

**LGA Independent Group
North West and West Midlands Regional Meeting
Thursday 28 May 2020 – 1.30pm**

Councillor Sarah Rouse, Regional Chair, welcomed attendees to the meeting. She outlined that councils have had to respond quickly and flexibly to a range of different challenges over the last few months, and that the meeting was an opportunity to hear from our members on what your challenges and successes have been. She added that Independent Group Leaders from across England and Wales have been meeting fortnightly and regularly emailing to share insights and experience and to help inform Marianne Overton in her discussions with Ministers and the LGA Chairman to ensure central government are hearing what's happening on the ground

Councillor Marianne Overton, Independent Group Leader, highlighted that as we work towards a “new normal” we focus on recovery and that in her weekly meetings with Ministers she has been raising the challenges our councils face and fighting for a new approach going forward. She introduced the Group's ten point plan, which puts the environment and social growth at the same level of priority as economic growth. That we prioritise healthy communities; green and small business; and devolution of power and money to the most local appropriate level of government.

Sarah Rouse opened a discussion on the issues that members in the West Midlands and North West regions have been facing. Members discussed:

- Communication within and between councils on coronavirus activity varies council to council
- Members noted politics and point scoring increasing – some councils have toxic atmospheres at the moment
- Some noted positives from the pandemic have been around support for rough sleepers (needs to continue), new ways of working, cross-party activity and more regular group leader meetings
- Members wanted to see councils having greater flexibilities in terms of powers and finances to inform a recovery that spanned social, environmental and economic changes
- The convening role of councils has been successful and well received – all agreed there must be ongoing engagement with the community around recovery – one example given was Malvern's ‘good neighbour network’

Break out discussion:

- Members shared there had been lots of positives over the last few months: improved reputation of council, housing homeless, remote working showing how councils can work, working cross-party, crowdfunding, improved social media communications; and support in the community alongside the voluntary sector.
- Challenges discussed include coming out of lockdown safely; financial concerns, negative press where there have been high infection rates; visitors flocking to areas during lockdown, bringing risks and rubbish with them; communications between and within councils, from government and by the police; scrutiny has dwindled in

places; many areas hadn't recovered from flooding before the pandemic hit and those issues still remain; the voluntary sector isn't established everywhere and in some areas district, town and parish councils have had to step in where lacking; resilience has been lacking in some authorities due to decades of cuts.

- Members discussed recovery and what's needed including: devolved funding, clearer guidance from government, flexibilities over how meetings are held should continue; need to continue with the community and social cohesion demonstrated in response to covid-19; everyone talking about a new norm where prosperity, growth, the environment and wealth are valued differently.