

## LGA Priority Issues

This is a high-level summary of the most pressing issues facing member councils.

- 1. Finances** The sector's financial challenge related to COVID-19 is now nearly £11 billion, in addition to the challenging financial context prior to the pandemic. The IFS have concluded that significant extra funding is required this year above the recently announced £1 billion additional funding relating to wider COVID-19 cost pressures.

Our Spending Review submission called for £10.1 billion of funding from central government per annum by 2023/24. This is needed to meet the £5.3 billion funding gap facing councils by 2023/24 to maintain services at 2019/20 levels (based on IFS work which assumed inflation-based growth in grants and 2 per cent annual council tax increases), £1.9 billion to address mounting underlying pressures in services such as children's social care, concessionary fares and homelessness and £2.9 billion to refocus early intervention efforts and address adult social care pay issues. Providing certainty and longer-term financial stability through the 2020 Comprehensive Spending Review and a multi-year local government finance settlement are now vital.
- 2. Managing local responses to the pandemic:** Many councils already have local contact tracing systems in place or under development, but local authorities still have considerable concerns about the testing system. The delays in providing results are undermining councils' ability to manage local outbreaks, and putting them under greater pressure when it comes to successfully tracing contacts of those with COVID-19. The recent data glitch in the NHS Test and Trace system has further undermined faith. Rollout of the seasonal flu vaccine has demonstrated how councils can assist in promoting take up amongst their communities. There should be urgent engagement on how the rollout of any new COVID-19 vaccine will be delivered, making the most efficient use of local capability, resources and venues. Councils have proven they can move incredibly quickly and effectively – putting arrangements in place from scratch to administer the £500 self-isolation payment in just 3 weeks. Government needs to trust in local systems in order to ensure the new tiered system works. They must engage local leaders on how to tackle a problem not how to implement a pre-determined solution.
- 3. Social care:** In addition to the ongoing need for extra funding for adult social care, councils are having to manage huge pressures to keep people receiving social care safe, and to support struggling providers. We need to see:

  - Improved access to testing, especially for care home residents and staff but for other care settings as well.
  - The promise of free PPE through the central portal being delivered at sufficient pace and scale.
  - Resolution to the issues that councils and providers are facing in getting insurance and indemnity cover especially for the recently announced designated scheme.
  - Follow through on promised parity of esteem for our social care workforce, in practical ways such as access to testing and wellbeing support.
  - A recognition that councils are now having to juggle a number of demands and initiatives, and therefore some joining up within central government.
- 4. Economic recovery:** The journey to economic recovery will be different in each 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 all sectors 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 assistance that those residents need as the economy recovers. They will also be able to understand the needs of different sectors in their areas

especially sectors like culture and the arts who have been particularly badly hit by the pandemic.

- 5. 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 COVID-19 and how it interacts with existing health inequalities. They must 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.
- 6. Children and young people:** Councils have planned for a surge in demand for children's services this autumn, both as a result of pent up demand from 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 are pushing the government to fully fund councils for the cost of supporting these children.
- 7. Planning:** The government is currently consulting on long-term fundamental structural changes to England's planning system. 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.
- 8. Elections:** Government still has not issued guidance on how elections will be run safely next year. At the moment, you cannot vote in person if you have been asked to self-isolate or have COVID-19. We need to ensure that those self-isolating are able to exercise their democratic rights. Measures that prevent some groups from voting could cause the election result to be challenged. We also need to consider the safety of election staff and the logistics of holding a different type of election. Government are currently saying they will not provide additional funding for holding elections in 2021. We are working to develop solutions for the sector.
- 9. Devolution and LGR:** Government has issued formal invitations to councils in Cumbria, Somerset and North Yorkshire, including the associated unitary councils, to submit proposals for unitary local government. The LGA will continue to lobby Government for a full devolution settlement independent of reorganisation, which delivers greater funding and powers to all councils.
- 10. EU Exit:** Discussions around EU Exit are becoming a bigger priority both for councils and Government. The Local Government Ministerial Delivery Board has been revived and meets regularly to discuss a range of issues related to the end of the transition period, such as capacity to deliver changes, the implications for regulatory services, Port Health Authorities, state aid and procurement. Issues not directly related to the negotiations but related to the previous workstreams of the EU Exit Taskforce, such as the UKSPF, EU Settlement Scheme and immigration issues are also discussed. The LGA will continue to work with the government to raise these issues.