

## Note of the last Safer & Stronger Communities Board

---

Title: Safer & Stronger Communities Board  
Date and time: Thursday 14 January 2021  
Location: Videoconference via Zoom

---

### 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 12 November 2020.
<b>3</b>	<b>Government Review of the Gambling Act 2005</b>  The Chair introduced the report which updated the Board on the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's (DCMS) review of the Gambling Act 2005.  The Chair invited Tom Oldfield, Head of Online Gambling Policy and Susan Harling, Head of Land-based Gambling, Department for Culture Media and Sport to introduce the review.  Tom explained that the current Gambling Act was published in 2005 and implemented in 2007, with significant changes in gambling patterns since necessitating an update of the Act. With the rise of smart phones and increase of online gambling, the update would ensure the existing regulatory framework is fit for purpose in the digital age and continues to meet its aims which are; to protect children and vulnerable people, prevent gambling related crime, and keep gambling fair and open.  Tom highlighted six key areas of focus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• online protection – players and products</li></ul>

18 March 2021

- advertising, sponsorship and branding
- the Gambling Commission's powers and resources
- consumer redress
- the protection of young people – e.g) age limits and verification
- land based gambling.

Tom explained this was a wide-ranging review with the call for evidence to be used to inform proposed changes to the Act expected to be set out in a white paper next year.

Tom put forward four key questions likely to be of specific interest to the Board:

- Whether changes to casino regulations via the Act had met their objectives for the sector, in terms of supporting economic regeneration, tourism and growth while reducing risks of harm?
- Whether licensing and local authorities have enough powers to fulfil their responsibilities in respect of premises licenses and the objectives of the Act?
- Whether to moderately increasing the default number of category D and C gaming machines permitted in alcohol licensed premises?
- Whether current measures for preventing children accessing land-based gambling were sufficient?

Following the presentation, the Chair invited Cllr Kate Haigh, one of the Board's licensing champions, to offer a perspective on the LGA's response. Kate commented that this was a welcomed review of the Gambling Act 2005, which the Board had taken a keen interest in. The Board had recognised gambling harm as a significant factor in, poor mental health, debt, crime and sometimes suicide. She highlighted that there was scope to increase of inspection and enforcement in some areas but highlighted the important role of the Gambling Commission's regional compliance officers in supporting activity smaller councils undertaking less regular gambling compliance work. There was a need for stronger public health presence and Public Health England (PHE) were in favour of treating this as a direct public health issue with more needed to be done to support families with young children, past treatment, vulnerable groups. She noted that collecting evidence of harm can be difficult but that councils are often in the frontline to try to do this.

Kate mentioned she had recently attended the Peers for Gambling Reform group, which was in favour of stronger measures around restricting advertising, sponsorship, stake limits, loot boxes, affordability and the appointment of an ombudsman.

Following the discussion, Members made the following comments:

- Members raised that there were enormous gambling incentives being offered to people, and that COVID-19 will increase the impact of this, with many people at home suffering from stress, loss of jobs and boredom, posing a significant risk.
- Members commented that 'loot boxes' on online gaming platforms were targeted at children and caused significant harm to young people and children, suggesting that local authorities should look at tackling this through public health, education and providing support through school services.

18 March 2021

- Members commented that gambling has been a longstanding issue within sports, particularly within football, almost all football matches advertise betting and gambling organisations, as well as with broadcasting.
- Members raised that people were able to set up numerous accounts with different betting bodies which none were linked, causing massive debts.
- Member asked for further clarification on the role of the Ombudsman and what would be the impacts and outcome of the role.
- Members expressed that a clearer understanding of the issue at a regional or local level is needed.
- Members commented that in some local authorities betting shops had been converted to gaming centres, in which only 20% of the machines can be category D but there is no limit in number of machines.
- Members raised that there was an increase in online gambling heavily glamorised by endorsing celebrities to target and lure in younger audiences.
- Members commented that cumulative impact policies can work well if there is buy in.

The Chair thanked Tom, Susan and Kate for their contributions to the review. She summarised that councils have an important role on this issue, which needed to cover public health and the impact of online gambling.

**Decision:**

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

**Actions:**

- Officers to develop a draft response to DCMS's review of the Gambling Act 2005, for sign off by Lead Members.
- Officers to consider including; enforcement role within local authorities, public health support for those who are vulnerable and educating children on online gambling and gaming platforms in draft response.

#### **4 Resilient Communities**

Ellie Greenwood, Senior Adviser introduced the report which outlined the proposed piece of work on community safety resilience.

Ellie invited Kersten England, Chief Executive of Bradford MBC and Solace lead for community safety and resilience to present her thoughts on resilient communities and the work Bradford had done in their area.

