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Guidance

Community engagement and EU Exit: guidance for local authorities

Guidance for local authorities on the ways in which they can understand, engage and reassure their communities in the lead up to and following EU exit.

From:

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

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Introduction

The government is committed to creating socially stronger, more confident and integrated communities by creating places that are better, safer and stronger, where people get along, can make the most of the opportunities available to them and play a full part in our society.

To achieve this, government at every level must strengthen their work to enable people to recognise and value the things that bind places and people together, promote opportunity and celebrate the neighbourhoods we live and work in. A key part of this is to ensure community voices are heard and valued, so people have – and feel they have – a say over the decisions that matter most to them in their local area.

Over the coming months, the government will continue its work to ensure that the UK remains a country where people live, work, learn and socialise together and share rights and responsibilities, whatever their background. We have published the Integrated Communities Action Plan (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-communities-action-plan>), clearly setting out the actions we will take across government to build stronger, integrated communities.

Leaving the EU with a deal remains the government's top priority. This transition will affect areas in different ways, so local leadership will be critical in ensuring that people feel reassured and can come together as we exit the EU, and in the months and years which follow.

We understand that the period before and following EU Exit may create uncertainty for some people, and we want to work with partners, including local leaders, to ensure that communities feel engaged, supported and reassured. Because they know their areas and residents best and have a critical role in bringing partners

together, local leaders are central to offering support and reassurance to their communities during this time of change.

Diversity enriches communities, brings new perspectives and can stimulate local growth. It makes us the outward-looking nation we are today. After the UK leaves the EU, EU citizens living in the UK will be able to continue to live their lives much as they do now. They are welcome in the UK and we want them to participate fully in their communities.

This guidance aims to provide local authorities with support on the ways in which they can understand, engage and reassure their communities in the lead up to and following EU exit as part of their work to build stronger, better integrated communities. It is part of the package of support being offered to local authorities. This includes a network of nine local authority chief executives from across England (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/mhclg-eu-exit-local-information-sharing>) established to engage with councils in their areas, a weekly e-bulletin to all chief executives and leaders of local authorities, a dedicated GOV.UK page (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-government-brexite-preparedness>) signposting relevant guidance from across Whitehall and a series of thematic events.

EU citizens may require particular support in this period, for example being informed about the need to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme (<https://www.gov.uk/settled-status-eu-citizens-families>) if they wish to stay in the UK long-term. This support sits alongside issues of importance among communities of all backgrounds that councils should reflect upon and address through their ongoing engagement plans.

Councils do critical work to support integration. Included in this document are a number of examples of what local authorities are already doing to engage and support their communities. Many of these programmes and activities have been part of a long-term strategy to build strong links with and across communities and embed integration across a range of policy areas, including education, housing and health and well-being.

This document also provides a set of issues to consider that councils and their partners may want to use in reviewing their engagement activities. In addition, it is underpinned by support for communities and partners through funding for hate crime reporting platforms, including Tell Mama and True Vision. We will continue to engage with communities themselves to make sure we understand and respond to their concerns.

Effective community engagement

Local leaders have an important role to play in generating trust, addressing misinformation and providing support in relation to the UK's exit from the EU. Community engagement offers a means of building links with communities, challenging misconceptions and offering reassurance, including with vulnerable groups. In this way it can be an effective method to reduce any risks of community tensions and quickly addressing these should they occur.

Many councils will regularly run forums to keep in touch with the local community and engage with residents on a range of policy issues. They also participate in and can encourage forums run by leaders within their communities. These can range widely from, for example, interfaith forums to residents' groups. Many of these forums have been built over several years and therefore rely on longstanding relationships. They are a useful source of information and provide networks for disseminating key messages. They also offer a platform for constructive engagement on issues which people may hold disparate views, such as EU Exit.

While well-established forums offer many advantages, councils have reported that some groups, including EU citizens, may sometimes be under-represented. To address this, some councils have adopted targeted approaches to reach those who wouldn't normally be engaged (for example, by holding engagement sessions in workplaces, deploying community outreach workers or working with intermediaries such as those in the faith sector).

It is also important to recognise that EU Exit will affect everyone. This is why some councils are putting in place specific EU Exit platforms aimed at engaging all residents, particularly those who may feel most unsettled or need additional support. Wide-reaching community engagement can be a way of ensuring that all groups in the community feel supported and listened to. At its best, this can help build and strengthen common bonds across communities, including between groups who may hold different views on EU Exit.

Understanding the issues

Given the diversity of place and interests, councils will be best placed to decide the kinds of messages which are likely to play out best in their communities. A number of councils have developed methods to gather information about their communities. This ranges from conducting regular surveys to carrying out community outreach. Citizens' forums, residents' panels and town hall meetings can be an effective way of testing messages and developing narratives which are likely to be most successful in a given context.

