

Safer and Stronger Communities end of year report 2022/23 and 2023/24 work plan

Purpose of Report

For direction.

Summary

This paper sets out the Safer and Stronger Communities end of year report, including initial proposals for the 2023/24 work plan.

LGA Plan Theme: **Championing climate change and local environments**

Recommendation

That members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board note the end of year report and consider the Board's work priorities for 2023/24.

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Safer and Stronger Communities end of year report 2022/23 and 2023/24 work plan

Background

1. At its meeting in September the Board considered its priorities for 2022/23 and agreed five overarching themes:
 - 1.1 Community safety
 - 1.2 Prevent, counter extremism and cohesion
 - 1.3 Regulatory services and licensing
 - 1.4 Blue light services and civil resilience
 - 1.5 Crematoria, funerals, coroners and registrars.
2. The Board has also covered issues relating to the voluntary and community sector and specific aspects of building safety.
3. This paper provides an overview of the achievements delivered against these themes and seeks an initial steer from the Board on its priorities for 2023/24.
4. Feedback from members on their priorities for next year will subsequently be developed into a full paper for consideration at the first meeting of the 2023/24 Board cycle in September.

Summary of key issues and work

Community safety

5. We have [published our updated council guide on modern slavery](#) (replacing the original version from 2018), [supported by a maturity matrix](#) designed to assist councils in developing their work on this issue. The guide builds on the experience of councils in developing their work on this issue in recent years and is split into targeted sections for officers working in different council services including children's services, adult social care, housing, community and regulatory services and procurement.
6. We have also established a Council Modern Slavery Network. The network is an informal meeting of council officers leading on anti-slavery work to share good

practice and discuss any issues. Additionally, we provided written evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee's inquiry on human trafficking.

7. However, anticipated work around an expected Modern Slavery Bill and new modern slavery strategy have not advanced as neither have been forthcoming. Officers have maintained discussions with officials in the Home Office's modern slavery unit, and have also tracked the implementation of changes introduced by the Nationality and Borders Act, as well as those proposed by the Illegal Migration Bill, although the LGA has not actively lobbied on these in line with our usual approach to dealing with asylum and migration issues.
8. The team has undertaken extensive reactive and proactive work responding to various legislative developments and government initiatives on a range of different community safety issues.
9. On domestic abuse, we continued to support councils with the implementation of the Domestic Abuse Act by hosting workshops bringing lead officers together, including with government lead officers, as well as public webinars showcasing best practice and speakers from different organisations in the domestic abuse sector. Councillor champions and officers have attended the Ministerial National Expert Steering Group overseeing the implementation of the Act, seeking to counter negative briefings from some sector organisations and highlighting the best practice work of councils, and officers hosted a stand at the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's conference in March.
10. Our lobbying work helped secure ongoing grant funding to support implementation of the Act, and we worked closely with the Government and LGA research leads to improve the proposed data monitoring approach to the Act to reduce burdens on councils.
11. We are now undertaking similar work in relation to the new serious violence duty, which came into effect in January. We have used our experience of what has worked well, and less well, for councils in the implementation of the Domestic Abuse Act to seek to influence the approach to and guidance on the new duty. LGA officers have taken part in the national oversight board for the duty, contributed to the development of the statutory guidance and helped shape the support offer for the implementation of the duty. We spoke at the launch of the duty and have established a network of lead officers to share what is working well and any common challenges up and down the country, in order to feed this into the Home Office.

12. We have similarly sought to influence the planned Victims and Prisoner's Bill duty for councils and local partners to collaborate on commissioning support services for victims. We gave evidence to the Justice Committee at pre-legislative scrutiny stage on our recommendations to the Bill, and have met regularly with Ministry of Justice officials and others to share experience of other similar duties and insight into what will work and what will be challenging at local level. We hosted a joint workshop with the APCC and NHS England to discuss how the duty will work in practice and are providing input to the development of statutory guidance on the new duty; we are also exploring the scope for collective guidance from the APCC, NHSE and LGA on the implementation of the new duty and effective local commissioning arrangements.
13. We have maintained regular engagement with the Home Office's CSP review team while the review was delayed and reshaped, providing a full response to the consultation in May 2023. We undertook extensive work in the early months of 2023 as the Government developed its new ASB action plan, and are now working with DLUHC and Home Office officials to support various strands of the implementation plan as they relate to councils. We are also discussing with the Home Office their strand of work to develop a new serious and organised crime strategy. LGA officers attend the steering group on SOC, and have linked the Home Office up with council leads who can contribute to updating local SOC profiles. We will also support the development of updated guidance on tackling SOC for local partnerships.
14. On water safety, we have continued to support and promote world drowning prevention day. LGA officers and the LGA's Coastal Special Interest Group have also taken part in a Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) Recommendations meeting to support an inquiry into the deaths of three vulnerable people while taking part in charity-delivered waterborne activities. We are providing ongoing support to the inquiry.

