

Safer and Stronger Communities Board – Report from Cllr Heather Kidd (Chair)

Licensing

1. In February, Cllr Woodbridge chaired the LGA's annual licensing conference. The conference examined the government's plans and expectations for licensing as well as the challenges facing licensing authorities. We had around 85 delegates and the event received excellent feedback.
2. We have [produced a table which seeks to map the levers local regulatory services](#) have at their disposal to help deliver councils' net zero ambitions. It is split into four broad categories of activity, which are then broken down into individual touchpoints identifying specific work areas and actions that can influence the journey to net zero. Councils can download the document and edit it to tailor it to local circumstances.
3. In preparation for the expected consultation on the Government's proposal to transfer control of taxi and private hire vehicle licensing to combined and upper tier authorities (as set out in the Levelling Up White Paper), officers surveyed licensing authorities who will be affected by this proposal. We received around 80 responses and the research team are currently analysing the responses. To support this work, we held a roundtable discussion at the end of January with county councils who would be likely to be given this responsibility to understand their views.

Modern slavery

4. Cllr Saunders and Cllr Dawson, the Safer and Stronger Communities Board's anti-slavery champions, met with the new Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner (IASC), Eleanor Lyons, to hear about her priorities and to brief her on the LGA's work to support councils to tackle modern slavery. The IASC agreed to attend a future Safer and Stronger Communities Board meeting.
5. At a recent modern slavery network meeting, officers indicated it would be helpful to have LGA support around training. LGA officers facilitated an officer led training working group meeting and we will develop some support for councils as a result of this meeting. One option discussed could be for the LGA to collate council focused training resources in one place on its website, such as the free e-learning modules Coventry and Birmingham Councils have co-produced.

XL Bully Ban

6. Officers continue to work with colleagues at Defra to secure new burdens funding for councils to support them with new responsibilities as a result of the XL Bully Ban.

7. We have also written to the Secretary of State at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, as well as the Policing Minister regarding the ban. Historically, councils have always relied on police dog legislation officers to 'type' suspected banned breeds so that they can be put down if councils collect them as strays. A number of police forces have withdrawn this service with no notice, and the National Police Chief Councils has written to all police forces advising them to do the same. Many councils are deeply concerned about this: whilst councils do have the powers to destroy a dog without the police typing it, most do not have staff trained to type dogs as it is not in their job description and they are worried they will soon run out of kennel space. Our letter asks for the Secretary of State's help in resolving this situation, and to encourage police forces to reconsider or at least restore the service temporarily so councils can implement some sort of contingency. Officers continue to work with officials at Defra and partners in the third sector to try and tackle this issue.

Water Safety

8. Cllr Kidd and Cllr Dawson, the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board's water safety champions, recorded a video on behalf of councils to celebrate the RNLI's 200th birthday and to thank staff and volunteers for all of their work to keep communities safe. This was shared on the LGA's social media channels.

Victims and Prisoners Bill

9. Following feedback from councils and the LGA, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) have dropped a proposal to establish a requirement for local partners to introduce a new partnership board to support victims. They will instead set some criteria by which existing partnership structures can be used. A working group will be established as the guidance on using existing structures is finalised.

Domestic Abuse

10. The LGA hosted a successful webinar on 30 January 2024, regarding how to tackle domestic abuse amongst those with no recourse to public funds. This is a complicated landscape and this was reflected in the interest of attendees (circa. 270). This was Chaired by Cllr Heather Kidd in her role as Chair of the Safer, Stronger Communities Board.
11. The second webinar will take place on 27 February 2024 and it will focus on best practice in Joint Needs Assessments. This will be chaired by Cllr Kelly Middleton in her role as the LGA's Domestic Abuse Champion.

Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs)

12. The LGA and The Office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner have issued a joint survey to local authorities to understand more about the challenges of undertaking Domestic Homicide Reviews. The survey's results will help articulate

the cost of DHRs, how many are taking place and the availability of independent Chairs. The LGA will be publishing the results, as will the Office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner.

13. Following publication the LGA's intention is to set up a DHR network to ensure best practice can be shared and challenges can be represented to Government with an evidence base. Initial talks with The Office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and Association of Police and Crime Commissioners have taken place to explore if this is a network we should establish together.

