

Note of last Councillors' Forum meeting

Title: Councillors' Forum
Date: Thursday 11 March 2021
Venue: Online via Zoom

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as [Appendix A](#) to this note

Item	Decisions and actions	Action
1	Chairman's Welcome	
	Cllr James Jamieson (The Chairman) welcomed members to the meeting and gave a brief reminder of etiquette and best practice in remote meetings.	
2	Digest of the last meeting held on 21st January 2021	
	The Chairman asked members to agree the digest of the previous meeting as an accurate record.	
	Decision The members of the Councillor's Forum agreed the digest of the meeting on Thursday 22nd October 2020 as an accurate record.	
3	Panel Discussion - Impact of COVID-19	
	The Chairman introduced the discussion noting that the COVID-19 pandemic had resulted in issues cutting across the remits of multiple LGA policy boards and creating complex challenges for local authorities.	
	The Chair's of several boards were invited to discuss these issues, starting with Cllr Judith Blake (Chair, LGA Children & Young People Board). Judith noted the following points;	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The re-opening of schools on w/c 8/3/21 presented a major challenge to local authorities particularly regarding grade attainment, socialisation, mental health and social inequalities. Education recovery was a growing priority, with the need to ensure sport, welfare and mental health were considered equally alongside grade attainment.- Children from low income households had been more heavily impacted by the pandemic, with additional educational and financial support needed. The recovery process would need to	

consider housing, access to green spaces and ability to play/socialise.

- Local authorities had illustrated the importance of the role in the education system and supporting schools. Judith encouraged the sector to focus on delivering for children.

The Chairman next invited Cllr Ian Hudspeth (Chairman, LGA Community Wellbeing Board) to speak. Ian noted the following points;

- The Pandemic created a new relationship with the Government, with new ways of working and reporting required to deliver results. Local Government played a key role in the delivery of contain frameworks and local testing. Adequate funding to enable local authorities to fulfil their role was emphasised.
- Testing was outlined as an area of significant cross cutting work. Surge testing illustrated the importance of local knowledge in delivering hyper-localised efforts. Asymptomatic workplace testing was also being expanded in collaboration with businesses.
- Delivery of the vaccination programme required cross sector cooperation.
- Supporting and protecting vulnerable people had seen collaboration across departments and branches of local government, with partners, voluntary bodies and communities. Moving forward the reintegration of individuals who had been shielding long term would require a similar effort.

The Chairman invited Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE (Chair, Culture, Tourism & Sport Board) to discuss relevant issues. Gerald noted the following points;

- Sport was noted a key issue moving out of lockdown, especially with the growing obesity and mental health crises. The need to maintain and develop modern sporting facilities for continue community access, especially in low income areas.
- Welcomed the £100m National Leisure Recovery Fund but highlighted concerns that leisure provision was under threat. A real risk existed that leisure providers could collapse or pull-out of areas due to additional costs, having knock on effects community services.
- Welcomed the dedicated funding for arts and culture, through the Culture Recovery Fund.
- Libraries in many cases continued to remain open and provide services, vital to support an extended re-opening especially for children and the elderly.
- Emphasised that nationwide local government is a major investor in sport, the arts and tourism, often more so than Sport England, Visit England and the Arts Council. Vital that Government should recognise this and include local government in recovery planning.

Cllr Richard Watts (Chair, Resources Board) was invited to speak.
Richard noted the following points;

- Funding has been the core issue, with the pandemic costing local government circa £10.2Bn in 2020/21. Consisting of £7.3Bn in extra spending and £3Bn lost in non-tax income. Figures for losses on council tax and sales, fees & charges won't be assessable until 2021/22.
- The Government put forward substantial packages unringfenced and specific grant-based funding, as well a promise to compensate authorities for 75% of council tax and business rates income. However, support was not available for commercial losses. The LGA was pushing for full compensation of council's costs, to make up the estimated £2.6Bn shortfall.
- Looking ahead, welcomed £1.5Bn grant funding and council tax support for 2021/22. Foresees a further £2.5Bn shortfall for the next financial year.
- A sustainable settlement for adult social care was seen to be vital given that it can account for 60-70% of upper tier authorities' spending.
- Final figures for Public Health funding were needed to enable local teams to support vaccination efforts, particularly for harder to reach or hesitant communities.
- For low income households, the Universal Credit uplift and Self-Isolation payments were welcomed, but questions remained over scale of funding and long-term application.
- Programmes to reintegrate experienced Environmental Health, Planning and ICT staff to local authorities' workforces were launched.
- EU successor funding work has seen £51Mn of ERDF reserves dedicated to re-opening high streets and the European Social Fund money being used to close the digital divide.

