

17 September 2020

## Update Paper

### Purpose of report

For information.

### Summary

The report outlines issues of interest to the Board not covered under the other items on the agenda.

### Recommendation

That members of the Board note and comment on the update.

### Action

Officers to action any matters arising from the discussion as appropriate.

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## Update Paper

### Domestic abuse

*Government's response to Home Affairs report on domestic abuse*

1. On 27 July 2020, the Government published its [response](#) to the Home Affairs Committee's report on Home Office preparedness for Covid-19: Domestic abuse and risks of harm. Following our oral evidence to the committee, the Government's response recognised the important work of the LGA in helping ensure that social workers continue to work with vulnerable children at this time. We will continue to make the case for investment in these important services as part of our Spending Review submission to the Treasury.

*Domestic abuse bill*

2. In July 2020, the [Domestic Abuse Bill](#) completed its passage through the House of Commons and had its First Reading in the House of Lords. During the House of Commons stages, several Government amendments were made, including new clauses on: children in the definition of victims of domestic abuse; homelessness; special measures in family and civil proceedings; prohibiting cross-examination in person in certain circumstances; and banning the 'rough sex' defence. The Bill will continue to its Second Reading in the House of Lords (date tbc).

*Advice line for employers*

3. This week, the charity Hestia [launched](#) a new advice line for businesses supporting employees experiencing or at risk of domestic abuse. Funded by the Home Office, the Everyone's Business Advice Line will be a point of contact for businesses, supporting them on how to approach disclosures of domestic abuse by their employees, particularly in light of Covid-19. They will also receive advice so that they can signpost staff to specialist domestic abuse services.

*MHCLG workshops on domestic abuse accommodation support and services*

4. The LGA also jointly hosted a series of workshops with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to discuss the new statutory duty the Domestic Abuse Bill proposes to place on Tier 1 local authorities to commission domestic abuse accommodation support and services. Officers working in housing, domestic abuse services and community safety joined the workshop sessions to share their views on the duty and discussed what the challenges and opportunities would be locally. MHCLG will be submitting their bid for funding of the duty as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review submission.

### Violence Reduction Units

5. In August, the Government announced that [Violence Reduction Units \(VRUs\) will be distributing a further £2.9 million](#) to hundreds of frontline charities working on violence prevention projects, designed to help young people at risk of being drawn into a life of

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violent crime. This follows the announcement in 2019 that 18 Police and Crime Commissioners in the areas worst affected by violent crime would share £35 million to establish VRUs, with a further £35 million provided for 2020/21. This new money is welcome, and it will be important for the VRUs to work closely with councils' community safety teams on local priorities that promote early intervention and prevention.

### **Tackling serious violence**

6. The Youth Violence Commission published its [final report](#), which recognised the devastating effect that serious violence has on young people and emphasised the importance of investing in youth services and early intervention. In our [media response](#), the LGA outlined that a public health approach is needed to tackle serious violent crime with the input of a range of partners, including those in the health and education sectors, as opposed to relying solely on a criminal justice strategy.
7. In addition to this, the LGA also published a [case studies document](#) on 'Taking a public health approach to tackling serious violent crime'. The document contains case studies on councils working in partnership to deliver early interventions which help to prevent children and young people from becoming involved in serious violent crime.

### **County lines and child criminal exploitation**

8. In September, Cllr Nesil Caliskan chaired an LGA webinar on tackling county lines and child criminal exploitation. The [webinar](#) (attended by over 280 delegates) was an opportunity to share best practice on how councils, working with their partners, are tackling county lines activity and child criminal exploitation. The session also reflected on the COVID-19 pandemic and what effect there has been on the drug supply chain. Our speakers included Leigh Middleton, Chief Executive Officer, National Youth Agency (NYA), Cllr Joe Calouri, London Borough of Islington Council, Jacqueline Nolan, SCP/SAB Business Manager, South Tyneside Council and Arnold Yousaf, St Giles Trust.

