

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

Licensing

1. Councillor Clive Woodbridge, Deputy Chair of the Board, chaired the annual LGA licensing conference at the start of February. Over eighty delegates, the majority of them councillors, heard about the future of the Licensing Act 2003, using health data in licensing, taxi licensing (in particular accessibility and safeguarding), managing the night time economy, the use of risk assessments and local area profiles from the Gambling Commission, the digitalisation of licensing, and the role of the member on licensing committees. I also chaired the final regional licensing workshop in the North West on licensing and its role in tackling child sexual exploitation.

Domestic Abuse

2. The National Oversight Group on Domestic Abuse, chaired by the Home Secretary, the Rt Hon Amber Rudd MP, met on 23 January and I represented the LGA at the meeting. The agenda covered progress by the police in addressing the various Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary reports on the police response to domestic abuse, commissioning services and the National Statement of Expectation, and the police response to honour based violence.

Meeting with the Home Secretary

3. Councillors Hilton and Knox, the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Fire Services Management Committee, met the Home Secretary to discuss the government's fire reform agenda on 24 January. The meeting covered the Thomas Review and workforce reform, including changes to the National Joint Council, collaboration between the emergency services and other partners such as health, the resilience of the services, and the creation of a new inspection regime.

Gambling

4. Councillor Joy Allen attended a roundtable with the Gambling Minister, Tracey Crouch MP, as part of the Government's review of gaming machines and social responsibility on Wednesday 25 January. Others in attendance were Sir Robin Wales, Mayor of Newham, and Councillor Dave Smith, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Environment, Bournemouth Council.

Meeting with Sarah Newton MP

5. I met with Sarah Newton MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Vulnerability, Safeguarding and Countering Extremism on 16 January to discuss the future of the National FGM Centre, delays experienced by London boroughs in obtaining Disclosure and Barring (DBS) checks, issues with the flow of information from the police where they had arrested taxi or private hire vehicles drivers, the Common Law Police Disclosure Scheme, licensing fees and Domestic Homicide Reviews.

Prevent Champions Network

6. Along with a number of members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board, as well as members of other LGA boards, I attended a roundtable for the newly-established Prevent Champions Network chaired by Ben Wallace, Minister of State for Security at the Home Office

on 23 January. Members of the network are councillors who will be supporting and advising other elected members on Prevent, championing Prevent in local communications and leading sessions in a series of regional events for elected members organised by the Home Office.

Tackling Radicalisation

7. On 9 February I addressed a conference on Tackling Radicalisation in the UK 2017 organised by Inside Government, where I spoke about the role of local authorities in preventing extremism. My speech stressed the unique position local authorities are in to combat extremism and radicalisation, by virtue of their local knowledge and the need for effective local partnerships if this work is to succeed.

Minister's speech on fire reform

8. Members of the Fire Services Management Committee, including the Chair, attended a speech by the Fire Minister, Brandon Lewis MP, on the fire reform programme on Tuesday 7 February. The Minister addressed the issues of accountability and transparency, efficiency and collaboration and workforce reform. The Minister said he had been 'encouraged to see that reform is happening across the service' but wanted the pace of reform to increase.

Counter Extremism

9. I spoke at an LGA Leadership Essentials course for elected members on Counter Extremism at Warwick University on 28 February and 1 March. The event explored in detail local government's role in countering extremism and delivering local government's Prevent duty, how to challenge extremist ideologies, approaches for building community cohesion and resilience and effective response to hate crime.

Fire Reform Board

10. The lead members of the Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC) attended the first meeting of the Fire Reform Board (England) on 27 January. This board has been established jointly with the Home Office and the National Fire Chiefs Council to oversee the fire reform programme in England.

Reducing reoffending

11. In mid-February DragonGate launched their Breaking Barriers report into the criminal justice system and options for local areas to create end-to-end and whole systems solutions to reducing reoffending. I gave a key note speech at the national summit held to launch the report on the role of local authorities in preventing crime and offending, and the future opportunities that devolution offers for remodelling the criminal justice system.

Memorandum of Understanding

12. At the end of January, the FSMC launched a Memorandum of Understanding on equality, diversity, behaviours and organisational culture in the Fire Service. This was co-signed by trade unions and groups representing female BME and LGBTQ+ fire service staff. The MoU, published on 31 January, commits its signatories to demonstrably uphold and promote the principles it sets out, deliver the commitments within it and take the specific actions it contains with the timetable agreed. In particular the MoU states that the fire and rescue service as a whole and specific groups within it, such as firefighting personnel, should reflect the diversity of the community it serves.

FOBTs

13. At the end of January, I responded to an All Party Parliamentary Group review of the maximum stakes on fixed odds betting terminals (FOBTs) and urged the government to use the current review to lower maximum stakes.

Retained Firefighters Union

14. The Chair of the FSMC met Tristan Ashby, CEO of the Retained Firefighters Union, representing some 2,500 firefighters, to discuss the fire reform programme, also on 7 February. Topics covered included the future pattern of recruitment and NJC reform.

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