

Safer and Stronger Communities Board: End of Year Review

Background

1. Although the state of the economy, health services, the availability of housing and improving standards in education have dominated the political headlines over the last year as well as the general election campaign, crime has remained a consistent concern for the public, especially the protection of vulnerable children and young people from sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation (FGM) and new psychoactive substances.
2. The Business Plan for 2014/15 set out a number of priorities for the Safer and Stronger Communities Board. These included: supporting economic growth by helping councils to strike the right balance between reducing red tape and protecting the community; improving the ability of fire and rescue authorities to protect people and places from harm, as well as increasing collaboration across bluelight services; promoting partnership work to tackle anti-social behaviour, protect vulnerable people and deal with organised crime, and support councils in improving their community safety work.
3. At the same time the Board had to respond to a number of unanticipated events over the year including continued access for councils to communications data, addressing the role of taxi licensing in child sexual exploitation, and issues arising from two police and crime commissioner by-elections.

Strategic Issues

4. The core of the Board's work over the last year has included helping councils to improve their response to FGM and submitting a joint bid with Barnardo's for funding to establish a national centre of excellence; making the case for new legislation to tackle the sale of new psychoactive substances; completing the work of the Betting Commission the Board established to look at the clustering of betting shops and the growth in the number of fixed odds betting terminals; amending provisions in the Deregulation Bill around taxi licensing; supporting Westminster City Council's case in the Supreme Court on licensing fees; and developing a 100 Days fire sector offer. There has also been work to assist councils in implementing the new tools and powers to tackle anti-social behaviour, lobbying around the role of councils in preventing terrorism, work on how councils can assist in tackling organised crime groups, and support for police and crime panels to improve their scrutiny of police and crime commissioners.

Achievements

Regulation

5. We lobbied successfully for an amendment to remove the provisions in the Deregulation Bill that would have deregulated taxi licensing and allowed anyone to drive a private hire vehicle when it is 'off-duty'.

6. We submitted a witness statement in the Supreme Court case of Hemming v Westminster City Council which outlined the impact a decision to exclude compliance costs would have on councils' ability to undertake licensing enforcement action. The Supreme Court judgement in April upheld Westminster's appeal and ruled that they could recover the cost of compliance and enforcement activity from licences.
7. We were successful in making the case to government for the introduction of a key proposal from our Rewiring Licensing work of a single online application process for licensing applications, with the Autumn Statement setting out a commitment to work towards introducing such an online process.
8. We worked with public health colleagues to develop good practice guidance on introducing 'Reducing the Strength' schemes.
9. We launched a Betting Framework jointly with the betting industry to encourage partnership working over local issues, and developed a new handbook on gambling regulation for councillors to cover changes made by the Gambling Commission which were intended to support licensing authorities and businesses in developing more local approaches.
10. We were successful in ensuring that regulations covering communications data retained local authorities' right to access it, and we contributed to the development of the report by the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, which also looked at councils' access and use of communications data.

Crime against vulnerable people

11. We supported councils in improving their response to FGM by creating an on-line resource for councils with case studies and briefings and which included a well-received councillors' guide to the issue setting out what councils can do to prevent FGM occurring, as well as safeguard children. These resources were launched at the conference we held on councils' role in tackling FGM.
12. Our joint bid with Barnardo's to the Department of Education's Social Care Innovation Fund for £2.14 million to establish a centre to improve the social work response to FGM and work in communities to eliminate the practice was successful. Work is now underway to set up the National FGM Centre.
13. We held training events on the licensing implications of tackling child sexual exploitation, offered bespoke support to areas with issues around child sexual exploitation and also revised and added to the taxi licensing handbook for councillors.
14. We commissioned the Centre for Public Scrutiny to write a guide for scrutiny councillors on domestic violence which included a range of questions scrutiny committees should ask councils and their partners about the local response to domestic violence.
15. Board members participated in a range of national panels including the Home Office's national group on preventing the sexual exploitation of children and vulnerable people, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary's reference group on the PEEL

effectiveness assessments, and we also contributed to a range of other departmental groups such as the Department of Health's preventing FGM advisory group.

