

Re-thinking local

#CouncilsCan

Executive summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed the communities in which we live and work.

The next six months have the potential to shape the direction of this country for years to come.

The challenges ahead are as great as those we faced during the pandemic.¹ We need to rebuild our economy, get people back to work and create new hope in our communities.

As we begin to look forward and rebuild, we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to not just recover but to go even further – to address the stark inequalities the pandemic has exposed and that have remained entrenched for too long; to connect with people’s identities and sense of community; to harness the energy and dynamism which have been the hallmarks of our response to this crisis; to rebuild the economy so that it benefits everyone.

We need to capture this moment and use it as a catalyst for a new way of working – a reset. To respond to the significant economic challenges ahead we need a new joint endeavour between local and national government. For too long, successive Governments have worked from Whitehall, in silos and largely out of touch with local communities. With the upcoming English Devolution White Paper and this year’s Spending Review, the Government has a unique opportunity to reset our communities’ relationship with their Government and, in doing so, level up the inequalities faced by our communities.

To achieve this, local leaders must be able to bring government departments and agencies together to deliver locally determined and accountable outcomes that go beyond the institutional boundaries of most of our local and national agencies. And they must switch focus from process and bidding for grants to one of outcomes and rewards for achieving them. Communities need the Devolution White Paper to offer the broadest vision possible. One which addresses the biggest public service issues such as social care, health and skills and employment. The vision must be bold and invite devolution deals which are shaped by the needs of local areas and help to level up inequalities between our communities and our regions.

¹ HM Treasury (June 2020) ‘Forecasts for the UK economy: a comparison of independent forecasts, No. 395’. Latest average economic forecast for the UK in 2020: -9.2 per cent https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/892791/Forecomp_June_2020.pdf

These new powers must be backed by a financial settlement that takes full account of the local costs of recovery and recognises the benefits of investment directed by those closest to the opportunities for shared prosperity. The Spending Review will need to move away from the traditional drivers of departmental spending towards a degree of fiscal decentralisation in line with some of the world's most productive economies. The economic challenges our communities are facing require a bold response – place-based budgets which are in tune with the needs of the local economy. We need to re-think how we fund public services – not try to fit new and bold ideas into old frameworks.

During this crisis local government has proven what we can do for and with our communities when we are called upon. We have shown that we know our residents, our businesses and our partners best and that we're trusted to work on their behalf. Rather than ask why local, any centralised approach should have to explain why not local?

Council leaders and the councils they represent stand shoulder to shoulder with their local communities, rallying residents and protecting businesses. Hard working frontline staff have continued to deliver essential public services and developed new services and approaches at pace and under pressure, leading rather than waiting to be led by national government.

Councils have never been more trusted by their residents to make decisions for them locally: polling conducted during June 2020² shows that 71 per cent of residents trust their council (an increase of 12 percentage points since February) and that the vast majority (75 per cent, an increase of 12 percentage points since February) are satisfied with the way their local council runs things in their area. Government should embrace the opportunity this local trust presents.

The trust placed in councils by their communities has been matched by innovation, resilience and bold leadership throughout the pandemic. Over the past few months councils have brought together local partners and built on the strength already present in our communities.

2 LGA (June 2020). 'Polling on resident satisfaction with councils: June 2020'. www.local.gov.uk/polling-resident-satisfaction-councils-june-2020

We're facing a new world where the social and economic challenges posed over the last decade have taken on even more prominence. Inequalities endured by many have been starkly exposed. There are calls from across the country for a renewed focus on environmental, economic and social sustainability. Only councils understand the unique challenges of their areas – and understand too the limitations of a recovery led from the centre.

We need a clear focus on the future of the country, on the quality of life that we offer our residents and on the role of councils, as leaders of place. The governance debate must be led by what can be delivered.

People have looked to us for leadership and we have proven that we can deliver the change our residents want.

This document sets out a series of offers to Government, alongside a set of asks and is the start of a process. A process to re-think our approach to these problems and a process that leads central government to re-think its view of us. We collectively need to re-think local and we hope this is the first step.

Now is the time for national government to grasp these opportunities and to lay the foundations for a future that is local.



Councillor James Jamieson

Local Government Association (LGA) Chairman



Councillor Nick Forbes CBE

Labour Group Leader and LGA Senior Vice-Chair



Councillor Izzi Seccombe OBE

Conservative Group Leader and LGA Vice-Chairman



Councillor Howard Sykes MBE

Liberal Democrat Group Leader and LGA Vice-Chair



Councillor Marianne Overton MBE

Independent Group Leader and LGA Vice-Chair

Our offers and our asks

The Government must:

- offer the broadest vision possible in its upcoming English Devolution White Paper
- present a localist Spending Review with place-based budgets, in tune with the needs of the local economy, communities and the environment.

Our offer to Government

Our ask of Government

<p>Economic recovery</p>	<p>To deliver an ambitious programme of financial stimulus and have the knowledge and expertise to direct funds where they will be able to deliver immediate impact to protect jobs and livelihoods and support long-term transformation of the economy, infrastructure and services in every locality.</p>	<p>To set the national fiscal and policy framework which will support councils to deliver on this agenda.</p>
<p>Adult social care</p>	<p>To support the Government’s reform process by facilitating the essential cross-party cooperation that is a prerequisite for success.</p>	<p>To work with all parts of social care, particularly those with lived experience, on a way forward for the long-term future of care that is informed by the many valuable lessons from the pandemic on the role and value of social care in all our lives.</p>
<p>Relationship with the NHS</p>	<p>To collaborate and work jointly with NHS partners, not only with frontline staff but also around commissioning and planning to ensure that care and support is planned and delivered as close to home as possible.</p>	<p>To ensure that system-wide plans of integrated care systems and sustainability and transformation partnerships build on and knit together place-based plans and neighbourhood delivery. The NHS needs to work closely with health and wellbeing boards on local transformation and sustainability plans, incorporating the whole of health, social care and public health.</p>

