

Note of last Safer & Stronger Communities Board meeting

Title: Safer & Stronger Communities Board
Date: Monday 15 June 2020
Venue: Zoom videoconference

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note

Item	Decisions and actions	Action
1	Welcome, apologies and declarations of interest The Chair welcomed members to the meeting. Apologies were received from Cllr Jim Beall. There were no declarations of interest. The Chair paid tribute to Andrew Campbell who had passed away unexpectedly last week. Over the past few months Andrew had been leading the Covid-19 workstream on excess deaths and bereavement services with members of the safer communities team, including speaking at the recent lead members' meeting, and would undoubtedly have joined the meeting today for the discussion of agenda item 5. The Board agreed to write to Andrew's family expressing their condolences.	
2	Minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 March 2020 The Minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2020 were agreed.	
3	Prevent regional delivery - Presentation by Chris Williams and Sam Howe, Home Office Chris Williams and Sam Howe from the Home Office gave a presentation on the delivery of the Prevent Programme, following which, there was a confidential discussion on the proposals. Decision Members of the Safer & Stronger Communities Board noted the presentation on the Home Office proposals.	
4	COVID-19 emergency: Safer and Stronger Communities team update The Chair invited Mark Norris, Principal Policy Adviser, to introduce the	

update.

Mark updated the Board on the team's activity since its last meeting in March and outlined the main areas where they had been working with councils and Government departments in relation to Covid-19. These were: emergency planning and Local Resilience Forums; supporting the shielded and vulnerable groups; the death management process (the subject of a separate report – item 5); regulation and licensing, particularly in relation to businesses closing and eventually reopening; providing support to domestic abuse victims; early release of prisoners; counter-extremism and community cohesion; and addressing beach safety.

Mark explained that several of the Covid-19 workstreams that the team were working on were now being wound down, as the immediate crisis passed. However, a number of them were likely to continue for the foreseeable future. In particular, he said that they were expecting Government announcements in the coming days about the future role of local authorities in supporting the shielded and vulnerable groups and the testing and tracing programme, with the potential for local lockdowns. Mark said that the reopening of local businesses on the high street and associated licensing and regulatory issues was also going to become increasingly important, and officers were having discussions with Government about the issues this would raise. Similarly, managing the increasing numbers of people who were accessing the coastline was going to be crucial as the summer progressed, and this was being looked at across several Government departments. Mark said it was a fine balance for many local authorities that relied upon income from tourists but also had a responsibility for people's safety.

Following Mark's introduction Members raised the following points:

- There was a lack of guidance from the Government about implementing Local Outbreak Management Plans. This could be very challenging for local authorities as there would be strong reactions from local residents. It was suggested that SSCB needed to think carefully about how best to manage this. The Chair stated that the legal advice he had received was that councils did not currently have the powers to enforce local lockdowns and so the Government would need to legislate for it. He added that it would be completely impractical and would take enormous amounts of police resources to enforce in an area such as Blackpool with a large beach. It was acknowledged that there couldn't be a 'one size fits all' solution. Mark said that as far as he was aware, there were no plans by the Government to legislate and officers were having conversations with Government about the issues raised by members.
- It was stated that in Gloucestershire, 47% of deaths from Covid-19 were in care settings and there had been serious shortcomings around availability and use of PPE, lack of testing and use of agency staff. This raised question marks about the effectiveness of councils' emergency plans and the LGA should look at how these could be improved for the future. The Chair agreed that Emergency Plans should be reviewed and approved on a regular basis but also how they were implemented. Members suggested that some Emergency Plans had been written with influenza in mind, rather than other possible pandemics, and that Government

guidance on recovery appeared to focus on flooding events, not pandemics. Further confusion was caused by the additional powers introduced by the Government in the Coronavirus Act and whether these were expected to be discharged centrally or locally.