Prevent, counter-extremism and cohesion

15. We have continued to raise concerns with Government about the impact of extremism on communities and the challenges this presents for councils, and of the need to retain national investment in measures to build resilience and tackle division and polarisation.

16. The long-awaited Independent Review of Prevent, and Government response, were published in February, which included a series of recommendations for the future of the strategy, themed around the refocusing of Prevent on the counter-terrorism space; reaffirming ideology as a driver for terrorism; resetting thresholds to ensure consistency across Prevent workstreams, commensurate to the national threat picture; and further rolling out of a regional model of delivery. We wrote to the Minister of State for Security setting out some concerns raised by councils in response.
17. In May, the Government published the draft Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill (also known as Martyn's Law), which proposes introducing a new duty for those responsible for certain public premises or events to take protective security measures to mitigate against terrorist attacks. We submitted written and oral evidence regarding the Bill to the Home Affairs Select Committee in June.
18. We have again provided significant support to councils to respond to ongoing extremism and cohesion issues through our work with the [Special Interest Group on Countering Extremism](#) (SIGCE), which the LGA has again supported both financially and operationally, and continues to receive excellent feedback from councils.
19. The SIGCE's work programme over the last year has included seven virtual roundtables for practitioners attracting up to 150 attendees per session, on: conspiracy theories; responding to extremist protests; building resilience to demographic change; mixed, unclear and unstable ideology in Prevent Channel cases; toxic masculinity and misogyny; the Independent Review of Prevent, and defining and tackling Islamist extremism. Each session has included a write up and resource pack which are posted on the online Knowledge Hub (KHub), whose membership has expanded over the last year to provide support to practitioners from over 120 councils and partner organisations.
20. The SIGCE has also delivered two interactive workshops featuring tabletop exercises based on a fictional scenario of anti-minority campaigns, and commissioning video resources for use at the sessions to help exemplify the scenarios and associated challenges. These sessions informed a toolkit on responding to anti-minority campaigns, which has been published on the SIGCE KHub.
21. Bespoke support on extremism and cohesion issues has also been provided for over ten councils across the year facing significant specific issues, including anti-asylum seeker campaigns; responding to criminal justice outcomes; intra-community tensions; and RSE curriculum related tensions. Work has also

included facilitating networks across councils to share learning amongst each other on specific issues.

22. A further five meetings of the Forum for tackling anti-asylum seeker activism, and a virtual conference, have also been held across the year as cohesion and extremism concerns related to asylum-seeker accommodation sites have grown, to share expertise and approaches in this field. The Forum has grown to over 100 councils, and has been supported by a dedicated KHub site, whose membership has expanded significantly across the year.
23. We have produced a series of case studies on tackling extremism and hate crime, alongside an evaluation of our community dialogue pilot, which should help inform future plans.
24. We have retained our involvement in two LGA/Home Office regional elected member networks in the North East and Yorkshire and Humber regions, and in February launched a new network in the East Midlands, to explore Prevent and counter extremism related issues, how they affect councils and the role of elected members in responding to them.
25. In the autumn we organised two roundtables as part of the Government's CONTEST strategy review and over the year we have instigated and subsequently fed into a number of cross-departmental Government working groups including on the Census release, on community tensions related to housing asylum seekers, and on tackling religious hatred.
26. Over the year we have supported the LGA's wider work on the Online Safety Bill, Levelling Up Bill, and asylum. The latter included responding to a call for evidence from the Commission on Integration of Refugees in March this year and feeding back sector views to Dame Sara Khan's review on social cohesion.
27. We will also deliver sessions at the LGA Annual conference session this summer, on asylum, Martyn's Law and the wider security landscape.

Regulatory services and licensing

28. On alcohol licensing, following sustained LGA lobbying the Home Office has launched a survey to understand the costs to councils of administering the Licensing Act 2003. We are aware that many councils incur a significant fee deficit in administering the Act, so we are pleased the Home Office has taken this action. We supported the Home Office in developing the survey and have

promoted it to our members and will continue to assist the Home Office with this work once the survey is complete.

