

11 July 2017

## **Improvement support to councils around community cohesion, counter extremism and Prevent**

### **Purpose**

For discussion and direction.

### **Summary**

Dame Louise Casey CB was commissioned by the government in July 2015 to conduct a review into how opportunity and integration could be boosted in the most isolated communities. The review's report was published in December 2016. Dame Casey attended the LGA's Executive in March to discuss its findings and recommendations. This report sets out proposals for an improvement programme to support councils in addressing the issues identified in the review, and outlines the LGA's existing improvement work around community cohesion, counter-extremism and Prevent.

### **Recommendations**

Members are asked to:

- 1) Note the improvement-related work already underway in the LGA around community cohesion, counter extremism and Prevent.
- 2) Consider the proposed programme of support for councils to assist them in responding to the Casey Review.

### **Actions**

Officers to action members' comments as appropriate.

**Contact officer:** Mark Norris  
**Position:** Principal Policy Adviser  
**Phone no:** 020 7664 3241  
**Email:** [mark.norris@local.gov.uk](mailto:mark.norris@local.gov.uk)

11 July 2017

## **Improvement support to councils around community cohesion, counter extremism and Prevent**

### **Background**

1. Following the murder of Lee Rigby in 2013 the government looked at what was being done to confront extremism and radicalisation. This work resulted in provisions in the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 placing a statutory duty on councils and other public bodies to prevent people being drawn into terrorism. It also led to the publication of the Counter-Extremism Strategy in October 2015. As part of the work associated with the Strategy, Louise Casey was asked to conduct a review of how opportunity and integration could be boosted in the most isolated communities.
2. Dame Casey's [review](#) was published in December 2016, and she attended the LGA's Executive in March, following a presentation by her team to the Safer and Stronger Communities Board in January. In her presentation to the Executive Dame Casey set out a number of challenges her review had identified:
  - 2.1. The need to develop a discourse on the impact of the pace and scale of migration that enabled issues to be discussed without dividing those with different views into different camps;
  - 2.2. Settlement patterns that result in communities segregated on a cultural and religious basis, which result in people growing up without understanding the nature of the country they were living in;
  - 2.3. Social and economic exclusion that resulted for example in high unemployment rates for young black men and poor life chances for white working class communities; and
  - 2.4. The need for political leadership to address these issues that extended beyond the leaders of councils, and related to that the need to improve standards in public office and the integrity of local government.
3. Prior to the announcement of the general election, the indications from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) were that a response to the Casey Review would be published in the summer or autumn. This was intended to be a cross-government response focusing on a range of issues in the style of a green or white paper. Officials also advised that government was proposing to support this with area based work in a number of hotspot areas, using a local/national partnership approach to generate new best practice in this field. This suggests funding of a similar scale to the 'Building a Stronger Britain Together' programme which has provided local areas with around £3 million in funding so far.
4. Clearly these plans are now subject to any changes in government policy and ministerial appointments following the election, and may also be affected by Dame Casey's departure from the civil service in the summer. As a result at this stage it is unclear what additional support, if any, there might be for councils, so the working assumption for the

11 July 2017

moment must be that there will be minimal funding made available from central government for local authorities on this agenda.

### **Response to the Casey Review**

5. The Executive agreed that the LGA should respond to the Casey Review and develop a programme of support for councils to address the challenges outlined at the Executive meeting. Councillor Blackburn, as chair of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board, was tasked with Group Leaders in developing a response. Subject to the Executive's agenda following the general election it is intended to take proposals to the Executive during the summer. These are likely to straddle both the LGA's policy and improvement work. This paper examines the possible strands of improvement work.
6. Exploratory discussions with a small number of member authorities on what support they would find helpful from the LGA, suggest that the opportunity to network and share good practice with other councils would assist, with less of an emphasis on publishing further guidance. They also provided a clear steer that while peer support would be useful, a separate peer review process would not be. There is scope however to look into whether high level analysis of community cohesion issues could be incorporated into the LGA's corporate peer challenge process or improvement support around councils' safeguarding role.
7. We are keen to ensure that there is other support available for those areas already at the forefront of this agenda. We are therefore proposing to bring together a group of councils focusing on this with the aim of establishing a peer support network that enables them to share and generate ideas and best practice through the medium the group finds most effective. We hope to be able to hold a first event in mid-to-late summer 2017.
8. However, it is much harder to define a specific product or single response that addresses the review's challenge to the sector to support councils and councillors in developing a local discourse on integration and cohesion. We propose therefore to undertake informal, Chatham House soundings from a number of councillors to help:
  - 8.1. Identify what are the challenges and barriers to showing leadership in different communities (recognising that these may vary) and what type of support would be helpful to address this.
  - 8.2. Develop this into a specific offer that can be tested and refined with support from councillors.
9. Improvement and Innovation Board members' views are sought on these proposals and whether there is any additional improvement support the LGA could provide to councils to address the challenges set out in the Casey Review.
10. The programme of support that is developed will be able to build on work already underway to support councils around the community cohesion agenda. After the increase in reports of hate crime after the referendum to leave the European Union, the LGA provided a range of material on its website that councils could access in work around building community cohesion and tackling hate crimes. In preparing that material it became clear that the LGA's existing guidance on community cohesion was over a

