

LGA Lobbying Headlines

Purpose of Report

For discussion

Summary

As the national voice of local government and as a member-led organisation, it is crucial that the Local Government Association remains agile and responsive to councils' needs and priorities.

The attached LGA Lobbying Headlines report is informed by daily feedback from councils across the country about the most pressing issues, current and anticipated, facing member councils.

As senior councillors setting the direction of the LGA's work, Executive Advisory Board members are invited to review whether our focus is on the right issues.

Comments and advice received from members of the EAB will ensure our work aligns with the challenges that matter most to our members and inform our work with government, partners and stakeholders.

LGA Plan Theme: Promoting Local Government

Recommendation(s)

That the Executive Advisory Board notes the LGA Lobbying Headlines document.

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Critical issues

Financial and service pressures – In the final 2023/24 Local Government Finance Settlement, the Government confirmed a £5.1 billion or 9.4 per cent increase in Core Spending Power for local authorities, including assumptions about increases in council tax. Despite this, our recently [published funding gap analysis](#) shows the cost to councils of delivering their services at current levels will exceed their core funding by £2 billion in 2023/24 and £900 million in 2024/25. The analysis excludes the resources needed to address existing underfunding in areas such as the adult social care provider market, children’s social care and homelessness, nor does it include funding to improve or expand council services. Concerns about growing SEND and children’s services pressures are particularly acute. We will continue to push the Government for sufficient, sustainable, multi-year settlements for local government and to provide clarity on the future of the New Homes Bonus and local government finance reforms. Following the LGA’s lobbying win, applications are now closed for the Sports England’s £20 million revenue element of the £63 million Swimming Pool Support Fund.

Workforce capacity – Workforce capacity concerns continue to dominate councils’ risk profiles as both senior leadership and front-line service delivery roles encounter challenges regarding recruitment and retention. According to our 2022 Workforce Survey, more than 9 in 10 councils are experiencing difficulties in this area.

These issues also restrict councils’ ability to support government to meet its key pledges, such as building more homes, boosting and levelling up economic growth and reforming adult social care. Councils are pulling out all the stops to tackle recruitment and retention issues; however, the local government workforce has a diverse range of skills, professions and occupations, and the workforce challenges each face are equally complex. We are working with councils and professional bodies on strategies to address the challenges for services experiencing the greatest difficulties and are pressing for flexibilities that will enable councils to invest in apprenticeships. We are calling for medium-term financial settlements and sufficient funding to enable effective workforce planning, recruitment and retention.

Asylum and resettlement – Concerns about how current programmes are being managed remain acute. We are raising councils’ concerns around housing and homelessness, cohesion and safeguarding as a result of recent policy and process changes by the Home Office, including hotel maximisation, large site use, and much shorter notice of Home Office support ending as part of the streamlined asylum process. These are exacerbated by pressures resulting from Afghan hotel closure, Ukrainian homelessness presentations and high numbers of arrivals, including of lone children. We continue to stress that the government should take account of the cumulative impact of all these pressures in existing regional plans for asylum dispersal, for more effective engagement at political level, and clarity about how the Illegal Migration Act is to be implemented.

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UAS children) – The High Court has ruled that the Home Office is unlawful in using hotels to accommodate UAS children, and Kent

County Council is unlawful in not taking all children into its care. The ruling has led to significant pressure on the National Transfer Scheme to move children away from Kent and close hotels. We are pressing for a whole-system approach that tackles insufficient placements, alongside the shortfall in funding to support UAS children and care leavers, including at the cross Whitehall UAS children Task Force. The challenge of unaccompanied children being placed in adult asylum accommodation continues to place significant pressure on individual councils.

Private rented sector reform – The Government published the Renters (Reform) Bill in May, which aims to improve the system for private renters and landlords in England – we are currently awaiting a date for the second reading in the House of Commons. The social and private rented sector reforms will introduce additional burdens on councils; we will work with the Government to ensure these are fully funded. The reforms will also bring wide-ranging workforce implications that need to be fully costed and addressed.

Housebuilding – The Government set out their long-term plan for housing, including plans to extend permitted development rights. We continue to make the case that these rights should be revoked as homes created through these rights are often of poor quality that impact people's health and well-being.

