

Safer and Stronger Communities Board – End of Year Report

Background

1. At its meeting in September the Board considered its priorities for 2020/21 and agreed five overarching themes:
 - 1.1. Community safety
 - 1.2. Prevent, counter extremism and cohesion
 - 1.3. Regulatory services and licensing
 - 1.4. Blue light services and civil resilience
 - 1.5. Crematoria, funerals, coroners and registrars.
2. Alongside these core areas of safer communities work, the Board's work plan also included an ongoing programme of activity on building safety, following the Grenfell Fire in 2017.
3. This paper provides an overview of the achievements delivered against these themes and seeks an initial steer from the Board on its priorities for 2021/22. As with 2019/20, the Covid-19 pandemic has continued to impact on delivery of the 2020/21 work plan agreed in September, with resources in some areas in particular still diverted to ongoing work on the pandemic. In recent months, team members who have been heavily focused on Covid-19 have begun to resume a more normal pattern of activity, and it is hoped that this will continue throughout summer and as we move into the 2021/22 Board programme.
4. Feedback from members on their priorities for next year will subsequently be developed into a full paper for consideration at the first meeting of the 2021/22 Board cycle in September.

Prevent, counter extremism and cohesion

5. We have continued to raise concerns about the impact of extremism on communities and the challenges this presents for councils, and urged Government to retain investment in measures to build resilience and tackle division and polarisation.
6. The last year in particular has continued to see the emergence of a number of extremism and cohesion issues for local government and partners. We have continued to provide significant support to councils to respond to these through our work with the [Special Interest Group on Countering Extremism](#) (SIGCE), which the LGA has also been financing since last autumn. The SIGCE has been key in providing timely guidance, support and a network of experienced practitioners to those facing issues throughout the year.

7. The SIGCE's programme comprised a number of workstreams, including: organising webinars on online extremism, COVID-19 and conspiracy theories (which has supported wider work at the LGA on vaccine disinformation), and social media monitoring; a series of practitioner roundtables focussing on themes such as COVID-19 narratives and exploitation by extremists, Black Lives Matter protests and counter-protests, and learning from the MHCLG integration area pilots; supported Newcastle City Council to host a further series of roundtables specifically on tackling the harassment of asylum seekers; worked with the East of England LGA to run a regional session for elected members; and provided regular guidance and updates through the online Knowledge Hub.
8. We have also continued to support the SIGCE's working groups on Far-Right extremism and Faith-Based "Islamist" extremism. The Far-Right Working Group has provided bespoke support and training to a council facing significant far-right activity, and developed guidance for councils on how to respond when activists exploit a local issue. The Faith-Based Working Group has also provided bespoke support to a council facing particular challenges in this space, and has commissioned research to explore the impact of terminology on community engagement and the delivery of local counter-extremism work, which is due to report back shortly.
9. Beyond the SIGCE, we delivered two successful training courses for officers on effective community engagement and communications, developed in response to specific concerns about how to respond and build resilience to far-right activity and narratives.
10. We published [guidance on the scrutiny of Prevent and counter-extremism](#) with CfPS and a [guidance note for councils on responding to calls for changes to public realm](#).
11. In December we submitted a response to the Law Commission's hate crime review, which stressed the seriousness of hate crime and its impact on communities, including on councillors and officers who have themselves been targets. We raised councils' concerns about increased levels of hate crime and a reported resurgence of racial and racialised narratives; welcomed efforts to amend hate crime legislation to remove discrepancies across characteristics; and supported proposals for misogyny to be recognised explicitly under the legislation.
12. More recently we responded to Lord Walney's review into political violence and disruption, setting out a number of concerns about extremist activity on- and off line, and drawing a distinction between protest activity which is disruptive only, and acts which are violent and/or target certain communities thus stoking division and mistrust.
13. Building on our 2019 submission, we provided supplementary information to the Independent review of Prevent, and over the year continued to feed in sector views to Government about the regionalisation of Prevent delivery.

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14. We are also producing a sector response to the Government's Protect duty consultation, which is aimed at helping to protect public venues and spaces from terrorist attacks, which is due at the beginning of July.

