

Board Policy Priorities for 2015-16

Purpose of report

For discussion and decision.

Summary

This paper sets out proposals for the Safer and Stronger Communities Board's priorities and work programme for 2015/16.

It outlines the LGA-wide priorities the Leadership Board has requested Boards help develop and how the Board can contribute to this work, and includes options for priorities based on (a) the LGA business plan and (b) suggestions for Board specific work based on a combination of the broad themes signalled by members at the June Board meeting, ongoing work, and recent policy announcements by government. Subject to members' views, officers will develop a work programme to deliver these priorities.

Recommendation

Board Members are asked to discuss and agree the Board's priorities and work programme for 2015/16.

Action

Officers will undertake the projects set out in the report.

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Board Policy Priorities for 2015-16

Background

1. At this first meeting of the Board, members are asked to consider the policy priorities for the work programme for the coming year. In making these decisions, members are asked to consider two issues:
 - 1.1. The work that the LGA Leadership Board has asked Boards to undertake based on the overall policy priorities of the LGA.
 - 1.2. Specific policy priorities based on the specific remit of this Board.

Work commissioned by the LGA Leadership from Boards.

2. As part of the recent member-led review of governance, the LGA Executive and Leadership Board have been asked to commission work from our Policy Boards where a clear corporate priority has been identified or where an important policy issue straddles more than one Board.
3. The Leadership Board met in July 2015 and agreed the following remit for the commissioning of policy work from Boards on behalf of the LGA leadership:
 - 3.1. The Leadership Board's commissioning is related to the most important (current and future) issues for LGA membership.
 - 3.2. The issues commissioned cover the terms of reference of more than one Board.
 - 3.3. There will be a limited number of corporate commissions, no more than five.
 - 3.4. Boards will continue to set policy priorities based on their specific terms of reference. These will be reported back to the LGA Executive.
4. The following cross-cutting areas of work were agreed and are being commissioned from relevant Boards in 2015-16. Specific Boards have been asked to lead this work and they are indicated below.
 - 4.1. **Devolution and the future shape of local government**
 - 4.2. *To be led jointly by the City Regions and People and Places Boards, with any supporting evidence submitted to these Boards from other relevant Boards.*
 - 4.3. The Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill will accelerate the pace at which groupings of councils develop bespoke devolution deals. At their last meetings in the 2014-15 cycle, the City Regions and People and Places Boards considered future work where the LGA can add value. They

suggested that more work needs to be undertaken on the models and mechanisms of future governance (including work on policing and fire). They also advocated that the evidence base which could support devolution deals was extended to new service area (from example, rural development). The Leadership Board has requested that this work should be new, commissioned externally and have a practical application in “devo deals”. There is also a political leadership role that is required to ensure that once the Bill is enacted, parts of Whitehall are voluntarily “letting go”. The LGA’s political lobbying will be a critical factor for success, as will partnership with business and other public service bodies, such as a NHS.

- 4.4. Making the case for greater local financial freedoms and fiscal autonomy needs to be maintained, building on the recommendations of the Finance Commission and the review of business rates. Though fiscal devolution is not an immediate offer from Government or national Opposition parties, it is very important that this debate has continued traction.
- 4.5. Housing**
- 4.6. *This work is to be led by the Economy, Environment, Housing and Transport Board, with any supporting evidence submitted to EEHT from other relevant Boards. There should also be support from an independent advisory board of experts (to be developed by the Board).*
- 4.7. Addressing housing need was a clear priority at LGA conference from all political groups. Our recent work and evidence base has supported councils’ clear role to support residents in this area. Later this year, we will have a new Housing Bill (including the extension of the right-to-buy and the sale of high-value properties) where new local solutions are required, especially on finance. Through leadership of this debate, we have the opportunity to ensure that a much bigger agenda about place shaping is developed, focusing on issues such as skills, welfare reform, community safety and an aging population that are vital parts of delivering our housing ambition. Whilst we would commission new research, we would also draw on our existing work such as Hidden Talents which showed that empowered local government can deliver the local construction skills needed to be able to build the number of new houses required, and cross-board work which has considered the role of housing in supporting vulnerable adults. A clear steer from the Leadership Board was that the focus on housing needed to be clear, rather than a wider debate on infrastructure in general.
- 4.8. Finance**
- 4.9. *This work should be commissioned from the Resources Board, with support from all relevant Boards.*
- 4.10. Work will need to continue on the future funding outlook through the spending review and into even more difficult financial era. This work is well-established in the organisation and it should be an important continuing priority.

4.11. Promoting health and wellbeing

4.12. *This work should be commissioned from the Community Wellbeing Board, with input from other relevant boards and potential wider contributions from think-tanks and other parts of the public sector including the NHS and Public Health England. It can draw on ongoing projects such as tackling Child Sexual Exploitation, Ageing and Skills which already operate across Boards.*

4.13. Continued moves towards an integrated health and care system remains at the top of councils and the Government's agenda, and getting these new arrangements right for councils and citizens remains a significant opportunity for the LGA. This work should: draw on the wider role of other local services such as schools, children's services, the fire service, public health, housing, transport and leisure; and play in promoting wellbeing across the life course and keeping people physically and mentally healthy, in work, and in their own homes. It should raise the profile of social care as an equal to the NHS, and build a business case for council-led investment as part of a much wider integrated approach to improve health outcomes and address health inequalities, as well as keep pressure off the NHS and other expensive services. This work should also consider the role of citizens and communities in supporting themselves and each other and promoting resilience and independence.