Communications and campaigns

The government has been clear that it values the contribution EU citizens make to this country and the benefits of our diverse society. It has stressed that it wants EU citizens currently in the UK to stay and has committed to protect their rights – whatever the outcome of the EU Exit negotiations. It has also underlined its commitment to challenging all forms of hate crime and discrimination.

Local leaders, including local authorities, can play a critical role in sharing this messaging and ensuring it reaches EU citizens and the wider community. In addition to providing practical information about the EU Settlement Scheme (see Supporting the EU Settlement Scheme (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/eu-settlement-scheme-community-leaders-toolkit/toolkit-introduction-how-to-use-the-local-authorities-toolkit-in-your-community-or-network>) for guidance), local leaders can help ensure that EU residents feel recognised and welcome, while stressing that discrimination or hate crime will not be tolerated. They can also play a critical role in reassuring the wider community and ensuring that there is an understanding of the status of EU citizens and the valuable contribution they make and will continue to make following EU Exit.

Some local authorities have opted to launch specific EU Exit related campaigns to inform and facilitate the public debate in ways that recognise differences of view but seek to avoid tensions. Other local leaders are doing so by sharing their messages via existing networks or in partnership with others.

While in some cases communities may respond well to campaigns which are focused on providing factual information; for others these approaches can prove counterproductive. Alternative approaches are being trialled in some councils, such as ones which facilitate personal contact between those who hold strong views.

Reaching all sections of the community

A number of local authorities are complementing the work they are doing via residents' events and road shows with online forums that can reach residents who are less likely to participate in the community. Local authorities can also use their own social media channels to signpost support and work with influential faith and community leaders to ensure these messages reach all communities. Working alongside intermediaries from the private sector or the community can be an effective way of offering reassurance.

While there are many models of implementation, effective community engagement models often share a number of common practices. Below we provide some of the questions councils and their partners may wish to ask of themselves as they design their approaches to community engagement in the context of EU Exit.

Barking and Dagenham – listening to the community

Since 2001, the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham has seen the highest rates of population growth and turnover in the UK. From being a borough where a significant majority of its population were White British only two decades ago, it is rapidly becoming one of the most diverse parts of the capital.

The borough, with support from the government's Controlling Migration Fund, has developed a data-led, systems approach to understand the impact of rapid population change on residents. Drawing on quantitative and qualitative insight from focus groups, resident surveys, the borough's Social Progress Index, and tools which map change in community demographics, the council has been able to understand the way different residents perceive community change.

In order to better listen to and understand the views and values of residents the council has taken a number of steps:

- launched a community 'amplifiers' programme, recruiting local residents as researchers focusing on under-represented groups, including EU citizens, to build relationships using participatory and storytelling techniques aimed at increasing harmony through appreciating different worldviews and practices
- deployed surveys to better understand the values of different residents and be more in-tune with the evolving local population. This seeks to help frontline service providers have more effective conversations, build relationships, and develop more emotionally intelligent branding and messaging with its increasingly diverse community
- created more opportunities for meaningful encounters between residents of different backgrounds through a range of culture, participation and public decision-making projects

Sheffield – engaging disengaged EU residents

Page Hall in Sheffield is home to a large and well-established Roma population. Last year, the council launched a Community Plan initiative aimed at enabling engagement about residents' aspirations for parts of the city which has seen the most rapid change. One of the key priorities of the programmes was to engage groups which had been under-represented in the council's consultations, including the Roma community.

Since the announcement of the EU Settlement Scheme the council has aimed to mobilise this process to encourage more Roma residents to engage. To do so they are now offering face to face support for members of the Roma community using funding from the government's Controlling Migration Fund. When Roma residents approach the council for advice and guidance on the scheme, staff carry out consultations on a range of issues which could inform Page Hall's Community Plan. By gaining greater insight into the needs of an under-represented community, the aim is to ensure that the final plan genuinely reflects the aspirations of all residents.

Issues to consider – what local authorities can do to engage with communities

Understanding the landscape

- Does the local authority have an up-to-date picture of its demographic make-up?
- Does the local authority carry out residents' surveys or other exercises which could generate useful information on local attitudes and concerns?
- Has there been research which could yield insights, including in similar local authorities?
- Are there systems in place to ensure that intelligence from communities is being collected systematically, shared and analysed?

Building relationships

- Has the local authority mapped its key stakeholders in the community? Is there an up-to-date database of key voluntary, community and faith groups operating in the area, including ones which offer support to newcomers? Is this being cross-referenced with population analysis to establish where there is greatest need for targeted outreach and engagement with the groups who are less involved?
- Are there mechanisms for community stakeholders and the council to share and / or receive information? Does the council have a list of key sites and influencers on local social media channels?
- Are regular 'temperature checks' being carried out on the sentiments expressed in local social media and the wider community?
- Is the council factoring community issues into its engagement with local businesses? Are there direct links with key employers, such as ones whose employees include significant numbers of EU citizens or businesses which serve EU national communities?

