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Equalities, inequalities and community cohesion

Purpose of report

For direction.

Summary

This report sets out the issues regarding equalities, inequalities and community cohesion affecting councils as a result of COVID 19 and seeks a steer on how the LGA responds.

Recommendations

1. That the Executive Advisory Board takes a view on how the LGA responds to its members request for additional leadership and support on equalities, inequalities and community cohesion, emphasised as a result of COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter.
2. That as part of this, the Executive Advisory Board gives direction on:
 - 2.1. How the LGA can enhance and raise the profile of equalities across its representative and improvement work. (note – proposal boards)
 - 2.2. Whether the issue warrants additional specific resources to review and coordinate the work of the LGA, identifying gaps and creating a single narrative for the organisation.

Actions

Officers will undertake actions as directed.

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Equalities, inequalities and community cohesion

Introduction

1. According to the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, “Equality is about ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents. It is also the belief that no one should have poorer life chances because of the way they were born, where they come from, what they believe, or whether they have a disability. Equality recognises that historically certain groups of people with [protected characteristics](#) such as race, disability, sex and sexual orientation have experienced discrimination.”
2. Inequalities, such as health inequalities, are the negative outcomes that arise as a result of a lack of equality. Issues arise with regards to community cohesion when misinformation, prejudices, fear, and the frustrations of inequality are felt within communities, and drive them apart rather than bringing them together.

Background

3. The COVID-19 pandemic has acted as a magnifying glass, bringing to the fore the impact that a lack of equality and embedded inequalities has on the lives and life-chances of our residents. This, coupled with the heightened awareness and call for change that the Black Lives Matters movement has generated, alongside a growing recognition of the need for genuine change to address equalities, has led to councils asking for more LGA leadership and support.
4. Whilst the LGA has been providing leadership and support on aspects of the equalities agenda and how to tackle inequalities, as well as around community cohesion, it has become apparent that we do not have a coherent and overarching narrative that we can share with our councils or lobbying on, or a complete package of support we are able to offer them.
5. The coronavirus pandemic has demonstrated the important role of councils in relation to equalities, tackling inequalities and community cohesion. These include:
 - 5.1. As community leaders – representing diverse all-age communities, promoting community cohesion and bringing people together in common cause at a time of grief, worry and uncertainty.
 - 5.2. As employers – supporting and advocating on behalf of council staff, many of whom come from communities and groups that have been particularly affected by the crisis.

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- 5.3. Through knowledge of their communities - collecting, sharing and analysing a complex range of data and information, which enables councils and their partners to understand need and assess the impact of services.
- 5.4. As providers of integrated public services – responding to emerging evidence on impacts, adapting and sustaining services to meet specific needs, bringing together diverse partners to deliver vital support and responding to established and emerging vulnerabilities.
- 5.5. Shaping and strengthening the local economy – putting in place preventative services to help those at risk of hardship; supporting businesses and employers towards strong, inclusive recovery, championing the ‘green’ economy, and ensuring that harder-hit places and employment sectors get the support they need

Issues

6. The LGA already delivers a range of vital work on equalities across policy, improvement, workforce, and with its own staff. There are a number of lead members already taking a leading role in supporting the sector and promoting the LGA’s work. An initial mapping of this work is set out in **Appendix 1**, with more information on Workforce in **Appendix 3**.
7. However, this work is not coordinated and can overlap, producing multiple workstreams and messages on similar issues. Members championing elements of equalities within their Board’s remit are missing out on being able to collaborate and enhance their messaging across the whole organisation.
8. In enhancing the LGA’s work on equalities, it is proposed that the LGA sets the following objectives:
 - 8.1. To provide councils with the cross-cutting support that they are requesting.
 - 8.2. To provide consistent key messages on LGA asks and priorities (which will inform both national policy development and our improvement offer).
 - 8.3. To respond to key high profile and national issues with a focus on or that impact equalities to ascertain the implications for local government and to ensure the role of councils in leading communities, collecting and sharing data and tailoring services is recognised and supported. These issues would include:
 - 8.3.1. The Government’s racial inequality review
 - 8.3.2. Issues raised by the ‘Black Lives Matter’ protests

