

LGA OVERVIEW OF ISSUES

Councils are working tirelessly to protect lives, livelihoods and the most vulnerable in our communities - to ensure that our most important public services keep running. This is a high-level summary of current and anticipated headline issues.

The immediate asks which have been put forward by councils are:

- **Social Care has become the front line of the battle against Covid-19 and councils and care providers need co-ordinated support to protect people using services and staff. While the focus has been rightly on care homes, and we share the government's ambition to build support to maintain resilience in the care home sector, councils support far more people outside care homes and we need a wider recognition of sector's role (and the risks) in supporting older people and people with disabilities as well as informal carers. The Government's Recovery Plan published on 11th May is welcome, but again makes the mistake of referencing social care principally in relation to its role in maintaining capacity in the NHS. We need genuine parity of esteem uniting the NHS and social care and a recognition that social care plays a huge societal role that goes well beyond supporting hospital discharge.**
- **The anticipated Plan to support care home resilience is needed urgently to support councils in providing the local leadership necessary across the health and care system as a whole.**
- **Access to PPE and testing continue to be key concerns for the sector and need to be addressed immediately.**
- **Grant funding worth £3.2 billion and cash flow measures have been welcome and provide additional certainty over the short term. The Government must continue to demonstrate a rock-solid commitment that it will meet the extra costs local authorities are facing due to the additional demands created by COVID-19, any additional costs of delivering 'business as usual' and the loss of income resulting from the lockdown. The total projected financial pressure in the year 2020/21 arising from the impact of COVID-19, including cost pressures, lost income and savings opportunities, nationally amounts to 3 to 4 times the £3.2 billion that has been allocated by Government so far. Projected income losses make up two thirds of this financial challenge.**
- **Councils are still encountering issues with the deliveries of food to shielded individuals and with the quality of the data provided by Government about these**

individuals. In addition, they are supporting vulnerable residents outside of the shielded cohort, but councils need Government's support in accessing supermarket delivery/collection slots for these people as well as in assisting those in a position of food insecurity.

- **Councils have effectively led their communities in lockdown. We need an empowerment of place leadership, through the convening power of local councils. The Government's plan, published on 11 May, sets out a stepped approach to emerging from the emergency measures. The plan envisages non-essential retail opening sometime after the 1 June and this will have an impact on the public realm. We are expecting COVID19 Secure Guidance on the public realm. Councils will need to be able to prioritise their resources locally to meet enforcement demands. We ask Government to work with us as we bring together local public and private leaders to stabilise our local economies and reshape services quickly, to customise them to the different needs of our villages, towns and cities. Councils will actively engage in how best they can support the Government's road map for reopening society and need to be enabled to move flexibly and quickly to meet the needs of their local communities.**

PROTECTING LIVES:

- **Social Care has become the front line of the battle against Covid-19 and councils and care providers need co-ordinated support to protect people using services and staff. Councils have a crucial role in supporting sector resilience and with local health services need to focus on working with local providers to access the workforce and clinical and financial support that they need. This is across the social care sector, including support for people to live at home, particularly domiciliary care and those using direct payments as well as support for informal carers. Any national oversight of this role must be balanced and proportionate and add value to council work.**
- **The sectors role in contact tracing needs further consideration with councils given advance notice of any additional responsibilities.**
- **We support Government ambition to ensure business continuity for all social care providers but for those that cater solely for the self-funder market, this should be addressed as a business support need rather than a council responsibility.**

Councils continue to ensure that comprehensive social care is delivered in their communities. They have had a central role in supporting national efforts to free up hospital beds and the discharge of hospital patients into social care has been an absolute priority for councils. This has contributed hugely to protection of our NHS. As the focus shifts out of hospitals, we need a commensurate shift of emphasis to protecting our social care and Government should make this a clear stated intention for the next period.

The focus recently has rightly been on care homes and we share the government's ambition to build support to maintain resilience in the care home sector. Councils have a crucial role in supporting sector resilience and need to focus on working with local providers. The anticipated plan to support care home resilience is needed urgently to support councils in providing the local leadership necessary across the health and care system as a whole. The support of local health services will be vital. National oversight must be balanced and proportionate and add value to council work.