Establishing trust

- Does the local authority have systems in place to track communications with key stakeholders to ensure that they engage regularly? Is there a strategy in place to communicate the implications of EU exit for local residents?
- Is there a mechanism to ensure that issues raised by community stakeholders are taken forward where possible? If this is not possible, have steps been put in place to reassure communities and to log their concerns so these can be passed, where appropriate, to those bodies responsible?
- Has the local authority considered the case for facilitating engagement between groups which hold strong and opposing views (including since the EU referendum)?
- Does the local authority have a strategy in place to maximise its visibility and accessibility as best as resources will allow across different communities / neighbourhoods, including areas where EU residents are most likely to live?

Communications – creating channels

- Does the local authority work with community leaders? If so, has it sought intelligence on how influential leaders may be in the wider community?
- Has the local authority taken steps to maximise its channels into its EU citizens' communities? Is there evidence to show that these steps are leading to greater / better engagement?

Communications – messaging

- Are there communications plans in place to ensure that local authority messages are reaching across the community, including EU citizens and UK nationals?
- Is the local authority carrying out checks to ensure that messaging is clear and consistent across key delivery partners and council communications?

Useful resources

We recognise that along with case studies of approaches other local authorities are pursuing, you may find external guides, toolkits and other publications of use to you.

Below is a list of documents freely available online which you may wish to review:

1. Local Government Association Guide to Engagement
(https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/New%20Conversations%20Guide%20refresh_11.pdf)

2. Community Planning Toolkit – Community Engagement (<https://www.communityplanningtoolkit.org/community-engagement>)

Supporting the EU Settlement Scheme

It has always been a priority for the UK government to protect the rights of EU citizens living in the UK, and the reciprocal rights of UK citizens living in the EU. To deliver that protection the government has launched the EU Settlement Scheme (<https://www.gov.uk/settled-status-eu-citizens-families>).

This enables resident EU citizens and their family members to obtain the UK immigration status which they will need in order to remain here permanently after we leave the EU. All local authorities will therefore be home to people who will need to apply for status under the EU Settlement Scheme. The scheme, which will be fully open by 30 March 2019, will also cover other EEA and Swiss citizens.

Irish citizens enjoy a right of residence in the UK that is not reliant on the UK's membership of the EU, so they will not be required to apply for status under the scheme, but they may do so if they wish. Their eligible family members (who are not Irish citizens or British citizens) will be required to obtain status under the scheme but they can do so without the Irish citizen needing to apply.

EU citizens' rights are protected by the draft Withdrawal Agreement and, in line with that, the EU Settlement Scheme will make it as simple and straightforward as possible for them to apply for status: they will just need to prove their identity, confirm their UK residence and declare any criminal convictions. Under the draft Withdrawal Agreement, the deadline for applications to the scheme, for those EU citizens resident here by the end of 2020, will be 30 June 2021.

Step by step guidance on how to apply (<https://www.gov.uk/settled-status-eu-citizens-families>) is available online.

In a 'no deal' scenario, the EU Settlement Scheme will also enable EU citizens living in the UK by 29 March 2019 and their family members to be able to stay and continue their lives here much as before, with the same access to work, study, benefits and public services that they enjoy now.

Test phase

We are currently in a public test phase of the EU Settlement Scheme. Applying during this phase is entirely voluntary: by the end of February 2019, we had received more than 150,000 applications during the test phases of the scheme, of which 135,000 (nearly 90%) have already been successfully concluded. The public test phase is testing the use of the EU Exit ID Document Check app, which enables applicants to prove their identity remotely, without needing to send in their identity document.

When the scheme is fully open by 30 March 2019, use of the app will be entirely optional – it will be one of several ways by which applicants will be able to verify their identity, including also by post.

Fees and refunds

The Prime Minister announced on 21 January 2019 there will be no application fee when the scheme is fully open by 30 March 2019. Anyone who has applied already during the test phases and has paid a fee, or who does so subsequently, will have their fee refunded. Details of the refunds process will be published shortly. Applicants applying during the current public test phase are advised to use the payment card they wish to be refunded on.

How local authorities can support EU citizens

The Home Office is making sure that the scheme is accessible and capable of handling vulnerable applicants with flexibility and sensitivity. Protecting the rights of vulnerable citizens is a core objective for the EU Settlement Scheme.

Ensuring that communications about the EU Settlement Scheme are effective and reach all parts of the UK's EU citizen population, including those who are vulnerable or at risk, will only be possible if all levels of government work in partnership.

Many local authorities have reported that they have often had limited contact with some EU citizens. This has been a consequence of high levels of mobility, high levels of economic participation and relatively low take up of public services. This may, in some instances, have made it harder to establish strong links with some EU citizens. This is why some local authorities are also working in partnership with local charities, churches, schools and advice centres with close links to local EU citizen communities to build relationships. By building and utilising partnerships, local authorities can ensure that they are reaching those who are in greatest need of support.

