

From the Chairman of the LGA
Cllr James Jamieson

Simon Clarke MP
Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
4th Floor, Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

7 May 2020

Dear Simon

Following the recent meeting of the recovery group, I thought it would be helpful to provide some thoughts on where some changes to policy would help councils as leaders of place to support businesses and our communities as we emerge from the emergency measures. In the next 6 months we will need to bring flexibility and speed to our interventions to ensure that the economy is stabilised. Local government must be empowered to convene all public sector bodies in their areas, with those bodies empowered to make decisions reflecting differing public sector footprints

Bring Forward Council Investment Programmes

As we emerge from the emergency measures into recovery, there is a real opportunity for councils to prime the local economy through bringing public investment projects forward. To do this Government needs to confirm existing funding allocations, relax conditions on funding streams, provide planning and procurement freedoms and provide longer term funding visibility

- **For all current grant schemes HIF/Future High Streets/Stronger Towns/Growth Funds /Local Transport Schemes/ESIF**
 - Expedite allocations
 - Relax conditions so that Councils can get on and deliver, focus on delivery not process (e.g. HIF)
 - Enable cross virement to deliver
 - Extend deadlines and flexibilities on completion timescales
- **Provide a 5-year allocation for highway maintenance funding** providing certainty for the private sector partners and delivery organisations and will help councils to design transport infrastructure that meets the future needs of communities, reflecting their changing travel patterns
- **Schools Capital Funding**
 - Create a single, locally held schools' capital funding pot with a five-year settlement, will allow for available resources to be used as efficiently as possible and bring forward projects
 - Allow surplus school sites including Academies to be sold/redeveloped provided proceeds ringfenced for school capital

- **UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)** proposals should be brought forward at pace and underpin local efforts to drive medium and long-term economic recovery.
- **Planning and Procurement**
 - Continue with Procurement Flexibilities for Councils for all projects related to public housing and public building projects for 12 months
 - Incentivise use of Local Development Orders (LDOs) to allow Councils to introduce new locally-determined permitted development rights for all projects related to public housing and public building projects e.g. schools, health facilities, libraries, leisure centres
 - Change rules around 106/CIL such that councils can invest upfront in Schools/Roads etc and claw back from associated developments
 - Remove viability as a material planning consideration

Kick Start Commercial Investment

There are a number of measures and reforms that would enable councils to kickstart recovery by boosting the delivery of new homes and supporting infrastructure. These include:

- **Turbocharge One Public Estate programme,**
 - Enable Councils to acquire any public land identified as surplus or redundant by current Public Sector owner in their area to provide public facilities at the valuation determined by the District Valuer based on current use. Where project is commercial introduce a claw back arrangement for land value uplift
 - Councils to have first refusal on any Public land offered for sale
- **Acquiring Stalled Sites** Streamlined powers to enable councils to acquire other land where a sale or development has stalled.
- **Expediting the examination and adoption of Local Plans** through a flexible, light-touch approach, and use of technology solutions which enable virtual discussion and document sharing. In particular, where there has already been a hearing, allow completion through written representations. This will enable councils to quickly get up to date plans in place and ensure a positive footing for economic recovery.
- **Removing the requirement for councils to make planning documents available at their principal office** and other such places through amendment of Reg 35 1(a) of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.
- **Introducing emergency powers to automatically extend planning permissions** which are due to expire in the next few months by a fixed period of time e.g. 6 months.
- **Right to Buy receipts**
 - Extend spend deadline from three years to five years.
 - Retain 100% of receipts
 - Right to Buy discount should not mean selling a property below build cost
 - Increase the proportion of retained Right to Buy receipts that can be used to meet the cost of replacement homes, currently capped at 30%
 - Combine Right to Buy receipts with other government grant funding streams

Local Transport

In addition to the infrastructure funding certainty and flexibilities outlined above, we would like you to consider other measures on transport will also greatly assist our collective response to recovery.

These include:

- **Grants to local transport authorities that allows them to specify and flex a bus network** during the recovery phase and deliver that network through secured bus service contracts with operators.
- **Making it easier to put Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) in place** so that councils can manage their networks in the recovery phase and undertake improvements to reflect new travel patterns, such as making it easier to close roads and pedestrianise streets.
- **Operationalising Part 6 of the Traffic Management Act** so that councils can manage and enforce against moving traffic offences to maintain better air quality and support public transport reliability.

Jobs and skills

Skills and training are going to be critical as we emerge from the immediate crisis. We will need:

- A **'Cobra' for jobs and skills** so Government Departments and agencies, local government, sector and trade bodies can co-ordinate and mobilise a response which ensures national skills and jobs investment lands well on the ground.
- A council/combined authority **multi-agency local skills and jobs taskforce** to coordinate local and national careers advice, employment, apprenticeships skills, and business support that is easy for residents and employers to access physically and online.
- A **Single flexible, local jobs and skills pot** combining all funds for non-levy apprenticeships, further education, careers advice, and back to work support, rolling in the new National Skills Fund and the National Retraining Scheme. This will help us make swift decisions including how to retrain those on Furlough and out of work. There is no time for multiple initiatives. If councils and combined authorities had the powers to strategically plan, and pool apprenticeship levy funds they would be in a position to address supply and demand side issues, widen participation to disadvantaged groups and specific cohorts.
- **Investment in locally commissioned, flexible job support schemes:** build on Future Jobs Fund and scale up local discretionary or devolved programmes. Contracting should be widened beyond 'prime providers' including recruitment agencies, and those that deliver employment services such as charities, housing associations, colleges and training providers, and local government. Those unemployed pre-COVID should not be last in the queue for support.
- **Young people:** with a reduced number of training and employment opportunities expected, the Government needs to engage councils and combined authorities and partners to plan and guarantee an education, employment and training place for all young people who were due to leave school or college.
- **Adults skills:** double the entire Adult Education Budget, increase investment in council-run adult and community learning, and publicly fund skills for three years to Level 3 qualifications.

- All investment prioritised to be based on **local labour market led careers advice and guidance** identifying which jobs will be generated. We must now move towards a joined up and locally relevant all age careers advice and guidance service as current provision is fragmented (young people) and patchy (adults).

Digital Infrastructure

Government must explore how to best leverage local superfast broadband projects already underway. It must streamline governance processes at Departmental level that see simple change requests by local areas or attempts to bring more premises into scope, take months if not years to approve. It must grant areas greater flexibility to use gainshare funding now to connect communities as soon as possible. It should explore the expanded use of voucher schemes to meet the immediate demand for broadband, particularly in more rural areas.

Creative, cultural and visitor economy

The creative, cultural and visitor economy will be important to the recovery:

- Councils need the finances and powers to convert and adapt buildings, including high street premises, into studios to facilitate the creative industries contribution to recovery.
- A wider **roll out of creative zones** would support councils in this and enable them to curate high streets.
- Funding locally led support to theatres and other venues that will not be commercially viable under conditions of social distancing but that want to reopen to improve community wellbeing and begin to use their multiplier effect on local economies.

I hope you find this helpful and I am happy to discuss any of these issues in more detail

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Jamieson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Cllr James Jamieson
Chairman