

Safer & Stronger Communities Board – report from Councillor Ann Lucas OBE (Chair)

Communications Data

1. The Government has accepted the LGA's argument for local authorities to retain access to communications data for the purposes of tracking down organised gangs, fraudsters preying on the vulnerable and certain environmental crimes. Council access to communications data does not include access to the content of communications and is strictly regulated. This decision is a welcome result of over a year of lobbying, alongside the Trading Standards Institute, and is a welcome result. Many other organisations have lost their access to this data, which would have been a crippling blow to council enforcement and trading standards teams.
2. The Government has decided to require all authorities to use the National Anti-Fraud Network to access this data and the LGA is working with the Home Office and NAFN to minimise disruption during the handover. The LGA has also been invited to contribute to the national review by David Anderson QC and will be reiterating why we need access to this information.

Council 'Reducing the Strength Campaigns'

3. Councillor Katie Hall and myself wrote to Jane Ellison, Minister for Health, about industry challenges to council initiatives that ask retailers not to stock high strength alcohol where it is found to contribute to street drinking levels. These schemes have been rolled out in a number of areas and have attracted significant local media coverage. Jane Ellison has responded to offer a meeting to discuss the issue. Officers have separately met with the Competition and Markets Authority and received reassurances about the legality of the schemes, subject to certain steps to protect retailers from inadvertently breaching competition law. The LGA will shortly produce a best practice guide on introducing these schemes.

Minicabs and the Deregulation Bill

4. I wrote to Baroness Kramer to express our continuing concerns about proposals in the Deregulation Bill to allow anyone to drive an off-duty minicab. Our concerns were picked during the second reading in the House of Lords with a number of Lords quoting from our briefing. As a result, Baroness Kramer has agreed to meet with Councillor Tony Page to discuss the matter.

FGM Task and Finish Group

5. The cross-Board FGM Task and Finish Group, chaired by the Board's Deputy Chair Cllr Lisa Brett, met at the end of August. The Task and Finish Group used the meeting to consider the announcements made by the government on FGM at their Girl Summit held in July, review the on-line toolkit produced by the Home Office and how the LGA could compliment that with material specifically designed for councils, and the LGA's lobbying for an amendment to the FGM Act 2003 that would make it an offence to promote or

encourage FGM. On this latter point the Task and Finish Group heard about the meeting earlier in the month with Ministry of Justice officials leading on the FGM provisions in the Serious Crime Bill. The Task and Finish Group was also able to hear from FORWARD about the model FGM Act they have developed.

Home Affairs Select Committee

6. Following the report by the Home Affairs Select Committee on Police and Crime Commissioners: progress to date earlier this year I have written back to the Chairman of the Committee, the Rt. Hon. Keith Vaz MP, setting out how the LGA will be responding to the recommendations in the report directed at the LGA and its support for police and crime panels. The Safer and Stronger Communities Board will deliver a programme of activity during 2014/15 to support panels and in particular their chairman, work with the offices of police and crime commissioners to improve local processes for scrutinising the precept, and carry out research on panels' experience of complaint handling.

Fire Services Management Committee

7. Cllr Kay Hammond, Deputy Chair of the Fire Services Management Committee is chairing a Leadership Essentials course for 14 FRA lead members at Warwick Business School on 10 and 11 September.
8. Cllr Kay Hammond will also be representing the LGA at the Firefighters' Memorial Annual Service of Remembrance at St Paul's Cathedral on Sunday 14 September.

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