

LGA Lobbying Headlines 07/09/2021

Key current issues

Adult social care funding

- The Prime Minister has announced plans for the future of adult social care through the Government's '[Build back better: our plan for health and social care](#)' publication. The LGA recognises the new Health and Social Care Levy as an important step towards changing the way social care is funded and paid for and welcomes that other social care matters impacting on people's ability to live the life they want to lead have been considered. However, we are clear these issues need to be acted on and require adequate investment for progress to be made and repeat our position that reliance on the social care precept is not the answer for funding core pressures. We are seeking clarity from DHSC on questions raised from the plan and are keen to have further detail on the proportion of the Levy coming to social care, when it will arrive and the mechanism through which it will be delivered.

Afghanistan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme (ACRS)

- We are asking for Government to engage with the sector as soon as possible so councils can continue to both make offers and support those moving into temporary bridging accommodation. We are calling for joint governance across the schemes and for recognition of ongoing pressures in other programmes, particularly asylum dispersal. Whilst many councils are already providing and offering support, we are concerned that key details of the new schemes have not yet been confirmed, including for what and for how long funding is available for councils, and both the start date and how the new resettlement scheme will work.

Issues of immediate importance for the sector

COVID-19

- **Vaccines for 12-15 year olds** - While we wait for the Government to decide whether to include 12–15 year olds in the national vaccination programme, we are calling for greater engagement with the sector as many local authorities continue to make contingency plans to move at pace and scale should the programme be extended.
- **Capacity** - A key issue for the sector is capacity in local authorities including supporting test and trace in schools and in the social care sector as a result of the requirement on staff to be vaccinated. More widely councils also face capacity issues as a result of supporting refugees, staff sickness and the lack of certainty over funding in the longer term.
- **Managed Quarantine Service** - While we continue to work to support a cross government approach, some councils are still facing pressures due to the concentration of hotels, so it is vital councils are engaged with as soon as possible to enable them to manage demand in relation to the arrival of international students and refugees.
- **Other issues** for the sector include lack of an evidence-base national strategy and framework about the role of testing, lack of certainty about support for individuals to self-isolate; the pathways for local areas to escalate issues to a national level in the event of an outbreak; and lack of detail about the future vaccination programme and how this will interact with seasonal flu vaccines.

Finances

- The COVID-19 funding package must be kept under review to cover councils for all cost pressures and income losses. We are working 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. The Build Back Local campaign forms the core element of this.

Long-term issues

- **Planning reforms:** The government response to the Planning White Paper has not yet been published, but we continue to work with MHCLG to ensure that: local plans remain the main tool for decisions on land use; democratic decision-making is retained; sufficient land value uplift is captured to meet infrastructure requirements; incentives are in place to get developments built in a timely fashion and that the planning system is properly resourced.
- **Levelling up and devolution** - Government's commitment to further devolution deals, and the extension of existing deals is welcome. We will be pressing Government to use the Levelling Up White Paper to provide opportunities for all councils and combined authorities to have greater powers, flexibilities and resources to create the conditions for inclusive and sustainable growth; improve peoples' skills and help employers find the workforce they need; and strengthen communities' pride in place.
- **Jobs and skills:** We are particularly concerned about the lasting impact of covid on jobs and local economies. We are pressing for skills policy to be devolved through devo deals so councils have the right levers to support local economies and we are highlighting how the right investment in the green economy can lead to new employment in all parts of England.
- **Supporting asylum seekers:** As well as stressing councils' key role in the response to the Afghan crisis, we continue to stress the need for better join up, equity and funding across all programmes that support asylum seekers and refugees, and the need to take account of existing pressures on councils and local partners. We continue to work with government and councils on the revised National Transfer Scheme for unaccompanied children, including raising concerns around the use of hotel accommodation and the impact of the ban on use of unregulated accommodation on placement sufficiency.
- **Housing:** The provision of the right housing in the right place in a way that supports communities remains both a critical and a long-term issue. Recent reforms to the Right to Buy system have been helpful, but more can be done. A programme to build substantially more social housing would be a boost to the economy and would tackle the shortage of housing where the need is greatest.
- **Homelessness:** the progress that national and local government have made through the Everyone In initiative and the Next Steps Accommodation Scheme has been significant. However, we now need an explicit, national-level focus on homelessness prevention work, and an associated funding regime, that enables and encourages councils to avoid residents reaching crisis and reduces the demand for emergency responses.
- **Climate change and COP26:** We are calling for a strong local government presence at the COP26 conference in November as well as a greater focus throughout the two-week conference on local government leadership to deliver the net zero target. Delivering national ambitions for net zero needs a strong partnership between central and local government.
- **Waste and recycling:** A key issue for the sector is the shortage of HGV drivers affecting some collection services worsened by the suspension of testing facilities during Covid and higher wages offered by other sectors. We also continue to work with Defra on the implementation of the Resources and Waste strategy and the outcome of key decisions, such as whether councils can continue to charge for garden waste collection.
- **Community Renewal Fund:** We are concerned that Government has not yet announced the successful bids to the Community Renewal Fund, which must be delivered by March 2022. If projects are not confirmed urgently, Government risks holding up the process such that projects will be unable to secure the full set of desired outcomes.
- **Fire safety:** The LGA is keen to see commencement of the Fire Safety Act as soon as possible, however it must be preceded by the Building Prioritisation Tool developed by the National Fire Chiefs Council so that responsible persons under the Fire Safety Order have all the appropriate guidance they need.
- **Education:** The Department for Education's £1.4 billion education recovery fund announced on the 2 June is welcome, but we are concerned that it does not go far enough. The Education Policy Institute (EPI) recommends that £13.5 billion is needed to tackle lost learning caused by the pandemic. While the Government's focus on academic recovery is understandable, a broader approach is needed that includes measures to support children and young people's socialisation, communication and mental health and well-being.

- **Children and young people:** We are calling for a cross-government strategy for children and young people to ensure all departments are working towards improving outcomes for children and families, recognising that the challenges facing children's social care cannot be solved by children's services alone.
- **SEND:** Through the ongoing SEND review we are calling on the government to develop an outcome focussed contractual relationship between councils and schools in the provision of high needs funding, increasing mainstream inclusion, 'value for money' when commissioning places in the independent and non-maintained special school sector and making it easier to 'step down' EHCPs when no longer needed.
- **Bus service recovery and renewal:** Local transport authorities are rushing to deliver long-term Bus Service Improvements Plans without a clear idea of the funding available from the National Bus Strategy and uncertainty over bus passenger ridership recovery. The sector is concerned that support to deliver strategies has been slow to arrive and uncertainty over short and medium-term limits ambition LTAs can reasonably commit to.
- **Mental health and wellbeing:** We are calling for sustainable and sufficient funding for local government statutory and non-statutory mental health services to meet current, unmet and new demand in the community as a result of Covid-19. This is necessary to ensure appropriate support for people who have vulnerabilities, to invest in preventative mental wellbeing work at scale and to respond to any further local outbreaks.
- **Culture, tourism and sport:** We remain concerned about the viability of the public leisure sector. We will use the LGA's Spending Review to put forward proposals for support and funding to make the sector and its physical assets sustainable in the long term.

Updated: 5.30pm