

## Note of last Safer & Stronger Communities Board meeting

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**Title:** Safer & Stronger Communities Board  
**Date:** Monday 16 March 2020  
**Venue:** Victoria Room, 8th Floor, 18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

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### Attendance

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

### Item Decisions and actions

#### 1 Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Cllr Katrina Wood, Cllr Mohan Iyengar, Cllr Richard Auger, Cllr Tim Roca and Cllr James Gartside.

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 2 Notes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2020 were agreed.

#### 3 British Red Cross and National Emergencies Trust: building community resilience and working with the voluntary sector

The Chair welcomed Anna Garrod and Anna Lewis from the British Red Cross (BRC) to the meeting and asked them to update the Board on their work.

Anna said that with the Covid-19 crisis escalating, now was a very opportune time for her to be speaking to the Board about the BRC's work.

Anna explained that the BRC's role was to offer practical and emotional support to communities in a crisis situation including people, equipment, space and resources. She said that BRC responded to a crisis every four hours across the UK and explained how BRC and the wider Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) worked with statutory agencies through Local Resilience Forums (LRF).

Anna then went on to talk about the report 'People Power in Emergencies' that BRC published in late 2019 calling for better collaboration between LRFs and the VCS. She gave several examples from the report of where joined up working was not as effective as it could be including the fact that just 30 per cent of local resilience plans defined vulnerable people. She added that short term needs were often prioritised over longer term

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support in plans.

Anna said that they were calling for the role of the VCS to be enshrined within civil contingencies legislation, and for more of a focus on human-centred guidance for those involved in responding to emergencies.

Anna then went on to talk about the new VCS Emergencies Partnership, chaired by BRC, which had been set up to address some of the criticism set out in a Charities Commission report on crisis responses. In particular, this called for better co-ordination of national fundraising and supporting learning from national emergencies during and after the recovery phase.

Following Anna's presentation, Members raised the following points and questions:

- Surprise was expressed at the 30 per cent figure of LRFs that defined vulnerability. Were any tools available to help them identify vulnerable groups? Anna said that they could talk to LRF chairs to see how guidance could best be circulated to facilitate this.
- Where did Maslow's hierarchy of needs fit into BRCs work? Anna said that these came before anything else; in a response situation they always ensured that people had basic necessities such as shelter, food and water.
- Did the Councils for Voluntary Services work with BRC? Anna said that they were part of the VCS Emergencies Partnership but she would go back and check just how involved they were.
- It was suggested that the response to Covid-19 would be seriously hampered by the necessity to practice social distancing and to keep away from vulnerable people. Anna said that they were looking at this and keeping it under review but social distancing didn't mean no social or other contact.
- It was stated that greater clarification of the role of councillors as community leaders in crisis situations would be helpful.
- Was the LGA involved in the new Emergencies Partnership? Anna said that they weren't at this stage but it would be helpful to have them around the table.

The Chair thanked Anna for her presentation and for answering members' questions.

The Chair then asked John Herriman from the National Emergencies Trust (NET) to give his presentation.

John explained that the NET had been set up in November 2019 in response to the Charities Commission recommendation that coordination of national appeals, fundraising and distribution needed to be improved following emergency incidents. He said that it was modelled on the Disasters and Emergencies Committee but would be for national incidents only.

John talked about the governance of the NET and that, although it launched in England, they were also able to operate in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

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John explained NET activation criteria for launching an appeal - sufficient scale and urgency; unmet need; public support; and whether it felt like the 'right thing to do'. He then described the operating model and emergency response process they had established in the event of having to act in a crisis situation.

Finally, John said that NET were beginning to think about how an appeal for the Covid-19 situation might work and explained the key roles of the UK Community Foundations Network and Local Resilience Forums. He said that the role of local voluntary groups in identifying the most vulnerable people was also crucial and that NET would act as an enabler to get funding to those organisations.

Following John's presentation, Members raised the following points and questions:

- Making best use of the large number of willing volunteers that were coming forward was considered to be a challenge.
- Support needed to be provided to those who were supporting the emergency relief effort. It was considered vital that these people remained fit and healthy.
- Providing support to non-statutory agencies on the ground was considered to be key to an effective response to the crisis. Where unmet need was identified it was necessary to ensure help and resources got to the right place.
- Following the advice of experts and sticking to it was the only way to effectively tackle the crisis. If people didn't follow advice, the strategy would inevitably fail. Therefore, there needed to be strong leadership.
- The economic damage caused by the Coronavirus crisis could impact on the ability of NET to raise money. John agreed that people's ability to support an appeal may reduce over time, in which case the Government would have to step in to support the community and voluntary sector in order to take pressure off the NHS and social care providers.

