

## **Introduction and comment on the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper**

*Building Stronger, More United Communities*

From the Baptist Inter Faith Working Group 17 May 2018

This will be of interest to churches in multi faith areas, those interested in inter faith relations and community cohesion and those who work with refugees and asylum seekers.

The Green paper came to the Baptist Inter Faith Working Group via the Faith Communities Forum of the Inter Faith Network. The paper and how to make responses to it can be found at

[www.gov.uk/government/consultations/integrated-communities-strategy-green-paper](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/integrated-communities-strategy-green-paper)

It was launched in March with publicity about five pilot areas in England that would receive additional funding over the next two years to develop local integrated community strategies. The five places are Blackburn with Darwen, Bradford, Peterborough, Walsall and Waltham Forest.

Mr Hardip Begol CBE, Director of Integration and Communities at the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, introduced the Green Paper at the Faith Communities Forum on 8 May.

**Following an introduction about Building Integrated Communities, it has eight chapters:**

- 1: Strengthening Leadership
- 2: Supporting New Migrants and Resident Communities
- 3: Education and Young People
- 4: Boosting English Language Chapter
- 5: Places and Community Chapter
- 6: Increasing Economic Opportunity Chapter
- 7: Rights and Freedoms
- 8: Measuring Success

**It outlines the following vision:**

'This is what true integration looks like – communities where people, whatever their background, live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities. Communities where many religions, cultures and opinions are celebrated, underpinned by a shared set of British values that champion tolerance, freedom and equality of opportunity. A society in which everyone is a potential friend.

These values – which include a proud history of defending people's right to practise their religion within the law – have helped make Britain what it is today, one of the most successful multi-faith, and multi-ethnic, societies in the world.

Integration is a two-way street. Everyone has a part to play in upholding these values. This includes not just the people who are already here, but those who want to make it their home.'

The challenge is put forward from Dame Louise Casey's independent review, published in 2016, which pointed to 'a worrying number of communities, divided along race, faith or socio-economic lines.'

**The paper then identifies seven factors which affect integration:**

- Level and pace of migration
- School segregation
- Residential segregation:
- Labour market disadvantage
- Lack of English language proficiency
- Personal, religious and cultural norms, values and attitudes
- Lack of meaningful social mixing

It goes on to outline what Government does and hopes to do and what it wants others to do. Some of it is already being done and it's difficult to distinguish what is existing and what is new.

**There are two pages of key policy proposals which include:**

- support the new Cohesion and Integration Network to enable it to identify best practice on leadership and to share this widely.
- promote mixing and twinning arrangements between schools in areas of high segregation;
- facilitate a new network of community-based conversation clubs.
- empower marginalised women, including exploring reform of the law on marriage and religious weddings;
- expand the Strengthening Faith Institutions programme to help a wider range of faith institutions to strengthen their governance structures, including the participation of women and young people;
- support faith communities and interfaith dialogue as a means of breaking down barriers between communities, building greater trust and understanding, and removing the conditions which can allow intolerance and unequal treatment to flourish;
- support delivery of the Hate Crime Action Plan in the Integration Areas, strengthening local partnerships to identify innovative practices to address hate crime and promote greater reporting of incidents.

It aims to take a local approach, working with the five local authorities and partners to develop their own local integration strategies.

**It is suggested that voluntary and faith organisations should:**

- Continue and enhance work in partnership with others to create strong, integrated communities, as well as calling out practices and behaviours which impede integration.
- Share best practice with government and across the sector.

There are questions for consultation at the end of each chapter for individuals and organisations and these are gathered together in an appendix. The opportunity to make responses to the green paper will close on 5<sup>th</sup> June

**Reflections**

There are lots of references to inter faith and inter faith organisations, as well as faith more generally and more specifically to faith schools.

It seems that the paper tries to make equality the underlying foundation, rather than so called 'British values', but these still play a part.

Whilst there are certainly some things to welcome in the green paper, the Inter Faith Working Group is concerned about the use of the term 'segregated communities'. This term has a particular history in the United States and suggests that segregation is a policy or is enforced in some way. We do not believe this is the case in the UK where it is more appropriate to think of concentrations of particular communities and the dynamic of 'parallel lives'. The use of 'segregated communities', in our view, exaggerates and overstates the case in a UK context and is at best unhelpful.