Fire and Rescue services

16. As part of the LGA's 100 Days campaign the Fire Services Management Committee and the Chief Fire Officers Association jointly produced *The Fire and Rescue Service: Making the Nation Safer*. The document set out our shared perspective on what the service offers to the government, and included proposals with the potential to save £500 million.
17. We lobbied successfully for the introduction of regulations making it mandatory for landlords to install smoke alarms in private rented properties. The Regulations made under section 150(1) of the Energy Act 2013 will, subject to Parliamentary approval, come into force on 1 October 2015.
18. We have continued to push for fairer funding for the fire and rescue service, responding to the Independent Finance Commission jointly with the Fire Finance Network.
19. Alongside workforce colleagues we responded to the Government's Independent Review of Terms and Conditions of Operational Firefighters, undertaken by Adrian Thomas.
20. We held a roundtable on equality in the fire and rescue service with senior members of the fire and rescue service, exploring the challenges that the service will be facing in the coming years and how the service should meet them.
21. We held two fire leadership essentials programmes for members on fire and rescue authorities, to help them develop their leadership style, network with other members and discuss good practice.
22. Members have met with the former Fire Minister at the October Fire Commission, as well as the Shadow Fire Minister, Lyn Brown MP as well as Clive Betts MP, Chair of the Communities and Local Government Select Committee. We responded to Lyn Brown's consultation on the structure of fire and rescue services.
23. Members have represented the LGA on a number of different boards and outside bodies, including the blue light integration working group and the strategic resilience board.

Organised crime

24. We successfully lobbied for an amendment to the Serious Crime Bill offence of participating in an organised crime group so that unwitting activity by local authorities would no longer be caught by it.
25. We collaborated with the Home Office on producing guidance for the police and local partners on the production of serious and organised crime local profiles to inform local action to tackle organised crime groups.
26. We held joint workshops with the Office of Security and Counter Terrorism and CIPFA on procurement and other types of fraud to identify issues and good practice in

reducing vulnerability to fraud, and the results of this work will feed into the next version of the Fighting Fraud Locally guidance.

Police, community safety and community cohesion

27. We lobbied successfully for the introduction of legislation to address the sale of new psychoactive substances, with a Psychoactive Substances Bill being included in the Queen's Speech.
28. Separately we published a guide for councillors to the existing powers available to councils to tackle the sale of new psychoactive substances including use of the new public space protection orders.
29. We ran a series of regional workshops to assist councils in making use of the new tools and powers in the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 for tackling anti-social behaviour and published a guide for practitioners on implementing the 'community trigger'.
30. We made a written submission and gave oral evidence to the Committee on Standards in Public Life's inquiry into leadership, ethics and accountability in local policing about the role of police and crime panels in scrutinising police and crime commissioners.
31. We held a training event for members and officers of police and crime panels and commissioned a good practice guide for panels on issues identified at the event.
32. We made a written submission on the draft guidance published by the Home Office on the implementation of the new statutory Prevent duty in the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015, and held a roundtable with the Home Office, CLG and practitioners to inform revisions to the guidance.

Events and Media

33. We held a range of successful conferences including the annual Licensing, Fire, and Safer Communities conferences, and held a joint conference with the Children and Young People's Board on tackling child sexual exploitation.
34. We issued press releases and statements on topics covering the proliferation of betting shops, the sale of new psychoactive substances, fire alarms, checks on taxi drivers, recovering assets from criminals, toxic fake alcohol, and metal theft rates.

LGA Annual Conference

35. The Board is running three events at the LGA's annual conference in Harrogate:

- a) Tuesday 30 June 2015 4.45pm
Out on the town: creating safe and successful night-time economies
- b) Wednesday 1 July 2015 2.10pm
Preventing the terrorist threat
- c) Wednesday 1 July 2015 5.20pm
There's more than one way to rescue someone: the role of the fire and rescue service in public health

Programme of work 2015/16

36. The LGA's Business Plan for 2015/16 include a number of overarching priorities that fall within the Board's remit:
- a) Councils work effectively with partners to build and sustain resilient and sustainable communities; and
 - b) Councils facilitate economic growth through the development of risk-based, business-friendly public protection services.
37. The work identified within these overarching priorities will complete work started in 14/15 and builds on other areas of work the Board has done and includes: the financing of councils' work around counter-terrorism and preventing extremism; working with partners on reducing crime; building greater collaboration across bluelight services; influencing the review of firefighters' terms and conditions; supporting police and crime panels; working with councils to develop simplified risk-based regulation that supports local businesses; and working with the Better Regulation Delivery Office on the implementation of the regulator's code.
38. There will be new issues which Members will want to discuss such as what devolution means for policing and community safety, and how local authorities respond to the possible developing role of police and crime commissioners. The LGA's Executive will also be considering what significant policy issues it wishes to see work on, which may have implications for the Board's programme of work in 2015/16. Detailed proposals for consideration will be submitted for the September Board meeting.

Financial Implications

39. All work programmes are met from existing budgets and resources.

Contact officer: Mark Norris
Position: Principal Policy Adviser, LGA
Phone no: 020 7664 3241
E-mail: mark.norris@local.gov.uk