



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government

Clive Betts MP  
Chair, HCLG Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
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**The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP**  
*Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and  
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Dear Clive,

**FURTHER INFORMATION FOLLOWING THE COMMITTEE SESSION ON 4 MAY**

Thank you for your letter of 14 May following up further on my recent discussion with the Committee. Please find the additional information you request below.

**Local Government Finance**

In total we have provided around £27 billion of support to help councils and communities through this challenging period. As I set out in my previous letter of 14 May and at the hearing, that includes £3.2 billion of additional, un-ringfenced funding for councils – meeting the costs of those activities central government has asked them to undertake, whilst also giving them flexibility to decide how best to meet these pressures. We have also provided £5 billion in additional cashflow support to councils, an extra £600 million for infection control in care homes, and last week announced £300 million of additional funding for local authorities to support the new Test and Trace Service. This unprecedented package ensures councils have the resources they need to continue their essential role in the nation's response to Covid-19.

As part of this, my Ministerial team and I have been in regular contact with Leaders, Chief Executives and representative organisations to provide direction and keep them informed of developments. As highlighted in my letter to you of 14 May, I wrote to councils asking them to prioritise specific tasks on 30 April, and my officials will be writing to all council leaders and chief executives shortly with further guidance. We also share key data from across government on a daily basis so councils and Local Resilience Forums can respond effectively to the pandemic, and host a regular teleconference with Ministerial representation from across government for all council Leaders and Chief Executives.

**Financial Survey Returns**

As you know, councils have been asked to provide data to my department on finance pressures due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The survey was designed in collaboration with local councils and launched in April as the first in a monthly series. The data collection is not a formal return but secures best estimates to inform work in Government on supporting local authorities, and will continue to be an important source of information on how councils are managing. The overall estimated additional expenditure to date (from March to the end of May) is £1.25bn, against our £3.2 billion of grant funding. We recognise the interest in this data set and have committed to publishing a summary in due course to share our understanding of the evolving situation.

## Vulnerable Children

The safety of vulnerable children and young people is of paramount importance, particularly during the current period. We continue to work closely with the Local Government Association and utilise a wide range of evidence to understand the pressures on local authorities at this time – and the Department for Education is working closely with the children’s services sector to monitor demand. As set out above, we have already provided over £3.2 billion of additional funding to support councils in meeting Covid-19 related pressures, including on children’s services. We will continue to keep this under very close review over the coming weeks and months.

We recognise that school is a key means of identifying vulnerable children and making referrals for support to children’s services. That is one of the reasons why the Government has kept schools and other education settings open. On the specific question of vulnerable children in temporary accommodation, we have been working closely with the Department for Education to ensure these children can continue to attend school throughout this period. The Department for Education has provided schools and other education settings with the flexibility to offer places to any child they deem vulnerable. [Guidance](#) for educational providers has been updated to make it explicitly clear that that may include children and young people living in temporary accommodation.

## Local Government Accountability

Your letter refers to concerns raised by the Campaign to Protect Rural England about the way in which different councils are holding virtual meetings. The *Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020* enable all local authority meetings taking place before 7 May 2021, including planning committee meetings, to be held remotely, and also allow for remote access for the public and press. The Regulations do not change the public’s statutory rights of access to meetings but rather make provision about how those rights can be exercised.

Given councils’ differing circumstances, the Regulations do not specify how local authorities in any particular case are to conduct their remote meetings and recognise there are a variety of ways in which to hold a meeting remotely and provide public access – including via telephone conferencing, video conferencing, live webchat and live streaming. This flexibility allows councils to tailor arrangements to their local circumstances and hold remote meetings in a manner that best ensures their decision-making processes remain accessible to their residents.

Many council constitutions provide a right for applicants and objectors to speak at planning committee meetings. Local authorities should therefore ensure there is sufficient public participation in remote planning committees as far as possible. We have been working with the Planning Advisory Service who have [published advice on ways this can be achieved](#).

You also refer in your letter to a concern about parish meetings. The key point to emphasise is that all parish councils are covered by these Regulations, and hence all parish council meetings can be held remotely. However, the Regulations do not cover parish meetings, where all electors have the right to attend. As such a meeting could run into several hundreds of people attending, and raise public health concerns and wider practical issues. However, we recognise this may have implications for parish meetings signing off their draft Annual Governance and Accountability Returns – and have therefore extended the deadline for submitting returns to 31 August 2020.



**RT HON ROBERT JENRICK MP**