Kersten informed the Board that, alongside prosperity, she believed there were three key conditions needed to create resilient communities, which were:

- Infrastructure for community life – places and spaces bringing people together to build bonds, where communities can create opportunities.
- Engagement and participation of the whole community in what is happening in their locality ensuring they have a meaningful say in shaping their communities.
- A whole system and agencies working with a deep insight into their localities, focusing on early intervention strategies.

18 March 2021

Kersten commented that local authorities had a critical role to play, acting as conveners for communities within their localities, and noted the challenges of cuts, loss of community infrastructure (e.g banks, religious institutions) and absence of a coherent policy programme on communities over the past decade. She stressed that Bradford did not have all the answers and that much of what it was doing was not unique, but highlighted specific features within Bradford that are aimed at building resilience in the city:

- Area committee structures – based on constituency boundaries, with Ward Officers supporting both the committees and ward councillors. Ward Officers have daily involvement with youth and environmental services and support to the VCS, which starts to build a locally based and responsive approach.
- Asset based approach aimed at building resilience from a strength based approach. The council provides seed money, removes barriers and supports fund raising by local organisation, with a facilitated platform showcasing community action; Kersten noted that this is a model that applies beyond community safety to COVID, flooding etc.
- Locality based prevention – daily and habitual knowledge sharing of all agencies and sectors operating in an area with a shared understanding of individuals and families in communities, allowing issues to be addressed quickly before escalating to agency responses.
- Legacy of programmes from the late 1990s and early 2000s with community anchor organisations at locality level often asset owning and able to support different activities, such as children’s education, employment opportunities. There is a clear difference between communities that have these anchor institutions and those that don’t.

Kersten also talked about the factors she considered to be critical for success:

- Diversity of workforce – representing and reflecting the community they serve with over 30% of residents, 28% of their workforce and 24% of senior management roles were from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities.
- Celebrations and events – recognition and celebration of different identities and beliefs with cross-community interactions.
- Community mediators – from different backgrounds and communities to tackle issues within communities, e.g. anti-social behaviour, extremism, counter-terrorism and serious and organised crime.
- Enablers included a comprehensive and correlated set of data, policies on asset transfer and commissioning, communications and engagement, all of which had benefitted the council during COVID.

Following the discussion, Members made the following comments:

- Members commented the importance of structures reflecting diversity within communities needed to be further strengthened and with COVID-19, there was risk of increased risk of people feeling not part of their wider communities. Kersten responded that ‘Bradford For Everyone’ an organisation outside of the council with representatives from all parts of the district was overseeing the delivery of the local integration programme, supporting community mediation, hate crime, anti-groomer critical thinking and development and district vales.
- Members commented with the difficulties of COVID-19 there was a decline in intervention programmes being delivered due to the lack of face-to-face

18 March 2021

interaction, with local authorities needing support to reclaim online space reaching out across all platforms. Kersten responded that they had tried to maintain youth facing programmes in Bradford and had rolled out COVID Youth Ambassadors with diverse backgrounds to engage with thousands of young people each week. Regular meetings were held with the ambassadors to go through feedback and critique on the overall approach to COVID with insight from people across all online platforms.

- Members commented sharing case studies of best practice across the country was key to managing solutions together and asked how could this be done through the LGA faster to reach those local authorities needing support and further guidance.
- Members commented the report and proposed work built a strong platform for the LGA to go to government and request support, policies to be put in place at national level and funding to reinvest in these communities.

The Chair thanked Kersten for her stimulating and detailed overview on community safety resilience within Bradford.

**Decision:**

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

**Action:**

- Officers to further scope out and take forward the proposed areas of work on community resilience.

## **5 Conspiracy theories and COVID-19**

The Chair introduced the report which highlighted a number of cohesion and extremism issues for local areas.

The Chair invited Dr Gareth Harris, an independent researcher affiliated to Coventry University, and lead Facilitator of the Special Interest Group on Countering Extremism (SIGCE), and Dr Valerie van Mulukom, a cognitive scientist at Coventry University, to provide an update to the Board on conspiracy theories in the context of COVID-19.

Dr Gareth Harris informed the Board that conspiracy theories pre-dated the COVID-19 pandemic and were often an integral part of extremist views. However, conspiracy theories thrive during times of uncertainty, using simple narratives to explain complex events, and coupled with increased use of the online space, recent months have seen more widespread circulation and endorsement. and which often express a distrust in the government, mainstream media and minority groups.

Gareth highlighted key conspiracy theories around the COVID-19 pandemic which include:

- The virus is a bio-weapon – deliberately developed by China to weaken the West.
- The 5G network is spreading the virus or lowering immunity to it – with reported attacks on 5G masts and engineers.

