

LGA Lobbying Headlines 09/06/2022

Critical issues

Cost of living pressures – An estimated 1.5 million households across the UK will struggle to pay food and energy bills over the next year due to rising prices and higher taxes, according to a study by The National Institute of Economic and Social Research. We are calling on the Government to bring forward measures to mitigate the immediate cost of living crisis and tackle fuel poverty. While the measures in the Energy Security Bill are positive, we need to go further to urgently decarbonise energy and insulate homes to make households more resilient to rising energy costs.

LG Finance – The LGA is working on reassessing future cost pressures in the light of increased cost pressures and will continue to make the case for sustainable funding. In addition, we continue to push the Government to provide clarity on local government finance reforms such as the Fair Funding Review, business rates reset and the New Homes Bonus and ensure no authority loses out from the Fair Funding Review.

Ukraine – whilst data flow, guidance and the rematching process is improving, significant challenges remain. We continue to stress the need for greater clarity on some safeguarding issues, special funding for very high-cost circumstances and longer-term solutions beyond six months. Councils remain keen to see the family visa scheme put on a similar basis to Homes for Ukraine so that where family arrangements break down those people can be rematched with a sponsor, and for shared data to have a shared understanding of current pressures. We are continuing to press for systematic engagement with councils based on a mapping of the increasingly complex system.

Levelling Up – We are pleased that the Government has proposed to speed up the process of devolution and make good on its commitment to offer all of England the opportunity to benefit from a devolution deal by 2030 through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill. The experience of previous negotiations has underlined the value of local collaboration and consensus between all partners, and we expect the Government to continue on this basis. The draft metrics proposed in the Levelling Up White Paper are a good first step, but they still fall short of the full breadth of what is needed to create thriving and inclusive communities. We will work with Government to ensure that the metrics used are fully consulted on and reflect the diverse needs and aspirations of communities across the country. We continue to lobby DLUHC to ensure that the new independent data body is co-designed with the sector. Specifically, we are making the case that data must be made available about the activity of other public sector bodies and central government at the local level if it is going to help local leaders shape their places.

Planning - Notwithstanding the omission in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill of incentivising developers to build out, we will continue to lobby the Government on providing councils with powers to encourage a timely build out of schemes. We will also continue to lobby for the removal of permitted development rights, which undermines a democratic, plan-led approach to planning. It is good to see that any new Infrastructure Levy will be non-negotiable and set at a local level. We want to work with the Government to ensure that the new Infrastructure Levy is a success. Empowering councils with further powers to bring vacant properties back into use is also an encouraging step and we will work with Government to ensure that these are simple, inexpensive and effective for councils to use. It is vital that the proposal to introduce a new approach to environmental assessment strengthens environmental protections whilst ensuring that councils can still deliver the new homes and supporting infrastructure that the country needs.

Adult social care – We remain very concerned that the funding allocated for the Government's adult social care reforms is likely to be inadequate, and that councils' capacity to deliver the reform programme – alongside the large range of other pressures - is extremely stretched. We have raised these concerns through various routes with Ministers and officials and want to discuss options to manage pressures and public expectations. We are undertaking a survey of lead members to understand their confidence in their councils to deliver the reforms.

Fragility of children's services – There is significant pressure on placements for children in care, in particular those with the most complex needs, with placement costs for all children expected to increase further as a result of the cost of living crisis. Workforce pressures are also causing significant challenges, while recent tragic cases are anecdotally driving increased referrals. We are in regular contact with the DfE to identify short term actions to be taken and to influence the implementation of the Review of Children's Social Care, Competition and Markets Authority Report, and recent National Panel Report.

Other issues of importance for the sector

Health and Care Act 2022 – We have produced an explainer which summarises the key provisions of the Act with most relevance to local authorities: <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/get-act-health-and-care-act-2022>. We continue to stress to Government and NHS England the importance of the NHS and local government working together as equal partners to improve the health outcomes for their populations.

Health Disparities White Paper - To truly level up the nation's health, we urge the Government to bring forward the Health Disparities White Paper, which was missing from the Queen's Speech, as soon as possible. We will continue to lobby the Government to ensure that the White Paper addresses the social determinants of health, as well as acknowledging the deeply entrenched and complex factors influencing poor health to support health improvement and embeds improving health and wellbeing as an objective across Government Departments.

