

SETTING THE FRAMEWORK FOR THE LGA'S WORK ON RECOVERY

BACKGROUND

Through our work with councils during the pandemic, leading LGA members, council groupings and councils have given clear steers on the issues that they think the LGA should focus on in the coming weeks and months.

Based on those discussions, this report sets out a proposal for the immediate priorities for the LGA as lockdown is revised and we start the journey to restoring active community and business life.

It is not a finalised strategy or business plan. We recognise that, as lockdown is revised, we are starting another journey which is uncharted and will bring unexpected challenges.

The paper is offered to members for them to give a steer on where LGA focuses its work in the next few weeks and months.

CONTENT AND TIMELINE

This paper offers

- Some general themes to guide our work
- Six tangible work areas
- How we ensure member councils lead this work

Our immediate work has been focused on responding to the pandemic and its effect during the short-term lockdown. This paper looks at the next two phases (whilst recognising that these may not be linear):

- Living with the virus in the population as lockdown is eased and where social distancing is maintained.
- Establishing a new normal for community and businesses.

THEMES TO GUIDE OUR WORK

A later section of the report offers six tangible work areas to support councils and communities during the next weeks and months. However, in discussions with members, it was clear that there was a need for some over-arching themes to future work which would act as a foundation for our lobbying and communications.

The following have been suggested:

Hope: Communities have deep concerns and are frightened about the future. We need to develop work which offers hope. Place leadership can play a central part in giving such hope to communities, offering them the levers to shape their future.

Strong Communities: The remarkable work of our communities and businesses in the most tragic circumstances needs to be recognised. They have stepped up with extraordinary resilience to keep essential services running. Without place leadership, this will be lost. We must highlight the “community” element of recovery.

Councils have stepped up. Local government itself has become the fourth emergency service, convening place, working at speed to set up new services. We have new evidence to showcase our leadership of place.

Finance: Without stable finances for local government, national recovery is not possible.

Reconfiguring public services and place leadership: The unprecedented challenges ahead demand a speedy reconfiguring of public services which recognises place differences. We must assume that Whitehall will lead from its silos and the onus will be on councils and the LGA to make that case for a reshape of local public services through place leadership. Councils are not seeking to run everything, but they recognise that they have the democratic legitimacy to shape and lead a joint endeavour locally. We need to show tangible examples of the benefits of localism and to describe what success looks like.

LGA priorities going forward

Based on our feedback from members and councils, we are suggesting six work areas to guide our work:

- (1) **ENSURE ADEQUATE RESOURCES.** This is clearly the top priority for members and councils. The financial sustainability of councils is critical to national recovery. The LGA will be expected to work with MHCLG and the Treasury to ensure that each place has the resources it needs to continue to deliver critical services and to meet the challenges of recovery.
Within this work area, we will also need to consider the reforms that the Government is putting in place to ensure “levelling up of all areas”. For example, the review of HMT’s Green Book. This will now need to be considered in light of the economic impact of lockdown and the local economic stimuli that will be needed to revive the economy.
- (2) **LEAD THE PUBLIC DEBATE ON LOCALLY-LED RECOVERY:** The expectation is that the LGA leads a campaign which highlights both the extraordinary achievements of councils and their communities during this most tragic period and the need for more empowered local leadership for the work ahead. As we move to recovery, the baton of leadership will be handed from the NHS to place leaders. They will need the tools to do the job.
- (3) **EMPOWER PLACE LEADERSHIP:** We need to set out the detailed offer from councils to lead and convene local public services for a joint endeavour to recovery. Members have highlighted the need for firm evidence which includes: very clear thematic asks, the local convening role needed (who, what, etc), the speed offered

locally, what will be achieved (our success criteria) and how councils can ensure communities are on board.

For the short term, work areas can include:

- The flexibilities, freedoms and speed needed from existing Government funding schemes to help economy and places re-open.
- Continued flex on procurement and state aid.
- Secure funding for public transport.
- The continued support needed by local business (esp for SMEs).
- Skill and employment reform.
- The changes needed in the public realm after lockdown, coordination needed between multiple agencies and the convening power needed by councils.

