

Opposition Day Debate: Local government responsibilities for public services, including social care

House of Commons

Wednesday 18 March 2020



Key messages:

- Councils as leaders of place have a vital role in responding to Covid-19. A widespread coronavirus epidemic across the country is going to have an impact on a range of services that councils provide and communities rely on. It is crucial that councils are supported properly at this time.
- Protecting and supporting communities, including the most vulnerable, remains councils' top priority. Council staff are working 24 hours a day to help delay the virus, minimise the spread of infection and keep people safe and well. Council colleagues are doing an amazing job in hugely challenging circumstances and we pay the highest tribute to their commitment and dedication.
- This is a unique situation and every day brings new questions and issues that need to be worked through. We need to be realistic and pragmatic as none of us will have all the answers immediately
- The LGA is working hard to support local government's contribution and to ensure that their vital role is recognised. We are in close contact with councils and are sharing the most up to date advice with council colleagues regularly, as well as sharing their concerns with Government.

Briefing

Adult Social Care

- It is important to acknowledge that as a service, adult social care is already starting from a position of historic underfunding and current pressure. Despite the welcome funding announced in the 2019 Spending Round, we estimate that adult social care faces a funding gap of £810 million for the year 2020/21 rising to £3.9 billion in 2024/25.
- The Budget 2020 announcement of £5 billion emergency funding is welcome but must be kept under review as more resources may be required. The funding must be fairly allocated between health, social care, public health and other services to ensure that all parts of the NHS, public health and social care system as well as wider council services are fully supported to play their part in protecting local communities and to provide support and treatment to people affected by Covid-19. There must be flexibility for councils to use social care allocations as they best see fit; the funding should not simply be about freeing up hospital space, as important as that it.
- Care workers will need to be able to access personal protective equipment and to have equal status with the NHS in their joint working.

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Children's social care

- Councils are working hard to ensure that vulnerable children and those in care remain safe and cared for throughout the current pandemic. This includes working with providers of children's homes and special schools to ensure continuity of care and providing support for vulnerable families and foster families.
- It is vital that, if schools are closed, support can effectively be provided to more vulnerable families. This includes consideration around how to use free school meals funding to ensure children still receive nutritious meals if they are not in school, how foster families can be supported where children are at home, and how we continue to effectively safeguard children. We must also consider support for kinship carers, many of whom are older and will need more support through this period.

Supporting vulnerable people

- Councils are well placed to work with their local voluntary and community sector to ensure that support is available and is also safe. We need to pay special attention to those groups who might be socially isolated and/or have English as a second language as well as those with health conditions. Councils will be willing to run help lines for vulnerable people, but we must manage expectations and messaging. This work will also need to be funded by central government
- The hardship fund for people is welcome. Councils now need clarity about how it will be disbursed, its purpose and flexibilities around issues such as who will be eligible. Councils will also need support with the administration costs.
- We also expect councils to face cost increases across a number of services and a loss of income. We will be working with Government to ensure that councils are supported as the situation develops.

Business support

- The Small Business Grant will provide some vital support for local businesses as they face the implications of the coronavirus on their activity. Councils need to know as soon as possible when they will receive the funding to distribute to small businesses.

Communications

- Councils will work to support the national communications effort through the promotion of national messaging and campaigns locally. They should be allowed to design how this works in their local area. The main issues are:
 - HMG top lines to be shared in a timely and consistent way
 - Summary of guidance produced and top lines in a single place
 - Increased profile of messaging from relevant Ministers about the important role of councils and specifically, the importance of social care staff
- The LGA has established a dedicated [hub](#) on its website containing useful information for councils.

Emergency legislation

- The forthcoming emergency legislation has the potential to help address some key issues that councils face and deal with the inevitable need to prioritise resources as the situation develops. We will be seeking to work with Government to develop the legislation to ensure that it provides councils with the flexibility they will require.