Our offer to Government

Our ask of Government

Public health	To convene the wide range of local partners and expertise needed in order to deliver a place-based approach to public health.	While we live with COVID-19, Government must work with council leaders and partners to ensure the consequences do not impact more on some groups, communities and places than others and widen health inequalities.
Supporting vulnerable local people	To continue to work with all partners to protect those most vulnerable to COVID-19 from the immediate, short-term and longer term impacts of the pandemic.	To work with councils to design the future programme of support to the vulnerable so there is an integrated and holistic offer based around the support councils are already providing to shielded and non-shielded vulnerable people.
Children and young people	To build on the effective partnerships established with schools and settings during the pandemic to support and protect children, young people and families.	To invest in preventative universal and early help services to ensure that children, young people and families receive the practical, emotional, educational and mental health support they need, as soon as they need it.
Climate change and air quality	To build on the public's new sense of ownership of the environment and local green recovery, with councils doing more of the heavy lifting to get local buy-in for making a transition to a green economy.	To facilitate for a locally-led green recovery, with funding flexibilities to stimulate the economy and as part of long-term allocations guaranteed for councils which will allow them to invest in green housing, jobs, infrastructure and other environmental measures locally and for the long term.
Skills and the green economy	To provide an integrated and devolved approach to skills, increasing qualifications and bringing fiscal benefits.	To back the LGA's 'Work Local' model for integrated and devolved employment and skills provision by funding local pathfinders in each region.

1. Introduction

COVID-19 has made us think differently about our lives.

For many of us, our homes have become our offices, schools, a place to relax and exercise. Returning to the old normal is no longer enough. People have seen what is possible during the crisis and we need to reassess what we want from our local areas, public services, our communities and lives. What does local mean to our communities now?

Re-thinking councils' place in the local community

Councils do not exist to simply deliver services or administer government grants. Councillors and the organisations they represent serve as the democratic leaders of our communities.

After a decade of austerity, local government's ability to tackle inequalities was already constrained. However, when the crisis struck and funding was released, councils were nimble in their support for communities, moving quickly to make sure people could access food; providing shelter for the homeless; shielding the vulnerable; and supporting local businesses.

³ LGA (June 2020). 'Building more inclusive economies'. www.local.gov.uk/inclusive-economies

A local approach is the right way to level up the inequalities we face.³ While central government is working on a strategy for the national economy, local leaders have already introduced decisive local measures which protect key sectors.

In the wake of this pandemic, where we have seen pre-existing inequalities – particularly for those from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds – come to the fore, we must think again about what people want from us. Expectations have changed and we need to respond to that.

Re-thinking what we value

During the pandemic, the country and communities have pulled together in ways we haven't seen in decades. Many people have found a new sense of purpose and community in supporting their neighbours, delivering food or medicines to those in need, or just being that regular phone call to people who would otherwise be lonely or isolated.

The crisis has highlighted severe inequalities within our population. Financial struggles, health risks, and poor housing conditions have been brought sharply into focus.

It has forced us to confront what is important to us all, particularly what we want the future to look like. As the part of government that has the most impact locally and is the most trusted⁴ to make a difference at a local level, councils are central to this re-evaluation.

Re-thinking what is possible

The past few months have led us to re-think what is possible and given us a glimpse of what can be achieved if we were sustainably funded. We have seen rough sleeping virtually eliminated, cleaner air in city centres and community action on a scale unthinkable before the crisis. Councils have been at the heart of this. But now we need to ensure that the temporary solutions that brought benefits to our communities become permanent ones that contribute to national efforts to rebuild the economy.

Local leadership works. Councils' efforts in caring for the most vulnerable while also maintaining business as usual in the most testing of circumstances is proof of that – and it has busted the myth that 'Whitehall knows best'. With flexibility and powers, and in partnership with national government, we can renew our communities across the country.

Re-thinking our relationship with the public sector

Working with our partners during this crisis has shown that the delivery of local services and support is best when there is collaboration across the public sector. Local government, in partnership with all parts of the public sector, including national government, must work together more effectively in the future. Our residents want good quality services that help improve their lives and areas. We must work together across the public sector to deliver this. Now is the time to build the bridge across local public services, led by elected members.

Re-thinking place leadership

Our relationship with our residents is endorsed through the democratic process. Our communities trust us. In these uncertain times, they want leadership and direction. The challenges and opportunities ahead demand a re-thinking of public services at pace. We are not seeking to run everything, and our residents don't want us to, but we do have the democratic legitimacy to shape and lead a joint endeavour locally. By meaningfully empowering place leadership councils can play a central part in giving hope to communities, offering them the levers to level up inequalities and shape their future. In short, people trust local decision making more than they do national.

⁴ LGA (February 2020). 'Polling on resident satisfaction with councils: February 2020'. www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Resident%20Satisfaction%20Polling%20-%20February%202020.pdf

Re-thinking local

During this pandemic, councillors and their councils have been true leaders. We have shown what is possible when leadership is rooted in local communities. When rapid action was needed, we delivered it for our residents. Despite facing a significant funding gap, we created new services, pulled partners together and instinctively protected the most vulnerable. Councils have delivered for their communities.

But a response to a crisis cannot be the limit of our ambitions. We must now take the lead in rebuilding our communities. If we are allowed to lead, we can do so much more to help level up our communities, and in turn, our nation. With the right tools and resources councils can deliver on the ambitions we have for the diverse communities we represent.

What is needed is a stronger working relationship across Whitehall so that we can effectively engage all of government in a debate about how we build services for the future. Let councils and communities bring forward the innovation and creative thinking they have demonstrated during this crisis. Let us have an open debate as equal partners with shared goals. We know that our colleagues in the UK Forum are beginning similar debates with devolved administrations across the UK.

This document is just the beginning of a much broader dialogue. Our work over the coming months will amplify the voices of our communities and councils' solutions to the issues that impact on their communities. We invite all councils, partners and national government to engage in this conversation and Rethink Local.

85%
of councils
redeployed staff

LGA COVID-19 workforce survey, 17 June 2020

You can find out how councils are addressing the challenges brought by COVID-19 at www.local.gov.uk/covid-19-good-council-practice

2. A local response to a global pandemic

COVID-19 has created challenges we could not have planned for. Nations have been brought to a standstill. Governments have had to make decisions that just months ago could never have been imagined.

