

LGA Lobbying Headlines 26/01/2022

Key current issues

COVID-19 and winter pressures

- **Multiple winter pressures:** Councils continue to manage cumulative winter pressures across a range of services including shortages of critical staff including HGV drivers, social care and regulatory service staff. In the current challenging environment, the easing of national restrictions needs to be carefully managed. Government has been asked to provide cover for councils, or at least to promote public understanding, whilst service delivery challenges continue.
- **Supporting residents:** We have now secured a local government team embedded within the Vaccine Deployment Programme to support take-up with underrepresented groups and bring clarity on the role councils can play. We advocate for priority being given to social care workers and users to receive vaccinations.
- **Impact on council budgets:** The Contain Outbreak Management Framework 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.
- **Decision making:** The Omicron variant has led councils to cancel and restrict attendance at in-person council meetings. We are asking Government to urgently reinstate the option for council meetings to take place virtually or in a hybrid manner ahead of the budget setting period. 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.

Issues of immediate importance for the sector

Finances

Additional funding in the Spending Review and confirmed for 2022/23 in the provisional local government finance settlement, will help keep services at the 2019/20 level of quality and access but does not address pre-existing pressures such as the adult social care provider market and overspends in children's social care. Following the settlement, we are pushing Government to provide clarity on local government finance reforms such as the Fair Funding Review, business rates reset and the New Homes Bonus as well as ensure no authority loses out from the Fair Funding Review.

Our analysis suggests the increases to core spending power projected by the Government in the 2021 Spending Review, including all councils increasing council tax to the maximum will fall short of meeting forward pressures by more than £1bn in the last year of the Spending Review period.

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. Government should confirm its expectations at the earliest opportunity. 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. Specific areas where there is likely to be a gap between expectations and financial reality are the charging reforms and the proposals for a "fair cost of care".

Integration White Paper

The LGA have published a [submission](#) to the forthcoming integration White Paper, which was due to be published in November 2021 but has been delayed to allow for wider consultation. Our submission outlines the LGA views on the purpose of integration, the key drivers and our proposals for escalating the scale and pace of integration. The Government has recently consulted senior local government stakeholders on draft proposals in the forthcoming integration white paper, including the LGA Community Wellbeing Board, the Local Government Health and Care Sounding Board and a briefing

between the Prime Minister and key local government chief executives, including the LGA Chief Executive. We understand that the White Paper will be published in the next few weeks. The LGA will publish a briefing to summarise key proposals and give our views once the White Paper is published.

We continue to press for councils 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 health and wellbeing boards.

Public health

Without financial certainty, drug and alcohol treatment, tackling obesity, and health visiting are among the vital frontline services at risk of being cut back or closing altogether. We are calling on Government to urgently publish the Public Health Grant funding allocations which councils will receive from April.

Asylum and resettlement

Pressures caused by asylum dispersal remain acute and we are working with Government and councils to explore solutions; stressing the need for equity, funding and coordination. Unaccompanied children are now being placed under the new mandated scheme with councils flagging ongoing issues around hotel use, data flow and age assessment. We continue to push for systematic engagement with local government, better data and swifter matching on the Afghan schemes so councils can support families move from hotels into permanent accommodation.

Levelling up, UKSPF 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 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 lines of accountability and discuss how our sector-led approach could inform a refreshed model of accountability and assurance, appropriate to the powers and funds devolved

Details of the domestic replacement for EU funding, Shared Prosperity Fund may be announced at the same time as the LU White Paper. The LGA has said that SPF 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.

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 clarity from Government about how it can now move forward and utilise a robust local/central partnership to deliver the 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.

Civility in public life

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

Council intervention

We have seen in the last 18 months an increasing number of councils subject to either statutory intervention by government or non-statutory intervention in councils such as Nottingham and Croydon. Although the number is still very small, it does illustrate a shift in the government's approach. LGA officers continue to discuss the situation with their counterparts in DLUHC.

Long-term issues

- **Addressing inequality and disadvantage:** We are encouraged by commitments such as the Office for Health Improvement & Disparities and cross-government ministerial board on prevention. However, councils are increasingly concerned about the impacts of the 'cost-of-living' pressures on households, and the lack of certainty about funding for future support. We urgently need firm policy commitment and sustainable resources for councils to provide a consistent, preventative approach to reducing socioeconomic disadvantage and promoting financial resilience. 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.
- **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.
- **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 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.
- **Children and young people:** 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.
- **Waste and recycling:** We continue to work with Defra on the implementation of the Resources and Waste strategy, including reforms to consistency in collection, 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 in this area.
- **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 (LTA's) are delivering at speed long-term Bus Service Improvement 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. Uncertainty will limit the ambition to which LTAs can reasonably commit and we have called on Government to commit early to keeping the Bus Recovery Grant going beyond March 2022.
- **EV charging infrastructure:** The LGA has responded to Office for Zero Emissions Vehicles (OZEV) 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.
- **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.