### **Safer Streets Fund to tackle burglary and theft**

9. The Home Office has announced that 35 Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) are to receive funding from a £25 million scheme to crack down on burglary and theft in crime hotspots. The money will go towards measures proven to cut crime. These include simple changes to the design of streets such as locked gates around alleyways, increased street-lighting and the installation of CCTV. Details of the successful bids can be found on the Government's website.

### **Community Trigger and Anti-Social Behaviour**

10. In July 2020, the Home Office refreshed its guidance webpage on the community trigger process (also known as the ASB Case Review). The guidance now includes a useful example of how the community trigger process works and how victims of persistent anti-

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social behaviour have the right to request a case review where a local threshold is met. Further information is [available here](#).

11. The LGA will be hosting a [webinar](#) on Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour on Tuesday 29 September 2020.

### **Police and Crime Commissioners / Panels**

12. The LGA submitted a response to the Home Office's review of Police and Crime Commissioners, which was announced in July. The review will run in two parts. Part one, which is due to report to the Home Secretary in October, is focusing on improvements that could be made to the current PCC model in advance of the rescheduled PCC elections in May 2021. This includes considering the existing accountability mechanisms, including the role of Police and Crime Panels, as well as links with the Mayoral model and the links with fire governance. Part two of the review, which will take place after the elections, will look at the Government's ambitions for expanding the role of PCCs in criminal justice and reducing reoffending.
13. The LGA will be holding a workshop session on Police and Crime Panels on Tuesday 22 September, 10:30am until 12:30pm. Speakers at this webinar include the Home Office, who will give an update on the current PCC review, the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, and National Association of PFCPs. If you would like to attend, please email Jordanne McKenzie-Blythe ([Jordanne.McKenzie-Blythe@local.gov.uk](mailto:Jordanne.McKenzie-Blythe@local.gov.uk)) who will circulate joining instructions nearer the time.

### **Cohesion, counter-extremism, and Prevent work**

14. We remain concerned about the impact of the pandemic on community cohesion and extremism. Several areas have reported significant increases in hate incidents locally, and narratives continue to circulate blaming particular communities for the further spread of COVID-19 (especially in areas under local lockdown). Black Lives Matter protests and counter protests, and the recent increased focus on migrant crossings have added further to concerns about rising community tensions in many areas. We anticipate that extremists will look to exploit the post-COVID landscape to further divisive narratives, particularly in the context of economic decline and rising inequality (or perceptions of these); we are working to support councils to respond effectively and build resilience to these evolving issues.
15. We have continued with our series of online sessions for councils to explore the cohesion, extremism and security challenges and threats that have emerged over recent months. This has included organising a webinar with the [Special Interest Group on Countering Extremism](#) (SIGCE) on online extremism in July, holding a number of roundtables with councils to discuss new and emerging issues and how to respond to these, developing

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and delivering bespoke support to councils facing specific current challenges, and reconvening the SIGCE's working groups. The [SIGCE's Knowledge Hub](#) also continues to be a well-used forum for councils to engage with one another and share ideas and resources.

16. In June we published a [guidance note for councils receiving calls for changes to the names of estates and streets and the removal of statues](#) (alongside objections to such proposals). We also recently published joint LGA/Centre for Public Scrutiny [guidance for scrutiny practitioners on counter-extremism and the Prevent duty](#).

### **Competition and Market Authority investigation into the funerals market**

17. In March 2019, the CMA began an investigation in to concerns it had identified about the funeral services sector, following a market study into the effectiveness of competition in the sector. The investigation identified a number of issues around choice, transparency and pricing and the CMA did consult on some proposed remedies to those issues. However, the CMA have recognised that COVID-19 has had unforeseen impacts on the funerals sector and on the investigation. You can read the [CMA's statement](#) on the conclusion of the investigation online.

### **The National FGM Centre**

18. The National FGM Centre was partially grant-funded by the Department of Education since its establishment in 2016. Despite a request for continued funding to support for the Centre, the grant period ended in June 2020. The Centre and Barnardo's are now working to identify other sources of funding and more sustainable ways of working, so that the Centre can continue to work towards its aims to end FGM by 2030, to protect those at risk from harmful practices, and to support those who have already been affected.