11 July 2017

decade old. This guidance is now being updated in light of the Casey Review and its recommendations.

### **Support to councils on counter extremism and Prevent**

11. The improvement support for councils around community cohesion will also be able to draw on wider work that the LGA has been involved in covering counter extremism and the Prevent strategy. Prevent is one of the four strands in the UK's counter-terrorism strategy, and is aimed at stopping people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism.
12. The Counter Extremism Unit (CEU) at the Home Office is working with approximately 45 priority areas to assist them in countering extremism and to tackle radicalisation. The LGA has participated in two roundtables with some of these councils and the CEU to discuss what support they need. The CEU is also providing funding to the councils to employ a community co-ordinator to lead their work. In order to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and case studies between these councils a forum has been established for them on the Knowledge Hub by the LGA.
13. Additionally CEU has been working with Luton Council, DCLG and the LGA to create a special interest group on counter extremism (SIGCE). The aim of the SIGCE is to share good practice between the community coordinators in the first instance, and then it is hoped it will provide a forum for sharing good practice more widely across the sector. The predecessor to the SIGCE, the special interest group on the English Defence League run by Luton and Blackburn-with-Darwen councils during 2013, rapidly grew in size because councils found it a convenient means of sharing experiences and seeking advice from each other in countering far right activity.
14. The LGA itself has developed a Leadership Essentials course on countering extremism, with the first course being run at the end of February. Two more courses are planned over the next year – on 6/7 September and 28/29 September in Leeds and Coventry respectively. We have also commissioned guidance from the Centre for Public Scrutiny for members on scrutinising Prevent and counter extremism. In addition we have commissioned an update to the toolkit on tackling the far right produced by the English Defence League special interest group in 2013. Alongside this we have commissioned a guide Understanding Islam in Britain. We expect to publish these papers after the LGA's annual conference.
15. The LGA has also been working with the Office of Security and Counter Terrorism (OSCT) at the Home Office around the Prevent Strategy, and the statutory duty on councils to prevent people being drawn into terrorism. Given the political sensitivities around the Prevent programme in some communities, we have in the main provided advice and assistance to the Home Office in designing their support offer to councils outside the Prevent priority areas. However after discussions with a previous Security Minister, one area where we have worked closely with OSCT is on identifying a cross-party selection of member peers to act as Prevent Champions. The role of the Champions is to raise awareness of the Prevent programme and its objectives to safeguard individuals from harm with councillors. To assist with this OSCT has been planning to host regional roadshow events for councillors later this year. Whether these take place will depend on the outcome of the election and the future government's views on Prevent, but we have been in discussion with officials about developing a Prevent

11 July 2017

Leadership Essentials course for councillors, which are planned for 1/2 November, 6/7 December and 20/21 March 2018 in Leeds, Crewe and Coventry respectively.

### **Implications for Wales**

16. As Welsh councils are supported by the WLGA on wider improvement issues and the Welsh Government is in direct discussion with the Home Office around counter extremism and Prevent, any LGA support would be directed at English local authorities.

### **Financial Implications**

17. Any improvement support offer to councils will have to be funded. The improvement grant for 2017/18 makes specific reference to the LGA leading a work programme around community cohesion, counter extremism and Prevent, and the work outlined in this paper will be funded from the DCLG improvement grant.

### **Next steps**

18. Members are asked to:
  - 18.1. Note the improvement-related work already underway in the LGA around community cohesion, counter extremism and Prevent.
  - 18.2. Consider the proposed programme of support for councils to assist them in responding to the Casey Review.