Sector resilience also needs to embrace services to support people living at home, particularly domiciliary care and those using direct payments as well as informal carers. Crucially there needs to be a recognition that social care plays a huge societal role that goes well beyond creating and maintaining capacity to support hospital discharge.

Care providers and councils are still not able to access sufficient supplies of PPE. This continues to be a major concern and additional drops of PPE to LRF's have not significantly addressed this issue. Care workers and other staff are not being provided with the protection they need to carry out their roles looking after vulnerable people. This is putting workers and vulnerable people at risk. This has become a major credibility issue for the government and needs to be addressed in a manner which restores confidence to the sector. It is vital that the arrangements set out in the adult social care plan and associated guidance to education and children's settings are urgently translated to reality on the ground. The intended national "Clipper" system has been too slow to come on stream and providers are increasingly turning to alternative suppliers and facing inflated costs and lack of product assurance – giving rise to further risks.

"PPE is a huge issue – we were led to believe that PPE would arrive, and it didn't, although we did get a shipment of 50 fluid resistant masks. We are now seeking to source our own PPE" **Chief Executive**

"We are still critically low on clinical waste bags and containers, and less than 7 days endurance for body bags. LRF drops were significantly smaller than expected, so we really need accurate info about what is arriving." **SCG**

"We had a delivery of face masks that were not up to specification and had to be replaced. 7 boxes came damaged on last delivery" **County Council**

"LRF drops of PPE have had expiry dates of 2015 at worst and 2018/19 at best. We have decided that we will not use these." **Unitary Council**

It is welcome that the Secretary of State for Health has recognised the key role played in this crisis by care workers. Critical workers in social care and other key sectors should now be given parity with the NHS in terms of supply of PPE. There should be one system for the distribution of PPE rather than care workers and others being treated as second class workers.

Access to testing is critical to this work. The LGA welcomes the news that Baroness Dido Harding has been appointed to lead the programme of testing and tracing as part of the Government's ongoing response to COVID-19. Also, in a positive response to the calls of councils and the LGA, Ministers have asked local directors of public health to take charge of testing in care homes and to help inform local prioritisation of testing. The increase in testing availability is welcome but too many care workers are still unsure how to access tests and tragically we are seeing the number of deaths among care workers increase.

We are monitoring social care and workforce availability with private sector providers and continue to work with councils and providers on funding additional costs and managing provider cash flow. We are concerned that councils are being asked to support private sector providers who provide services entirely or predominantly to the self-funder market. We support government ambition to ensure business continuity for all social care providers but for those that cater solely for the self-funder market, this should be addressed as a business support need rather than a council responsibility. There are many calls on the £3.2 billion of funding allocated to councils and providing financial support to care businesses that do not contract with councils would only increase the gap between presenting pressures and resources available.

“Councils should be made aware of changing testing policy. Following the announcement of plans to include over 65s and those needing tests to return to work, our mobile testing unit site was inundated by people wanting tests without an appointment” **London Borough**

We welcome the Governments acknowledgement of our call to utilise the unparalleled skills, knowledge and experience of councils to help national efforts to track and trace coronavirus. Joining up local, regional and national responses to defeating this virus and getting them working effectively is crucial to beating it and lifting lockdown measures.

Councils know their communities best. It is vital that the Government capitalises on the significant work being done by Directors of Public Health to tackle the virus and increase local engagement in towns, cities and rural areas across the country. Councils’ must not be sidelined – they will be vital in supporting the national testing and contact tracing to halt the spread of COVID-19 and need to be included in the contact tracing programme. This means being given up-to-date infections data to enable them to target particular streets or communities to help to track previously unknown cases and encourage those with symptoms to self-isolate. This would also help address flaws in the NHS COVID-19 app which will not be able to reach every area of the country.

Costing an initiative like this is not straightforward as it could involve a significant amount of resource and for it to be in place for many months until a vaccine is ready.