Taking the LGA-wide work forward

5. All lead Boards have been asked to detail the scope of the Leadership's request at their first meeting and to report back to the LGA Executive. This Board and Fire Services Management Committee have contributions to make to a number of the cross-cutting policy commissions, including models and mechanisms of future governance of devolution deals where this covers policing or fire, the role of housing in delivering safer communities, and the part the fire service and community safety has to play in promoting wellbeing. As the lead Boards develop the cross-cutting commissions we will seek contributions from this Board to the work.
6. In 2016, it is intended that we could draw on all of these pieces of work to inform a more forward-looking vision for the future of local public services and the relationship with communities, perhaps for a launch at next year's annual conference.

Work of relevance to this Board's remit

7. Boards will continue to develop specific work within their policy areas, some of which may have cross-cutting elements.
8. The LGA Business Plan sets out the context for this Board's work:
 - 8.1. Councils work effectively with partners to build and sustain resilient and sustainable communities; and

- 8.2. Councils facilitate economic growth through the development of risk-based, business friendly public protection services.
9. Following the General Election the LGA's focus has been on the Spending Review. At this year's annual conference *A shared commitment; Local government and the Spending review* set out how a strong partnership between central and local government could help reduce the national deficit while ensuring the quality front line services the public want and need. It looked at resources and how local government could continue to join up with other public services to ensure the maximum value for money, while putting the case for decentralising powers and responsibilities to local leaders to drive public service reform. It also explained how local government could drive local growth, and the wider national benefits that would bring.
10. With increasing recognition within the police that their work needs to be more closely integrated with other public services if they are to protect and safeguard vulnerable individuals and families and to respond to emerging threats, community safety partnerships are well placed to make a major contribution to the public service reform and local growth agendas. They can also support the work within councils and with other parts of the public sector like health to improve outcomes for residents while getting the maximum value from public spending.
11. This paper sets out a number of strategic priorities to ensure we continue to make difference for our member authorities in terms of relevance and pace and ensuring the LGA is well positioned to influence government thinking about councils' role in community safety, the fire service and regulation. However we have always adopted a flexible approach in order to respond effectively to issues which arise throughout the year, such as emerging new items or emergency issues, and we will continue this.
12. This paper suggests six key overarching themes:
 - 12.1. **Regulation**
 - 12.1.1. Our discussion paper Remodelling Public Protection set out the key issues and challenges facing trading standards, environmental health and licensing as funding reduces, and some possible solutions. The Chartered Trading Standards Institute has also proposed the creation of strategic trading standards authorities as part of its vision for the future of the service, while government has also recently launched a review of trading standards services. Building on the Remodelling Public Protection report we will conduct our own review of trading standards and assess the options for the future of the service. We will develop recommendations from this work on the future delivery of trading standards services.
 - 12.1.2. We will continue to lobby the Home Office for changes to the licensing system to give councils greater flexibility in managing their local economy and protecting local residents. We will build up an evidence base for the localisation of licensing fees, take forward our proposals in Rewiring Licensing for reform of licensing processes by building on the

exploratory work councils have done in this area, and press for government to reform taxi and private hire vehicle licensing based on proposals set out in the Law Commission's report. We will also continue to support councils in improving their existing approaches around licensing for example in relation to child sexual exploitation.

12.1.3. The work carried out around the Board's 'Open for Business' vision for regulatory services has highlighted the work councils have done with businesses to support the local economic growth agenda. We will use this work to make the case to the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills and the BRDO about how better regulation can be more effective at helping businesses and supporting economic growth as a focus just on deregulation.

12.2. **Blue light services collaboration** – the fire service is increasingly collaborating with the police and health service on the delivery of a range of programmes, and is playing an increasing role in preventing health harms and in increasing wellbeing. The government has also indicated it will be looking at increased integration and collaboration between police and fire governance structures. The Fire Services Management Committee has indicated these areas are a priority over 2015/16.

12.3. **Public Protection** –

12.3.1 Councils have been at the forefront in supporting victims of violence directed at women and girls, especially domestic abuse. We will feed views into the refresh of the violence against women and girls strategy by the Home Office, and continue to work with Barnardo's on establishing the National FGM Centre as the main source of information and advice for councils on FGM. We will contribute to the CLG review of services, and gather and share examples of good practice especially of joint commissioning of services and around perpetrator programmes, to improve outcomes for victims.

12.3.2 The Casey Review of Rotherham Council's response to child sexual exploitation identified a number of important issues around the role of community safety and regulatory services in tackling CSE. We will continue our work in this area, for example around taxi licensing, and contribute to the wider LGA work to assist councils in responding to this issue led by the Children and Young People's Board.