The Chair thanked John for his presentation.

### **Decision**

The Board noted the report and presentations.

#### **4 Maritime and Coastguard Agency proposals on responsibilities for beach safety and update from the National Water Safety Forum**

The Chair welcomed David Walker, Head of leisure safety policy at the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) and Dominic Watkins from DWF Law LLP to the meeting.

David gave Board members an update on the work of the National Water Safety Forum (NWSF). He explained that the Forum was a network of over 100 expert members whose goal was to prevent accidental drowning. The Forum's UK Drowning Prevention Strategy 2016-26 had a goal of

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reducing accidental fatalities by 50 per cent by 2026 and reducing risks amongst key groups and communities. He said that in 2018 there were 263 accidental deaths in water and 220 suicides and added that the trend in accidental deaths was steadily decreasing whereas suicides were on the increase.

David then explained how the Forum was intending to align their activities and work with the LGA to try and reduce the number of deaths in local areas. This included:

- Coordinating a response to the Camber Sands tragedy
- Using a new national shared incident system
- Creating a single national set of water safety messages
- Increasing focus on suicide prevention plans
- Providing support for local authorities and partnerships to introduce a risk-based water safety strategy.
- Disseminating best practice through the LGA's water safety toolkit.

Dominic Watkins introduced his review of legal responsibilities for water safety, a piece of work that he was commissioned to do by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) following the inquest into the deaths at Camber Sands in 2016.

The intention of the review was to provide clarity on who has legal responsibility for ensuring water safety on our coastline. As part of the review Dominic looked at existing legislation and spoke to key stakeholders including the RNLI, the MCA, the LGA, RoSPA, various coastal local authorities and members of the NWSF.

Whilst the findings of the review have not been published, Dominic outlined some of the key recommendations. Including that; in the short term guidance for managing beach safety should be updated and consolidated; in the medium term that a new legal duty should be created to ensure beach safety and duties of the HM Coastguard be and; consideration to be given to centralisation of funding and/or delivery of beach lifeguarding duty.

Dominic said that in his view, rather than just clarifying existing guidance or extending local authority by-laws and existing legislation, the most effective way of improving beach safety would be to introduce a specific piece of new legislation. He then went on to describe what this could look like and stressed that it should be risk-based and not create disproportionate or unsustainable duties on authorities.

Following David and Dominic's presentations, members raised the following points:

- Where did tidal estuaries, with scheduled main rivers, fit into this? Dominic said that the same issues applied as to beaches but that this was outside the scope of his review.
- It was suggested that there needed to be a two-pronged approach incorporating risk assessment and prevention, rather than just implementing reactive measures in the aftermath of serious incidents. In this context it was questioned how best to get local authority buy-in to the process.

- Concern was raised about introducing new legislation which could result in a new claims culture and undermine individual social responsibility.

The Chair thanked David and Dominic for their presentations.

### **Decision**

Board members noted the report and presentations.

## **5 COVID-19**

The Chair asked Mark Norris to introduce the Covid-19 update and asked Board members to focus on how the LGA could help and what they could be doing as community leaders.

Mark updated members on the latest infection figures and said that they were expecting a 40 per cent daily increase in cases over the next few weeks which would inevitably lead to a significant increase in hospitalisations.

Mark explained that the Government's focus was now on supporting the most vulnerable members of society – i.e. those aged over 70 and with underlying health conditions. He said that the LGA was now working with Government, councils and the community and voluntary sector to ensure that these vulnerable people could be supported in terms of food, shelter, medicines and mental well-being for potentially a period of 3-4 months.

Mark said that the LGA was keeping a log of issues raised by local authorities. Many councils were concerned about the extra financial resources they were going to need to support vulnerable residents through the crisis. He said that the Government had made £5 billion available to the NHS and other services in the first instance but they had also made it clear that more would be made available to councils as and when needed.

Mark said that they were in regular contact with Ministers and there was a council leaders' call with the Secretary of State following this meeting, in addition to a call with the Prime Minister later in the week.

Mark finished by saying that if members had any issues or questions around Covid-19 to contact him or Ellie Greenwood in the first instance. He added that the LGA was currently re-prioritising its workstreams in the light of Covid-19 and that some areas of work would now unfortunately be receiving less attention, particularly if staff became ill and had to self-isolate.

Following Mark's introduction, members raised the following points:

- Would LGA Board meetings still be going ahead? Mark said that this was still to be determined but it was likely that they would need to either be postponed or held remotely for a period of time.
- What could be done to tackle fake news around Covid-19 on social media?

