

16 June 2022

Update Paper

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

The report outlines issues of interest to the Board not covered under the other items on the agenda.

Recommendation/s:

That members of the Board note and comment on the update.

Action/s:

Officers to action any matters arising from the discussion as appropriate.

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Draft Victims Bill

1. The Government has now published the [draft Victims Bill for pre-legislative scrutiny](#) and [a formal response to the 'Delivering Justice for Victims' public consultation](#), which sets out a wider package of measures that will put victims at the heart of the justice system. Collectively the Government hopes these measures will amplify victims' voices in the criminal justice process, improve the support victims receive, and strengthen oversight of criminal justice agencies. The Secretary of State, Dominic Raab MP, also laid a [written ministerial statement](#), outlining the provisions in the draft Bill.
2. In [our media response](#), we said it was positive to see Government's commitment to improving services and amplifying victims voices in the criminal justice process through this Bill, but highlighted that it is also important to ensure that the Bill does not lose sight of the need to ensure victims of all crimes are supported effectively. A locally-led approach, which provides areas with the flexibility and resources to identify local priorities and take action, is one of the best ways to improve collaboration but it is essential that any proposed new duties are clarified by government and funded in full.
3. Following the publication of the draft Bill, the Government subsequently published its [Victim Funding Strategy](#), which sets out the Government's vision for how victim support services can be better funded and commissioned, securing high quality support for victims now and in the future. This includes a commitment to multi-year funding for core victim support services and the introduction of new national commissioning standards, establishing a minimum level of service quality. We continue to work with the Government and partners as the Bill and the Victims Funding Strategy progress.

Modern slavery

4. We have published the [findings of our modern slavery survey](#), which was open to councils at the end of 2021 and early 2022. 35 per cent of councils responded, a reasonable response rate given this was a lengthy and cross-cutting survey reflecting the many different council teams that have a role to play in tackling modern slavery and supporting victims.
5. The survey showed that encouraging numbers of councils provide training to officers on this issue and have pathways for referring victims of modern slavery into different services, but suggested there is more work to do to encourage councils to think about how housing teams can support victims of modern slavery. Since our

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housing/homelessness and modern slavery webinar in early March, we have been working with The Salvation Army (TSA) to help connect their modern slavery support providers with council housing teams to improve joint working. TSA have reported that the LGA's guidance and communications on this has been hugely beneficial and helped to achieve real progress with a number of councils.

6. We are using the survey to inform the final development of the refresh of our council guide to modern slavery, which will be supported by a maturity matrix for council work on this issue.

Violence Reduction Unit funding

7. In April, the Government [announced](#) an additional £64 million would be made available for Violence Reduction Units, supporting the existing 18 and enabling two new units to be established in Cleveland and Humberside. The Government also announced an additional £30 million would be allocated to the 'Grip' police enforcement programme. The overall funding announcement is expected to support the implementation of the new Serious Violence Duty and Serious Violence Reduction Orders, being brought into law via the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act.

Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act

8. The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act reached [Royal Assent](#) on 28 April 2022. A series of factsheets on the various aspects of the Act can be found [here](#). The LGA will be publishing a Get-in-on-the-Act explainer in the coming weeks and will circulate details of the commencement schedule once available. If you would like any further information, please contact Rachel.Phelps@local.gov.uk

Drugs strategy

9. Cllr Joanne Harding, the LGA's substance misuse lead, gave evidence to the House of Commons [Home Affairs Committee inquiry on drugs](#) alongside Maggie Boreham, a public health commissioner at Hackney Council and Professor Jim McManus, President of the Association of Directors of Public Health and Director of Public Health at Hertfordshire County Council. Cllr Harding welcomed the 10-Year Drug Strategy and the additional funding it has brought. However, she stressed that it must be backed by measures and funding for the wider preventative services that are needed to tackle the socio-economic drivers of problem drug use.
10. Cllr Harding also highlighted that councils need long-term sustainable public health funding and a plan for the public health workforce to truly rebuild drug treatment services. Professor Jim McManus said that despite a 24 per cent funding cut to the

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public health grant, 85 per cent of the outcomes that local government are responsible for in public health have held up or improved.

Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan

11. On 30 March, the Government [published](#) its Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan, which outlines the Government's approach to tackling domestic abuse through prioritising prevention, supporting victims, pursuing perpetrators, and building a stronger system.
12. The Government also launched two consultations related to changes made by Domestic Abuse Act 2021, the first is on [controlling or coercive behaviour statutory guidance](#) and the second is on the [Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme](#).
13. The Government also [published](#) a position statement on male victims of crimes considered in the Tackling Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy.

Strategic group on tackling domestic abuse perpetrators

14. Cllr Lois Samuel, the Safer and Stronger Communities Board Champion on Tackling Domestic Abuse, attended the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's strategic group on tackling domestic abuse perpetrators. This meeting focused on the response to the Government's national Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan, and the specific commitments on tackling perpetrators. The LGA will continue to work with the Commissioner's office and partners to share best practice in this area.
15. The LGA and the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners supported a webinar on tackling perpetrators, hosted by Safe Lives and Respect. The webinar focused on the research and data available on current perpetrator interventions and provided guidance on evaluated projects that local authorities and Police and Crime Commissioners could review the findings from. The LGA will continue to host best practice sessions on this topic area, and work with partners to share examples of good practice.

