

LGA Lobbying Headlines

Critical issues

Financial and service pressures – We are finalising our submission to the Autumn Budget which will be submitted on 13 October on behalf of all councils.

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, and Home to School Transport. 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. As part of the Sector Support offer for 2023/24 we are working with Solace and the sector to create a new national recruitment campaign that will promote the benefits of working in local government and highlighting the infinite variety of a career in the sector. We are calling for medium-term financial settlements and sufficient funding to enable effective workforce planning, recruitment and retention in addition to compliance with government's National Living Wage policy. We also continue to engage with DfE to seek reform to the apprenticeships' policy that would enable councils and schools to make better use of their Apprenticeship Levy.

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, argue 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 – We have set out how councils can go faster and further, resuming 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.

Whitehall has set out its own 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

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.

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 – We are continuing to lobby on the importance of co-production with local government, and providing an opportunity for local government to collaborate and help shape the Office for Local Government's (Oflog) work capturing and sharing good practice building on current work and expertise of the sector.

Oflog is intending to provide authoritative and accessible data and analysis about the performance of local Government and support its improvement. Our award winning benchmarking platform LG Inform already does what the Oflog dashboard does but so much more. We will continue to seek clarity around how Oflog's scope fits with the current sector led improvement work the LGA leads.

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. The Prime Minister recently scrapped the "consistency in collection" reforms, and this will largely be replaced by the 'Simpler Recycling' scheme announced by Defra last month. We continue to press for clarity on the new 'Simpler Recycling' scheme, 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 – Government announced a Long Term Plan for Towns, which will see £1.1 billion allocated to 55 towns over the next 10 years. It is positive that this funding has been allocated on the basis of need and not via competition, something the LGA has long called for. We will work with DLUHC officials on next steps in line with the Make it Local report.

Planning – The LGA and 29 other bodies across the sector [wrote to the government to urge them to refrain from introducing the proposed Infrastructure Levy \(IL\)](#). Following this, the LGA [responded to the APPG for Housing and Planning inquiry on developer contributions](#), including Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 agreements, setting out what practice works well and what improvements could be made to the system.

The LGA have responded to the Government's consultation on further expansions to [permitted development rights](#), once again calling for them to be urgently revoked as they undermine the plan-led system and local democracy.

The Government's amendment to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill on nutrient neutrality, was defeated in the House of Lords. We are awaiting further detail on the next stages for this proposed policy.

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 held 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 demonstrated how councils have used the grant to reduce poverty and build financial resilience.

We continue to work closely with DWP and we are surveying the sector this month to build an evidence base on the impact of the grant.

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.

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 additional funding for local government 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. LGA lead members and the Chair 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 DfE 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 continue to raise concerns with DSIT around the transfer of all analogue lines (Public Switch Telephone Network or PSTN) to digital internet-based infrastructure by 2025. We are calling on DSIT to coordinate the multiple bodies involved in the switchover and build on the LGA's communications campaign and wider support for the sector.

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 – The Electoral Commission published its full review of the May 2023 elections, including the implementation of Voter ID in September 2023. It finds that some groups struggled to meet the ID requirement, and recommends government improve accessibility and support people who do not have accepted ID. The Commission also published a report looking at the completeness and accuracy of the electoral register. 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.