We are calling for the Government to go further and faster so councils can properly resume their historic role as major builders of affordable homes by implementing [a six-point plan](#) for social housing. Our plan includes rolling out five-year local housing deals to all areas of the country that want them by 2025 – combining funding from multiple national housing programmes into a single pot; Government support to set up a new national council housebuilding delivery taskforce; continued access to preferential borrowing rates through the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB); further reform to Right to Buy; reviewing and increasing where needed the grant levels per home through the Affordable Homes Programme, as inflationary pressures have caused the cost of building new homes to rise; certainty on future rents, to enable councils to invest. The Government must commit to a minimum 10-year rent deal for council landlords to allow a longer period of annual rent increases and long-term certainty.

Homelessness – We have raised significant concerns that frozen Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates, the rising cost of living, the closure of Afghan bridging hotels, wider asylum and resettlement pressures, and an insufficient supply of affordable housing will drive increases in homelessness and reduce the ability of councils to source suitable accommodation, further straining incredibly stretched homelessness services. Government data published in July shows that more than 104,000 households were in temporary accommodation at the end of March 2023 – the highest figures since records began in 1998.

As well as our aforementioned housebuilding asks, we are seeking an unfreezing of LHA rates and an explicit, national-level focus on homelessness prevention work (with an associated funding regime) that addresses the drivers and levers of homelessness, enables councils to avoid residents reaching crisis, and reduces demand for temporary accommodation and emergency homelessness responses.

Data – At the LGA Annual Conference, the Secretary of State launched the Government's new Office for Local Government (Oflog). The new body is intended to provide authoritative

and accessible data and analysis about the performance of local Government and support its improvement.

The LGA continues to focus lobbying on the importance of co-production with local Government in future iterations of the dashboard to make it more meaningful locally; the dashboard should include a broader set of metrics about the activities and performance of the rest of the public sector (including central Government) and not just those about council performance. There needs to be clarity around how the platform fits together with dashboards proposed by the Department for Education and other work on indicators being undertaken by the Department for Health and Social Care. We have queries that we continue to raise with officials around the chosen metrics in the Local Authority Data Explorer and the need for a clearer distinction between different council roles in two-tier areas.

SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) – We are engaging with the Department for Education at both Ministerial and official levels on the proposals in the SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan. We welcome the proposed national standards, which will clarify the support available, who will be responsible for delivering it, and the focus on early identification of needs and support. The focus on improving levels of mainstream inclusion is also welcome and will be crucial to both improving outcomes for children with SEND and reducing pressures on high needs budgets. However, we have expressed concerns that the proposals do not fully address the fundamental demand and cost pressures that prevent councils from effectively meeting the needs of all children and young people with special needs. We are calling for councils to be given more powers to lead local SEND systems and to intervene when children are not adequately supported. A programme of sector led support to mirror what is available for children's social care would be helpful.

As a result of our engagement, the Department has agreed to set up an elected member sounding board to allow for discussions and feedback on implementing the plan. Working with CCN, we have also commissioned independent research to ascertain whether the SEND and AP improvement plan proposals will improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND while allowing councils to manage and eliminate their high needs deficits.

Waste – The Government has confirmed that it will delay the implementation of the Extended Producer Responsibility by one year, with the first payments due to councils in October 2025. We continue to press for clarity of the detail of “consistency in collection” reforms, for detailed work on EPR to continue and for ambitions not to be diluted under pressure from industry.

We also continue to press the Government to abandon plans to ban councils charging for DIY waste to be taken to household waste recycling centres and the risks of waiving the new burdens process. Other key work areas include the treatment of Persistent Organic Pollutants, Emissions Trading Scheme application to Energy from Waste, waste prevention strategy, fly-tipping, and single-use vapes.

Children's social care – Forthcoming changes to regulations around supported accommodation for young people will exacerbate pressure on placement capacity, especially for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. We have called on the Government to delay the implementation of these reforms or risk making outcomes for children worse. We have

responded to the [children's social work workforce consultation](#), which aims to tackle issues around the agency workforce. However, we are concerned that insufficient action is being taken to increase the overall number of social workers. The DfE is consulting on changes to statutory guidance to improve multi-agency safeguarding partnership working, reflecting concerns about how this works on the ground. Challenges around placements for children in care with the most complex needs remain critical, with the continued use of unregulated placements for some children due to a lack of regulated provision. The Government plans to establish two "Regional Care Cooperative" pathfinders involving around 20 councils to trial new approaches to commissioning provision. However, the sector has significant concerns that these will not deliver change at the scale and pace required.