FINANCE:

- **Cost pressures, the loss of income, and liquidity issues that all councils are experiencing are significant issues which need monitoring and addressing as they arise.**
- **Grant funding worth £3.2 billion and cash flow measures have been welcome and provide additional certainty over the short term. It is also welcome that the funding is not be ringfenced and that councils will be able to spend this on local priorities and pressures. The total projected financial pressure in the year 2020/21 arising from the impact of COVID-19, including cost pressures, lost income and savings opportunities, nationally amounts to 3 to 4 times the £3.2 billion that has been allocated by Government so far.**

- **Income losses constitute two-thirds of this financial challenge. This is due to predicted drops in collection of council tax and business rates income (60 per cent of projected income losses), as well as losses of fees, charges and commercial income (40 per cent of projected income losses).**
- **The Government must continue to demonstrate a rock-solid commitment that it will meet the financial challenges local authorities are facing due to the additional demands created by COVID-19 (including for services which were already under pressure such as social care, hardship and homelessness support), any additional costs of delivering ‘business as usual’ and the loss of income resulting from the lockdown. Only this will ensure council chief finance officers have the certainty they need to not consider issuing section 114 reports in the coming weeks and months.**
- **The payment schedule of the grant needs to be confirmed as soon as possible to allow councils to plan their cash flows. Other grants, such as the DHSC public health grant, should be considered for early payment in line with the approach taken to MHCLG social care grants.**

Certainty over sufficiency of funding and liquidity is vital to ensure that councils can successfully deliver the best possible response to COVID-19, but many councils are already finding themselves in a very challenging financial environment. Every council is seeing a huge drop in council tax, business rates and income they receive from fees and charges such as leisure services, commercial estate and parking. In addition, councils face increased costs to meet additional social care demand as well as those to support those in increased financial hardship.

Based on over 170 responses to the April MHCLG survey, which have been shared with the LGA, local authorities were projecting that, the 2020/21 annual financial pressure arising from the impact of COVID-19, including cost pressures, lost income and savings opportunities, nationally amounts to 3 to 4 times the £3.2 billion that has been allocated by Government so far.

Around two-thirds is due to projected losses in income, such as council tax and business rates (60 per cent of projected income losses) and fees and charges, commercial and other income (40 per cent of projected income losses). Councils fund anywhere between 5 and 70 per cent of their gross spending through sales, fees and charges, and council tax alone is worth around half of all council spending power. Therefore, drastic losses of this income have a very significant impact. Unallocated reserves would only cover up to half of the remaining shortfall on average.

The majority of the initial £1.6 billion allocation will have been spent on adult social care, which is in line with the Government’s approach to the distribution of this initial tranche of funding.

Different types of councils will face a different nature of pressures. For example, district councils are more exposed to losses in income, while county councils are dealing more with cost pressures on areas such as adult social care and children’s services. Unitary authorities will face a mix of both pressures which will be different in each area

“We had budgeted for £1m growth in 2020/21 – this will no longer happen. We have also developed best, medium and worst-case scenarios, and all of them draw on reserves”
District Council

“Our budget relies on income from fees and charges of £53m. Our current forecast is we will only collect £20m – a loss of £33m.” **Unitary Council**

“The funding shortfall in the region is over £900m from additional costs and loss of income; based on the first allocation of 1.6bn the region would need to receive 4-5 more funding top ups to cover this gap.” **Chief Executive**

Under existing regulations, Chief Finance Officers will need to consider issuing s114 reports if the Government does not provide sufficient guarantee and certainty that funding, and liquidity will be available as and when needed.

The Government has announced that implementation of both its review of relative needs and resources (‘Fair Funding Review’) and the move to 75 per cent business rates retention will now be postponed and not go ahead from April 2021. This will provide councils with more certainty over their 2021/22 budgets.

However, both reforms have been delayed on three separate occasions. The Government must provide clarity over the future of these reforms, including whether and when they will now be implemented, as soon as possible to help councils plan their medium-term financial strategies which will already be challenged by the impact of COVID-19.

