards regarding both training and accountability of private sector employees, including how accountability was structured through Police and Crime panels. Terms of reference for the panel would need to enable them to look into contractual arrangements of the police and track LAs' intentions further.

Nonetheless, Members stressed that they were not opposed to the idea of privatising some areas in principle. They felt the issue had been misrepresented to some extent in the media, with the incorrect suggestion that Police Officers would go private. They pointed out that in the average force only a third of its staff are police officers and these had been supported by police staff and PCSOs for years. What was radical was the scale of the proposals.

Many felt that the police need to be specialist rather than "omni-competent" and this move could allow them to focus on more fundamental policing. Members argued that roles such as increasing public awareness on crime prevention did not need to be done by an officer and privatising in these areas would create a sustainable police presence on the ground.

The Board agreed to keep a "watching brief" on this issue.

**Late night drinking**

Cllr Canver said she would be inviting Members views regarding the licensing of late night drinking, with a view to writing a letter to Lord Henley.

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**Action**

Officers to draft letter for Cllrs Khan and Canver to Lord Henley sharing Members' views on late night drinking. (Appendix A)

**Letter and  
response from  
Lord Henley  
attached.**

**Date of next meeting: Monday 9 July 2012, Local Government House**