Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper
LGA response
June 2018

Key messages

- We welcome the publication of the Green Paper and the opportunity to feedback on its proposals. Building cohesive communities and helping to shape the environments in which communities flourish lie at the core of councils' day to day business, and the Strategy rightly acknowledges the importance of locally-led approaches.

- We support the broad objectives of the Strategy. However, for many of the proposals there is little detail about how the objectives will be achieved. More importantly, while it acknowledges a range of issues around areas key to achieving cohesive communities, such as education, housing, skills and growth, it stops short of setting out what is needed to enable councils to address them. We accept the call for local government to be bolder about tackling difficult cohesion issues. But this must be matched by a genuine commitment from central government to do the same. Government must capitalise fully on this opportunity to tackle a range of issues if the Strategy is to truly achieve its aims.

- Local government has seen a successive removal of powers over three decades, with the key areas referenced above managed or constrained by Whitehall. This approach has failed many of our communities, as the challenges cited in the Casey review into Integration and Opportunity highlighted. Central government has a clear role to play in addressing this, but the starting point must be to further empower local areas and councils to respond.

- Councils continue to face significant funding challenges after years of unprecedented reductions, with an overall funding gap of £5.8 billion anticipated by 2020. This has had a considerable impact across service areas and substantially affected councils' work, both directly and indirectly, around the cohesion agenda. Further devolution of powers to local government must be matched by sufficient and long-term investment in order to tackle the complex and deep-seated issues that undermine cohesion.

Building integrated communities

1. *We define integrated communities as communities where people - whatever their background - live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities. Do you agree with our definition?*

2. *We believe that the varied nature and scale of integration challenges means that tailored local plans and interventions are needed to tackle the issues specific to particular places. Do you agree?*

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3. Do you have any examples of successful approaches to encourage integration that you wish to highlight, particularly approaches which have been subject to evaluation?

We agree that cohesive communities are places where:
- the opportunities that living in Britain affords are available for everyone
- people from different backgrounds are able to form relationships with others at school, in the workplace and in their neighbourhoods
- there is a shared vision and set of values for all
- people's differences are positively valued.

We would extend the definition to include places where there is a sense of belonging for all.

Building cohesive communities, establishing the foundations in which local areas can flourish, and helping to develop resilience to cohesion challenges, can only be successful with an in-depth understanding of that locality. Cohesion issues vary from place to place; understanding local demography, local perspectives and the complexities of specific local issues are vital in responding to challenges and in developing and adapting strategic approaches that meet local needs. Councils' position as shapers of place, sitting at the heart of their communities, provides them with a unique vantage point and the knowledge needed to both respond, and build resilience, to integration challenges, alongside local partners.

The integration agenda sits at the heart of councils' work and ambition. However to truly achieve this ambition, both local and national government must be willing to tackle long-standing and complex issues. A new Integrated Communities Strategy presents an opportunity to move away from disparate, often top-down, initiatives on interconnected issues, towards a long-term and cross-cutting strategic approach.

The Green Paper rightly recognises the need for locally-led approaches, but it does not go far enough in providing the powers that areas need to help address some of the issues undermining cohesion. Further, councils continue to operate within the context of severe financial pressures across services, facing an overall funding gap of over £5 billion by 2020. While local authorities stand ready to do what they can in the cohesion and integration space, progress will be restricted by the limited powers and resources available to councils to deliver real and sustained change - as we set out elsewhere in this response. The Green Paper provides a footing to review these limitations and make the changes needed in order to achieve the strategy's aims.

We welcome the Integration Area pilots announced as part of the Green Paper, which will enable areas to explore issues in greater depth. There are real opportunities here to develop ambitious, new and comprehensive approaches to building cohesion within the five area. However it is important that the lessons learned from the pilot programme are shared more widely and we look forward to seeing plans for how the outcomes will be disseminated.

The LGA will shortly be publishing updated guidance for councils on Building cohesive communities. This includes a number of council case studies on successful cohesion approaches across a range of issues.

Strengthening leadership

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4. The Green Paper proposes that we need to build the capacity of our leaders to promote and achieve integration outcomes. Do you agree?

Building cohesive communities means tackling some very difficult and complex issues, necessitating strong leadership, both at local and national level and across partners from the public, private and third sectors.

As the Green Paper recognises, councillors have a core role in taking forward the cohesion agenda locally; as leaders of place, with a democratic mandate to represent their residents, and as leaders of communities, by shaping and supporting a local identity and vision with the necessary reach across a range of service areas and partners.