Local authorities will need to ensure that applications for the Scheme are made on behalf of all looked after children who are EU citizens and for whom they have parental responsibility. For more information, please speak to your Director of Children Services.

The Home Office has created a new grant funding scheme of up to £9 million to enable voluntary and community sector organisations to provide information and application assistance to the most vulnerable EU citizens and their family members. Bids for funding closed on 1 February 2019.

Enlisting the help of a wide variety of third sector organisations that have expertise and strong local links with vulnerable EU citizens in communities throughout the UK is important. It will help to disseminate information about the EU Settlement Scheme in the right areas, and it will also provide vital support to vulnerable or at-risk EU citizens and their family members, who need assistance to apply.

Organisations awarded funding will be mobilising their operations to provide outreach and practical support to vulnerable EU citizens from April, providing a network across the UK. The Home Office will provide the detail of the new network to local authorities as soon as the competition has concluded. Any enquiries related to the grant scheme funding can be directed to: EUSSGrants@homeoffice.gov.uk.

Tools to help you

The Home Office has recently published a new local authority toolkit (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/eu-settlement-scheme-community-leaders-toolkit/toolkit-introduction-how-to-use-the-local-authorities-toolkit-in-your-community-or-network>) on GOV.UK. The toolkit contains practical and ready-made communications materials aimed at giving voluntary and community sector organisations and local authorities the ability to cascade messages about the EU Settlement Scheme and to encourage applications from those wishing to stay in the UK. The toolkit includes introductions, briefing packs, factsheets, leaflets and posters. Video content and FAQs will soon be available on GOV.UK.

There is also a toolkit for community leaders (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/eu-settlement-scheme-community-leaders-toolkit/toolkit-introduction-how-to-use-the-community-leaders-toolkit-in-your-community-or-network>) for local and voluntary organisations who want to support EU citizens. Many local authorities are already supporting EU citizens in their communities in the following ways:

Insight into the community

Local authorities may wish to proactively work with local partners to improve their understanding of their EU citizen residents, their needs and the ways in which the EU Settlement Scheme is affecting them.

Data can help councils target support to groups which are most vulnerable or at risk. It will therefore help ensure that they are being proactive about sharing information about the EU Settlement Scheme with residents who may need additional support or may have concerns about the process.

Councils may use a combination of administrative and population data, alongside the information gathered from frontline service provision and via community engagement, to shape their work.

Offering guidance and support to EU citizens

In order to ensure that EU citizens have all the information and support they need in accessing the EU Settlement Scheme, a number of local authorities are establishing support services for EU citizens via the creation of models such as help desks and online information hubs. Some have opted to make these as readily accessible as possible by using libraries, shopping centres, council buildings and other venues which people use in their daily lives. Others have launched bespoke websites offering guidance to EU citizens in English and other EU languages.

EU citizens can access a range of support, including:

- Telephone enquiries to the Settlement Resolution Centre – call 0300 123 7379.
- Digital assistance for those who may struggle to access information or do not have the technology and/or digital confidence to apply online. Community organisations which provide digital assistance can access full training and payment for every applicant they assist via the We Are Digital (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/765076/EU-settlement-scheme-local-authorities-introduction-pack.PDF) programme. The support is available over the phone, at one of over 150 local centres or – where necessary – at home.
- ID verification services are being hosted by a number of local registration services at councils (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/eu-settlement-scheme-id-document-scanner-locations/locations-offering-chip-checker-services>) where people can, for a small fee charged by the local authority for providing this service, get their passport checked in person. We would like to see a good geographical spread of local authorities choosing to offer this service – especially in those localities that have the largest EU citizen populations. Training and assistance in setting up the service is provided. If you would like to offer this service, please contact paul.dumke@southwark.gov.uk who is coordinating on behalf of the National Registration Panel.
- Advice on housing, benefits, services and employment issues. In some cases, local authorities have opted to provide translations services to support EU citizens who don't speak English apply for the EU Settlement Scheme.
- Translated materials about the EU Settlement Scheme will be available in 23 EU languages and Welsh once the scheme is fully live.

Fair and effective implementation

There will be no change to the rights and status of EU citizens currently living in the UK until 2021, when the UK's new skills-based immigration system will be introduced. Employers, landlords, banks and others have a duty not to discriminate against EU citizens in light of the UK's decision to leave the EU. A number of councils have launched campaigns targeted at key stakeholders and intermediaries, such as employers and landlords, in order to ensure that they too understand the EU Settlement Scheme and to minimise the risk of discrimination. Current 'right to work' checks (e.g. passport and/or EU national ID card) apply until the end of 2020.

There is an employer's toolkit (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/eu-settlement-scheme-employer-toolkit>) on GOV.UK that provides guidance to employers who wish to help their employees obtain status under the EU Settlement Scheme.

Keep informed

The Home Office has set up various channels to access information about the EU Settlement Scheme.

