

Digest of last Councillors' Forum meeting

Title: Councillors' Forum
Date: Thursday 21 January 2021
Venue: Online via Zoom

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note

Item	Decisions and actions	Action
1	Chairman's Welcome Cllr James Jamieson (The Chairman) welcomed members to the meeting and gave a brief reminder of etiquette and best practice in remote meetings.	
2	Presentation from Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP - Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government The Chairman welcomed the Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP (Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government) to give a speech. Robert noted the following points in his speech: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Welcomed the work of local government and it's key role in responding to the COVID pandemic. Noted that the previous year has seen major challenges for local government in delivering it's core services but also personally for councillor's.- Eager to ensure that local government is involved and consulted at all stages of the COVID vaccination programme. Appointment of Eleanor Kelly (CEO, Southwark Borough Council) to Vaccine programme was representative of this commitment.- Collaboration between the NHS and local government was being encouraged on the vaccination programme. Local Authorities possess vital skills and data on logistics, setting up vaccination centres and contacting harder to reach/isolated communities. Noted that Sir Simon Stevens (Chair, NHS England) had committed to delivering close collaboration. Explained that local government would be provided with NHS data to accomplish this.- The Minister noted that funding had been an issue of high priority, with an additional £7Bn secured for local government through the pandemic in addition to establishing dedicated compensation for losses of sales, fees and charges. The draft Local Government Settlement would be presented to Parliament soon.	

- The Prospectuses for the Levelling Up Fund and UK Shared Prosperity Fund will be published soon. Working to deliver a direct funding relationship with local authorities, that circumvents LEPs. The aim being to deliver the goals and needs of local government.
- Homelessness and Rough Sleeping had been a top priority for the Minister and the crisis seen among homeless people internationally had not been seen in the UK thanks to the work of local authorities. Stressed that vulnerable people must be effectively weaved into the vaccination programme.

In the subsequent discussion members raised the following points:

- The Local Elections planned for May 2021 were discussed at length. Members requested an update on planning for the elections, interdepartmental work and the prospect of any further delays given the ongoing COVID pandemic. Robert explained that the elections are being addressed across Government with the Cabinet Office commissioning Public Health England to undertake specific safety assessments. While many of the arguments for further delay have been considered the Government believes the delivery of the democratic process is vital. The Chairman agreed to liaise further with Government on this matter.
- A member requested further clarity on the prospect of a continued nationwide lockdown and noted the importance of consistent and clear public messaging on the topic. The Minister explained that international vaccine supply challenges could inhibit progress and thus delay an easing of restrictions.
- Members welcomed the Minister's comments regarding the role of LEPs in the delivery of the UKSPF and greater direct responsibility for local authorities. However, questions were raised on the role of MPs and deprivation criteria to be applied. Robert explained that by engaging local MPs in both funds would encourage stronger cooperation with local authorities. His desire for the Levelling Up Fund was to implement a system that would account for pockets of deprivation in otherwise wealthy areas as well as larger areas affected by deprivation.
- An update on the progress of the Government's proposed planning reforms was requested. Robert explained that the White Paper consultation had received around 44,000 responses, which would be responded to in Summer 2021, with possible details of legislation in the Queen's Speech.
- Concerns were raised with the workload being placed onto Council officers for the administration of COVID related business support as a result of eligibility rules changing at each COVID Alert Level.
- The importance of allowing local authorities to continue the use of remote meetings was highlighted. Robert explained that he felt remote meetings had been effective and was willing to support their continuation if there was an appetite for such nationally. Any extension to their use would require primary legislation for which

there was limited time in Parliament.

The Chairman thanked the Minister for his time at the meeting and support throughout the pandemic.

3 Chairman's Update

The Chairman presented the update, noting it summarised his activity since the previous meeting. Added a personal note of thanks to Cllrs, praising their work throughout the pandemic;

- Felt the Local Government Settlement was largely satisfactory, even though it is based largely on Council Tax increases. A further announcement on the Settlement was expected in March 2021, with possibility of a Mutli-Year settlement.
- Roll out of the COVID Vaccination Programme represents a significant body of work to improve communication with the NHS and ensuring local authorities are able to play their vital role
- Post-Lockdown local government will face significant recovery challenges but such represented an opportunity to argue and secure greater devolution.