THE MOST VULNERABLE:

- **Councils still need better data with greater detail about the shielded clinically vulnerable cohort, so they can ensure those who need assistance get the help they require.**
- **Councils are already supporting the NSV and need Government’s support in accessing supermarket delivery/collection slots for these people, as well as in assisting those in a position of food insecurity.**
- **Government needs to postpone or suspend the requirement to publish a wide range of data in order comply with the Local Government Transparency Code.**

With doorstep food deliveries to the clinically vulnerable 2.1m continuing, the main issues raised by councils relate to issues with the deliveries themselves, with for example, some individuals struggling to cancel parcels they do not need, while others who need parcels have not received them. Improvements in the timing, flow and quality of data between central government and councils about shielded individuals also needs addressing. For example, delays in updates to the NHS patient list data causing councils considerable problems in responding to the transfer of data on those shielded individuals the Government’s call centre has been unable to contact. As a result, councils are having to spend considerable time on data cleansing and are also struggling to report updates back to government. A simple

mechanism for councils to update centrally held data on contact councils have had with shielded individuals would also assist. Any processes put in place to assist those self-isolating with Covid-19 identified as a result of the development of tracing and testing measures need to build on and align with the support to the shielded group.

Councils have also established systems with their local voluntary and community groups to support the non-shielded vulnerable (NSV). Councils continue to provide high volumes of food parcels to this group, with one Northern unitary with a population of 140,000 delivering 9,000 food parcels per week. Similarly, councils have been supporting those in food poverty, even though they are not funded to do so, nor have statutory responsibilities to do so. Any nationally developed programme of support for the NSV and those in food poverty should build on these locally led and managed approaches, complementing and supporting councils' activity, not replacing it.

Defra's work to broker discussions with the supermarkets has resulted in an offer for councils to refer the NSV for the delivery/click and collect slots they need. Discussions continue with Defra and MHCLG on allocation of these slots and who they will be made available to. Consideration still needs to be given to how those NSV who are also digitally excluded can be supported, how rural and urban councils are supported to address the different circumstances they face, and how the NHS Volunteer Responders can assist in helping get food to the NSV, especially once social distancing measures are eased.

"There is a major issue with the national food parcel delivery service – our hub team have been contacted by people who had a food parcel the week before last, but didn't get one last week and have now run out of food so the council is having to deliver emergency boxes."

Chief Executive

"Emergency food demand to be fulfilled by boroughs is larger than anticipated, and government's expectations on what councils should be doing for those vulnerable but not shielded is unclear." **Unitary Council.**

Looking ahead to the transition from lockdown feedback from councils suggests that in addition to the surge in children's social care referrals referred to below, there will also be a surge in the reporting of domestic abuse cases. While there has been a considerable increase in demand on domestic abuse helplines this has not yet resulted in an increased number of cases being reported to councils. There are also concerns that supplies have been impacted by the lockdown which has resulted in drugs being cut with harmful substances and this practice will continue as lockdown restrictions are relaxed. There is also concern that drugs have been stockpiled by organised crime groups (OCGs) which will lead to greater availability and the possibility of escalating violence as OCGs re-establish county lines.

While additional flexibility for councils and partners to support children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) is welcome, we should continue to monitor whether further flexibilities are needed, for example on timescales to complete reviews and re-assessments.

Alongside this, the ongoing statutory requirement to publish data in line with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 is diverting authorities from other data priorities, such as managing and cleansing the data on shielded individuals. This requirement to publish a

wide range of data on items such as union facility time, parking spaces and pay multiples should be postponed or suspended at this time.

The Prime Minister's recent announcement about the nation's road map for reopening society has indicated a potential request for schools to consider limited reopening in June. Councils have seen a significant drop in referrals to children's social care since lockdown began. Action is being taken at a local level to address this and ensure that children are being kept safe, and referral rates are picking back up in some areas. We expect a surge in referrals when schools re-open. We are in discussions with DfE about all these issues and looking at how partners can work together on this.