Finally the Chairman called Cllr Nesil Caliskan (Chair, Safer & Stronger Communities Board) to speak. Nesil noted the following points;

- Compliance and enforcement were highlighted. Public and environmental health teams played key roles in closing/opening business, health & safety in the workplace and supporting social distancing efforts. Flexible funding had been secured to support this work. These teams were also heavily involved in local Test & Trace programmes.
- Death management was also noted as significant area of activity. Regional coordination was used to manage pressures and mitigate capacity issues. Greater resilience was built ahead of the 2nd wave of infections. The LGA continued to lobby on key issues to the

sector.

- Finally, authorities had worked closely with the Police on crime and anti-social behaviour. The increased risk of domestic violence and abuse had necessitated effective police partnerships.

In the subsequent discussion the following points were raised by members:

- A question arose on how to secure greater NHS engagement on reaching the outstanding 15% of the most vulnerable groups who had not yet been vaccinated. Ian responded noting that the NHS had been very guarded about data sharing throughout the pandemic but that work is ongoing. The Chairman added that the Local Outbreak Planning Advisory Board has been stressing the need for data sharing.
- An observation was made on an apparent breakdown of social distancing in schools and by parents collecting children. Judith responded explaining that evidence of such was being seen across the country, regular testing in secondary schools was creating a sense of complacency. Noted that locally, Leeds City Council was preparing information packs to highlight the continued importance of social distancing measures.

4 Chairman's Update

The Chairman presented the update, noting it summarised his activity since the previous meeting. Noted that recent work had been focused on COVID response, Health & Care Bill, the 2021 Local Elections and the continued use of remote meetings.

5 LGA Board Chair Reports

The Chairman invited the following Board Chair's to present their written reports;

a. *Children & Young People Board – Cllr Judith Blake CBE*

Judith drew attention to Independent Review of Children's Social Care and encouraged all authorities with the consultation. Judith also announced that she would be stepping down as Chair of the Children & Young People Board, thanking LGA officers and colleagues for their work and cooperation.

b. *Community Wellbeing Board - Cllr Ian Hudspeth*

Ian added that a range of specific concerns were being raised around Integrated Care Systems and coterminous boundaries.

c. *Environment, Economy, Housing & Transport Board – Cllr David*

Renard

In his update Cllr David Renard (Chairman, Environment, Economy, Housing & Transport Board) noted the following;

- A Government consultation on future home standards was underway. The LGA was lobbying on specific funding for modernising and refitting homes to sustainable standards. Work continued on building standards and cladding.
- On planning reform a White Paper was expected in Autumn 2021.
- LGA webinars were planned on Social Housing White Paper and on invigorating high streets.
- Expressed concerns that if specific funding is discontinued councils won't be able prevent increasing numbers presenting as homeless from rough sleeping.
- Greater emphasis will be placed on climate change work in the build up to COP26.
- David noted that he wrote to the DfT regarding the reduced 2021/22 highways maintenance settlement.

d. People & Places Board – Cllr Kevin Bentley

In his update Cllr Kevin Bentley (Chairman, People & Places Board) noted the following:

- Lobbying continued on improved digital services and skills training in often deprived rural and coastal areas.
- The Government announced the locations of the ten Freeports to be established.
- Evidence was published to the Environment Audit Select Committee on green jobs.
- The pilot scheme for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund was announced in the Spring Budget. Lobbying from across the LGA for local government to administer the fund was successful.

6 Presentation from The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP

The Chairman welcomed the Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP (Secretary of State for Health & Social Care) to give a speech. The Minister noted the following points in his speech:

- Thanked the LGA for its input on the Health & Care Bill White Paper. A collaborative effort developed over two years; the Paper was focused on ensuring health services are effectively structured

including those provided by local authorities.

- In the current system there is a disconnect arising from accountability for services at local and national levels. The White Paper aims to maintain accountability while reducing bureaucracy, improving cooperation and increasing service levels.
- The Minister explained that while concerns around the timing of the Bill were noted, it is critical to do preparatory and Parliamentary work to allow implementation in 2022/23.
- Enacting the correct structures for Integrated Care Systems (ICS) in a population health management model was a key element to ensure resources were leading to community health outcomes. Such necessitated collaboration on budget aligning and joint planning.
- The Bill made provisions for greater transparency on social care to inform policy making and response to align the split accountabilities at local and national levels. A range of Public Health reforms including moving fluoridation to a national accountability and specific actions on tackling obesity were also included.
- Intended that the Bill would interlink with and support other reforms to public health, social care and mental health provisions to ultimately deliver improved public services.

