

## **Community Cohesion and Safer Communities - the Local Government White Paper - Decisions and Actions Required**

### **Decisions**

1. *Board members are asked:*
  - a. *to review the programme of Safer Communities interventions for 2006/7 and agree that, in the context of likely LGA work to follow up the Local Government White Paper, the previously agreed interventions should proceed as planned. Officers will continue to review interventions to ensure that outputs are aligned as far as possible to wider post-White Paper priorities.*
  - b. *to agree the proposed approach to Community Cohesion from a Safer Communities Board perspective (paragraph 10), noting that this is in practice subject to wider LGAX/Group leader decisions on the overall approach to this topic.*

### **Actions Required**

2. *Officers as directed by the Board.*

**Action by:** *LGA Policy*

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## Community Cohesion and Safer Communities - the Local Government White Paper

### Summary

1. *This paper assesses how well the Safer Communities Board interventions for 2006/7 align with likely high priority areas in the LGA's response to the Local Government White Paper. It also offers initial views on how aspects of the Community Cohesion issue (itself a prominent feature of the White Paper) might in future be considered by the Board, recognising that this is a cross-cutting issue of wider interest to the LGA.*

### Background

2. *The Local Government White Paper, published on 26 October, sets out a range of proposals that are relevant to the work of the Safer Communities Board. Annex A of the White Paper summarises the proposals in the main document from a Safer Communities perspective. This is a useful 'first stop' read for Board Members.<sup>1</sup> In summary, the White Paper looks to create a sustainable framework for local action on community safety and Respect, by strengthening partnership working and ensuring greater clarity over who is responsible for agreeing and delivering local community safety targets. The aim is for it to be easier for local authorities, chief constables, police authorities and other partners to work together within existing accountability frameworks. The document also identifies a critical role for local government to play, working in partnership with the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), local probation boards, and youth offending teams, in reducing re-offending and protecting the public. Similarly, the delivery of an effective criminal justice system will require increasingly strong links to be made between local authorities, Local Criminal Justice Boards, and regional Reducing Re-offending Partnerships. There is, however, little specific mention of fire and rescue authorities within the White Paper: those areas which are likely to have most impact here are the proposals on an enhanced role for LAAs, and the future of performance assessment.*

3. *In addition, Chapter 8 of the main White Paper deals specifically with Community Cohesion issues, recognising the key place-shaping role that local authorities have in building and maintaining cohesive, sustainable communities. The main proposals are to:*

- *work with local authorities and their partners to identify where cohesion should be a local priority reflected in improvement targets in LAAs and work with them on how they should address local challenges;*
- *provide support and challenge when areas are facing difficulties;*
- *emphasise the importance of promoting community cohesion through Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and Sustainable Community Strategies;*

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- *share best practice effectively between local authorities who have long standing experiences of immigration and those for whom the impact is comparatively recent;*
- *support the establishment of forums on extremism in parts of the country where it is necessary. These will be strategic groups attended by key local partners, such as police and third sector organisations.*

4. *The overall thrust of the LGA response to the Local Government White Paper has been to welcome the progress that it represents (for example in its proposals to strengthen local leadership and enhance the role of frontline councillors; to cut back the plethora of national targets and streamline inspection, and to broaden the scope of local area agreements) whilst noting that this is only the first step if the devolutionary vision of “Closer to People and Places” is to be made a reality. We need to keep up the pressure as we move forward to the Queen’s Speech, the Lyons Review and the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review. The LGA has wanted to position itself to influence and drive forward the next stages of White Paper implementation. Against that background, it is important that the LGA’s effort over the coming months is focussed on activities which contribute to that objective. Individual policy Boards are asked therefore to review how well the programme of interventions align with likely White Paper follow-up work.*

#### **How do the Safer Communities Interventions measure up?**

5. *The main Board intervention - Working Together to Build Safer Communities – offers a good vehicle for taking forward aspects of White Paper follow-up work (as well as providing a platform for LGA responses to a range of crime-related legislation expected in the Queen’s Speech in mid-November). Specifically designed around the themes of “Closer to People and Places”, it aligns well with post-White Paper work on:*

