

Meeting: Safer and Stronger Communities Board

Date: Thursday 23 March 2023

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.

Is this report confidential? No

Recommendation:

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

Contact details

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Update Paper

Background

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

Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) – follow up to previous Board meeting

2. At the last Board meeting, officers were asked to clarify councils' responsibilities for RAAC roofs. We have not sought legal advice but understand the position to be as follows:
 - In schools, councils are responsible where the school is maintained; they may also have responsibilities for academy schools depending on any contractual responsibility for maintenance.
 - Employers have responsibilities, under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, for anyone on their premises. This means they need to take reasonable steps to ensure people are safe, such as ensuring the roof is not likely to collapse.
3. The LGA has prioritised work on school roofs but has worked to raise awareness in relation to other buildings and has shared the [Office of Government Property's correspondence with duty holders on its website](#). LGA officers have raised issues around RAAC with workforce colleagues who run a group for councils as Health and safety duty holders.
4. As a regulator, we understand that a council's building control officers would have a responsibility if a building were to be reported as potentially hazardous or dangerous but they do not proactively seek out such buildings through for example a programme of inspections. Councils will also enforce the health and safety at work act in some workplaces (offices and shops).
5. Officers are continuing to follow up this issue with the Cabinet Office/Office of Government Property.

Online Harms Bill - follow up to previous Board meeting

6. Also at the last Board meeting, members sought an update on the Online Harms Bill. The LGA's policy work on this Bill is being led by the Children,

Young People and Democracy Team in conjunction with our public affairs team.

7. The Bill had its second reading in the House of Lords at the beginning of February ([the LGA briefed Peers on the Bill](#)); however, it has not progressed since and the Government is applying for an extension to the previously agreed carry-over for the Bill, which would give until 20 July for passage of the Bill to be completed. We do not expect it to begin committee stage in the Lords ahead of the Easter recess.
8. The LGA has been using the Bill to highlight the online abuse experienced by councillors, calling for the Government and Ofcom to go further and adopt clearer and more robust provisions to manage the 'low level' abuse experience by councils that falls below the criminal threshold. We are seeking assurances from the Government that the democratic and journalistic protections set out in this Bill will not inadvertently protect perpetrators of abuse. We have also expressed regret at the removal of the harm-based communications offence by the government at committee stage in the Commons, which could have been an important tool in tackling this intimidation, harassment and abuse.
9. From the Board's perspective, we have been monitoring provisions in the Bill that relate, firstly, to terrorism content. We have argued that there is a need to tackle legal, but harmful extremist content, with extremists adept at remaining within the law; and that providers should work with extremism experts to identify and ban individuals/groups behind coordinated and/or repeated publication of extremist content. We have also commented on measures to tackle financial harm, with the Bill including duties to prevent and remove fraudulent advertising.

Licensing training

10. Cllr Woodbridge, Vice-Chair of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board, chaired the LGA's annual licensing conference in early February. The conference gave delegates an opportunity to reflect on some of the key developments that can be expected to affect councils' licensing committees and teams over the next year. There was a wide range of expert speakers who covered issues including licensing and counterterrorism, how to secure alignment between licensing and planning regimes and best practice in fee setting. Cllr Jeanie Bell, one of the Board's licensing champions, also delivered a presentation on how to link licensing into councils' priorities. This was an in-person, paid for conference, which attracted around 60 delegates.
11. Officers also hosted a licensing leadership essentials course in March. The course is aimed at chairs and vice-chairs of licensing committees and focuses on how a good committee is run. The course was attended by around 15 members and received excellent feedback.

Gambling

12. The Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee is holding an inquiry into gambling regulation to investigate the progress the Government has made on addressing the known issues in gambling regulation. The LGA has submitted written evidence to the inquiry.
13. The LGA and Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) hosted a roundtable on tackling gambling harms in early February. The meeting consisted of PCCs, the National Police Chiefs Council, councillors and council officers from public health and licensing. It sought to identify good practice and collaborative working between councils and PCCs on gambling harm. The outcomes of the roundtable will inform a refresh of the LGA's guidance on taking a whole council approach to gambling harms and the APCC's checklist on gambling.

Taxi licensing

14. The LGA has been advised that the information sharing provisions in the Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle (Safeguarding and Road Safety) Act will commence on 27 April 2023. This will make it mandatory for councils to check the National Register of Licence Revocations, Refusals and Suspensions (NR3S) database when making licensing decisions.
15. In 2018, the LGA funded the development of what was then known as the National Register of Licence Revocations and Refusals, which is hosted by the National Anti-Fraud Network (NAFN), to address the issue of taxi drivers losing a licence in one area but then applying for a licence in another area without declaring their previous licensing history. Before the introduction of NR3, there was no central database of drivers' history of revocations and refusals, and local authorities had to rely on applicants to self-disclose this information. As a result, crucial intelligence could be missed, which could pose a potential risk to public safety.
16. The LGA is co-badging guidance to support councils to implement their new duties under the Act.
17. The Welsh Government has [recently launched a white paper](#) which sets out proposals for legislation to modernise the taxi and PHV sector in Wales and address the problems of cross border hire within Wales. The LGA will review these proposals and expects to submit a brief response to the consultation given proposed measures relating to English drivers wishing to work in Wales.