KEEPING PUBLIC SERVICES RUNNING:

- **Councils have effectively led their communities in lockdown. We need an empowerment of place leadership, through the convening power of local councils. We ask Government to work with us as we bring together local public and private leaders to stabilise our local economies and reshape services quickly and to customise them to the different needs of our villages, towns and cities.**
- **As we move into the next phase of the Government's road map for reopening society councils should be enabled to deliver flexible and quick responses to the needs of their local communities. The effective delivery of the next phase will depend on all agencies working in partnership at the local level. Councils are best placed to convene this work.**

Councils have led their local communities in this time of crisis. They have kept public services running and communities are safe in the knowledge that if they need help their councils will be there for them. Across the country councils have worked hard to keep schools open for the children of key workers. They have got over 90 per cent of the homeless off the streets and into safe accommodation. 98 per cent of kerbside waste and recycling collections have continued as usual. Councils have also stepped up and overnight created new services for the vulnerable who need support whilst self-isolating. Local volunteers have stepped forward in their 1000's to support the communities' they live in.

The partnership between local and national Government is crucial in this time of emergency. The Government has now outlined its plan to emerge from the emergency measures, with the first relaxations taking place on 13 May. Councils are ready to support their communities and businesses as we begin the process of recovery and will flex local services accordingly. This means working in partnership with national Government to collectively develop service provision to meet the needs of local communities. As we have co-designed the emergency response, we will need to co-design the "new normal" and the support our communities will need to move towards exiting lock down and moving towards recovery.

This COVID19 Secure Guidance on Workplaces published on 11 May 2020 highlights councils' enforcement role. We know that councils' regulatory teams are already stretched, and councils will need to have local flexibility to prioritise their use to best meet the needs of their communities. The Government has outlined its message on the road map for reopening society. National messaging around social distancing and carrying out vital activity needs to remain consistent so that councils can deliver effective local services in line with current resourcing pressures. Councils have come under recent pressure to reopen Household Waste

Recycling Centres (HWRC), parks and cemeteries. Councils are working with Government to address these requests where possible, whilst maintaining public safety as the main priority.

The reopening of society and return to normal for councils requires a careful balancing of workforce resources as many staff are currently redeployed to provide the COVID response and cannot return to their original roles until it is clear which elements of COVID response are stopping. Similarly, there are some areas where additional demands (eg. on tracing) are being put on a relatively small workforce of environmental health officers. This is indicative of a medium-term risk to workforce capacity in some areas.

The social and economic task ahead is great. We will need to continue to work at speed and embed the new community spirit which has helped us through the worst weeks of the pandemic. We need an empowerment of place leadership (through the convening power of local councils). We ask Government to work with us as we bring together local public and private leaders to reshape services quickly and to customise them to the different needs of our villages, towns and cities.

*“Opening of HWRC sites needs to be considered in a co-ordinated way – we are concerned that doing this may not be consistent with lockdown messages.” **Unitary Council***

*“When we move toward an exit from lockdown, we need clear public messaging around what the public can, and can’t, do. This messaging needs to be consistent across government, for use in all local circumstances.” **Unitary Council***

SUPPORT FOR BEREAVEMENT:

- **The Government’s message that funerals should not be delayed by families is welcome but in parts of the country demand at crematoria remains well below capacity. Stronger messaging may be needed if delays continue to be a problem.**
- **It will be essential to keep funerals operating at capacity. This will mean ensuring that Funeral Directors and all funeral staff have the PPE they need.**
- **Councils have incurred significant additional costs to secure additional capacity based on SAGE modelling. These costs will need to be recognised in future funding decisions.**

Significant additional capacity has been put in place by LRFs across the country as deaths increase. It is welcome that the national pods are also now beginning to be delivered. The risk to storage capacity proving to be inadequate can be minimised by two things: adequate PPE and reducing delays. Firstly, without adequate PPE for those involved in deaths management, there is the risk of funeral directors or others refusing to handle COVID 19 cases, or staff becoming ill themselves or having to self-isolate if colleagues become infected. This will reduce the capacity to hold funerals and create additional pressure on body storage capacity. Lack of social distancing at funerals can also heighten this risk to staff. Secondly, while it is completely understandable that many families wish to delay in the hope that current restrictions will be lifted, if this becomes routine even the enhanced storage capacity could prove inadequate. As restrictions begin to be lifted, there needs to be national messaging that

funerals cannot be delayed, and that social distancing must continue to be observed at funerals.