Councils too have responded in an unprecedented manner. But we went into this pandemic with our own significant challenges – the prospect of an £8 billion funding gap by 2025 and pressures growing on increasingly fragile services that supported the most vulnerable, such as children’s services, adult social care, and homelessness support. Despite multi-year settlements, councils have never had certainty of funding.

Despite these unresolved issues, at a time of national crisis councils put their local leadership role first. They moved at pace, used innovative approaches and worked flexibly to support their communities and keep services running.⁵ Their communities trusted them, and they delivered. Throughout, councils learnt from and supported each other through sector-led improvement.

Our key lessons are worth reflecting on:

Councils can: Quickly create new services to support national policy

Overnight, councils across the country set up completely new services to support the most vulnerable whilst they shielded at home. Within weeks, 132 council-led hubs⁶ were established across the country. Drawing on local expertise, councils led partnerships across the public, private, voluntary and community sector (VCS) handling requests for food parcels, financial support and wellbeing issues.

As the crisis began, councils quickly identified those in most need. Every council set up a range of communications channels, locally tailored in a way not possible at a national level. Befriending schemes and mental health support were offered to tackle loneliness and isolation, whilst many councils provided additional financial support to those they assessed as being in greatest need. All of this was done whilst ongoing data quality issues remained, and the role of supermarkets had to be negotiated.

⁵ This has been the experience of colleagues across the UK and particularly our members in Wales, where the Welsh Government has turned to, and relied on, local government to maintain core services and coordinate a community response to the crisis. Although this ‘Re-thinking local’ paper focuses on English councils’ role and relationship with the UK Government, the experiences, principles and priorities will be relevant in Wales. We are therefore sharing learning and liaising with colleagues in the WLGA who are engaged in similar discussions about renewal, recovery and the future role of local government with the Welsh Government. www.wlga.wales/SharedFiles/Download.aspx?pageid=62&mid=665&fileid=2750

⁶ Public Health England (Last updated June 2020). ‘COVID-19: guidance on shielding and protecting people defined on medical grounds as extremely vulnerable’. www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19

Leeds City Council

Supplying food and provisions to vulnerable residents

In under a week, Leeds City Council established a large-scale partnership effort involving food banks and the voluntary sector to pack and deliver over 10,000 food parcels. Using a warehouse facility as a central hub for their emergency food provision system the council provided a coordination point for fleet vehicles and food deliveries, in a space where social distancing could be safely maintained.

East Suffolk Council

Community fund

East Suffolk Council organised a community fund amounting £150,000 in lieu of the crisis. The fund offered additional resources to more than 50 VCS organisations including food banks, community response groups, telephone befriending services and fuel/volunteer expenses for Good Neighbour Schemes.

Councils can: Deliver a cross-sector response

Councils have repeatedly demonstrated that they are the core central body that can quickly convene a range of partners to address significant national issues. From the start of this emergency, councils have provided leadership on the key issues. For example, councils in the West London Alliance teamed up with North West London Health to work collectively on mitigating the risk of infection in care homes. Craven District Council worked closely with funeral directors across Craven, Lancashire and parts of West Yorkshire to ensure they could provide funeral services for a small number of close family members throughout the pandemic. Cornwall Council worked with partners to repurpose homes that had been built but not yet sold to act as emergency accommodation for the homeless. Across the country, councils used their influence to convene the local partnerships that mattered.

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

Changing bereavement services

Bereavement has been one of the most difficult issues for communities and families to deal with during the crisis. Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council developed a strong partnership with local religious organisations and councillors, which helped to address concerns around Muslim burials. During the early days of the crisis, the council engaged with mosques, scholars, imams, residents and the wider community. This work was supported by the local resilience forum and the National Burial Council at the community and national level.

Wirral Council

Supporting business

Wirral Council distributed grants totaling £24 million to 2,200 local businesses in just 10 days. The council rapidly redeployed staff and increased weekend working to help get funds into business accounts and provided £100,000 in additional resource to help local businesses. Working closely with the Wirral Chamber of Commerce, business support helplines were established with online access and information, and social media campaigns.

Councils can: Lead local economic recovery

Councils have been central to the employment and economic support that has been provided to residents and businesses. They employ significant numbers of local people in their areas and, along with support for SMEs, provide the economic backbone of local places. They were pivotal in distributing the £12.3 billion Government made available to support business through Small Business Grants, and wider support for retail, hospitality and leisure. Councils acted with urgency to provide the relief at short notice. They identified local businesses, assessed eligibility and distributed funds to over 800,000 organisations. In the first eight weeks of social distancing measures, councils had distributed £9.9 billion of funding.

Elmbridge Borough Council

Elmbridge Civic Improvement Fund

Elmbridge Council expanded its existing business funding scheme to help independent high street businesses to reopen safely. Funding was made available for businesses to purchase equipment – including hand sanitiser and cleaning stations, barriers, and signage – valued up to £250. A simple application process was created to ensure that businesses could implement the necessary adaptations quickly. As of June 2020, over 60 business have accessed this funding, which has helped to protect both customers and staff.

Councils are now turning to longer term recovery issues, reviewing the opportunities offered by the green economy and digital innovation, and supporting local businesses. In Barnsley, the council's business support service, Enterprising Barnsley, has continued to build on its web-based services for local businesses with a suite of offers to support recovery and beyond. This includes online video content and webinars. Slough Borough Council has developed a recovery and renewal plan covering the next five-year period while Malvern Hills District Council is developing a town prospectus with businesses, town councils and others to deliver a new sustainable, green and innovative future. Councils can lead the social, economic and environmental recovery at a local level because they understand the needs and nuances of local economies. The speed at which councils got their response up and running shows that local can be more nimble than national and councils can deliver at pace.

Councils can: Care for people

Social care, alongside the NHS, has formed a vital part of the frontline response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and councils have stepped up as direct providers and commissioners of social care services. Councils have been at the forefront of work to support infection control both in care homes and in domiciliary settings, and have worked to facilitate training and guidance, retain staff and enhance the advice they were able to offer.

Councils support far more people outside care home settings, making the range of needs they must address much more complex. Of the funding given to local government to support the COVID-19 effort, 40 per cent of it has been allocated directly to adult social care.