Alcohol licensing

18. The Home Office has launched a short [consultation on extending the scope of the late night levy](#), which allows councils to issue a levy on businesses in the night time economy to cover some costs associated with alcohol fuelled crime

and disorder. A very small number of councils have the levy in place, but the LGA submitted a brief response to highlight some improvements we believe need to be made to the levy in order to make it a more useful tool for councils.

19. The Home Office has also [launched a regulatory easements consultation](#), which seeks to understand whether the changes around off-sales and Temporary Event Notices that were introduced by the Business and Planning Act 2020 should be made permanent. The LGA will be responding to the consultation on behalf of councils.
20. Separately, following sustained LGA lobbying, the Home Office will shortly be launching a consultation to understand the costs to councils when administering the Licensing Act 2003. Fee levels are specified in the Act but have not been increased since 2005 and as a result, councils incur a significant deficit when administering the Act.

Human trafficking

21. The Home Affairs Committee is [holding an inquiry](#) into Human Trafficking, which is looking into the scale of human trafficking in the UK; the support available for victims and the efficacy of current legislation in this space. The LGA has submitted written evidence to this inquiry.

Voluntary & Community Sector (VCS)

22. Before the end of March, the LGA and Locality will be launching a toolkit to help councils take a fresh look at how effective their strategic relationships with local VCS organisations are. Aimed at senior officers and councillors, the toolkit is based around a self-assessment tool which aims to help councils map their strategic relationships, understand their strengths, identify weaknesses, and plan ways forward.
23. The toolkit is an extension of the work by Locality to [produce a report earlier this year](#) on the state of strategic relationships between councils and VCS, which identified examples of good practice, the core foundational principles for effective joint working, and some of the key barriers to creating effective strategic working between the sectors. The report was presented to the Board at its meeting in September 2022.

Prevent statistics

24. In January, the Home Office released the [latest statistics on Prevent referrals](#), for the year ending March 2022. Headline findings included:
 - There were 6,406 referrals in total, which is a 30% increase on the previous year (most likely as a result of the lifting of pandemic restrictions)

- Of those, 76% (4,848) were deemed not suitable for Channel. The majority of those were signposted to other services (3,754; 77%) most commonly to the Education (26%), or Health sectors (21%); 23% (1,486) were considered for Channel support; and 13% (804) were adopted as a Channel case
- 89% of those referred were male, with males making up 92% of those discussed at Channel; and 94% of adopted cases
- Where age was recorded, the highest proportion of initial referrals was for 15-20-year-olds (30%); 29% were for those under 15; and 16% for those aged 21-30. Under 15s were the highest proportion of case discussed at Channel (32%) and adopted as a case (37%)
- Of the 6,406 referrals, 'Vulnerability present but no ideology or terrorism risk' accounted for 33%; 20% for extreme right-wing (XRW) extremism; 16% for Islamist extremism; 2% for concerns re school massacres; 1% for Incel
- Of the 804 Channel cases adopted, 42% were for XRW extremism; 19% for Islamist extremism; 15% for Conflicted ideology; 13% for no terrorism risk or ideology, 5% for school massacre concerns; and 3% for incel-related concerns.

East Midlands regional Prevent and counter-extremism network

25. In February, working alongside the Home Office, we launched a new regional network in the East Midlands for elected members and lead officers on Prevent and counter-extremism. The aim of the network is to support local delivery of Prevent and counter-extremism work by providing elected members with an increased awareness of local, regional and national Prevent and counter-extremism policy and practice, and facilitating opportunities for local authorities to share approaches and learning.
26. This follows the establishment of similar networks in previous years in two other regions, the North East and Yorkshire & Humber.

Asylum cohesion issues

27. Councils have continued to raise concerns about cohesion and extremism issues linked to asylum seekers and refugees. Following the January Board meeting, the LGA held a webinar for councils and statutory partners to discuss some of these issues in more depth and share learning from areas who have encountered issues. The event also provided an opportunity for councils to share their experiences with senior Home Office and DLUHC officials.

Domestic abuse

28. In March, Cllr Lois Samuel, the Board's Domestic Abuse Champion, attended the fifth meeting of the National Expert Steering Group on Domestic Abuse. The Steering Group, jointly chaired by the Housing and Homelessness Minister Felicity Buchan MP and the Domestic Abuse Commissioner for

England and Wales Nicole Jacobs, oversees the implementation of the statutory duty placed on local authorities to provide domestic abuse accommodation-based support and services to victims and children. The meeting focused on the proposed evaluation of the statutory duty, being undertaken by Ipsos Mori, as well as a presentation on the Respite Rooms pilot programme. Imkaan also highlighted a “by and for” services working group with local government officers, which the LGA and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities are supporting. The next meeting is expected to take place in June 2023.