Adult social care – We welcomed the Government's announcement of £600 million over the next two years to boost the capacity of the social care workforce and funding for the social care sector. The LGA specifically called for this funding to be ring-fenced for adult social care and distributed to councils to help fund frontline services. We are pleased that the Government has listened to councils and protected this money. The Government have also confirmed that this money will be distributed through an existing mechanism, ensuring no additional burdens.

We have raised concerns about the Government's plan to introduce single word gradings as part of the new adult social care assurance regime that commenced on 1 April 2023. We are continuing to work closely with DHSC and CQC on this. We have developed a [workbook](#) to support councils in preparing their self-assessments for the new assurance process. We will further update the document once the CQC pilot process is complete in the Autumn.

Other issues of importance for the sector

Devolution, Economic Growth and Levelling Up – Following a commitment in the Levelling Up White Paper, DLUHC has published a [plan to simplify aspects of the funding landscape](#) for councils, [a long-held ask of local government and the LGA](#). The plan includes the simplification of some existing levelling-up funds, and the introduction of a funding simplification doctrine that will apply to new grants. We will work with DLUHC officials on next steps in line with the Make it Local report.

Planning – We continue to lobby on the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill as it progresses through parliament. The bill is now in the House of Lords, and we continue to brief on our asks and engage peers on proposed amendments.

The LGA and 29 other bodies across the sector wrote to the government to urge them to refrain from introducing the proposed Infrastructure Levy (IL). We have significant concerns that the proposed IL will result in fewer, not more, affordable homes delivered, will expose councils to excessive levels of financial risks, and will be increasingly burdensome and complex for local authorities to implement and manage. The signatories met with Rachel Maclean MP to discuss our concerns and proposed that retention and improvement of the current developer contribution system is the most appropriate solution.

The Government has announced that it will table an amendment to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, removing the requirement for Natural England to issue advice to councils on planning decisions in areas affected by nutrient areas. Instead, Natural England will develop specific solutions in each river catchment area to tackle the causes of nutrient pollution. The Bill is in Parliament and will go through the House of Lords in its next stage. We have [responded to this announcement](#) and highlighted that short-term local solutions are still needed to address environmental concerns about river pollution.

Alongside this, there will be an expansion of Natural England's nutrient mitigation scheme and further work on the new Protected Site Strategies, also led by Natural England in partnership with local communities.

Cost of living pressures in communities – The Household Support Fund is due to end on 31 March 2024 and Government have made no commitment to its continuation. The sector have voiced serious concerns over the feasibility of maintaining welfare offers and crisis support payments if the scheme closes and the impact this will have on communities.

We are working closely with the Department of Work and Pensions and will be surveying the sector in October to build an evidence base on the impact of the grant. We are also holding an event in Parliament with the APPG on Ending the Need for Foodbanks on 13 September, where MPs and Cllr Sharma Tatler from the LGA's cost of living members advisory group will demonstrate how councils have used the grant to reduce poverty and build financial resilience.

Early education and childcare – Councils are considering the implementation of extended access to free early education and childcare. However, the early years sector is facing financial and sustainability challenges and these changes will cause further pressure. These changes are also building on a complex and difficult to navigate system and will place significant additional pressure onto council teams. We are stressing the need for LA funding to support the market and parents and carers, workforce support and capital funding, as well as pressing for assurance that early entitlements will be fully funded to ensure the financial sustainability of the sector.

Climate change – The LGA continue to work with DESNZ on the Local Net Zero Forum, which is working jointly on a business case for devolving council retrofit funding, initially through MCA trailblazer agreements. We will be meeting ministers in the autumn to press for wider devolution to all councils of measures to enable local climate action, in line with our Make it Local report.

Public health – We continue to make the case for multi-year settlements and for more long-term certainty around public health funding. We are pushing for an increased focus on prevention, achieved through an uplift to the Public Health grant. This will support the Government's wider aims by improving health outcomes, reducing health spending, and putting social care and the NHS on a better footing for the long-term.