29. We have also responded to several Government consultations related to the Licensing Act, on topics including spiking, the late-night levy and regulatory easements.
30. Additionally, we have updated our Licensing Act councillor handbook to encourage councils to consider the importance of counter terror/ first aid in the licensing process and have produced a case study which highlights how Manchester Council has embedded the principles of Martyn's Law into their licensing process.
31. In May, the Government published the Gambling Act Review and officers will respond to the relevant consultations as required. We are pleased that the Government has listened to a number of our lobbying priorities, such as introducing cumulative impact assessments and a mandatory levy on gambling operators to fund research, education and treatment. We are also finalising our comprehensive update to the LGA's [guidance on taking a whole council approach to tackling gambling related harms](#).
32. We also submitted written evidence to the Culture, Media and Sport select committee's inquiry into gambling regulation. Additionally, 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.
33. On taxi and private hire vehicle (PHV) licensing, we have supported the Department for Transport as it commenced the information sharing provisions in the Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle (Safeguarding and Road Safety) Act. We are pleased the Government chose the LGA's National Register of Licence Revocations, Refusals and Suspensions (NR3S) database for this work. We have co-badged guidance to support councils to implement their new duties under the Act.
34. We have also responded to the Welsh Government's Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle White Paper, and we are continuing to engage with the DfT on the proposals contained within the Levelling Up White Paper around transferring

control of taxi/PHV licensing to combined/ upper tier authorities.

35. On pavement licensing, the LGA has worked closely with officials at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to ensure the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (which makes provision for a permanent pavement licence regime) includes measures which increase the licence fee cap, have a longer consultation and determination period, and strengthen enforcement powers for licensing authorities. We have engaged with the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill as it has progressed through its parliamentary stages. We have supported an amendment to the Bill which would provide councils with alternative enforcement powers and met with the Levelling Up Minister to discuss this. We have also supported an amendment which would create smoke-free pavement licences. We will continue to monitor the Bill as it completes its parliamentary stages.
36. We have continued to make significant progress on councillor training. [We have developed a licensing committee training resources page on our website](#), which signposts members to useful training materials. This includes our recently refreshed licensing e-learning module and some scenario-based licensing training videos.
37. In October 2022 and March 2023, we hosted licensing leadership essentials courses for chairs and vice chairs of licensing committees. The course focuses on how good licensing committees are run and received excellent feedback. Based on feedback from chairs attending the course, we [produced a flyer to promote being on a licensing committee](#) to new members.
38. In February, Cllr Woodbridge, Vice-Chair of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board, chaired the LGA's annual licensing conference. 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. This was an in-person, paid for conference, which attracted around 60 delegates, including a large number of councillors.
39. On regulatory services, we are continuing to engage with the LGA workforce team as part of wider corporate work to address local government workforce shortages, with surveys indicating challenges in recruiting trading standards officers and environmental health officers in particular. We contributed to the development of various internal LGA papers on this, briefed the LGA chairman on challenges in environmental health; although these services have not been

identified as a priority area for the LGA to focus on at this time, we will continue to engage with council heads of services to identify current trends, issues and support options (should resources become available), as well as working with partners such as the Food Standards Agency who are undertaking their own work on this issue.

40. Ahead of the latest round of local government reorganisation in April 2023, we [produced a briefing note on bringing together regulatory services teams into a newly formed unitary council](#), based on a roundtable discussion with councils. The briefing provides an overview of lessons learnt and will hopefully provide useful advice to councils going through this process in the future. We also submitted evidence to the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities consultation on youth vaping.

Blue light services and civil resilience

Fire Reform White Paper

41. Government is yet to respond following the consultation on its White Paper on reforming the Fire and Rescue Service last summer, although a response expected to be published before the summer recess. The White paper included a wide range of proposals around governance of the fire and rescue sector. There were also proposals around operational independence for chief fire officers as well as questions on changes to promotion and entry requirements, ethics and the negotiating machinery for pay and terms and conditions.
42. Home Office official's recent focus has been around the design of the future of fire professionalism, with Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC) lead members sharing views and feedback on the ideas for activities that could be run centrally, for example through a College of Fire, to support the sector in areas of research, data, leadership, ethics and achieving professional standards.

Fit for the Future

43. A revised version of Fit for the Future, a joint piece of work undertaken by the LGA, the National Fire Chiefs Council and the National Employers (England) on the future of the fire and rescue service, and how we will seek to enhance and improve the service going forwards has now been published.