The inclusion in the recent survey sent to CFOs of costs resulting from deaths management was welcome. Many councils have incurred significant costs on behalf of their LRFs in order to provide the capacity that Government figures suggested would be necessary. It will be important that these costs are fully recognised in future funding decisions. As central modelling of expected COVID-19 deaths changes, communicating the latest figures are quickly to LRFs will help ensure adequate capacity is put in place without incurring unnecessary costs.

*“A local crematorium has allowed mourners inside its building, resulting in an influx of families from outside the district choosing this service, rather than their local service, due to differing restrictions.” **Unitary Council***

LIVELIHOODS and ECONOMIC RECOVERY:

- **Councils have worked incredible hard to ensure that business grant payments are made as quickly as possible since the funding was received on 1 April. Councils have made significant progress in making payments to small businesses. The introduction of the discretionary grant scheme for small businesses that are not eligible for existing grants is welcome. However, we remain concerned that the size of the fund, £617 million will be insufficient to meet demand.**
- **The hardship fund must be funded to enable councils to meet the increasing costs and to administer a discretionary element**

As we move to a stepped approach to emerging from the emergency measures there will need to be a degree of coordination. Schools will begin to open after 1 June with nurseries, reception year 1 and year 6 children going back first and with thought being given to years 10 and 12 having some face to face teaching before the end of the school year. Opening-up the economy will in part depend on the availability of childcare and schools; we are already hearing that in some areas, there are difficulties with people being expected back at work but having no access to childcare. With schools not opening fully before September, and issues around parents being unwilling to send children back, this will have an impact on the pace of the recovery. It will be important for the new Economic Recovery Task Force to influence the direction of national fiscal policy in the recovery period as well as the practical measures that can be put in place at the national, regional and local level.

Businesses and communities are rightly worried about their income and livelihoods. Councils have been given the task of delivering a local hardship fund, providing business rates holidays for leisure/retail and getting grants to SMEs. It is becoming clear that the amount is not sufficient given the impact on our local economies. Councils have received the funding for the two grant schemes and this money is being paid out to businesses across the country. Public messaging by Government about the payment of these grants should seek to support councils in delivering this function.

Uncertainty over the continuation or reduction of the Job Retention Scheme causes issues for councils and local businesses alike as employers are not confident that they will be able to rely on the scheme beyond the end of June even though some sectors will remain closed. Guidance on the use of the scheme is still inconsistent posing difficulties to councils both as

users of the scheme and as sources of information for other employers. The restrictions on furloughed employees' ability to do anything for their employer also limits the responsiveness of businesses throughout the supply chain who may not want to call people back to work during a three week furlough period and risk losing the scheme's financial support.

There are still gaps in support for individuals and some businesses including those who are newly self-employed and cannot access the self-employed income support scheme. The discretionary grant for small businesses that do not qualify for Small Business Grant Scheme or the Retail Hospitality and Leisure Grant Scheme is welcome, but the size of the funding for this grant, at £617 million is a concern to councils that will administer the grant, because it is unlikely to meet demand, support is needed for businesses that are in shared office space or in council or privately owned business parks, where businesses are not individually rated and where business rates are rolled into rent payments. Evidence from just one council, Plymouth, shows that there are 400 of these businesses in that area, accounting for over 3000 employees. Clarity is also needed on some elements of grant guidance, particularly around state aid, where the government has sought a derogation for the schemes from the EU. This has not yet been agreed.

A key issue for the hardship fund is sufficiency with many councils not expecting there to be any money available for the discretionary element of the scheme once the council tax relief for vulnerable households has been funded especially given the substantial rise in benefit claimants.

*"We have received a 74.76 per cent increase in the number of new council tax support claims." **District Council***

*"Recovery needs to be social and economic, addressing inequalities such as health and educational attainment gap" **Unitary Council***

Councils will need flexibility in the use of a range of levers to support the economic recovery as the emergency measures are lifted. Government can support this by bringing forward: proposals for UKSPF, a devolution White paper that devolves a core set of responsibilities to the local level, including skills; lower borrowing rates for council investment; and proposals to streamline a range of funding pots, with local flexibility on how the pot is used. Councils will want to consider how local economies can build on the recent transformation in working practices and consider the impact of accelerating trends in sectors such as retail.

