

LGA Lobbying Headlines – March 2024

Critical issues

Financial and service pressures – We welcomed the additional £600 million in the 2024/5 Final Local Government Finance Settlement. However, this falls short of the £4 billion funding gap, in this year and next, identified in our October 2023 funding gap analysis. Our analysis excludes the resources needed to address existing underfunding in areas such as adult and children’s social care, SEND and homelessness, nor does it include funding to improve or expand council services. We will continue to make the case to the Government for sufficient funding and multi-year settlements for local government – including in the run up to the Spring Budget on 6 March - and for certainty on reforms such as the Fair Funding Review, the business rates reset and the New Homes Bonus.

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. 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 (which so far is unknown). The LGA is running ongoing campaigns to attract talent into the sector, such as the graduate Pathways to Planning scheme, and the first national workforce campaign for the sector, which is being piloted in the north east during 2024.

Private rented sector reform – The Renters (Reform) Bill - which aims to improve the system for private renters and landlords in England - has completed its Committee Stage and a date for Report Stage is awaited. 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 will be vital that councils are properly resourced.

Housebuilding – With housing and homelessness pressures ongoing, we continue to make the case for councils to be able to resume their historic role as major builders of affordable homes through implementation of [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, and a minimum 10-year rent deal for councils landlords, to enable councils to invest.

Homelessness –We have commissioned research that will support our lobbying to uprate the Local Housing Allowance rate that determines the subsidy for claims in respect of people living in temporary accommodation - this currently remains capped at 90 per cent of the January 2011 rates. This work will also support our lobbying for LHA rates to continue at the 30th percentile of market rents from 2025-26. We continue to seek an explicit, national-level focus on homelessness prevention work (with an associated long-term, multi-year 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. We have expressed concern that the government's proposals to further restrict eligibility criteria for social housing and extended qualification periods could result in a rise in homelessness.

Asylum and resettlement – many councils will be marking the two-year anniversary of the Homes for Ukraine scheme with both guests and sponsors. We continue to stress the need for Government to take account of the cumulative impact of asylum and resettlement on local areas. Whilst it is anticipated smaller numbers are moving on from asylum accommodation, the impact of the Home Office's continuing [clearance of the asylum backlog](#), the lack of equitable approach accommodation procurement and lack of funding is being compounded by housing and support pressures from Afghan resettlement and ongoing issues with councils' support for [Ukrainians](#).

Oflog – The LGA is keen that Oflog succeeds in delivering real benefits to the local government sector and the wider public.

The LGA welcomes the following developments since it submitted its [evidence to the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Select Committee](#):

- The first meeting of the Political Advisory Group (with other meetings for officers) has taken place
- There have been helpful discussions to inform the development of a shared narrative which will set out the respective and complementary roles and responsibilities of Oflog and the LGA, and how the two organisations will work collaboratively and minimise duplication, with a shared aim of supporting improvement in the sector.

In its written response to the committee, the LGA sought to address some apparent misconceptions which had emerged via some commentators suggesting that LG Inform was not free to access, not available to the public, not comprehensive and that somehow the data was manipulated. None of this is the case and Oflog is clear about that.

Children's social care – Challenges around placements for children in care, particularly those with the most complex needs, remain critical, with costs escalating rapidly amid difficulties in finding placements able or willing to provide appropriate support. We are speaking with the Department for Education about potential measures to improve sufficiency and alleviate pressure. Some councils are looking to make cuts to early help services due to ongoing budget pressures despite the additional funding announced for social care in the Local Government Funding Settlement which risks increasing demand in the longer term.

Adult social care – Additional funding for social care was announced in the Local Government Funding Settlement, but substantial pressures remain which we continue to highlight. In particular we are highlighting 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.

We have called for adequate new burdens funding for councils to reflect the time and energy needed in the assurance process, and adequate notice of assessment for councils.

SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) – We are engaging with the Department for Education at both Ministerial and official levels on the testing of proposals in the SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan in the nine Change programme partnership areas. 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 remain concerned 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

Planning – Legislative amendments to increase planning application fees took effect on 6 December 2023. Application fees have increased 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 – Evidence shows that many households continue to face considerable challenges meeting their essential living costs. Councils report that demand for local welfare services remains at record levels. Despite this, the current Household Support Fund (HSF) is due to end on the 31 March. To prevent a cliff-edge in support and increased pressure on other local services, we are calling for the HSF to be extended for a minimum of year.

Alongside this, we continue to explore a clear long-term role for councils in supporting low-income households as part of their wider work to improve life chances, tackle inequalities

and improve economic prosperity, and call for local welfare funding put on a sustainable long-term footing.

Early education and childcare – Councils are delivering on 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 highlighting the challenges facing providers financially. We have welcomed the DfE's new recruitment campaign for early years workers to help deal with capacity issues facing providers.

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 is working on a range of policy reforms, including building standards, retrofit skills, transport, renewable energy, nature, electricity grid.

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 single-use vapes – We have strongly welcomed the government's decision to ban single-use vapes, a move the LGA has campaigned for. Single use vapes are inherently unsustainable, causing issues both around litter and in the recycling process, as well as raising the risk of young people taking up vaping. As legislation progresses through Parliament, we continue to support the Government's ambition of creating a smokefree generation.

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 LNRs will regard local plans.

Waste – The LGA continues 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. Government has also now published proposals for waste electricals which we are engaging with. 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 (we are expecting a consultation soon), waste prevention strategy and fly-tipping. The LGA is engaging with government around concerns relating to the funding formula for weekly food waste collections, including whether this adequately reflects inflationary and supply chain issues.

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 in partnership with councils and other stakeholders and we need a clearer understanding of the impact on social services. We are asking for an increase in suicide prevention funding alongside the launch of the new Suicide Prevention Strategy.

We are calling for the 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.

Digital – We have published the results of a survey of councils about the 2G/3G mobile network switch off. We have used the results of the survey to highlight concerns with the impact on technology and services from this and the transfer of analogue lines, and how the switch off will work in more rural areas.

Civility in public life – Through the Debate Not Hate campaign, we have continued to raise the profile of the level of harassment and intimidation faced by councillors, making the case for all councillors to be able to withhold their home addresses, and for dedicated government support and funding for councillor security. We worked with the Jo Cox Foundation to ensure local government issues were reflected in their Civility Commission’s final report, and achieved significant broadcast, print and online media coverage, with LGA spokespeople prominently represented, of councillor security concerns during February 2024.

Access to elected office – as part of the Cabinet Office/DWP Disability Action Plan, the government committed to introducing funding arrangements to support disabled people seeking election by 2025. We have been calling for a system to mitigate the additional costs faced by disabled candidates to replace the now-closed Access to Elected Office fund.

Elections delivery – The Government has published a [response to the Committee’s](#)

[enquiry on voter ID](#). The Government recommitted to continuing to review the impact of voter ID at the next two UK Parliamentary elections as per the statutory requirement. The Government also recognised that some demographic groups are more likely to be impacted by the voter identification requirement and that there is work still to be done to raise awareness of the free voter authority certificate. They did not commit to additional funding for targeted local awareness raising campaign as suggested by the Committee.