Education – With the abandonment of the Schools Bill, we are calling for the Department for Education to bring forward alternative legislative arrangements to introduce a register of children being electively home educated, accompanied by sufficient powers for councils to check that home educated children are receiving a suitable provision, where concerns have

been raised that this is not the case. The Schools White Paper proposed that greater inclusion could be achieved by statutory regulation of the academy sector by the DfE. This proposal was also included in the Schools Bill. In the Bill's absence, we are calling for the Department to set out how similar outcomes can be achieved without the need for underpinning statutory powers.

Environment – The Environment Board has written to Ministers on the progress of Biodiversity Net Gain, raising several concerns about key actions needed before implementation begins in November 2023. We continue to work with officials on these issues. Defra has now published details of the responsible authorities for Local Nature Recovery Strategies and confirmed funding allocations to develop these. However, vital information still needs to be added, around the role of local planning authorities, including guidance on how LNRSs will regard local plans.

Integrated Care Systems – We are disappointed that the Government has not given an explicit commitment to supporting the development of a peer-led approach for ICS leaders. We will continue to work with Government and NHS England to ensure that the voice of local government, its interests and its vital contribution is reflected in the future development of ICSs.

Adults with care and support needs – We are calling for a preventative, assets-based approach to health that recognises the essential components of good health beyond NHS treatment, showing how an assets-based approach supports people to make healthy choices and enables them to live healthy, independent and productive lives.

We recently highlighted our concerns to the Government about the rollout of the 'Right Care, Right Person' (RCRP) National Partnership Agreement on Mental Health and Policing. We are asking for an increase in suicide prevention funding alongside the launch of the new Suicide Prevention Strategy.

We are calling for Government to [invest in therapeutic-led reablement](#). We are also calling for a focus on prevention and recovery services to reduce pressures in hospitals ahead of winter, including steps to support the voluntary sector to provide fast, low-level support. We are pushing for an increase in funding for home adaptations so that councils can upgrade existing stock, as well as pressing for simplification of the Disabled Facilities Grant process.

Supported housing – We are a major stakeholder in the consultation work on the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Bill, which gained Royal Assent and became an Act on 29th June. We do have some concerns about the potential capacity challenges for councils if new responsibilities are introduced due to the Bill, highlighting that significant resources will need to be given to a licensing scheme and enforcement of new National Supported Housing Standards. We are also lobbying for long term, sustainable funding for councils to commission supported housing.

Transport – The LGA will continue to call for longer-term, multi-year funding certainty to help patronage levels recover and grow and stick to commitments in the National Bus Strategy. We have called for the Government to reverse its decision to reduce active travel spending by over £200 million over the next two years, and we continue to lobby for more funding for road maintenance as 20-25 per cent cost increases in the sector have resulted in increased repair backlogs and deterioration of road quality.

Digital – We have voiced concerns over the implications of the Public Switch Telephone Network (PSTN) switchover, which will see the 1.7 million people who access technology-enabled care and support at risk of being left without a connection. We have launched a [digital switchover hub](#) with resources to support councils and their residents and led a communications campaign. While the PSTN upgrade is an industry-led process, the LGA calls on the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) to coordinate the multiple bodies involved with the switchover.

Civility in public life – We continue to press for Government to amend the existing legislation on sensitive interest, so that councillors may choose not to have their full home address on the public register in line with MPs registers and to support the sector to improve provision for the safety and security of councillors, particularly in relation to the police. In June 2022, the LGA launched the Debate Not Hate campaign to raise awareness of the issue and improve support locally. The campaign has over 550 individual signatories to our public statement and over 30 councils who have signed up to the campaign as a whole. A new report looking at what more councils can do to support councillors was published at LGA Annual Conference 2023.

Elections delivery – A full review of the May 2023 elections, including the implementation of Voter ID, is expected from the Electoral Commission in September. The Commission will also publish a report looking at the completeness and accuracy of the electoral register in September. In addition, the Commission is working with the electoral sector, including the LGA, to consider bolstering the capacity of electoral services and polling activities. The LGA continues to engage with the Government on implementing provisions in the Elections Act 2022 in the run-up to the 2024 electoral period.