

Civil Disorder

Purpose of report

For discussion.

Summary

This paper updates members on the actions taken by central and local government following the civil disorder in early August and outlines how the LG Group will be shaping and influencing national discussions about how to prevent further civil disorder in the future.

Recommendations

Members are invited to:

1. Commend the work of councils in responding to the civil disorder in August and the short-term measures put in place to help councils and communities recover from the affects of the disturbances; and
2. Discuss the community safety related work the Group will be engaged with as the government takes forward longer term work to prevent further disturbances.

Action

LG Group Officers to incorporate members' comments into the Group's work in this area going forward.

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Background

1. Between 6– 10 August there were widespread civil disturbances in London, the West Midlands and Greater Manchester, as well as areas like Kirklees, Merseyside, Nottingham, Bristol, Gloucester, and Wiltshire. This disorder affected over 1,800 businesses, and a significant number of residential properties in those authorities where there were disturbances.
2. Local authorities played a vital role in responding to the disturbances, both at the time they took place and immediately afterwards, and this fantastic example of community leadership has been commended and congratulated by Ministers and the media. Activity has been wide ranging and included providing financial and other support to local businesses, assisting residents left homeless, printing CCTV images of looters to aid investigation, intensive work by trading standards to recover stolen property, making buildings safe, and leading the clear up of their streets. Mobilising and organising residents to help in the aftermath has also been important.
3. The Local Government Group has been involved at a national level in response to the disturbances in Cabinet Office Briefing Room meetings, and has been in contact with authorities (including fire authorities) to offer support. This involvement is on-going through the Group Chairman's place on the Ministerial Recovery Board chaired by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

Short-term assistance for affected communities and their councils

4. In the aftermath of the disturbances, in addition to local recovery activity, Whitehall's efforts have concentrated on helping affected residents and businesses, in particular providing them with financial support. A one-off package of measures has been put together to help rebuild communities, open shops, rebuild damaged buildings, re-house those made homeless and assist councils in returning their areas to normality. Government is also keen to harness the enthusiasm of communities that turned out to clean up their local areas. Our work here has focused on ensuring councils' needs are championed in government and that central government effort is channelled to best effect; and ensuring swift and communications advice to councils about the various support packages.

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5. The measures include:
 - 5.1. A £10 million recovery fund to help councils with the immediate costs of making their areas safe, clear and clean. As well as being used to make repair damage such as that to pavements and roads it can also be used to cover the costs of offering council tax discounts or relief to homes that have been damaged but are habitable.
 - 5.2. Homelessness Support funding to meet the immediate costs of emergency accommodation for homeless families with the funding provided by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG).
 - 5.3. A £20 million High Street Support scheme, administered by councils, which is designed to help businesses start trading again and to meet short term costs. It can be used to reduce business rates, finance building repairs, and encourage customers back to affected areas.
 - 5.4. In London the Mayor of London's Fund will provide £50 million to make major long term improvements to the capital's town centres and high streets damaged by the disturbances, while the London Enterprise Fund will provide specific, targeted support for Tottenham and Croydon to reverse economic decline and boost the local economies.
6. Individuals, homeowners or small businesses (whether or not they are insured) that have suffered damage to or loss of their building or property as a result of rioting are also able to seek compensation under the Riot Damages Act from police authorities, with the government stating they will ensure police authorities have the funds they need to meet the cost of claims.
7. For councils themselves the long-standing Bellwin scheme is available to meet immediate and sizeable recovery costs, although the thresholds in the scheme mean that most councils would only receive assistance above costs in excess of around £1 million.

Longer-term recovery for communities

8. Now that the immediate consequences of the disturbances have been addressed, the focus for councils and government is on addressing the underlying societal issues which led to the disorder. As a first phase, the Cabinet Office has set up a Ministerial Recovery Group to develop a Recovery Plan, starting to look at why riots took place in some areas, but not others, to analyse differences and make evidenced decisions about future work.
9. The Prime Minister is considering which Cabinet Committees should be established to address particular longer term policy issues such as tackling gangs, further legislation, the impact of social media, implications for policing and the treatment of young people in the criminal justice system. The government has also established the independent Communities and Victims

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Panel announced at the end of August, which will be chaired by Darra Singh, and will look at the causes of the riots and what can be done to prevent future problems. This will publish interim findings in November and a final report in March.

10. The Group Executive will be looking at the broader issues for councils in building community relations, ensuring communities are more resilient and reducing the likelihood of further public disorder. At its next meeting it will be considering how the Group can register with Ministers the excellent work councils have done to date; how important it is that local democratically elected representatives continue to address the deep seated problems in their communities; and how a localist central government can ensure local authorities have the freedom, flexibility and tools to do this. One of the main challenges for the Group will be to persuade the government to take community budgets to a much more ambitious operational level e.g. full roll out and the inclusion of significant funding streams which have previously been resisted.
11. The Group Executive will also be considering a range of measures to build social capital and harness community spirit locally, some of which require changes in Whitehall. Initial thoughts include on what these measures might be include giving councils the tools they need to invest in both existing and new housing stock; providing councils with the means to grow their local economies by getting the localisation of business rates right, and developing a market for municipal bonds to provide councils with the investment needed to generate growth; and making a better public service offer to young people by bringing together services and funding and making them more locally accountable with young people having a greater say in the services they receive.

Rebuilding communities: SSCB policy issues

12. One policy area where the government has committed to make changes is addressing gangs and gang culture. A cross-government group headed by the Home Secretary and Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has been established to develop a plan of action for dealing with gang culture, and will report to Parliament in October. Officers are already involved in the officials group supporting this work and we are pressing for implementation of gang injunctions for under 18s.
13. Here there is a clear role for the Board, in conjunction with the Children and Young People's Board, to highlight the existing good practice and experience of councils in tackling gangs and violence among young and helping councils adapt existing programmes to reducing budgets and resources.
14. Another area of political debate is likely to be around police numbers. Funding for the police and the impact this would have on officers on patrol and available

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to deal with large scale disorder featured in the emergency debate and media coverage of the disturbances. From the Group's perspective this debate reinforces the need for local budgets to be pooled to fund the multi-agency work needed to reduce the likelihood of further civil disturbances. It also reinforces the need for the police and councils to work together to identify efficiencies and improvements that can be made not just in terms of joint services but also in back office functions.

Conclusion and next steps

15. Members are invited to commend the work of local authorities (and fire authorities) in responding to the civil disturbances; and discuss the emerging medium term issues ahead of the LG Group Executive discussion on 15 September.

Financial Implications

16. Any work arising from the civil disturbances will be met from existing resources and budgets.