

## **#CouncilsCan campaign plan**

### **Purpose of report**

For discussion.

### **Summary**

This paper sets out our campaign priorities and approach to lobbying. Our planned approach will be to extend the LGA's #CouncilsCan campaign to demonstrate the work councils have been doing during the COVID-19 pandemic and into the recovery phase.

As things are developing at a fast pace, we are continually reviewing our priorities and will adapt our campaign and lobbying strategy as necessary.

### **Recommendation**

That Executive Advisory Board provide feedback on the overall plan.

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## **#CouncilsCan campaign plan**

### **Background**

Every three years, we develop a communications strategy, agreed by the LGA Board, that sets the long-term direction for our communications activity. Since March, and the change of focus for both councils' and our own work, we have re-focussed our strategy. This is based on the priorities directed by the LGA Board and includes:

- Funding for local government
- Devolution
- Adult social care
- Children's social care
- Housing and planning
- EU transition
- Sector-led improvement and promoting the work of councils

As things are developing quickly, we are continually reviewing our priorities, as set by our members, and will adapt our approach to lobbying and campaigns as necessary, should they change.

### **#CouncilsCan**

To ensure a consistent narrative, our campaign work all sits under the umbrella of '#CouncilsCan', with individual campaign plans for each strand of work. Our research shows that many councils have been using this to amplify our messaging and is a recognised 'brand'.

In their response to the COVID-19 pandemic, councils have proved themselves to be place leaders, supporting communities and their local economies - repurposing staff to make sure key public services continue and the most vulnerable are looked after, as well as supporting local businesses.

Public services that have been valued by the public, most notably the NHS, have rightly received a lot of plaudits over this period. But there has also been a growing recognition of the contribution of councils and their front-line workers, most prominently social carers, waste crews, teachers and public health professionals.

The LGA has been supporting local government in its response as well as promoting the work of councils to Government and the public. One of the LGA's primary roles in doing so has been to protect and bolster the reputation of local government, challenging Government, where needed, on behalf of councils.

### **Research**

To help shape our strategy, we undertake a range of polling and research. Our regular public polling shows that residents have recognised the important role councils have played during the Pandemic. The most recent round shows:

- 73 per cent trust councils most to make decisions about how services are provided in their local area.
- These levels of trust also extend to councillors, who remain by far the most trusted to make decisions about how services are provided in their local area – at 71 per cent.
- Sixty nine percent of residents say their council keeps them well informed about the services they provide and the work they have been doing.

These are the highest levels we have recorded since starting polling in 2012.

### **Political lobbying and engagement**

The LGA is one of the few politically-led, cross-party associations lobbying in Westminster. It is the leadership of our politicians that makes us distinct and credible, ensuring the voice of local government is at the fore of all our parliamentary activity. This involves close working with the Political Group Offices and our boards to build the profile of our asks of national government. This involves, but is not limited to, briefing regularly for parliamentary debates, giving evidence to a wide range of parliamentary inquiries and influencing primary legislation as it is debated and agreed by both Houses. The LGA has a strong track record of influencing decisions as set out in our LGA in Parliament reports, and our CouncilsCan narrative is well embedded in our parliamentary communications and regularly quoted in the House. As part of our Comprehensive Spending Review campaign we will continue to maintain our profile with key influencers and reach out to those MPs who were elected to Parliament in the last general election and have a demonstrable interest in local government issues. In addition, our Vice-Presidents continue to play a key role, lobbying on our key priorities, as do our leading members, maximising their links to national politicians.

Each year, to help shape our strategy, we evaluate our progress by commissioning reputational polling with parliamentarians, reporting on our success influencing parliamentary committee reports and influencing primary legislation.

### **Summary**

To date, the organisation's campaigning and lobbying work has delivered a number of 'wins' on behalf of local government, including:

- Government recognition of the role councils can play as leaders of local areas
- £1 billion in additional funding (October 2020)
- 2 x £1.6 billion COVID grants
- Funding to strengthen care for the vulnerable
- Testing in care homes
- More involvement in shaping Government strategy and policy, and closer working with Government departments

- A recognition of council staff as frontline workers (for example, rainbow pictures for waste crews)

There is clearly more to do to ensure councils get the powers and resources they need, and our strategy aims to help deliver these.

Most councils, whilst still focusing on the response phase have also started to consider recovery, re-set and renew, working closely with LRFs and local partners.

Councils will continue to play a key role throughout this health crisis and through the economic recovery of the country. This campaign aims to build on the current momentum, ensure perceptions around councils and their performance remain positive and deliver the powers and resources councils need to be able to fully lead their communities.