- Concern was raised about the safety and additional costs of reopening public toilets, particularly for areas that currently operated community toilet schemes.
- In order to aid economic recovery, many councils weren't planning to charge businesses for street furniture licenses but this would have implications for income.
- It was suggested that the Prime Minister had not helped the water safety situation by encouraging people to swim in lakes, rivers and the sea. It was also queried whether local authorities would be able to enforce local lockdowns on beaches that they didn't own. It was reported that Swim England were publishing guidance on safety in swimming pools for when they were allowed to reopen.
- It was stated that local government had generally responded well to the pandemic but there were some areas for improvement. How could the sector learn from its experiences, share best practice and recognise areas where things could have been done better? What could central Government and other national bodies have done differently that would have made it easier for local government to respond on the ground. The Chair responded that there would be a national Public Inquiry in due course which would look at the response by national bodies and institutions but a local review should be led by the LGA.
- Concern was expressed about inconsistent advice from schools around shielding, with some schools saying do send people in, others saying don't.
- As the hospitality trade begins to reopen, there would be considerable pressure on the resources of licensing departments and committees.
- It was proposed that a new working group be formed at the LGA to review the impact of community groups on the Coronavirus response, to learn lessons and help develop a strategy for the future sustainability of this new resource. Members agreed that this would be helpful.
- The close cooperation between military and civilian authorities during the crisis had been fantastic and should be recognised as having great potential for the future.

Decision

Members of the Safer & Stronger Communities Board noted the update.

Actions

Officers to consider establishing a member-led working group to review the impact of the Community & Voluntary Sector during the Covid-19 crisis.

5 Impact of Covid-19 on Bereavement Services

The Chair invited Lucy Ellender, Senior Adviser, to introduce the report.

Lucy began by paying tribute to Andrew Campbell who had been leading

on this work stream before his sudden passing last week.

Lucy said that death management had been one of the key workstreams for the LGA since the pandemic hit and there were 3 main areas of activity – (i) responding to issues raised by councils; (ii) engaging with Government to represent councils' views and highlight issues; and (iii) producing resources for councils to help respond at a local level.

Lucy reported that two workshops had been held on the lessons learned from the pandemic, one with registrars and one with those responsible for wider death management. The outcomes from these had been used to draft the next steps outlined in the paper, including a proposal for the Board to write to MHCLG to outline the key points that had been raised with the LGA on death management issues. Lucy asked whether there were any further areas that the Board would like officers to look into.

Following Lucy's introduction, Members raised the following points:

- Great efforts had been made to build capacity into the system early on during the crisis and thankfully, it had not proved necessary to make use of it all.
- The changes to the death management process that were introduced in response to the lockdown – in particular, removing the requirement to register deaths in person - had actually improved the user experience in many cases. Could the LGA lobby for these changes to be made permanent?
- Members queried whether the changes made by the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) to the processing of funeral expenses payments had made any noticeable difference, and were there a significant number of people now in funeral poverty as a result of Covid-19? Lucy said that in 2015-16, the DWP had taken an average of 18.6 days to process applications whereas at the beginning of June they were processing double the number of applications within their 15-day target. She sounded a note of caution that there weren't any figures on how successful the applications had been. Lucy added that there was a mixed picture in terms of the number of public health funerals being carried out across the country. Members requested some more detailed figures on this, as public health funerals were considered to be a hidden cost of Covid-19 for councils. Lucy said that she had a survey ready to go out to councils on this and she would report back to members when she had some results.

Decision

Members of the Safer & Stronger Communities Board noted the report and agreed the next steps outlined in paragraphs 24 and 25.

6 Building safety update

The Chair invited Charles Loft, Senior Adviser, to introduce the update.

Charles reported that remediation of residential blocks with ACM cladding had slowed down as a result of Covid-19 with just 4 blocks being completed in the previous month.

Charles reported that the Fire Protection Board was launching the next stage of its Building Risk Review programme this week.

On the Joint Inspection Team, Charles said that the funding agreement had now been signed and they were recruiting new staff members with a view to starting inspections up again in July.

On non-ACM remediation, Charles reported that the Government had now published the prospectus for bids to its new £1 billion fund and added that the deadline for submitting bids – 31 July 2020 – would be very challenging. Councils would be eligible if the cost of the remediation works threatened the financial viability of the provider, or the Housing Revenue Account for stock holding authorities.

Charles then ran through the recommendations of the recent Housing, Communities & Local Government Select Committee report on dangerous cladding and said that all but one of them were measures that the LGA had been calling for.