- development of the performance framework**, through work on the “Safer and Stronger” block of Local Area Agreements, aiming to ensure appropriate flexibility for local targets in the context of the LGA’s proposed 30 national outcomes. Engagement with NOMS on the design of commissioning arrangements for services to support a reduction in reoffending may have practical application in wider LGA work on an approach to multi-area agreements (as a way of bridging local/regional commissioning models). Work to influence the implementation of the new Inspectorate for Justice, Community Safety and Custody so that it is aligned with the proposed new performance framework for localities from 2008 and works efficiently with the Audit Commission without duplication is also relevant here.*
- strengthening accountability and governance**, through work to develop the community leadership role of local government relating to community safety. In particular the intervention will look to ensure that the Community Call for Action is workable for local authorities and that the extension of the role of overview and scrutiny is adequately thought through and resourced. There is some potential for mismatch between accountability/scrutiny in the safer communities arena as compared to the extension envisaged in the White Paper of Community Call for Action principles to other areas of local authority and partnership activity. The practical implications of this disconnect will be worked through as part of the production of detailed guidance for local authorities. Work on the strategic/operational split for CDRPs and on the role of elected members in neighbourhood policing is relevant too.*

*Officers will continue to review the forward workplan for this intervention to ensure alignment with wider White Paper work and timescales, so that the outputs can be exploited to best effect.*

6. Although a useful demonstration of local authorities taking the lead to improve service delivery, the intervention on **fire suppression systems** does not so readily lend itself to post-White Paper lobbying and implementation work. Instead, the main vehicle for influencing the broader development of Government (and indeed the local government sector's) thinking in this area is the work the LGA is leading to develop a ten year vision for fire and rescue services. Effective governance by fire and rescue authorities lies at the heart of this vision, and we will need to look at the impact of proposals in the White Paper on our strategic direction. We will work closely with DCLG and CFOA to take this work forward and aim to publish a joint vision statement next year (the vision is being launched for consultation at the Fire Conference in Telford on 9 November). Getting this right needs to be a priority for policy development resource in the coming months. Officers propose to bring the vision to the main Safer Communities Board for consideration (during the consultation phase, probably at the January Board meeting). That does not mean that we cannot continue to pursue the fire suppression systems intervention – we have an 'open goal' opportunity to influence the outcome of the Building Schools for the Future programme, and a secondee from the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority who will be helping to take the work forward. But it does mean we need to be careful to follow the staged approach set out at the September Board meeting so that we can devote appropriate effort to the broader fire agenda in parallel. That means that the task group will need to agree clear objectives for each stage, concentrating our efforts on fire suppression in schools in the first instance, before moving in turn to further buildings accommodating vulnerable people and to wider issues around the link between sustainable buildings and fire safety.

7. Work on **transforming council regulatory services** (including environmental health and trading standards) is similarly unlikely to be a 'first tier' issue for the LGA's main post-White Paper agenda, but there should be scope to pull through a range of useful supporting messages. In particular, the intervention should be well-placed to feed into follow-up work on aspects of the improvement and performance framework agenda (based on joint work with the Tavistock Institute) and on the role of local authority regulatory services in underpinning and promoting economic development. More generally, there is a risk that central Government's instincts on regulatory services are to centralise: we do not want that to dilute or counter the overall message in *People and Places*, and the White Paper, about devolution of powers to the local level. The intervention aims to tackle that centralising tendency and help shape Government thinking in the post Hampton era, particularly with the proposed creation of the Local Better Regulation Office. Importantly, LACORS work will look to drive further improvements in these key front line council services, ensuring they more effectively contribute to the wider economic, social and environmental well-being agenda for local communities. From a narrow LGA perspective, this is in any case a resource-light intervention: LACORS is leading the work (and as such it offers a useful trial of LGA policy board oversight and direction of work by other members of the 'family'). On that basis, there is little scope to free up LGA policy capacity for higher White Paper priorities. Taking these factors together, the intervention should continue as previously agreed by the Board, with officers from LGA and LACORS liaising closely to ensure that we maximise the opportunities to use the output of the intervention in supporting the wider White Paper policy case.