Equality and diversity

44. Equality and diversity has remained a key priority for FSMC following [the independent cultural review into London Fire Brigade](#), conducted by Nazir Afzal, and the [spotlight review on values and culture in fire and rescue services](#) undertaken by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) earlier this year.
45. The spotlight review found that whilst many services had invested in their attempts to improve their values and culture and some progress had been made, in many services efforts to improve values and culture have not always meant improvements in staff behaviours and bullying, harassment and discrimination were to varying degrees present in all services. The review has a total of 35 recommendations directed at a range of organisations.
46. [LGA responded in the media to the publication of the report](#) and initial discussions with the Home Office have been held on the recommendations. FSMC have agreed a number of next steps to progress work in this area and continue engagement with the NFCC, HMICFRS, the Home Office, and the Unions. A free, one-day conference for members looking at their governance and leadership role in EDI, alongside their employer role is planned for the 27 June 2023.
47. The LGA has continued to support the Fire Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Member Champions Network. We have held sessions on different issues including a training session on the role of governance and scrutiny in driving change and case studies from Gloucestershire and Lancashire Fire and Rescue Services. The Network provides a forum for discussion of EDI issues and support for members and is chaired by the Equalities Advocate for the FSMC, Cllr Jane Hugo from Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service.

Climate change

48. Climate change has been a new priority for FSMC this year following the devastating wildfires last summer. The LGA is running a one-day evidence session for a small, cross-party group of FSMC Members with an interest in this area to hear from a range of experts and explore these impacts in more detail to inform a policy position.

49. The [Climate Emergency handbook](#) for Fire and Rescue Authority Members, exploring current risks, and the leadership role FRA members have in driving this agenda forward is currently being updated and will be re-publish in the summer.

Training

50. We have also continued with our Fire Leadership Essentials Programme to support leading members on FRAs delivering session in November 2022 and March 2023 which were well attended.

Civil resilience

51. We commissioned and published a series of [case studies highlighting how councillors can support local civil resilience activity](#), linked to the publication of the UK Government Resilience Framework, which envisages a greater role for democratically elected officials in driving local resilience work and ensuring accountability for this. We published a short briefing on the UKGRF to try to raise awareness of this with senior councillors and officers, and have been maintaining engagement with lead government officials as they develop plans to pilot various aspects of the framework. Plans to publish a short briefing on building community resilience (in a civil resilience context) have been postponed due to work on the Covid Inquiry.

Covid Inquiry

52. The team has played a leading role in developing the LGA's responses to modules one and two of the Covid Inquiry. Module one focused on preparedness for the pandemic, and focused on both civil resilience planning and public health work; module two focused on the Government's decision making, but officers from the safer communities team led the coordination of the LGA's response, which covered Government engagement with the LGA and local government on a range of issues during the pandemic. The Inquiry has required significant resources from the team in terms of developing our responses and, more recently, preparing for the first hearings for module one (which began in early June) through reviewing witness statements, evidence proposals and planning for the LGA's expected evidence session in late June/early July.

Crematoria, funerals, coroners and registrars

53. We have continued to provide support to member authorities on issues related to coroners and registrars. We have continued to provide input into the Ministry of Justice Coroner Services Committee and the Coroner Services Managers Panel.

Building safety

54. We have continued our work with the Department of Education (DfE) to ensure local authority uptake of DfE's survey registering the prevalence of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) across the school estate. Several previously challenging authorities have recently completed these registrations and we are now nearing the close of this project as registrations near finalisation.

55. Where it had previously focused on school buildings, central government is now looking to expand RAAC identification and remediation to the wider public estate.

56. The Office of Government Property (OGP) will be convening a working group in which there will be a designated representative from each Government department who is responsible for the identification and remediation of RAAC in buildings owned by that department. This group will also be attended by key stakeholders including the LGA.

57. On the 23 May 2023, Secretary of State for Schools Nick Gibb announced that the DfE will make its full dataset on the condition of schools- including prevalence of RAAC – publicly available by summer recess, which begins on the 20 July 2023.

Voluntary & Community Sector (VCS)

58. The LGA has worked with Locality to undertake [a study into the state of strategic relationships between local government and the voluntary and community sector \(VCS\)](#), particularly in the light of the experience of the Covid pandemic, cost of living, and various waves of refugee arrivals. The study found a national picture that is very mixed, with some councils engaging clearly and consistently across departments, some having effective relationships in pockets, while others have little engagement at all. The report identifies a range of barriers to effective strategic working, including a lack of time and resource to invest in relationships;

commercialisation of relationships reducing scope for collaboration; and a lack of shared understanding of agendas, priorities and roles.