Councillors' political leadership role includes leading by example, having the courage to tackle challenging issues and not shying away from difficult conversations or messages. In our response[1] to the Casey review on Opportunity and Integration we accepted its call for brave leadership around cohesion issues, but noted the risk in standing up to communities on difficult issues and that good councillors may not get re-elected as a result.

We also noted that given the varying nature of cohesion issues and challenges in different areas, as acknowledged in the Green Paper, there is not a single solution to support and embolden councillors to tackle sensitive issues.

We accept too that there is more to do to bring cohesion and integration issues into increased prominence across all councils' work, including reviewing policies and services that might impact on cohesion locally, and ensuring appropriate action is taken to address issues where resources and powers are available. In two-tier areas, where responsibility for public service delivery is mixed, there is also a need for greater cooperation across authorities, to ensure that cohesion and integration issues are given sufficient weight and considered at a strategic level.

Councils cannot, of course, work in isolation. Effective local leadership from councils requires effective collaboration with, and contribution from, various other local partners – including eg the police, police and crime commissioners, businesses, health services, schools and housing associations. It is crucial that partners recognise the importance of integration issues in both the delivery of public services, and in building prosperous, safer and more resilient local areas – and are willing to do their bit.

The LGA has developed a wide-ranging improvement offer for councils that helps support work around cohesion, incorporating a number of streams to develop leadership skills, including:
- Specific leadership training through a variety of courses and modules, including the leaders' programme; top team development; leadership academy; next generation courses, and focus on leadership
- Regional peer support networks focused on local leadership, including identifying and resolving issues upfront
- Leadership as a key focus of the corporate governance theme of our corporate peer review process (in future the LGA will expect all its member

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[1]

https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/LGA%20response%20to%20the%20Casey%20review%20%28Dec%202017%29_0.pdf

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councils to engage with the corporate peer challenge and undertake a peer challenge within the expected timetable)

- Tailored leadership courses on countering extremism and dealing with crises, with a further course on cohesion in development for this year
- Guidance and bespoke leadership development modules on community engagement and exploring how to approach difficult issues with local communities.

The Green Paper raises specific issues around leadership that is representative of the population, in particular ensuring that the voices of women and ethnic minority groups are heard. The LGA's Be a Councillor campaign recognises how important it is that elected members reflect the communities they represent and works with councils, political parties, individuals and others to encourage more people to stand as councillors. The campaign includes a focus on encouraging women and under-represented groups to engage with and enter politics, and includes the establishment of a women's network of female councillors to help and advise those thinking about standing. We want to work further with central government to encourage more women to enter politics.

More needs to be done however to identify and address the barriers that deter some people from standing. For instance a lack of parental leave and pension contributions, and the intimidation of those in public life, particularly women, can be obstacles to standing as a councillor or taking on responsibilities as a cabinet member. The Committee on Standards in Public Life recently published a report into Intimidation in Public Life and we raised concerns during the review about issues impacting local councillors. We have fed back a detailed response[2] to the Committee's wider review into local government ethical standards, which notes that instances of councillors being attacked and harassed, notably on social media, are increasing, with anecdotal evidence that female leaders and councillors are subject to more abuse than their male counterparts. To better understand this problem, the LGA will be including this issue in its 2018 councillor census.

Supporting new migrants and resident communities
5. *The Green Paper proposes measures to support recent migrants so that they have the information they need to integrate into society and understand British values and their rights and responsibilities. Do you agree with this approach?*

6. *The Controlling Migration Fund was constructed to deal with the short-term migration pressures and associated costs that local authorities can encounter. Do you think it adequately achieves this objective?*

Local government and their regional representatives continue to work hard to support the many programmes for refugees and asylum seekers currently in operation, and this active involvement of councils is crucial in supporting new migrants and resident communities. Councils not only support families, children and vulnerable adults who are seeking asylum or being resettled as refugees, but as community leaders they are also vital in bringing local partners and communities together.

We note – and welcome - that the Controlling Migration Fund sought to deal with the short-term migration pressures and their associated costs. But clearer links,

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[2] https://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/lga-response-committee-standards-public-life-consultation-review

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funding and data need to be made across all the current programmes for asylum, migration and resettlement to make sure there is enough funding, capacity and support available to achieve the vision for integration as outlined in the Green Paper. There need to be more effective mechanisms for discussions between central and local government leaders to develop the long term vision and funding required to secure the capacity of local communities to integrate new arrivals.

