

Note of last Councillors' Forum meeting

Title:	Councillors' Forum
Date:	Thursday 23 January 2020
Venue:	Westminster Room, 8th Floor, 18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note

Item Decisions and actions

1 Chairman's Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest

The Chairman welcomed members to Councillors' Forum and thanked members for all feedback that was received on the revised format to the meeting

2 Panel: Intimidation and Harassment of Councillors

Cllr Ruth Dombey gave members an over view of the issues around intimidation & harassment of councillors and highlighted the work that the LGA is currently doing to support members and local authorities.

Cllr Ruth Dombey welcomed Seyi Akiwowo, founder of Fix the Glitch. Seyi Akiwowo gave a presentation on their experiences in local government as a councillor around harassment and highlighted the following points:

- Many councillors have quit their roles or chosen not to re-stand based on online abuse and the lack of safe guarding.
- This has even had an affect on candidates wanting to stand.
- Councillors have rights and should not be ignored when they raise concerns about their safety.
- Local Authorities should be ensuring they take mental health of councillors and officers very seriously, especially around times of increased political scrutiny.

Cllr Izzi Seccombe referenced the fine line between scrutiny and abuse, with councillors being allowed to carry out their functions in a safe manner. Cllr Izzi Seccombe highlighted that the LGA was reviewing the code of conduct guidelines for local authorities. The LGA should be leading the way on supporting councillors.

Members made the following comments:

- Working with an internet service provider can be unhelpful when they do not act about online abuse. Changing how internet service providers support councillors could make the difference on safety earlier.
- Councillors must give their addresses to the public, while MPs do not. This could be a piece of work the LGA takes up to support

councillors.

- Physical threats to councillors at surgeries are becoming an increasingly bigger risk for safety
- Councillors bullying officers is a big issue and councillors need to ensure officers are supported against councillors, even those in their own political groups.
- Local Authorities will often refuse to help councillors as they are not employees and state it is part of their role as councillors.

The panel responded:

- It is sad that councillors have a bigger reputation for the abuse they receive than the great work they do for their communities.
- Tech companies need to have a bigger duty of care for councillors as public servants. Understanding the terms of abuse is how best to get action on those who break the law. Using tech companies own terminology is how you get them to act.
- The LGA should host on its own website, details and examples on how to build up evidence to create cases of abuse for the police
- Parliament needs to agree better code of conduct guidelines for councils and allow members to stay online safely.
- Applying for exemptions for addresses is hard work, but important for councillor safety.
- Officers in local authorities need to be better supported. Senior staff are often seen by the workforce as getting the worst abuse from councillors and this has a knock-on effect on recruiting younger staff to take on these roles.

Cllr Ruth Dombey thanked the panel and stated that Local Government should be at the forefront of saying it is possible to disagree, agreeably.

3 Viscount Younger of Leckie, Minister for Communities and Faith

Viscount Younger of Leckie, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government briefly addressed the Councillors' Forum and highlighted the priorities they had for their role, including tackling homelessness and welcomed working with the LGA in the future.

Decision

Members noted the update.

4 Chairman's Update

The chairman introduced the update, highlighting the work the LGA is doing around Devolution and Adult Social Care. The report covered the outgoing and incoming Chairman's activities in the period between October 2019 – January 2020.

5 LGA Board Chair Reports

Children and Young People Board - Cllr Judith Blake CBE

- **National Children and Adult Services Conference 2019:** Nearly 850 delegates attended this year's NCAS Conference in Bournemouth in November, with councillors and lead members from the Board participating in a range of sessions.
- **Adoption and Special Guardianship:** On 15 November, Councillor Susie Charles attended the national Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board. Topics covered included kinship care, the work of virtual school heads, and improving the recruitment of adopters.
- **Child Tooth Decay:** Tooth decay remains the most common reason for hospital admission in children aged six to 10, with those from deprived areas most likely to suffer problems.

City Regions Board - Sir Richard Leese CBE

- **Local Growth:** IPPR North has been commissioned to deliver an inclusive growth engagement programme and report detailing practical, evidence-based proposals for councils, which the Board will oversee.
- **Urban Cost Pressures:** Members have agreed that the Board should undertake further work to produce more quantitative evidence on urban cost pressures. LGA officers have commissioned an external provider to support this work. As part of the initial scoping phase of this project a workshop with representatives from Core Cities, Key Cities, SIGOMA and London Councils was held in early December.
- **Placed Based Growth:** In November 2019, the LGA hosted a skills conference, Thriving economies: focusing on people, places and partnerships. The event was well attended by 60 delegates and received a high-level of positive feedback. The sessions covered issues important to the sector including building inclusive economies, supporting youth participation and the future of adult skills. We are now planning to host a series of events to explore the how the youth angle in more detail.

Community Wellbeing Board - Cllr Ian Hudspeth

- **National Children and Adult Services Conference 2019:** Nearly 850 delegates attended this year's NCAS Conference in Bournemouth in November, with councillors and lead members from the Board participating in a range of sessions. Despite the programme needing substantial change as a result of the general election, the event still provided opportunities to share local innovation, reflect on current issues in adult social care and to identify what the Board's priorities for working with the new government both immediately and in the long term could be.
- **Secretary of State for Health and Social Care:** In December, members were invited to hear Matt Hancock's four priorities for the new decade. He gave a strong commitment to making the 2020s the decade of prevention. He underlined the importance of people in the NHS and reiterated the Conservative manifesto commitments to money to recruit and retain more nurses.

- **The Queen's Speech:** We look forward to working with the Government to ensure that their change agenda for health, care and wellbeing is accompanied by adequate resources, a joined-up approach across the care and health workforce, and a whole system shift in focus to prevention and supporting wellbeing in order to reduce the need for more intensive or acute support.

Culture, Tourism and Sport Board - Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE

- **Board Priorities:** At the recent board meeting, members agreed the three main board priorities of: Understanding a tourism levy, Social prescribing, Investing in culture, tourism and sport.
- **Cultural Strategy in a box:** Board members received a presentation from our consultants, We Made That on Cultural Strategy in a box. The final document will be launched at the annual Culture and Tourism Conference on 2 & 3 March 2020.
- **Investment in sports facilities:** Board members received a presentation from Sports England on the need for investment in aging facilities across England.

Members made the following comments:

- Social prescribing is normally arts based but could be around physical activity, like sports clubs for children.
- Increasing funding for youth centres for allowing children to explore new hobbies.
- The challenges in the health sector are about cost drivers in the arts & mental health and there is need for evidence-based research to lobby for this.
- A Landlord licencing scheme with powers for authorities that could be granted with devolved powers is vital.

The Panel responded

- Social prescribing around physical and mental activity can have benefits to stop stress on NHS and local authority services.
- GPs have worked with art and culture providers, for patient referrals.
- Function budgeting around social prescribing has seen an increase in support for arts as a health intervention.
- The government are looking at private tenants rights, but work needs to be done on landlord licences.

6 Digest of the last meeting held on 31 October 2019

Members agreed the minutes of the previous meeting held on 31 October 2019.