

Note of last Councillors' Forum meeting

Title: Councillors' Forum
Date: Thursday 21 October 2021
Venue: Bevin Hall, 18 Smith Square, and online via Zoom

Attendance

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

Item

1 **The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP - Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities**

The Chairman introduced the Rt. Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Levelling Up Housing & Communities.

The Secretary of State thanked LGA members for inviting him to speak to the Forum.

He explained that the Department had been renamed to reflect the new emphasis on levelling up and stated that levelling up would consist of 4 broad strands:

- Strengthening local leadership
- Economic development – attracting new investment into areas and creating high skilled jobs
- Improving quality of public services where they are not of acceptable standard. There are still too many areas which have poor public health and education outcomes when compared to other areas.
- Giving people pride in where they live

On Adult Social Care, the Secretary of State said that he recognised many of the concerns held by local government and, in particular, singled out staff shortages as a significant challenge that needed to be addressed urgently. A lot of the issues had been exacerbated by the Covid pandemic and in that regard, the Secretary of State put on record his sincere thanks to the sector for all their efforts during the last 18 months.

On housing, the Secretary of State said that he was currently in the process of reviewing the Planning White Paper but remained committed to making reforms to the system. He wanted to see more high quality, beautiful homes in the right places and stressed that they must contribute towards the UK's net zero commitment as well as being completely safe for their residents.

Following the Secretary of State's introduction, members raised the following points and questions:

- Cllr Izzi Seccombe – social care was currently facing a workforce crisis with 110,000 vacant positions. With significant additional funding going into the NHS there was a real danger that trained social care staff would leave to work in the health sector. Council tax and the social care precept was not the solution to the funding shortfall as it didn't necessarily match the areas of highest demand. During covid, councils had demonstrated that the public health function was best carried out within local government. SoS response: This issue is top of his priority list and he was speaking with No. 10 and the Secretary of State for Health about getting the right support in the right places. The National Insurance increase was part of the solution but recognised that more needed to be done, in particular about upskilling and retaining the workforce whilst at the same time ensuring the solvency of providers. He agreed that local government has a crucial role to play in public health.
- Cllr Nick Forbes – Welcomed the Secretary of State's clarification of levelling up and stated that local government is best placed to help deliver on this agenda. Local leaders needed to be empowered within their areas to drive change. He asked if the Secretary of State could explain how levelling up would be a whole programme of government rather than just a series of initiatives? SoS response: agreed that levelling up should be a place-based philosophy. It is not about funding one-off projects, rather it is about ensuring that systems are in place to make localities attractive places in every respect. Powers of local leaders to bring about change in this regard was crucial. To be successful, levelling up needed to be UK wide, cross-party and cross-tier.
- Cllr John Fuller – highlighted the importance of councils in delivering housing through the planning system and asked the Secretary of State to help councils through providing powerful fiscal incentives. SoS response: agreed that proper incentives need to be in place. Also, important to ensure that local communities get a proper share of the land value uplift from new housing developments.
- Cllr Marianne Overton – Expressed real concern about attacks on politicians culminating in the tragic murder of David Amess. What was the Government doing to tackle this? Also emphasised the importance of allowing councils to conduct their meetings both in-person and online to increase accessibility and to enable greater participation. SoS response: agreed that councils should have the capacity to hold hybrid or virtual meetings but recognised that there may be occasions where this isn't appropriate.
- Cllr Joe Harris – Councils are at the forefront of fighting climate change. They want to facilitate the delivery of zero carbon homes but legislation currently doesn't allow them to insist on this in new developments. Homes that are now being built will require expensive retrofitting in a few years' time. Can the Government bring forward the Future Homes Standard to enable councils to do this? SoS response: Agreed on the vital importance of reducing emissions from homes but there was a fine balance between this and impacting on the economics of housing delivery. Also wanted

to address embodied carbon in the construction industry.

- Cllr Andrew Western – Called for an urgent review of the delivery of SEND services. Councils currently don't have any control of the levers that drive demand which makes budgeting very problematic. SoS response: Agreed that this needed to be addressed.

2 Chairman's Welcome

Following the Secretary of State's session, the Chairman commenced the rest of the meeting by formally welcoming members, in particular those members who were new to the Forum.

He noted the sad passing of MPs James Brokenshire and Sir David Amess and said that he had passed on condolences and best wishes to their families on behalf of local government. The murder of Sir David Amess had profound consequences for all public servants and the LGA would be redoubling its work around civility in public life to try and ensure greater protections could be put in place.

3 Digest of the last meeting held on 22 July 2021

The digest of the previous meeting held on 22 July 2021 was agreed as an accurate record.

4 Chairman's Update

The Chairman reported that he was getting around to meeting new ministers who had been brought in as part of the October Cabinet reshuffle and had met on a one-to-one basis with the new Secretaries of State for DLUHC and Education.

Decision:

Councillors' Forum **noted** the update.

5 LGA Board Chair Reports

The Chairman invited the following Board representatives to discuss their reports:

- a) City Regions Board – Mayor Marvin Rees (Chair)
 - Mayor Rees introduced himself as the new Chair of the Board and said he was looking forward to working with colleagues at the LGA.
 - He welcomed the Secretary of State's attendance at the Forum and for offering his perspective on levelling up which was a vital issue for councils moving forward.
 - The LGA was working to influence the Skills and post-16 Education Bill, introduced to Parliament in May. The bill, currently in the House of Lords, designates new employer representative bodies (ERBs), seeks to make it a legal requirement that ERBs and colleges collaborate to develop

Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs), introduces new Secretary of State powers to intervene when colleges fail to deliver, and puts in place provisions for a new Lifelong Learning Entitlement.

- The LGA was looking to host an annual urban leadership summit.

b) Improvement & Innovation Board – Cllr Judi Billings (Deputy-Chair)

- The Board had been stepping up its programme of support to councils on climate change ahead of the COP26 summit in Glasgow in November.
- The launch of the Be A Councillor programme (www.local.gov.uk/be-councillor) which works to attract a diverse group of potential candidates and supports councils with a toolkit to help reach outside of established networks to encourage new people to stand for election – particularly from under-represented groups.
- With the easing of Covid-19 restrictions in July, face to face support offers have been able to resume, including the Corporate Peer Challenges. However, as part of a hybrid approach, remote peer support remains available, including recovery and renewal panels, remote corporate health checks and bespoke remote peer support. This situation would remain under review over the autumn and winter as the course of the pandemic becomes clearer.

c) Safer & Stronger Communities Board – Cllr Mohan Iyengar (Vice-Chair)

- The Board has responded to the second part of the Government's Review into the role and remit of Police and Crime Commissioners in respect of Community Safety Partnerships and the responsibility and accountability of PCCs.
- The team successfully delivered two Governance and Leadership workshops for our Fire and Rescue Authority members with another planned for November 2021. The bi-annual Fire Leadership course, held virtually this year, attracted a large number of delegates.
- Lead members wrote to all licensing authorities to raise awareness of the National Register of Licence Revocations and Refusals and to encourage authorities to use the database.
- The LGA has been participating in the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's strategic reference group on domestic abuse perpetrators, with the most recent meeting focusing on quality standards for perpetrator programmes. The LGA has also been invited to be a representative of the National Steering Group, which will oversee the new statutory duty in the Domestic Abuse Act, to deliver domestic abuse accommodation-based support and services.
- The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill continues in Committee Stage in the House of Lords and the LGA continues to lobby on the serious violence duty and wider

issues.

Decision:

Councillors' Forum **noted** the LGA Board Chair reports.

6 Update on Cyber Security

The Chairman invited Owen Pritchard, Programme Manager Cyber-Security, to introduce his update.

Owen gave a confidential presentation on the current cyber threats faced by councils, including recent 'testing' results from councils on their preparedness for rebuffing cyber attacks. Owen ran through the LGA's support offer to councils and finished by highlighting a list of 10 key questions that councillors should be asking their council officers in relation to cyber-preparedness.

Members' comments and questions:

- Councils hold a large amount of confidential information on vulnerable residents. How can this best be isolated from other non-confidential information? Owen introduced the concept of 'segmentation' as a way of increasing data security and said that councils should have systems in place to ensure this happens. He added that it was important that councils tightly manage the amount of privileges granted in relation to confidential data.
- Members felt that the proliferation of partnership working in recent years and the need to share data with these partners, made systems more vulnerable. Similarly, it was considered that the wider transfer of data systems online increased the risk of breaches enormously. Owen acknowledged that both of these factors increased risks for all organisations and emphasised the crucial need for ever greater vigilance on the part of councils and for having the appropriate systems in place to counter the threat.
- There was generally a 'monoculture' of operating systems and software within councils – was this likely to increase their vulnerability to attack and should they therefore try and diversify the products used? Owen said that there was always a tension between resilience and efficiency in IT systems which councils needed to assess objectively.

Owen concluded the session by highlighting the information on the LGA website and said that he would be more than happy to talk to councillors or council officers individually to provide further guidance. He agreed to circulate the 10 questions for a councillor to ask in the next Chairman's bulletin.

