



# Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

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Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP  
Secretary of State  
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

14 May 2020

Dear Robert,

## **Further information following Committee session**

Thank you for appearing before the Committee on Monday 4 May. The Committee is grateful and, further to the additional information you committed to providing during the session, we request some further information in writing.

### **Local Government Finance**

During the session, you said that the Government will ensure that councils are fully compensated for those things that the Government is asking them to do in response to Covid-19. Can you please provide a list of those things that the Government has asked them to do, and inform us how this list has been communicated to local government?

### **Financial Survey Returns**

We understand that the Government has sent out surveys in April and in May to assess the developing financial needs of local councils in response to the COVID-19 crisis. The Committee is keen to ensure that there is certainty for councils on their financial stability. Therefore, we would be grateful if you could inform us when the Ministry expects to have completed their analysis of the May survey returns from local councils. Additionally, it would be helpful to know if you intend to publish the outcomes and analysis of the April and May surveys. If the survey outcomes are not being published, we would be grateful if you could inform us how and when you will share the key findings and conclusions with the Committee. We would expect this information to be disaggregated to allow an evaluation of the impact between different councils and areas, as well as identifying not only additional spending areas but also where income has been lost.

### **Vulnerable Children**

The question of the response of local councils to ensuring the safety of vulnerable children was discussed during your appearance before the Committee. We appreciate the challenges which exist because schoolteachers' ability to raise concerns about a child has been severely limited by this crisis. The Local Government Association has told us that they anticipate a spike in referrals when children do return to school. We would be grateful to know what measures are the Ministry taking to help local authorities cope with the additional demands on resources and on their children services that would result?

The Local Government Association also raised the idea of permitting children who are in temporary accommodation to attend schools during the lockdown, in the same way as children of essential workers. Can you tell us whether any discussions about the education of this group of children have taken place?

### **Local Government Accountability**

The Campaign to Protect Rural England has expressed concerns to us about the way in which different councils are holding virtual meetings. They stated that councils have had different interpretations of the rules about virtual meetings. They are particularly concerned that current arrangements do not permit councillors, applicants, and objectors to participate in publicly accessible meetings about planning issues. Therefore, the committee would like to know whether the Ministry is monitoring how the Coronavirus Act 2020 is being interpreted by Councils?

The National Association of Local Councils has raised with us their concern that parish meetings cannot take place through virtual meetings under the *Coronavirus Act 2020* and regulation 3 of *The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020*. This contrasts with parish councils and other local authorities which can hold their meetings virtually. We would be grateful to be updated on this situation.

We would be grateful if you could supply this information by Friday 22 May.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Clive Betts', with a large, stylized initial 'C' at the start.

**Clive Betts MP**  
**Chair, Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee**