

## Tackling inequalities progress update

### Purpose of report

For information and direction.

### Summary

This report sets out what progress has been made to embed issues around inequalities into the LGA policy work following the Executive Advisory Board's decision in July to review and strengthen the work of the LGA around equalities and to create an Equalities Advocates role for LGA Boards. It also summarises other external facing equalities work from other teams across the LGA since July and asks members to give a steer as to whether the Executive Advisory Board should appoint a lead for equalities.

### Recommendation

That Executive Advisory Board notes the contents of the update and give direction as to whether the Board should appoint an Equalities Advocate to lead this area of work, as per paragraph 28.

### Action

LGA officers to proceed as directed.

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## **Tackling inequalities progress update**

### **Background**

1. On the 16 July the Executive Advisory Board received a report setting out the issues regarding equalities, inequalities and community cohesion affecting councils as a result of COVID-19 and seeking a steer on how the LGA should respond to these issues.
2. Members provided a steer and comments as to how the LGA could enhance and raise the profile of equalities across its representative and improvement work and discussed strengthening the LGA equalities offer.
3. Member agreed that each LGA policy board should appoint a Member Champion (Equalities Advocates) supported by officers and that the equalities issue warranted additional specific resources to review and coordinate the work of the LGA, identify gaps and create a single narrative for the organisation.

### **Equalities Advocates**

4. Following the Executive Advisory Board in July, officers developed a high-level description for the Equalities Advocate role, which is to raise the profile of equalities in their own board area and to attend occasional meetings of the Advocates to discuss cross-cutting equalities issues and develop views to present to the Executive Advisory Board. See [Appendix 1](#) for the full role description.
5. The Equalities Advocates were appointed by the Group Offices by mid-November and each Advocate will have an officer single point of contact. Officers are working with colleagues to develop an initial briefing document for each Advocate so that they are familiar with the main equality issues in their board's area of interest. This exercise will also assist officers to map out the current work of the policy team and to identify gaps which need further consideration.

### **Policy approach**

6. In early October, the policy directorate had an Away day focused on tackling inequalities. At the session, Cllr Anntoinette Bramble, Deputy Leader of the LGA Labour Group, gave a short speech to contextualise the issues around equalities historically and in the context of current developments. Officers were then given the opportunity to consider three questions around how equalities issues present in our policy work and what more the LGA could be doing.
7. Through the discussions officers identified some key priorities to take forward including: improving our evidence-base around equalities issues; focusing on long-term systemic change to address complex; improving representation of underrepresented voices; being proactive in challenging the status quo; improving our approaches to cross-cutting issues; and engaging with the root causes of inequality.

8. The LGA Board has agreed an update to the LGA's three-year business plan which includes a new priority around 'Narrowing inequalities and protecting communities', see below:

***Councils lead and work with diverse communities and partners to address inequalities and build cohesive and resilient communities – we will:***

- *Review and strengthen the LGA's work on reducing inequalities, promoting equality through our policy messages and lobbying and our improvement and leadership support to councils.*
  - *Promote and support councils in developing the diversity of their candidates, elected members and senior leadership.*
  - *Underline the need for a strong commitment to tackling health inequalities and ensure that local government concerns and priorities resulting from the impact of COVID-19 on their communities are heard by Government.*
  - *Support councils as they address the inequalities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, with particular regard to those from ethnic groups most affected by the virus and to children and young people whose development and futures will be affected by the containment measures.*
9. An additional resource is being recruited to lead on this work in the Policy team: it is anticipated that this resource will be in place in March, to lead the work to coordinate the LGA's policy work in this area and to develop a single narrative for the organisation.
10. Officers are working to develop this area of work including considering what training officers might benefit from; what improvements might be made to our procurement practices to increase the diversity of our contractors; and how best to utilise the Advocates to raise the profile of equalities issues and collaborate on cross-cutting issues; and how to ensure that equalities implications are fully considered in the LGA's decision-making.

