

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

Taxi Licensing and Child Sexual Exploitation Conferences

1. Cllr Philip Evans spoke on the importance of political oversight in licensing systems at two LGA-run conferences in Manchester and London, respectively chaired by Cllr Anita Lower and Cllr Joanna Spicer. Over 200 delegates attended, hearing about issues relating to child sexual exploitation, data sharing with the police and licensing reform. Our revised and expanded [taxi licensing handbook](#) for councillors was launched at the events, and has been well received by members.

Supreme Court ruling on licensing fees

2. Cllr Tony Page has written to all licensing authorities to update them on a critical ruling about recovering the cost of enforcement through licensing fees. The Supreme Court agreed with Westminster Council, and the LGA's written intervention, that enforcement costs are essential to ensuring the integrity of a licensing system and can be recovered under existing domestic law. This is an important decision for councils, who were facing a black hole in their licensing budgets, compounding the deficit left by the Government's decision to not permit the local setting of fees under the Licensing Act 2003.
3. Cllr Page also met with Lynne Featherstone, then Minister for Crime Prevention, to discuss the Coalition Government's decision against localising licence fees. The Minister asked the LGA to undertake further research work to build the evidence base for localisation – we have written to the new Minister to seek confirmation that this request remains current.

New Psychoactive Substances

4. The Board's Chair, Cllr Ann Lucas, highlighted the need for a ban on the sale of new psychoactive substances, also known as 'legal highs' during May. Cllr Lucas was interviewed by the BBC after work by an undercover reporter found that new psychoactive substances being sold in Worcester contained not only detergent but also dangerous chemicals known to cause heart attacks. In addition Cllr Lucas' call for the Queen's Speech to include a ban on the sale of new psychoactive substances featured in articles in national papers like the Telegraph and Daily Mail as well as BBC on-line and ITV on-line. This call was followed up by the inclusion of the Psychoactive Substances Bill in the Queen's Speech, which will ban the sale of psychoactive substances.

Committee on Standards in Public Life

5. The Board's Deputy Chair, Cllr Lisa Brett, attended the concluding roundtable in the Committee on Standards in Public Life's inquiry into its local policing inquiry in mid-March. The inquiry has been looking at the role of police and crime commissioners in providing leadership and setting the agenda around ethics and accountability in policing. In her evidence to the roundtable Cllr Brett raised the points that the Board had made in its evidence to the Committee about the important role played by police and crime panels, the need to review panels' role in dealing with complaints about the behaviour of police and crime commissioners, and changes to what commissioners have to publish so panels have greater notice of key decisions police and crime commissioners are making. The suggestion that commissioners should produce a forward plan

of key decisions generated some debate at the roundtable, so the Board will study the Committee's recommendations with interests when it reports later this summer.

National FGM Centre Advisory Group

6. In April Cllr Brett chaired the first meeting of the advisory group that the LGA and Barnardo's have established to advise the centre they are jointly establishing to improve the social work response to female genital mutilation (FGM). The group had representatives from NHS England, the National Police Chiefs' Council and the National Clinical Group attending and the Association of Directors of Children's Services will be attending the next meeting. The group received an update on progress in establishing the centre, agreed terms of reference for the group and considered the name of the centre. After discussion it was agreed that going forward the centre should be known as the National FGM Centre. The group will be meeting again at the end of June.

Home Office Letters

7. Following the general election the Chair of the Board, Cllr Lucas, wrote to the new ministerial team in the Home Office to request meetings to talk about the counter-extremism strategy, Prevent, child sexual exploitation, domestic abuse, female genital mutilation, licensing, new psychoactive substances, and the review by the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation.

LGA Annual Fire Conference and Exhibition

8. In March Cllr Jeremy Hilton chaired the LGA's Annual Fire Conference and Exhibition. The event was well received and there were nearly 300 attendees and exhibitors from across the fire sector. Delegates heard from a range of speakers, including the former Fire Minister, Penny Mordaunt MP, as well as Lyn Brown MP, the Shadow Fire Minister, and Baroness Cathy Bakewell, the Liberal Democrat spokesperson on fire. Delegates also heard from Clive Betts MP on fire service reform, Peter Dartford, President of the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) and Kieran Timmins, Chair of the Fire Finance Network on the next Spending Review as well as Adrian Thomas and Matt Wrack on Thomas' Review into firefighters terms and conditions. The next conference will take place between 8 – 9 March 2016 in Bristol.

The Fire and Rescue Service: Making the Nation Safer

9. The LGA, jointly with CFOA, published *The Fire and Rescue Service: Making our Nation Safer* as a part of our 100 days campaign for the next Government. Councillor Jeremy Hilton wrote to a number of parliamentarians about the document, including Penny Mordaunt MP, Lyn Brown MP and Baroness Cathy Bakewell. Cllr Hilton also wrote to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Fire and Rescue and a number of other APPGs who would have an interest in some of the specific proposals. The Government have already taken forward one of our proposals by introducing regulations to make it mandatory for landlords to install smoke alarms in private rented properties from October 2015.

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