Community safety

15. On **domestic abuse**, we have focused on the passage of the Domestic Abuse Act through Parliament, highlighting the importance of preventing domestic abuse from occurring in the first place and the need to take co-ordinated and urgent action against the perpetrators of abuse.
16. Following our lobbying, the Government recognised the calls of the LGA and charities for a domestic abuse perpetrator strategy and committed to bring this forward as part of the forthcoming Domestic Abuse strategy.
17. We welcomed the Spending Review 2020 announcement of £125 million funding to help enable local authorities to deliver the new statutory duty to support domestic abuse victims and their children in safe accommodation. The LGA continues to work with councils and government on this so that we can ensure the successful implementation of the new statutory duty. We are also working hard to ensure this new funding meets any increases in demand for services, and any additional burdens identified by local needs assessments.
18. We also expressed concern that the learning from Domestic Homicide Reviews was not being shared at a national level or part of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's remit. We were pleased the Government amended the legislation to require a person or body carrying out a domestic homicide review in England and Wales to send a copy of the report of the review to the Domestic Abuse Commissioner.
19. The LGA campaigned for greater investment in community-based support services, which provide vital support for domestic abuse victims. The legislation has now been amended so that the Domestic Abuse Commissioner is able to publish a report, under her new powers in the Act, on the provision of and need for community-based services. Local authorities will also be able to assess the impact of the safe accommodation duty on the provision of community-based support in their area.
20. A full overview of our lobbying work on the Domestic Abuse Act is [available here](#).
21. In addition to our Parliamentary work, the LGA has held several webinar sessions on tackling domestic abuse, most recently with a webinar session on transforming the response to economic abuse. We have held a series of workshops throughout the year with local authorities to support them in the implementation of the new statutory duty.

22. The Safer and Stronger Communities Board has been very active on tackling **Violence Against Women and Girls** issues. We submitted a [response](#) to the Government's [consultation](#) on the development of the next Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy (VAWG), highlighting the need for this to align with other strategies and legislation, including the Domestic Abuse Bill. We also reflected on the terrible news about Sarah Everard, and the wider concerns about public safety. The LGA also submitted [written evidence](#) to the Home Affairs Committee [inquiry](#) into Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).
23. The LGA continues to contribute to Government strategic discussions on tackling antisocial behaviour and regularly attends the Home Office-led Anti-Social Behaviour Advisory Board. We have hosted a several well-attended conferences on tackling anti-social behaviour and the Community Trigger, as well as published a series of best practice [case studies](#) for local government. The Chair of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board also took part in an ITV programme on addressing anti-social behaviour, alongside representatives from the National Police Chief's Council and ASB Help. We have also worked closely with the Victim's Commissioner's office and attended roundtables on this important issue.
24. On **serious violence**, the LGA continues to lobbying MPs on the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, which contains provisions on the forthcoming serious violence duty, as well as measures on unauthorised encampments, right to protest, youth custody and remand, Offensive Weapons Homicide Reviews and Serious Violence Reduction Orders. In May, Cllr Nesil Caliskan gave [oral evidence](#) to the Public Bill Committee, and we submitted supplementary written evidence.
25. The LGA has also held webinars on tackling serious violent crime and published a series of case studies on 'taking a [public health approach to tackling serious violence](#)'. We continue to work with the Government, councils and partners on this important issue.
26. **Modern slavery** is one of the areas where our activity has been impacted by the need to focus on Covid-19, although we have sought to maintain our involvement in regular discussions with the Home Office and other key stakeholders. We are now aiming to build this back up and have scheduled a webinar in mid-July to introduce councillors and others to the issue of modern slavery, and are currently aiming to develop a wider programme of sessions responding to issues that councils have identified they would like to hear about. We are also in the process of developing a set of case studies of good practice on housing and modern slavery.

Blue light services and civil resilience

27. The LGA continues to input into the government's long-term ambitions on fire governance. In September 2020, the LGA submitted a [consultation response to part one of the Home Office's two-part review into the role of Police and Crime Commissioners \(PCCs\)](#), on behalf of the Fire Services Management Committee and the Safer and Stronger Communities Board. The submission focussed on both Police and Crime Panel (PCP) issues as well as fire governance. The LGA represents Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs), Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners and PCPs.
28. The LGA worked with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and the Home Office to develop a business case for submission to the 2020 Spending Review, submitted in August 2020. We have continued working with the NFCC input into the Spending Review process we are expecting this year. This includes re-convening the Senior Sector Group (SSG), following the positive engagement we had with the Home Office through the SSG throughout 2020.
29. Fire Services Management Committee and FRA Members across England have continued to engage with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services to contribute evidence to its annual inspections, including the COVID-19 inspection in 2020. This has culminated in: the [COVID 19 National Inspection Report](#), published in January 2021; and the [State of Fire 2020 report](#), published in March 2021. We also continue to hold a position on the Fire Standards Board.
30. On 1-4 March 2020, the annual LGA Fire Conference was held virtually for the first time. Guest speakers included the Minister of State for Building Safety, Fire and Communities, Lord Stephen Greenhalgh, and HM Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services, Sir Thomas Winsor. All four plenary sessions and the two interactive meetings were well attended, and positive feedback was received. Planning for the 2021 LGA Fire Conference has begun, including reviewing key considerations regarding options to return to in person conference activity, subject to government guidance later in the year.
31. Throughout 2020/21, the LGA worked with the NFCC, the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC), and consulted with the broader fire and rescue sector, to develop the [Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services](#) for England (Core Code). The Core Code is designed to help employees of the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) act in the best way towards each other and while serving the public. On 18 May 2021, the Core Code was launched, alongside the Code of Ethics Fire Standard developed by the Fire Standards Board, which we also contributed to the development of.
32. In 2020/21, the LGA delivered the Fire Leadership Essentials course, which aims to support FRA members with their responsibilities, including developing skills around leadership and understanding of practical scrutiny in FRAs, and improving their knowledge of the key strategic issues facing the sector. This was delivered via Zoom this year for the first time.