Future developments can build on the lessons learnt from the current Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme in ensuring new arrivals have the information they need to integrate into society and understand their rights and responsibilities. This includes:
- the importance of long term funding for integration support
- the impact of early involvement of local government in design and delivery
- the recognition of the importance of local authority leadership in creating local partnerships, building welcoming communities, and utilising the wish from local communities, faith groups and NGOS to participate
- enabling regions and local areas to decide the arrangements that work best for them
- transparent data and evaluation.

Learning from this and previous schemes can also highlight what limits integration and what will need to be addressed in the future, such as:
- a lack of access to effective mental health support
- a lack of variation in ways to learn conversational English that reflects the diversity of new arrivals' needs
- difficulties accessing sustainable employment that reflects new arrivals' previous experience and skills.

What new arrivals receive in terms of integration support is currently dependent on which route they come to the UK. Building a vision for the future will require greater scrutiny of these differences to avoid impacts on cohesion and integration.

The long-term resource implications for councils of providing opportunities for new arrivals to integrate must be recognised in order to minimise the impact on the vital services councils provide to their whole community. It is hoped the CMF has provided the evidence of the sorts of interventions and approaches that will need funding at scale across local government in the long term, rather than via a bidding process by which only a few can benefit. In the interim, the LGA would wish to continue to be involved in conversations on how the Fund is developed and how the learning of those that successfully bid for funding can be shared more widely.

Engagement from local communities will remain a crucial factor in successful integration of new arrivals. As noted above, local government remains best placed to work with local statutory partners and local communities to support integration. It is also best placed to share what works with others as a commissioner of services, rather than as a provider 'competing' with others for funding. It can help to 'myth bust' where communities are more resistant to new arrivals and lead some of the difficult conversations around migration that may be needed.

Local leadership from councils is crucial in ensuring that local offers are strategically focused on the range of needs of new arrivals. Without this local leadership, there is a risk of a focus on single issues, and a fragmented lack of focus on providing support across the range of key areas needed for successful integration. However, as resource restrictions to councils has impacted on their ability to build a well-

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resourced community and voluntary sector, councils will need sufficient resources to build capacity where this does not exist in order to avoid the use of more costly statutory support.

There is also a need to co-ordinate work across Government given the cross-cutting nature of asylum and resettlement on other issues. There will be national policies that impact both on refugees' ability to integrate - and councils' ability to support this - in order to build an effective and equitable system. These include issues such as the benefit cap and local housing allowance, access to legal advice and legal aid, and the availability of affordable housing – some of which are explored further elsewhere in this response. There also needs to be greater consideration of the extent to which services provided at a national level - especially in relation to benefits, health and education - are suitable and accessible to new refugees or whether additional support may be needed to assist refugees, particularly those close to arrival. A current example that could impact on initial access to welfare support is that Universal Credit is individually managed online in English, which is challenging for new refugees without language skills.

We welcome the recognition of the need to build resilient communities that can support recent migrants to integrate and to understand their rights and responsibilities. However, the requirement to make savings on the Government's contract for housing asylum seekers has led to significant numbers of asylum seekers being placed in areas with lower housing costs, with limited support available for their integration. The Government should consider further the impact on integration of the placement and churn of large numbers of people in areas, often with existing deprivation, development or regeneration challenges, of people who are unable to contribute to the local communities they have been placed in while asylum applications are processed. This is exacerbated by – even under the forthcoming new contracts - the limited support from accommodation providers to facilitate their integration pending and post asylum decisions - and by a lack of funding for councils and other local services for the costs of the support needed to fill the gap.

There also needs to be greater join up and a longer term view that explores the impacts of other Government policies and priorities with dispersal, such as new council responsibilities for homelessness reduction and the impact of welfare policies on the increased need for affordable housing that may reduce the pool of cheap housing available for dispersal.

The forthcoming new contracts for dispersal must be underpinned by a commitment to put the relationship between local authorities, future providers and the Home Office on a more strategic footing. As part of this, a specific commitment to effective engagement with local leaders in advance of the new contracts being rolled out is vital. The new contracts must address engagement and relationship issues in the previous contracts in order to encourage other councils to become dispersal areas and to create a more equitable system. Challenge and request for change from councils must be addressed to minimise the impact on both local communities and asylum seekers themselves.

We have welcomed the recognition of the impacts on local areas of asylum dispersal, as indicated by the CMF funded trial of Local Authority Asylum Liaison officers. However, member authorities have fed back concerns about the need for greater consultation in advance of the release of funding, and the requirement to match fund these posts in order to access that funding. The LGA would welcome

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working with the Government and councils on what the pilot has shown in terms of benefits in order to inform the next Comprehensive Spending Review and to develop a long-term vision for the asylum system throughout the UK.

