

## **Safer and Stronger Communities Board – Report from Cllr Nesil Caliskan (Chair)**

### *DLUHC technical consultation on street naming*

1. The Board 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.
2. 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.
3. 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*

4. The Board recently responded to a call for evidence by Dame Sara Khan, the Government's Independent Adviser for Social Cohesion and Resilience. In our response 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. The response 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.
5. The submission also set out a number of challenges for local authorities, 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 [Special Interest Group in Countering Extremism](#) in providing support to councils on counter-extremism and cohesion, as well as wider LGA resources for example to support councillors facing abuse.

### *Countering extremism and tackling hate crime guidance and case studies*

6. The Board 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*

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

#### *Draft Victims' Bill evidence session*

8. I appeared before the [Justice Committee as part of their pre-legislative scrutiny of the draft Victims' Bill](#). I was joined by Sophie Linden, the Joint Lead for Victims at the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, and London's Deputy Mayor for Policing. The Bill includes measures to improve the support victims receive, including introducing a duty on local partners, such as PCC's, the NHS and local authorities, to collaborate when commissioning victims' services.
9. I highlighted that there are good examples of local collaboration happening already that should be built upon but that for the duty to be effective, it must be backed by sustainable funding for victims' services and greater alignment of funding across Government departments, as this will make the most meaningful change for victims.
10. In the session, I also emphasised that it is vital that the duty is aligned with other existing and forthcoming duties and strategies in this space, such as those introduced in the [Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act](#), to enable local authorities to effectively deliver them on the ground. Meanwhile, Ms Linden noted that the duty to collaborate was weak in comparison to the duty to commission in the [Domestic Abuse Act](#), and said there is a risk that victims outside the duty of collaboration would end up with less focus and worse outcomes.

#### *Modern slavery*

11. LGA Modern Slavery Champion, Cllr Alan Rhodes, presented at an APPG on Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery meeting on the role of local government licensing in mitigating the risks of trafficking in sectors with recognised high risks of labour exploitation, such as hand car washes, nail bars, garment manufacturing and cash only restaurants. Cllr Rhodes highlighted that the LGA wants effective interventions to tackle modern slavery and if a licensing regime was implemented, it would need to be evidence led and sufficiently resourced.

#### *Taxi licensing*

12. The LGA [submitted evidence](#) to the Department for Transport's best practice guidance consultation on taxi and PHV licensing. In our response we welcomed the guidance, which provides helpful clarity on some complex issues in taxi/PHV licensing and will be a useful resource for both licensing authorities and the taxi and PHV trade. We also highlighted some specific issues where we had concerns or where further clarity was required.

### *Pavement licensing*

13. We also inputted into the LGA's [Second Reading briefing for the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill](#) to comment on the Bill's provisions for a permanent pavement licensing regime. We expressed our support for a permanent pavement licensing regime and welcomed that officials at DLUHC have engaged with councils and the LGA to make improvements to the temporary regime by increasing pavement licence fees, providing a longer consultation and determination period, and improving enforcement powers for councils.

### *Fire Inclusion and Diversity Member Champions Network*

14. The LGA's [Fire Diversity and Inclusion Champions Network](#), Chaired by Cllr Fiona Twycross met following the last Fire Commission on 10 June.
15. The network heard from two expert speakers; Tim Powell, Director of People at London Fire Brigade discussed the cultural review underway in LFB; and Cllr Lud Ramsey, who spoke about his own journey from firefighter to councillor and the work that he has been doing in his local area to improve equality, diversity and inclusion.

### *Fire and Rescue Leadership Essentials*

16. Cllr Fiona Twycross is due to Chair the next Fire and Rescue Leadership Essentials course which will take place Tuesday 12 July – Wednesday 13 July at Warwick Conference Centre. The course provides an induction to the fire sector and networking opportunity for fire members.

### *Fire Reform Board*

17. The inaugural Ministerial Fire Reform Board was held on 29 June, chaired by Lord Greenhalgh Minister for Building Safety & Fire. Cllr Ian Stephens and Cllr Nick Chard both attended the meeting alongside representatives from the Home Office, National Fire Chiefs Council, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, the Fire Standards Board and the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners. The Board was set up to assist and advise the Home Office with their objectives for reforming fire and rescue services set out in the Fire Reform White Paper.
18. The first meeting focused on some of the key components of the Fire Reform White paper consultation with Board members offering initial thoughts and feedback on proposals around a Fire College, Fire and Rescue Services Oath, 21st century leadership course and the National Joint Council Review. The consultation period for the White Paper concludes later in July and the intention is for the Board to take a more in depth look at specific proposals and advise on how these could work in practice and raise any concerns.

### *Annual conference activity*

19. A workshop session for members of Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) on 'Governance Reform' was held on the Tuesday afternoon and was jointly Chaired by Cllr Ian Stephens and Cllr Marianne Overton.

- 19.1 Speakers included Cllr Keith Aspden - Deputy Chair, LGA Fire Services Management Committee and Leader, York City Council and Cllr Darren O'Donovan - Chair, West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority.
- 19.2 The focus of the session was exploring the implications of the Fire Reform and Levelling Up White Paper for fire and rescue authorities, mayoral combined authorities, and county and unitary authorities responsible for their local fire and rescue service.
- 19.3 Discussion concentrated on what new accountability and scrutiny arrangements will be needed across the range of fire and rescue authority types, the possibility of redrawing fire and rescue authority boundaries and what enshrining operational independence in law for chief fire officers will mean for those on fire and rescue authorities
20. Also on Tuesday, Cllr Heather Kidd, Deputy Chair of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board hosted a session on tackling modern slavery. The session heard from Hope for Justice, an anti-slavery charity, who talked about what councils can do to address modern slavery, as well as the work to prevent refugees from Ukraine being drawn into exploitation. The key message from Hope for Justice was to build partnership working to tackle slavery. Cllr Kerrie Carmichael, leader of Sandwell council, also spoke, providing an overview of the best practice work the council has been leading on modern slavery for several years.
21. Cllr Lois Samuel, the Board's Domestic Abuse Champion, chaired the LGA Annual Conference workshop session on tackling the Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) epidemic. She was joined by the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) lead for tackling VAWG, DCC Maggie Blyth, and the Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales, Nicole Jacobs. The session focused on the progress made since the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, and the importance of working in partnership to tackle this important issue. Discussions turned to whether the draft Victims' Bill would help to fund and support community-based support services, and what more could be done to focus on prevention and early intervention. The LGA continues to work closely with the NPCC and the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office on tackling VAWG and domestic abuse.

#### *Media activity*

22. I have commented on the government's decision to end the release of prisoners on a Friday which can leave them without the support that can prevent them re-offending over their first weekend out of prison, and on the government's response to the report from the Home Affairs Select Committee on spiking. The Board's Deputy Chair, Cllr Clive Woodbridge, used the start of the festival season to call for licensing fees to be set by councils.

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