Funding to cut youth crime

16. In May, the Government [announced](#) £300 million funding over the next three years to support councils across England and Wales in catching and preventing youth offending earlier than ever, helping to stop these children and teenagers from moving on to further, more serious offending. Councils will be given funding to intervene early with teenagers displaying signs such as poor school attendance, troubles at home, and a history of substance abuse which are known to be factors which often drive young people into crime – so they can steer them away from law-breaking before an offence is even committed. The LGA will continue to work with the Government and partners on this important issue.

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Anti-social behaviour roundtable

17. Safer and Stronger Communities Board lead members attended a roundtable discussion with Association of Police and Crime Commissioner (APCC) leads to discuss tackling anti-social behaviour and wider community safety issues. LGA officers will continue to work with the APCC on a joint webinar to raise awareness of the community trigger, and support ASB Awareness Week in July. Future meetings may be held to focus on LGA and APCC's response to the forthcoming Community Safety Partnership Review.

Travellers Site Fund

18. The LGA hosted a [webinar](#) with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to provide further information about the [Travellers Site Fund](#). DLUHC launched £10 million of capital funding for 2022/23 to support local authorities in building new transit and permanent traveller sites, to refurbish existing permanent traveller and transit sites and provide temporary stopping places and facilities for travellers. The webinar reached approximately 100 delegates, and the DLUHC presentation continues to be available on our [LGA website](#). The deadline for bids into the fund is 13 June 2022.

Government guidance on forced marriages

19. The Government has [published](#) statutory guidance for heads of safeguarding organisations, and non-statutory guidance for front-line professionals, on forced marriage.

Resolve ASB Awareness Week

20. Anti-social behaviour (ASB) Awareness Week has been confirmed for 18-24 July 2022. This week of action will focus on the impact of anti-social behaviour on young people, and the importance engaging with the wider public about their vital role in tackling ASB. Further information is [available here](#).

Vagrancy Act submission

21. The LGA has responded to the Government's consultation on an effective replacement for the Vagrancy Act. Our full response is available [here](#).

DLUHC technical consultation on street naming

22. The LGA recently responded to a DLUHC consultation on proposals for amending the legislation around changing street names, which sought views on the content of regulations for councils.

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23. Currently, requirements are set out in three Acts: the London Building Acts (Amendment) Act 1939, which applies to London authorities only; with local authorities outside of Greater London able to choose between the procedures in the Public Health Acts Amendment Act 1907 or the Public Health Act 1925. The consultation proposes replacing this with a single requirement for a residents' vote on any changes to street names based on the principles set out in 1907 legislation. The proposals suggest this should involve:
- 23.1 Repealing the existing three Acts
 - 23.2 Ensuring that the consenting population 'electorate' for changing street names is defined and clearly set out (through regulations); and
 - 23.3 Ensuring that the rights of local residents are clear (through regulations, which may be supplemented by statutory guidance), on matters such as the process for engaging with the electorate.
24. The consultation sought views on both the principles and the detailed questions of how to define the electorate for undertaking a consultation, the process for engaging with the electorate, and other issues that might be covered in regulations (and any statutory guidance).
25. In our response we argued that the proposals were unnecessary and undermined the fundamental principles of local democracy - where decisions about street names can and should be made at local level. We set out that there was no evidence of councils changing street names without engaging with residents; no evidence of a significant issue with the methods they currently use; and that communities are currently involved in decisions about street names through their elected representatives who are responsible for making those changes.
26. Further we raised a number of concerns that the proposals would be unworkable in practice, including difficulties in defining the electorate for referenda in a manner that will be appropriate in every case, and in the additional significant increase in demand on electoral registering authorities, Returning Officers and electoral staff.

Social cohesion and resilience call for evidence

27. Dame Sara Khan, the Government's Independent Adviser for Social Cohesion and Resilience, recently launched a call for evidence to explore the experiences of those targeted by extremists; the role of local authorities and public bodies in promoting cohesion and countering extremism; and how local communities and civil society can be supported to challenge extremism, develop community resilience and promote cohesion.
28. In our response, informed by a practitioner roundtable in May, we set out our concerns about the abuse and harassment of elected members, with evidence of campaigns based on discriminatory narratives, significant concerns about the safety of councillors from particular ethnic groups, and about the abuse of individuals online.

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We highlighted the important role of local authorities in countering extremism and building resilience alongside partners, the need for effective and meaningful engagement and communication with communities, and the critical leadership role of elected members.

