

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

### **Domestic Abuse**

1. In July I attended a meeting of the Home Office's National Oversight Group on domestic abuse, a group chaired by the Home Secretary to oversee improvements to police responses to domestic abuse. Following the meeting, members of the Group were invited to submit some early written comments about the Government's outline proposals for a Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill, and new Domestic Violence and Abuse Commissioner. Our response set out support for the overall aims of the legislation, but outlined some broad concerns about the potential implications for councils.

### **Safer communities**

2. Cllr Kate Haigh spoke at a Labour Party Conference fringe session on 'Safer Cities: a new urban agenda'. Safer Cities is a programme run by Plan International UK about girls being at the heart of their community, having an equal voice in local matters and fulfilling their right to feel safe in their community. Cllr Haigh's speech covered a range of issues including collaboration between councils, fire and rescue services and other agencies; our work around tackling violence against women and girls, including domestic abuse and female genital mutilation; councils' role in licensing and the night-time economy; and female representation in local government.

### **Counter-extremism**

3. I co-chaired the second LGA leadership essentials course on countering extremism in Leeds in September. The course was attended by eight elected members from a range of authorities and the feedback was very positive. A further course is scheduled for late November and is already fully booked.

### **Knife crime**

4. Following council trading standards teams' findings about the underage sale of knives, in July I called for the retail industry to fund underage test purchasing activities and liaise with councils to help improve safety standards and compliance with the law on knife sales. I also called for tougher sentences, including larger fines, to reflect the seriousness of selling knives to children.

### **Moped and scooter crime**

5. In September I attended a Home Office ministerial roundtable on moped and scooter related crime, convened in response to increasing concerns about a rise in thefts of these vehicles and regarding their use to facilitate other offences. I reported on issues raised with us by member councils about the nature of these issues and difficulties in identifying and tracking down bikes.

### **HMICFRS External Reference Group**

6. Cllr Rebecca Knox and Cllr David Acton attended the fourth meeting of the HMICFRS External Reference Group on the introduction of inspection for the fire and rescue service.

20 July 2017

The meeting discussed the Inspection methodology, communications with the sector and the progress of HMICFRS to date.

### **Inclusion and Diversity Masterclass**

7. Cllr Ian Stephens, the Chair of the Fire Services Management Committee, introduced the Inclusion and diversity masterclass for the fire and rescue service. There were sessions on inclusive leadership and unconscious bias, attendees also heard from two fire and rescue authorities on their work and from HMICFRS on inspection.

### **Sprinklers**

8. The LGA approach to the retro-fitting of sprinkler systems or other fire suppression methods was discussed at a joint meeting of the lead members of Fire Services Management Committee, the Safer and Stronger Communities Board and the Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board at the start of August. At the end of the meeting it was noted that across the three boards:
  - 8.1. There were strong views in support of sprinklers being installed in new buildings, and that there should be risk assessed retro-fitting of sprinklers or other fire suppression systems in existing buildings;
  - 8.2. The height of the building was less important as a risk factor than the residents' vulnerability and the characteristics of the building; and
  - 8.3. Residents in some areas had expressed concerns about the retro-fitting of sprinklers and there were also issues associated with costs, skills and timescales to do the work. It should be a matter for local decision as to what buildings were retro-fitted.
9. During the discussion, it had also been noted that the effectiveness of retro-fitting sprinklers was dependent on them being installed in a large proportion of the flats in a block, and the presence of a large number of leaseholders due to right-to-buy sales could impact on any retro-fitting programme as leaseholders could not be compelled to have sprinklers fitted in their properties.

### **Trading standards**

10. In August, I highlighted the work of council trading standards teams in tackling scams and fraudsters, and urged people to ensure scams are reported to help raise awareness of the latest swindles.

### **Food safety regulations**

11. In September, I urged that Government to ensure that existing food regulations are maintained after the UK leaves the EU, but also to take the opportunity to strengthen the framework by introducing mandatory display of food hygiene rating scheme scores.

### **Gambling**

12. Ahead of an expected announcement in the Government's review of gaming machines and social responsibility measures, the four lead members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board wrote to the Sports Minister, Tracey Crouch MP, to urge the

20 July 2017

Government to introduce a substantial reduction in maximum FOBT stakes and introduce measures limiting the exposure of children and young people to gambling advertising.

**Contact officer:** Mark Norris  
**Position:** Principal Policy Advisor  
**Phone no:** 020 7664 3241  
**Email:** [mark.norris@local.gov.uk](mailto:mark.norris@local.gov.uk)