

The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP,
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government,
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government,
2 Marsham Street,
London SW1P 4DF

14th April 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

We represent councils up and down the country and we are writing to you as we are in desperate need of more support. Local authorities are on the front line in the fight against coronavirus, but to ensure we can fulfil our role to keep our communities safe and help stop the spread, urgent measures needed include the examples below.

A major concern is the lack of support we have seen from government for the social care sector. Similar to the NHS, the coronavirus crisis has brought to the fore how desperately underfunded our social care system is. With around 122,000 vacancies and a funding shortfall, of £3.5 billion by 2024/25, it paints a worrying picture across the care sector.

Social care workers look after the most vulnerable in our communities and it is vital we give them the tools they need in what is already an incredibly challenging and unprecedented situation. Not only should they be a priority for testing, but it is vital we increase availability for Personal Protective Equipment.

One crucial way that councils up and down the country could help those struggling financially as a result of the crisis is get more support from government in helping people in financial hardship with council tax bills. The coronavirus crisis has plunged many people into financial insecurity, with people losing their livelihoods overnight, and we believe that extra funding from Whitehall to assist those people is a measure that could ease some of the burden on those wondering how they will be able to put food on the table over the next few months.

For many years local authorities have faced slashed public health grants leading to a decline in public health information. The £3.3 billion public health grant is welcome, but we do not think it will be enough. The government must confirm that the public health grant will be increased if the outbreak continues allowing us to properly combat the spread of coronavirus. The Government has said on various occasions that the best way to reduce the peak of coronavirus is to contain and delay it – public health information is a key part of that strategy and it must not be neglected by this government.

Councils have put in a monumental effort to get rough sleepers and homeless people off the street since the coronavirus outbreak. They have now managed to find housing for nearly all people sleeping rough, a task that has been made all the more difficult following the recent closures of hotels and caravan parks.

In a small minority of cases, councils have encountered difficulties where people sleeping rough refuse to take up the offer of help and we will continue to engage with these cases, but we ask that government fully funds the extra costs associated with this provision.

We welcome the initial £1.6 bn for councils but there is an urgent need for this to be supplemented by further support from the Government, given the financial pressures faced across local government. Local councils are very willing to be accountable and transparent about how government support is used, but extra help is needed now.

We hope you will listen to our calls and would be happy to discuss them with you further.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Ruth Dombey, Leader, London Borough of Sutton
Cllr Keith Aspden, Leader, City of York Council
Mayor Dave Hodgson, Elected Mayor of Bedford Borough Council
Cllr James Walsh, Leader, Arun District Council
Cllr Emily Smith, Leader, Vale of White Horse District Council
Cllr Stuart Bray, Leader, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council
Cllr Mark Cory, Leader, Colchester Borough Council
Cllr Sara Bedford, Leader, Three Rivers District Council
Cllr Val Keitch, Leader of South Somerset District Council
Mayor Peter Taylor, Elected Mayor of Watford Borough Council
Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson, Leader, Portsmouth City Council
Cllr Caroline Kerr, Leader of Kingston upon Thames Council
Cllr Giles Archibald, Leader, South Lakeland District Council
Cllr Stephen Robinson, Leader, Chelmsford City Council
Cllr Stephen Cooksey, Leader, Mole Valley District Council
Cllr Caroline Reeves, Leader, Guildford Borough Council
Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts, Leader, Somerset West and Taunton Council
Cllr Virginia Taylor, Leader, Eden District Council
Cllr Dine Romero, Leader, Bath and North East Somerset Council
Cllr Vikki Slade, Leader, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Councils
Cllr David Worden, Leader, North Devon Council
Cllr John Boyce, Leader, Oadby and Wigston Borough Council
Cllr Steve Darling, Leader, Torbay Council
Cllr Chris White, Leader, St Albans District Council
Cllr Gordon Hook, Leader, Teignbridge District Council
Cllr Sue Prochak, Deputy Leader, Rother District Council
Cllr Adam Paynter, Deputy Leader, Cornwall Council
Cllr Karen King, Deputy Leader, Redcar and Cleveland Council
Cllr Peter Thornton, Deputy Leader, Cumbria County Council
Cllr Paul Clark, Deputy Leader, North Herts District Council
Cllr James Maccleary, Deputy Leader, Lewes District Council
Cllr Carole Mulroney, Cabinet Member, Southend on Sea Borough Council
Cllr Fran Oborski, Deputy Leader, Wyre Forest District Council
Cllr Mike Bell, Deputy Leader, North Somerset Council