

## **LGA Lobbying Headlines 19/10/2021**

### **Key current issues**

#### **Finances**

In our [Spending Review \(SR\) submission](#), we set out the £7.8 billion of cost pressures facing local government by the end of the SR period to keep services as they are now and point to other pre-existing pressures totalling £4.2 billion. The submission is built around 6 priorities of which lobbying in the run up to the Spending Review on 27 October will focus. These are: a strong and certain financial foundation, adult social care and public health, investing in communities and tackling health inequalities, reaching net zero, education and children's social care and building back local economies.

#### **Civility in public life**

The tragic death of Sir David Amess has again highlighted the importance of work to ensure the safety of elected officials. We will be launching a call for evidence next week to support lobbying on this issue, which will include calls for improved support from the police and online safety measures.

#### **Multiple winter pressures**

Local government has concerns about the impact on residents and services from the shortage of HGV drivers. We also anticipate cumulative winter pressures on services. We have offered to support the Government to help join up the work of individual departments and review business continuity planning, supporting those measures already being taken by providers, local authorities and LRFs.

### **Issues of immediate importance for the sector**

#### **COVID-19**

- **Household Support Fund:** We will be working with councils and Government on the use of this fund, drawing on our existing support on local welfare provision. We will continue to discuss with the Department for Work and Pensions the need for more long-term, sustainable funding to enable councils and partners to prevent hardship and promote resilience.
- **Covid-19 regulations:** We continue to call on Government to work with councils to support the vaccination programme and are also calling for Directors of Public Health and Directors of Children's Services to be involved in oversight in their areas.
- **Other issues** for the sector include our call for an evidence-base national strategy and framework about the role of testing and addressing anti-vaccine concerns.

#### **Levelling up and devolution**

Government's commitment to further devolution deals, and the extension of existing deals is welcome. We are pressing for 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 strengthen communities' pride in place. Following the appointment of Michael Gove and Neil O'Brien at DLUHC, we will reiterate that local transformation must be matched by reform of Whitehall culture to drive forward a renewed focus on place.

#### **Adult social care funding**

The Government's '[Build back better: our plan for health and social care](#)' publication raises questions that give us cause for concern. First, we are not confident in the adequacy of the earmarked funding for social care to cover all the Plan's commitments: it is not clear what adult social care will receive from the levy in each of the three years or what social care can expect to receive after that. Second, we are disappointed the announcements provide nothing for social care in the immediate term and are alarmed at the suggestion that social care's core pressures can be met through Council Tax, the social care precept and long-term efficiencies. Third, we are clear the Government's White Paper

must build on the LGA and partners' work on this agenda and be fully funded and these points are reflected in our Spending Review submission.

### **Planning reforms**

Following the appointment of Michael Gove at DLUHC, the planning system reform has been paused. We are calling for greater clarity and involvement in conversations around next steps while we continue to work with DLUHC to ensure that: local plans remain the main tool for decisions on future development and land use; democratic decision-making is retained; sufficient land value uplift is captured to meet infrastructure requirements; incentives are in place to build developments in a timely fashion and that the planning system, and the transition to a new system, is properly resourced.

### **Afghanistan Relocation and Resettlement Schemes, and asylum**

We are continuing to press for systematic engagement with local government to share data appropriately and enable good joint planning to move Afghan families from hotels into permanent accommodation. We are also seeking further clarity on key questions, including how councils can claim for costs incurred so far.

Pressures relating to asylum dispersal are extremely acute and many areas are losing confidence that the system can be improved. New approaches are urgently needed to take pressures off those areas most affected and to rebuild confidence both in relationships and the system as a whole. 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.

### **Long-term issues**

- **Jobs and skills:** We are concerned about the lasting impact of Covid-19 on jobs and local economies. We are pressing for skills policy to be devolved 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.
- **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.
- **Housing:** The provision of the right housing in the right place in a way that supports communities remains a key issue. Recent reforms to the Right to Buy system have been helpful, but more can be done. We are pressing for a programme to build more social housing to boost the economy and tackle the shortage of housing where the need is greatest.
- **Pressure on Housing Revenue Accounts (HRA):** Various policy changes are likely to impact the sustainability of HRA for councils with housing stock including building safety work; housing decarbonisation; a Decent Homes Standard and council house building ambitions. We are working with Government to raise concerns that there will be trade-offs in delivery unless additional funding is provided, or councils have powers to raise additional income.
- **Homelessness:** The progress 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 demand for emergency responses.
- **Integration White Paper:** Ahead of the proposed Integration White Paper later this year, we are calling for greater clarity on how the Integration White Paper will build on the proposals set out in the Health and Care Bill and link to and support a sustainable long term plan for social care to be set out in the Social Care White Paper.

- **Waste and recycling:** We continue to work with Defra on the implementation of the Resources and Waste strategy and the outcome of decisions, such as whether councils still charge for garden waste collection.
- **Community Renewal Fund:** We are very concerned Government has still not announced the successful bids to the Community Renewal Fund, which must be delivered by March 2022. Government must agree local flexibilities to achieve the agreed outcomes.
- **Fire safety:** The LGA is keen to see commencement of the Fire Safety Act, however it must be preceded by the Building Prioritisation Tool developed by the National Fire Chiefs Council so responsible persons under the Fire Safety Order have all the appropriate guidance.
- **Education:** The DfE's £1.4 billion education recovery fund is welcome, but we feel it does not go far enough. 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 challenges facing children's social care cannot be solved by children's services alone. Changes to legislation on placements for children aged 16 and under, and ongoing high numbers of UASC arrivals, are adding to the significant pressure on placements for children in care.
- **SEND:** Through the SEND review we are calling on 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. We are concerned support to deliver the plans has been slow to arrive and uncertainty over short and medium-term limits ambition LTAs can reasonably commit to.
- **EV charging infrastructure:** OZEV are consulting on whether councils should have a statutory obligation to plan and deliver EV charging infrastructure. We are worried about the quality of the consultation and any duty placed on councils may expose unnecessary risks and costs, given the EV charging industry is still a nascent one.
- **Mental health and wellbeing:** We continue to ask for sustainable and sufficient funding for local government statutory and non-statutory mental health services to meet demand as a result of Covid-19. This is necessary to ensure 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. The LGA's Spending Review submission puts forward proposals for support and funding to make the sector and its physical assets sustainable in the long term.
- **Addressing inequality and disadvantage:** We are encouraged by commitments such as the Office for Health Improvement & Disparities and cross-government ministerial board on prevention, the Levelling Up agenda and initiatives such as Supporting Families and the DWP's emphasis on local welfare. This should be underpinned and strengthened with a cross-government strategy led by, and accountable to the Prime Minister, working with councils to reduce inequalities exposed and exacerbated by Covid-19.
- **Virtual council meetings:** We are calling for the Government to urgently reinstate the option for council meetings to take place virtually or in a hybrid manner. There are significant concerns about the impacts of requiring in-person attendance on the accessibility of council meetings and the risks attending council meetings for people who are clinically vulnerable.
- **Workforce capacity:** Councils continue to report recruitment difficulties in a range of services and professions including social workers, environmental health officers and planning officers and are directly affected by the tight labour market for HGV drivers. We need engagement with the HE/FE sector on the supply of necessary courses; collaboration between local and central government to promote opportunities to school leavers and career changers; and

consideration of a bursary system to encourage people not only to train in the key shortage skill areas but encourage them to work in the public sector once qualified. There is also a need to support the recruitment of a new generation of regulatory apprentices and increase income for services through increasing statutory fees and creating new funding mechanisms.