We also need a discussion on the unfunded support which councils are obliged to provide for failed asylum seekers without recourse to public funds. This creates significant unfunded resource implications for councils on already overstretched budgets. Recent data from the NRPF Network indicates that £44 million a year was being spent by a group of 50 authorities alone. This discussion needs to include a confirmation that council-supported cases will be prioritised by Home Office case workers. The majority of cases were eventually awarded leave to remain with recourse to public funds – but only after a time of support from councils that averaged 887 days.

Government policy in this area creates huge uncertainty about what support can be provided and in many cases, prevents the potential for long-term solutions and effective integration. Families and individuals struggle to integrate as they do not have stable accommodation, face difficulties engaging in social activities due to the cost, and childcare costs may prevent them from sustaining employment. They may fall into hidden homelessness and destitution within migrant communities, which in turn makes them vulnerable to modern slavery and other forms of exploitation. The impacts of destitution such as street homelessness and begging will also be a very visible - and possible resented – presence in local areas, with impacts on cohesion locally and the willingness of communities to support integration.

Councils will also need to work with Government on communication with those who may have issues regularising their status pre and post withdrawal from the EU to ensure that this group of council supported families and individuals who cannot access state support does not grow exponentially.

The Government's future vision for the integration of new arrivals must stress the need for flexibility around approaches that reflect both the different needs of new arrivals, and local and regional differences. The impacts of sudden increases in migration to areas that are new to migration or have experienced sudden change are well known. But there is also a need to recognise that changing communities outside migration, such as via 'gentrification', have led to feelings of anxiety and exclusion amongst some more established community members, that can impact on communities' wish or ability to welcome further change and can lead to community tensions.

Education and young people
7. *The Green Paper proposes measures to ensure that all children and young people are prepared for life in modern Britain and have the opportunity for meaningful social mixing with those from different backgrounds. Do you agree with this approach?*

8. *The Green Paper sets out proposals to support parents with their choice of out-of-school education settings. Do you agree with this approach?*

We agree that it is important that there are opportunities for children and young people to mix with others from different backgrounds.

Schools have a hugely important role in promoting cohesion through shaping the values and behaviour of their pupils, as well as by providing a good education.

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Ensuring that their curriculum and topic based learning promote the values of tolerance, respect for diversity, knowledge and understanding of different faiths, as well as an understanding of British values; tackling bullying or racial harassment; and providing opportunities for children to mix with others' from different backgrounds (whether from within their own school or different schools) are all steps that all schools should already be taking and which will support this agenda.

We have previously raised significant concerns around out of school settings. The draft Strategy acknowledges that local authorities often feel they have insufficient powers to tackle issues regarding out of schools settings, particularly unregistered schools, yet fails to set out proposals to adequately address this.

While the majority of parents who home educate their children do a good job, there are a minority of children for whom this is not the case. Further, there remains a need to ensure home schooling is not being abused by people who wish to promote views that are at odds with British values, and who by doing so pose both a safeguarding risk to individual children and a risk to society as a whole. The Strategy references the pending report on the call for evidence on out of schools settings, which has since been published[3], but the measures announced around home education still stop short of our calls for registering home schooled children. Placing a legal duty on parents to register home-schooled children with their local authority would help councils to monitor how children are being educated and prevent children from disappearing from the oversight of services designed to keep them safe.

The Green Paper also sets out proposals around voluntary arrangements and non-statutory guidance for out of schools settings, however we remain concerned that these proposals will not be sufficient. Councils need the powers and appropriate funding to enter both homes and other premises to check a child's schooling to ensure that they are not being taught in unsuitable or dangerous environments. Councils should have the ability to close out of school settings or illegal schools where necessary, reflecting councils' duties around safeguarding.

More broadly, councils' direct role in local education provision has reduced in recent years with the advent of free schools and academies. The LGA has repeatedly raised concerns that councils have the responsibility to make sure there are enough school places in their local areas but are unable to directly commission the building of new schools or fully shape local provision and admissions. It is also a concern that councils have no power to become involved in failing academies and free schools, and that the admissions policies of many academies and free schools may not reflect local communities or promote cohesion. Councils should be given back the powers to open new maintained schools and existing academy schools should expand where required.

Budget cuts have also had a significant impact on provision for young people to mix in other settings, for instance forcing the closure of over 600 youth centres since 2012[4]. Not only does this impact on cohesion and integration issues in the short term, it also limits opportunities for early intervention, for instance in reducing crime

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/698250/Out-of-school_education_settings-Report_on_the_call_for_evidence.pdf

4 https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2016/08/23996.pdf

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and supporting young people into further education and work, that may impact further on community cohesion in the longer term.