29. We also set out a number of challenges for local authorities in this space, including tackling difficult issues sensitively, national policy uncertainties, the need for a long-term approach that addresses underlying cohesion issues, and limited resources and capacity available for this work. We highlighted the role of the SIGCE in providing support to councils on counter-extremism and cohesion, as well as wider LGA resources for example to support councillors facing abuse.

30. The deadline for submissions to the [call for evidence has now been extended to 23 June](#), and Sara is keen to receive further responses from councils to support her review (including individuals from councils who have been targeted by extremists).

Countering extremism and tackling hate crime guidance and case studies

31. We recently published a series of [case studies on partnership working to counter extremism and tackle hate crime](#). These are accompanied by a guidance note which explores the consistent elements common across the case studies, namely multi-agency working; information and intelligence; community engagement and development; co-production and communication.

Protect duty

32. In a recent [article for Open Access Government](#), Cllr Caliskan commented on the introduction of a new Protect duty to help prevent terror attacks, and the potential implications for councils.

Taxi licensing

33. The Department for Transport has published new [statutory guidance for licensing authorities in England](#). The statutory guidance is intended to help licensing authorities comply with their new duties under the [Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles \(Safeguarding and Road Safety\) Act 2022](#) which come into effect from 31 May 2022. The other duties of this Act relating to the refusals, suspensions and revocations database, will come into effect once commenced via legislation at a later date.

34. We are also aware that the [Department for Transport has sent a letter to licensing authorities](#) encouraging them to prepare for the upcoming commencement of the [Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles \(Disabled Persons\) Act 2022](#) on 28 June. This letter sets out a range of recommended actions to help licensing authorities prepare for the changes the Act will introduce.

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35. We are also finalising our response to the [Department for Transport's best practice guidance consultation](#), which we hope to submit in the coming weeks.
36. In a speech in the House of Lords on Wednesday 11 May, Baroness Vere, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, appeared to suggest that the Transport Bill which was announced in the Queen's Speech will include clauses relating to taxi and PHV licensing. Baroness Vere stated that *'technology has also led to changes in how the taxi and private hire vehicle industry works—for example, through booking apps available on mobile phones. We will modernise the law to ensure that the same minimum standards are met by drivers across England to gain or retain a taxi or private hire vehicle licence, and we will enhance licensing authorities' existing compliance and enforcement powers. These changes will create a level playing field and make journeys safer for all passengers.'*
37. Details are yet to be announced but based on earlier discussions with officials at the Department for Transport, we expect that the Government will use the Bill to take forward the commitments it made in its response to the 2018 task and finish group on taxi/PHV licensing, when it accepted the group's recommendations for national minimum standards, national enforcement powers and a national licensing database. We do not expect the Bill to consider the proposal in the levelling up white paper for taxi/PHV licensing functions to be moved to upper tier or combined authorities.
38. The LGA was part of the taxi/PHV working group and is supportive of the measures proposed, however we are disappointed that they constitute a small number of amendments rather than the comprehensive overhaul that is required.

Pavement licensing

39. Details of the Government's proposals for a permanent pavement licensing regime were announced in the [Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill](#). It is welcome that officials at DLUHC have engaged with councils to make improvements to the temporary regime and that this Bill increases pavement licence fees, provides a longer consultation and determination period, and improved enforcement powers for councils. We will continue to engage with the Bill as it proceeds through Parliament.

Gambling licensing

40. The Gambling Commission has contacted the LGA to raise the importance of licensing authorities conducting age verification test purchasing of the gambling premises they licence as well as other premises where gambling machines are situated, such as pubs. Prior to the Covid pandemic, the failure rate for age verification test purchasing was around 85 per cent. The Commission would like to see a renewed focus on this important work.

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Food regulation reform programme

41. Officers met recently with counterparts at the Food Standards Agency (FSA) for an update on the FSA's ongoing work to modernise the food regulation delivery model. The FSA reported that some councils are experiencing challenges in delivering the post-Covid recovery plan agreed by the FSA as councils returned to business as usual following the pandemic: evidence suggests an ongoing high level of new business registrations and compliance issues among some existing businesses, while there are recognised challenges with professional capacity and recruitment. The FSA is considering various initiatives for councils to develop their own skilled capacity.
42. The FSA is also looking at key performance indicators and data reporting by councils and, separately, its audit programme and what the overall purpose of this should be.
43. The agency continues to work on programmes to modernise both food hygiene and food standards work as part of its Achieving Business Compliance programme. It continues to push for a mandatory food hygiene rating system, something the LGA supports.

Resilience reviews

44. In March, the Government published its [post implementation review of the Civil Contingencies Act](#), which the LGA contributed to last summer. The review found that the principles underpinning the Act remain effective, but that there was a need for greater accountability and assurance. The review reflected a point raised in the LGA's submission about the need for democratic accountability, noting that the levelling up white paper included an ambition to empower local leaders and communities and ensure combined authorities have a clear role for them in local resilience. It is expected that the national resilience strategy, expected in summer, will set out how it intends to take forward ambitions for stronger local assurance and clear lines of democratic accountability, although legislative change is not expected in the short term.