# 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 on what the Board might suggests under the key areas the LGA has identified.

**LGA Plan Theme:** Putting people first

## 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) **Comments on the proposed approaches set out in paragraphs 8 to 19 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 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 convenor 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 Community Wellbeing 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 care, health and helping adults with care and support needs. Arranged below under the three major areas where the LGA is seeking feedback are proposals for the Community Wellbeing Board's contribution to the White Paper

**Public Service Reform**

8. The LGA's current work with the NHS Confederation and the Health Devolution Commission around health and devolution is likely to conclude that there are the right legal structures and powers already in place in relation to health and care integration through Integrated Care Systems (ICSs). From the Board's perspective we will want to emphasise the importance of leadership, values and behaviour as the most effective drivers of real change, with the importance of government giving more time and space for local leaders to do this. As part of this we can also emphasise that ICSs must work in equal partnerships with place based leaders such as Health and Wellbeing Boards amongst others, with the key point that we build from the bottom up and actively promote the principle of subsidiarity.

9. Rather than recommend any further legislative or structural reforms, it is proposed the Board suggests the NHS and local government need stability rather than any further change, and that going forward the focus should be on sector-led improvement as a driver for improvements through the dissemination of good practice and by embedding a culture of shared learning in which all parts of the system are committed to continuous improvement. Alongside that it is proposed the Board argues for rationalising or reducing national targets and performance management of ICSs, while calling on government to provide ICSs and their partners with greater certainty to plan joined up services.

10. However in relation to public health it is proposed the Board commissions work to consider what powers councils have around developing healthy neighbourhoods. This would involve working with key stakeholders to identify the gaps, barriers and key challenges to developing healthy neighbourhoods (including planning, advertising, parks, green spaces etc) and looking to identify innovative practice. As part of this work it is proposed the Board commissions some work looking at local laws, by-laws and their role in enabling / empowering councils to create healthier neighbourhoods.

**Enabling Local Leadership**

11. Addressing issues of loneliness, social isolation and good mental health are essential for a healthy and prosperous society. Demand for mental health support increased during the pandemic and is anticipated to increase further due to the cost-of-living crisis. Local government must be at the heart of a new drive to improve our nation's mental health. Councils have a range of statutory duties and non-statutory functions related to mental health and supporting mental wellness. From housing to public health, social care to the identification of children and adults with special educational needs and disabilities, to voluntary sector support and culture and leisure services, councils lead local services that help prevent mental ill health, support early intervention, respond to crisis and provide ongoing support. It is therefore proposed the Board makes the case for councils to be put on an equal footing with NHS clinical mental health services, and highlight their central role in partnership with health in supporting wellbeing and mental health in the community.

12. There is a strong link between addictive behaviour and mental health, and of course addictive behaviour whether in relation to alcohol, drugs, nicotine or gambling, has a significant impact on health outcomes. Addictive behaviour is also an important factor in issues like domestic abuse and other forms of criminal behaviour. A range of factors are effecting the demand for addiction related services including the impact of lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic on alcohol misuse, and the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan which has reduced production of opium and heroin by 95 per cent. The result has been an increase in the supply of synthetic alternatives like fentanyl, which requires different approaches to treatment. As with mental health support early intervention to support people with addiction can improve health outcomes and in the longer term reduce the costs on the health and care system. The Board may therefore wish to highlight the role councils play in supporting residents address their addictive behaviour.

13. Alongside this role around mental health and addiction it is proposed the Board suggests the White Paper continues to promote councils' leadership role in addressing and preventing loneliness and social isolation and the role of public health, social care, and wider council services such as libraries and open spaces. The importance of tackling loneliness and social isolation also link to the work proposed in paragraph 10 around healthy neighbourhoods as part of a whole-place approach to preventing ill health and support wellbeing.

14. The most recent Census in 2021 puts the estimated number of unpaid carers at 5 million in England and Wales. This means that around 9 per cent of people are providing unpaid care. Based on assessments by Age UK this figure could be even higher. It is proposed the Board suggests the Local Government White Paper sets out the vital role councils play to supporting carers who support people often with complex needs, such as dementia, in the community. It is suggested the Board make the point in the White Paper that Government need to recognise the support councils provide to carers and how supporting carers – particularly support to help mitigate the physical, emotional and financial consequences of caring – is central to helping unpaid carers continue their invaluable work, which also helps reduce future pressures on health and social care.

15. Where people are not directly supported by unpaid carers, high quality care and support services are dependent on a skilled and valued workforce. The Board may therefore want to suggest government builds on the vision the LGA, the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services as well as the wider social care sector have developed of what should be in a care workforce strategy (as well as drawing on Skills for Care's work to develop a care workforce strategy) to put in place a national care workforce strategy equivalent to that for the NHS.

16. Work is underway within the NHS to understand how digital technological changes, such as the widespread adoption of artificial intelligence can transform the quality of health care as well as health outcomes. Within the LGA Partners in Care and Health are assisting councils to make better use of digital technology. The Board may wish to suggest the White Paper calls for government to work more closely with councils in identifying and removing barriers for using digital technology to improve the delivery of social care, and that the needs of social care are embedded in national policy, strategy and delivery around the use of digital technology in health and care.

17. The lack of collaboration and coordination between Whitehall departments also impacts on local government's ability to deliver improvements in health and care. The Board may want to suggest government looks at how the silos between departments on cross-cutting issues such as addressing the social determinants of health can be broken down to put local government in a better position to improve health and care outcomes.

**Funding and Resources**

18. Funding and resources for adult social care and public health remains one of the Board's priorities for this board cycle. The LGA has set out propositions for the funding of adult social care in its submission to the Autumn Statement. It is therefore suggested the Board suggests the White Paper makes the case for:

    18.1. The need to address the balance within the health care system between acute care and the rest of the system, and how an invest to save approach to health and care (which includes addressing the wider determinants of health) can deliver significant economic benefits.

    18.2. Certainty of funding with local government and health partners being given long term certainty in order for example to invest in more preventative interventions that will have an impact on demand for acute and more intensive care and support.

    18.3. Funding to enable improvement in pay (parity with comparable roles in the NHS), conditions and career development opportunities for the frontline care workforce not directly employed by councils.

    18.4. An independent review of care worker pay for those not directly employed by councils.

    18.5. Substantial new investment to help tackle unmet and under-met need through an expansion of provision, including preventative services, and in new models of care, including housing, and funding for the voluntary and community sector.

19. Alongside the White Paper the LGA may want to consider a cross sector campaign that raises awareness of what adult social care is, what its value is, why it matters to people, and good examples of innovation. Early discussions on what such a campaign might look like have started between the LGA, ADASS, Skills for Care and Social Care Future. The exact shape of this is still to be worked out; a discussion with aforementioned stakeholders, and others, is due to take place at NCASC 2023.

## Implications for Wales

20. 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 health and care services to inform the proposals it makes.

## Financial Implications

21. 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

22. As the support of care and health services can have a greater impact on people with protected characteristics, making care and health services more effective will improve equality, diversity and inclusion within communities, and the proposals set out in the paper will assist in improving equality.

## Next steps

23. The proposals set out in paragraphs 8 to 19 which are agreed by the Board will be submitted as the Board's contribution to the development of the Local Government White Paper.