

**Written evidence submitted by Cllr Nesil Caliskan, Chair, Local Government Association's  
Community Safety Board, Local Government Association (COR0191)**

**COVID-19 and policing inquiry**

1. I am writing as the Chair of the Local Government Association's (LGA) Community Safety Board to share our views ahead of your Committee's inquiry into COVID-19 and policing.

2. Councils have been working extremely hard to deliver and support the nation's response to the COVID-19 emergency. Alongside the police, councils have played a key role in enforcing new coronavirus regulations and have worked hard to support businesses to comply with new legislation both around business closures and safe re-opening. Like the police, councils will generally take a staged approach to enforcement, seeking to work collaboratively with businesses to support compliance, but using enforcement powers and tools where there is persistent or wilful non-compliance.

3. In many places the join up with police on enforcement is working well. We are aware that in some areas, councils have expressed concerns that the police do not seem to have had the resources to visibly enforce the COVID-19 regulations as they apply to individuals, potentially making it harder to curtail riskier behaviours. However, we recognise that for the police, as for councils, there are significant capacity challenges in enforcing the new regulations.

4. As part of the LGA's work to support councils with the response to COVID-19, we have proposed several measures to national government which focus on giving councils the correct tools to be able to help use limited capacity most efficiently and take effective action quickly to address non-compliance and protect communities. Key to this is the need for a clear and straightforward approach to enforcement based on legislation rather than guidance wherever possible. We are also encouraging the Government to invest more time on co-designing enforcement regulations with councils, who can provide advice and guidance on how regulations can be interpreted and implemented on the ground, ensuring that they are workable from the outset and that councils are prepared for new regulations as they are introduced.

5. Councils need to be empowered to take effective action quickly. Whilst councils have powers to fine and ultimately close businesses, in some cases a more nuanced approach would be helpful. For example, the use of COVID specific improvement and prohibition notices which can be applied to any premises which are not complying with COVID rules would be welcome. The LGA has also called for the introduction of a temporary public health (or COVID-19) objective in the Licensing Act which would enable councils to take action where licenced premises like pubs, bars and restaurants are not protecting the public during the pandemic – such as maintaining social distancing. Whilst the vast majority of businesses are working hard to implement the necessary measures to protect people's safety, there have been examples of guidelines not being followed by some licensed premises and councils have told us that they do not feel they have the powers they need to stop this, putting people at risk of infection. Extending licensing powers would mean they can act quickly and proactively in cracking down on places that flout the guidance, to prevent problems in the first place instead of only being able to act when it is too late.

6. As always, the importance of close engagement between central and local government is crucial. In recent months, councils have demonstrated that local can deliver where a centralised design and control of public services from Whitehall simply cannot. We now need to be empowered to be

allowed to innovate and create services that are tailored to communities and localities. Where new regulations are implemented, councils also need sufficient lead time to prepare for these to allow them to be adequately resourced and undertake the necessary engagement with businesses and residents.

7. The LGA is pleased that Government has recognised the pressures on council enforcement officers and has provided £30 million in funding to help councils enforce COVID-19 rules. It is also helpful that councils have the flexibility to determine how best to use the money, as the LGA had called for, so they can decide on the best approach for their areas. It is nevertheless important to recognise that the pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing pressures on councils' regulatory services, which in many places are now at tipping point. In the [LGA's submission to the Comprehensive Spending Review](#), we called on Government to ensure councils have enough funding to maintain vital trading standards and environmental health services.

8. I hope the information outlined above is helpful. If you would like to discuss this further or if we can help with anything else, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

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