

LGA Lobbying Headlines

Critical issues

Financial and service pressures – It was hugely disappointing that the Autumn Statement did not provide the funding needed to protect children's and adults' services.

Our recently updated funding gap analysis shows the cost to councils of delivering their services at current levels will exceed their core funding by £2.4 billion in 2023/24 and £1.6 billion 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, SEND and homelessness, nor does it include funding to improve or expand council services. In the run up to the Local Government Finance Settlement, 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.

Workforce capacity – According to our latest Workforce Survey, more than 9 in 10 councils are experiencing difficulties with senior leadership and front-line service delivery roles. 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 potential variety in 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 future National Living Wage policy.

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, and are arguing for more effective engagement at political level, and clarity about how the Illegal Migration Act is to be implemented.

Private rented sector reform – The Renters (Reform) Bill - which aims to improve the system for private renters and landlords in England - was carried over into the King's Speech on 7 November, and is currently in Committee Stage. While there is much in the Bill for the LGA to support, including abolishing unfair Section 21 "no fault" evictions; ending the system of assured shorthold tenancies; creating a new register of PRS landlords and establishing an Ombudsman for the PRS to help tenants and landlords to resolve disputes, further measures are required to fully realise our shared ambition for a fairer, more secure, and higher quality private rented sector. The Bill places significant new regulatory and enforcement responsibilities on councils and for the reforms to be effective, it is vital that councils are properly resourced.

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.

We are pleased that the Government has extended until June 2025 the Public Works Loan Board policy margin announced at Spring Budget 2023 to support local authority investment in social housing.

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 are pleased that the Government has acted on our urgent and consistent calls to restore Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates to the 30th percentile of market rents. However, we are disappointed that the Autumn Statement did not include a commitment to uprate the Local Housing Allowance rate to determine the subsidy for claims in respect of people living in temporary accommodation as the maximum subsidy, which remains capped at 90 per cent of the January 2011 rates. It is critical that this higher level of subsidy is available as local authorities spent £1.74 billion supporting 104,000 households in temporary accommodation, both the highest figures since records began. We continue to seek 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 providing an opportunity for local government to collaborate and help shape the Office for Local Government's (Oflog's) work capturing and sharing good practice building on current work and expertise of the sector.

Oflog have recently set out another suite of metrics that they are looking to add to their dashboard. These metrics are already on our award winning benchmarking platform, LG Inform. We are aware that Oflog are looking to pilot their approach to having "early warning conversations" with councils and potential peer reviews. We continue to raise with Oflog the need to ensure that this work is not duplicating the LGA's work in this area including the work of our regional teams and member peers and our corporate peer challenge programme. We will submit evidence setting out our concerns to the LUHC select committee inquiry into Oflog.

Children's social care – Challenges around placements for children in care, particularly those with the most complex needs, remain critical, with the continued use of unregulated placements for some children due to a lack of regulated provision. Costs are escalating

rapidly amid difficulties in finding placements able or willing to provide appropriate support. The Government plans to establish two “Regional Care Cooperative” pathfinders involving around 20 councils to trial new approaches to commissioning provision, along with investment for some councils in fostering recruitment and retention work. However, the sector has significant concerns that these will not deliver change at the scale and pace required.

Adult social care – We used our Autumn Statement submission (and accompanying public-facing media and campaigning work) to highlight the continuing pressures on adult social care, despite the investment announced at Autumn Statement 2022. In particular we highlighted directors’ concerns about meeting statutory duties on market sustainability and prevention, the scale of the recruitment and retention challenge facing the care workforce, and persistent levels of unmet and under-met need. Our joint press release with ADASS highlighted the pressures facing the sector, including planned in-year overspends.

In our response to the Autumn Statement, we expressed our disappointment at the lack of new investment for adult social care and were clear that the government should not think that the adult social care system is fixed. While we also welcomed the increase in the National Living Wage, we pointed out that care providers will expect to see their increased wage costs reflected in the fees councils pay.

On assurance, the five pilot councils have now completed their CQC assessment and received their assessment reports and indicative ratings. 4 of the 5 received an indicative rating of ‘Good’, and the other received an indicative rating of ‘Requires Improvement’. Full rollout of assurance is due to commence early in the new year and we continue to push CQC and DHSC for clarity on when the first tranche of 20 councils to go through assurance will be notified.

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.

