

24 March 2022

Note of the last Safer and Stronger Communities Board

Title: Safer and Stronger Communities Board
Date and time: Thursday 20 January 2022
Location: Virtual via Microsoft Teams

Attendance

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

Item	Decisions and actions
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1 Welcome, Apologies & Declarations of Interest

The Chair welcomed members to the Safer and Stronger Communities Board meeting.

No apologies were received.

Declarations of interest were made by Cllr Lewis Cocking, who informed the Board he was Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire.

2 Notes of previous meeting

Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board agreed the notes of the last Board meeting, held on Tuesday 9 November 2021.

3 Modern Slavery

The Chair introduced the report which outlined the Local Government Associations (LGA's) recent activity in relation to tackling modern slavery, accompanied by an update to the Board from the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner Dame Sara Thornton DBE QPM.

The Chair invited Dame Sara to give some opening remarks. The Commissioner highlighted the following key points:

- Councils and other public authorities are under a duty to cooperate with the Commissioner, whose statutory role is to encourage good practice in – the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of slavery and human trafficking offences;
- the identification of victims of those offences.
- Her strategic plan for 2019-21 sets out the following priorities
 - Improve victim care and support
 - Supporting law enforcement and prosecutions
 - Focusing on prevention
 - Getting value from research and innovation

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- There had been several developments since the Commissioner last attended the Board in September 2019. These included:
- A significant increase in council NRM referrals of child victims of modern slavery. Identification of victims by local authorities had increased over the last few years.
 - In 2018, 19% of National Referral Mechanism (NRM) referrals were made by councils but by 2020, 28% of NRM referrals were made by councils - 25% of referrals for children, 2% for adults and 1% where the ages were unknown.
 - For Q1-Q3 of 2021, 26% of National Referral Mechanism NRM referrals were made by councils - 23% of referrals for children, 2% for adults and 1% where the ages were unknown.
 - The increase in numbers had largely come from local authorities identifying children who were victims of criminal exploitation.
- NRM decision making for children
 - The Commissioner recognised it would be a new burden but had previously argued that decision making for children would be made better at local level. She was pleased that in 2021 the Home Office had commenced a year long pilot running in ten local authority areas. Early feedback shows much faster decision making.
- The Commissioner also highlighted some of the difficult issues for councils around modern slavery, specifically around support for adult victims. She noted tensions between councils and the Home Office support provider over who should provide support and emphasised that support through the national contract should not prevent anyone from receiving support they are entitled to receive locally. She noted particular issues with housing and adult social care and gave an example of where a victim had been left without support as different councils looked at whether they were required to provide this or not.
- Dame Sara noted that the Care Quality Commission is to begin looking at how councils are fulfilling their Care Act responsibilities, and encouraged authorities to look at Sheffield City Council's trusted assessor model in housing support, local connection policies, links with The Salvation Army national support provider and Multi-Agency Case Conferences to strengthen their response.
- The Commissioner encouraged councillors individually to look at 3 issues:
 - How engaged their authority is in multi-agency working.
 - The level of support the authority provides at pre-, post- or non-consenting to NRM level.
 - Ensuring their authorities are prepared for the extension of supply chain requirements to councils.

Following the discussion, members made the following comments:

- The importance of taking a public health approach to the issue – the Commissioner noted that she is meeting with the domestic abuse and victims commissioners to try to promulgate this approach across the public sector.
- Members commented if enough progress had been made on addressing slavery in supply chains and if there were examples of best practice. Dame Sara replied that the issue around supply chains was highly problematic both in public and private sector, which needed to be looked at much more seriously. Councils should look at high risk sectors in particular.

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- Members highlighted that there were difficulties around housing as there was a lack of temporary and permanent accommodation available to local authorities due to funding, with more needing to be done to provide specific resources. Dame Sara agreed that there was a shortage of accommodation but argued that resources were often found eventually - the system needed to make quicker decisions so that it is less damaging to victims who were often passed around different departments and agencies.
- The Chair outlined the extensive work on modern slavery within her authority and raised that youth violence, county lines and drugs were linked to modern slavery. Dame Sara replied that she agreed that county lines was a form of modern slavery as it was child criminal exploitation, which was largely linked to the high child referral numbers.
- Members expressed that in some areas it was hard to get engagement and acceptance around the issue, particularly in more rural areas. As well as highlighting that public health support was a key component in the issue but faced cuts due to pressures of the pandemic. Dame Sara responded that modern slavery was often more hidden in rural areas as there were issues around scarcity and sparsity of support. Other members provided ideas of how they had tried to raise awareness in their areas.
- More needed to be done to discourage perpetrators from taking risks. Dame Sara explained the reason why prosecution rates were low (despite there being lots of investigations) was partly due to victims being more vulnerable and not wanting to give evidence. Cases were often far more complex as they were carried out over several years, making it harder to investigate and gather evidence to convict. There was also a lack of expertise within forces across the UK, and sometimes in the degree of priority given to this.