Charles reported that the Fire Safety Bill was entering the Committee stage in the House of Commons and the LGA was working on a set of amendments which would address some of the concerns set out in paragraph 27 of the report.

On Approved Document B, Charles said that the Government had announced that the height at which sprinklers would be required in new buildings was to be lowered to 11 metres from November. This was an excellent result after a long period of lobbying by the LGA.

Finally, Charles highlighted the continuing insurance and mortgage issues being faced by leaseholders in blocks that had dangerous cladding and the difficulties faced by surveyors seeking insurance to demonstrate that cladding was safe. The LGA was providing examples of these problems to MHCLG.

Decision

Members of the Safer & Stronger Communities Board noted the update.

7 End of year report and future Board priorities for 2020/21

The Chair invited Mark Norris to introduce the report.

Mark explained that the first part of the report summarised the work carried out on the priority areas that were set out by the Board in September 2019. Mark stressed that the Covid-19 outbreak had diverted the team's time and resources away from the original work plan to other priorities.

Mark then outlined some initial thoughts on themes for the 2020/21 work priorities and said that these would remain broadly consistent with 2019/20. He warned members that it was likely that part of the team's capacity would continue to be diverted to the Covid-19 response and that they would have to retain some flexibility to respond to any further developments in this area, such as a second peak of infections.

Following Mark's introduction, members raised the following points:

- Could the successful LGA annual licensing conference be added to the annual report? Members agreed to add this in.
- Could the cross-cutting work on community safety resilience that was agreed as part of the 2019-20 work plan be carried over into next year? Ellie Greenwood, Senior Adviser, said that this work had been due to start in March this year but had to be postponed due to Covid-19. This could be picked up again next year.
- It was considered important to include policing and community relations as a workstream given the events of recent weeks around the Black Lives Matter campaign. It was vital that local government, through the LGA, had a voice on the various reviews and commissions that were being set up to look into the issues. The Chair agreed and suggested that officers speak to the Association of Police & Crime Commissioners to get their viewpoint.
- The water safety brief and, in particular, the increasing number of related suicides, was considered to be a high priority. Could this work be tied in with the work of the Community Wellbeing Board on suicide prevention?
- It was suggested that modern slavery retain the high profile that it had in the workstream in 2019-20. The Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown could well have exacerbated the situation.
- Members re-emphasised the need for a piece of work focusing on community engagement and support in the Coronavirus response and developing a strategy for future sustainability.

Mark thanked members for their comments and said that these would be used to feed into a more detailed work plan for 2020-21 which would come to the Board for agreement in September 2020.

Decision

Members of the Safer & Stronger Communities Board noted the End of Year Report and agreed that the points raised in the discussion be fed into the 2020-21 Work Plan.

Actions

- Officers to incorporate LGA Annual Licensing Conference in End of Year Report.
- Officers to amend 2020-21 Work Plan to incorporate members' comments.

8 Safer and Stronger Communities Board update

The Board update paper was noted without discussion.

Decision

Members of the Safer & Stronger Communities Board noted the update.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role

Councillor

Authority

Chair	Cllr Simon Blackburn	Blackpool Council
Vice-Chairman	Cllr Katrina Wood	Wycombe District Council
Deputy-chair	Cllr Bridget Smith	South Cambridgeshire District Council
	Cllr Hannah Dalton	Epsom and Ewell Borough Council
Members	Cllr Eric Allen	London Borough of Sutton
	Cllr Mohan Iyengar	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council
	Cllr Andrew Joy	Hampshire County Council
	Cllr Dave Stewart	Isle of Wight Council
	Cllr Lois Samuel	West Devon Borough Council
	Cllr Kate Haigh	Gloucester City Council
	Cllr Alan Rhodes	Nottinghamshire County Council
	Cllr James Dawson	Erewash Borough Council
	Cllr Farah Hussain	Redbridge London Borough Council
	Cllr Johnson Situ	Southwark Council
	Cllr Jeremy Hilton	Gloucestershire County Council
	Cllr Philip Evans JP	Conwy County Borough Council
Apologies	Cllr Jim Beall	Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
In Attendance	Cllr Richard Auger	Daventry District Council