

Integrated Communities Strategy

Purpose of report

For discussion.

Summary

The Government's Integrated Communities Strategy is due to be published as a consultation document this month, with lead officials due to attend the Board meeting to discuss this. This paper outlines our expectations for the strategy and seeks the Board's views on the document and appropriate LGA next steps.

Recommendation

That Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board provide their views on the content of the strategy, to help develop the LGA's response to the consultation, and the LGA's supporting activities on cohesion.

Action

Officers to develop a draft response to the consultation, and take forward the supporting actions outlined in this paper.

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Integrated Communities Strategy

Background

1. Dame Louise Casey published her report into opportunity and integration in December 2016. Subsequently, the Government's manifesto in 2017 committed to developing a new integration strategy that would help those in more isolated communities engage with the wider world, help women into the workplace, and teach more people to speak English. It also committed to working with schools to ensure pupils are taught about pluralistic British values and help them get to know people with different ways of life.
2. The strategy has been much delayed, but is now expected to be published by the time of the Board meeting. The strategy document is expected to take the form of a Green Paper, with Government launching a consultation that runs until early summer.
3. This paper sets out the key findings of the Casey review and our response to it; our expectations for the strategy; and proposed next steps.

The Casey review and LGA response

4. In March 2017, Dame Louise Casey attended the LGA Executive and set out a key a number of key findings in relation to councils, which can be summarised as:
 - 4.1. Social and economic exclusion is a major barrier to cohesion and integration, with high unemployment rates for young black men and poor life chances for white working class communities highlighted.
 - 4.2. Settlement patterns have resulted in communities segregated on a cultural and religious basis, which results in people growing up without understanding the nature of the country they were living in.
 - 4.3. There is a need to develop a discourse on the impact of the pace and scale of migration that enables issues to be discussed without dividing those with different views into different camps.
 - 4.4. Political leadership is needed to address these issues that extends beyond the leaders of councils, and related to that there is a need to improve standards in public office and the integrity of local government.
5. The Chairman of the Board was tasked by the LGA Executive to work with Group Leaders to develop a LGA response to the review. Our response, which was published in December, outlined the following key points:
 - 5.1. The LGA welcomes the helpful insight provided by the Casey review.

19 March 2018

- 5.2. The country is experiencing an evolving context on community cohesion issues. Against a backdrop of tensions highlighted by the referendum on leaving the European Union and threat of extremism and terrorism, local cohesion challenges vary considerably from place to place. Within this context, councils must be given the tools that can help them improve opportunities cohesion in all local areas.
- 5.3. Opportunity and integration, the two main themes of the review, are unequivocally linked to social mobility and aspiration; and in turn, to access to good quality education, jobs and housing.
- 5.4. Local government has a key role to play in all of these services, but their powers to progress them have been eroded by successive governments. Councils need to be freed from current constraints that prevent us doing more around education, local economic growth and housing.
- 5.5. Changes to the education system have impacted on councils' ability to promote integration amongst children and young people and ensure that school populations reflect local populations. The LGA has called for councils to have the power to direct academies to expand to meet local demand; and for councils to have a lead role in commissioning new free schools to make sure they provide places where they are most needed and can take account of cohesion issues.
- 5.6. There are concerns about the growth in home schooling and an associated rise in illegal schools – the LGA believes there should be a legal duty on parents to register home-schooled children with their local authority, and that councils should have powers (and funding) to fulfil their duty to ensure that a suitable education is being provided.
- 5.7. The LGA recognises it has a role in equipping councillors with the skills and knowledge needed to show leadership on difficult issues like cohesion and migration – as well as our current offer to councillors, including training, peer support and guidance, we are looking at what more support we can provide around leading political discourse on challenging issues and engaging with the media and public debates.

