

LGA's 'Hot Topics'

The following priority issues reflect the short-term needs for councils in order to deal with the COVID crisis as well as topical policy issues.

National roadmap – Current priorities are responding to phase 3 lifting of restrictions, most notably international travel and quarantine, and feeding into government the risks of stage 4 and what councils need beyond the end of the roadmap to manage local outbreaks. The impact of the Delta variant continues to cause concern.

Finances – The COVID-19 funding package must be kept under review to cover councils for all cost pressures and income losses. We have started work on the 2021 Spending Review, including reviewing the medium-term financial challenges facing council services and rebuilding the case for certainty and a multi-year funding settlement for local government as soon as possible.

Immediate Covid Issues:

Quarantine Hotels – Government must engage councils prior to the allocation of new Quarantine Hotels to ensure suitability, local system readiness and the prevention of the risk of community transmission. Government must work with councils on the ongoing management of Quarantine Hotels to ensure the health and safety of staff, guests and the local community. Government must also take into account the significant impact on councils hosting multiple hotels. Government should agree with the Ofsted legal advice that minors (from under 18 years) should not be staying unaccompanied in any Quarantine Hotels, and a clear SOP should be developed should either an unaccompanied minor arrive in the country from a Red list country or a parent/s or guardian/s falls ill whilst in quarantine resulting in unaccompanied children.

Amber travel routes – Feedback from councils is that they are hesitant to take on any enforcement role through the use of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) but see a role to support quarantine. This support should be accompanied by financial resources for councils, even if taking on the role is voluntarily. Councils need data from Passenger Locator Forms (PLFs) and from the companies undertaking private testing regarding Amber travellers in their areas to provide support and manage any outbreaks. The Home Office should not be referring at risk individuals identified via the follow up door-knocking by their contractors, Mitie, to councils for an assessment, but should contact the emergency services. Government should undertake a risk-assessment to local communities and transport staff of Amber travellers using public transport to return home prior to self-isolation and act on it accordingly.

Variants of concern (VOCs) and surge testing – Surge testing for VOC should be reviewed so that councils can initiate a localised and targeted testing regime using local knowledge and building on the success of the local tracing programmes. Initial reviews show that the current volume of testing creates fewer leads and a more difficult contact tracing follow up. This means Government must share new variant and testing data with the local system from the outset.

VOC areas guidance confusion – Government must ensure that any changes to guidance, policy or restrictions are communicated to councils in good time to avoid another scenario similar to the press reports on 25 May regarding the change in guidance related to travel, etc, for VOC Covid hotspots.

Funding – Government must provide, and quickly confirm, the full funding envelope for councils to continue to address the pandemic beyond June 2021. This should include a continuous Outbreak Management Fund (including any support/enforcement around international travellers), specific funding for those experiencing enduring transmission and an emergency 'draw-down' fund to address outbreaks, particularly of VOCs. Test and Trace payments should also be funded beyond June 2021, and the use of them as a tool to

incentivise self-isolation (rather than providing hardship support) should be clearly communicated to councils.

Remote meetings - Government failed to legislate to extend the flexibility clauses of the Coronavirus Act and the High Court recently ruled meetings must go ahead in person. The Government should urgently legislate to allow councils the flexibility to hold meetings virtually as well as in person.

Social distancing review/Roadmap – We welcome initial discussions that the LGA will have information on the social distancing review and 21 June reopening prior to public announcement and ask Government that this takes place.

Compliance and enforcement – Government are consulting on an extension to the no 3 (direction) regs which are currently due to expire in July (having originally been extended from January). The LGA is support councils' feedback that these will remain a useful tool for the next few months, and DCMS, DHSC have indicated that they would like to see these extended.

Care homes – We are awaiting outcome of the Government's proposal to make vaccination mandatory in care homes; the sector needs a more sustainable solution for indemnity against claims arising from for COVID infections; the current limited (designated settings only) state-backed scheme expires end June 2021; widespread (LFT) testing fatigue reported.

Test and trace systems – We are awaiting the outcome of the Government's asymptomatic testing review. Government needs to deliver a comprehensive testing strategy to set out the purpose, future and best means of delivering testing to reduce the current multiplicity of testing channels and accompanying confusion. This includes asymptomatic testing and testing for travellers.

Longer term Covid planning:

Medium-term living with Covid – Councils and the LGA are urging Government to lay the foundations for living with Covid, alongside meeting the Roadmap, to avoid any more sudden and unexpected escalation of restrictions, allowing councils to properly plan and set out how we need the public to act to help contain the virus as a 'new normal'.

