

Safer & Stronger Communities Board – report from Councillor Ann Lucas OBE (Chair)

Rewiring Licensing

1. I wrote to Oliver Letwin MP, as Minister responsible for the Deregulation Bill, in support of a 'Right to Revoke' for councils. Conceived by Westminster Council, this power would allow councils to apply to Government to disallow regulations that are impeding local growth or acting as burden on the council without providing meaningful protection for consumers or businesses. It is proposed that this would also apply to regulations enforced by agencies of Government, such as the Health and Safety Executive, Food Standards Agency, and Gambling Commission. The LGA has supported the proposal under our Rewiring Licensing badge. Separately, Cllr Tony Page spoke about Rewiring Licensing, and the ways in which councils can use this to innovate within the current system, at the Institute of Licensing's National Training Event.

Betting Commission

2. The second meeting of the LGA's Betting Commission took place at the beginning of June. The meeting discussed the recent government announcement on proposed changes to planning use classes for betting shops and player protection measures, and heard a presentation from the Assistant General Secretary of Community, the trade union representing betting shop workers. The Commission also considered examples of successful local engagement between councils and betting shops, and the extent to which this might be replicable elsewhere. The LGA, ABB and a number of betting firm representatives will be focusing on this in advance of the next meeting of the Commission, which is expected to take place in September.

Deregulation Bill

3. Officers at The LGA have been working hard to highlight concern about the three taxi clauses in the Deregulation Bill, which would radically reduce councils' ability to vet drivers of vehicles marked as minicabs. MPs discussed the proposed changes to taxi licensing on 23 June and our concerns and briefing were quoted extensively.
4. The Independent On Sunday reported warnings that measures aimed at cutting bureaucracy could make it easier for sexual predators to pose as minicab drivers and quoted the Safer and Stronger Communities Licensing Champion Cllr Tony Page's comment that "Under the proposals, councils will also find it more difficult to revoke licenses from reckless drivers who repeatedly put passengers at risk by driving dangerously."
5. The LGA is continuing to work with councils, charities such as the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, and industry associations to make Government fully aware of the risks associated with these proposals. Our position is supported by 19 Police and Crime Commissioners who have publicly opposed the measures.

Ending gang and youth violence

6. The Board's Vice-Chair, Cllr Joanna Spicer, chaired the joint conference the LGA hosted with the Home Office to highlight good practice from the 33 priority areas on tackling gang and serious youth violence. Delegates heard about the successes of the London Borough of Hackney's integrated gangs unit, the role of health in treating violence as a public health issue, from the Early Intervention Foundation on early intervention and youth violence prevention, and safeguarding girls at risk of gang related violence. The Home Secretary, the Rt. Hon. Theresa May MP and the Crime Prevention Minister, Norman Baker MP also addressed the conference.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

7. Lynne Featherstone MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for International Development who leads for that department on eliminating violence against women and girls and has a cross-government role on ending female genital mutilation (FGM) met the Board's Deputy Chair, Cllr Lisa Brett, who also chairs the Board's working group on FGM. Also at the meeting were the President and Vice-President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services and Isabelle Trowler, the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families. The meeting discussed how government could assist local authorities in identifying girls at risk of FGM and then take action to safeguard them. Cllr Brett used the meeting to highlight the LGA's proposed amendment to the Serious Crime Bill making it an offence to promote or encourage the practice of FGM. There was also a discussion about what could be done to raise awareness of the Girl Summit 2014 being held in July to mobilise efforts to end FGM and child, early and forced marriage.

Fire Peer Challenge

8. Cllr Kay Hammond (Chairman of the FSMC) chaired the first fire peer challenge review working group on the 17 June. The peer challenge programme have been very successful with all fire and rescue authorities fully engaged. The cross party review working group will consider the strengths, review the areas for improvement of the current peer challenge process for the fire sector and how best to incorporate the findings of the recent evaluation of the programme by Cardiff university and will report back to FSMC in December 2014.

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