

LGA Local Government White Paper

Purpose of Report

For decision.

Summary

All LGA Boards have been asked to develop proposals for inclusion in the LGA's Local Government White Paper. This paper sets out proposals for what the Board might suggest under the key areas the LGA has identified.

LGA Plan Theme: Championing climate change and local environments

Recommendation(s)

That the Board:

- (a) Notes the key areas set out in paragraph 5 of interest to the LGA as well as the emerging themes in paragraph 6; and**
- (b) Agrees the proposed approaches set out in paragraphs 8 to 12, and that these are then submitted by the Board as its contribution to the Local Government White Paper.**

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LGA's Local Government White Paper

Background

1. As Lead Members will recall from the paper taken to the Board in September the LGA Chair announced the Local Government White Paper as a priority at the LGA's Annual Conference in July 2023.
2. The White Paper is a broad piece of work designed to allow the LGA to influence manifestos and the detailed delivery plans of both the first year and the longer-term programme of a new/returning government.
3. Feedback from the sector has suggested that the fundamental problem we need to solve is the relationship between national and local government. We need a relationship which enables us to maximise our delivery for the public. A general election provides an opportunity to reset this relationship.
4. Therefore, the aim of the Local Government White Paper as agreed at the Executive Advisory Board in September is to *demonstrate how stronger and more empowered local government could deliver the public's priorities more effectively and strengthen the value that the public place on the UK's democratic structures.*
5. In order to provide a structure to the LGA's engagement with member authorities and stakeholders members agreed an analysis framework. There are 3 areas where the LGA is seeking specific feedback:
 - 5.1. **Public service reform:** How can fully empowered local government lead public service reform for better places and services?
 - 5.2. **Enabling local leadership:** How do we re-set the relationship with Whitehall?
 - 5.3. **Funding and resources:** What could local government "offer" in relation to any new resources?
6. From the feedback so far key emerging themes are:
 - 6.1. **Financial sustainability:** Continue to retain a focus on the issue of quantum. Some councils are keen to look at what reform of the existing system could enable councils to do ie business rates review, tourist tax options
 - 6.2. **Meaningful devolution/constitutional settlement:** An opportunity to use discussions about a new constitutional settlement to make the case for councils and greater devolved powers. Councils keen that devolution is meaningful and not just a means of reorganisation.
 - 6.3. **Accountability, transparency and assurance:** Wanting to be at the forefront of what this could look like. Can we make an offer as a sector?
 - 6.4. **Statutory duties and role in prevention:** Councils are keen that we shine a light on prevention. Strong feeling that we could have a greater role in this. Some councils raising questions about whether we can fulfil all of our current statutory duties - does this lead to a broader debate?

- 6.5. **Partnership working/convening powers:** Councils feel that we should have a nationally recognised role as the convener of partnerships in our localities.
- 6.6. **Recognising local leadership:** At a time when local government is more trusted than national politicians how do we use this relationship to deliver for our communities. Local leaders want to be able to deliver hope. What does that look like and how do we enable it? How do we get national government to trust us?

Proposal

7. As discussed at the September meeting the Safer and Stronger Communities Board needs to develop proposals setting out how a stronger and more empowered local government can deliver more effectively than central government on the public's priorities around reducing crime and anti-social behaviour, improving community safety, and strengthening consumer protection as well as emergency planning. Arranged below under the three major areas where the LGA is seeking feedback are proposals for the Safer and Stronger Communities Board's contribution to the White Paper

Public Service Reform

8. The Board has a number of legislative changes it has been pressing for (some for significant periods of time). It is therefore suggested the Board proposes the White Paper make the case for:
- 8.1. Comprehensive reform of the taxi and private hire vehicle licensing legislation to make it fit for the 21st century.
- 8.2. Introducing cumulative impact assessments under the Gambling Act as soon as possible, as pledged under the recent review of the legislation, and the use of these assessments to be considered more widely as a mechanism for examining impacts on communities.
- 8.3. Introducing health as a licensing objective in the Licensing Act 2003 and the Gambling Act.
- 8.4. Amending the Higher-Risk Buildings (Descriptions and Supplementary Provisions) Regulations 2023 introduced under the Building Safety Act 2022, to ensure regulators can consider buildings as a whole.