Hertfordshire County Council

A coordinated approach to supporting care markets

Hertfordshire County Council set up a 'provider hub', run jointly with the Hertfordshire Care Providers Association, including a helpline, available seven days a week. Since its launch, the hub has supported more than 800 social care providers by giving professional advice and answers to questions around government guidance, financial support, personal protective equipment (PPE), food supplies, staffing issues and access to financial support packets. The hub also collected information from social care providers on the difficulties they were having (including those related to confirmed cases of COVID-19 and deaths). This information was shared with the council's Adult Social Care Board to support a swift public response to challenges, alongside public health partners.

And councils took the lead in tackling the issue of PPE shortages for social care staff, recognising its importance in protecting not just staff but the most vulnerable in our society.

In Surrey, councillors coordinated activity with schools and colleges to make visitors and in Richmondshire, its councillors set up a 'scrub hub' to produce supplies.

Warwickshire County Council

Enabling a county wide approach to PPE

Warwickshire County Council created a PPE taskforce to help ensure that frontline staff had access to PPE. The council worked with local companies, charities, community groups and residents to procure supplies additional to the national stocks. The taskforce has successfully provided PPE to more than 400 care providers to date and has a 24-hour standard service (or within three hours for urgent requests).

Kingston Council

Talking about mental health

With Mental Health Awareness Week aligning with the social distancing measures, Kingston Council invited residents to join a virtual Q&A, asking them to submit questions around mental health and COVID-19 to be answered by a panel of mental health experts. This session provided residents with an opportunity to gain valuable information and advice, and to tackle anxieties by engaging in a broader conversation about mental health.

Councils can: Adapt to a new world

Across the country, councils reshaped and redesigned core services in response to COVID-19. Nationally 91 per cent of household waste collections continued as usual although services were hit by staff illnesses, social distancing challenges and increased amounts of waste to collect.

Councils worked with education leaders to ensure schools remained open to the children of key workers and vulnerable children. They tailored their children's social care services so that vulnerable children were protected and supported, introducing new initiatives such as 'home from home' offers to support children when their relatives were unwell and getting social workers to engage with children online.

Parks were among the first places that people turned to to support their mental and physical wellbeing during the restrictions. Councils worked hard to ensure they remained open. Library service membership increased by an estimated 120,000 people during the first few weeks of lockdown; while registrations for digital library access increased by 600 per cent.

There has been a boom in the development of online and streamed library services and museum hubs, and some councils such as Brighton and Hove and Southampton, have developed virtual tourism experiences so that 'visitors' can enjoy what places have to offer without having to leave their own homes.

Sutton Council

Better data-sharing with the voluntary sector to make referrals

Data-sharing with the NHS has enabled Sutton Council, working with the VCS, to provide households with the support they need during the crisis. The council already had excellent and well-established working relationships with these sectors to build on. On receiving the shielding lists from government, a council triage team contacted each individual to understand their needs. Data-sharing agreements were quickly put in place with the voluntary sector so that referrals could be made to the most appropriate organisation for the support required. In total, over 600 Sutton residents were contacted and received the support they needed in this way.

Councils can: Provide democratic accountability

Councils have overcome the practical issues relating to democratic decision making. With social distancing requirements, councils rapidly introduced online meetings to ensure democratic accountability remained central to decision-making and switched to the use of online platforms. The transition from 'real' to virtual meetings has been almost seamless, allowing councils to concentrate on supporting their

communities. They have maintained transparency and allowed local democracy to flourish, while developing technological solutions at scale and in ways not seen before. During this period more than 200 councils used the LGA's Remote Councils meetings hub⁷ for practical information and guidance on how to run virtual meetings.

Councils can: Continue to lead local responses

The response of local government to the challenges and consequences of COVID-19 has cut across all council services and responsibilities. The breadth, pace and interconnectivity of the response could only have been achieved by local government. As the country emerges from the restrictions, it is essential that local responses continue to inform recovery and renewal. This will be best supported by a sector-led approach and will require councils to continue to lead partnerships at a local level, renewing the relationship between citizens and public services and building on the community capacity that has been developed.

⁷ www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/remote-council-meetings

3. Re-thinking local

Where the response to COVID-19 has been locally led councils have delivered. The pandemic has also demonstrated the variety of different circumstances faced by councils across the country. The disease has not affected everyone in the same way or at the same rate, and neither has the impact of the social distancing measures. It has highlighted the inequalities between communities and the inequalities within them.

Public Health England found that people from some BAME groups are at a significantly higher risk from COVID-19.⁸ The Office for National Statistics (ONS) have highlighted the link between the COVID-19 death rate and deprived communities.⁹ The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) have reported 'evidence is already emerging that the economic repercussions of the crisis are falling disproportionately on young workers, low-income families and women'.¹⁰ In order to deliver a robust recovery that reaches everyone, we need to acknowledge and respond to these inequalities.

Building cohesive communities is a vital part of councils work over the coming weeks. The social impact of the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement have shown us the need for councils to build communities where everyone feels valued and welcome.

Councils must be given the backing and tools to do this – to ensure that everyone can lead a healthy, safe and productive life supported by their community. We need a policy response to acknowledge the diversity of approaches needed if we are to address this challenge. We have highlighted some of the approaches that will be necessary and the potential that this will unlock.

⁸ Public Health England (June 2020). 'Disparities in the risk and outcomes of COVID-19'.

www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-review-of-disparities-in-risks-and-outcomes?utm_source=2e046dd4-5550-4042-b5a7-372873716a2a&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate

⁹ ONS (June 2020). 'Deaths involving COVID-19 by local area and socioeconomic deprivation: Deaths occurring between 1 March and 31 May 2020'.

www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsinvolvingcovid19bylocalareasanddeprivation/deathsoccurringbetween1marchand31may2020

¹⁰ IFS (April 2020). 'Recessions and health: the long-term health consequences of responses to the coronavirus'. www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14799



Economic recovery

The impact of the pandemic on local economies has been huge and councils have been integral to ensuring that essential local businesses have been able to continue functioning. As we start to reopen the economy, businesses that were forced to close have looked to us for guidance and support about how they can reopen safely.

The Government has taken on a new role by providing enormous financial support to businesses, employees and the self-employed through the pandemic. However, additional fiscal stimulus is going to be required that fully recognises the scale of the economic challenge. The recovery must address expectations of a more inclusive and greener future which, in itself, is a foundation for economic recovery. Councils must reconsider our role in stimulating the local economy, delivering vital infrastructure and coordinating our transport network.

