

14 January 2021

## Note of the last Safer & Stronger Communities Board

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Title: Safer & Stronger Communities Board  
Date and time: Thursday 12 November 2020  
Location: Videoconference via Zoom

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### Attendance

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

Item	Decisions and actions
<b>1</b>	<b>Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest</b>  The Chair welcomed members to the Safer and Stronger Communities Board meeting.  No apologies were received.  No declarations of interest were made.
<b>2</b>	<b>Notes of the previous meeting</b>  Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board agreed the notes of the last Board meeting, held on Thursday 17 September 2020.
<b>3</b>	<b>Business plan 2019-22 - 2020 review and update</b>  The Chair introduced the report and informed the Board that following a series of consultations and discussions, the LGA Board had approved a new 3-year business plan, built around the United Nations sustainable development goals and comprising: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• six policy priorities with supporting targets</li><li>• a Supporting Councils priority with associated improvement targets and</li><li>• the LGA's internal/operational plan.</li></ul> The business plan has been revised and updated to include – " <i>Narrowing inequalities and protecting communities</i> " – to reflect events over the past 8 months and the range of actions arising from them and will be published.  Following the discussion, no comments were made by the Board.  <b>Decision:</b> That the Safer and Stronger Communities Board note the 2020/21 update of the 3-year business plan as the basis for work programmes over the coming months.

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#### **4 Update on Maritime and Coastguard Agency Review of the Legal Responsibilities for Beach Safety**

The Chair introduced the report which provided an overview of the independent review into beach safety carried out for the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA). Key recommendations from the review and the potential impacts on local authorities include; legal duties, coast and lifeguarding, and broader engagement.

Following the discussion, Members made the following comments:

- More emphasis was needed around engaging and educating people about water safety. Before COVID some beaches had Beach Ambassadors who interacted with locals and visitors regarding water safety, which worked very well.
- Concerns around placing another extensive duty on local authorities, which will have an impact on costs and raises questions how this will be funded; there is also a grey area of privately owned beaches and foreshore, with fragmented ownership potentially making this very complex.
- Members welcomed the fact legislation around Coast guards is being looked at but felt the review had not considered search and rescue, which is no longer provided by the Royal Navy or Royal Air Force so is often privately operated.
- The National Coast Watch Institution which has not been mentioned in the report, has over 50 operational stations and carries out coast watch activities with trained volunteers.

Rebecca responded that the review is extensive, covering a wide depth of recommendations and impacts, but stressed that it is an independent review and not an MCA recommendation.

#### **Decision:**

Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board noted the report.

#### **Actions:**

- Officers to look into the National Coast Watch Institution
- Officers to review Cornwall feedback
- Officers to feed the Board's views into the consultation response.

#### **5 Law Commission Review of Weddings law**

Lucy Ellender, Senior Adviser, introduced the report which outlined proposals from the Law Commission to change the law governing weddings in England and Wales, and their potential impact on councils.

Lucy commented that the proposal has wide reaching implications for councils, especially for registration services who undertake civil preliminaries, conduct wedding ceremonies, and licence external venues for weddings.

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Lucy highlighted the following key changes in the proposals:

- The officiant of the wedding would be subject to regulation rather than the building in which the ceremony was conducted. The Government would also make a determination on allowing other groups or people to conduct legal wedding ceremonies, which can currently only be conducted by registrars and some religious groups.
- There would be significant changes to current approved venues regulation. At the moment councils issue licences to venues to allow them to hold wedding ceremonies (conducted by registrars). The new system would make it the responsibility of the officiant to check venue is safe and dignified with no licensing required by the local authority.
- There would be scope for voluntary pre-approval system for regular wedding venues which would be held by local authorities, with a fee set at a local level for inspecting the venues.
- A number of changes to fees; councils to have a fee set nationally in regulation for conducting a statutory wedding but there would be no cap on what independent officiants could charge.
- There could be changes to strengthen the civil preliminaries in advance of a wedding; at present it is an in-person interview with the couple, which would change to a two-step process; providing details remotely and an in-person interview. This would strengthen the role of registrar's role and assist in the detection of forced and sham marriages. There was a question on whether the current system on Anglican preliminaries should continue or if there should be universal civil preliminaries.

Lucy introduced Jane Parker, Head of Registrars Service and Lead Manager for Coroners Service at Suffolk County Council and Chair of the National Panel for Registration, to provide an officer perspective.

