

Safer and Stronger Communities Board - End of Year Report

Background

1. The updated Business Plan for 15/16 set out a number of priorities for the Safer & Stronger Communities Board. These included: pressing for simplified risk-based regulation that supports local business and pressing for further reform of the licensing system; supporting councils to implement 'Prevent', to reduce crime against vulnerable people and to address violent and cyber-related crime; and making the case for the risk-based funding of the fire and rescue service.

Achievements

2. We successfully lobbied the Ministry of Justice to ensure councils remained outside the scope of the expanded statutory Victim's Code. The Psychoactive Substances Bill received Royal Assent. The National FGM Centre held its first conference and secured funding for 2016/17 and is running pilot schemes in 6 local authorities.

Prevent Counter Extremism & community cohesion

3. The chair held meetings with John Hayes, the Security Minister, and Lord Ahmad, the Minister for Counter-Extremism, to discuss the role of councils in the Prevent and counter-extremism agendas. He highlighted the pressure this work was placing on councils' community safety related activity & budgets. We produced a set of six case studies of councils' counter-extremism activities, covering schools, taxi licensing & community sport.

Protecting the public and community safety

4. We ran a training session for police and crime panel members and launched an e-learning tool for panel members; we influenced the development of the refreshed Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy; our work around child sexual exploitation and taxi licensing provided support and training to councils; we held regional workshops on responding to extreme weather events and produced a guide to the role of councils in civil emergencies; we published a guide to council's role in tackling organised crime; and held the annual Safer Communities conference.

Regulation

5. The Investigatory Powers Bill proposes to maintain councils' access to communications data, following ongoing lobbying by the LGA; the Policing and Crime Bill's licensing provisions also reflects previous LGA lobbying. We completed a survey of licensing fees to support our future lobbying for localisation of licensing fees. We promoted the findings from a Westminster / Manchester project to help understand area vulnerability to gambling related harm, which the LGA part-funded, and hosted our annual licensing conference for nearly 100 councils.
6. We published our review into the future of local government trading standards services, and commissioned further work intended to help councils think about their local options for

ensuring future sustainability of trading standards and wider regulatory services. We also submitted evidence to the 'Cutting Red Tape' review of local authority regulatory services, and continued to make the case for licensing reform.

Fire & Rescue Services

7. The Fire Service Management Committee responded to the consultation from the Home Office, Department of Health and Department for Communities and Local Government on collaboration between the emergency services; signed a consensus statement with NHS England, PHE, Age UK and Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA) on the role of the fire service in the health agenda and published case studies in 'Beyond fighting fires 2' that demonstrated the sector's ability to lead the way on blue-light collaboration. FSMC also lobbied around the Policing and Crime Bill, with the Chair meeting the Home Secretary; and held its annual fire conference and two fire leadership essentials courses.
8. The FSMC continued to make the case for risk-based funding of the fire and rescue service, through its joint submission to the spending review with CFOA.

Crematoria & coroners

9. The Board responded to a number of reviews looking at the provision of coroners and crematoria services. Our submission to consultation on cremation provision for faith communities highlighted how councils have already responded to the needs of the different communities they serve. Our response to the consultation on infant cremation emphasised the importance of a local response to these issues. The LGA has been working with the Department of Health, the National Association of Funeral Directors and the National Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors to discuss bereavement related issues and the introduction of medical examiners. We have also responded to the Work and Pensions Committee's Inquiry into funeral poverty.

Programme of work and priorities 2016/17

10. There is likely to be a degree of continuity in the Board's work over 2016/17. Preventing terrorism and countering extremism continue to be issues of national importance. The government's agenda of transferring responsibilities to Police and Crime Commissioners including the governance of the fire service and a greater role in the criminal justice system will have implications for Fire and Rescue Authorities as well as police and crime panels. Having conducted a survey on the costs of administering the alcohol licensing system we will want to continue to push for locally set fees, as well as supporting councils to implement joined up approaches to local licensing. We will also continue to support councils to find sustainable structures for wider regulatory services. The Violence Against Women and Girls agenda and the support councils provide to victims of domestic abuse and FGM will remain of interest to Whitehall departments and other stakeholders. There will also be new issues that emerge and which members want to see the LGA working on. Detailed proposals for consideration will therefore be brought to the Board meeting in September.

Financial Implications

11. All work programmes are met from existing budgets and resources.