Locally-led action will be key to ensuring that the economy recovers in a way that addresses the long-term inequalities we have seen across the country. Local economies are different and will need different things to stimulate them. Some require greater connectivity, some need to transition to new industries and others are short of affordable housing.

Understanding the exact nature of an effective and sustainable stimulus can only be carried out locally. In turn these decisions can only be taken by empowered local decision makers who know what resources they can expect for the long term, including from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and the flexibility to use them in a way that makes sense locally.

In the Budget which preceded the COVID-19 crisis, the Government announced a review of HM Treasury's Green Book process, the way in which investment projects are evaluated and compared, mixing return on investment with other measures. The crisis has served to underpin that economic improvement across the country is a vital part of the nation's wellbeing. Ministers must take the whole country with them.

The Government must recognise councils as empowered local decision makers. The only way to level up the economy is to let councils act. Central decision making will deliver the same results it has for decades, with unequal growth across the country.

If councils are empowered in this way, we can get local economies started again and deliver a pipeline of long-term investment that will revive the economy and deliver long term economic, social and environmental transformation. And we can do this at pace.

Our offer to Government

As councils we stand ready to deliver an ambitious programme of financial stimulus and have the knowledge and expertise to direct funds where they will be able to deliver immediate impact to protect jobs and livelihoods and support long-term transformation of the economy, infrastructure and services in every locality.

Our ask of Government

We need Government to set the national fiscal and policy framework which will support councils to deliver on this agenda.

844,434

Coronavirus Business
Grant payments made to
businesses by 21 June



Adult social care

Many of the challenges facing social care that have been exposed by the COVID-19 emergency are not new to those of us in local government. Inadequate funding, an undervalued workforce, a provider sector battling with increasing pressures, an agenda for integration dominated by the NHS; these and many other issues have been at the heart of our campaigning work for some time. It is a tragedy that it has taken a pandemic to put these challenges squarely in the public spotlight.

In time, we hope that, above all else, this pandemic will be remembered for revealing our natural instinct to care about each other. Whether that's our family, friends or neighbours, what we have wanted for them during this time is what we want for ourselves: to live the life we want to lead. Social care and support has shown itself to be an essential part of how we achieve that. Councils have led this by convening partners and coordinating the local response.

Social care has shown itself not as an end point on a journey toward a service or services, but as the way in which people are supported to continue their own personal journey in life. How social care is framed in the weeks and months ahead will be crucial to its future.

Now more than ever, we need to recognise that the inadequacy of the funding model for social care has held care and support back for too long. Of course, in the short-term, more funding will be needed. But as it is made available, we need to think how it can be used to help diversify provision so that people are able to access support in a way that best suits them: the right care, in the right place, at the right time. In this way, traditional residential care and home care services would still have a role to play, but they would exist alongside a wider offer of support that we have seen on display during the current pandemic, such as innovative housing arrangements and the maximisation of each community's full range of local assets.

The workforce is fundamental to the delivery of all of this. It is heartening to see social workers and care workers now being more regularly recognised by all parts of society. But claps, a CARE badge, and offers of free goods and services from retailers are no substitute for proper pay and conditions and a pathway to progress within a professionalised care sector.

Through all of the above, we are seeking a change in how people are supported to live the lives they want to lead. This must be the legacy of COVID-19 for social care.

Our offer to Government

To support the Government's reform process by facilitating the essential cross-party cooperation that is a prerequisite for success.

Our ask of Government

To work with all parts of social care, particularly those with lived experience, on a way forward for the long-term future of care that is informed by the many valuable lessons from the pandemic on the role and value of social care in all our lives.

90%

of rough sleepers offered
safe accommodation

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, statement,
18 April 2020



Relationship with the NHS

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to test our health services to their very core. At the outset the whole nation held its breath to see if the virus would overwhelm the NHS. A concerted national effort – the kind not seen since the Second World War – took place to help save lives. Effective and swift joint planning and delivery between local government, the NHS and the community and voluntary sector was the hallmark of how national and local services worked together freeing up capacity at the moment it was most needed. Within the health and care sectors, services were quickly adapted and delivered in different ways, with a significant shift to online support. This was seen across GP services, outpatient consultations and mental health services resulting in increased capacity and convenience for patients.

We must harness and build on this to re-shape the health and wellbeing landscape. Our focus needs to be on prevention, on strengthening wellbeing, resilience and independence rather than just treating illness – helping to protect our NHS into the future. We need an all-encompassing approach to health which is fundamentally preventative.

This requires place-based leadership to address the basic health inequalities which exist and inevitably lead to uneven life chances within our communities. Place-based leaders, including GPs, councillors and community leaders are the future architects of this. Only they can truly build from the neighbourhood, ward and practice level up. It is this localised view which will get to the very heart of local health problems. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to the existing health inequalities which blight the life chances of so many people. But a localised solution will deliver hope to people across the country – levelling up opportunities.

Councils and the NHS must work together as equal partners to give their communities choice and true engagement in their local health services. It will be crucial for issues around information sharing and inter-operability between the NHS, councils, providers and the voluntary and community sectors to be addressed, as well as addressing concerns over confidentiality and privacy.

The last few months have highlighted the importance of social care having parity with health and on investing in prevention to reduce the burdens on the health service. Councils want to retain and build on the progress in joining up health and social care achieved during the pandemic.

Councils and their health partners need a more flexible and locally-led approach with a stronger emphasis on partnership and place-based leadership, with health and wellbeing boards taking a leading role. As we and the NHS move forward with the NHS Long Term Plan, we need a new emphasis on place and neighbourhood, with system-wide plans needed to build on and knit together place-based plans and neighbourhood delivery. The principle of subsidiarity is crucial – that decision-making is taken at the most locally appropriate level.

In this way we can build the healthcare services we need for the future and give assurance to communities that their specific needs are understood and will be effectively addressed.

Our offer to Government

To collaborate and work jointly with NHS partners, not only with frontline staff but also around commissioning and planning to ensure that more care and support is planned and delivered as close to home as possible.