Boosting English language skills

9. *The Green Paper proposes a number of measures to improve the offer for people to learn English. Do you agree with this approach?*

10. *Do you have any other suggestions on how we can improve the offer for people to learn English?*

There is no doubt that English language proficiency is a key part of creating cohesive communities, assisting newcomers to better integrate into their local communities and economies, access services and engage in civic participation. The draft Strategy acknowledges a number of barriers to providing effective provision, and that English as a Second Language (ESOL) provision should provide support both in an employment context and to help individuals understand conversational English. As the Green Paper notes, this is reflected in the additional funding for provided to local authorities participating in the Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme.

A range of options should therefore be available that meet local circumstances and employment opportunities, and support individuals with different needs - who may need to fit learning around working long or unsocial hours. Provision should also support those who have moved to the UK for marriage rather than to work and/or are at home supporting a family; the latter groups being highlighted in the Casey review as being particularly at risk of becoming isolated from wider society.

The Casey review noted that government funding for ESOL provision had reduced in recent years. Sufficient and long-term funding for schemes must be ensured; some previous schemes have been short-lived due to limited investment over time, inevitably restricting the impact of provision as well as the number of places taken up. Government should consider further the potential role of the business sector in supporting employees to develop their language skills, and provide incentives for employers to do more.

The strategy sets out that responsibility for the Adult Education Budget (AEB) will be devolved to eight Mayoral Combined Authorities MCAs and the Greater London Authority (GLA). The areas with AEB 2018 devolution contained in their deals have to date put in a tremendous amount of work to meet the Government's readiness criteria so it is disappointing that AEB devolution is delayed. The Government has confirmed in the Industrial Strategy that the new revised date for AEB devolution is 2019, so we trust it will commit to it and work closely with those areas to make this happen, and that they will have full flexibility to spend the money on local priorities. Equally important is how the Education and Skills Funding Agency will work with non-devolved areas to manage the national AEB budget.

We look forward to seeing further details about the new English language fund to develop new infrastructure to improve the offer around provision, which will be open for bids from councils, and to the development of a new English language strategy for England, including how this will be resourced.

Places and community

11. *The Green Paper proposes measures to ensure that people, particularly those living in residentially segregated communities, have opportunities to come*

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We agree that where people live and how they interact with others in their local area are key to building cohesive communities.

Access to good quality, affordable housing is at the heart of individuals' sense of security and place. Living in poor quality or temporary housing along with high housing costs puts great stresses on individuals and families, and may affect particular groups – we noted above some specific challenges for recent migrants and asylum seekers. Strains on limited housing resources has in some places had a negative impact on relations between different groups within communities. Demand for housing is outgrowing the supply of housing in many areas, putting pressure on existing stock, which can lead to overcrowding and community tension. Additionally, rising insecurity of housing creates increased churn and reduced stability that can make it difficult to build a strong community.

If empowered and enabled financially, councils can make a big difference in addressing the shortfall by building additional new homes. We have called on Government to lift the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) borrowing cap, which prevents councils from borrowing to invest in building new homes, including those needed for social rent. The Autumn Budget 2017 lifted the housing borrowing cap for some councils in 'areas of high affordability pressure', enabling them to bid for up to £1 billion in funding by 2021/22. However while this recognised the role that councils must play in providing homes, we believe the HRA cap should be lifted for all councils and HRA borrowing removed entirely from contributing to the national public debt. Our call has been supported by the House of Commons Treasury Committee, following its inquiry into the Autumn Budget 2017.

We also believe Government should develop a new definition of affordable housing, helping to support families from different backgrounds, based on affordability rather than housing prices.

Councils want to encourage home ownership, without a corresponding decline in the number of social rented homes. It is essential that the Government enables councils to keep 100 per cent of receipts from Right to Buy sales, to invest in new housing. Under current arrangements, councils are only able to retain a third of receipts from the sale of homes.

We welcomed the announcements in the 2017 Autumn Budget about Government investment in building new homes, however all councils must have a leading role in shaping this investment to ensure that new housing and infrastructure meets local needs. Government must also devolve housing funding alongside infrastructure funds. Placed based budgets bringing together the affordable housing programme, housing infrastructure fund and others would enable councils to join up local investment, supporting local economies and growth and meeting demand for local housing.

