

FGM Task and Finish Group

Purpose of report

For information and discussion.

Summary

This report provides the Board with an update on the work of the FGM Task and Finish Group since the last Board meeting in July.

Recommendation(s)

Members are invited to:

- a) Note the work of the FGM Task and Finish Group since the last Board meeting; and
- b) Comment on the final output and forward strategy from the Task and Finish Group's work.

Action

Officers to action as appropriate.

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FGM Task and Finish Group

Introduction

1. At its meeting in July the Board received a report on the work of the Task and Finish Group established to look at how the LGA could assist councils in tackling female genital mutilation (FGM). This paper provides an update on the work of the Task and Finish Group since the last Board meeting.

Meeting with Rt. Hon. Lynne Featherstone MP

2. Lynne Featherstone MP, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department of International Development leads the Department's work on ending violence against women and girls and has a strong personal interest in eliminating FGM. The Minister chaired a meeting with Councillor Brett and the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) to discuss what the government could do to assist local authorities in identifying girls at risk of FGM and in stopping the practice.
3. The discussions centred on what could be done to raise awareness of FGM among social workers and how good practice could be disseminated as well as the new work the Mayor's Office of Policing and Crime in London was doing with six London boroughs on children's safeguarding which would include FGM. The Department of Education was also exploring how good practice/case studies would be provided to social workers. Cllr Brett raised concerns about the Home Office toolkit with the Minister, highlighted the need for a change in the FGM legislation to make it an offence to encourage and promote FGM as a practice, and pointed out that a greater focus on FGM in a safeguarding context would have an impact on the resources of Children's Services in councils.

Serious Crime Bill

4. As was discussed at the July Board, the LGA has been lobbying to amend the Serious Crime Bill to make it an offence to promote or encourage FGM. Baroness Meacher tabled an amendment on behalf of the LGA and although the amendment received considerable cross-bench support from peers, it was resisted by the government on the grounds that the provisions in the 2003 FGM Act and the Serious Crime Act 2007 would allow those who promote or encourage FGM to be prosecuted.
5. At the end of the Committee Stage debate the government undertook to write to Baroness Meacher in more detail about their reasons for resisting the amendment. A copy of the letter sent to Baroness Meacher is attached at **Appendix A**. Officer discussions with the Ministry of Justice's civil servants have concluded the reluctance to accept the LGA's amendment is based on:
 - 5.1 a lack of evidence that there are people promoting or encouraging FGM in their communities;
 - 5.2 a lack of evidence that those promoting or encouraging FGM have a substantive impact on communities willingness to abandon FGM as a practice; and

- 5.3 a lack of evidence that the police have struggled to prosecute those promoting or encouraging FGM.
6. If the Ministry of Justice was presented with evidence that the promotion or encouragement of FGM by leading people in communities was a problem, it is possible that they would no longer object to the amendment. We will therefore be contacting voluntary and charitable organisations working to eliminate FGM as a practice to identify how many of them have encountered problems with their work due to the promotion and encouragement of FGM.

Girl Summit

7. On 22 July the government hosted the Girl Summit aimed at mobilising domestic and international efforts to end FGM and child, early and forced marriage. As part of the Summit the government announced a range of measures to protect girls at home and abroad from FGM and forced marriage. These included:
- 7.1 a £1.4 million FGM Prevention Programme in partnership with NHS England;
 - 7.2 new guidance from the College of Policing and an inspection programme from HMIC;
 - 7.3 a consultation on proposals to introduce new civil orders to protect girls identified as being at risk of FGM;
 - 7.4 new legislation that will enable parents to be prosecuted for failing to prevent their daughters being cut, and grants victims lifelong anonymity from the time an allegation is made; and
 - 7.5 a new specialist FGM service to proactively identify and respond to FGM.
8. At the same time as the announcements on measures were made a new report was published on prevalence of FGM. This report by City University London and Equality Now estimated that approximately 60,000 girls aged 0 to 14 had been born in England and Wales to mothers who had undergone FGM, while approximately 127,000 women who migrated to England and Wales aged over 15 are living with the consequences of FGM.
9. The Home Office also produced an on-line resource pack on FGM (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/female-genital-mutilation-resource-pack/female-genital-mutilation-resource-pack>) for local agencies. The resource provides an introduction to FGM and its practice, case studies of good partnership working between the voluntary sector and local authorities, issues for local partners to consider including how widespread the practice is and what should be done to safeguard victims and potential victims, effective practices including new multi-agency guidelines, sector specific information on FGM, and information on materials (including a range of DVDs), training and contacts.

FORWARD's FGM Model Act

10. With the government looking to strengthen the provisions in the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 FORWARD have developed a model FGM Act, which is designed to better protect women and girls, through for example a different definition of FGM. FORWARD recognise the issue the LGA has raised promotion and encouragement and

this model Act will now incorporate an offence covering it. A copy of the model Act can be provided on request. FORWARD have been in contact with peers about tabling amendments to the Serious Crime Bill at the Report Stage to update the FGM Act 2003 in line with the provisions in the model Act. FORWARD have indicated they would welcome any support the LGA can give to these amendments when they are considered at Report Stage.

DfE's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme

11. At the Task and Finish Group's meeting in June it was agreed that the LGA would conduct an audit of referrals into children's services of cases where a child is thought to be at risk of FGM, and to make a bid to the Department of Education's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme for the development of a specialist FGM service, which would act as a multi-agency 'centre of excellence'.
12. We have now surveyed authorities and had responses from 86 councils in mid-August. We have extended the deadline for responses and chased up a number of authorities to provide information. These results will be used to identify areas where further in depth work can be done with a small number of councils to better understand what happens to FGM cases referred to them.
13. Separately to the LGA, Barnardo's had also considered submitting a bid to the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme related to FGM and we have agreed a joint bid to the Department of Education. This will be submitted in mid-September.

Association of Directors of Children's Services

14. We continue to work with ADCS and recently met them alongside officials from the Home Office and Department for Education, and the Association of Chief Police Officers to discuss the government's initiatives on FGM, including those announced at the Girl Summit in July. ADCS support the audit of referrals being conducted as well as the bid for funding from the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme.

Conclusion and next steps

15. Going forward the LGA will publish a guide for councillors to FGM. The Task and Finish Group has already commented on this and it is being revised in light of their comments. It not only sets out the facts about FGM but also examines how councils can support victims and help eliminate the practice of FGM. The guide will form part of a wider resource package for councils which will be available on-line. The resource pack will cover a range of subjects from data collection, through working with faith leaders to multi-agency working. There will be case studies from councils showing the work they have undertaken in these areas. The guide and resource will be launched at the FGM conference the LGA is holding on 14 October. The results of the survey of children's services and the referrals of FGM cases will be used to inform a more detailed piece of work with a small number of children's services departments to examine how they handle FGM cases. The bid to the Department of Education will initially be used to scope what a specialist FGM service might look like, and will be followed by a further bid to establish the service if this is supported by the Department. The LGA will also undertake

further lobbying to create an offence of promoting or encouraging FGM through an amendment to the Serious Crime Bill when it reaches the Report Stage in the House of Lords later in the autumn. Members' comments are sought on the on-going activity of the Task and Finish Group.

Financial Implications

16. There are no financial implications arising from this report.