### **Health inequalities**

11. The LGA in collaboration with Public Health England (PHE) and the Association of Directors of Public Health (ADPH), have collated a suite of resources relating to health inequalities and COVID-19 to support place-based approaches to planning and responding to the pandemic, while mitigating against potential impacts on those with the poorest health outcomes. An overview of these resources can be found [here](#).
12. To expand the resources above we have commissioned a new set of case studies focused on reducing health inequalities and building fairer, healthier communities as part of the recovery.
13. Our submission to the 2020 Spending Review focused on the need for sustainable funding for public health in order to tackle health inequalities. We highlighted that increases to the public health grant are necessary in order to invest in the services and community assets which can tackle some of the major areas of health inequalities such as obesity or alcohol addiction.

14. The Community Wellbeing Board restated their commitment to tackling health inequalities in their 2020/21 Board Priorities. We will also continue to make the case that local government is best placed to lead on the 'levelling up' and health inequalities agenda if given the right resources.
15. We will continue to highlight the impact social and economic factors have on the long-term ill health and premature death rates for the most deprived and support councils to evaluate the public health impact of Covid-19 on their communities and respond effectively. Emerging data will show the impact of lockdown on everything from rates of problem drinking, exercise, mental health, smoking cessation to breastfeeding. We will work with national partners and councils to support place-based strategies to mitigate the negative public health impacts of Covid-19 as well as capitalising on any positive trends – such as the reduction in smoking levels.

### **Workforce**

16. During 2020, the Workforce Team provided a range of advice and guidance to councils on workforce equalities issues. Including:
  - 16.1. Continuing to raise awareness of good EDI practice through blogs, social media and other media, and highlighted the diversity of staff by celebrating religious festivals and various national days of celebration. For example, working with the LGA BAME Network to gather new and information about the significance of October's Black History Month for local government staff.
  - 16.2. Gathering and publishing good practice examples of work that local authorities did to carry out supplementary risk assessments with their BAME staff, who may be disproportionately affected by COVID-19, to find to what additional support could be put in place to make them safe at work.
  - 16.3. Agreeing joint national advice and guidance with the unions to support the health and safety of council, teaching, firefighting and other local government staff who have disabilities or are clinically extremely vulnerable and agreed a framework for supporting staff with caring responsibilities.
  - 16.4. Continuing to support fair and transparent pay systems by providing job evaluation advice and training to local authorities.
17. The Workforce Team are working on a series of equalities focussed webinars with the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) to run from February to March and exploring ways to be inclusive employers on issues such as race, carers, and the menopause. The events will be supported by a guide for local authorities examining ways to embed good EDI practice and shift culture to be fairer and more inclusive.

## Improvement

### *Webinar*

18. In September the Leadership team organised a webinar titled 'Difference and Inclusion: Building a How To Toolkit'. The webinar was chaired by Cllr Sharon Taylor OBE, and hosted by Dr Kul Verma, Director of Deep Insight and a former police officer with considerable experience working on diversity inclusion in the police service and with other large organisations.
19. The session provided an opportunity for delegates to re-evaluate how they could actively advance the adoption of genuinely inclusive practices in teams and organisations, through a live and interactive webinar. Over 200 delegates attended, and a lively discussion took place, with lots of pertinent questions raised. The session can be watched back here: <https://www.local.gov.uk/difference-and-inclusion-building-how-toolkit-23-september-2020>

### *National Graduate Development Programme*

20. Following a full, independent Equality and Diversity Review in 2019, the NGDP team have embedded a range of measures to improve the diversity of the programme, including re-procuring and designing all assessment processes, targeting specific marketing to diverse graduates, and working closely with partner councils to reach out to their communities.
21. In autumn 2020, the NGDP took on its most diverse cohort to date, with 28% of the cohort of 149 graduates identifying as BAME. The proportion of candidates declaring a disability also increases year on year. Mentoring, coaching and support is also being put in place for the next cohort of candidates going through the recruitment currently, amongst a range of other measures.

### *Be a councillor campaign*

22. In the November issue of *First*, two articles were published as part of the [Be a councillor](#) campaign, the first highlighting the opportunity to diversity candidates and local representatives in the May 2021 elections (<https://www.lgafirst.co.uk/features/be-a-councillor/>) and the second a retrospective from Cllr Paulette Hamilton and Q&A from Cllr Anntoinette Bramble on their motivations for standing for election (<https://www.lgafirst.co.uk/features/how-i-chose-to-become-a-councillor/>).