### **Challenges**

Based on our research, there are several issues that we have considered in the planning of this campaign:

- Whilst the announcements of £3.2 billion of funding were welcomed by local government, there has been public 'questioning' of why councils need extra funding when they're still paying council tax.
- There is a perception, particularly amongst some parliamentarians, that councils can still make more efficiencies.
- The country is facing the deepest recession / depression since WWII and with that will come additional pressure on public finances at a time when local government was already facing huge gaps. We don't yet know what this new economic landscape will be and what it will mean for councils and their communities, particularly when considering the business rates review.
- Whilst focus is rightly on responding to the pandemic, the wider political environment should still be considered. The Government is still negotiating a Brexit deal with the European Union and any deal / no deal will impact on the 'recovery/reset/renew' phase.
- The last six months has prompted enormous changes in behaviour amongst the public – including a focus on building communities, shopping locally and engaging with councils and other organisations virtually. However, we need to understand whether behaviour and attitudes have changed fundamentally, and what that means for councils and other public services.
- We have, rightly, been amplifying Government messaging around the response to the pandemic but we now need to balance the sharing of important public health messages with the need to represent our political membership, and our role as local government's champions and councils' role as a voice for their communities.
- Whilst it's important we champion local government staff and the value they bring, we should avoid 'unsung heroes' narrative, which can make the sector appear outdated rather than dynamic and agile.

Key points in time:

- The Comprehensive Spending Review in Autumn 2020
- The Government will publish its white paper on devolution (this now looks most likely to be sometime in 2021)

## Issues

### 1. Objectives (For success metrics, see evaluation section below)

#### **Ensure that councils are fully funded to lead recovery**

- The Comprehensive Spending Review is a localist one with place-based budgets, in tune with the needs of the local economy, communities and the environment  
The Government provides sustainable funding throughout the crisis and beyond

#### **Persuade the Government to grant councils the powers and levers needed at each local level to lead the recovery locally and nationally**

- Ensure the Devolution White Paper offers the broadest vision possible

#### **Communicate the value of councils**

- Increase support for councils and local government staff amongst the public
  - Public recognises the role that councils have been playing in responding to COVID-19.
  - Public values local government staff on a par with health workers.
  - Public identifies and appreciates the services provided by their council.
- Increase understanding of the value of local government within national government
  - Parliamentarians recognise the role that councils have been playing in responding to COVID-19.
  - Parliamentarians value the role local government plays in each local area, they know their communities and are leaders of place

#### **Provide support to councils**

- Increase the value councils place in the LGA's work, and the percentage who are satisfied with the LGA's work.

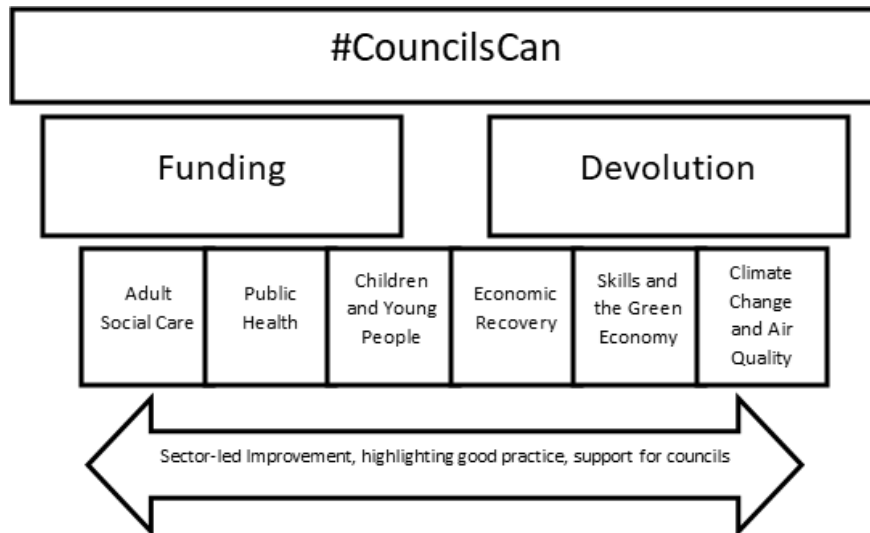
### 2. Strategy

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the LGA has been championing the work that local government has been doing to support communities as well as being its voice at a national level, lobbying and campaigning on behalf of councils.