Decision

The members of the Councillor's Forum noted the update.

4 LGA Board Chair Reports

The Chairman invited selected Board Chair's to present their written reports and to answer questions in the first instance:

a. City Regions Board - Cllr Sir Richard Leese CBE

In his update, Cllr Sir Richard Leese (Chair, City Regions Board) noted the following points:

- Flooding has been a major challenge in previous 24 hrs. Several hundred staff have been involved in the emergency response.
- A Vision for Urban Growth & Recovery was a major area of work in planning for post-COVID recovery. Long term planning models recovery over a 3-5 year period. Noted that he was active on an MHCLG Task Force on Urban Centre Recovery.
- Employment & Skills recovery was another focus. Welcomed the work done by the Government on Kickstart and Restart programmes. A key question moving forward was how they would link in with DfE programmes and the work of local government.

b. Culture, Tourism and Sport Board - Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE

In his update Cllr Gerald Vernon Jackson (Chair, Culture, Tourism &

Sport Board) noted the following points:

- Delivering additional funding for cultural and sport sectors had been a top priority. Noted that DCMS has been well engaged and responsive on such issues.
- Raised concerns on the level of understanding within DCMS on the role of local authorities in sport.
- Expressed concern that the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture & Sport had not been responding to correspondence.

c. Improvement and Innovation Board - Cllr Peter Fleming

In his update Cllr Peter Fleming (Chairman, Improvement & Innovation Board) noted the following points:

- Outlined the shift in focus from LGA Improvement & Innovation staff to providing specific COVID support to local authorities. Welcomed the work of LGA staff.
- Bespoke Recovery & Renewal Plans and remote Peer Support offers have been put in place with Councils.
- Climate change was highlighted as an area of increasing focus, with efforts underway to collate work taking place across the LGA.

The following comments were made by members:

- A question was raised on commending the industry approval of Sector Led Improvement to Government given their apparent poor perception of it. Peter explained that SLI has been independently assessed with high levels of sector satisfaction. Political groups were encouraged to commending to Government the role of SLI in providing service improvement over the previous decade.

d. Resources Board - Councillor Richard Watts

In his update Cllr Richard Watts (Chair, Resources Board) noted the following points:

- Highlighted the work done around financial support for low income households, especially on the self-isolation payment system.
- The next round of workforce pay negotiations were expected to start in late January 2021.
- The announcement of a one-year settlement was not in line with the LGA's submission calling for a multi-year deal. Felt that individual authorities' views on the deal would be closely linked to the size of their Council Tax base.
- Welcomed the additional £1.5Bn COVID linked funding.
- Noted that careful monitoring is required on the collection of

Council Tax and Business Rates receipts moving forward.

The following comments were made by members:

- Members made several comments on Adult Social Care funding and Council Tax. It was suggested that the 3% ASC Council Tax Precept is not sufficient to meet funding needs particularly in smaller authorities or areas where the majority properties sit in lower bands. Richard suggested that moving forward Social Care has to be the core principle in funding considerations.
- A recommendation was put forward for the LGA to lobby on the replacement of Core Spending Power calculations given their growing incompatibility with Council needs. Richard explained that CSP was never the LGA's preferred model and that he did not feel it was an effective way of measuring financial power.
- It was suggested that the Government have not met promises made on COVID related funding with many authorities facing significant shortfalls. Richard responded by noting that the £1.5Bn recently announced would roll into the next financial year, but noted the need for long term funding to enable recovery planning

e. Safer and Stronger Communities Board - Cllr Nesil Caliskan

In her update Cllr Nesil Caliskan (Chair, Safer & Stronger Communities Board) noted the following points:

- The Board had overseen work on response to consultation on Serious Violence Reduction Orders.
- Domestic Abuse Bill was expected to pass through parliament in coming months. Discussions were underway been on the statutory obligations to be placed on local authorities and the necessary funding to ensure full delivery.
- Noted communications with Baroness Williams (Lords Minister) regarding Counter Extremism and funding for the dedicated APPG.
- Lobbying work continued on building safety and cladding issues.

