

LGA Lobbying Headlines

Critical issues

Financial and service pressures - It was hugely disappointing that the Autumn Statement and 2024/25 Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement did not provide the funding needed to protect services.

Our recently updated funding gap analysis shows the cost to councils of delivering their services at current levels will exceed their core funding by £2.4 billion in 2023/24 and £1.6 billion in 2024/25. The analysis excludes the resources needed to address existing underfunding in areas such as the adult social care provider market, children's social care, SEND and homelessness, nor does it include funding to improve or expand council services. In the run up to the final Local Government Finance Settlement, we continue to push the Government for sufficient, sustainable, multi-year settlements for local government and to provide clarity on the future of the New Homes Bonus and local government finance reforms.

Workforce capacity – According to our latest Workforce Survey, more than 9 in 10 councils are experiencing difficulties with senior leadership and front-line service delivery roles. We are calling for medium-term financial settlements and sufficient funding to enable effective workforce planning, recruitment and retention in addition to compliance with government's future National Living Wage policy (which so far is unknown). We launched a new local government recruitment campaign which is being piloted by local authorities in the North East of England. The campaign is part of the LGA's Sector Support Offer and funded by UK Government. We continue to work with councils to ensure they maximise the benefits of the Apprenticeship Levy while seeking reforms from government to allow additional flexibility in the levy to enable councils to use it more effectively.

Asylum and resettlement – Concerns about how current programmes are being managed remain acute. We are raising councils' concerns around housing and homelessness, cohesion and safeguarding as a result of recent policy and process changes by the Home Office, including hotel maximisation, large site use, and much shorter notice of Home Office support ending as part of the streamlined asylum process. These are exacerbated by pressures resulting from Afghan hotel closure, Ukrainian homelessness presentations and high numbers of arrivals, including of lone children. We continue to stress that the Government should take account of the cumulative impact of all these pressures in existing regional plans for asylum dispersal and are arguing for more effective engagement at political level, and clarity about how the Illegal Migration Act is to be implemented.

Private rented sector reform – The Renters (Reform) Bill - which aims to improve the system for private renters and landlords in England - has completed its Committee Stage and a date for Report Stage is awaited. While there is much in the Bill for the LGA to support, including abolishing unfair Section 21 "no fault" evictions; ending the system of assured shorthold tenancies; creating a new register of PRS landlords and establishing an Ombudsman for the PRS to help tenants and landlords to resolve disputes, further measures are required to fully realise our shared ambition for a fairer, more secure, and higher quality private rented sector. The Bill places significant new regulatory and

enforcement responsibilities on councils and for the reforms to be effective, it will be vital that councils are properly resourced.

Housebuilding – With housing and homelessness pressures ongoing, we continue to make the case for councils to be able to resume their historic role as major builders of affordable homes through implementation of [a six-point plan](#) for social housing. Our plan includes rolling out five-year local housing deals to all areas of the country that want them by 2025 – combining funding from multiple national housing programmes into a single pot; government support to set up a new national council housebuilding delivery taskforce; continued access to preferential borrowing rates through the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB); further reform to Right to Buy; reviewing and increasing where needed the grant levels per home through the Affordable Homes Programme, and a minimum 10-year rent deal for councils landlords, to enable councils to invest.

Homelessness – We have commissioned research that will support our lobbying to uprate the Local Housing Allowance rate that determines the subsidy for claims in respect of people living in temporary accommodation - this currently remains capped at 90 per cent of the January 2011 rates. This work will also support our lobbying for LHA rates to continue at the 30th percentile of market rents from 2025-26. We continue to seek an explicit, national-level focus on homelessness prevention work (with an associated long-term, multi-year funding regime) that addresses the drivers and levers of homelessness, enables councils to avoid residents reaching crisis, and reduces demand for temporary accommodation and emergency homelessness responses.

Oflog – We are continuing to offer to collaborate with Oflog and their work capturing and sharing good practice, building on the current work and expertise of the sector.

Oflog have recently added new metrics to their dashboard, all of which are already on our award-winning benchmarking platform, LG Inform. We are aware that Oflog are looking to pilot their approach to having “early warning conversations” and peer reviews with councils, and we have shared with them some of our own experiences of running corporate peer challenges and webinars. We will work with Oflog to try and ensure that their work is complementary to rather than duplicating the LGA’s programmes in this area, including the work of our regional teams and member peers and our corporate peer challenge programme. We are hoping that we can agree a joint narrative which describes the respective roles of both our organisations. We have now submitted [evidence setting out our concerns](#) and wider views to the LUHC select committee inquiry into Oflog.

Children’s social care – Challenges around placements for children in care, particularly those with the most complex needs, remain critical, with the continued use of unregulated placements for some children due to a lack of regulated provision. Costs are escalating rapidly amid difficulties in finding placements able or willing to provide appropriate support. The Government plans to establish two “Regional Care Cooperative” pathfinders involving around 20 councils to trial new approaches to commissioning provision, along with investment for some councils in fostering recruitment and retention work. However, the sector has significant concerns that these will not deliver change at the scale and pace required.

