

Safer & Stronger Communities Board – report from Councillor Ann Lucas OBE (Chair)

Communications Data

1. The Government has accepted the LGA's argument for local authorities to retain access to communications data for the purposes of tracking down organised gangs and fraudsters preying on the vulnerable. This decision is a welcome result after intensive lobbying by the LGA and Trading Standards Institute, when councils' right to access this data was put at risk during the Communications Data Bill.
2. The Government has decided to require all authorities to use the National Anti-Fraud Network to access this data and the LGA is working with the Home Office and NAFN to minimise disruption during the handover. The LGA was also invited to contribute to the national review of communications data and interception powers by the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, David Anderson QC, which was launched as the DRIP Act was passed. Our submission reiterated why councils need access to this information and highlighted a series of case studies where councils had used this data to tackle serious criminal activity.

Council 'Reducing the Strength' Campaigns

3. Councillor Katie Hall and myself wrote to Jane Ellison MP, Minister for Health, about industry challenges to council initiatives that ask retailers not to stock low cost, high strength alcohol where it is contributing to problems with street drinking. These schemes have been launched in a number of areas and have attracted significant interest among other councils, producers and retailers. Jane Ellison has responded to offer a meeting to discuss the issue. Officers have received reassurances from the Competition and Markets Authority about the legality of the schemes, subject to certain steps to protect retailers from inadvertently breaching competition law. The LGA will shortly produce a best practice guide on introducing these schemes.

Minicabs and the Deregulation Bill

4. I wrote to Baroness Kramer to express our continuing concerns about proposals in the Deregulation Bill to allow anyone to drive an off-duty minicab. Our concerns were picked up during the second reading in the House of Lords with a number of Lords quoting from our briefing. Additionally, a number of national newspapers and television channels reported our press releases and I followed up with radio interviews. As a result of lobbying by the LGA and others, including the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, Police and Crime Commissioners and minicab driver associations, the Government has now dropped this proposal from the Bill.

FGM

5. There was strong Board representation at the conference we held on female genital mutilation (FGM) on 14 October. Cllrs Lisa Brett and Joanna Spicer, the Board's Deputy and Vice-Chair, respectively chaired and delivered the keynote speech at the conference. Delegates also heard a video contribution from Jane Ellison MP, the

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health, the Home Office official leading on FGM, the experiences of Newham, Hackney and Bristol in tackling FGM and from voluntary sector organisations Forward, the Dahlia Project and the British Arab Federation. The conference also saw the launch of the LGA's on-line resource for councils on tackling FGM and the publication of the guidance for councillors on FGM.

6. Cllr Brett also met Norman Baker MP, the Home Office Minister with responsibility for FGM, on 14 October to discuss the amendment the LGA has been seeking to make to the Serious Crime Bill. The amendment would make it an offence to promote or encourage FGM, a move which would assist the individuals and organisations already at work in communities to persuade them to eliminate FGM as a practice.

HMIC PEEL Inspections

7. Cllr Sophie Linden attended the advisory group HMIC have established to help inform the development of the police efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy (PEEL) inspections. These inspections will lead to each force being individually graded as outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate. HMIC is currently in the process of conducting inspections around police ability to cut crime and which will inform the effectiveness strand of the HMIC assessments. The meeting heard about the initial findings from these inspections.

Fire Authorities Conference

8. Councillor Kay Hammond, Deputy Chairman of the Fire Services Management Committee, gave a speech on behalf of Councillor Jeremy Hilton, Chair of the FSMC, at the recent Combined Fire Authorities Conference. Councillor Hammond's speech focused on the Fire Services Management Committee's priorities for the year including working to assist resolution of the current industrial action, the Independent Review of Terms and Conditions, transforming blue light services and the funding of the fire and rescue service.

Fire Commission

9. On 17 October, the Fire Minister, Penny Mordaunt MP will attend the LGA's Fire Commission meeting to discuss her priorities for the coming year. This is the first time the new Minister has addressed the Fire Commission.

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