Asylum and resettlement - Pressures caused by asylum dispersal and the Afghan schemes remain extremely acute, particularly around the emergency use of hotels. A formal consultation is ongoing with each region to develop a regional plan for a more equitable approach to asylum dispersal and a refusals policy in the Afghan schemes. We continue to push for systematic oversight and engagement across all schemes, better data and councils to be involved in matching for Afghan families to support quicker moves from hotels into permanent accommodation

SEND: Dedicated Schools Grant deficits - We welcome many of the proposals set out in the SEND Green paper, but it will take a number of years for those proposals to be implemented. In the meantime, councils are continuing to struggle with rising Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficits as demand for SEND support rises year-on-year. In response the Government has made additional high needs funding available for all councils for 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 and via the 'safety valve' programme for councils with the largest DSG deficits and the recently announced 'Delivering Better Value in SEND' programme. This is welcome, but we are calling for the Department for Education to go further and develop a plan that eliminates the Dedicated Schools Grant deficits of every council.

Education – In relation to the Schools' Bill, we disagree with budget-setting based on the National Funding Formula (NFF). We call on the DfE to clarify how the direct NFF will work in a fully academised school system. We are concerned that Ofsted lack the capacity and local knowledge to act quickly to close illegal settings. We will lobby the Government to ensure councils, who know their local areas best and are ideally placed to take timely action where these settings are identified, have adequate powers to take action against illegal schools.

Environment and development - Housing planning permissions have been put on hold in 70 local authority areas by a moratorium imposed by Natural England due to excess levels of river pollution, we estimate banning around 20,000 new homes a year. The LGA is lobbying for a long-term solution that protects the environment by improving water quality and reducing pollution, while also delivering the homes and infrastructure that the country needs. We will publish new research alongside launching a new policy enquiry into the solution.

Mental health – We support the reforms in the new Mental Health Act. It will have significant resource implications for councils which need to be fully funded on a long-term basis. The LGA is working with the

Government to identify any new burdens arising from the Act and to ensure councils and our partners are adequately resourced to support effective implementation.

Civility in public life - The Queen's Speech did not include measures to enable councillors' to keep their home address private as a matter of personal safety. We will continue to lobby for existing legislation to be amended to provide flexibility for councillors to omit their full address from their council's register of pecuniary interests, as they now can on the ballot paper when they stand for election.

Homelessness - We are now seeking 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.

Housing - We want to work with the Government and the Regulator to ensure that there is a proportionate, risk-based approach to inspection, and we call on the Government to urgently provide clarity on how this will be delivered and funded. We would welcome more clarity on the proposal to enable the Regulator to act more quickly and take action where it has concerns about the decency of a home. At present, there is a £5,000 cap on fines that the Regulator can impose on social landlords. The Government must consider carefully the implications of lifting the cap on the fines that the Regulator can issue to a landlord who fails to meet required standards. Fines on council landlords would in effect end up being paid for, at least in part, out of tenants' rents, to the detriment of local service provision – they should only be used as a last resort.

Private rented sector – In relation to the Renters' Reform Bill, a legally binding Decent Homes Standard is a welcome step, however, any new responsibilities falling on councils must be sufficiently funded.

Climate change - We continue to press that climate change remains a high priority in Government, particularly as energy costs increase. We are working with Government to establish the new local/central forum on NZ to deliver the national ambitions of the Net Zero Strategy and lead adaptation in communities.

Children and young people – In relation to the Online Safety Bill, we welcome the ambition to ensure children are safe online and broadly welcome the duty of care placed on in-scope services. However, the Bill can be strengthened by accounting for cross-platform harm, despite the nature of much online harm and exploitation occurring in this way. Services must therefore be instructed to work with one another in addressing cross-platform risk.

Transport - Following the introduction of the Transport Bill, we would welcome further measures being brought forward to protect and enhance bus services. We will also continue to lobby for further legislation to be brought forward to help councils tackle the scourge of pavement parking, deal with obstructive parking that is a danger to pedestrians and vulnerable people and regulate the sale and use of private e-scooters

Culture, tourism and sport – The viability of the public leisure sector remains a concern and we are working with partners to increase Government awareness of the challenge, with a particularly increased threat from rising energy prices and a coalition of partners has written to the SoS for DCMS and DLUHC calling for urgent discussions about how to support services. Recent survey work suggests many swimming pools will close in the next six months without financial support. We have launched a **Culture Commission** to explore and articulate the role that council culture services and funding bring to the cultural and creative sector, and the impact on communities.