### *Sector-led improvement support and the LG Equalities Framework*

23. A new Equalities Hub is being developed for the LGA website to make it easier for website users to access equalities content including advice and guidance, equality frameworks and other toolkits from different teams across the LGA. The Hub will also host a library of new equality case studies that showcase how councils are addressing equality issues in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter campaign.

24. The equality peer challenge offer to councils is now a bespoke offer being delivered remotely. Five peer challenges are expected to be completed by the end of March with several more in discussion. The equalities peer cohort is being expanded and more review managers are being equipped to respond to this increased demand.
25. The new Corporate Peer Challenge will include an increased focus on equality, diversity and inclusion considerations. Work has been underway for a number of years to increase the diversity of member and officer peers to enable the LGA to offer more diverse peer teams, and good progress has already been made given the constraints with the diversity of both senior officers and members. This focus will increase in 2021, with a renewed drive to ensure peer teams fully reflect the local circumstances of councils.
26. Since early summer several regional improvement teams have been receiving requests from councils for assistance on equalities issues. Many of these have been around training for Members but other requests are for advice and guidance on issues like taking an equalities agenda forward or dealing with specific policy/practices. Teams have provided this support in house wherever possible or signposted councils to external providers.
27. Given the increased demand from councils for support in this area, the Improvement and Innovation Board have already agreed that equalities will be more prominent in the improvement offer funded by MHCLG for 21/22.

**Direction from the Board:**

28. The Board is asked to consider and give direction as to whether to appoint an Executive Advisory Board Equalities Advocate/Lead to lead this area of work and to further enhance and raise the profile of equalities across the LGA's representative, policy, communications and improvement work. If so, the Board is asked to give direction on what the role of that Lead would be. Possible aspects to the role might include:
  - 28.1. Acting as the EAB Equalities Advocate and promoting equalities issues within the work of the EAB
  - 28.2. Chairing meetings of the Equalities Advocates across other LGA Boards
  - 28.3. Commenting on the equalities work programme
  - 28.4. Representing the LGA around cross-cutting equalities issues.

**Implications for Wales**

29. As a cross-cutting issue, the LGA has already been in conversation with the WLGA about the work they are doing to focus on equality issues and will continue to collaborate as and when appropriate.

### **Financial Implications**

30. There are no further financial implications of this update beyond the additional resource that has already been agreed by the Board in July 2020.

### **Next steps**

31. Officers to continue to embed equalities issues within all policy areas with the Equalities Advocates to lead this at board level.

32. To recruit a new Senior Adviser to coordinate the work of the policy team around equalities.

### **Appendix 1**

#### **Equalities Advocate role description**

The Executive Advisory Board have asked each Board to identify a member to be an Equalities Advocate within each Board to raise the profile of any equalities issues within the Board's workstream, to contribute to the cross-cutting work around equalities, and to report into the Executive Advisory Board on equality issues relating to their Board.

The nature of this may vary between different policy areas, but the Advocates aim across all Boards will be to help the Board embed equalities into the work of the Board.

Within the Board the Advocate will be expected to:

- Encourage the Board to consider equality issues in all their work
- Challenge the Board to embed equalities into the work of the Board
- Hold the Board to account around equalities issues.

Outside of the Board the Advocate will be expected to:

- Collaborate with other Equality Advocates from other LGA Boards on cross-cutting equalities issues
- Provide input into and feedback to the LGA equalities work programme.

#### *Support*

The role will be supported through the normal officer structures which support each Board as we aim for equalities to be embedded in our policy work.

#### *Time commitment*

Members may be asked to attend additional meetings to contribute to the cross-cutting equalities work and the development of the equalities policy work programme. Otherwise this is a role that should be performed within the role as member of the Board.

**Appendix 2**

<b>Board</b>	<b>Advocate appointed</b>
Children and Young People	Cllr Teresa Heritage
People & Places Board	Cllr Kevin Bentley
Safer and Stronger Communities	Cllr Nesil Caliskan
Culture, Tourism and Sport	Cllr Julian German
City Regions	Cllr Abi Brown
Community Wellbeing	Cllr Paulette Hamilton
Improvement and Innovation Board	Cllr Liz Green
Environment, Economy, Housing & Transport	Cllr David Renard
Fire Services Management Committee	Fiona Twycross
Resources Board	Cllr Sharon Taylor