

LGA response to Casey review on integration and opportunity

Purpose of report

For direction.

Summary

This paper seeks the Executive's approval of the LGA's draft response to Dame Louise Casey DBE CB's review of integration and opportunity. It also outlines the LGA's next steps in this area, and highlights other developments.

Recommendation

That the Executive approves the draft response and future activities in this area.

Action

Officers to take forward as directed.

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Background

1. As the Executive will recall, Dame Louise Casey's review of integration and opportunity was published in December 2016, and discussed by the Board in January this year.
2. Following that discussion, Dame Louise attended the LGA's Executive in March to give an overview of the review and the key findings in relation to councils, which can be summarised as:
 - 2.1. Social and economic exclusion being 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.
 - 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. 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.
 - 2.4. 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. Cllr Blackburn as Chair of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board was tasked with working with Group Leaders to develop an LGA response to the review for consideration by the Executive.
4. Following the Executive session, further work has been undertaken to:
 - 4.1. Discuss the review and expected Government response with Dame Louise before she left the civil service at the end of June.
 - 4.2. Take soundings on the wider issue of standards and integrity of local government.
 - 4.3. Hold discussions with councillors in areas perceived to face cohesion challenges to get their perspective on how councils and the LGA can provide support on the issue of leadership and cohesion.

- 4.4 Liaise with Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) officials over the government's planned response.

Issues

5. *LGA response to the review*

- 5.1. The key themes for the LGA's draft response to the review were discussed by Cllr Blackburn and Group Leaders at their meeting in October. A draft response was subsequently approved by Group Leaders and is attached (at **Appendix A**) for consideration by the Executive. The response straddles both our policy and improvement work, given that much of the discussion at the previous Executive meeting focused on political leadership, corporate governance and standards in public office, as well as local conversations around shared values and qualities.
- 5.2. On socio economic exclusion, councils' ability to address these issues are currently constrained by the lack of levers available to councils, as has previously been noted in the context of the Casey review. The LGA's existing policy proposals around employment, skills and the economy would enable councils to deliver inclusive growth, but our response on this point recognises the need to make the further link to how devolution of these powers will help support more resilient, cohesive communities.
- 5.3. Similarly, the Casey Review's findings around segregation can be used to strengthen future LGA lobbying on the ability of councils to determine where and what type of new schools are built in their area. We also urge Government to empower councils to have a more effective role in overseeing home schooling, in order to tackle the growth in illegal schools, which poses a risk to both individuals and society as a whole.
- 5.4. A particular emphasis in the discussion at Executive was on political leadership at the local level, and on integrity in public office as an important strand in strengthening local political leadership. This challenge on integrity in public office is clearly applicable beyond its impact on community cohesion. Without a national standards board and with reduced powers for monitoring officers, the LGA was urged to take a lead in this area.
- 5.5. On the specific cohesion aspect of political leadership, our discussions since the Executive have confirmed that there is no simple, off the shelf solution for emboldening councillors to tackle difficult and sensitive local issues. Both the LGA, and individual councils corporately, have a role in supporting members to do this, as do individual political parties. Our response sets out the LGA's existing work in this area, and outlines further areas of support that we are considering.

5.6. On the wider issue of standards, it is clear that there is little appetite across local government for a return to a major framework equivalent to the Standards Board regime. Our response sets out the work that the LGA already does in this area, as well as an expectation that all councils will in future engage with the corporate peer challenge process. We also look ahead to wider consideration of these issues in an expected review of local government standards by the Committee on Standards in Public Life in 2018.

6. *Government response to the review*

6.1. The Government's own response to the Casey review was expected to be published in November, but is now due to be published in the New Year.

6.2. Discussions with officials at DCLG indicate that the Government is likely to publish a green paper style response that invites views on the key themes it highlights for the integration strategy. These themes are expected to build on the issues highlighted in the Casey review – that is, leadership, migration, economic opportunity amongst others - but with the intention of moving the agenda on, and recognising the good work that already takes place locally across the country.

6.3. We are expecting the paper to be accompanied by the launch of an area based programme that supports local and central partnership working on cohesion in different areas; we understand that the programme will begin with five council areas but scale up during 2018.

7. *LGA activity on cohesion, counter-extremism and Prevent*

7.1. The LGA is continuing a range of work to support councils on cohesion and the related issues of counter extremism and Prevent. In September, we ran a successful event for over 25 councils to share information and good practice about their work on cohesion.

7.2. We are also part way through a programme of Leadership Essentials courses for councillors on counter extremism and Prevent; following four successful events in September, November and early December, a further event will take place in March. These are open to all members.

7.3. At the end of November, over 80 council representatives attended the launch of the new Special Interest Group on Countering Extremism (SIGCE). Co-chaired by Leeds and Luton councils, the SIGCE provides a forum to bring together councils in England and Wales to share learning and experience, and to promote good practice on countering extremism at a local level.

- 7.4. In the coming months, we will be releasing new publications for councils including a scrutiny guide for counter extremism and Prevent, and comprehensive guidance on cohesion issues, as well as exploring the development of other toolkits and support offers.

Implications for Wales

8. Our work on this issue is clearly of relevance to Welsh member councils, although some key issues such as education are devolved to the Welsh Assembly. LGA materials and events are open to Welsh colleagues.

Financial Implications

9. Work on cohesion related issues is being undertaken within our existing budget, including funding made available through the DCLG improvement grant.

Next steps

10. Our next steps on this agenda are to:
- 10.1 Formally respond to the Casey review subject to approval of the draft by the LGA Executive.
 - 10.2 Continue to liaise with Government to help shape the area based programme in a way that works for councils.
 - 10.3 Consult on and formally respond to the Government's integration paper once it is published.
 - 10.4 Take forward the set of activities on Prevent, counter extremism and cohesion agreed by the Safer and Stronger Communities Board as part of their 2017-18 work programme.