- Sign up for email alerts (<https://gov.smartwebportal.co.uk/homeoffice/public/webform.asp?id=67&id2=627DF7>) about the EU Settlement Scheme.
- Participate in local authority specific teleconferences to stay informed with updates and receive support from the Home Office. You will have access to the scheme's key officials and will be able to ask questions or raise issues specific to your locality. To sign up for the teleconferences please email: EUsettlementscheme@homeoffice.gov.uk.

Brent council – reaching out to EU citizens

The London borough of Brent is home to approximately 55,000 EU citizens (16% of its population). The council aims to provide an integrated package of support to EU citizens who are resident in the area and are planning to apply for the EU Settlement Scheme.

In addition to offering information through its residents' magazine, the council is writing directly to all EU citizens who are currently on its open electoral register to share key information about the scheme. It is also holding outreach and information events in the community. It is launching a campaign with posters and leaflets translated into the major language groups in key localities across the borough and via targeted social media.

Brent council has partnered with the Romanian consulate to offer support to Romanian nationals who were seeking to renew or apply for documents. From April, the council will also be offering an ID verification service to help EU citizens in making their application under the scheme.

Welcome to Oldham

In light of recent increases in the numbers of new arrivals to the borough, including an increasing number of short-term residents from the EU, Oldham council has designed an online portal for newcomers to the city with support from the government's Controlling Migration Fund.

The platform provides information on everything from how to access key services (including school and GP registration), pay council tax and practical information, such as the rubbish collection arrangements, to street drinking and noise nuisance rules. There will be a particular focus on providing information on issues which their community engagement work has shown can unsettle the wider community and produce tensions.

Fenland district council – reaching out to EU citizens

In recent years, the population increases into the Fens and the scale and pace of change have been unprecedented. These changes have been particularly striking in Wisbech – a town which 10 years ago had had little experience of inward migration and where today approximately a third of the population is of Central and Eastern European background. A large proportion of these newcomers come from rural areas, have low levels of English and lack knowledge of the UK. They often struggle to access services and suffer high levels of vulnerability.

To support the most vulnerable newcomers the council, working with partners, has recruited 16 volunteers from the Lithuanian, Latvian, Russian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Polish and Portuguese communities. Support has been provided on a wide range of issues – from hospital appointments, tax credit and GP appointments to providing support on homelessness, HM Revenue & Customs payments and employment rights issues.

In addition, the volunteers have provided 110 English language sessions reaching over 100 new students who were previously not accessing this support. Volunteers offer 3 sessions per week where people can access basic English drop-in classes and a progression class to enable students to move forward, in addition to 42 online accredited training opportunities. Since the scheme started in April 2018, the volunteers have supported 351 clients. This has resulted in 154 statutory service interventions.

Bolsover district council – reaching out to EU citizens

As an element of its Community Resilience Programme, Bolsover district council has launched a scheme aimed at increasing levels of volunteering in the local area. The scheme is open to all local residents but the council has targeted EU citizens in order to ensure that they too participate. The local area has used this as an opportunity to build stronger links with those communities. They have also identified volunteering as an opportunity for EU citizens to practice English.

The council has worked with volunteers to produce a promotional video clip which highlights the work of volunteers across all local communities. Activities have included boxing classes and Polish language lessons aimed at residents of the Pear Tree ward. Local community groups, such as the International Ladies Club, have also been supported to boost the involvement of EU citizens in their activities.

Issues to consider – what local authorities can do to support the EU Settlement Scheme:

Understanding the EU population

- Does the local authority understand where EU populations live, employment status, age, education level and other factors which could help identify vulnerable populations who may need greater support, such as rough sleepers?

Making applications on behalf of EU looked after children

- Does the local authority have resources identified specifically for supporting eligible looked after EU national children and care leavers who need to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme?
- Are there processes in place to ensure accurate recording of data, which is important to EU national looked after children and care-leavers, such as nationality?
- Does the local authority have an effective mechanism to record and retain valuable information about the status granted after an application has been made? It is important for local authorities to keep a record of application details of looked after children and care-leavers who make a successful application, so they can access their digital status in the future and details can be appropriately shared with new social workers or adoptive parents, for example.

Engaging with EU citizens

- Is the local authority providing sign-posting information about the EU Settlement Scheme in the places that EU citizens commonly access, such as libraries or churches?

- Have key local frontline services been briefed about the scheme and know how to readily access information on how the scheme operates, and its implications? Do they know where to sign-post EU citizens who request information?
- Is the local authority engaging with key stakeholders who interface with EU citizens (including employers, private landlords, local estate agents and community groups)? Are they being sign-posted to relevant guidance regarding their role in relation to the EU Settlement Scheme?

Working to tackle hate crime

Overall, communities in the UK remain strong and cohesive. 82% say their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together and this has remained stable over recent years. However, one of the lessons from the 2016 EU referendum is that there should be no room for complacency. Figures from the Home Office's hate crime bulletin

(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/748598/hate-crime-1718-hosb2018.pdf) from October 2018 showed that the number of racially or religiously aggravated offences recorded by the police rose significantly around the time of the EU referendum.