### **Law Commission consultation on weddings**

19. On the 3 September, the Law Commission published a [consultation on weddings](#). The Commission believes that the current law is not fit for purpose and does not meet the needs of many couples; they propose that couples should have a greater choice over their wedding venue, including outdoor locations, and that couples should have more freedom to decide the form of the ceremony. The Commission suggests that updating marriage law would simplify the process by removing unnecessary red tape and make it easier for couples to have a wedding that is meaningful to them; they also propose that flexibility on the location of a wedding will reduce the cost associated with weddings. These changes would bring England more in line the approach to weddings taking in other places, including Scotland, Ireland and the Channel Islands. The proposals will affect local authority registrar services and so the LGA will be submitting a response to the consultation, which closes on 3 December 2020.

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### **Her Majesties Inspectorate for Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services' (HMICFRS) COVID-19 inspection**

20. The second cycle of national inspections of fire and rescue services was halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as it was impossible to carry out inspections in the usual manner. HMICFRS has now been commissioned by the Home Secretary to conduct a thematic inspection of FRS' around their response to COVID-19. The LGA will feed in to this inspection and respond to the final report, which will be published in January 2021.

### **Comprehensive Spending Review fire submission**

21. The LGA and National Fire Chiefs Councils have been working together on a joint submission into the Home Office for the Spending Review. The final submission went into the Home Office in July and provides the Home Office with a strong evidence base with which to make their arguments to the Treasury to support fire budgets through the next spending review period.

### **Statutory Standards for taxi licensing**

22. Over the summer the Department for Transport [published new statutory standards on taxi and private hire vehicle licensing](#). The new standards have been developed to support councils to safeguard vulnerable passengers and included a number of recommendations that the LGA has pushed for including enhanced driver safety checks and safeguarding and disability awareness training. However, [we have also made the point](#) that the best way to improve passenger safety is to reform outdated legislation. We will be updating our [Cllr Handbook](#) to reflect these new standards shortly.

### **Sexual Entertainment Venues**

23. The Chairman of Cheltenham Council's Licensing Committee wrote to the LGA requesting that the SSCB consider a government review of Sexual Entertainment Venue (SEV) licensing legislation. The regulation of SEVs has not been explored by the SSCB previously and Members are asked for views on whether this is an area that causes issues in their areas, and if so whether it is an issue that the LGA should explore further.

### **Spending Review Regulatory Services Submission**

24. The LGA is developing a joint submission with the Chartered Institutes of Trading Standards (CTSI) and Environmental Health (CIEH) ahead of Spending Review this autumn. The submission will focus on our call for the Spending Review to address the challenges faced by council trading standards and environmental health teams and provide the resources needed to maintain these vital public protection services over the next few years and beyond.

### **Food Standards Agency letter to councils on the impact of COVID-19**

25. The Food Standards Agency has written to councils asking them to complete a short survey on the impact of the pandemic on the delivery of official food controls. The FSA has

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previously agreed to normal requirements being relaxed during the height of the pandemic, with regulatory capacity diverted to COVID related work. The survey will help inform the FSA about what is feasible after the current relaxation comes to an end in September.

### **EU transition**

26. Officers have been working with the LGA's policy leads on EU transition and Government officials to highlight the impact on council regulatory services of changes to border controls following the end of the transition period in December. A phased approach to introducing checks on EU goods currently not subject to them will see port health authorities required to check certain goods and imports from Europe with effect from July. Defra have opened up a fund for Port Health Authorities to bid into to recruit additional capacity to support these checks, but there are concerns about the ability to recruit new staff. It is also not yet clear where the responsibility for these checks will rest in areas where inland ports are required to be built to accommodate these checks away from ports.
  
27. There are also likely to be implications for councils with businesses newly requiring an Export Health Certificate to export fish products to the EU, and additional checks on some business premises required to demonstrate compliance with standards. These issues are being considered in conjunction with our work with the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health on EH capacity.