While this has worked – the Government has recognised the hard work of local government as well as announcing additional funding – further proactive communications will build on the initial messaging and build on it into the recovery phase. The campaign proactively promotes the work councils are doing, looking beyond our more traditional channels into ones which reach more of the general public, making the case for further devolving of powers and funding.

Following the publication of [Re-thinking Local](#), the umbrella #CouncilsCan campaign will focus on our overarching asks – on devolution, finance – on highlighting the positive impact that councils have on their local areas and on supporting councils.

Underneath that umbrella campaign, will sit a series of topic specific, focused pieces of activity around local government priorities – separate campaign plans are being developed based on relevant board priorities:



All communications activity will include elements of the below:

1. **Promoting best practice from councils**, focusing on the people behind the services – both councillors and officers – and showcasing ways that councils have pivoted quickly to meet the demands of their communities, embracing new ways of working.
2. **Highlighting the impact that councils are having on their local areas** and, collectively, nationwide using statistics showing the amount of work done. This should focus not just on the work which is directly linked to COVID-19 – food deliveries made, vulnerable children in school, tackling homelessness etc – but on the everyday, the work that councils have continued to do – for example, bins collected on time and road repairs.
3. **Working with stakeholders** to amplify messages across sectors and different audiences
4. **Supporting councils** sharing best practice using sector-led improvement principles, positioning the LGA as the 'go-to' for supporting officers and elected members.

#CouncilsCan will also include **evidence-led thought leadership**. Councils have been dynamic and agile in their response to this crisis and those ways of working will be embedded for the recovery/re-set/renew. With the gradual easing of restrictions, the public and councils continuing to think and work in new ways. As place leaders and shapers, councils should be at the forefront of this. To demonstrate this and to further inform our lobbying approach, we have commissioned independent analysis of the public's changing opinions and behaviour and the longevity of these changes, to inform our policy development but also to provide to councils to inform their planning and decision making. [see appendix for more information].

We also used this approach in commissioning independent analysis by the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) to support our Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) work.

### 3. Key messages

These key messages will be segmented depending on the audience being targeted.

- Councils **can**, and **have**, supported their communities throughout the pandemic.
- Councils will be key to the national recovery/re-set/renew
- Councils deliver efficient, agile services for their residents every day
- Councils provide value for money
- Local government – councils and councillors – are most trusted by residents to make decisions on their behalf
- Local government workers are on the frontline, working round the clock to keep communities running and to keep them safe.
- Councils know their local communities. They can make decisions about what's best for their local areas and can be their community's voice.
- The LGA is the national voice of local government and supports councils, officers and councillors. During the response to COVID-19 it played a vital role in fighting for and championing local government.

As issues around response and recovery/re-set/renew are constantly changing and there are currently many 'unknowns', we will keep these key messages under review and look to change where necessary, based on research and analytics.

### 4. Audiences

Communications activity will segment and target different audiences depending on key message being delivered and desired outcome.

- General public (work is being undertaken to further profile and segment this audience group)
- MPs and Peers
- Government
- LGA members
- Media
- Stakeholders (internal and external)
- Business community

### 5. Implementation

Campaign activity will reflect the breadth of councils' roles with a rolling focus on different policy areas coordinated across all channels.

Packages of content, across all disciplines, are being developed for each policy area, with segmented messaging which is targeted at specific audiences.

### 6. Evaluation

Ensure that councils are fully funded to lead recovery

- The Comprehensive Spending Review is a localist one with place-based budgets, in tune with the needs of the local economy, communities and the environment
- The Government meets the funding gap of £11 billion facing local government in 2020/21

**Measured by: Evaluation of the CSR - sufficient funding being allocated to local government**

Persuade the Government to grant councils the powers and levers needed at each local level to lead the recovery locally and nationally

- Ensure the Devolution White Paper offers the broadest vision possible

**Measured by: Evaluation of the Devolution White Paper and the powers devolved from Whitehall**

Communicate the value of councils

- Increase support for councils and local government staff amongst the public
  - Public recognises the role that councils have been playing in responding to COVID-19.
  - Public identifies and appreciates the services provided by their council.

**Measured by: Regular resident tracker polling on COVID issues – an increase of 5 per cent of people who are satisfied with how their local council is supporting them and their household; increase of 5 per cent of people who are satisfied with how their local council is supporting their local community; increase of 3 per cent in those who believe their council has been able to keep services running normally during the COVID-19 response.**

- Increase understanding of the value of local government within Parliament
  - Parliamentarians recognise the role that councils have been playing in responding to COVID-19.
  - Parliamentarians value the role local government plays in each local area, they know their communities and are leaders of place

**Measured by: a.) reputational polling of parliamentarians which analyses their support for key policy statements about local government priorities and the COVID-19 response; b.) securing support for our policy recommendations in select committee and All-Party Parliamentary Group reports and c.) influencing legislation and policy proposals as they are discussed in the House.**

Provide support to councils

- Increase the value councils place in the LGA's work, and the percentage who are satisfied with the LGA's work.