12.3.3 Recent work by the College of Policing on the demand on police forces has highlighted how much of their time is now taken up with public protection issues such as safeguarding vulnerable people. The same is true of councils. While individual cases receive considerable support and scrutiny it is more difficult to identify common issues and features across cases which may indicate links with particular a offender or offenders. Community safety partnerships can provide a link between safeguarding arrangements in councils and other partners. This work will explore with the Children and Young People's and the Community Wellbeing Boards how councils can improve their public protection responses.

12.3.4 The Ministry of Justice is currently consulting on revisions to the Victim's Code which will see it extended to cover all types of criminal offences, and to any organisation with a role in prosecuting offenders. This is likely to include local authority services such as trading standards. Our work here aims to minimise the impact on council finances and operations as a result of these changes.

12.4. Policing and community safety

12.4.1. With police and crime commissioners (PCCS) at the centre of police governance structures, we will continue to support police and crime panels in their scrutiny of Commissioners ahead of the next PCC elections in May 2016, and respond to the recommendations directed at the LGA by the Committee on Standards in Public Life by agreeing guidance with the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners and developing an e-training package for panel members.

12.4.2. Whilst crime rates overall have continued to fall, the amount of cyber or cyber-facilitated crime has grown and continues to do so. We will explore the potential impact on councils' work of cyber and cyber-facilitated crime and support councils in thinking through what this means for them in protecting themselves and their communities.

12.5. Prevent, counter-extremism and cohesion – the continuing conflict in Syria and Iraq, which still draws individuals and families to leave the UK and join extremist groups along with terrorist incidents in Europe we will support councils in the important roles they have in preventing terrorism, countering extremism and facilitating integration.

12.5.1. We will continue to support councils in preventing terrorism, including making the case for councils' work on this agenda to be fully funded, and we will assist them in implementing the Counter-Extremism Strategy.

12.5.2. Share councils' experiences and views on how best to encourage integration and build cohesive communities, as well as how central government can facilitate local action, with the Louise Casey review.

12.6. Crematoria and coroners – the inquiry by Shropshire Council into the disposal of infant and fetal remains at the Emstry Crematoria, along with the raising of concerns in some areas about out of hours provision by coroners has led to the announcement of three reviews by the Ministry of Justice and Communities and Local Government (CLG) of crematoria and coroners' services. We will respond to these reviews to ensure the interests of councils are considered and we will assist councils in improving the customer experience at crematoria.

Legislation

13. A number of different areas of legislation are of direct relevance to the Board. Our ongoing work around the Psychoactive Substances Bill will continue to highlight the importance to councils of additional powers to tackle the sale of new

psychoactive substances, and will involve monitoring amendments tabled during detailed consideration of the Bill to ensure the best outcome for local authorities. We have continued to engage with the Home Office and CLG on the implementation of the prevent duty in the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 to identify gaps in support for councils, and we are considering how best the Board can support local authorities, including a possible guide for councillors to the new duty and whether we could establish a facility to allow councils to share resources. We will also keep in touch with authorities around implementation to identify any emerging problems so they can be resolved swiftly.

14. The Investigatory Powers Bill, the Extremism Bill, as well as changes to the Licensing Act 2003, all of which are expected to be introduced over the autumn, will have important implications for local authorities. The Immigration Bill will introduce new offences for illegal workers, with knock-on-effects for alcohol and taxi licensing, while the Enterprise Bill commits to reducing red tape by a further £10 billion and will expand the Primary Authority scheme. We will scrutinise and provide input as the relevant bills are introduced to ensure they can continue to protect consumers, tackle extremism and promote the night time economy while minimising the harm caused by alcohol related violence.

Communications and Events

15. There are a number of internal and external communications channels available to help the Safer and Stronger Communities Board promote the work it is doing and to seek views from our member authorities.
16. We have a full programme of conferences and events which support these draft priorities and are designed to support members and officers with new issues and improving their ability to protect the public and communities they serve. Conferences already being planned include:
 - 16.1. 16 October 2015: Taxi and PHV Licensing Conference
 - 16.2. 1 December 2015: Annual Safer Communities Conference
 - 16.3. 23 February 2016: Annual Licensing Conference
 - 16.4. 8-9 March 2016: Annual Fire Conference
17. Additionally, for the fourth year running we will also be supporting the joint TSI, CIEH and BRDO 'Year Ahead in regulatory services' conference in February 2016, using this as a platform to take forward our work on regulatory services.
18. During 2015/16 we are planning to hold a series of events to support councils' response to emergencies including flooding and extreme weather events with the involvement of other boards. As part of our support to police and crime panels we also plan to host an event for members and officers ahead of the PCC elections in May 2016.
19. We also have a dedicated section on the LGA website, regular e-bulletins with a personal introduction from the Chair of the Board (though the LGA's e-bulletins are due to be reviewed), outside speaking engagements and interviews, advisory

networks, features and news items in First magazine as well as twitter accounts which are used to keep in touch with our members.

Next steps

20. Following the Board's discussion, officers will prepare a detailed work programme to manage the day to day work, and the Chair will include these in our next Bulletin. The priorities agreed by the Board will also be reported back to the LGA Executive.

Financial implications

21. This programme of work can be delivered in existing resources.