

23 February 2015

Female Genital Mutilation

Purpose

For information.

Summary

This report provides an update on LGA activity on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) since the update at the December 2014 Board meeting.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note the LGA's work on FGM.

Action

Officers to action as appropriate.

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Female Genital Mutilation

Background

1. The December Board meeting received a report on the work of the Task and Finish Group 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 LGA's work on FGM since the start of December.

Updating the Councillors Guide to FGM and the online resource

2. Ahead of FGM Zero Tolerance Day on 6 February, the LGA has updated the Councillors Guide on FGM to take account of comments and suggestions received since the publication of the guide in October 2014. The guide, which is available on the LGA's website, has been downloaded over 3,700 times since its launch.
3. The on-line resource for councils on FGM, which was launched at the conference we held in October, has also been updated. New case studies from councils about their work to end FGM in their area have been added to the briefings and information, useful documents and links to other organisations. Officers are in the process of gathering further case studies to be added to the resource to help other councils identify good practice they can adopt.

Lobbying on the Serious Crime Bill

4. The LGA has continued to lobby for an amendment to the Serious Crime Bill which would make it an offence to encourage or promote FGM. Cllr Brett met Baroness Williams of Trafford, a Whip in the House of Lords, to discuss the amendment and the reasons for it. The meeting discussed the revised wording for the amendment produced by a leading barrister and the testimony the barrister had obtained from victims and organisations supporting them in the UK. The main concern raised by the Ministry of Justice officials was having enough evidence to justify an offence that would limit the right to free speech.
5. The LGA therefore passed further evidence to the Ministry of Justice of how FGM was being promoted and encouraged in the UK. The need for the amendment was also raised with MPs ahead of the Bill starting its passage through the Commons. As a result the Labour Home Affairs team tabled an amendment on behalf of the LGA. They also tabled an amendment of their own which would allow the police to issue warning notices to those deemed to be promoting FGM. Both amendments were debated in January. In resisting the LGA's amendment Ministers said they still had serious concerns about the necessity and proportionality of the offence being proposed. The Government has however indicated they will be discussing both amendments with the Opposition before the Bill reaches its Report Stage in the Commons later this month.

International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM Summit

6. The Government held a cross-departmental summit on 6 February to mark the International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM. The event was attended by a range of organisations involved in tackling FGM, and the LGA was invited to participate. Those

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attending heard from ministers from the Department of Health, the Home Office, Department of Communities and Local Government and the Wales Office, along with the Solicitor General, the Director of Public Prosecutions and representatives from the Department of Education and the Association of Chief Police Officers.

7. A number of new measures were announced to mark the International Day including further funding for prevention work, a new national system allowing clinicians to note the risk of FGM on a child's health record and the extension of the mandatory requirement to record patients with FGM to GPs and mental health trusts.

DfE's Social Care Innovation Programme

8. One other announcement made at the summit was that the joint bid by the LGA and Barnardo's to the Department of Education's Social Care Innovation Programme to develop a specialist FGM service had been successful. The LGA and Barnardo's will receive £2.14 million to establish and run the service for its first two years after which it is planned to become self-sustaining. The service will include specialist social workers to help local authorities case manage FGM referrals, a consultancy and practice development service to build the capacity of professionals working with children, the gathering of information and good practice examples to help inform the development of better practice, and a community outreach service to change attitudes and behaviours in communities.
9. As part of the bid a project plan for establishing the service was drawn up, and LGA officers met Barnardo's staff earlier this month to discuss how this project plan is taken forward. Key actions include agreeing and establishing governance arrangements by July, agreeing models of social work support councils can buy into by May, identifying communities for the community outreach work by June and appoint an evaluator for the project.
10. Partners who have already expressed an interest in being involved with the development and delivery of the service have been informed of the success of the bid and asked to confirm they wish to be involved going forward. The Association of Chief Police Officers, NHS England, the College of Social Work and FORWARD have already responded to say they wish to work with the service, and we are waiting to hear from the Association of Directors of Children's Services and the Department of Health. The LGA and Barnardo's have already started to approach a small group of local authorities to discuss how the service could help manage their FGM referrals.

Next steps

11. Members are asked to note the LGA's continuing work on FGM, and the Board will be updated on progress with establishing the specialist FGM service, and on the LGA's lobbying around the Serious Crime Bill.

Financial Implications

12. There are no financial implications arising from this report as the work around the specialist FGM service will be financed through the grant, and the other work is carried out through existing resources.