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33. Improving equality, diversity and inclusion remains a priority area in the fire and rescue sector. The LGA's Fire Diversity and Inclusion Champions Network has continued to convene virtually throughout 2020/21. The Network brings together elected representatives who are responsible for diversity and inclusion issues in their fire and rescue authorities. Topics covered during the four virtual sessions included: Positive action; The Benefits of Staff Networks; and a Two-part meeting series on 'Improving Racial Equality in the Fire and Rescue Sector'.
34. In 2020, the LGA commissioned Andy Fry, ex-Chief Fire Officer and former HM Inspector of Fire Services in Wales, to deliver a series of instructive videos covering various topics associated with the governance role of Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) members. Building on the LGA's guide, [Leading the fire sector: Oversight of fire and rescue service performance](#), the webinar series aims to provide an introduction to governance issues for those who are new to FRAs, as well as the support the development of existing members. The first three webinars – ['The Role of Fire and Rescue Authority Members'](#), ['Political Oversight of Fire and Rescue Service Performance'](#), and ['Effective FRA Governance During Times of Crisis'](#) – are available on the LGA website. The remaining webinar will be published in Summer 2021.

Water safety

35. The independent review of the legal framework for beach safety commissioned by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) was published in November and the Board considered the implications for local authorities at its meeting that month. The National Water Safety Forum (NWSF) then consulted on the recommendations in the MCA review, which we responded to in December. However the majority of respondents to the NWSF consultation supported some of the key recommendations that the Board and member authorities had concerns about. The Board therefore wrote separately to the Minister for Aviation, Maritime & Security setting out our position and making clear we do not support a new duty as well as sharing our views on alternative approaches to improving water safety.

Licensing and regulation

36. Our work on regulatory services and licensing has been dominated this year by Covid-19 compliance and enforcement activity. In a rapidly changing environment (particularly throughout Autumn 2020) we have worked closely with both councils and key Government departments to feed into the development of evolving regulations and policy approaches on a wide range of compliance and enforcement matters, identify issues and support councils with information and guidance. We have also held a series of compliance and enforcement webinars attracting several hundred delegates each.
37. In Autumn, the LGA argued that the pressures on council regulatory services merited a cross government approach to identifying pressures and priorities, with demands linked to COVID and EU exit layering on top of existing capacity issues within the services. This

led MHCLG to convene a cross-government regulatory services task and finish group which we have been supporting over the past 5 months. The task and finish group is looking at options for increasing the resilience of regulatory services, specifically environmental health and trading standards. Alongside the growing demands being made of these services, there is also the challenge of an ageing workforce with a limited pipeline of officers being developed, with recruitment challenges already occurring in many places. From an LGA perspective, the proposals being developed by the task and finish group workstreams are likely to align with the ideas in the submission on regulatory services which we made to last year's spending round, which we will update for the spending review expected later this year.

38. On **taxis**, we have recently updated our councillor handbook to reflect the statutory guidance published last year. This will be published shortly, and we intend to run some supporting webinars to promote this.

Crematoria, coroners and medical examiners

39. The ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly during the second wave, has impacted planned work on crematoria and burial services, coroners, registrars, medical examiners, and emergency planners. The LGA has continued to engage with Government and the sector on the impact of the pandemic on these services. The LGA is currently undertaking work on the role of Coroners in local government.
40. The LGA has input into key government guidance documents, including the [Public health funerals: good practice guidance](#) (published September 2020) and the regular updates to the [Guidance for arranging or attending a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic](#) (latest version published 4 June 2021).
41. The Competition and Markets Authority's (CMA) investigation into the funeral market was originally paused during the early stage of the COVID-19 response in 2020, acknowledging the pressure that local authorities were under. The CMA resumed their investigation in Summer 2020, which the LGA inputted into. The CMA may revisit this issue again in the future.

