

Safer & Stronger Communities Board – report from Councillor Simon Blackburn (Chair)

Counter-Extremism

1. Cllr Janet Daby attended the roundtable the Minister for Vulnerability, Safeguarding and Countering Extremism, Sarah Newton MP, held with a number of councils the Home Office is working with on countering extremism in mid-December. The roundtable discussed the challenges councils face in tackling extremism, the range of activities councils are undertaking to build community cohesion, and how the new community coordinators could best support this.

FGM

2. The December meeting of the National FGM Centre's Advisory Group, chaired by Cllr Lisa Brett, discussed the support the range of social work support the Centre can offer councils on FGM, the 136 families it has worked with over the last 18 months on behalf of the six pilot councils it is engaged with, and the 5 FGM Protection Orders it has been involved with on behalf of councils. The Group went on to discuss the sustainability of the Centre in 2017/18.

FOBTs

3. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport announced the long-awaited review of gaming review stakes at the end of October, and in our response I raised the concerns councils have about the number of high-stakes fixed odd betting terminals and betting shops on our high streets.

Minibus licensing

4. I warned of the loophole in the law that means people licensed to drive public carriage vehicles – those seating between nine and sixteen passengers – by the DVLA are not subject to criminal records checks. Taxi or minicab drivers who have had their licence taken away or their application refused by councils are able to obtain a public carriage vehicle licence and continue to operate in the same area. Following the LGA raising this issue, the Department of Transport has committed to reviewing the law.

Taxi licensing events

5. A number of Board members supported a series of regional events on taxi licensing. Held in Telford, Gateshead, London and Cambridge, the events highlighted best practice in taxi licensing and focused on the role of members sitting on licensing committees.

Fire and Rescue Services conditions of service

6. Cllr Jeremy Hilton responded to the publication of the long awaited independent review of conditions of service for fire and rescue staff by Adrian Thomas at the start of November. The review had a wide ranging set of recommendations, a number of which were directed at the LGA, including proposals to make the fire service more reflective of the communities it serves. Fire Services Management Committee will be looking at how to build on the work already underway to address the issues identified in the report.

Fire Reform

7. Lead members from the Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC) met the Fire Minister Brandon Lewis MP in October to discuss the Government's fire reform agenda. The discussion covered the need to increase diversity within the fire service, improving procurement, the introduction of a new fire service inspectorate and associated changes to the LGA's peer support offer, governance issues and the FSMC's work with the Chief Fire Officer's Association.

Tattooists

8. Safer and Stronger Communities Vice-Chair, Cllr Morris Bright, warned about the dangers of using illegal tattooists in a feature on the issue in the Sunday Mirror.

National Trading Standards

9. Councillor Nick Worth met with Lord Harris, Chair of National Trading Standards, for an update on the work of NTS in tackling regional and national consumer protection issues.

Alcohol licensing event

10. Councillor Joy Allen, one of the Board's licensing champions, gave a speech at an event entitled 'Alcohol licensing: responding to reform.' Cllr Allen reiterated the messages in the LGA's House of Lords Select Committee review into the Licensing Act 2003, arguing that on balance the Act provides a solid basis for regulating alcohol, but setting out our call for a health objective to be added to the Act.

Death, funerals and coroners conference

11. On 1 December, Cllr Morris Bright, chaired the LGA's Deaths, funerals and coroners conference. The programme covered a wide range of issues including funeral poverty, the implementation of the medical examiners service, and the future of the services, pathology and commercialisation. Cllr Ian Gillies, SSCB Bereavement Services Champion, provided the opening address and outlined the work of the LGA on these issues. The conference welcomed approximately 60 attendees and the feedback received so far has been positive.

Public Spaces Protection Orders

12. On 25 October, Cllr Anita Lower attended the launch of a report by the Kennel Club on Public Spaces Protection Orders controlling dogs.

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