### **Community Cohesion**

8. At the September Board meeting, members agreed that work on Community Cohesion should be added as a Board priority, and that a report was needed on how this might be taken forward in context of work elsewhere in the Association. In terms of next steps, the White Paper chapter on Community Cohesion looked to the **Commission on Integration and Cohesion** to deliver tangible proposals to move the agenda forward when it reports next year. The Commission has a strong local government flavour to it: it is chaired by Darra Singh, Chief Executive of Ealing Council and has among its members, Professor Michael Keith (former leader

of Tower Hamlets), Nargis Khan (Hackney) and Ed Cox (LGIU). The latter will lead for the Commission on local government outreach: Irene Payne (IDeA) and David Williams (LGA Policy) are in contact with him. A consultation exercise including questions tailored to local government is due to be launched in the week of 6 November. In parallel, and in conjunction with the Institute of Community Cohesion (Ted Cattle), IDeA has continued to build on the earlier work (reflected in a range of joint publications with the LGA<sup>2</sup>) to spread best practice on approaches to cohesion and offer practical guidance on what works in practice as local authorities try to promote cohesive communities. It is also working to help build the capacity of local government to fulfil the community leadership role. The forward work programme for IDeA in this area also includes work in new areas of tackling extremism, youth engagement and strategic housing.

9. Set against that background, the key question for the LGA in deciding its approach to community cohesion is how the organisation can best engage in a way which reinforces and adds value to the range of local government activity already underway. Within that overall approach, we should consider what a distinctive Safer Communities Board contribution might be. The first question is essentially an issue for the LGA's political leadership and Executive to consider, not simply because of the issue's political profile but also because the building of strong, cohesive communities is genuinely cross-cutting and affects the full range of LGA board business in delivering 'People and Places'. Possible high-level approaches could include:

- demonstrating political leadership on the importance of this issue, both within the central 'family' to ensure that cross-cutting cohesion issues are properly reflected in policy work and externally to the local government sector as a whole.
- offering to lead on aspects of the Commission's evidence gathering and its development of options for the way ahead. This could range from supporting IDeA in gathering examples of best practice, facilitating engagement of the Commission with the wider local government sector through to offering a keynote policy think-piece from a local government perspective framed around the key questions in the Commission's consultation exercise (we shall want to offer some form of response to the consultation exercise at the very least).

10. The overall LGA response needs to be decided before we can be clear how the Safer Communities Board can best engage, but two specific topics suggest themselves at this stage as possible areas to develop in more detail for this Board:

- a. the LGA has highlighted "Greater cohesion, social responsibility and respect in communities" in its proposed national outcomes framework. Provided we can keep the task sensibly bounded, we will look to take forward this aspect as part of work under the main Board intervention to develop of the "Stronger and Safer" block of LAAs. There may also be synergies with planned work under this heading on engagement with voluntary and community organisations.
- b. there may be scope for a specific piece of work on tackling extremism. This is an aspect of the community cohesion work that could lend itself to a specific Safer Communities Board view, but it does not fall neatly within the scope of existing interventions. If Board members are content, officers will scope such an exercise and offer advice to office holders in advance of the next Board meeting on where it might sit relative to other Board interventions. We would look to align work with IDeA activity in this area to minimise the additional policy resource requirement.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the 2006 LGA/IDeA "Leading Cohesive Communities" – a two part guide for leaders and chief executives

## Implications for Wales

11. *There are no specific implications for Wales from these proposals. Any specific factors relating to Wales arising from the programme of interventions will be addressed as part of individual workstreams.*

## Financial/Resource Implications

12. *At this stage, there are no specific financial implications flowing from the proposals in this note, although it is worth emphasising that policy resources (both in terms of staff effort and funds for external commissioning) are finite and need to be deployed in a way which best meets high level LGA priorities and individual Board interventions. For the Safer Communities programme, our plans are such that most resource is directed at those Board priorities which best lend themselves to supporting wider LGA work on the follow-up to the Local Government White Paper. The availability of resources is one factor that needs to be taken into account in scoping any specific SCB approach to Community Cohesion.*

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