We recommend that the draft Strategy should consider further improving both access to and quality of homes. Councils are providing private rented sector accommodation to help support a better quality offer; Birmingham City Council is building a scheme of 92 privately rented apartments through a wholly owned council company. The drivers for this include a strong demand for high quality private rented homes in the city centre and an inadequate supply, driving up standards of quality and design, as well as returning a surplus to the council. London Borough

of Lewisham is developing a joint venture using council owned land for purpose built private rented housing. Homes are aimed at people who cannot afford to buy but are unable to access social housing, with the joint venture partner bringing investment and housing management expertise to the development. While these are excellent initiatives, we believe more can be done at a national level and repeat our call for an end to restrictions in buy to let mortgages that prevent access to housing for households in receipt of welfare benefits.

We support efforts to help tackle rogue landlords, but need stronger powers to enhance standards in the private rented sector. While councils can introduce discretionary licensing schemes for private landlords, we believe the Government should provide greater flexibility to extend these schemes across all areas. Currently, local authorities have to apply to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government for permission to introduce schemes that cover more than 20 per cent of an area or 20 per cent of privately rented homes.

Beyond housing provision, councils' role as place shapers also includes providing places and opportunities for their communities to come together to mix and socialise and to break down barriers. Austerity has inevitably had a severe impact on councils' ability to resource these facilities. However councils remain the country's biggest public funder of culture, investing over £2 billion per year into arts, museums, libraries and other cultural services.

Libraries reach all parts of the community but unlike most cultural or public institutions, they are proportionally more likely to be used by ethnic minority groups. Councils recognise that library services are critical to the effective delivery of a wide range of strategic outcomes relevant to cohesion and integration, many of which, such as support for English language skills, digital literacy and accessing public services and information are central to the library role. There are changing demands and expectations on libraries, requiring that some are refurbished or relocated to new population centres. Specific funding streams to assist with this transformation, as with the rollout of Wi-Fi provision across the national network, are particularly effective.

Councils also understand how important parks are to residents and the value they have in promoting health and fitness, local heritage, public art, festivals and appreciation of wildlife. Ensuring parks remain open and accessible to our communities is a key concern for local authorities facing budget pressures and councils are doing everything they can to provide the best possible park services, including innovative approaches to using park spaces, such as providing pop-up spaces, hosting local events and giving communities a say in how their parks are run. However while section 106 money can support the initial creation of these parks and spaces, identifying funding mechanisms – including government funding - for the effective on-going maintenance of these spaces is critical.

The Strategy does not consider in any detail people's ability to travel in order to mix with others, and access public and private-sector services, workplace, skills and training opportunities. However, many communities are dependent on public transport to make these vital journeys. Recent changes to legislation gives Mayors of combined authorities similar powers to franchise bus services as in London, which will enable councils to shape the provision of public transport services, and ensure that there is a sensible balancing of resources and services across the network. Until franchising takes hold in other areas, bus services will continue to operate under a deregulated market place. Councils have been doing what they can to support bus services, but bus usage continues to decline, partly because of

continuing pressures on council budgets and the need to subsidise the national and statutory concessionary fares scheme by an estimated £200 million a year. The LGA has therefore called for the Government to properly fund the national concessionary fares scheme; devolve the Bus Services Operators Grant to councils (which otherwise goes directly to private operators to subsidise all bus journeys, even commercially viable ones) and to make bus franchising powers easily accessible to all areas.

Increasing economic opportunity

12. The Green Paper proposes measures to provide tailored support to people, especially those who may not currently be active in the labour market, to build their confidence and skills to take up employment. Do you agree with this approach?

We agree that tailored approaches to support are important, but they cannot be designed or delivered nationally. The Green Paper acknowledges the importance of understanding and responding to local needs and challenges, but it does not go far enough to enable locally tailored approaches that would help address them. It is only through an effective partnership which draws on local and national knowledge and expertise that interventions can truly respond to social, economic and demographic variations.

Ensuring local residents have access to education and training that provides them with the skills to compete for jobs, is key to building strong and resilient local economies where everyone can contribute to, and benefit from growth. Across England, people are out of work for any number of reasons and every area has unique labour market conditions, which will affect job prospects.

However the current system is, in the main, characterised by a national commissioning approach and is not set up to respond to local need in the way that is required. Different central government departments and their agencies are directly responsible for employment and skills policy, design, funding and oversight, including Jobcentre Plus, the National Careers Service, and the Education and Skills Funding Agency. There is no common plan on how they will work together or a duty to discuss with councils how services will operate in their local areas. Local areas have little ability to influence their priorities, funding or delivery.

This makes national interventions hard to coordinate amongst one another, let alone local services, resulting in poor outcomes for some individuals that may need more support, as the Race Disparity Audit evidences.