18 March 2021

- COVID-19 is a 'scamdemic' – a distraction from Government plans eg to erode personal freedom, microchip the population through vaccinations and de-population.

The increased online circulation of conspiracy theories has likely led to considerable offline activity, including anti-lockdown demonstrations and attacks on 5G masts drawing in a broader demographic in support. Networking between groups has exposed people to more extremist ideologies, deepening distrust in state agencies and mainstream media.

Dr Valerie van Mulukom introduced her presentation which outlined how both low levels of trust and information regarding the pandemic in an environment of threat and uncertainty have contributed to more widespread circulation and advocacy of conspiracy theories. COVID-19 conspiracy beliefs have negatively influenced adherence to COVID-19 safety guidelines, endangering the lives of many. Moreover, these beliefs have been linked to other problematic attitudes, such as prejudice and vaccine hesitancy.

Valerie highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic was a hugely challenging time with two key factors of concern:

- Threat – e.g possibility of catching a potentially debilitating or lethal disease and possibility of losing jobs.
- Uncertainty – e.g not knowing/understanding the disease fully, uncertainty about the future, whether about social, health, or economic consequences.

Valerie explained that COVID-19 conspiracy beliefs followed from increased fear due to low levels of trust and low levels of comprehensive, accessible information.

The consequences of belief in conspiracy theories has included:

- Pseudoscientific practices – eg ingesting 'miracle cures' (including deadly substances such as methanol or disinfectant).
- Vaccination hesitancy – Theorists generally had anti-vaccination attitudes due to misinformation and incorrect beliefs.
- Hoarding – can help people to regain a sense of security and control (without relying on other people or institutions).
- Prejudice and discrimination – eg that COVID-19 is an artificially created threat associated with certain nationalities or communities.
- Violence – 5G COVID-19 conspiracy has been followed by public demonstrations, abuse of technicians and arson.

Valerie stated the following key factors contributed to COVID-19 conspiracy beliefs:

- distrustful personality traits
- distrust in authority
- fewer resources, e.g lower levels of psychological well-being, education and income
- lack of knowledge and understanding
- obtaining knowledge from social media

Valerie's research suggested that in the UK levels of trust in scientists were high, compared to levels of trust in government and other people. Based on the research

18 March 2021

results, Valerie concluded that there should be more focus on building trust in authorities and making information accessible.

Following the discussion, Members made the following comments:

- Members asked about the extent to which theorist beliefs were related to people feeling 'left behind', with e.g gaps between rich and poor. Dr Harris responded that there was no one single profile for those vulnerable to conspiracy theories and encompassed a broad group of people. There was a risk however in wide-ranging groups providing opportunities to cross-pollinate ideas cross network.
- Members raised the dangers of people going beyond main-stream social media platforms and reaching out on unregulated platforms. Dr Harris responded that de-platforming reduced reach, influence and how fast messages virally spread.
- Members commented that more support tools were needed for local authorities to confidently challenge these theories.
- Members asked about what advice there is for supporting people that already had deep conspiracy beliefs.

The Chair thanked Dr Gareth Harris and Dr Valarie van Mulukom for their insightful and detailed presentations.

**Decision:**

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

**Actions:**

- Officers to consider what further support could be provided to local authorities to counter conspiracy theories.

## **6 Building Safety update**

The Chair introduced the report which covers on the LGA's building safety related work since its last meeting.

Following the brief discussion, Members made the following comments:

- Members raised that there were still massive problems with the Waking watch costs which would require further discussions with the Grenfell Task Group.
- Members commented private building owners applying to government funds were being silenced with gagging clauses, stopping them from speaking to the press or other parties without government approval.

**Decision:**

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

**Action:**

- Officers to pick up on gagging clauses and update the Board at the next meeting.

18 March 2021

**7 Update paper**

The Chair asked members to raise any points regarding the Update Paper by email if necessary.

**Date of the next meeting:** Thursday, 18 March 2021, 11.00 am, Videoconference via Teams.

**Appendix A – Attendance**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Authority</b>	
Chair	Cllr Nesil Caliskan	London Borough of Enfield
Vice Chairman	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 – in attendance
	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
	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	
Substitutes	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		



18 March 2021

LGA Officers

Mark Norris  
Ellie Greenwood  
Lucy Ellender  
Charles Loft  
Rachel Duke  
Rachel Phelps  
Jessica Norman  
Jade Hall  
Joe Difford  
Tahmina Akther

In attendance

Tom Oldfield  
Susan Harling  
Kersten England  
Dr Gareth Harris  
Dr Valerie van Mulukom

Head of Online Gambling Policy  
Head of Land-based Gambling  
Bradford MBC  
Coventry University  
Coventry University

Press

Daniel Peters

Municipal Journal