

Note of last Safer & Stronger Communities Board meeting

Title: Safer & Stronger Communities Board
Date: Thursday 17 June 2021
Venue: Westminster Room, 8th Floor, 18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

Attendance

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

Item Decisions and actions

1 Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest

The Chair welcomed members to the Safer and Stronger Communities Board meeting.

Apologies were received from Cllr Johnson Situ and no declarations of interest were made.

2 Notes of previous meeting

Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board agreed the notes of the last Board meeting, held on Thursday 18 March 2021.

3 Social Cohesion and Resilience

The Chair introduced the report and invited Sara Khan, Government Independent Adviser for Social Cohesion and Resilience to present to the Board.

Sara introduced herself and thanked the Board for inviting her to the Safer and Stronger Communities Board meeting, building on her earlier engagement with the Board as Counter-Extremism Commissioner. She informed the Board that she would update members on her plans for her role, explore members' concerns about extremism and cohesion issues and outline her plans for the coming year.

Sara emphasised that she was a firm believer in the role of local authorities in promoting cohesion, strengthening resilience and tackling division, intolerance and extremism.

As Commissioner, one of her reports had focused on the broad question of what a whole society response to extremism looks like and looked at the issue of cohesion. The report showed that there was still a serious gap in knowledge about social cohesion and how local areas were targeted by extremists. Sara also noted that people talk about contributing to cohesion but sometimes undermine it, and that we need to improve and quicken our response to issues such as the Birmingham RSE protests.

Sarah confirmed that her role would focus on working with MHCLG to promote social cohesion, strengthening communities and institutional resilience: she commented that counter extremism and promoting cohesion and resilience are complementary and both need to be addressed. She noted data showing that investing in social cohesion is beneficial and leads to increased trust in government and social engagement. However, she stated that there are gaps in what we know and how we can assess cohesion and resilience.

Sarah emphasised that as part of her review she was keen to look at the following key areas:

- What more can be done to support victims targeted by hardliners promoting polarisation.
- What is the role of public bodies and local authorities - do they have the expertise, capacity and/or capabilities required?
- What was the role of national government in supporting this work?
- How could cohesion and resilience work be streamlined within existing structures and alongside other issues?
- How might local communities and civil societies work with local authorities to challenge polarisation and extremism?
- What works in promoting social cohesion and tackling extremism?

Following the discussion, Members made the following comments:

- Members commented that a particular issue in some local authorities was how to engage with communities beyond “community leaders”, and how to conduct this in a meaningful way. Many community leaders were men of a certain age who all seemed to know each other, leaving women plugged out of these networks. It would be useful to observe case studies of where places have been able to reach women who might not feel connected to any public bodies or community group to hear their views. Sara responded that this was a familiar issue where some men did not want women to be heard or seen but, now was a

time for councils to go beyond community leaders and engage with women and people who would make a difference.

- It was noted that on issues such as RSE and teaching, councillors and others need to feel empowered to speak out on issues when necessary, including saying that having the support of lots of people on an issue didn't make a position right. Sara agreed on the importance of giving confidence, training and examples of good practice, and cited the positive role of the local press in Sunderland.
- Members commented that it would be good to look at how local authorities with dedicated prevent officers might work alongside resettlement teams and the benefit of this. How could this be funded?
- Members asked what was being done to educate people about conspiracy theories and how schools could be supported, as reaching young people was critical. Sara replied that schools play a vital role in educating children on conspiracy theories and the curriculum should be modernised to fit the challenges of today's society.
- Members raised concerns that social media amplified extreme far-right views, leading to a breakdown in community cohesion, and created tension between communities. What could be done to bridge the gap between people who are vocally far-right on social media and choose not to vote at local and general elections; it was noted that having a social media tool kit for councillors would be useful. Members also noted the responsible role that politicians and political parties needed to play, including avoiding stoking so called "culture wars".
- Members noted the willingness of communities to engage on issues that matter to them, for example on issues such as knife crime, or housing repairs.
- Sara responded that being able to engage with people on a human level to understand their personal needs, e.g. education, work, housing, helps build trust and strengthen rapport as everyone has these basic needs She agreed the importance of schools, particularly on issues such as VAWG and developing critical thinking to prevent conspiracy theories spreading. She also agreed that political parties need to take a zero tolerance approach, although this was outside the scope of what she wanted to focus on.

The Chair thanked Sara for her insightful and well detailed presentation.

Decision:

Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board noted the report.

Action:

- Officers to gather members' thoughts on the discussion and share with Sara.

