

14 January 2021

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.

Contact officer: Mark Norris
Position: Principal Policy Adviser
Phone no: 020 7664 3241
Email: mark.norris@local.gov.uk

14 January 2021

Update Paper

Counter Extremism

1. In November, Cllr Caliskan wrote to Baroness Williams, Lords Minister with responsibility for counter-extremism, setting out some of the extremism challenges for councils that have emerged over recent months; expressing concern about how these might continue to evolve; and urging Government both to continue to take seriously extremism threats and retain investment in measures to build resilience and prevent division and polarisation from taking hold. The letter was co-signed by co-Chairs of the Special Interest Group on Countering Extremism (SIGCE), Cllr Hazel Simmons (Leader, Luton Council) and Cllr Debra Coupar, Deputy Leader, Leeds City Council).
2. In December we submitted our response to the Law Commission's consultation on hate crime legislation. In our response we:
 - 2.1 welcomed the review and the renewed focus on the seriousness of hate crime and its impact on individuals and on local communities, including on councillors and officers who have themselves been targets for abuse.
 - 2.2 set out councils' concerns about levels of hate crime in their areas over recent months in particular, including a resurgence of racial and racialised narratives; and community frustration, both when harmful hate-fuelled activity takes place but which does not cross a legal threshold, and with failures to enforce existing laws.
 - 2.3 welcomed efforts to amend hate crime legislation to remove discrepancies across the current protected characteristics, and supported proposals for misogyny to be recognised under the legislation.
 - 2.4 emphasised how legislative approaches to tackling hate crime must be seen alongside wider initiatives to prevent hate incidents and counter extremism, with continued focus and investment in this broader space.
3. We are developing a virtual training course for council officers on effective engagement and messaging to counter extremism, which will be delivered over the next couple of months. Officers can find out more and sign up for the sessions via rachel.duke@local.gov.uk

COVID-19 compliance and enforcement

4. We have supported the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to [publish a good practice framework](#) which highlights examples of the work councils have been doing around compliance and enforcement of COVID

14 January 2021

regulations. In December we held a webinar to share good practice in this area which was attended by more than 400 council officers and have a further session planned on 13 January.

5. Additionally, we have pulled together some 'lessons learnt' on the [Knowledge Hub](#) based on feedback from officers of early experiences and emerging compliance issues with the new tiered regulations, in particular challenges around substantial meal requirements and the ban on indoor household mixing in Tier 2 areas.
6. MHCLG has recently set up a cross-governmental Regulatory Services Task and Finish Group to consider the wide ranging and competing asks on councils' regulatory services relating to COVID, EU transition as well as 'business as usual' activity. Two council chief executives as well as the LGA sit on the group. The aim of the task and finish group is to agree on prioritisation of various activities and communicate a clear message to councils on what is critical and anything that can be deprioritised as a way to support local government to manage capacity. MHCLG intend to share this prioritisation work by writing out to councils in the next few weeks.

Online licensing applications

7. In December Cllr Nesil Caliskan wrote to Michael Gove MP as Minister for the Cabinet Office to raise the LGAs concerns about the potential retirement of online application forms hosted on gov.uk by March 2021. We understand that around 50 per cent of council licensing teams rely on gov.uk forms to facilitate online applications for licences under the Licensing Act and retirement of this platform without a viable replacement risks councils having to spend valuable time and resources creating their own online forms or reverting to paper based systems which is a step in the wrong direction. We have asked government not to retire the gov.uk service in March and instead work with councils to develop a replacement.

Statutory taxi and private hire vehicle (PHV) standards

8. Cllr Caliskan also wrote to Baroness Vere who is the responsible Minister for taxis at the Department for Transport. Baroness Vere is keen to see progress made by councils on the implementation of the statutory taxi and private hire vehicle (PHV) standards which were published by the DfT in July. Given the pressures on councils this year in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic it is likely that councils may not have made as much progress as they would have hoped and we have asked Baroness Vere to take this into account when asking councils to report on progress this month.

14 January 2021

Domestic Abuse

Domestic Abuse Bill

9. The Domestic Abuse Bill had its Second Reading in the House of Lords on 5 January 2021, and it will progress to Committee Stage in the coming weeks. In our [LGA briefing](#) ahead of the debate, we called for a coordinated and comprehensive approach to be taken across the whole of Government and through the Domestic Abuse Bill, rather than a piecemeal approach focusing on specific aspects of the response to domestic abuse.
10. The Bill proposes a new statutory duty on local authorities to deliver accommodation-based support to victims of domestic abuse (Tier 1 to deliver services, Tier 2 to collaborate). The Government has said it is committed to funding this type of support, as safe accommodation and support clearly plays a critical and necessary role in responding to domestic abuse.
11. The Spending Review announcement of £125 million funding to help enable local authorities to deliver the proposed new duty to support domestic abuse victims and their children in safe accommodation is welcome. We have asked for further detail on this funding as it is not yet clear how the figure has been calculated and whether it will meet the full costs of the new proposed duty.
12. In our LGA briefing, we outlined the new funding needs to fully account for any increases in demand for services, and any additional burdens identified by local needs assessments when the duty comes into force in April 2021. Children have been added into the statutory definition of domestic abuse, so it will be important to assess whether additional provision is required and therefore whether councils need additional funding to meet the new proposed duty.
13. Alongside the Bill's focus on crisis interventions and criminal justice, the LGA has highlighted that tackling domestic abuse requires a cross-government response incorporating health, housing and education. We have called for an equal focus on, and funding for, prevention and early intervention measures that aims to prevent domestic abuse happening in the first place.
14. During the debate, a number of Peers also echoed the LGA's calls for greater investment in perpetrator interventions and for the Government to introduce a National Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Strategy. We will continue to work with the Home Office on this important issue.