Our ask of Government

To ensure that system-wide plans of integrated care systems and sustainability and transformation partnerships build on and knit together place-based plans and neighbourhood delivery. The NHS needs to work closely with health and wellbeing boards on local transformation and sustainability plans, incorporating the whole of health, social care and public health.

75%

of residents are satisfied with the way their local council runs things in their area

Polling on resident satisfaction with councils: June 2020



Public health

Public health has been at the heart of the local response to COVID-19. The early stages of this pandemic were a mixture of frustrations with the national response, and pride in a good job done locally under pressured circumstances. Councils have spent a lot of effort trying to ‘stitch’ together different elements of the pandemic response, whether it be on ensuring PPE reached care homes, volunteering or testing – because of a disconnect between how policy is formed nationally and how it is implemented on the ground. And whilst resources were diverted to respond to the crisis, councils still had to work hard to ensure vital public health services were kept running. By reprioritising the delivery of crucial support services around early life services, sexual health clinics and drug and alcohol services were able to continue operating.

Central government cannot have insight into the local mechanics of Sheffield, Newham or Devon. That local knowledge lies with councils. There is a disconnect between how policy is formulated and how it is implemented, that requires more local involvement – and that means bringing bodies like the LGA and Association of Directors of Public Health (ADPH) and others closer to the design.

The challenge for now is to ensure an effective contact tracing system. Councils have a unique understanding of their communities and are ideally placed with the skills, knowledge and experience on the ground to help ramp up the level of testing and contact tracing necessary to respond to the virus. To help councils understand where the outbreaks are happening and be able to act quickly to contain them, government must share vital and up-to-date data with them alongside other agencies and this must be accompanied by consistent and ongoing funding.

In the long term the Government must commit to sufficiently fund and reprioritise prevention. The pandemic has shown that investing more in prevention would have led to better outcomes. A more robust strategy should be set out in a new Prevention Green Paper, which considers the long-term impact of COVID-19 on our communities.

There is early evidence which suggests that some of the social determinants of health, including obesity, poor mental health, ethnicity and socio-economic status are contributing to higher levels of COVID-19 deaths. This is worrying and underlines the need for a strong Government commitment to tackling health inequalities and the need for more council resources and flexibilities to tackle the underlying economic and social causes of ill-health and premature death, including increased support to public health teams.

We need to invest in the ongoing resilience of our communities with an assets-based approach which invests in the strengths and capabilities of our communities. Councils need the resources to work in partnership with their VCS to provide low-level support to improve health, wellbeing, participation and resilience. Community resilience and support has been vital in addressing the crisis, but it will also be vital in delivering a meaningful recovery.

If public health at a local level is given the parity of esteem it deserves, health inequalities could be levelled and prevention put at the centre of our future approach.

Our offer to Government

To convene the wide range of local partners needed in order to deliver a place-based approach to public health.

Our ask of Government

While we live with COVID-19, Government must work with council leaders and partners to ensure the consequences do not impact more on some groups, communities and places than others and result in further increases in health inequalities.



Supporting vulnerable local people

COVID-19 has put an additional burden on some of the most vulnerable people in our communities. Many were already suffering from inequality and known to their councils. But the pandemic has also identified new people as being vulnerable and needing shielding or support. As the crisis hit, councils immediately stepped up – they worked tirelessly with national government and local partners to provide an impressive range of emergency food, financial care and wellbeing support across all ages.

As the restrictions ease and we move as a nation towards recovery, this work continues. Vulnerable people, including the shielded cohort, are likely to be adversely affected by the pandemic. One of the most noticeable impacts is on the digitally excluded. This has been heightened by the closure of libraries, which account for the vast majority of public access computers, meaning some weren't able to apply for benefits. The aftermath of COVID-19, and the prospect of our communities having to live with the virus for a while, is likely to be felt for some time by the most vulnerable members of our communities

as financial inclusion and mental health issues hit them the hardest. Councils, the NHS and the VCS must have the flexibility and resources to continue to support them.

While the national shielding programme was an impressive concept it has been made a reality on the ground by councils. It has created significant challenges for councils in terms of data quality, inaccurate data flows and issues with deliveries to vulnerable people. Enabling councils to design systems that meet local needs, and extend across all vulnerable groups, will support more effective outcomes and better use of resources. The core principle of ensuring systems are co-designed with the input of councils, who are closest to the people these systems support, must become the bedrock of all future public policy development.

For our vulnerable residents, the pandemic has thrown up a range of financial inclusion issues. LGA research has shown the national benefits system cannot meet the complex challenges and vulnerabilities faced by many low-income households without considerable and consistent support from councils and other local partners. Many households have taken on new debt during COVID-19 or will need to find new ways of managing on a reduced income.¹¹ Councils are embedding financial wellbeing at the heart of a wider safety net alongside other

¹¹ ONS (June 2020). 'Employment in the UK: June 2020'.
www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/employmentintheuk/june2020

key services like health, social care and housing. This will be vital to ensuring that people aren't left behind and are able to respond to new opportunities as councils lead their communities into recovery.

The mental health impacts of COVID-19 will affect communities in different ways. Councils already have the insight and partnerships (especially with the VCS) to identify need, target immediate support, and with the right resources, lead preventative mental wellbeing approaches at scale. Supporting mental wellness can only be done effectively at the local level. National mental health policy and funding remains too focused on treating mental ill health rather than helping everyone to stay mentally well, receiving community support and helping people continue with their lives. Good mental health needs to underpin the COVID-19 recovery. Councils are seeing positive changes which with the right funding and support could be the foundation for a more preventative approach to mental wellness that aids recovery and community resilience in the long term.

If society is judged by how it treats its most vulnerable, then now is the time for us to act across local and national government to ensure these people have better life outcomes.

Our offer to Government

To continue to work with all partners to protect those most vulnerable to COVID-19 from the immediate, short-term and longer term impacts of the pandemic.

Our ask of Government

To work with councils to design the future programme of support to the vulnerable so there is an integrated and holistic offer based around the support councils are already providing to shielded and non-shielded vulnerable people.