Adult social care – We used our Autumn Statement submission (and accompanying public-facing media and campaigning work) to highlight the continuing pressures on adult social care, despite the investment announced at Autumn Statement 2022. In particular we highlighted directors' concerns about meeting statutory duties on market sustainability and prevention, the scale of the recruitment and retention challenge facing the care workforce, and persistent levels of unmet and under-met need. Our joint press release with ADASS highlighted the pressures facing the sector, including planned in-year overspends.

In our response to the Autumn Statement, we expressed our disappointment at the lack of new investment for adult social care and were clear that the government should not think that the adult social care system is fixed. While we also welcomed the increase in the National Living Wage, we pointed out that care providers will expect to see their increased wage costs reflected in the fees councils pay.

On assurance, the five pilot councils have now completed their CQC assessment and received their assessment reports and indicative ratings. 4 of the 5 received an indicative rating of 'Good', and the other received an indicative rating of 'Requires Improvement'. Full rollout of assurance has started but only three councils at a time are being notified when they will go through assurance, with the first three now notified - we continue to push CQC and DHSC for clarity on when all of the first tranche of 20 councils will be notified.

SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) – We are engaging with the Department for Education at both Ministerial and official levels on the testing of proposals in the SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan in the nine Change programme partnership areas. We welcome the proposed national standards, which will clarify the support available, who will be responsible for delivering it, and the focus on early identification of needs and support. The focus on improving levels of mainstream inclusion is also welcome and will be crucial to both improving outcomes for children with SEND and reducing pressures on high needs budgets. However, we remain concerned that the proposals do not fully address the fundamental demand and cost pressures that prevent councils from effectively meeting the needs of all children and young people with special needs. We are calling for councils to be given more powers to lead local SEND systems and to intervene when children are not adequately supported. A programme of sector led support to mirror what is available for children's social care would be helpful.

As a result of our engagement, the department has agreed to set up an elected member sounding board to allow for discussions and feedback on implementing the plan, the first meeting of which took place on the 2 November. Working with CCN, we have also commissioned independent research to ascertain whether the SEND and AP improvement plan proposals will improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND while allowing councils to manage and eliminate their high needs deficits.

Other issues of importance for the sector

Devolution, Economic Growth and Levelling Up – The People and Places and City Regions Boards have appointed Henham Strategy to work with councils on the integration of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) ahead of the end of government funding in April.

Learning from the project workshops will be shared with the sector as soon as possible, and the Boards will continue to stress to Government that councils must be fully funded for any new functions.

Planning – Legislative amendments to increase planning application fees took effect on 6 December 2023. Application fees have increased by 25% across the board, rising to 35% for major schemes.

The Government will be announcing a consultation on a new Permitted Development Right (PDR) for subdividing houses into two flats without changing the façade. It is disappointing that the Government continues to extend national permitted development rights further. We continue to call for PDRs to be urgently revoked as they undermine the plan-led system and local democracy.

Cost of living pressures in communities – Evidence shows that many households continue to face considerable challenges meeting their essential living costs. Councils report that demand for local welfare services remains at record levels. Despite this, the current Household Support Fund (HSF) is due to end on the 31 March. To prevent a cliff-edge in support and increased pressure on other local services, we are calling for the HSF to be extended for a minimum of year.

We welcomed the uprating of Local Housing Allowance in the Autumn Statement. However, to support vulnerable households with the ongoing cost of living challenges, it is our longstanding position that government should provide a fair, accessible and sufficient safety net, that covers the cost of essentials; provides financial stability and enables people to live well, in addition to tackling the wider drivers of socioeconomic disadvantage.

Alongside this, we continue to explore a clear long-term role for councils in supporting low-income households as part of their wider work to improve life chances, tackle inequalities and improve economic prosperity, and call for local welfare funding put on a sustainable long-term footing.

Early education and childcare – Councils are delivering on the implementation of extended access to free early education and childcare. However, the early years sector is facing financial and sustainability challenges, and these changes will cause further pressure. These changes are also building on a complex and difficult to navigate system and will place significant additional pressure onto council teams. We are stressing the need for additional funding for local government to support the market and parents and carers, workforce support and capital funding, as well as highlighting the challenges facing providers financially.

Climate change – The LGA continue to work with DESNZ on the Local Net Zero Forum, which is working jointly on a business case for devolving council retrofit funding, initially through MCA trailblazer agreements. LGA Chair and LINZ Lead Members met with Ministers as part of the second Ministerial Local Net Zero meeting, discussing devolution and funding simplification. The LGA is working on a range of policy reforms, including building standards, retrofit skills, transport, renewable energy, nature, electricity grid.

Public health – We continue to make the case for multi-year settlements and for more long-term certainty around public health funding. We are pushing for an increased focus on

prevention, achieved through an uplift to the public health grant. This will support the Government's wider aims by improving health outcomes, reducing health spending, and putting social care and the NHS on a better footing for the long term.