Response during COVID-19

15. The coronavirus outbreak has been a particularly worrying time for victims of domestic abuse. In particular, the social-distancing measures required have had and

14 January 2021

will continue to have a serious effect on domestic abuse victims by increasing exposure to those perpetrating the crime. It is vitally important this is recognised, and we do everything possible to help tackle domestic abuse.

16. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the LGA has [published](#) a resource guide for councils on tackling domestic abuse. This has been available since April 2020 and continues to be updated with relevant resources and information.
17. Last week, [Home Secretary Priti Patel wrote to the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and the Victims Commissioner](#) about the Government's response to COVID-19 and has reminded victims of domestic abuse that they do not have to observe lockdown restrictions if they need to leave home to seek refuge or help.
18. The Government's #YouAreNotAlone campaign raising public awareness of domestic abuse issues and signposting victims to sources of support, has been extended to cover the winter period. Government is also preparing to launch a codeword scheme in conjunction with retailers, as well as working with businesses to explore opportunities to further promote information on domestic abuse through their outlets and online services.
19. Around a third of £76 million in government funding allocated to charities supporting victims of domestic and sexual abuse, vulnerable children and their families and victims of modern slavery, has now been distributed to domestic abuse organisations. The LGA will continue to work closely with the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, the Government, councils and partners on tackling domestic abuse and providing support during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy – consultation

20. The Government is seeking views to help inform the development of the Government's next Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy. The consultation closes at 11:45pm on 19 February 2021. Further information is [available here](#). Please contact Rachel Phelps (Rachel.Phelps@local.gov.uk) if you would like to discuss the LGA's response in further detail.

Serious Violent Crime

21. A Policing and Crime Bill is expected to be introduced into Parliament at the start of 2021. One of the provisions in the Bill will be to introduce a [new duty](#) on relevant agencies and organisations to collaborate, where possible through existing partnership structures, to prevent and reduce serious violence. Following its passage through Parliament, the Government expects the duty will come into force no sooner than 2022.

14 January 2021

22. The new duty will require organisations to work together to plan, share data, intelligence and knowledge, to generate evidence-based analysis of the problem and solutions to prevent and reduce serious violence in local areas.
23. The duty holders will include the police, local authorities, youth offending teams, probation, fire and rescue, and health authorities. Local authority chief executives will be responsible for ensuring adequate representation to and participation with the local partnership.
24. Educational institutions and prisons/youth custodial establishments will be under a separate duty to co-operate with core duty holders. There will be a requirement for the partnership to consult with all such institutions in their area.
25. The Government also intends to amend the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to ensure that serious violence is an explicit priority for Community Safety Partnerships. The geographical scope of the proposed new duty is England and Wales, mirroring that of the Government's Serious Violence Strategy.
26. The new duty is intended to complement the current investment in Violence Reduction Units, in the 18 police force areas most affected by serious violence, by establishing a legal framework to support the successful delivery of this cross-sector approach, including through the extended set of partners on whom the duty will fall.
27. In our response to the new proposed statutory duty, we have outlined our support for a public health approach to tackling serious violent crime, which has become an increasing priority for councils. We have emphasised that early intervention and prevention needs to be central to this work, as opposed to relying solely on a criminal justice strategy. There should be input from a range of partners, including those in the health and education sectors.
28. Local areas need to have flexibility to tackle the types of serious violence they face, which will change from locality to locality and over time. In our [LGA response](#) to the Government's consultation, we outlined that a one-size-fits-all approach will not be effective and forcing local partners down one route risks disrupting existing successful partnerships.
29. We have also outlined our concerns that amending the Crime and Disorder Act will not create the required step-change to tackle serious violent crime, particularly if this is not supported with extra funding.
30. The Home Office has been invited to speak at our next LGA Safer and Stronger Communities Board meeting to outline the provisions in the forthcoming Bill. We will continue to work with the Government, particularly highlighting the need for long-term

14 January 2021

and consistent funding to prevent and effectively tackle serious violent crime. If you would like any further information, please contact Rachel Phelps (Rachel.Phelps@local.gov.uk)

Community Trigger

31. The LGA will be holding a [free webinar](#) on Thursday 28 January 2021 on the community trigger/ ASB case review process. The charity, ASB Help, will join the webinar and will be sharing some examples of best practice across local government. This is also a good opportunity to highlight the Home Office's Anti-Social Behaviour guidance, which highlights information about the community trigger should be provided on the websites of all the relevant bodies, signposting the public to the lead agency's website, a point of contact and the procedures for activating the process. For further information, please contact Rachel.Phelps@local.gov.uk

Safer Streets Fund 2021/22

32. The Government previously announced a £25 million '[Safer Streets Fund](#)' to help local areas crack down on burglary and theft in crime hotspots. On 17 December 2020, the Government has [confirmed](#) that an additional £20 million will be made available for a second round of the Safer Streets Fund (2021/22). Given the key role that councils have in supporting safer and stronger communities, we will be calling for the second round of safer streets funding to also be open to councils to bid directly into. We expect an update on this second round of funding shortly and continue to work the Home Office on this issue.