4 Update Paper

The Chair asked Mark Norris, Principal Policy Advisor, to introduce the report, which outlined issues of interest to the Board not covered under the other items on the agenda. Mark stated that now the shift in focus had moved on from COVID-19 related issues the Board could resume with business as usual. Mark highlighted the following key points in the report:

- Counter-extremism – broader conversations with government emphasised the need for investment in long-term measures.
- Regulatory services – issues around investment in local authorities and levels of staffing.
- Shisha premises - councils have raised concerns about the lack of effective powers to tackle ongoing nuisance, anti-social behaviour and criminality issues.
- Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill – the Chair had given evidence to the Bill committee highlighting the importance of taking a public health approach to tackling serious violent crime, investing in prevention and early intervention, as well as identifying the risk factors and drivers of youth violence

The Chair drew the Boards attention to the evidence she gave to the House of Commons Public Bill Committee for the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill and the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Domestic Abuse. The Chair emphasised that she used the opportunity to reiterate the Boards position with clear asks from the LGA for local authorities.

Following the discussion, Members made the following comments:

- Members commented that the proposed agreement to increase the permitted number of temporary event notices (TEN) per premises from 15 to 20 per year would impact other regulatory services in terms of more noise complaints.
- Members also warned that an increase in pavement licencing would cause further issues within local authorities facing complaints over obstruction of footways and tables and chairs infringing accessibility. Ellie Greenwood responded that the LGA would be able to put the issues raised by the Board in a letter to the government.
- Members highlighted the issues surrounding unauthorised

encampments, the impacts caused for residents and the financial costs for local authorities in dealing with them, and questioned when the new enforcement measures in the PCSC Bill are expected to be passed as legislation. Rachel Phelps responded that the Bill was currently in the House of Commons stage and had only just begun its passage through Parliament.

- On regulatory services, members asked for more information about the work of the regulatory services task and finish group and recognised the issues local authorities were having with recruiting environmental health officers and the high usage of agency staff. Ellie replied that the task and finish group was set by up Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), in which the LGA pushed the government to set up last year to add pressure on environmental health and wider regulatory services. The full report would be shared with the Board once the work stream had reported back to the task and finish group within the coming weeks.

The Chair concluded the item and asked the Board to note that in relation to paragraph 15, Offensive Weapons Homicide Reviews, the LGA has been invited to join the Home Office's Offensive Weapons Homicide Review Cross-Government design and pilot board. The LGA would provide feedback to Government officials on the reviews and put forward any local government queries or concerns.

Decision:

Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board noted the report.

Actions:

- Officers to draft a letter to Ministers setting out concerns about the extension of temporary pavement licensing provisions.
- Officers to include regulatory services into a future agenda item to discuss.

5 **Queen's Speech**

The Chair introduced the report which provided a summary of the announcements of relevance to the Safer and Stronger Communities Board in the Queen's Speech on Tuesday 11 May.

Mark highlighted the following key points in the Queen's speech that related specifically to the Board which were:

- Building Safety Bill
- Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill

- Animal Welfare Bills
- Online Safety Bill
- Victims Bill
- Criminal Justice catch up and recovery plan (including coroners)
- Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy
- Immigration Plan (including recommendations on modern slavery)
- Regulatory Reform
- Integrated Review

Mark continued that in relation to the legislation around the Action Plan for Animal Welfare, three Bills were expected, of which the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill and Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill had already been introduced to Parliament. The plan included a range of proposals in which councils were likely to have a role in enforcing, which was relevant to the discussion members had just had about pressures on regulatory services.

Following the discussion, Members made the following comments:

- Members raised concerns around unlicensed dog breeders and the ability for regulatory services to keep on top of demand. During the COVID lockdown there was an increase in unlicensed breeders and there was a strong link between serious organised crime gangs using puppy sales and theft of animals to fund organised crime.
- Members commented on the increased sentencing power for assaults on emergency workers and agreed this was a positive step in protecting emergency staff. However, the sentencing guideline council should be asked to look at the sentencing policy as the disposal of these case were usually community penalties or suspended prison sentences, not deterring people to commit such crimes. Mark responded that this particular point has been raised in a number of other areas and that there were increased sentences available to courts but, the sentences were not reflecting the severity of the crime with little account taken into time taken to investigate the case.
- Members welcomed the proposed plans for modern slavery and in particular the proposal for the commitment for Government to clarify its obligations to victims of modern slavery within UK law as soon as possible.
- Members welcomed the Victims Bill but asked how this would be funded, noting that this mustn't be at the expense of detection r. The Chair agreed and replied that there was no clear commitment around additional resources for local government or other public sector organisations that may need the resources to fulfil the legislation and this point had been raised in LGA submissions for various parliamentary

committees.

