

The LGA's current "hot topics"

In the light of the Board's feedback, the format of this report has evolved. This paper outlines a high-level summary of the most pressing issues, current and anticipated, facing member councils.

1. **Finances:** The financial challenge related to COVID-19 facing councils is nearly £11 billion, in addition to the challenging financial context for local government prior to the pandemic. Recent research by the IFS concluded that at least an additional £2 billion is required to meet the full impact this year, excluding local taxation losses. Allowing councils to spread tax deficits over three years will help but irrecoverable income losses, and costs needs to be fully funded and go together with appropriate measures to manage any cash flow implications. Some councils have already started to take action to reduce spending. Providing certainty and longer-term financial stability through the 2020 Autumn Budget, Spending Review and a multi-year local government finance settlement are now vital. The LGA continues to press the case for more immediate action related to COVID-19 as well as build the case for favourable Spending Review decisions.
2. **Local outbreaks:** Any response to deal with local outbreaks should be proportionate, be implemented as a last resort and have the consent of the community. It is important that national and local government learn about the best and most effective way of limiting the spread of COVID-19, including the use and review of powers available to help councils manage potential new clusters of cases. Precise, granular information is needed in order to help councils track down and isolate any specific outbreaks or clusters. This data needs to be provided promptly and shared quickly, with councils at all levels, to ensure the swiftest and most effective response. Capacity challenges within the testing programme are a concern, particularly in view of children returning to school and the anticipated pressures following the return of students to universities. We continue to emphasise to Government the need to ensure that all local areas not only have access the capacity they need, but are also able determine testing deployment locally.
3. **Social care:** Councils continue to raise current pressures on social care and the LGA continues to press Government to support and work with councils to address these. The LGA is also lobbying on the future of social care and launched 7 key principles:
 1. Adult Social Care should be rooted in, and guided by, what works for people, not what works for systems or structures.
 2. It should be a local service built on a foundation of keeping people well, safe and independent in resilient local communities
 3. Extra funding should move us to a more person-centred and preventative model.
 4. There should be a new deal for the Social Care Workforce
 5. There needs to be a broader service offer from local person-centred providers
 6. Health and Social Care are equally important and need parity of esteem reflected in a stronger role for Health and Wellbeing Boards alongside integrated NHS systems
 7. Social care reform must embrace service reform alongside funding reform
4. **Economic recovery:** The journey to economic recovery will be different in each place and community and will see fundamental changes to the way people go about their lives, where they work and how businesses run. Councils are best placed to bring together at a local level, the necessary economic, social and environmental levers that local communities need to revive their businesses and places of work. For example, they can identify those households who are most

at risk of financial hardship and economic vulnerability, and, with the right financial support from Government, provide the safety net those residents need as the economy recovers.

5. **Children and young people:** There have been many weeks of hard work and planning by school and council teams to allow the full reopening of schools. Councils are planning for a surge in demand for children's services when children return to school, both as a result of pent up demand (referrals to children's social care fell by on average 18 per cent in the first two months of lockdown) and increased need due to issues such as increasing unemployment and household stress. However budgets were consistently overspent before the crisis therefore funding to ensure services are available is a significant concern. The unaccompanied asylum-seeking children emergency in Kent is also continuing and we continue to push for the Government to fully fund councils for the cost of supporting these children to encourage more councils to offer placements to relieve the pressure on Kent County Council.
6. **Equalities, inequalities and community cohesion:** Councils will also need to respond to the evidence that is currently being brought together on the differential impacts of coronavirus and carefully consider whether some sections of their local community, for example people from particular socio-economic groups or racial backgrounds, are more at risk of social or economic exclusion during recovery than others.
7. **Shielding:** Shielding of the clinically extremely vulnerable 2.2m will be paused from 1 August. Local authorities therefore need confirmation that any costs associated with continuing to support the shielded cohort beyond the 1 August will be met by government. Local government's preference for the next phase of the system is for a locally-led system subject to proper funding for delivery of it from government, clarity on what is expected from councils in terms of the support to be provided, time to plan and implement the new system, and an end point for the support (which might be tied to a specific Covid alert level rather than a specific date).
8. **Planning:** On 6 August, the Government published the Planning for the Future White Paper consultation paper with proposals for long-term fundamental structural changes to England's planning system. The consultation period closes on 29 October. Concurrently they published the consultation paper Changes to the current planning system which includes proposals for more immediate amendments to existing processes. The consultation period closes on 1 October. We have heard a range of concerns from councils including: how the new rules based system will work in practice; the role of Councillors in the new proposed system and the implications for local democracy; the implications of a new system of developer contributions for the provision of affordable homes and infrastructure: and the implications of changes to the standard method for assessing housing numbers in strategic plans. We will be lobbying Government to ensure that the issues raised by councils are addressed.

Other emerging issues: **EU exit discussions** (the Local Government Ministerial Delivery Board has been revived); the **White Paper on English Devolution** (detailing an anticipated new offer from Government on local powers); **next year's elections** and new working practices for democratic processes.