A report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services published in July 2018 shows that incidents of hate crime 'spike' after national events. A similar increase is possible when the United Kingdom formally leaves the European Union. There may also be a risk of more localised trigger events which local authorities and their partners should be mindful of.

Against this backdrop, regardless of the evidence, community concerns around hate crime may be heightened at this time. Fear of hate crime or the perception that there is an increased risk can be damaging too, regardless of whether there is any recorded or actual increase in the number of incidents. These anxieties might be heightened for some communities and it is crucial that partners recognise this and respond appropriately. It is also important to realise that relatively 'minor' crimes can attract significant attention because of the 'signal' they send to affected communities.

Ensuring that hate crime is tackled and community tensions are minimised depends on proactive engagement and effective collaboration across government, both national and local, and with partner organisations and communities themselves.

The government has a comprehensive plan for tackling hate crime

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hate-crime-action-plan-2016>) which was refreshed in October 2018. It sets out work with partners from prevention through to work with local communities, victims and a robust criminal justice response.

What should local authorities be doing?

It is advisable that each local authority appoints a central point of contact for information, advice and support on hate crime. Some of the early activities that this focal point should consider are:

- Increase engagement with hate crime lead officers in local police forces and The Crown Prosecution Service.
These officers have oversight of community tensions, hate crimes and non-crime hate incidents, which often require specialist knowledge and understanding. They work in partnership with external agencies to support the needs of victims, their families and their communities to make them safer. These officers will be a source of expertise and advice for local authorities, particularly if an increase in community tensions occurs. The local police feed into a national police 'Gold Group' which has national oversight of hate crime trends and tensions and will also have oversight of national communications strategies. Engagement with the local police hate crime lead will enable local authorities to feed into this process and receive key updates on tension assessments.

- Early engagement and familiarisation with specialist third party reporting centres and identifying which ones are the most relevant for the local area (see list below). It is important to audit and test what structures exist and more importantly to understand where there are gaps which can be tackled through efforts to build new local partnerships. A range of public, private, charitable and voluntary organisations such as housing associations, places of worship and many others have become third party hate crime reporting centres, providing access to support for different communities. A guide to setting up third-party reporting structures (http://www.report-it.org.uk/files/hate_crime_booklet.pdf) is available on True Vision
- Ensuring that local community safety partnerships (CSPs) actively assess their readiness for any raised tensions including by
 - Ensuring that communication lines and contact points are up to date and posts are filled.
 - Assessing the suitability of community contacts recognising that previously unaffected communities may be the hardest to reach.
 - Ensuring that all relevant agencies and partners have routes to share tension indicators, especially schools and housing groups.
 - Having an oversight of local changes that may cause raised tensions including political and economic factors.
- Regular engagement with local faith and community groups/representatives, especially in areas with large minority groups. This engagement could also act as a source of information on any specific anxieties or concerns which local communities may have regarding the UK's exit from the EU. In addition, these stakeholders could be useful channels for any communications which need to be targeted at specific groups. Experience in 2016 highlighted that affected groups included those that had experienced abuse in the past but also others (such as some white European communities) who had not previously highlighted hate crime to be a major factor in their lives. These may need proactive efforts to reach key community contacts. Where appropriate, Counter Extremism Community Coordinators, Prevent Coordinators and Prevent Education Officers provide other means of engaging.
- Recognising that local authority staff are often an excellent route into communities and internal communications can be an excellent way of getting key messages of reassurance into communities.
- Use of social media for reassurance messaging and targeted communications emphasising personal safety. Signposting the police's online hate crime reporting portal, True Vision (<http://report-it.org.uk/home>) and other specialist agencies (see below) if community tensions increase.
- Take steps to tackle incidents, such as graffiti, as quickly as possible. A quick response can reassure communities that such activity will not be tolerated by the authorities. As part of their business continuity plans, councils should advise private contractors about potential issues and the importance of a rapid response.

Case Study: Merton borough council

Merton is a diverse borough with 200,000 residents speaking over 100 languages. The council is committed to tackling all forms of crime and works with partners to ensure that the maximum sanctions are sought against all crime.

Its Hate Crime Strategy sets out their objectives in tackling perpetrators of hate crime and identifying how they will support victims. One of the key objectives in Merton's Hate Crime Strategy is: "To reassure the public before, during, and after Article 50 is triggered, following the UK's decision to leave the European Union."

To deliver this the council has:

- Released a statement making clear the triggering of Article 50 and eventual leaving of the European Union has no impact on the legal status of hate crime and that the Metropolitan Police and Merton council will not tolerate such incidents.