Building safety

42. The [LGA lobbied on behalf of councils on the Fire Safety Bill](#), successfully ensuring that the Bill's commencement will be accompanied by guidance designed to minimise the problems arising from a shortage of fire risk assessors and working with the NFCC and the Home Office to design the guidance. It is impossible to say whether the guidance will completely overcome this issue as the number of buildings affected and the number of assessors available are unknown.
43. The LGA [responded to the Fire Safety Consultation](#) addressing the recommendations of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry's first phase.

44. The LGA submitted [evidence](#) to the HCLG select committee's pre-legislative scrutiny of the Building Safety Bill and Lord Porter gave [oral evidence](#). Officer continued to liaise with MHCLG and the HSE over the development of the new building safety regime, in particular through membership of the Joint Regulators' Group.
45. Lord Porter also gave [oral evidence](#) to the [HCLG select committee inquiry inquiries into remediation of flammable cladding](#) and the LGA gave [written evidence](#) to the [PAC inquiry into the same subject](#).
46. We published a guide for counsellors in supporting residents of buildings with dangerous cladding and a [position statement on leaseholder costs](#).
47. The LGA has continued to work with NFCC and MHCLG on the remediation of buildings with dangerous cladding, in particular through its membership of the Fire protection Board and through hosting the Joint Inspection Team.

2021/22 Priorities

48. It is expected that the themes for the 2021/22 work priorities will remain broadly consistent with 2020/21, with a number of workstreams continuing into the new Board cycle.
49. The table below sets out some initial thinking on workstreams that will continue into the new Board cycle, subject to the Board's views:

Priority area	Proposed activity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevent, counter-extremism and cohesion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to lobby Government on the importance of retaining investment in measures to prevent extremism and build resilience Deliver a programme of support to councils on tackling extremism through the Special Interest Group on Countering Extremism, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A series of roundtables and webinars for practitioners to share emerging challenges and facilitate support Case studies to capture good practice in tackling extremism and hate crime Facilitating academic support to councils on tackling far-right and faith-based extremism Continuing with the work of the SIGCE's Working Groups on far-right and faith-based extremism Provide training for elected members on tackling extremism and building cohesion

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeding in sector views in response to anticipated legislation on tackling online harms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with the Government on the forthcoming Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2021 – 2024 and continue to lobby for increased investment in VAWG services - as well as the DA strategy. Support councils to implement the duties in the recent DA Bill. Continue to lobby Government on the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, including ensuring the proposed new statutory duty to tackle serious violent crime is fully funded by Government. Also, engage with the forthcoming Draft Victims Bill. Provide support to councils responding to unauthorised encampments and work with LGA Boards to inform our response on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities. Take forward work delayed from 2020/2021 looking at resilience in community safety issues. Develop a programme of work to support councils on tackling modern slavery. Host a range of webinars and events for councils on community safety issues.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blue light services and civil resilience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribute an LGA view to the government review of Local Resilience Forums and the Civil Contingencies Act. Respond to the Police and Crime Commissioner Review White Paper when published and seek to shape government's policies on changes to fire and rescue service governance. Work with the National Fire Chiefs Council to inform the Home Office's Spending Review submission. Continue to support FRAs respond to HMICFRS's State of Fire report recommendations and to individual inspection reports. Continue work around transparency and standards, workforce development and climate change. Support Police and Crime Panels scrutiny of Police and Crime Commissioners.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Licensing and regulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lobby government to provide sustainable funding for vital public protection services and build on the work of the regulatory services task and finish group by introducing changes that increase the resilience of services. Develop our training offer for licensing committees (potentially including a further Leadership Essentials course and an online offer).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to participate in the JRG, FPB and similar groups working to strengthen building safety.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to host the Joint Inspection Team. • Support the implementation of the Fire Safety Act. • Lobby around the passage of the Building Safety Bill.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crematoria, coroners and registrars 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We anticipate that there will be a range of work related to resilience in the death management processes including crematoria and registrars' service. • Officers will continue to respond to the CMA investigation on the funerals market on aspects that affect local authorities.

50. The Board's views on any other areas they would like us to focus on would be very helpful.

Implications for Wales

51. We will work with colleagues at the Welsh LGA to identify areas where our work will be applicable to Wales, and where WLGA may wish to use our work as a basis for Welsh specific work of its own.

Financial Implications

52. None. The work priorities identified for 2021/22 will be delivered within the planned staffing budget and grant funding available from the LGA's MHCLG grant (although this funding has been reduced for 2021/22).

Next steps

53. The Board are asked to reflect on the work delivered this year, and consider and comment on their priorities for 2021/22.