

Council – 13 November 2017

Cohesion and Integration Strategy 2017-2020

Service: Change and Governance

Wards: All

1. Summary

This report presents reasons and background that led to preparation of the first Cohesion and Integration Strategy 2017-2020. The Strategy was formulated as result of recommendations of the cross-party Cohesion Working Group. Extensive engagement and consultation with partner organisations, voluntary and community sector and residents took place to inform the Strategy. It takes account of local government statutory duties and governmental initiatives in relation to “fostering good relations” and creating conditions for better integration. It is directly linked to three out of four key Council priorities and outlines the performance indicators required to be delivered with partner organisations in order to make a positive difference to lives of all people and communities living in the borough.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Council approves the Cohesion and Integration Strategy 2017-2020 and related Action Plan.

3. Report detail

3.1 Borough of Walsall has welcomed people from different cultural and religious backgrounds for many decades. Due to various economic, international and travel influences, people that have settled in the area in the last decade have made the borough even more ethnically and culturally diverse, with 23.1% of the population now being from minority ethnic background and with 130 different languages spoken in Walsall schools. Whilst Walsall Council previously included aspirations for building cohesion in its Sustainable Community Strategy 2013-2016, it has never had a stand-alone community cohesion strategy.

3.2 In August 2015 a cross-party *Cohesion Working Group* was formed in order to formally recognise and identify impact of the increasing diversity and inform our potential cohesion priorities. The working group tasked the Community Cohesion team to start engagement with a broad range of community representatives, voluntary organisations and residents from all different backgrounds, including newly settled communities and majority White population. Recommendations from both the *Cohesion Working Group* and *Community Conversations* were then reported to the Corporate and Public Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and full Council in the later part of 2016, with a view of preparing a first Strategy.

3.3. In December 2016 the government published *The Casey Review: a review into opportunity and integration*. The review called upon local government strategies to put greater emphasis on promotion of English language skills, empowering marginalised women, promoting more social mixing, particularly through schooling and among young people, and tackling barriers to employment for the most socially isolated groups. This has led to extension of the consultation period and minor review of our priorities and focus.

All of the above developments have informed the Council's first Cohesion and Integration Strategy 2017-2020 that is presented to the full Council with this report.

3.4 The Strategy contains 8 areas of focus:

1. Improving understanding and challenging myths in communities;
2. Parallel lives, reduced opportunity and parochialism;
3. Extremism and hate crime;
4. Indigenous communities and minority communities;
5. Changing demographics;
6. Faith communities;
7. Representative workforce and workforce development;
8. Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities.

3.5 The Strategy includes an Action Plan, Appendix 1, outlining the activity that is planned against each area and expected performance indicators. The Action Plan also specifies the stakeholders and partners that Council seeks to work with in order to achieve these indicators.

3.6 Appendices 2-4 summarise key findings from the *Community Conversations*, the legal context underpinning our statutory duties in the areas of equality, diversity and cohesion and ward level and neighbourhood level statistical data concerning diversity and deprivation. Appendix 6 provides an overview of main faiths currently present in Walsall and their potential impact on cohesion.

4. Council priorities

The Cohesion and Integration Strategy relates directly to the following council priorities:

- **Increasing economic prosperity through increased growth**, particularly in relation to creation of opportunities for volunteering and take up of volunteering and developing a sustainable infrastructure, external to the Council, to support community cohesion;
- **Maximising people's health, wellbeing and safety** - ensuring that services recognise cultural barriers, and are inclusive and accessible for existing, new and emerging communities and protect communities and individuals from the threat caused by extremist behaviour;
- **Creating healthy and sustainable places and communities** - supporting a sustainable third sector and empowering connected, inclusive and resilient communities.

5. Risk management

There are currently no plans to reduce budget for community cohesion activity or staffing in the course of 2018-2019 budget planning. However, if financial pressures change and budgetary reductions occur, there's a risk that some of the events, training or school twinning and faith exchanges will not be delivered as planned. Building capacity in Voluntary and Community Sector are essential for continuation of activities through self-sufficiency and external fund-raising in future.

6. Financial implications

There is currently 75k allocated towards Community Cohesion activity, excluding staffing budget.

7. Legal implications

Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 places a general Public Sector Equality Duty on public bodies, this includes a duty "to foster good relations between people with protected characteristics and those who do not share them".

A range of other government instruments, such as the *National Strategy – Creating Conditions for Integration* and the *Casey Review* and, to an extent, the national *Prevent Strategy* all put emphasis on supporting activity that allows different communities to better understand each others' perspectives and cooperate together in positive activities.

8. Health and wellbeing implications

Management of community cohesion events, volunteering and partnership with voluntary sector in organising activities is subject to Council's existing Health and Safety standards.

9. Equality implications

Cohesion and Integration Strategy includes specific targets for carrying out equality impact assessments on key activity as part of its Action Plan.

10. Consultation

Engagement and consultation that informed the Strategy is summarised in the Cohesion and Integration Strategy, pages 20-21.

Background papers

The Cohesion and Integration Strategy 2017-2020 – full document.

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