Children and young people

The rhythms of education, the school year and other youth services have been completely changed by the impact of the crisis. Whilst many families have enjoyed the extra time together, we must reflect on the fact that the services to support our young people are often designed around interaction between them and other trusted adults, including teachers and youth workers. With those face-to-face interactions suddenly taken away councils have had to quickly re-imagine how they deliver on one of our most important duties – ensuring young people thrive.

The partnership between schools and councils was strengthened during the pandemic. Councils convened the local family of schools, helping them to interpret and implement government guidance and supporting them in assessing the risks of opening to new groups of children including the most vulnerable pupils and children of key workers. Councils hold the local levers over issues such as public transport and public health that will be needed to get children back to school safely and parents back to work.

The real challenge for children's services is yet to come. Referrals to children's social care have fallen during lockdown and a surge in the number of children needing support is anticipated as we move out of the initial response phase. We need to support children, young people and families as the longer-term impacts of the social distancing measures and pandemic hit, whether that is hidden harm, poverty or mental health issues. Services must be properly funded for that, and they must retain flexibility to respond to the different challenges different areas will face.

The significant challenges currently in providing the right placements for children in care will become even more apparent if we see an increase in children coming into care or a spike in placement breakdowns as restrictions are lifted. Councils will need to work urgently to expand local provision, both in-house and working with private and voluntary sector providers, to ensure children have safe, loving homes appropriate for their needs. Important lessons have been learnt about new ways to deliver services that in some cases have been better for children, young people and their families. We must learn these lessons and give councils space to embed this learning.

Early education entitlements have been underfunded for years, which meant many early years providers had little financial headroom to protect their services when COVID-19 hit. Regardless, many continued to offer provision even when this meant operating at a loss. We must recognise the vital contribution early years settings make, both to children and to families, enabling parents and carers to work and fund the entitlements properly in the long term.

COVID-19 is likely to lead to an increase in mental ill-health in children and young people, both as a direct consequence of the virus and as a result of the measures needed to contain it. There are likely to be groups who are more vulnerable to experiencing mental health issues, such as young carers, vulnerable children, those in households with domestic abuse and those in households experiencing economic hardship.

Councils are uniquely placed to bring together the local services that are needed to support children and young people's mental health and tackle problems before they become acute. Again, schools will be on the frontline, but will need to access a range of services that support families including public health, adult and children's services and housing. Many mental health services have been delivered remotely and online during the pandemic and lessons can be learnt in the delivery of an expanded range of services to support mental health and wellbeing of children and their families.

With appropriate funding and as local leaders of education and children's services, councils will be integral to minimising the longer-term impacts of restrictions on our children and young people, and helping them to thrive again.

Our offer to Government

To build on the effective partnerships established with schools and settings during the pandemic to support and protect children, young people and families.

Our ask of Government

To invest in preventative universal and early help services to ensure that children, young people and families receive the practical, emotional, educational and mental health support they need, as soon as they need it.



Climate change and air quality

The past few months have highlighted the scale of the challenge we face if we are going to protect our environment. We have all seen noticeably cleaner air, especially in our big cities. There is less traffic, wildlife is more abundant and wildflowers bloom on verges and in parks. Councils are already reflecting on how we can get back to work whilst maintaining the benefits of a greener world.

Less immediately tangible, but just as important, is the reduction in carbon emissions. For the first time in centuries we have seen simultaneous global carbon reductions. Whilst welcome, this has only highlighted the scale of what we need to do.

As we emerge from this crisis, we cannot make this a choice between the economy and the environment. We need an economic model that can deliver the scale of improvement we have seen whilst also delivering fair and sustained growth.

Taking the steps needed, whilst ensuring the benefits are felt by the whole community is a task for local leadership. For example the steps we need to take to improve carbon free transport in a rural setting will be different to what might be best for an inner city. The policies may be different but the goal is the same.

We need a new dialogue around climate change and green growth. It must be one in which all partners are equally engaged and transparent about what they will bring to the table. Government needs to work with councils and business to establish a national framework for addressing the climate emergency. We need an Environment Act which is fully aligned to achieving net zero carbon, where producers pay the full cost of the recycling and disposal of packaging material and funding is delivered so that councils can deliver much faster improvements that align climate smart outcomes and reduced greenhouse emissions whilst supporting economic recovery and fixing social inequalities.

As we enter recovery, the legacy of COVID-19 must be that we grasp the opportunity to protect and enhance our natural environment.

Our offer to Government

To build on the public's new sense of ownership of the environment and local green recovery, with councils doing more of the heavy lifting to get local buy-in for making a transition to a green economy.

Our ask of Government

To facilitate a locally-led green recovery, with funding flexibilities to stimulate the economy and as part of long-term allocations guaranteed for councils which will allow them to invest in green housing, jobs, infrastructure and other environmental measures locally and for the long term.

During the pandemic

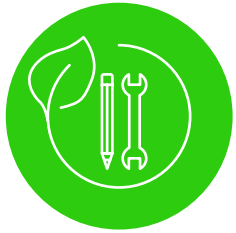
91%

of councils continued normal household rubbish collections

81%

operated a normal recycling collection

ADEPT COVID-19 waste survey,
18 May



Skills and the green economy

Many people have been working in very different ways or have been forced to take breaks from working altogether. This has led many of us to question what we want from work and how it fits into our lives. We are asking fundamental questions about the shape of our economy post-COVID-19. What do people want from their jobs, their careers and their lives and how can we deliver that in the new green economy?

Nearly 700,000 direct jobs could be created in England's low-carbon and renewable energy economy by 2030, rising to more than 1.18 million by 2050. We need to think again about how we support people into those jobs and ensure they have the skills the local economy needs. Long term recovery can only be delivered by industries that have a long-term future in a post carbon economy.

We must also reflect on our own role as a major employer. Our workforce has achieved amazing things throughout the last few months. They have shown resilience and capacity to adapt whilst serving the public in difficult circumstances. We must invest in our own workforce as well as the skills needed for the local economy.

Councils have supported the unemployed and local businesses. They know how long-term unemployment affects communities and public services. Past local economic shocks were dealt with swiftly by councils bringing together local and national partners to coordinate support.