Enabling Local Leadership

9. The Board has less developed positions around strengthening local leadership in the community safety space, while there are long standing legislative frameworks and consultative arrangements for the Health and Safety Executive and Food Standards Agency to coordinate activity with councils. Members will be aware however that the Home Office review of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) Parts 1 and 2 has looked at the role of PCCs in the partnership landscape. This has included their relationship with community safety partnerships (CSPs), with the Home Office having recently commenced a review of CSPs.

10. When the Board considered the future of CSPs at its meeting in January 2021, members expressed concerns about PCCs having greater powers of direction in respect of CSPs, such as the ability to merge or direct them. Members also highlighted that CSPs were able to address problems at a community level, while PCCs were not so linked into local circumstances and issues. Members did however reflect on the differing quality of CSPs. The Board may therefore wish to propose the White Paper highlights the importance of sub-police force partnership arrangements in being able to respond to local issues and circumstances, with CSPs having the tools, powers and resources they need to take action. The Board could also highlight the need for investment in the training and resources available to CSPs.
11. Feedback we have received from council officers supporting CSPs is that the growth of statutory duties to cooperate to address particular crimes (such as those around the provision of emergency accommodation for victims and domestic abuse and to tackle serious violence) is becoming a burden to CSPs and reducing their ability to act more flexibly. The Board may therefore want to propose there is a review of existing community safety duties to cooperate between local partners with a view to rationalising and reducing them.

Funding and Resources

12. Funding and resources for a range of council community safety and regulatory services has been a Board priority for some time. It is therefore suggested the Board proposes the White Paper makes the case for:
 - 12.1. Enable councils to set licensing fees under the Licensing Act 2003.
 - 12.2. Funding health and safety at work functions through a fee for intervention approach, with this model also being explored for the funding of wider environmental health and trading standards services.
 - 12.3. Dedicated funding for apprenticeships and recruitment programmes related to the regulatory services workforce to boost the future pipeline of officers entering local government.
 - 12.4. Moving to multi-year funding settlements for community safety projects and initiatives in order to provide local partners with certainty about funding arrangements which would allow greater innovation.
 - 12.5. A shift in the allocation of funding resources towards a more substantial investment in prevention and early intervention programmes to reduce the number of people entering the criminal justice system and re-offending. This will have the long term benefit of reducing crime rates, as well as reducing costs around policing and community safety. Such programmes could also reduce instances of violence against women and girls and with issues like domestic abuse.
 - 12.6. Further and continued investment in measures that build community cohesion and resilience within communities. This will limit the ability of extremists to exploit issues to create polarisation, disorder, hate crime, and increased risks of

radicalisation. This includes funding for the Special Interest Group on Countering Extremism.

Implications for Wales

13. The Board may wish to consider seeking views from the WLGA on the differing model of local/central partnership which has developed in Wales since devolution, as well as from the models in Northern Ireland and Scotland, and whether there is anything the LGA might learn on the delivery of community safety services to inform the proposals it makes.

Financial Implications

14. There are no direct financial implications arising from this work for the Board. In terms of impact on government and local authority budgets where possible the options developed by each Board should concentrate on what could be delivered by reprioritising existing departmental budgets.

Equalities implications

15. As crime can have a greater impact on people with protected characteristics, the ability to tackle crime and disorder more effectively will improve equality, diversity and inclusion within communities, and the proposals set out in the paper will assist in improving equality.

Next steps

16. The proposals set out in paragraphs 8 to 12 which are agreed by the Board will be submitted as the Board's contribution to the development of the Local Government White Paper.