The Chair thanked Dame Sara for joining the Board meeting and sharing her insightful presentation.

Decision:

The Board agreed the LGA's ongoing work on modern slavery, and to support completion of the modern slavery survey with as many councils as possible.

Action:

- Officers to progress the LGA's work on modern slavery as directed.

4 Victim's Bill consultation

The Chair introduced the report which highlighted the key proposals within the Ministry of Justice consultation on improving victims' experiences of the justice system and requested the Board's views on the LGA's consultation response.

The Chair invited Rachel Phelps, Policy Adviser, to provide some opening remarks. Rachel highlighted the following key points:

- The deadline for responses was early February.
- Ahead of developing its response to the Victims' Bill consultation, officers had liaised with the Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales, the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, wider partners including councils.

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- Key questions in the consultation were focused around supporting victims of crime with the aim of ensuring that when a criminal offence had taken place, the victim of crime is supported through to prosecution.
- The consultation sets out a proposal for a statutory duty focused on community-based support services for victims of domestic abuse, sexual offences and serious violence.
- The draft LGA response highlighted the importance that all approaches were to be made cohesive with current reform changes, in particular the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, Police, Crime and Sentencing Bill and Violence Against Women and Girls strategy.
- The Victim's Bill would go through a pre-legislative scrutiny process, where a draft form of the Bill will be considered, with an additional consultation period, before the Bill would formally be introduced into parliament.

Following the discussion, members made the following comment:

- Members raised concern around the language used when referring to short term funding provided by Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs).

Decision:

Board members have been asked to provide direction on the LGA's response to the consultation on improving the victims' experience of the justice system.

Action:

- Board members to provide any feedback on the draft response by the end of January. Officers to amend the LGA consultation response based on feedback from Safer and Stronger Community Board members and submit.

5 Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) – CONFIDENTIAL

The discussion for this item is confidential and has been distributed to members of the Board separately.

6 Update paper

The Chair introduced the report which outlined issues of interest to the Board not covered under the other items on the agenda.

Following the brief introduction, members made the following comments:

- Members commented that would like to invite a speaker to a future board meeting to discuss drug diversion schemes and how successful they were. Mark Norris, Principal Policy Adviser, responded that it would be good to hear how councils were tackling with this broad issue in light of the drug strategy, a recent 10-year plan with funding committed for 3-years.
- In regard to the phase out of Covid Plan B, it was important for local authorities to still offer advice on this issue. Members recognised that the advice laid-out by government did not always sit in line with the needs of local areas. Members highlighted that government advice for mask wearing on public transport differed in London than other parts of the UK, causing confusion and across different networks and borders.

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- Members raised concern that current pavement licence fees do not cover the full costs of issuing these.

Decision:

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

Actions:

- Officers to discuss with lead members bringing an item on the drug strategy and drug diversion schemes to a future board meeting.

7 Building Safety update

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

Following the brief introduction, members made no comments.

Decision:

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

Date of Next Meeting: Thursday, 24 March 2022, 11.00 am, TBC.

Appendix A – Attendance

Position	Authority	
Chair	Cllr Nesil Caliskan	London Borough of Enfield
Vice Chairman	Cllr Mohan Iyengar	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council
Deputy Chair	Cllr Heather Kidd	Shropshire Council
Deputy Chair	Cllr Clive Woodbridge	Epsom and Ewell Borough Council
Committee Member	Cllr Eric Allen	London Borough of Sutton
	Cllr Bill Borrett	Norfolk County Council
	Cllr Lewis Cocking	Broxbourne Borough Council
	Cllr Julia Lepoidevin	Coventry City Council
	Cllr Lois Samuel	West Devon Borough Council
	Cllr Arnold Saunders	Salford City Council
	Cllr Asher Craig	Bristol City Council
	Mayor Damien Egan	Lewisham London Borough Council
	Cllr James Beckles	Newham London Borough Council
	Cllr James Dawson	Erewash Borough Council
	Cllr Jon Ball	Ealing Council
Cllr Philip Evans JP	Conwy County Borough Council	

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Apologies	Cllr Jeanie Bell Cllr Alan Rhodes	St Helens Council Bassetlaw District Council
Substitutes	Cllr Paul Findlow Cllr Kris Brown Cllr Nicola Dillon Jones	
In attendance	Dame Sara Thornton DBE, QPM	UK's Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner
LGA Officers	Mark Norris Ellie Greenwood Lucy Ellender Charles Loft Rachel Duke Rachel Phelps Jade Hall Francis Saukila Megan Edwards Guy Head Tahmina Akther	
Press	Megan Kenyon	