Decision:

Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board noted the report.

Action:

- Officers to consider comments made by members.

6 **Building Safety Update**

The Chair introduced the report which covers on the LGA's building safety related work since its last meeting.

Charles Loft, Senior Advisor informed the Board of the following key points:

- Remediation –
 - Following the recent fire at New Providence Wharf, the interim report showed that the smoke detectors on the 8th floor communal corridor failed to operate both the Automatic Opening Vent (AOV) and the cross-corridor fire doors. The building was first identified as having ACM cladding in September 2017 and work began just after the fire to remove the cladding. In response the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) And LGA are writing jointly to building owners to remind them of their responsibilities
 - The Joint inspection Team has secured funding for another year.
 - The Fire Protection Board's Building Risk Review program has remained on track to ensure all residential buildings over 18m will be assessed or inspected by the end of 2021.
- Reform –
 - The Building Safety Bill was due to be published in June but had been delayed, amidst concern about how to avoid passing costs to leaseholders.
 - Fire Safety Act – an online tool that building owners would have to use to prioritise their buildings for fire risk assessments, has been delayed until October.
 - Gateway One, developers of residential buildings over 18m would need to provide a Fire Statement and the Health and Safety Executive's Building Safety Regulator would become a statutory consultee on planning, due to commence from August.

Charles updated the Board on the following point since the report was produced:

- The government was consulting on building safety standards for schools and planning to remove the requirement for sprinklers to be installed in all new schools.

- The government has launched the consultation of personal emergency evacuation plans, looked at how to evacuate people that need assistance from relevant buildings.
- The LGA is putting together a training programme for councils/councillors on their obligations as landlords, incorporating the lessons from the Grenfell fire.

Decision:

Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board noted the report.

7 **End of Year Report and Work Plan 2021-22**

The Chair introduced the Safer and Stronger Communities end of year report, including initial proposals for the 2021/22 work plan.

Mark informed the Board that as this was the last meeting in the cycle of the year and that Board meetings would resume in September officers were looking to set priorities for the Boards work programme for 2021/22.

Mark stated that the new Board cycle of workstream would include the following:

- Prevent, counter-extremism and cohesion
- Community Safety
- Blue light services and civil resilience
- Licensing and regulation
- Building Safety
- Crematoria, coroners and registrars

Following the brief discussion, Members made the following comments:

- Members praised the work undertaken during the course of the year.
- Members commented they wished to explore issues regarding speeding and community safety, as there was a lack of enforcement powers for local authorities. Mark responded that this was an issue the police led on rather than councils, but recognised it is an issue that many councils were facing.
- Members raised that another area of interest would be how to tackle the grip criminal drug gangs have in communities, with around 80% of young people youth teams work with having some links to gangs. The Chair replied that this linked to county lines which the Board and the LGA have worked on and there already was a good co-ordinated approach nationally on county lines work. Mark added that this issue fits within existing strands of work by the Board and with Children and Young People Board.
- Members asked to focus on the overall resilience of councils community safety work.
- The importance of linking up with the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners was noted. Members highlighted work to

support PCPs in their scrutiny of PCCs, and opposition to mandatory transfers of fire governance to PCCs.

- Ongoing work around water safety and the outcome of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency review was also highlighted.

The Chair concluded the item and brought the meeting to a close.

Decision:

Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board noted the report.

Date of the next meeting: Tuesday, 21 September 2021, 11.00 am, TBC

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr Nesil Caliskan	Enfield Council
Vice-Chairman	Cllr Katrina Wood	Buckinghamshire Council
Deputy-chairman	Cllr Bridget Smith	South Cambridgeshire District Council
	Cllr Hannah Dalton	Epsom and Ewell Borough Council
Members	Cllr Eric Allen	Sutton London Borough Council
	Cllr Andrew Joy	Hampshire County Council
	Cllr Mohan Iyengar	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council
	Cllr Lois Samuel	West Devon Borough Council
	Mayor Damien Egan	Lewisham London Borough Council
	Cllr James Dawson	Erewash Borough Council
	Cllr Alan Rhodes	Bassetlaw District Council
	Cllr Farah Hussain	Redbridge London Borough Council
	Cllr Jeremy Hilton	Gloucestershire County Council
Cllr Philip Evans JP	Conwy County Borough Council	
Apologies	Cllr Johnson Situ	Southwark Council