Building Safety

14. The LGA continues to support the launch of the Building Safety Regulator (BSR). This is new territory for the Government and there are concerns over whether adequate resources are available to achieve the aims of the BSR in its initial five years.
15. It is too soon to say whether resources are adequate but the LGA is commenting on monitoring and possible mitigation.
16. It is clear the first year will see a focus on buildings over 50m tall with more than 11 residential units as well as a mixture of ACM clad buildings and large panel systems that meet certain criteria.
17. Some concern has been expressed that not all building control officers will be qualified under the new regulatory regime by the time of the launch. This could provide significant bottlenecks for local authorities.
18. Cllr Kidd met the Chair of the Health and government concerns about the introduction of the new building safety regime in April created by the Building Safety Act 2022. In particular Cllr Kidd raised the registration and certification (competency) process for council building control inspectors, and the possibility there will be a shortage of registered and supervised building control inspectors, and the impact this will have on councils to deliver their building control functions. The discussion covered the numbers of staff registering and booking places on assessment courses, and Cllr Kidd subsequently wrote to Sarah Newton asking for further details on the numbers to provide reassurance about the likely position in April and the need for possible mitigation measures. During the meeting Cllr Kidd also raised concerns about the potential overlap between the work of the Regulator of Social Housing and the Building Safety Regulator (part of HSE) around fire and structural safety in social housing high rise blocks and the need for both regulators to jointly provide councils with clarity about their roles and functions. In addition the meeting covered the financial pressures on councils and the opportunities to look at different funding models for environmental health related work including moving to fee for intervention.

Community cohesion

19. We are continuing to support councils to respond to community cohesion and extremism challenges, through our work with the [Special Interest Group on Countering Extremism](#) (SIGCE). This has included a series of practitioner roundtables on current cohesion concerns and signposting guidance and resources on the SIGCE's knowledge hub platform. A further event on tension monitoring is planned for later this month.

Prevent

20. A 1½ day free residential [Leadership Essentials course for elected members on Prevent and counter extremism](#) is taking place on 14-15 March to explore local government's role in this space. The programme will explore national and local approaches to Prevent delivery, counter extremism and cohesion work, including exploring changes to the Prevent duty; national and local threats, including the online and conspiracy theory space; emerging and evolving challenges; and communications and community engagement on divisive issues. Spaces are still available; further details and booking are via grace.collins@local.gov.uk

Martyn's Law

21. In February, the Home Office launched a [consultation into the new Terrorism \(Protection of Premises\) Bill](#), also known as 'Martyn's Law', for premises that fall under the standard tier of the Bill. The Bill proposes imposing requirements in relation to certain premises and events to increase their preparedness for, and protection from, a terrorist attack. The consultation sets out revised proposals for standard-tier premises, that would have a capacity of 100-799 individuals. Officers held a roundtable that invited colleagues from across the sector (community safety, health and safety, leisure and libraries) and sought their views on the revised proposals. We will be drafting a written response to the consultation.

Fire Services Management Committee

22. The LGA hosted a Fire Leadership Essentials Programme in Warwick on 6 & 7 February 2024. The programme included sessions on scrutiny and governance, the Home Office's work on fire reform, building safety, the inspection regime, responding to inspections, climate change, the LGA's work on fire policy and reflections from an FRA Chairman. Equality, diversity and inclusion was a golden thread throughout the programme, especially given the recent concerns regarding the culture of the fire service. There were nine attendees in total and we are awaiting feedback on the programme.

23. The LGA will be hosting its Annual Fire Conference in Bristol on the 12 & 13 March 2024. We have confirmed speakers including the minister and shadow minister of crime, fire and policing and representatives from HMICFRS, NFCC, Mind, DLUHC and various fire services.

24. Councillor Biederman attended HMICFRS's Fire Performance Oversight Group in February, which provides enhanced monitoring for fire and rescue services that are not performing as expected. He highlighted the work the LGA has done to assist the services.

Contact details

Contact officer: Mark Norris

Position: Principal Policy Adviser

Phone no: 020 7664 3241

Email: mark.norris@local.gov.uk