- Launched an awareness campaign to reassure those who are anxious about the UK's decision to leave the European Union. This included a social media campaign on twitter with the hashtag #MertonStopsHate.
- Started monthly hate crime advice surgeries in partnership with Tell MAMA and Merton Police. These drop-in sessions were advertised as safe spaces to discuss hate crime and report incidents anonymously.
- The council agreed on a set of outcomes which they aim to achieve by the end of their strategy in 2021. These include:
 - Residents feeling safe and secure through the process of leaving the European Union.
 - Potential perpetrators of hate crime made to be aware of the Metropolitan Police's zero-tolerance approach to hate crime, no matter the outcome or implications of leaving the European Union.
 - EU citizens not losing their sense of belonging in Merton's communities and feeling safe and comfortable in the borough.
- The council is tracking this through regular engagement of their Hate Crime Strategy Group with local faith and community groups including the Polish Family Association.

Case Study: Richmond upon Thames borough council

Context: 8% of Richmond upon Thames residents are non-British EU citizens; well above the national average. This equates to approximately 17,000 residents. The council has pledged to mitigate the effects of Brexit on the area. This includes protecting the wellbeing of all residents, including those with EU citizenship who contribute significantly to the local community and economy.

Richmond has high levels of community cohesion, but despite this, the borough saw a temporary increase in hate crime around the time of the EU referendum in June 2016. Although hate crime levels have since returned to lower levels, the council recognises the potential for a similar spike in 2019 around the time of EU exit.

Feedback from some EU residents indicated that they were uncertain about the impact of Brexit on them and their families and were struggling to navigate the available information.

In response:

- The council commissioned Citizens Advice Richmond to provide a dedicated advice and support service to EU citizens who are concerned or uncertain about their status.
- Citizens Advice have delivered 3 free public information events in the last year which have been well attended, reaching hundreds of local residents. They have also carried out community outreach and provided one-on-one advice to a steady stream of casework clients. See a video of one of the information events:
- The council's Community Safety service works proactively with the Police and the local Hate Crime Forum to remain alert to potential incidents as well as providing advice and support. Any potential increases in community tensions are also monitored to promote reassurance and cohesion.
- The council worked with the local Hate Crime Forum to hold a community cohesion focused event in February 2019, targeted at young people and aimed at improving their understanding and awareness of hate crime.

The council has monitored its progress through the numbers of residents reached by the advice service, resident feedback, and by tracking hate crime statistics. As well as the Hate Crime Forum, the council also have a range of other mechanisms for engaging with local communities to track progress. Officers

support and attend quarterly meetings of the local Interfaith Forum and an independent Equality Stakeholder Scrutiny Group. EU exit has been discussed at meetings of both groups. The council has also been holding a series of 'Community Conversation' events which allow local residents to feedback on a wide range of issues, including EU exit.

Issues to consider – working to tackle hate crime

Reporting

- Are all relevant staff aware of third-party reporting portals/centres for hate crime (e.g. True Vision)?
- Do all relevant staff have direct contact details for the local hate crime lead police officers? Do they have the right levels of engagement with them?

Communicating

- Is clear and accessible information on hate crime support organisations (e.g. Stop Hate UK) available to all staff?
- Do all relevant staff have access to communication channels (e.g. social media) in case of an emergency?
- Is there a handling plan in place in the event of a spike in hate incidents? Are strategies in place to address high visibility incidents such as graffiti? Have private contractors been briefed about risks and responses to incidents such as graffiti?

Monitoring

- Does the council have timely access to the latest hate crime data?
- If the council saw an increase during the referendum, has it reviewed its response? Has it collated any lessons learnt and implemented new processes accordingly? Is this new approach informed by the latest data? Have the council's contacts in community groups, the local media and other networks been asked to share intelligence of hate incidents with the council? Have these sharing structures been audited recently?

Key resources

Reporting centre:

1. True Vision (<http://report-it.org.uk>): The police's online hate crime reporting portal where there are downloadable resources such as posters and a team who can advise on new indicatives.
2. Stop Hate UK (<https://stophateuk.org/>): Charity that provides independent and confidential support to people affected by hate crime. (This is a commissionable service that only covers areas that participate. A list of the areas (<https://www.stophateuk.org/stop-hate-areas/>) can be found on the website). 24 Hour Helpline: 0800 138 1625 Fax: 0113 341 0396 Text: 07717989025 Email: talk@stophateuk.org
3. Victim Support (<https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/>): A national charity offering free and confidential help to victims of crime, witnesses, their families, friends and anyone else affected. They are not a government agency or part of the police and you don't have to report a crime to the police to get their help. You can call any time after the crime has happened, whether yesterday, last week or several years ago. Victim Support Helpline: 0808 16 89 111 Email: support@victimsupport.org.uk
4. Community Security Trust (<http://cst.org.uk/report-incident>): An organisation dedicated to tackling anti-Semitism and providing victim support.
5. TELL MAMA (<https://tellmamauk.org/submit-a-report-to-us>): An organisation dedicated to tackling anti-Muslim hatred and providing victim support.