Twenty employment and skills funding streams are managed by eight departments or agencies, spending more than £10 billion a year. Despite this investment, they often fail to meet local need, address economic and social challenges, or make a decisive impact on outcomes. An integrated and devolved approach to skills could have huge benefits. For a medium-sized combined authority each year this could lead to an additional 8,500 people leaving benefits and 5,700 people increasing their qualification levels, with additional local fiscal benefits of £280 million per year and £420 million to the economy.¹²

We need strong, visible, joined-up democratic and accountable leadership nationally and locally to address these issues, and we need a strategy in place now.

¹² LGA (July 2019). 'Work Local: Making our vision a reality'. www.local.gov.uk/work-local-making-our-vision-reality

Our offer to Government

To provide an integrated and devolved approach to skills, increasing qualifications and bringing fiscal benefits.

Our ask of Government

The Government should back the LGA's 'Work Local' model¹³ for integrated and devolved employment and skills provision by funding local pathfinders in each region.

Potential
1.18 million jobs
in low-carbon sectors
across England,
by 2050

13 www.local.gov.uk/work-local

4. Funding local services and investing in communities

We can't re-think what local means and how councils can deliver more effectively without also considering how we pay for the local services we rely on.

If councils are to continue to innovate and be able to invest in their services and in local economies, they need confidence in the financial system. This is not possible if they are not properly funded, have already spent their reserves or are having to find further significant savings to balance the books.

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, councils were already facing a funding gap of £6.5 billion by 2024/25 even with the assumption of council tax increases of 2 per cent each year, fees and charges rising and sustained levels of business rates growth.

Now, councils are also dealing with the immediate financial impact caused by extra costs, loss of income and uncollected local taxes arising from COVID-19. The newest information from the June round of the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) financial information survey indicates that the financial challenge councils are dealing with is nearly £11 billion in 2020/21. Of this, the Government has so far met £3.2 billion with welcome grant funding and clinical commissioning groups have contributed nearly £300 million from their budgets.

Under the principles of the business rates retention system, Government will also absorb half of the business rates losses of some councils – but not until next year. We want to work with Government to ensure a package of measures are put in place to address this challenge. These measures will need to provide a bespoke solution to address losses in local taxation, meet all additional costs councils are incurring as a result of the pandemic and provide a guarantee for all lost income from fees and charges and other sources. Councils have a legal duty to balance their budgets each year and these measures are vital if councils are to avoid taking steps, such as in-year cuts to local services, to cope with funding shortfalls.

The next budget and the autumn Spending Review will need to take first steps to properly enshrine long term, locally-led investment in the economy and infrastructure as well as take steps towards a place-based rather than agency-based model of funding local public services.

We cannot address entrenched inequality and social issues with more of the same. We need to look at not only how much we spend but the way in which we allocate it. We need to allocate money to places and not departmental silos. These budgets need to reflect the needs of diverse local communities. They need to be based on equality impact assessments and not suit the false distinctions of Whitehall departments.

We can only address the deep-seated issues of inequality if we acknowledge them at the beginning of the policy process and plan our spending and services accordingly.

This type of re-think will provide a fundamental opportunity to tackle some of the most deep-rooted inequalities within communities and should include how councils are incentivised. Now is the time to place emphasis on communities and place within the Spending Review by having multi-department place-based budgets. These need to be explicitly built around the needs of diverse local communities using equality impact assessments.

The pandemic is already having a profound impact on the economy. In this context, the best possible efforts of councils to spark local recovery will not bear fruit without sufficient funding and certainty to underpin them.

With the Fair Funding Review postponed, councils might have to set three one-year budgets from 2019/20 to 2021/22. Without even considering the impact of the pandemic, this does not allow for meaningful long-term decisions to guarantee best value for public money. Government will need to take early and decisive steps to provide councils as much certainty as possible, which is vital for them to provide the services areas need, as well as meet their legal obligation to balance their budgets each year.

Councils' confidence in business rates as a reliable income source has reduced. The taxbase is eroded by a gamut of national discounts, with council income propped up by Section 31 grants. The Government's fundamental business rates review has not yet started and the next revaluation of business rates will also be highly controversial regardless of when it happens, which will add to the angst currently surrounding the tax. Council tax also faces pressure, with increases constrained by nationally set referendum limits and a debate over the future funding of the adult social care precept.

We currently have a system which forces councils to look to the centre even for funds to meet core responsibilities, as well as in times of crisis. This relationship has endured for too long and neither empowers local decision making nor delivers on the priorities that the Government has set out for the country. In this profound moment of uncertainty and change we need to ask not only how we can balance the books but also how do we rebalance our system. We need a system that raises sufficient resources for local priorities in a way that is fair for every resident and which gives local politicians all the tools they need to be the leaders of their communities.

5. Foundations for a local future

We need the Government to deliver a devolution white paper for England that enables recovery in its broadest sense, to be led locally. This needs to sit alongside a comprehensive Spending Review that puts place first. Only if we allocate the resources where they are needed rather than determining everything from Whitehall can this process achieve what the country needs.

The world has changed considerably over the past few months. So has our sector and the work of the LGA. We threw ourselves into the COVID-19 response and we have created new services, new structures and delivered for our residents where we were needed. Local government has been tested and we have delivered.

This is borne out by our support for our most vulnerable residents, our children, our local businesses and by continuing to deliver vital services. The public have seen their council deliver. Our latest public opinion survey shows 71 per cent of residents trust their council and 75 per cent are satisfied with the way their local council runs things in their area. The public trust us and know we can deliver. We need to harness that goodwill and trust to deliver new thinking for our communities.

We are ready to rise to meet the next challenge, the challenge of recovery. We won't be simply recovering what we had, we want to seize this opportunity to think again about what our residents want. What do we want from our economy? What do we want from our community and how do we achieve that together?

This conversation needs to start now and it needs to start on the right terms – with councils and Government as equal partners. We are both elected to serve the people. We hold different powers and levers to make change happen, but these differences should not put us in competition nor place the national above the local. We need to harness all our collective experience, skill and ability to meet the challenge ahead.

This document is just the beginning. A starting point ahead of a long journey of national recovery. This conversation and the actions we take in partnership with the government will help us recover and rebuild a stronger nation.

Re-thinking local will help to re-build our nation, so that we are stronger, more equal, giving everyone the opportunity to thrive, releasing the potential of all our communities.



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REF 3.70