**Measured by: 3% increase in key perception study metrics, including:**

How well do you know the LGA (to 83% agree)

I would speak positively about the LGA (to 82% agree)

Satisfied with the work of the LGA (to 81% agree)

The LGA keeps me informed about its work (to 87% agree)

**Implications for Wales**



7. The WLGA (and indeed COSLA) are keen to utilise the work we have developed on our campaign and lobbying. We will continue to liaise with the WLGA on campaign messaging and delivery, and to share resources.

#### **Financial Implications**

8. All activity will be funded out of the Communications Directorate budget.

## **Appendix: #CouncilsCan Behavioural Research**

### **Introduction**

Recent surveys have shown that most people don't want to go back to how things were before COVID-19 emerged, but to make something better. This research will seek to help councils shape their COVID-19 recoveries by asking local people how their views may have changed over the last few months of lockdown, and how they have changed their behaviour – and how it may change in the future. The research will inform the LGA's policy development and provide detailed and timely insights to councils in order to inform their planning and decision making, as part of the #CouncilsCan campaign.

### **Aim**

Like the discipline of user research, this piece of work seeks to explore people's behaviours and motivations (i.e. what they do, why and importantly why they don't do other things), and their opinions and attitudes, to support councils in their COVID-19 recovery planning and decision-making. It is always crucial, before embarking on a project, to ensure that decisions are taken from an informed position.

The research will dive deeper into the details on people's views and behaviours than collected by the LGA's recent COVID-19 tracker, which provides details of residents' satisfaction with their council's response to the pandemic.

The research aims are two-fold:

- 1) To test out with a range of respondent groups the assumptions that councils are making in their local recovery plans.
- 2) To explore with a range of respondent groups what 'local' means to them and how their views may have changed as a result of COVID-19.

### **Method**

The research should put residents front and centre and test out some of the ideas that are central to councils' recovery plans, while also exploring what 'local' means to people in this new changed environment.

### **Part 1**

The LGA will conduct in-house desk research to ascertain the key themes and issues emerging from a range of local recovery plans. This exercise will identify the

most common and radical ideas and interventions that councils are considering. Some possible examples are outlined in Table 1 however, the themes will be dependent on the results of desk research.

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Behavioural</b>	<b>Attitudinal</b>
Climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will residents take up councils' offer of cycle lanes?</li> <li>• Will residents adapt their driving habits based on new parking fees and charges?</li> <li>• Will residents switch to electric cars if more charging points are provided?</li> </ul>	How have residents' attitudes towards climate issues changed over the last few months of lockdown (e.g. views on waste, pedestrian-friendly environments, energy use)?
Local economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will residents visit their local shops more frequently?</li> <li>• Will residents use businesses if more outside space is provided?</li> <li>• Will residents buy more locally produced food?</li> <li>• Will residents make use of a 'Library of Things' where they can borrow items or mend things?</li> </ul>	How have residents' attitudes towards the local economy changed over the last few months of lockdown?
Community and civic life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will residents continue to volunteer in the future?</li> <li>• Will residents participate in online meetings and consultations?</li> <li>• Will residents join a local credit union?</li> </ul>	How important is it to be involved in local community life and projects?
Leisure and tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will residents be more inclined to take domestic holidays?</li> </ul>	
Digital engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will residents take up digital self-serve offers?</li> </ul>	

## **Part 2**

The research will explore what 'local' means to people in this new changed environment, which may involve collecting views on one's sense of belonging, civic participation and collective responsibility. Key questions to address are: how do people feel about their local areas; and what are their preferences for local decision-making?

### **Methodology**

The LGA will consider any suitable qualitative methodologies that address the two key research questions of this exercise, for example, focus groups, diaries and/or online discussions. Any methodology employed must be robust and the outcomes must be of use to all council types across England.

### **Sampling**

An important part of the country's COVID-19 recovery is building a fairer society across communities. The research should achieve a sample that is reflective of a range of demographic groups, such as people living in cities, post-industrial towns, coastal areas and rural villages. These can be selected from an existing panel or recruited for the specific purpose of this research.