During the pandemic, councils' role as leaders of place has been emphasised as never before. The next journey will be the road to recovery. The scale of the economic, environmental and community challenges that we now face should not be underestimated. The Government has agreed to establish a Task Force between the LGA and MHCLG ministers to address economic recovery. This will which bring together economic and social partners to ensure a common purpose in driving and coordinating recovery at both a national and local level. The task force will be supported by an advisory officer group drawn from across local government.

ANTICIPATED ISSUES

The LGA currently holds a COVID-19 incident log. During the period 24th April to 6th May, 155 cases were logged. More than two thirds of all cases were notable practice examples or for information purposes only. These are not included, and neither are the few cases asking specific questions about the LGA.

The remaining cases asked for guidance or support. Forty-seven per cent of these were concerned with keeping public services running, 17 per cent were about protecting lives, 14 per cent focused on data, 11 per cent were about supporting the most vulnerable and a further 11 per cent were about protecting livelihoods.

PROTECTING LIVES

- As the course of the virus evolves local spikes in infection rates are expected. It will be essential to ensure local political leadership of actions to address these local spikes as part of the work of the national biosecurity centre.

FINANCE

- Many councils will continue to face extreme difficulties to remain financially afloat in the coming months – this will become more of an issue with likely drops in collection of council tax and business rates.
- Businesses in the secondary supply chain, such as agriculture supporting restaurants, will need further support – these economies need to be acknowledged and appropriately supported.

VULNERABLE PEOPLE

- Further guidance will be required in the coming weeks to ensure councils can continue to provide appropriate levels of support to non-shielded residents, individuals who have “fallen through the gaps,” vulnerable children, and victims at risk of domestic abuse and consequential homelessness.
- Public expectation around the provision of support from councils is very high – consideration will need to be given to how councils can harness understanding of local services to move away from dependency and towards coproduction.

RECOVERY

- Councils are concerned about unexpected requests to reopen facilities and businesses, and whether this will continue during the recovery period. The reopening of public transport and the management of public spaces needs clear national guidance.
- Councils’ recovery planning is mainly focused on boosting local economies, so clarity on the future of the high street and towns fund will be crucial: councils ideally want these to be combined and fast-tracked so they can deliver efficient recovery projects.
- Homelessness recovery is flagged as a key issue for councils to plan for, specifically when hotels reopen to the public. Many homeless were relocated to the same area to live within one or two hotels so this will have a big impact on these communities.
- Councils have concerns around planning issues; the five-year land supply was already an issue for most councils and several developments are ending without planning extensions.
- During the lockdown a two months backlog in registrations of births has built up and weddings have had to be deferred. Councils need adequate warning around changes in the guidance to holding weddings so they can properly plan to hold weddings while also ensuring social distancing measures are respected, and telephone registration of births would also assist.

WORKFORCE

- Public expectations on councils is extremely high, and councils do not have adequate resources to help the police enforce lockdown measures. This is likely to become a bigger issue as some local organisations are starting to blur the lines.
- Councils are deeply concerned about staff welfare: in many cases staff have been deployed from operational tasks to dealing with community distress at speed and therefore with little training. Most imperatively, staff working within care homes need to be supported to avoid any PTSD.
- Councils are struggling with the lack of guidance on the government furloughing scheme, and councils within the same region are receiving different advice from HMRC.

GOVERNANCE

- Political dynamics are becoming challenging for some councils due to the postponed local elections and by-elections. In some places, a third of current councillors were due to stand down in the 2020 local elections, so councils may need to start reviewing their local constitution because of this.

WASTE

- As councils begin to reopen HWRCs, local determination will be important. Consideration needs to be given to how councils should enforce social distancing, ensure safety of staff and create new queuing systems to manage the inevitable high levels of demand. Councils should be able to decide at a local level when and how to reopen, as they will be unable to instantly redeploy staff if all centres are required to open at short notice.