Expectations for the strategy

6. We have engaged with officials from MHCLG's integration team throughout the development of the strategy, and earlier this month Cllr Blackburn met the Parliamentary Under Secretary for Faith, Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth, to discuss this.
7. Based on these discussions, we understand that the strategy will focus on the following themes:

- 7.1. **Strengthening leadership** – politically (nationally and locally), but also among other parts of the community, such as the faith, business, and voluntary sectors.
 - 7.2. **Supporting new migrants and existing resident communities** - for example providing better information for new arrivals on expectations about norms and behaviours.
 - 7.3. **School segregation and young people** – preparedness for life in modern Britain, school segregation, safeguarding and home schools.
 - 7.4. **Boosting English language** – English for Speakers of Other Languages support, matching needs and support, outside classroom support.
 - 7.5. **Role of communities in social mixing** – opportunity outside of schools and residential areas, community rights, building resilience, National Citizen Service, sports.
 - 7.6. **Economic opportunities** - working with Job Centre Plus on support for labour market, bringing out of reach groups back to the labour market.
 - 7.7. **Personal / cultural factors** – that can hold back integration and links to the Hate Crime action plan.
 - 7.8. **Evaluation and measuring success** – how to measure cohesion and share learning.
8. The strategy is expected to be accompanied by the launch of an area based programme that supports local and central partnership working on cohesion in different areas. This will be trialled in five areas.

Key issues for discussion

9. The Board may wish to consider the following questions in relation to the strategy:
- 9.1. How can Government ensure that its integration strategy is linked up with the related issues of counter extremism and Prevent? While these cannot be wholly conflated with cohesion, they similarly cannot be considered in isolation. There are significant national developments on the horizon for all three policy areas and it is important that work is joined up and presents a coherent approach (alongside the integration green paper this includes the updated counter-terrorism 'Contest' strategy; roll out of Dovetail for local authority administration of Prevent Channel panels; the establishment of the new office of the Counter Extremism Commissioner).
 - 9.2. What funding will be available to support the Area Based Programme and integration strategy work?

9.3. What are the government's plans for consultation on the green paper and how will they engage with councils specifically?

9.4. How will government support councils which are not involved in the area based programme? How will learning from the programme be disseminated more widely?

Next steps and LGA activity

10. Once the Government's integration strategy is published, the LGA will seek the views of member councils, as well as relevant Boards, to help develop a formal response. Given the expected themes for the review, this is likely to cut across a number of other LGA Boards with responsibility for economic growth, education and other issues.

11. We will also continue to liaise with Government to help shape the area based programme in a way that works for councils. The LGA can play a key role in linking the development of the new integration pilots with other broader work – for instance that of the Special Interest Group on Countering Extremism (SIGCE). The SIGCE has identified a Delivery Group of councils which will support the development and delivery of the SIGCE's programme of work, so that there is cross-over with areas trialling the integration area based programme, to help join this learning up.

12. Alongside this, we will also continue with our existing planned activity in the area of cohesion, counter-extremism and Prevent. This includes:

12.1. Our successful leadership essentials programmes for elected members on counter-extremism and Prevent which has been running for over a year now, and has included sessions on engagement and leadership around sensitive issues. Subject to funding, further courses will be held next year. Additionally, a new leadership essentials course will be launched this month on emergency planning and civil resilience which will look at local leadership in times of crisis.

12.2. Plans to commission further work around engagement with 'hard to reach' groups, particularly working class communities, with the potential to trial some approaches next financial year.

12.3. Supporting a roundtable in April for local authority chief executives to discuss cohesion and integration issues.

12.4. Publishing new guidance on cohesion, which will support the themes of the strategy, and we expect to finalise in April or May.

Implications for Wales

13. Most of the themes in the strategy are devolved matters that fall under the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly, but some of our work will be or relevance to Welsh Member Councils (in particular around Prevent and counter extremism). LGA materials and events are open to Welsh colleagues. We will liaise as appropriate with WLGA about how our work may assist Welsh councils.

Financial Implications

14. Funding from the LGA's improvement grant will be used to support the delivery of our work on integration in the 2018-19, through the continuation of a dedicated post within the team to focus on this issue.

Next Steps

15. Members are asked to provide their views on the content of the strategy, to help develop the LGA's response to the consultation, and the LGA's supporting activities on cohesion.