59. To help councils overcome some of these barriers, LGA and Locality followed up on the report with [the publication of a toolkit for councils](#). The toolkit was honed through workshops with officers and councillors working in this area, to help ensure it is a practical resource for councils of all tiers and at all stages in their journey of building or re-examining their VCS relationships. It also encourages councils to undertake the mapping exercise in partnership with their local VCS, looking for honest feedback around what works and what doesn't in their local relationships. The toolkit is being promoted to councils across the country, including through the LGA's improvement channels.

Proposed areas of focus for 2023/24

60. The table below sets out proposed areas of work for 2023/24. This includes work projects that have recently been discussed/approved by lead members and/or the full Board, as well as work areas that will continue beyond the summer (notably areas of work which are driven by Government activity).

Priority area	Proposed activity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Counter-terrorism, counter-extremism and cohesion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver a programme of support to councils on tackling extremism through the Special Interest Group on Countering Extremism, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A series of roundtables and webinars for practitioners to share emerging challenges and facilitate support, including the dedicated Forum for tackling anti-asylum activism Develop projects on communications support and community engagement Facilitate two knowledge hub sites Facilitating academic support to councils on tackling extremism Provide training for elected members on delivering the Prevent duty, tackling extremism and building cohesion Lobby around the draft Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill (Martyn's Law) and CONTEST review to ensure they reflect sector views.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a report which explores why some council's work on modern slavery is more advanced than others, and on what makes an effective modern slavery partnership. Subject to the Board's views, update the councillor guidance on modern slavery and promote with councillors. • Undertake a piece of work on drugs and community safety issues (see separate Board paper). • Maintain engagement with government and key partners on the implementation of duties on serious violence and commissioning victim support services. • We anticipate less work on domestic abuse as the Act is becoming embedded, but host a limited number of workshops for council officers/webinars. • Influence the development of the CSP review and implementation of the ASB action plan.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blue light services and civil resilience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider and respond to Government's proposals on reforming the fire service, once this is published • Continue work around key themes of people, professionalism and governance • Continue work to support Fire and Rescue Authorities around culture, equality, inclusion, and diversity. • Seek to raise awareness of and ensure senior council engagement on the UKGRF; track the selection and launch of pilot areas testing out aspects of the framework.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Licensing and regulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to lobby around the need to localise/increase fees under the Licensing Act 2003. • Update the LGA's existing guidance on licence fees. • Respond to any relevant consultations related to the Gambling Act Review and finalise the refresh of the LGA's guidance on taking a whole council approach to gambling related harms. • Engage with the Department for Transport and other stakeholders to lobby against proposals in the Levelling Up White Paper on transferring

	<p>control of taxi/PHV licensing to combined/ upper tier authorities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to enhance and promote the LGA's training offer to members of licensing committees, including refreshing the annual licensing conference to focus on aspects of the leadership essentials in licensing course.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to raise awareness among local authorities of the risks associated with RAAC, and to shape the development of government police through our relationships with the Department of Education and the Office of Government Property.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crematoria, coroners and registrars 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research into the of the provision of Public Health Funerals was last conducted by the LGA in 2011. This is an issue it would be helpful to revisit to gain a greater picture of the impact of the cost of living crisis and pandemic on public health funeral provision.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voluntary & Community Sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research into the potential for VCS infrastructure organisations to support councils in engaging with the wider VCS eco-system, particularly those organisations operating in communities that the sector finds it hardest to engage with.

Implications for Wales

61. We will work with colleagues at the Welsh LGA to identify areas where our work will be applicable to Wales, and where WLGA may wish to use our work as a basis for Welsh specific work of its own.

Financial Implications

62. The LGA's financial year runs from April – March, cutting across two board years. At their meeting in May, lead members agreed the allocation of the Board's budget for the 2023/24 financial year, with resources targeted on a) those areas where external support is necessary to deliver our priorities and b) member training courses as part of the LGA's leadership essentials programme. Around £5k remains to be allocated during the year.

Equalities implications

63. These will be considered as individual workstreams are developed.

Next steps

64. The Board are asked to reflect on the work delivered this year and consider and comment on their priorities for 2023/24. Officers will develop a more detailed work plan for consideration at the next Board meeting in September.