Education recovery –The DfE recovery plan needs to go beyond academic achievement to include measures to support children and young people more broadly. It is vital that vulnerable children, who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, are the focus of this work. In their role as leaders of local education systems, councils can bring together partners, join up local efforts to promote education recovery.

Children's services – Councils report rising need for support amongst families (both below social care thresholds, and in terms of complexity of need of those with social workers). Councils must be supported to provide families with support when they need it, before problems escalate.

Adult social care - The LGA is urging government to plan ahead for continuing pressures on the sector. The pressures include an ongoing need to arrange testing, address care market strains like under occupancy in care homes, ensure take up of vaccinations, put in place infection control plans, and ensure a sufficient workforce. The LGA is also asking that, as part of such planning, funding is allocated for these pressures well in advance and consolidated into a single fund to allow more local flexibility.

Culture, leisure & sport - We continue to call for long-term sustainable funding for sport and leisure. Sport England research pre-pandemic highlighted ageing infrastructure in need of urgent replacement which could cost approximately £1.5 billion, but offers the ability to climate proof and meet new community needs at the same time. However, there is also a revenue gap of £400-700 million, according to a Sport England market analysis by Grant Thornton.

Economic vulnerability – We are calling for the restoration of local welfare funding and a

stronger emphasis on financial inclusion. We are asking Government to retain the £20pw uplift in Universal Credit for as long as it is needed.

Homelessness and rough sleeping – We are calling for restoration of local welfare funding (above), a long-term plan to help people stay in their homes, a renewed focus on prevention services and social housing.

Other issues of immediate importance for the sector:

Social Care Reform - We continue to push for sustainable long-term funding and a reimagining of the form and function of care and support, particularly in the context of recovering from the pandemic.

Levelling Up - One of the main lessons from the COVID-19 crisis is that councils can innovate well and help create and deliver new services from scratch and at speed. We are discussing with Government its stated ambition for English Devolution and how this aligns to work on the levelling-up agenda, as councils and combined authorities tell us progress on devolution must continue.

Health and Social Care Bill/ White Paper – The LGA has published a position paper summarising our messages, priorities and concerns on the proposals in the Government's Integration and Innovation – working together to improve health and wellbeing white paper.

Climate Change – In advance of COP26, we are working with the other UK and international LG associations to ensure a strong council input into the conference. Councils share the ambition of Government for a green revolution and want to work with government and businesses to establish a national framework for addressing the climate emergency, supported with long term funding. We also continue to make the case that devolving powers to local areas, highlighting the LGA's [Local green jobs report](#).

UK Health Security Agency, Office for Health Promotion – We stressed the need for UKHSA to be able to operate nationally as a global player to major health threats. The Office for Health Promotion will lead national efforts to improve and level up the health of the nation by tackling obesity, improving mental health and promoting physical activity.

Planning Reform – The Planning Bill announced in the Queen's Speech is a key mechanism for the government to deliver its proposed planning reforms consulted on in Autumn 2020. We still await the Government's response to the White Paper consultation which is still expected in Spring.

Equalities – The LGA is committed to addressing inequalities and is currently working to review and strengthen its equalities work, including promoting equality through our policy work, our improvement work and our leadership offer to councils. This includes specific work around tackling health inequalities and inequalities highlighted by the pandemic.

Capacity – The [LGA's Workforce Survey](#) for April found that:

- 50 per cent of councils reported significant difficulties recruiting for some posts.
- Councils were asked to choose from a list of specialist occupations where they were experiencing recruitment difficulties: 100 per cent of county councils reported difficulties recruiting children's social workers. In district councils, 55 per cent said they were having problems recruiting planning officers and 45 per cent said they were having problems recruiting environmental health officers.
- Councils were asked to look ahead and think about staff and what they were considering doing in the current financial year. Nineteen per cent of those that answered this question said that they were thinking of reducing staff numbers overall in 2021/22.

Digital – Covid-19 has brought digital inequity into stark focus. We are supporting councils to close the digital divide through digital inclusion, connectivity and transformation.

UK/EU trade – The introduction of new border checks are postponed until October as a result of business concerns about readiness. We will be monitoring developments,

especially at ports of entry. We are engaging with Whitehall on reforms of repatriated procurement and state-aid laws to ensure simplifications and flexibilities to help local economies.