Jane stated that the National Panel recognised the need for reform of marriage laws, which date back to the Victorian era. In general, officers are not against the idea of universal civil preliminaries as there are inconsistencies in how marriages are performed. Conducting universal civil preliminaries for all marriages would incur extra costs to carry out appointments, this would need to be accompanied by an appropriate fee to cover the cost of undertaking this work. However, she noted that with the Commission keen to widen the possibility to allow marriages to take place in more locations, councils may lose current income from approving premises for weddings as it will be for the officiant to decide if a venue is "safe and dignified". There were concerns that the proposed fee structures did not reflect the full costs involved.

During the discussion of the proposals, Members made the following comments:

- Marriage law needs to be simple with a universal legal ceremony. This could then be followed by a celebration in line with the couple's wishes. It should not be governed by the state or for the state to determine what is dignified.
- The impact of the proposals on religious weddings was highlighted as a particular issue. It was noted that legal religious ceremonies would be able to be performed under the new officiant based scheme, with wider numbers of religious groups being able to perform legal ceremonies than are currently able.

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- There were concerns around what protections there would be for couples under the new proposals from venues that are operating outside of the law.
- Members felt that what made a venue “dignified” was subject to interpretation and a personal choice of how and where weddings take place.
- There is no mention of same sex marriage and if these can take place in religious places. The Terms of reference of the marriage law consultation state that the Law Commission will not consider the question of whether or not religious groups should be obliged to solemnize marriages of same sex couples. It will be for government to align the legal changes, and down to individual religious groups and trustees to allow same-sex marriage and civil partnership in their buildings.

The Chair thanked Jane for her comprehensive presentation.

**Decision:**

Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board considered the issues set out in the paper.

**Action:**

- Officers to produce a consultation response to capture points raised by members which will be shared with the whole Board.

## **6 Building Safety update**

Charles Loft, Senior Advisor, introduced the report which covers the work the LGA has continued with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the Home Office to support building safety reform and the remediation of dangerous buildings.

Charles highlighted the following key points from the update:

- The government has published data on waking watch costs, showing how alarm costs are almost always lower than waking watch costs.
- The Public Accounts Committee reported on the progress of remediation at the end of September; the Sunday Times had reported it will take almost 150 years to complete at the current rate and insurance costs are increasing significantly. The LGA’s response to the PAC report urged the Government to act on its recommendations without delay, especially action to address the chronic shortage of necessary skills.
- The LGA was expecting the Government to introduce a concessionary amendment to the Fire Safety Bill, in place of an amendment proposed by the LGA, which addresses the lack of qualified and insured risk assessors to carry out risk assessments.
- The Building Safety Bill has been subjected to pre-legislative scrutiny by the HCLG select committee; this was due to be completed by the end of September. A working group has been looking at charges and cost recovery under the Bill. There is concern that the shadow regulator has yet to emerge, so it may be some years before the building safety regulator is fully up and running. Officers agreed to produce a timeline on building safety work for the next meeting.

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Following the discussion, Members made the following comments:

- Concerns raised around whether any landlords, leaseholders, or residents are aware of the waking watch costs report. Charles responded that he would look into promoting this and is in the process of putting together top tips for councillors who are approached by residents who have this issue.
- There are unrealistic deadlines for freeholders around completing claims forms for building funds by 31 December based on contractors starting work by March, which will not happen. Charles responded the EWS1 form has failed to achieve what is set out to achieve and has had massive impact on homeowners but that he had heard that the government was trying to change the form.

**Decision:**

Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board noted the LGA's building safety related work.

**Action:**

- Officers to share a building safety timeline at the next meeting.

## **7 Update paper**

Mark Norris, Principal Policy Adviser, introduced the report which highlighted wider issues of interest to the Board and raised the following key points:

- The LGA with feedback from Lead Members has submitted a response to the Government's consultation on Serious Violence Reduction Orders (SVROs); a proposed new court order to target known knife and offensive weapon carriers, and there has been a consultation on capacity funding for domestic abuse to help councils prepare for domestic abuse accommodation support and services.
- The LGA has been working closely with the Special Interest Group on Countering Extremism (SIGCE), which seeks to provide support and share good practice in countering extremism across councils in England and Wales, which is no longer receiving funding from the government. The LGA is working towards ensuring support can continue in the absence of funding.
- The need for effective cyber security in local authorities has been increasing with potential vulnerabilities and as more people work from home. The LGA has been working closely through the Improvement Board to improve cyber security for local authorities, providing initial technical guidance for council IT colleagues containing important advice and actions to take.

Following the discussion, Members made the following comments:

- The need to address issues around disproportionality in the use of tools such as SVROs with an apparent increase in the use of stop and search among young black men during COVID: SVROs could exacerbate the issue. The Chair noted concern that searches could take place without any suspicion, recognising that certain parts of the community would be disproportionality affected and that this could have an impact on community cohesion.