In the subsequent discussion the following points were raised by members:

- A question arose on prospects for a long-term adult social care funding settlement. The Minister explained that the issue of the social care settlement is complex and cannot solely be funding focused.
- A concern was noted that the Bill could legislate against local care funds. The Minister explained that there was to integrate local programmes not undermine them.
- Specific concerns were noted with some proposed ICS boundaries, particularly on how ensuring they meet local circumstances, need and authority boundaries. Matt explained boundaries need to consider and work with local authority boundaries in order to deliver the best standard of care possible. He added that work continues on a number of proposed boundaries in order to find the most suitable model.
- A concern was expressed with the proposals from an accountability perspective as it was felt that local government would not be an equal partner under the reorganisation. The Minister responded that the intention was to create a structure joined up different strands of work as effectively as possible.
- A question arose on the role of local Public Health teams under proposals, given the key role they had played in the pandemic

response. Matt stressed that the role of public health would be strengthened and the delivery partnerships built on a local and national levels would be further enhanced.

- In response to a query on how the Levelling-Up agenda had been considered in the White Paper, Matt explained that the Fund was in the remit of MHCLG but in a health perspective the aim was to reduce health inequalities and enabling people to lead healthier lives.
- An explanation was requested of the role Health & Wellbeing Boards would have in the new structure. The Minister responded that the Boards would play a strategic planning role, with ICS responsible for delivery.

The Chairman thanked the Minister for attending the meeting, and for the good progress of the vaccination programme.

7 Close of Meeting

The Chairman closed the meeting and thanked members for attending. He also wished all members standing for election luck and thanked any members stepping down for their work.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr James Jamieson	Central Bedfordshire Council
Vice-Chairman	Cllr Izzi Seccombe OBE	Warwickshire County Council
	Cllr Howard Sykes MBE	Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council
	Cllr Marianne Overton MBE	Lincolnshire County Council
Deputy-chairman		
Members	Cllr Robert Alden	Birmingham City Council
	Cllr John Fuller OBE	South Norfolk District Council
	Cllr Teresa O'Neill OBE	Bexley Council
	Cllr Philip Atkins OBE	Staffordshire County Council
	Cllr Kevin Bentley	Essex County Council
	Cllr Paul Bettison OBE	Bracknell Forest Borough Council
	Cllr Morris Bright MBE	Hertsmere Borough Council
	Cllr Nick Chard	Kent County Council
	Cllr Andrew Day	Warwick District Council
	Cllr Peter Fleming OBE	Sevenoaks District Council
	Cllr Peter Golds CBE	Tower Hamlets Council
	Cllr Paul Middlebrough	Worcestershire County Council
	Cllr Colin Noble	Suffolk County Council
	Cllr Ian Hudspeth	Oxfordshire County Council
	Cllr William Nunn	Breckland Council
	Cllr Roger Phillips	Herefordshire Council
	Cllr David Renard	Swindon Borough Council
	Cllr Linda Robinson	Wychavon District Council
	Cllr Michael Wilcox	Lichfield District Council

Cllr Katrina Wood	Buckinghamshire Council
Cllr Nick Forbes CBE	Newcastle upon Tyne City Council
Cllr Nesil Caliskan	Enfield Council
Cllr Judi Billing MBE	Hertfordshire County Council
Cllr Judith Blake CBE	Leeds City Council
Cllr Anntoinette Bramble	Hackney London Borough Council
Cllr Amy Cross	Blackpool Council
Cllr James Dawson	Erewash Borough Council
Cllr Tudor Evans OBE	Plymouth City Council
Cllr Kate Haigh	Gloucester City Council
Cllr Paulette Hamilton	Birmingham City Council
Cllr Richard Henry	Stevenage Borough Council
Cllr Susan Hinchcliffe	Bradford Metropolitan District Council
Cllr Simon Henig CBE	Durham County Council
Cllr Helen Holland	Bristol City Council
Cllr Anthony Hunt	Torfaen County Borough Council
Cllr Brigid Jones	Birmingham City Council
Cllr John Merry CBE	Salford City Council
Cllr Oliver Ryan	Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council
Cllr Shama Tatler	Brent Council
Cllr Sharon Taylor OBE	Stevenage Borough Council
Cllr Leigh Redman	Somerset County Council
Cllr Alan Rhodes	Nottinghamshire County Council
Cllr Richard Watts	Islington Council
Cllr Andrew Western	Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council
Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE	Portsmouth City Council
Cllr Colin Mann	Caerphilly County Borough Council
Cllr Paul Woodhead	Cannock Chase District Council