

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

Moped, Motorcycles and Scooter Related Crime Roundtable

1. In January, I attended a Home Office roundtable on crimes involving mopeds, motorcycles and scooters, a group chaired by Nick Hurd MP, the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service, and Victoria Atkins MP, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability. This is an issue which has been raised by some member councils, especially crimes involving the use of scrambler bikes in more rural areas. The Home Office are working towards an action plan to help prevent crimes involving motorcycles, mopeds and scooters, and will update on their progress in April 2018.

Counter extremism

2. In February I met with the new independent Counter Extremism Commissioner, Sara Khan. The Commission for Counter Extremism has been established following a statement in the Queen's speech last year, with Sara's appointment announced in early February. Its work over the next three years is expected to include advising government on new policies to tackle extremism, including whether there is a need for new powers; supporting communities and the public sector to confront extremism; and promoting British values and community cohesion. The LGA has also been invited to attend an initial Commission stakeholder roundtable at the end of March.

Licensing

Zoo licensing

3. In January I gave evidence at an internal Labour inquiry into zoo licensing. The inquiry was set up by John Woodcock MP following high profile events at South Lakes zoo to look into practise and laws on zoo licensing and to examine whether improvements could be made. I gave evidence alongside John Woodcock MP, the RSPCA and Born Free, setting out the LGA's position on zoo licensing, that the current structure of the zoo licensing framework, with licensing authorities drawing on specialist expertise to exercise their responsibility to license local premises, is fundamentally sound but that we would support a review of existing zoo licensing legislation. The inquiry is set to convene another inquiry session later this year and I think there is some more work to be done to gauge what, if any, changes could be helpful to councils.

Gambling licensing

4. In January, Cllr Anita Lower attended an event hosted by the APPG on FOBTs to discuss the Government's consultation on gaming machines and social responsibility. The event was an opportunity for Parliamentarians, councils, think tanks and the gambling industry to hear about new research from the Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR) suggesting the costs of reducing FOBT stakes would be much lower than claimed by betting shops.

Best Bar None awards

5. On 5 February, Cllr Kate Haigh attended the Best Bar None Awards at the House of Lords, hosted by Lord Smith of Hindhead CBE. The awards were in recognition of the work industry, police and councils have achieved as part of the Best Bar None scheme to promote responsible drinking and higher professional standards. New Minister, Victoria Atkins MP, gave the opening address outlining the Government's commitment to reducing alcohol-related crime and disorder and her support for partnership working as a way to achieve this objective. Plymouth picked up the title for 'Best Overall Scheme'.

Annual licensing conference

6. In February, Cllr Clive Woodbridge chaired the LGA's Annual Licensing Conference, which was attended by more than 90 members and officers. The conference covered a range of different areas of licensing and speakers included the Gambling Commission, Department for Transport, Defra and Daniel Zeichner MP. Cllr Kate High and myself spoke at the conference with delegates also hearing from a number of councils who identified best practice and shared their own experiences.

Domestic violence

APPG on Domestic Violence

7. I gave evidence to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Domestic Violence as part of their inquiry into the role of the new Domestic Violence Commissioner. This was an opportunity to outline the LGA's priorities for the upcoming Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill and particularly highlight the importance of investing in prevention and early intervention approaches to tackle domestic violence and abuse before it escalates. Following the evidence session, the APPG plans to put forward recommendations to the Government as part of the consultation on the Domestic Violence and Abuse Bill.

Half of children in need referred to councils experience domestic violence

8. In a recent [LGA press release](#), I called for the Government to close the funding gap in children's services and provide an urgent injection of funding to protect services that families rely on to tackle problems or recover from domestic violence and abuse. The release highlighted that almost half of children in council care with extra needs have witnessed or experienced domestic violence, which is why there needs to be adequate funding of children's services and a switch towards intervening early to prevent domestic abuse from happening in the first place. The press release received coverage in the Guardian, the Independent Online, the Mirror, the Mail Online, Sky News Radio, Talk Radio, LB and BBC Radio 2 News Bulletins.

National Oversight Group on Domestic Violence

9. Cllr Anita Lower attended the National Oversight Group on Domestic Violence, a group convened by the Home Office to oversee improvements to police responses to domestic violence and abuse, as well as discuss broader issues such as 'honour-based' violence and stalking. The group involves a wide range of partners, reflecting the need for multi-agency approaches to tackling domestic violence and abuse. During the meeting, Cllr Lower outlined the LGA's response to the Joint Targeted Action Inspection report and agreed with its findings that domestic abuse is a widespread public health issue that needs a long-term strategy to reduce its prevalence.

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10. Cllr Lower highlighted that councils recognise the importance of prevention, but funding cuts and rising demand mean that councils are increasingly having to prioritise reactive child protection above proactive early intervention.

College of Policing

11. In February, I met with the College of Policing to discuss their plans to update their guidelines on modernising neighbourhood policing. I relayed feedback from the SSC Board on the guidelines, stressing the importance of maintaining a strong neighbourhood policing presence and ensuring residents feel safe and able to report crimes in their local areas. We discussed ways in which local communities could be involved in shaping police and crime plans and policing priorities, in order to strengthen better community engagement.

Crime, safeguarding and vulnerability

12. I met Victoria Atkins MP, the Minister with responsibility for crime, safeguarding and vulnerability, at the beginning of February for an introductory meeting. We had a wide ranging discussion across a number of areas in the Minister's portfolio including child sexual exploitation and the role of Barnardo's Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse and our views on the balance between the provision of services to victims and interventions to reduce offending.

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