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- Members supported adding sex or gender to the protected characteristics under hate crime legislation.
- Concern around Barnardo's putting the National FGM Centre into its BAME Centre of Expertise as this is any issue that can happen in any community and will lose sight of vulnerable young girls. Mark responded that the decision was a practical financial choice and Barnardo's would prefer having a specialist bespoke approach to tackling this issue but are restricted due to funding. Members also expressed concern about use of the term BAME and the way it fails to distinguish between diverse communities.

**Decision:**

Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board noted the update paper.

**Actions:**

- Officers to consider the scope for the SSCB/LGA to look at use of the term BAME.

## **8 COVID-19 Compliance and enforcement and wider update**

Ellie Greenwood, Senior Policy Adviser, introduced the report which covers the COVID-19 compliance and enforcement activity the team have been supporting since the previous Board meeting, and a presentation from Birmingham City Council's Interim Assistant Director of Regulation and Enforcement, Paul Lankester.

Paul Lankester introduced his presentation on Enforcement of Coronavirus regulations, which focused on implementing enforcement measures to curb high levels of COVID-19 cases in Birmingham.

Paul highlighted the following key points:

- Birmingham City Council (BCC) have used a mixture of education and enforcement; issuing warnings and fixed penalty notices.
- As part of the proportionality assessment, BCC defined its purpose;
  - To reduce the spread of Covid-19
  - To protect residents
  - To protect businesses from further lockdown
  - To reassure the public
- The council received the highest grant from the government enforcement fund, although this presented challenges as the funding is expected to be used within four months or returned. The council intends to spend the grant on the following:
  - Funding Covid Marshals
  - Supporting BIDs - to take on board Covid Marshal works.
  - Working with the city's Universities – putting together a scheme to help reduce infection spread and ensure compliance among university students.
  - A campaign on behalf of and working with faith groups and funeral directors to get greater compliance in relation to funerals and reduce spread.
  - Substituting expenditure on linked issues, such as tackling graffiti denoting COVID-19 as 'a government hoax'.

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Following the discussion, Members made the following comments:

- Marshals in London would be helpful around 'huddle points' such as train and tube stations but recruitment, community tension and lack of tools is a major concern.
- Avoiding confrontation is not doing the community any good as positive case numbers and deaths will increase. The Chair responded that within her own borough they have rolled out Community Champions to spread public health messages within their own communities.
- Educating communities can only go so far when certain groups of people break the rules and enforcement is the only option to address the issues.
- Smaller authorities do not have the staff or resources to roll out Marshals out of hours. Paul responded that other local authorities who have resources should share their experiences of best practice to smaller authorities which would help them tackle issues within their own authorities.

The Chair thanked Paul for his detailed presentation.

**Decision:**

That members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board note the update.

**Date of the next meeting:** Thursday, 14 January 2021, 11.00 am, Videoconference via Zoom

**Appendix A – Attendance**

Position		Authority
Chair	Cllr Nesil Caliskan	London Borough of Enfield
Vice Chair	Cllr Katrina Wood	Buckinghamshire County Council
Deputy Chair	Cllr Bridget Smith	South Cambridgeshire District Council
Deputy Chair	Cllr Hannah Dalton	Epsom and Ewell Borough Council
Committee Member	Cllr Eric Allen	London Borough of Sutton
	Cllr Mohan Iyengar	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council
	Cllr Andrew Joy	Hampshire County Council
	Cllr John Pennington	Bradford Metropolitan District Council
	Cllr Dave Stewart	Isle of Wight Council
	Cllr Lois Samuel	West Devon Borough Council
	Cllr Kate Haigh	Gloucestershire City Council
	Cllr Alan Rhodes	Nottinghamshire County Council
	Mayor Damien Egan	Lewisham London Borough Council
	Cllr James Dawson	Erewash Borough Council

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	Cllr Farah Hussain	Redbridge London Borough Council
	Cllr Johnson Situ	Southwark Council
	Cllr Jeremy Hilton	Gloucestershire County Council
	Cllr Philip Evans JP	Conwy County Borough Council
Substitute	Cllr Jo Beavis	
	Cllr Jeanie Bell	
	Cllr Richard Auger	
	Cllr Tim Roca	
	Cllr Nicola Dillon Jones	
	Cllr James Gartside	
	Cllr Daniel Francis	
	Cllr Paul Findlow	
LGA Officers	Mark Norris	
	Ellie Greenwood	
	Lucy Ellender	
	Charles Loft	
	Rachel Duke	
	Rachel Phelps	
	Jessica Norman	
	Jade Hall	
	Joe Difford	
	Tahmina Akther	
In attendance	Jane Parker	Suffolk County Council
	Paul Lancaster	Birmingham City Council