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- A significant number of residents couldn't read English – how would information be relayed to them?
- How could people, who might be tempted to visit elderly relatives during the lockdown, be prevented from doing so?
- Councils should look at best practice from community / mutual aid groups and how councils interact with them.
- This should not be turned into a political issue. Councils should share data and information with elected members from all parties.
- There would be a need to relax planning rules in terms of the statutory time limits otherwise councils could be open to appeals from developers for non-determination.
- The issue of older and vulnerable people being scammed by people offering assistance was raised and what local authorities could do to stop it.
- Local authorities needed to get support in place for businesses who would be struggling in the current situation.
- The issue of continuing to uphold local democracy was raised. It was likely that many elected members would have to self-isolate or may catch the virus itself. This in turn might leave vacancies in wards and put additional pressure on those members who remained fit and healthy.
- The importance and responsibility of elected members providing authentic information to residents was emphasised. It was suggested that the LGA cascade daily briefings to all councillors with the latest information, so that all councillors are sighted on the current position.
- Members suggested that the above 70 age cut off was too simplistic as some over 70s were in good health and less vulnerable than many under 70s.
- There needed to be more clarity from Government and the LGA on the specific roles of councils and councillors during the pandemic. It was suggested that some councils and other organisations were not following advice and were going off on a tangent. For example, some councils were cancelling events, ward surgeries etc. whilst others were still going ahead.

Ellie noted that it had been agreed that the LGA would develop specific guidance for councillors on their role in responding to the Covid-19 emergency. Mark thanked members for their contributions and said that he would add their points to the issues log.

### **Decision**

Board members noted the update.

## **6 Building safety update**

The Chair asked Mark Norris to introduce the update.

Mark said that since the report had been written, the Chancellor had announced an additional £1 billion for the remediation of flammable

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cladding and to help local authorities collect data on buildings in their area. Mark said that civil servants were currently drawing up the detail but that the distribution of the money was likely to be modelled on the existing ACM cladding fund.

In relation to the data collection exercise, Mark said that returns were currently running at around 30 per cent but there was likely to be an extension for councils with large numbers of buildings in their areas.

Mark informed members that the Government was keen for the Joint Inspection Team to ramp up its work but this would need to be reviewed in the light of Covid-19.

Finally, Mark said that the Fire Safety Bill was due to be laid before Parliament later in March but that this may also need to be reviewed.

Members expressed concern that the outsourcing of the building control function by councils had undermined consistency in standards and that councils no longer had control of the building safety process. Mark said that a key part of the new Building Safety Bill would be the establishment of a new regulator which would provide oversight of issues such as building control.

### **Decision**

Board members noted the update.

## **7 Update Paper**

The Chair asked Mark to introduce the update.

Mark said that, in view of the time, he would just take questions.

- Members thanked Rachel Phelps and the team for delivering an excellent knife-crime conference and also Ellie Greenwood and Rebecca Johnson for the Licensing Leadership Essentials course.
- The Board's champion for tackling modern slavery, Councillor Alan Rhodes, said that he was due to meet with the Commissioner, Dame Sara Thornton, following the Board meeting.
- The Chair and other members expressed concern that the Serious Violence Task Force, chaired by the Home Secretary, hadn't met for 14 months.
- The Anti-Social Behaviour Awareness Week at the end of March was flagged up to members.

### **Decision**

Board members noted the update.

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**Appendix A -Attendance**

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chair	Cllr Simon Blackburn	Blackpool Council
Vice-Chairman		
Deputy-chair	Cllr Bridget Smith Cllr Hannah Dalton	South Cambridgeshire District Council Epsom and Ewell Borough Council
Members	Cllr Eric Allen Cllr Andrew Joy Cllr John Pennington Cllr Dave Stewart Cllr Lois Samuel Cllr Kate Haigh Cllr Alan Rhodes Cllr Jim Beall Cllr James Dawson Cllr Farah Hussain Cllr Johnson Situ Cllr Jeremy Hilton Cllr Philip Evans JP	London Borough of Sutton Hampshire County Council Bradford Metropolitan District Council Isle of Wight Council West Devon Borough Council Gloucester City Council Nottinghamshire County Council Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Erewash Borough Council Redbridge London Borough Council Southwark Council Gloucestershire County Council Conwy County Borough Council
Apologies from full Board members	Cllr Katrina Wood Cllr Mohan Iyengar	Wycombe District Council Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council
In Attendance	Anna Garrod Anna Lewis David Walker Dominic Watkins John Herriman	British Red Cross British Red Cross RoSPA DWF Law LLP National Emergencies Trust