

Minutes of last Safer & Stronger Communities Board meeting

Safer & Stronger Communities Board

Thursday, 18 January 2024

Hybrid Meeting - 18 Smith Square and Online

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as [Appendix A](#)

Item	Decisions and actions
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1 Welcome, Apologies and Substitutes, Declarations of Interest

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

Apologies were received from Cllr Priti Joshi, Cllr Bobbie Dove and Cllr Brenda Dacres, substituted by Cllr James Gartside and Cllr Peter Golds.

Declarations of interest were received from Cllr Jeanie Bell as Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside.

Cllr Arnold Saunders declared an interest in item 6 as a Rabbi and in item 7 as a Rabbi who officiates at funerals and as a member on the Board of Management which looks after Jewish Cemeteries.

Cllr Peter Golds declared an interest in item 7 as a member on the Board of Management of synagogue who is involved in issues relating to funerals and the conduct of its services.

Cllr James Dawson also declared an interest in item 7 as Chair of the Joint Committee for the local crematoria.

2 FSA - Local authority food standards and safety capacity

The Chair invited Rebecca Kirk, Head of Regulatory Compliance Strategy and Karen McCloskey, Head of Delivery Standards at the Food Standards Agency (FSA) to present a food safety update, focussing on areas such as workforce and capacity issues in local government food standards and safety (slides page 9 - 20 of agenda pack). The FSA is concerned because food inspections have not returned to pre-covid levels, and the presentation looked at reasons for this including local authority workforce and capacity issues. Their aim is to raise the profile of food safety with senior leaders in the sector and they plan to write to local authority Chief Executives asking them to share with leaders and section 151 officers highlighting concerns and prompting adequate funding to these statutory services.

Members' comments:

- A member highlighted the difficulties of recruiting Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) and mentioned that their council is currently recruiting from Ireland.
- It was highlighted that the scale and impact of food safety issues needs to be considered when addressing problems, such as prioritising issues in large supermarkets over smaller stores.
- Members raised the need for reforms that would support service funding such as reforms to the fixed penalty notice system.
- A member requested information on any issues councils need to be aware of in port regulation.

Rebecca Kirk and Karen McCloskey responded to comments:

- The FSA are looking into ways of increasing EHOs in England by understanding why Ireland has a surplus of EHOs and looking at University Degree Courses that could be offered in England.
- The FSA are working on reform of the system to allow for funding to be received for councils from penalties and the potential for this to be incorporated into the legislation.
- The Department of Food, Rural Affairs and Agriculture (Defra) leads on port health and will be implementing a new border target operating model at the end of April which will increase the number of checks on imported food. Defra will be providing funding to councils to allow capacity for port officers to be able to implement the port controls.

Decision

The Board noted the FSA's presentations and will feedback on the proposals set out in paragraph 17 and consider how the LGA works with the FSA going forward on workforce issues of mutual concern.

Actions

- FSA to share information on the areas where staff recruitment is of greatest need.
- Members to raise awareness of the important role of food and feed teams.
- Members to feed back to Officers via email on the recommendations from the paper, specifically the proposals set out in paragraph 17 and any suggestions on how the LGA works with the FSA going forward on workforce issues.

3 DLUHC - Stronger Local Resilience Forum Pilots

The Chair invited Paul Phipps-Williams, Head of Regional Resilience at the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to present. The presentation outlined the progress on the eight areas which are piloting stronger Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) through the creation of a Chief Resilience Officer (CRO). This initiative flows from the UK Government Resilience Framework. The CRO will develop a resilience strategy for the LRF and as part of the pilots, issues such as accountability through local politicians and a stronger LRF secretariat will be addressed.

Members' comments:

- It was highlighted that DLUHC need to ensure partnerships such as Community Safety and Integrated Care Partnerships already in existence are considered – as well as work with Police and Crime Commissioners and on the Criminal Justice Bill. It was raised that the right people may need to be brought together, as opposed to a new system and staff.
- A member commented on the need for cross-party working with changes in council leadership and emphasised that accountability could not come down to the role of a single elected member.
- A member encouraged the idea that local authorities should be DLUHC's links to help simplify the process of navigating the complexities of structures and responsibilities of different council areas.
- A member requested understanding of how the Chief Resilience Officer (CRO) will fit in with mechanisms already in place, such as the London Resilience Forum, Mayor of London, and Borough Resilience Forums.
- A member highlighted the different interpretations of what defines resilience in different areas and therefore varied ideas on how to achieve resilience.
- A member asked if the funding would be tailored to each area to match the complexities.
- A member commented on how to ensure work is not being duplicated.
- Information was requested on what powers CROs will have.
- It was emphasised that although the Welsh Government is not taking part in the pilots, cross-border working needs to be considered.
- A member requested feedback from partners to help understand the themes across the pilots.