Decision:

Councillors' Forum **noted** the update.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr James Jamieson	Central Bedfordshire Council
Senior Vice-Chair	Cllr Nick Forbes	Newcastle upon Tyne City Council
Vice-Chairman	Cllr Izzi Seccombe OBE	Warwickshire County Council
Vice-Chair	Cllr Joe Harris	Cotswold District Council
Vice-Chair	Cllr Marianne Overton MBE	North Kesteven District Council
Members	Cllr John Fuller OBE	South Norfolk District Council
	Cllr Robert Alden	Birmingham City Council
	Cllr Philip Atkins OBE	Staffordshire County Council
	Cllr David Fothergill	Somerset County Council
	Cllr Linda Robinson	Wychavon District Council
	Cllr Nicholas Jones	Bury Metropolitan Borough
	Cllr Rory Love OBE	Kent County Council
	Cllr Teresa Heritage	Hertfordshire County Council
	Cllr Mohan Iyengar	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council
	Cllr Alan White	Staffordshire County Council
	Cllr Michael Wilcox	Lichfield District Council
	Cllr Roger Phillips	Herefordshire Council
	Cllr Mark Hawthorne MBE	Gloucestershire County Council
	Cllr Tim Oliver	Surrey County Council
	Cllr Martin Tett	Buckinghamshire Council
	Cllr Antony Mullen	Sunderland City
	Cllr Martin Hill OBE	Lincolnshire County Council
	Cllr Michael Payne	Gedling Borough Council
	Cllr Jas Athwal	Redbridge London Borough
	Cllr Susan Hinchcliffe	Bradford Metropolitan District Council
	Cllr Tudor Evans OBE	Plymouth City Council
	Cllr Shabir Pandor	Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council
	Cllr Andrew Western	Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council
	Mayor Marvin Rees	Bristol City Council
	Cllr Judi Billing MBE	Hertfordshire County Council
	Cllr Shaun Davies	Telford and Wrekin Council
	Cllr Simon Henig CBE	Durham County Council
	Cllr Carl Johnson	North Tyneside Council
	Cllr Richard Henry	Stevenage Borough Council
	Cllr Rachel Sutton	Exeter City Council
	Cllr Kaya Comer-Schwartz	Islington London Borough
	Cllr Dhanisha Patel	Bridgend County Borough Council
	Cllr Amy Cross	Blackpool Council
	Cllr Shama Tatler	Brent Council
	Cllr Amanda Serjeant	Chesterfield Borough Council
	Cllr Louise Gittins	Cheshire West and Chester Council
	Cllr Hannah Dalton	Epsom and Ewell District Council
	Cllr Paul Woodhead	Cannock Chase District Council
	Cllr Sue Baxter	Bromsgrove District Council
	Cllr Colin Mann	Caerphilly County Borough Council
	Cllr Andrew Cooper	Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council
	Cllr Mike Haines	Teignbridge District Council
	Cllr Jon Ball	Ealing Council
	Cllr Heather Kidd	Shropshire County Council

Cllr Jonathan Canty
Cllr Isobel Darby
Cllr Richard Cox
Cllr Adrian Hardman
Cllr David Leytham
Cllr Martin Whelton
Cllr Vikki Slade
Cllr Gareth Williams
Cllr Vanessa Churchman
Cllr Phil Hewitt
Cllr Helen Holland
Cllr Julia Lepoidevin
Cllr Deborah Taylor
Cllr Jo Beavis

Rushmoor Borough Council
Buckinghamshire Council
Lichfield District Council
Worcestershire County Council
Lichfield District Council
Merton Council
Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council
Buckinghamshire Council
Isle of Wight Council
Cannock Chase Council
Bristol City Council
Coventry City Council
Leicestershire County Council
Braintree District Council

Apologies

Cllr Paul Bettison OBE
Cllr Kevin Bentley
Cllr Peter Golds CBE
Cllr Peter Fleming OBE
Cllr Keith Glazier
Cllr Sam Chapman-Allen
Cllr Olivia Lyons
Cllr Anntoinette Bramble
Cllr Georgia Gould
Cllr Paulette Hamilton
Cllr Nesil Caliskan
Sir Stephen Houghton
CBE
Cllr Sharon Taylor OBE
Cllr Brigid Jones
Cllr Bridget Smith
Cllr Ian Stephens
Cllr Linda Haysey
Cllr Gerald Vernon-
Jackson

Bracknell Forest Borough Council
Essex County Council
Tower Hamlets Council
Sevenoaks District Council
East Sussex County Council
Breckland District Council
Cannock Chase District Council
Hackney London Borough Council
Camden Council
Birmingham City Council
Enfield Council
Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Stevenage Borough Council
Birmingham City Council
South Cambridgeshire District Council
Isle of Wight Council
East Hertfordshire District Council
Portsmouth City Council