

Safer and Stronger Communities Board: Review of the Year

Background

1. The Business Plan 2013/14 set out a number of priorities for the Safer and Stronger Communities Board including, supporting businesses by reducing unnecessary red tape and regulatory burden at the local level as well as by fighting crime, and by improving the ability of fire and rescue authorities to protect people and places from harm; promoting community safety partnership working including with police and crime commissioners; and building the resilience of communities so they are able to thrive in the face of challenging economic conditions.
2. The Board has also had to respond to unanticipated events the year. For example LGA supported councils during the flooding crisis, the biggest such event to hit the UK in more than 300 years. In addition, the LGA has helped support local authorities tackle ongoing concerns with betting shops and explored further the role that councils and their regulatory functions have in supporting local businesses.
3. This year has also seen a change in the chairmanship of the Board. Mehboob Khan, who chaired the Board for three, years stood down in February. At its meeting earlier this month the Board expressed its thanks for his work on behalf of the Board and the LGA during that time.

Achievements

Regulatory Work

4. We set up a taskforce to look at the clustering of betting shops, as well as the harm caused by fixed odds betting terminals. This has brought together council representatives and government officials with the leading high street betting shop firms and industry bodies for the first time.
5. We worked closely on the Deregulation Bill currently going through Parliament, which aims to free businesses and councils from unnecessary and unwanted red tape.
6. We assisted councils in implementing the Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013 by 1 October 2013. This included publishing guides to the application process and enforcement, publishing template application forms and licences, speaking at conferences and answering questions from officers responsible for the licensing process. Councils have issued over 6,000 licences to date.
7. We launched Open for Business: Vision for local regulation' which aims to recognise and build on the contribution local trading standards, environmental health and licensing teams can make to economic growth and job creation.
8. We developed well received proposals for comprehensive reform of local authority licensing frameworks, and secured government funding for councils to pilot the proposals.

9. We successfully lobbied for the Government to amend the Draft Consumer Rights Bill to ensure councils can continue to act on intelligence and target high-risk businesses through unannounced visits.
10. We provided a number of masterclasses for councillors on licensing committees as well as developing an online module on licensing.

Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women and Girls

11. We established a cross-Board working group to look at the role councils can play in tackling female genital mutilation (FGM), which has heard evidence from a range of councils and charitable organisations involved in this field.
12. We participated in a range of national panels including the Home Office's national group on preventing the sexual exploitation of children and vulnerable people, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) reference group on their review of the police response to domestic violence and the Home Office's panel on improving the commissioning of domestic abuse services.

Fire and Rescue Services

13. We successfully ran a number of Fire Leadership Essential programmes across the country, involving Chairs and senior members of local fire and rescue authorities.
14. We established an online resource for councils to use to keep up to date with the latest developments on flooding. We also supported and kept in contact with local authorities affected by the flooding crisis and participated in the national recovery groups convened by the government.

Police and Crime

15. We gave oral evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee's Inquiry on Police and Crime Commissioners, setting out a range of recommendations for strengthening the ability of Police and Crime Panels to hold Police and Crime Commissioners to account. The Committee adopted many of these recommendations in their final report, including the suggestion that PCCs should have to publish a forward plan of key decisions in the same way councils do.
16. We persuaded the government to amend the injunction provisions in the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill to give councils greater powers to tackle anti-social tenants in private rented accommodation, which was one of our key requests in the evidence we gave to the Bill Committee.
17. We established the LGA and Association of Police Crime Commissioners joint strategic partnership board, which has discussed a range of issues including domestic violence.
18. We presented key evidence at a number of parliamentary Select Committees and public bill committees where Board members represented the LGA, including the Justice Select Committee's inquiry into the co-ordination of crime reduction policies across Whitehall and the potential impact of the government's Transforming Rehabilitation agenda on reducing re-offending, as well as participating in the Home Office's expert panel on new psychoactive substances.

Programme of work 2014/15

19. Building on these achievements the Board agreed a number of overarching priorities which form part of the LGA Business Plan for 2014/15:
 - 19.1. Councils work with businesses to determine the right level of risk and regulation for a local area balancing community protection with economic growth.
 - 19.2. Councils and fire and rescue authorities protect people and places from harm, providing the safe environment in which businesses and communities can thrive.
 - 19.3. Councils work effectively with partners to deliver safe and cohesive communities.
20. As well as completing the work started in 13/14, Members of the Board have given a steer on the following broad priorities for 14/15: championing the work of councils in tackling serious and organised crime and crimes against vulnerable people (including domestic abuse, FGM, trafficking, working with the children and Young People's board on child sexual exploitation); continuing to work on the reform of policing and the blue light services; and responding to civil contingency situations. There are some important new issues which Members will want to discuss such as cohesion and values debates (as a result of events in Birmingham schools) and Prevent. We will submit detailed proposals for consideration at the September Board meeting.
21. This provides significant scope for the Safer and Stronger Communities Board to identify innovative projects or campaigns to be delivered over the next year, particularly in the run up to a General Election. **Members will be asked to discuss the priorities and propose 2 or 3 innovative projects or campaigns they consider would best support councils in the coming year.**

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