

LGA Lobbying Headlines 09/12/2021

Key current issues

Multiple winter pressures

We anticipate cumulative winter pressures on services and have concerns about the impact of the shortage of a range of critical staff including HGV drivers, social care and regulatory services staff, potentially exacerbated by new self-isolation requirements. We have offered to support Government to help join up the work of individual departments and review business continuity planning, supporting measures already being taken by providers, local authorities and LRFs. In the case of adult social care, DHSC has responded positively in setting up a winter pressures coordination group.

COVID-19

- **Vaccines for Care Staff:** We continue to highlight the impact on workforce capacity and call for additional measures to build long-term resilience in the social care workforce. We advocate for priority being given to social care workers and users to receive vaccinations.
- **Infection Control.** Social care providers and councils continue to be expected to take all feasible measures to prevent the spread of infection. This sometimes must be balanced with other priorities such as visits into care homes or flexible deployment of staff, and we are engaged with DHSC and other partners in seeking the right balance.
- **Household Support Fund:** We are working with councils and Government on the use of this fund, drawing on existing support on local welfare provision. We continue to discuss with DWP the need for sustainable funding to enable councils and partners to promote resilience.
- **Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF):** The COMF is set to end in March 2022. Without guarantees around the future of this funding, councils will struggle to rapidly stand-up locally driven testing and contact tracing, support for vaccine boosters, and to be able to respond swiftly to any future localised outbreaks.
- **Other issues** for the sector include a need for improved communications concerning vaccine messaging.

Adult Social Care White Paper

We remain concerned the money allocated to social care from the Health and Care Levy will not be enough to fund the promised social care reforms. It is likely that councils will continue to struggle to meet statutory duties under the Care Act and we are troubled only £200 million is available in 2022/23 to support the introduction of reform, particularly if Government expects councils to begin moving towards a fair rate for care in the first year of the reform programme. Government should confirm its expectations at the earliest opportunity. Councils are concerned this will leave little to pay for other underfunded priorities, such as investing in prevention, care worker pay, new models of care, and meeting unmet and under-met need. These concerns are not adequately addressed in the recently published Social Care White Paper, and we remain extremely concerned about the fragility of the sector as well as councils' ability to meet the welcome ambitions set out in the White Paper.

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 people's skills; and strengthen communities' pride in place. Local transformation must be matched by reform of Whitehall culture to drive forward a renewed focus on place and future funding rounds should move towards a more sustainable, joined-up model with fewer competitive funds. We want to work with Government to develop a better understanding of current lines of accountability and discuss how our sector-led approach could inform a refreshed model of accountability and assurance that is appropriate to the powers and funds being devolved.

Children and young people

The tragic murder of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes has focussed attention on children's services both in government and in the media. The LGA will work with the council, Government, Ofsted and the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel as we collectively work to learn from the case to keep children safe.

More broadly, we are lobbying 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.

Asylum and resettlement

Pressures caused by asylum dispersal remain acute and we are working with Government and councils to explore new approaches to take pressure off areas most affected, stressing the need for better join up, equity and funding. Government is working through representations from councils around not participating in a mandated National Transfer Scheme for unaccompanied children, with mandated transfers likely to start early in the new year. Ongoing issues around support for care leavers, placement sufficiency and age assessment issues remain. We continue to push for systematic engagement with local government on the Afghan schemes so councils can support Afghan families move from hotels into permanent accommodation.

Issues of immediate importance for the sector

Finances

The Spending Review (SR) announcements will help meet some, but not all, of the extra cost and demand pressures councils face just to provide services at pre pandemic levels. Initial LGA analysis suggests that the increases to core spending power projected by the Government, including all councils increasing council tax to the maximum, will meet estimated forward pressures in 2022/23 to keep services at the at their 2019/20 level of quality and access, but will fall short by more than £1bn in the last year of the SR period. The SR additional funding does not address pre-existing pressures such as the adult social care provider market and consistent overspends in children's social care. We are looking for clarity and certainty over the future of local government funding reforms and hope this three-year SR will be reflected in a three-year settlement for local government.

Climate change and the Environment Act

At COP26, LGA and international lobbying secured recognition for the vital role of local government in delivering net zero. Looking ahead, we need to clarity for Government how it can now move forward and utilise a robust local/central partnership to deliver national ambitions of the Net Zero Strategy, and to lead adaptation in communities. The Environment Act is now law, introducing a range of significant measures most of which need secondary legislation and policy.

Virtual council meetings

The emergence of the Omicron variant and uncertainty about risks associated with face-to-face meetings has led councils to cancel in-person council meetings until more information is known about the variant. We are asking Government to urgently reinstate the option for council meetings to take place virtually or in a hybrid manner. There are also concerns about the impacts of requiring in-person attendance on the accessibility of council meetings and risks for people who are clinically vulnerable.

Civility in public life

The tragic death of Sir David Amess again highlighted the importance of work to ensure the safety of elected officials. We launched a call for evidence of abuse and intimidation of councillors to support lobbying, and our online campaign will include calls for improved support from the police and online safety measures. We have also launched a series of events on personal safety for councillors.

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.
- **Planning reforms:** We continue to work with DLUHC and we are seeking greater involvement in the next stage of the reforms to ensure: 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 the planning system, and transition to a new system, is properly resourced.
- **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.
- **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. 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:** The LGA have published a [submission](#) to the integration white paper outlining the purpose of integration, the key drivers and our proposals for escalating the scale and pace of integration. We continue to press for health and wellbeing boards (HWBs) to have a central role in driving integration, and for integrated care systems to use existing place-based partnerships to shape the integration agenda, in particular HWBs.
- **Waste and recycling:** We continue to work with Defra on the implementation of the Resources and Waste strategy, including reforms to consistency in collection (including food and garden waste), the extended producer responsibility, and the deposit return scheme.
- **Environment and development:** There are growing local concerns about tensions between national policy to protect and grow environment and the planning system. Particularly, there is concern about Natural England decisions on nutrient neutrality.
- **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.
- **SEND:** 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.
- **Bus service recovery and renewal:** Local transport authorities are delivering at speed 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 that support to deliver the plans has been slow to arrive. Uncertainty will limit the ambition to which LTAs can reasonably commit.
- **EV charging infrastructure:** The LGA has responded to OZEV's consultation on whether there should be a statutory obligation to plan and deliver EV charging infrastructure, including a duty on councils. Our [submission](#) says that we do not believe a statutory obligation on councils is the right approach and any duty placed on councils may expose unnecessary risks and costs. We had a positive meeting with the OZEV minister in late Nov.

- **Mental health and wellbeing:** With no additional funding to address existing ASC funding pressures and no increase in the public health grant, we remain concerned about the ability of local government statutory and non-statutory mental health services to meet current, unmet and new demand for mental health support as a result of the pandemic.
- **Culture, tourism and sport:** The viability of the public leisure sector remains a concern. Funding announced in the SR for parks and sports pitches was positive. More support and funding are needed 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.
- **Workforce capacity:** 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 recruitment of a new generation of regulatory apprentices and increase income for services through increasing statutory fees and creating new funding mechanisms. There is a significant shortfall in capacity in the commissioned adult social care workforce and we are engaged with government, councils and providers to find the best mitigation measures.
- **UK Shared Prosperity Fund:** Details of the domestic replacement for EU funding is still to be announced. The replacement should be a localised, place-based fund, driven by councils and combined authorities and locally determined outcomes and meeting the quantum of funding it is replacing. The Government should work with local government to codesign the fund.