Research for the LGA revealed that 20 employment and skills funding streams are managed by eight departments or agencies, spending more than £10 billion a year (2016/2017). Despite this investment, they often fail to meet local need, address economic and social challenges, or make a decisive impact on outcomes:
- nine million people lack literacy and numeracy skills.
- 54 per cent of all young unemployed people do not claim benefits or receive support from Job Centre Plus, demonstrating it is not doing enough to identify and attract the unemployed.
- 5.5 million people want a job or more hours.

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All the evidence points to locally designed schemes[5],[6] many through devolution deals and providing targeted and bespoke support, being the best way of supporting people into sustained jobs. But often these are dependent on time limited funding or devolution. The LGA continues to make the case for the current national employment and skills system to be more integrated and localised and for the sector – both councils and combined authorities - to benefit from a speedier and enhanced devolution deal process offering real freedom and flexibility. It should also be noted that many of the local programmes which identify, target and support the jobless would not have got off the ground without European match funding. As Britain exits the EU, so too will it lose access to EU funding from December 2020. It is therefore critical that the successor UK Shared Prosperity Fund provides at least an equal quantum of funding and is locally designed and commissioned.

What is needed is a high performing and well-coordinated employment and skills system, responsive to the needs of employers and local areas. Only then can skills gaps and shortages be addressed by investing adequately in, and targeting retraining and upskilling support for, the current workforce and ensuring young people are trained for current and future jobs.

Work Local[7] is the LGA's positive proposal for change. Led by combined authorities and groups of councils, in partnership with local stakeholders, the LGA proposes that Work Local areas will plan, commission and have oversight of a joined-up service bringing together advice and guidance, employment, skills, apprenticeship and business support around place for individuals and employers.

A more coordinated and targeted service would better serve young people and adults who are either unemployed, low skilled, or have complex needs, and support local economic growth by bringing training providers and businesses together. This would see a reformed system that worked better for the economy by responding to local economic needs, provided a personalised and joined-up service for local people and delivered a one-stop, locally rooted, employer-demand led system for employers. Across a medium-sized combined authority, this could result in 8500 people off out of work benefits, 6000 people attaining better skills, additional fiscal benefits of £280 million and a benefit to the economy of £420 million each year.

Our Work Local approach is now critical as combined authorities, councils and local partners plan how their areas will respond to the challenges and opportunities of Brexit and the Government's Industrial Strategy. We continue to call on the Government to embrace this place-based approach and to help take the agenda a step further, and we have recently proposed a new partnership between the sector and DfE to deliver more effective collaboration on post-16 skills.

We welcome the commitment in the Green Paper to ensuring that integration challenges are factored into the roll out of Universal Credit. The move from legacy benefits to Universal Credit is an opportunity to engage with people to ensure that they are getting the support they need and help prevent marginalisation.

Universal Credit encompasses some (but not all) aspects of a significant programme of reform to the social security system. This programme of reform has

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[5] https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/employment-and-skills/work-local/work-local-case-studies
[6] Southwark 5000 Lives https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=odY36fyhFHw
[7] https://www.local.gov.uk/work-local-our-vision-integrated-and-devolved-employment-and-skills-services-full-report

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significantly reduced government spending on working age benefits, which has in turn reduced benefits income for some households.

It is vital that these households get the support they need to sustainably manage this reduction. While employment is one way in which this may be achieved, as set out above, reducing other outgoings, such as housing costs, may be possible for others. However research conducted by the LGA and many others shows that many affected households may be unable to increase their income from employment and/or reduce their housing costs in the short term, and may still need further support even if they can. Locally provided support on key issues such as financial inclusion, health, childcare and debt advice is therefore crucial to the effective delivery of Universal Credit and wider welfare reform.

The Green Paper acknowledges particular challenges for some groups. Research commissioned by the EHRC shows that some are also particularly affected by cumulative impacts from different reforms. These include women, some ethnic minority households (particularly those with larger families), disabled people and lone parents. These are all groups who are at risk of marginalisation, which may be exacerbated by unsupportable reductions in household income.

Funding for local welfare support is currently fragmented, piecemeal and insufficient. The LGA would like to see existing funding such as Universal Support and Discretionary Housing Payments brought together and devolved. We would also like to see the reinstatement of separately identified funding for local welfare assistance. A properly devolved, recognised and resourced local safety net will prevent greater costs to the public purse in the long term by preventing crisis and social exclusion, enabling the reformed welfare system to work more effectively.