5 Digest of the last meeting held on 22nd October 2020

The Chairman asked members to agree the digest of the previous meeting as an accurate record.

Decision

The members of the Councillor's Forum agreed the digest of the meeting on Thursday 22nd October 2020 as an accurate record.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr James Jamieson	Central Bedfordshire Council
Vice-Chairman	Cllr Izzi Seccombe OBE	Warwickshire County Council
	Cllr Howard Sykes MBE	Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council
	Cllr Marianne Overton	Lincolnshire County Council
	MBE	
Deputy-chairman		
Members	Cllr Robert Alden	Birmingham City Council
	Cllr John Fuller OBE	South Norfolk District Council
	Cllr Philip Atkins OBE	Staffordshire County Council
	Cllr Kevin Bentley	Essex County Council
	Cllr Paul Bettison OBE	Bracknell Forest Borough Council
	Cllr Morris Bright MBE	Hertsmere Borough Council
	Cllr Peter Fleming OBE	Sevenoaks District Council
	Cllr Peter Golds CBE	Tower Hamlets Council
	Cllr John Hart	Devon County Council
	Cllr Ian Hudspeth	Oxfordshire County Council
	Cllr Rory Love OBE	Kent County Council
	Cllr Paul Middlebrough	Worcestershire County Council
	Cllr Colin Noble	Suffolk County Council
	Cllr William Nunn	Breckland Council
	Cllr Tim Oliver	Surrey County Council
	Cllr John Pennington	Bradford Metropolitan District Council
	Cllr Roger Phillips	Herefordshire Council
	Cllr David Renard	Swindon Borough Council
	Cllr Linda Robinson	Wychavon District Council
	Cllr Nicholas Rushton	Leicestershire County Council
	Cllr Linda Taylor	Cornwall Council
	Cllr Michael Wilcox	Lichfield District Council
	Cllr Katrina Wood	Buckinghamshire Council
	Cllr Nick Forbes CBE	Newcastle upon Tyne City Council
	Cllr Tom Beattie	Corby Borough Council
	Cllr Nesil Caliskan	Enfield Council
	Cllr Judi Billing MBE	Hertfordshire County Council
	Cllr Judith Blake CBE	Leeds City Council
	Cllr Anntoinette Bramble	Hackney London Borough Council
	Cllr Doina Cornell	Stroud District Council
	Cllr Amy Cross	Blackpool Council
	Cllr James Dawson	Erewash Borough Council
	Cllr Tudor Evans OBE	Plymouth City Council
	Cllr Kate Haigh	Gloucester City Council
	Cllr Richard Henry	Stevenage Borough Council
	Cllr Susan Hinchcliffe	Bradford Metropolitan District Council
	Cllr Simon Henig CBE	Durham County Council
	Cllr Helen Holland	Bristol City Council
	Sir Stephen Houghton	Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
	CBE	
	Cllr Anthony Hunt	Torfaen County Borough Council
	Cllr Brigid Jones	Birmingham City Council
	Sir Richard Leese CBE	Manchester City Council
Cllr John Merry CBE	Salford City Council	
Cllr Dhanisha Patel	Bridgend County Borough Council	

Cllr Shama Tatler
Cllr Sharon Taylor OBE
Cllr Leigh Redman
Cllr Darren Rodwell

Cllr Alan Rhodes
Cllr Richard Watts
Cllr Andrew Western
Cllr Heather Kidd
Cllr Adele Morris
Cllr Gerald Vernon-
Jackson CBE
Cllr Sarah Rouse

Brent Council
Stevenage Borough Council
Somerset County Council
Barking and Dagenham London Borough
Council
Nottinghamshire County Council
Islington Council
Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council
Shropshire Council
Southwark Council
Portsmouth City Council
Malvern Hills District Council