Smokefree Generation and Teen Vaping – As legislation progresses through Parliament, we continue to support the Government's ambition of creating a smokefree generation. We want tighter controls on the sale and marketing of vapes to children and a complete ban on the sale of disposable vapes. The LGA is concerned about the impact vaping is having on children and young people and the environment impact of discarded vapes.

Education – Since the abandonment of the Schools Bill, we are calling for the Department for Education to bring forward alternative legislative arrangements to introduce a register of children being electively home educated, accompanied by sufficient powers for councils to check that home educated children are receiving a suitable provision, where concerns have been raised that this is not the case. The Schools White Paper proposed that greater inclusion could be achieved by statutory regulation of the academy sector by the DfE. This proposal was also included in the Schools Bill. In the Bill's absence, we are calling for DfE to set out how similar outcomes can be achieved without the need for underpinning statutory powers.

Environment – The LGA continue to press the case for crucial further details in the operation of Biodiversity Net Gain, government is due to publish much of this soon as part of a wider nature strategy. We continue to work with officials on these issues. Defra has now published details of the responsible authorities for Local Nature Recovery Strategies and confirmed funding allocations to develop these. However, vital information still needs to be added around the role of local planning authorities, including guidance on how LNRSs will regard local plans.

Waste – The LGA continues to engage Government and councils on the detail of the new Extended Producer Responsibility scheme, which transfers the costs (estimated £900m a year for England) for dealing with packaging waste from the state to producers. We are also engaging Government on the detail of the 'simpler recycling' reforms, which while including some significant lobbying wins, present some new concerns. Government has also now published proposals for waste electricals which we are engaging with. We also continue to press the Government on the solution for treating products containing Persistent Organic Pollutants, the Emissions Trading Scheme application to Energy from Waste (we are expecting a consultation soon), waste prevention strategy, fly-tipping, and single-use vapes.

Adults with care and support needs – We remain concerned about the rollout of the 'Right Care, Right Person' (RCRP) National Partnership Agreement on Mental Health and Policing. Implementation should be planned in partnership with councils and other stakeholders and we need a clearer understanding of the impact on social services. The Chairman hosted a roundtable on 15 January which highlighted a range of issues the health service and voluntary sector are experiencing with the roll out by the police of RCRP.

We are asking for an increase in suicide prevention funding alongside the launch of the new Suicide Prevention Strategy.

We are calling for Government to [invest in therapeutic-led reablement](#). We are also calling for a focus on prevention and recovery services to reduce pressures in hospitals ahead of

winter, including steps to support the voluntary sector to provide fast, low-level support. We need more funding for home adaptations so that councils can upgrade existing stock and are pressing for simplification of the Disabled Facilities Grant process.

Supported housing – We need long term, sustainable funding for councils to commission supported housing as well as well working with DLUHC to ensure the upcoming supported housing act is implemented in a way that takes into account council pressures and improves outcomes for residents.

Transport – The Government published its Network North plan in October 2023, following the announcement to cancel Phase 2 of HS2 rail. This includes the creation of Local Integrated Transport Settlement (LITS), a new £4.7 billion fund transport fund, which will have similar longer-term funding security and flexibility as City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements (CRSTS) areas and is for those transport authorities in the North and Midlands that are not in existing CRSTS areas. Whilst this is welcome news, the LGA continues to call for longer-term, multi-year transport funding certainty for all areas.

Digital – We have published the results of a survey of councils about the 2G/3G mobile network switch off. We have used the results of the survey to highlight concerns with the impact on technology and services, and how the switch off will work in more rural areas. We also continue to raise concerns with DSIT around the transfer of all analogue lines (Public Switch Telephone Network or PSTN) to digital internet-based infrastructure by 2025.

Civility in public life – In light of international events and rising community tensions that may impact elected members, we wrote to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Michael Gove MP, in October to ask him to urgently amend the existing legislation so that councillors may choose not to have their full home address on the public register. In response, the Local Government Minister, Simon Hoare MP, highlighted the [2019 letter](#) from the then LG Minister, Rishi Sunak MP, that suggested that monitoring officers should be sympathetic to requests for home addresses to be redacted from the public register of interests. We will continue to lobby for legislative change. The Home Office is also conducting a Protective Security Review and in November, the LGA facilitated a Roundtable with Home Office officials and councillors who have experienced significant abuse, threats and in some cases physical assaults. We are raising significant concerns about councillor safety and funding for physical security measures through this review.

Elections delivery – The Electoral Commission published its full review of the May 2023 elections, including the implementation of Voter ID in September 2023. It finds that some groups struggled to meet the ID requirement, and recommends government improve accessibility and support people who do not have accepted ID. The Commission is working with the electoral sector, including the LGA, to consider bolstering the capacity of electoral services and polling activities. A response to the Commission's report is expected on 30 November. The LGA continues to engage with the Government on implementing provisions in the Elections Act 2022 in the run-up to the 2024 electoral period.