Other issues of importance for the sector

Devolution, Economic Growth and Levelling Up – The Government published a framework for extending deeper devolution to existing Level 3 Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs). The Level 4 framework provides new powers for MCAs to draw down on, and, based on the trailblazer deals negotiated with the Greater Manchester and West Midlands Combined Authorities, plans to roll out single settlements to Level 4 mayoral areas. The Government's framework for devolution is an important step which the LGA has long called for. We will continue to advocate for a genuine 'local first' approach to policy making across Whitehall, and support calls for a National Devolution Baseline for England.

Government announced a Long Term Plan for Towns, which will see £1.1 billion allocated to 55 towns over the next 10 years. Government also announced projects awarded funding from the third and final round of the Levelling Up Fund. It is positive that both funding announcements have been allocated on the basis of need and not via competition, as we had proposed. We will work with DLUHC officials on next steps to the plan for towns in line with the Make it Local report.

Planning – The Government has committed in the Autumn Statement to ensuring councils will in the future be able to set planning fees to cover the full cost of processing major applications which will mean local taxpayers no longer have to subsidise these costs. This is welcome and we will continue to work with DLUHC on the details in due course. Legislative amendments to increase planning application fees will also take effect on 6 December 2023. Application fees will increase by 25% across the board, rising to 35% for major schemes.

The Government will be announcing a consultation on a new Permitted Development Right (PDR) for subdividing houses into two flats without changing the façade. It is disappointing that the Government continues to extend national permitted development rights further. We continue to call for PDRs to be urgently revoked as they undermine the plan-led system and local democracy.

Cost of living pressures in communities - We are very pleased that the Government has acted on our calls for a third round of the Local Authority Housing Fund which will help councils support families to move into their own homes and reduce homelessness risks amidst reduced supply of temporary and move-on accommodation for councils.

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.

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 Chair and LINZ Lead Members met with Ministers as part of the second Ministerial Local Net Zero meeting, discussing devolution and funding simplification. The LGA has continue campaigning, launching polling, holding parliamentary events, and engaging on the detail of a range of policy, including on retrofit, grid, transport and more.

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.

Smokefree Generation and Teen Vaping – As legislation progresses through Parliament, we continue to support the Government's ambition of creating a smokefree generation. We want tighter controls on the sale and marketing of vapes to children and a complete ban on the sale of disposable vapes. The LGA is concerned about the impact vaping is having on children and young people and the environment impact of discarded vapes.

Education – Since 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 LGA continue to press the case for crucial further details in the operation of Biodiversity Net Gain, government is due to publish much of this soon as part of a wider nature strategy. 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.

Waste – The LGA continue to engage Government and councils on the detail of the new Extended Producer Responsibility scheme, which transfers the costs (estimated £900m a year for England) for dealing with packaging waste from the state to producers. We are also engaging Government on the detail of the 'simpler recycling' reforms, which while including some significant lobbying wins, present some new concerns. We also continue to press the Government on the solution for treating products containing Persistent Organic Pollutants,

the Emissions Trading Scheme application to Energy from Waste, waste prevention strategy, fly-tipping, and single-use vapes.

Adults with care and support needs – We remain concerned about the rollout of the ‘Right Care, Right Person’ (RCRP) National Partnership Agreement on Mental Health and Policing. Implementation should be planned and we need a clearer understanding of the impact on social services. The Chair is hosting a roundtable to discuss this in January 2024. 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 need more funding for home adaptations so that councils can upgrade existing stock, and are pressing for simplification of the Disabled Facilities Grant process.

Supported housing – We need long term, sustainable funding for councils to commission supported housing as well as well working with DLUHC to ensure the upcoming supported housing act is implemented in a way that takes into account council pressures and improves outcomes for residents.

Transport – The LGA continues 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 said the Government should 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 – A new report looking at what more councils can do to support councillors was published at LGA Annual Conference 2023. In light of international events and rising community tensions that may impact elected members, we wrote to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Michael Gove MP, in October to ask him to urgently amend the existing legislation so that councillors may choose not to have their full home address on the public register. The Home Office is also conducting a Protective Security Review and in November, the LGA facilitated a Roundtable with Home Office officials and councillors who have experienced significant abuse, threats and in some cases physical assaults. We are raising significant concerns about councillor safety and funding for physical security measures through this review.

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 is working with the electoral sector, including the LGA, to consider bolstering the capacity of electoral services and polling activities. A response to the Commission's report is expected on 30

November. 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.