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- 8.3.3. A response to Marmot 2020 and ongoing work on health inequalities
- 8.3.4. The Government's approach to economic recovery planning and 'levelling up'
- 8.3.5. The Windrush lessons learnt review
- 8.3.6. The Lammy review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) individuals in the Criminal Justice System.
- 8.4. To respond quickly and effectively to the complex and dynamic national policy environment as Government continues to develop its evidence and understanding of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on different sections of society.
- 8.5. To safeguard the financial viability and reputation of local councils working to recognise and meet the needs of their diverse communities.
- 8.6. To have an overview and narrative on the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), both in terms of the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery and more broadly.
- 8.7. To build on the existing 'cross-cutting' work on health inequalities and community leadership.
- 8.8. To lead by example, particularly through our own policies, use of language, leadership and workforce development.
- 9. In helping to meet these objectives, there are already a number of workstreams operating, although they would benefit from greater cross-LGA coordination and some may need to be enhanced. In summary, these include:
 - 9.1. The LGA's own leadership and workforce development through its HR team and SMT.
 - 9.2. The LGA's Workforce Team, working with local government as a major employer of over 2 million with a duty of care to the workforce and objectives to improve diversity and inclusion at all levels.
 - 9.3. The work of LG Inform and the Research Team in recording, sharing and using data to understand equality impacts and help councils design appropriate and effective policy and services.
 - 9.4. The work of the Policy Team in specific policy areas, such as disabilities, older people, welfare, children and young people, community cohesion, domestic violence, etc.

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- 9.5. The policy and improvement work on health inequalities, including joint work with the Care and Health Improvement Programme (CHIP), given its central importance in the context of coronavirus.
 - 9.6. The Improvement Team's support for councillors, including women, parents, carers, young councillors and BAME Councillors, as well as development in supporting diversity in political and community leadership.
 - 9.7. The 'Be a Councillor' programme on encouraging diversity in those putting themselves forward to become councillors.
 - 9.8. The Policy and Improvement Team's work on community engagement, empowerment and volunteering.
 - 9.9. The LGA's Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG), peer review and improvement offer to councils – which the Improvement Team are looking to review and refresh, particularly the role of the LGA in providing Equalities Accreditation.
 - 9.10. Community cohesion as a key element of the Safer Stronger Communities Team.
 - 9.11. The work of the cross-policy COVID-19 'Vulnerable People' Team, which has been maintained in the short-term to support the move towards coronavirus recovery.
10. More detail is set out in **Appendix 1**.
11. The Boards have also been contributed to a number of important cross-cutting priorities, set out further in the below, which may benefit from more integrated ownership:

Health inequalities

12. The LGA has a well-established programme of work on health inequalities, which has formed the core of much of our immediate response to the pandemic. This is a key priority for the Community Wellbeing Board, but also has important links to the work of other Boards.
13. Although in general lives are getting longer, stubborn health inequalities persist across the country and it remains the case that people in the richest areas enjoy 19 more years in good health than those in the poorest. We also see differences in health linked to learning disability, gender, race, age, sexuality or religion.
14. Councils have a central role in providing the key social and environmental factors that underpin good health - a good education, a decent job, a suitable roof over our head, friendships and networks to feel part of. The importance of these factors mean that local

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government and local areas have a crucial role to play, forging alliances across their community that boost wellbeing and reduce inequalities.

15. To inform this vital work PHE, LGA and ADPH have worked together to publish [Place-Based Approaches for Reducing Health Inequalities](#).

Rethinking local – showcasing and building on the local government response

16. The response to the COVID-19 pandemic has often shown local government at its best and has broken-down silos in both national and local government and between partners. It has highlighted how well councils already know their communities, how much work they do to promote resilience and co-design services, and how quickly and effectively they can respond in a crisis.
17. Councils are keen to capture this learning and ensure that it leads to more preventative services and better life chances in the longer term. For example: some isolated older people have become more visible; rough sleepers with complex needs have been brought-in off the streets and we have demonstrated the vital role of the local safety net in responding quickly to food poverty and financial hardship.

The Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG)

18. The LGA has an established benchmarking and SLI tool in the EFLG. This also forms the core of the LGA's equality peer review. There is a good case for refreshing the framework and peers to ensure that our offer is up-to-date and relevant to the current circumstances and draws on the best knowledge and learning that the sector and equalities organisations have to offer.
19. The LGA delivers a wide range of both improvement support and policy work that enables councils to meet the PSED. However, there is currently no single point of contact or dedicated resource for the LGA's policy and improvement work on equality and cohesion. As with all cross-cutting policy areas, there is therefore a risk of inconsistency and gaps in our approach.
- 20. Members are particularly asked for a steer on whether the LGA should continue to provide an Equalities Award as part of the Equalities Framework for Local Government, or whether there should be a greater emphasis on supporting continuing improvement.**

Community cohesion

21. The requirement of 'fostering good relations' within the Public Sector Equalities Duty (PSED) clearly overlaps with and links in to work on Community Cohesion. However, they are not completely analogous. Good and effective work on equality can underpin community cohesion. But local approaches to community cohesion can also be about

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managing complex or contentious messages about what councils are doing – or might need to do – to address particularly complex or entrenched inequality.

Finance, resources and impact assessment

22. Councils may have to take some difficult decisions in the coming months, as they manage the impact of the pandemic on their own finances. Researchers and campaign groups have produced strong and compelling evidence of the impact of both the pandemic and the squeeze on local government finances on many different sections of society, all of whom will have legitimate cause to expect help and support from the public sector. Councils will therefore be dealing with complex and competing priorities.
23. Effective equality impact assessment, consultation and co-design can help to ensure that decisions are taken in ways that are fair, transparent and understood by local communities. The LGA's peer review and improvement offer could offer vital support. It will also be important for the LGA to provide a single, shared and cross-cutting narrative that balances the needs and concerns of a diverse range of stakeholders.
24. Work led by Resources, Cities and People & Places will need to draw on work across the other Boards to take this forward.

Direction from the Board

25. Building on the background and issues set out above, the Board is asked for direction on how the LGA can further enhance and raise the profile of equalities across its representative, policy, communications and improvement work. Possible options include:
 - 25.1. Identifying a member champion or advocate on equalities within each Board to raise the profile of the issues within that Board's workstream, and the bringing of these champions together to coordinate the messaging across the organisation and to report to the Executive Advisory Board.
 - 25.2. Identifying a champion or advocate on equalities across a few key Boards, for example, one covering the LGA's policy-based Boards, one for the Improvement Board and one from the Resources Board, to also coordinate the messaging across the organisation and report to the Executive Advisory Board.
 - 25.3. The appointment of a single LGA member champion or advocate on equalities to do this across all the Boards at the LGA.
26. The Board is asked for direction on whether the LGA should be investing additional resource into the issue of equalities at the LGA. Particularly with a view to translating the breadth and complexity of this work into a clear narrative and to identify the gaps in the LGA's work that need filling and to undertake that filling. Resources would also be

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needed to support any cross-board Member group. Possible options for this resource could include:

- 26.1. Commissioning an independent organisation to undertake a review of the LGA's work on equalities, alongside a broader report into the role of local government in addressing equalities, inequalities and community cohesion in addition to its statutory requirements under the PSED, with recommendations for follow up.
- 26.2. Creating a fixed-term internal post to undertake a review of the LGA's work on equalities and undertake the work needed.
- 26.3. Investing in a longer-term resource to review, coordinate and deliver the LGA's work on equalities within the organisation.
- 26.4. LGA and local government policy responses to high profile and national areas of work, to ensure that the role of councils in leading communities, collecting and sharing data and tailoring services is recognised and supported including:

Implications for Wales

- 26.5. As a cross-cutting issue, the LGA could share its position and views with the WLGA.
- 26.6. The WLGA is part of the pan-UK programme on Civility in Public Life.

Financial Implications

- 27. The delivery of additional work and support on equalities will require additional resources that will need to be identified.**
- 28. The support to any cross-board member group or Equalities Advocate will require additional resourcing.**
- 29. The commissioning of an independent organisation to review the equalities work at the LGA will require additional resources.**
- 30. The appointment of any new personnel to work on equalities will require additional resourcing.**

Next steps

31. Officers will scope out the resourcing requirements to meet the direction of the Board.
32. Officers will examine how the LGA budget can meet these resourcing requirements.

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33. If directed, officers will establish a cross-board Equalities Advocacy group or support a single Equalities Advocate.