We welcome the Government's commitment in the Strategy to increase apprenticeship starts for people from ethnic minority backgrounds. Local authorities are already working hard to increase apprenticeship opportunities across the country, including councils from Greater Manchester, London, Bristol, Birmingham and Leicester which have joined with other local employers to support the Government's '5 Cities Project' to promote the take-up of apprenticeships among under-represented groups, including ethnic minority groups and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. We look forward to discussing this further with Government and exploring what additional resources may be available to support the work.

Rights and freedoms

13. *The Green Paper proposes measures to encourage integration and resist divisive views or actions. Do you agree with this approach?*

14. *The Green Paper proposes measures to address practices which can impact on the rights of women. Do you agree with this approach?*

Work to build cohesive communities touches on a vast array of issues all across the public, private and voluntary sectors. With the right tools and resources, local government can play its part in creating more resilient communities that help to prevent cohesion challenges and restrict the space in which divisive views might grow.

We agree that there is more to do - across central and local government, partners and communities - to tackle division and to challenge some of the myths and stereotypes that can allow divisive views to develop. We noted above that we accept the call for local government to be brave in tackling difficult cohesion issues and recognise the critical role of local leaders in supporting this. Central government too must be willing to do the same - and demonstrate further how it will tackle some of the barriers to achieving integration identified elsewhere in this response.

Where specific challenges and trigger events do occur, councils and their partners must be enabled to respond quickly and effectively. To support this we believe that both locally and nationally, work around integration and cohesion, counter extremism and preventing individuals from being drawn into terrorism demand a joined-up and coherent policy approach. There are significant national developments anticipated in related policy areas, including a new Contest strategy, and the Integrated Communities Strategy will need to take account of these developments.

The Green Paper sets out a number of areas for further work under this chapter, in particular to understand specific issues in greater depth and we await the outcomes of this work. We also look forward to feeding in further to the work of the Commission for Countering Extremism as it develops, along with the revised Hate Crime Action Plan. The forthcoming legislative and non-legislative measures around domestic abuse and violence against women and girls present another opportunity for Government to take a cross-departmental approach to tackling issues that affect the rights of women.

In the interim we must continue with important work to tackle some of the issues identified. No area is immune from divisive views, harmful practices or extreme narratives and it is clear that extremism presents issues for local authorities across the country. However while some 'supported areas' receive central funding for dedicated counter-extremism Community Coordinator posts (40 areas have or have had Coordinators, with 41 expected in total), we are concerned that non-supported areas do not have the resources they need to respond effectively to extremism threats and build resilience.

The LGA is aiding the work of the Special Interest Group on Countering Extremism (SIGCE), which was established in 2017 to build a sector-led network, chaired by Luton and Leeds councils, supported by the Home Office, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and partnered by Coventry University's Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, with funding secured for two years. The SIGCE aims to support the dissemination of best practice and sharing of ideas across all local authorities and its programme of work includes the delivery of a number of thematic seminars and developing associated resources.

The LGA will continue to build its own support and improvement programme for local authorities to support councils and councillors to tackle difficult and sensitive issues, respond to times of crisis, and to engage effectively with local communities in the cohesion and counter extremism space. We also continue to partner with Barnardo's in delivering the National FGM Centre, to protect and support those affected by female genital mutilation and other harmful practices and help prevent new cases. We have worked with the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner to produce guidance on tackling modern slavery[8], complemented by a number of

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[8] https://www.local.gov.uk/modern-slavery-council-guide

events for local authorities; as noted above we believe that there are increased risks for individuals who are less integrated into their communities of being exploited in this way.

We also highlighted above our work to encourage people from all backgrounds to become councillors. This sits alongside our recent work with the Women's Local Government Society to identify and celebrate the lives of 100 women who were active in the campaign for women's suffrage and who went on to use extended rights to citizenship in a positive way locally; it is hoped this will see more nominations from women (and other under-represented groups) in future.

Measuring success

15. The Green Paper proposes core integration measures for national and local government to focus on. Do you agree these are the right measures?

We agree that it is important to be able to assess levels of cohesion and integration locally in order to understand, promote and track cohesion and broadly welcome establishing a set of measures to help understand and address local issues.

We believe that the data collected should provide insight into integration issues across a range of groups so that there is an appropriate balance between measures focusing on minority and majority populations, including, eg age and social class.

As this work is developed, further thought should be given to the collection of data that can be analysed at local authority level, and that some of the suggested indicators measure issues which sit outside of local authority control. We would also welcome further discussions with Government about what data can be collected from councils and how this can be done in a non-burdensome way.

Local Government Association

Submission