For the longer term, we need a reshaped proposal for enhanced place leadership. Members have highlighted that much of this work has already been developed (for example, through devo deals and the work of the LGA's Boards), but the work now needs to be refreshed to deal with the impact of the lockdown and the pandemic. The following areas for work have been suggested:

- Support for communities leaving lockdown and a new local offer on mental health and domestic abuse.
- Kick starting construction through council house building.
- Local incentives for new commercial sectors- green economy.
- Restarting public transport and promoting cycling/walking.
- Councils acting as "agents of change" to develop a new local consensus on climate change and air pollution actions.
- Merger of national funding pots into a local funds for speed and flex (plus speed for UKSPF).
- Unemployment and skills reform to address local impact of the recession.
- NHS and social care inter-dependency.
- Local recovery deals (to succeed city deals) for infrastructure investment
- Regenerating tourist towns.

There was also a clear steer that we must detail the new duties of councils: former duties to stop, emergency provision to continue/stop, new areas to take on board and legal liabilities to be considered (from areas deprioritised).

- (4) **KEEP PUBLIC SERVICE WORKING:** As we emerge from lockdown, the LGA must ensure that the new reality at the front-line provides the evidence base for Whitehall's new policy making and budget setting. The onus will be on the sector to provide the evidence and policy solutions.

The examples below illustrate some of the challenges ahead:

- The huge demands on councils to ensure our communities are safe from covid infection will remain. We have created new services such as community hubs

from scratch and our communities will expect these to continue in addition to existing services.

- There will be new challenges for well-established council services:
 - The pressures from a reshaped NHS will continue to create new demands on our local social care services.
 - We do not yet understand the impact of lockdown on our supply chains. Customised local intervention may be required and councils may have to create new markets.
 - How and when public transport is used will need to be re-defined. We will need to rethink timetabling and work with our communities to redesign when and how we commute.
 - Children's services will face new challenges. Safeguarding referrals fell during lockdown and we anticipate a surge in demand for support once schools start to return. As schools reopen, the challenges will include catching up on lost educational progress and attainment, supporting pupils' wider personal and social development and possibly higher levels of absenteeism. There is also a concern about the financial stability of some nurseries which may affect return to work for some.
 - Lockdown pressures prevented councils from fulfilling some statutory duties and robust support from Government on legal liabilities and the usefulness of some duties will now be needed.
 - Our non-statutory services may be more important than some legal duties. Our support to business and for local economic development are discretionary powers.

The granular detail of services will need to be understood and this is where the LGA Boards will play a leading role. The next series of LGA Board meetings will be discussing the immediate and longer-term impact of covid and lockdown in their specific areas. This will ensure a wider debate and a longer-term view. Given the speed at which this work needs to be developed, lead members are able to make decisions between full Board meetings to progress urgent issues.

- (5) **UNDERSTAND CHANGING PUBLIC NEED:** Members have been clear that we need to build on the new community spirit that is found in every place. Members have also fed back that long-established public perception may change, for example, how and where we want to live. We need to understand these in order to plan services and understand changing places. We will also need to examine the lessons from and practice in other nations.
- (6) **RE-FOCUS OUR IMPROVEMENT OFFER:** The support needed by our councils has changed. Since the start of the pandemic, we have re-orientated most of our direct support to councils to work on covid. As we move to recovery, councils will face new challenges and our support offers will need to be refreshed in the coming months.

MOVING THE DEBATE FORWARD

LGA's work during the pandemic has been led and directed by the evidence and urgent steers from our member councils. The scale of the challenges ahead requires the same level of engagement and evidence. In the LGA, we have established new ways of working

and new systems to ensure that this emerging evidence is captured. Such work will be vital as we move forward.

In refreshing our work on place leadership, we are starting a debate on the future role of local government. This debate needs the voices and suggestions of our member councils. There is some concern that the speed of Government work has meant that councils have not been actively involved in decision-making. We are currently refreshing our immediate communications work, which will involve listening to councils across our membership to ensure we bring the innovative ideas from councils into the centre of the debate, so that we can influence Government thinking and help co-design future policy. We are looking at a range of ways to engage councils, including through our lead members and Political Groups, our virtual events programme and our Principal Advisors.

WALES

We have been working closely with WLGA, COSLA and NILGA in recent weeks – particularly in aligning our work on councils' financial needs. Where appropriate, we are seeking to make representations as a UK-wide local government family.