6. GateHerts (<https://www.gateherts.org.uk/hate-crime>) An organisation dedicated to preventing hate crime and discrimination against Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities in the UK.
7. Friends, Families and Travellers (<https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/>): Hate incident reporting and support service run by and for Gypsy, Roma and traveller communities in the UK.
8. Galop (<https://www.galop.org.uk/hatecrime>): An organisation dedicated to tackling homophobic, biphobic and transphobic abuse: National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0800 999 5428 Email: help@galop.org.uk

Support Organisations

1. Changing Faces (<https://www.changingfaces.org.uk/campaign/whatishatecrime>): The UK's leading charity for people in the UK with a visible difference: a mark, scar or condition that makes them look different.
2. Mencap (<https://mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/bullying/mate-and-hate-crime>)
3. DeafPlus (<https://www.deafplus.org/deafplus-hate-crime-helpline>): A charity for deaf and deafened people, providing advocacy, support and advice

Guides

Crown Prosecution Service guides (<https://www.cps.gov.uk/hate-crime>) on hate crime for individuals and people/organisations supporting individuals

Responding to incidents in the community

Communication with local communities is a key element to responding to and minimising the affect of incidents which may impact the locality. The likelihood of such events may be low, and they may be unrelated to EU Exit, but as we prepare to leave the European Union it is entirely responsible and appropriate that local leaders continue to work closely to ensure full preparedness.

Although responses are likely to involve a wide range of actors – including central government, the police and groups in the community – local leaders, including local authorities, are the best placed to coordinate local responses. Local leaders play a key role in sharing timely and accurate information, often drawing from a wide range of sources across different agencies, both within and outside government.

In some cases, response and communications may be coordinated through the Local Resilience Forum, particularly if there are concurrent events in the community. Local authorities are also members of multi-agency Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) and have duties to cooperate with partners in that forum. LRFs are doing some work to identify their own local planning assumptions for EU Exit and determine any appropriate action they might need to take. Most LRF have completed scenario workshops focused on EU Exit to identify risks and implement appropriate actions arising. They are also reviewing existing processes for collating and synthesising multi-agency information reports and for co-ordinating communications.

Past experience shows that preparedness is critical because community reactions and the appearance and circulation of information across media can move very quickly. Incidents can quickly gain traction in the media and on social media platforms. Without a rapid and effective response in place, communities are more vulnerable to misinformation and narratives which can create uncertainty, and damage trust in local leaders and their partner organisations. A key aspect of preparing to respond to incidents is to have clear, reactive communications plans in place, drawing upon your existing links with your communities.

The check list below sets out some questions which local authorities and their partners may wish to ask themselves in seeking to strengthen existing communications plans to ensure they can respond rapidly and effectively.

The nature of communications material will necessarily be dependent on the scenario but positive messaging affirming that local leaders and communities stand together in championing shared values can be effective in emphasising the strengths and assets of the local community. Through positive messages local leaders can call upon, galvanise and amplify local unity, and challenge behaviours and actions which stand in the way of community integration. It is critical however that local leaders remain sensitive to local concerns when constructing messages and identify where some content or language may not resonate well across their community.

Issues to consider – preparing for an incident in the community

Coordination

- Are you clear about your authorities' line of communication with central government?
- Is there a platform to coordinate rapidly with the Local Resilience Forum, the police and key community leaders?

Media strategy

- Is there a pre-prepared media plan which can be easily adapted and deployed in the case of a critical incident?
- Is your database of local media contacts and local social media influencers up-to-date?
- Have you pre-agreed statements which can be rapidly adapted and shared via local press, social media and other channels?
- Have you agreed a command structure to ensure that statements can be tested and cleared as quickly as possible?
- Do you have contacts from a range of groups who are representative of the community (including young people, faith / minority communities)? Are there representatives who will be prepared to share information and front joint communications efforts?
- Do you have pre-prepared and up-to-date case studies which could be shared with journalists which showcase shared values and the strengths of the local community (such as schools, community centres or employers)? Have you verified that these case studies can be featured in broadcasts or other media? If so, are you satisfied that their staff have sufficient media experience? Could the council provide support in this case?
- Do you have a database of local faith and community leaders who are likely to be approached by journalists? Have you asked them to inform you before they carry out interviews or provide comments?

Rebuttal

- Are there processes in place to respond to inaccurate or misrepresentative material in the press or social media? Do you have access to trusted external stakeholders who can help stress test these messages?
- Do you have a list of key community influencers who can help disseminate rebuttals swiftly?

For general advice on local authority preparedness for contingency scenarios see the following links:

- Local resilience forums: contact details (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-resilience-forums-contact-details>)
- Guide to local authority mutual aid (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-authority-mutual-aid-a-short-guide>)
- Business Continuity advice (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61029/Chapter-6-Business-Continuity-Management_amends_04042012.pdf)

Explore the topic

- [Brexit \(https://www.gov.uk/government/brexit\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/brexit)