

26 June 2017

Queen's Speech

Purpose

For discussion and direction.

Summary

The Queen's Speech on 21 June set out the government's legislative agenda for the next session of Parliament, and contained a number of bills and announcements of interest to the Safer and Stronger Communities Board. This report sets out the details of these bills and announcements.

Recommendation

Members are invited to note the Bills and announcements in the Queen's Speech of interest to the Board.

Action

Officers to incorporate members comments in any work going forward on these areas.

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Queen's Speech

Background

1. Following the General Election on 8 June, the Queen's Speech was delayed until Wednesday 21 June. The outcome of the election meant that the Government put forward a slimmed down legislative programme; however many of the manifesto commitments relevant to the remit of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board (for example, on counter extremism and domestic violence) were retained included in the Queen's Speech. Alongside the legislative commitments proposed, the Queen's Speech also outlined a set of work following on from the recent terrorist attacks and Grenfell fire tragedy.
2. This paper provides a brief overview of the areas of the Queen's Speech relevant to the SSCB's work programme, some of which are explored in full elsewhere on the agenda.
3. The LGA's on the day briefing provides an analysis of the whole of the Queen's Speech and has also been attached for information.

Counter Extremism

4. The Queen's Speech had announcements on both counter terrorism and counter extremism. The government will be reviewing the counter-terrorism strategy, Contest, to ensure that the police and security services have all the powers they need. As part of the review custodial sentences will also be looked at to ensure they are sufficient to keep people safe. The review will also consider what steps need to be taken to halt the spread of extremist propaganda online.
5. Alongside the review the government announced it would be establishing a statutory Commission for Counter Extremism as promised in its manifesto. The commission will support government in stamping out extremism in all its forms by identifying examples of extremism, help the government to identify new policies to tackle extremism and support the public sector and civil society in promoting pluralistic British values.
6. With Prevent being the most controversial part of the Contest strategy it will be important for any review of Contest to take on communities and local authority views and experiences, which can then inform Prevent work going forward. As part of the role of the Commission for Counter Extremism will be assisting local authorities the Board will undoubtedly want to help shape the Commission as it is set up and its work going forward. Making the case for local government's involvement with the review and in the creation of the Commission will be part of the Board's work going forward.

Domestic Violence

7. As expected, the Queen's Speech outlined a draft Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill. The Bill's objective is to transform our approach to domestic violence to ensure that victims feel able to come forward and report abuse in the knowledge that the state will do all it can to support them and their families and pursue their abusers.

8. The Bill proposes to develop a statutory definition of domestic abuse; create a Domestic Violence and Abuse Commissioner who will work with and monitor the response of statutory agencies and local authorities; ensure that court sentences reflect the lifelong impacts that domestic abuse can have on children affected by it, and create a consolidated new domestic abuse civil protection and prevention order regime.
9. Our response to the Queen's Speech welcomed the announcement of the draft Bill, noting that the creation of a Commissioner post will give the issue more profile (as has been seen with the creation of a Commissioner for Modern Slavery) and that a legal definition of abuse will provide helpful clarity.
10. It will be important that the new Commissioner takes a consistent approach with the expectations for councils set out in the Government's December 2016 National Statement of Expectations on Violence Against Women and Girls. It will also be important that there is recognition of the different ways in which councils seek to provide support to victims of domestic abuse alongside refuge provision.
11. The LGA will look to meet with the Commissioner as and when he or she is appointed. We also anticipate being actively involved in work and lobbying to shape the Bill as it is developed will ensure that the specific implications of the draft Bill are incorporated into our ongoing work on this issue.

Grenfell Tower

12. The Queen's Speech also confirmed the details of the government's announcement it would be holding a public inquiry into the causes of the fire at Grenfell Tower in Kensington. The inquiry will be established under the Inquiries Act, will be chaired by a judge recommended by the Lord Chief Justice, with a wide range of people having an input to its terms of reference including residents of the tower and the families of the deceased. Residents and victims' families will receive legal representation so their views are taken into account by the inquiry.
13. Part of the package was an announcement that the government had made a £5 million Grenfell Tower Residents' Discretionary Fund available. Every household whose home has been destroyed as a result of the fire will receive a minimum £5,500 payment from the fund. The government also committed to ensuring that until people are rehoused, the cost of temporary accommodation will be met on their behalf.
14. In the longer term the government guaranteed that people will be rehoused as close as practically possible to where they previously lived, so there would be minimal change in the public services they have been accessing such as their local school or local GP. Where possible people will be rehoused in the same borough and, where it is not, in a neighbouring borough.
15. As well as outlining the work undertaken by the Department of Communities and Local Government to audit high rise local authority properties in England, the Queen's Speech also indicated that the government will be developing a new strategy for resilience in

major disasters, which will include a new Civil Disaster Reaction Taskforce to help at times of emergency.

16. Local authorities' immediate priority is ensuring the safety of their tenants. Councils have been identifying high rise buildings with cladding since the fire, and as the Prime Minister indicated in her statement on 22 June, where appropriate are now sending samples of the cladding off for testing. Advice has been provided by DCLG on what to do if those tests show there are problems with the cladding. An oral update will be provided at the meeting on the latest situation with this work.
17. Councils will also be keen to learn if there are any other implications for fire safety arising from the investigation into the causes of the fire. It will therefore be important that any interim findings are shared as soon as possible, and the LGA will be pressing for that to be the case.
18. The LGA will be seeking to ensure that the new resilience strategy draws on the experiences of councils around a range of disasters, including the range of authorities over the last few years that have experienced flooding, and this is likely to be an area of focus for the Board and other LGA boards going forward.

Brexit

19. A number of the Bills proposed in the Queen's Speech will manage the technical process of leaving the European Union. The Board will recall that the Repeal Bill will incorporate the existing body of European based legislation, rules and decision into domestic law to ensure certainty and avoid a cliff edge following the UK's departure from the EU. The LGA has already begun work to develop a local government position on the changes we would like to see that legislation as and when different elements of it come to be reviewed following our official exit. An update on our work in this area is included at item 7 of the agenda.
20. On other Brexit Bills, the Customs Bill is the one most likely to impact on the remit of the Board, in terms of changes to the process of importing and exporting goods into the country. Local regulatory services have a role in both sides of this work, and our response to the Queen's Speech therefore highlighted the need to ensure that the impact on local services is considered, particularly in light of the capacity constraints most of these services are operating under.

Implications for Wales

21. Security and policing matters are not devolved to the Welsh Assembly Government so we will be engaging as necessary with the WLGA around the review of counter terrorism legislation and the draft Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill.

Financial Implications

22. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Next steps

23. Members are asked to:

23.1. Note the Bills and announcements in the Queen's Speech of interest to the Board.