Paul Phipps-Williams responded to Member comments:

- The intricacies of the different organizations and boundaries are being considered heavily, and DLUHC are engaged across Whitehall to map this correctly. Pilot areas have been picked specifically because of their complexities.
- Currently exploring how London Boroughs responsible for emergency planning and resilience can work together more effectively with panels and institutions.
- The pilot is exploring what funding is needed in different areas to deliver 'resilience' and evidence is being built of what can be achieved with extra funding.
- CROs will focus on gaining influence and engagement to create resilient areas. Powers remain the same under the Civil Contingencies Act (CCA), however the outcome of the pilots will help DLUHC to understand if there needs to be any strengthening of powers.
- Paul Phipps-Williams described engagement with officials from the LGA who are engaging with operational partners in pilot areas to identify targeted help to bring authorities together to share ideas.

Decision

The Board noted and commented on the presentation, supported the pilots and will feedback to officers identifying any actions for the LGA to

address any governance or other issues.

Actions

- Officers to share slides.
- Members to share any further feedback on paragraph 14 regarding how the LGA can support the pilots and whether there are any concerns about progress to date which DLUHC need to address.
- Officers to explore scope to do a piece of work reaching out to councils involved to understand their experience which could be brought to a future Board.
- Officers to connect those leading in the Thames Valley, Northumbria, and West Mercia pilots with the local LGA Principal Advisor to get politicians together to discuss this.

4 Support for care leavers

The Chair invited Louise Smith, Senior Adviser from the LGA's Children and Young People team to introduce the item which outlined corporate parenting as one of the Chair of the Local Government Association (LGA), Councillor Shaun Davies' main priorities for 2023-24, with a particular focus on support for care leavers.

Members' comments:

- A member requested for the LGA to consider recognizing care experience as a protected characteristic. Another member referred to councils that have recognised this, and questioned until what age being a care leaver should be considered a protected characteristic.
- A member requested for children entering the care system due to parental imprisonment to be considered.
- It was raised that many councils supported care leavers through the Household Support Fund, and the future of this fund is uncertain.

Louise Smith thanked members for their comments, and explained regarding recognition of the protected characteristic, that the LGA are waiting on the results of a large survey by the Children's Commissioner to inform policy going forward. The survey has requested views on care experience becoming a protected characteristic and what people with care experience would like to see happen.

Decision

The Board noted the LGA's work on corporate parenting, specifically support for care leavers, and commented on the current plans for this programme of work.

Action

- Members to feedback to officers if they have any further areas of good practice in their councils and additional ideas as to how the LGA can promote positive outcomes for care leavers.

5 Update paper

The Chair introduced the paper which outlined issues of interest to the Board not covered under the other items on the agenda.

Members comments:

- Information was requested on if local authorities had been contacted regarding any changes following the banning of XL Bullies, for instance, abandonment of the dogs outside of areas.

Charles Loft, Senior Adviser responded that councils had been contacted with a request for feedback, and Defra have revised their estimate of dog numbers and consequently the level of funding, although this was still not expected to cover council costs.

Decision

The Board noted and commented on the paper.

Action

- Officers to ensure anything in the update paper mentioned has been logged in the SSC work plan.
- Officers to share any feedback from councils regarding XL Bullies when received.

6 DLUHC - Local government engagement with faith - Bloom review

Members had a confidential discussion on a presentation from DLUHC regarding the Colin Bloom Review.

7 Law Commission - Burial and cremation law

Members had a confidential discussion with the Law Commission on burial and cremation law.

8 Minutes of previous meeting

Members agreed the minutes of the previous meeting held on 22 November 2023.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr Heather Kidd MBE	Shropshire Council
Vice chair	Cllr Jeanie Bell	St Helens Council
Deputy chairman		
Deputy chair	Cllr Clive Woodbridge	Epsom and Ewell Borough Council
Members	Cllr Anthony Okereke	Royal Borough of Greenwich
	Cllr Kelly Middleton	Telford and Wrekin Council
	Cllr Asher Craig	Bristol City Council
	Cllr James Dawson	Erewash Borough Council
	Cllr Sue Woolley	Lincolnshire County Council
	Cllr Bill Borrett	Norfolk County Council
	Cllr Liam Bones	North Tyneside Council
	Cllr Arnold Saunders	Salford City Council
	Cllr Jon Ball	Ealing Council
	Cllr Jake Short	Sutton London Borough
	Cllr Karen Lucioni	Isle of Wight Council
Apologies	Cllr Brenda Dacres	Lewisham London Borough
	Cllr Priti Joshi	Oagby and Wigston Borough Council
	Cllr Bobbie Dove	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council
In Attendance	Cllr James Gartside	Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council
	Cllr Peter Golds CBE	Tower Hamlets Council
	Cllr Kevin Dodds	Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council
	Cllr Sara Conway	Barnet London Borough Council
	Cllr Jacqui Taylor	St Albans City and District Council
	Cllr Mandy Ewings	West Devon Borough Council
	Cllr Andrew Walters	Salford City Council
	Cllr Chidi Nweke	Epping Forest District Council
	Cllr Majory Millum	Richmond upon Thames London Borough Council