

Female Genital Mutilation

Purpose

For information and discussion.

Summary

This report provides an update on LGA activity on Female Genital Mutilation, following on from the update received by the Board in September 2014.

Recommendation

Members are invited to note the work of the FGM Task and Finish group

Action

Officers to action as appropriate.

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Female Genital Mutilation

Introduction

1. The September Board meeting received a report on the work of the Task and Finish over established by the board to look at how the LGA could assist councils in tackling female genital mutilation (FGM). This paper updates the Board on the work of the Task and Finish Group since September.

FGM Task and Finish Group

2. The task and finish group's work since September has continued to focus around two key themes, firstly, improving the ability of councils to deliver services that deal with cases of FGM, and secondly assisting councils in their work to change societal attitudes in those communities where FGM is practised. There have been four main strands of work under these themes:
 - 2.1. Creating "Female Genital Mutilation: A Councillors Guide" and the online resource
 - 2.2. A bid into the Department of Education's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme to create a "Centre of Excellence"
 - 2.3. Lobbying on the Serious Crime Bill
 - 2.4. Identifying case studies for good practice in councils on FGM referrals

Creating "Female Genital Mutilation: A Councillors Guide" and the online resource

3. The LGA has now produced a Councillors' Guide on FGM, including information on what FGM is, the national policy context, the role of councils, information on partnership working, key considerations for councillors and questions for councillors to ask. The Councillors' Guide on FGM has now been downloaded nearly 2700 times since its launch at our FGM Conference on 14 October. Hard copies have also been distributed.
4. Our conference was chaired by Cllr Brett and there was a key note speech from Cllr Spicer. It was well attended with approximately 50 delegates and the feedback received has been overwhelming positive. 100 per cent said that overall they were either very or fairly satisfied with the event. The conference also saw the launch of an online resource for tackling FGM on our website. In addition to the Councillors' Guide the resource includes useful documents and links to other organisations, case studies from councils, briefings and information related to the Serious Crime Bill. This has been visited around 260 times.

5. The intention is that the resource will continue to be updated as we go forwards to ensure that it continues to be a source of factual information for our members. We will also run a session on FGM at next year's LGA Public Health conference.

DfE's Social Care Innovation Programme

6. As was reported in September the LGA has made a joint bid with Barnardo's to the Department of Education's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme for the development of a specialist FGM service, which would act as a multi-agency 'centre of excellence'.
7. The bid outlined plans to scope a model for delivering an FGM service that is integrated, cost effective and multi-agency. It was envisaged that the service would consist of a sustainable centre of excellence providing shared delivery, expert knowledge and an advisory service across a number of local authority areas. It is also intended that there would be dedicated FGM social workers who would draw on evidence-based interventions and specialist local expertise to provide a holistic, multi-agency response.
8. We are pleased that we have reached the next stage of the process to develop a full proposal. This bid has to be submitted on 10 December with the expectation that it will be considered by DfE's Investment Board in mid-January. We will be discussing the proposal immediately after the Board meeting with a range of interested stakeholders including the Association of Directors of Children's Services, the Association of Chief Police Officers, NHS England, the Department of Health, the College of Social Work and FORWARD. If the bid is successful, work will commence shortly after with Barnardo's to establish the 'centre of excellence'.

Lobbying on the Serious Crime Bill

9. As the Board will recall from the reports in July and September the LGA has been lobbying to amend the Serious Crime Bill to make it an offence to encourage or promote FGM. The amendment that Baroness Meacher tabled on behalf of the LGA at the Bill's committee stage resulted in a meeting over the summer with Ministry of Justice officials. From these discussions, and a letter from the government to Baroness Meacher, it appeared that the reluctance to accept the amendment was based on a lack of evidence that people are promoting or encouraging FGM in their communities, that this impacts on the willingness of communities to abandon the practice and that the police were struggling to prosecute those promoting or encouraging FGM.
10. The LGA therefore contacted voluntary and community organisations working on FGM to see if they would support the amendment. We received number of letters of support including ones from the British Arab Federation, the British Kashmiri Women Council and Pure Hearts. The London Borough of Newham also wrote in support of the amendment following evidence they had come across of people promoting FGM as a practice, which has been passed to the police and is the subject of a police investigation. These letters were passed on to Baroness Meacher and the Ministry of Justice.

11. Baroness Meacher moved a further amendment around the promotion and encouragement of FGM at the Bill's Report Stage but unfortunately the government rejected the amendment.
12. Since the Report Stage debate, Baroness Meacher has been in further contact with the LGA about an amendment drafted by a leading barrister that improves on the wording of our amendment to make it an offence to promote or encourage FGM. The barrister has also produced a supporting briefing setting out why the amendment is needed and how it would support the UK's international obligations. Cllr Brett is due to meet the new Minister for Crime Prevention at the Home Office, Lynne Featherstone MP, at the end of November to discuss this amendment and the reasons the LGA is seeking to make it an offence to promote or encourage FGM.
13. Should the government still be reluctant to accept this amendment there is further scope for the LGA to continue lobbying around the issue when the Bill is considered in the House of Commons.

Identifying case studies for good practice in councils on FGM referrals

14. Following discussions at the Task and Finish Group in June, the LGA conducted an audit of referrals into children's services of cases where a child is thought to be at risk of FGM. This was undertaken over the summer to help inform our work, with the questionnaire sent to all children's services departments in England, as well as being highlighted in our bulletins. Although we have had responses from 98 councils, we need to do some more work collecting case studies to draw any conclusions from this work.

Conclusion and next steps

15. The core work of the Task and Finish Group has been completed. We will be seeking further steers from the Board, and our champion Cllr Lisa Brett as the work progresses.