29. New measures on domestic abuse were also announced in February, as the Government confirmed the police and the probation service will start work immediately to ensure that offenders sentenced to a year or more for controlling and coercive behaviour are recorded on the violent and sex offender register. In addition, abusers could be fitted with a tag, prevented from going within a certain distance of a victim’s home, and made to attend a behaviour change programme, as part of a trial of domestic abuse protection notices and orders. Also, those at risk of, or suffering from, domestic abuse will be able to receive emergency help from 18 jobcentres across the UK. Further details of the measures can be [found here](#).

Serious Violence Duty

30. The LGA has been working with the Home Office, the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners and NHS England to ensure that communications relating to the serious violence duty are relayed to all partners/conveners involved. The LGA has circulated updated funding guidance, provided by the Home Office, which has also been made available to all partners involved in the duty. This follows feedback from our Community Safety Advisers Network and wider local government officer sessions seeking transparency and clarity on how the serious violence duty is expected to work at a local level, and how the funding arrangements will work. The LGA is holding a best practice session with local government officers to understand challenges, concerns and progress made so far in the implementation and delivery of the duty and will continue to liaise with our national partners to help share best practice.

UK Government Resilience Framework

31. The new [UK Government Resilience Framework](#) has previously been circulated to the Board, alongside a short summary of the key issues for councils and local places. Of particular interest is that fact that it commits to addressing the LGA’s concern about the absence of democratically elected councillors within the Civil Contingencies Act structures. The framework identifies three core pillars for strengthening LRFs, empowering them, local partners and leaders to consider, drive and improve resilience across their areas, including:

- Piloting the creation of a permanent LRF chair role; effectively a chief resilience officer *accountable to executive local leaders*, who will have a clear role in ensuring the effective delivery of resilience activity.
 - Considering mechanisms for stronger assurance of LRFs collective delivery, as well as integrating assessment of resilience into the inspection/audit regimes of individual responders.
 - Integrating resilience into the levelling up and growth missions, and included as a key aspect of devolution deals (or, where no deals are in place, as a key component of community safety).
32. Officers are engaging with DLUHC officials, who have indicated that they intend to pilot three specific elements of these ideas:
- Linking resilience into devolution deals.
 - Accountability – shifting away from the current model of part time LRF chairs drawn largely from the blue light services to create a full time role focused on building resilience and preparedness (as much as response) and ensure accountability for this. DLUHC appear to recognise that a wider focus on building resilience fits more naturally with councils' broader place shaping role than with the blue light services.
 - Integrating this with other issues. It is notable that DLUHC are keen to think more widely than LRFs, with a focus on building resilience and civil resilience into wider activity rather than seeing this as something discrete or response focused.
33. It is encouraging that DLUHC are recognising the central role of councils in wider resilience issues as well as emergency response.
34. The Government hopes to run 5-8 funded pilots on these themes. Expressions of interest are expected to be sought in the coming months, with pilots confirmed in June and due to commence in January 2024. The LGA will ensure that these opportunities are publicised with councils, and a DLUHC engagement event for LRFs is also taking place on Wednesday 22 March.

Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan

35. In January 2023, the Prime Minister [outlined](#) plans for tackling anti-social behaviour (ASB) through providing local authorities, police forces and mayors with additional tools to tackle ASB, and aiming to improve community confidence that crimes would be quickly and visibly punished.
36. On 16 January 2023, the Government held a private No.10 roundtable to discuss solutions and challenges related to tackling ASB, which our Chairman, Cllr Jamieson, attended alongside representatives from the police, Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and ASB practitioners. We

understand the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities will be leading on the development of a Tackling ASB action plan, with input from wider government departments.

37. Following the No.10 roundtable, Cllr Jamieson wrote to the DLUHC Secretary of State outlining our LGA views on tackling anti-social behaviour, and our recommendations for the Government's Tackling ASB action plan. LGA officers have continued to feed views into departmental sessions held over the previous few weeks. This includes feedback received from the Safer and Stronger Communities Board on 19 January 2023.
38. We understand the Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour Plan is expected to be published imminently, and LGA officers will provide an update to the Board once it is available.

Community Safety Partnership Review

39. In March 2022, the Government provided an update on Part Two of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Review, via a [written ministerial statement](#). The statement outlined that the Government intends to undertake a full review of Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) to initially improve their transparency, accountability, and effectiveness, before assessing their position within the wider landscape of local partnerships across England and Wales.
40. The CSP review was expected to be launched in July 2022, however this was delayed due to changes within Government. We expect the CSP Review to be launched alongside the Tackling ASB Plan, which is expected to be published imminently.

Implications for Wales

41. Officers to work with the Welsh LGA as necessary.

Financial Implications

42. None.

Equalities implications

43. To be considered in relation to each individual policy area.

Next steps

44. Officers to continue progressing these issues as required.