

Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Chairman, Health and Social Care Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

17th April 2020

Dear Jeremy,

Thank you again for your kind invitation to the LGA to provide evidence to the inquiry into preparations for coronavirus. Further to my earlier letter, I am getting in touch to answer Rosie Cooper MP's query about how councils are working with the NHS and government to support those who are being shielded.

Councils are working extremely hard to support their local communities through this difficult time. Government has put in place arrangements to support the shielded group with deliveries of food and medicine, and access to social care and/or contact where there do not have friends or family to provide it. Councils are an integral part of this system. Councils have:

- Used the data on the shielded group provided by the NHS along with their own records to identify the most vulnerable so they can contact them and offer support.
- Provided social care and/or other help and contact to those people in the shielded group who have registered a need for assistance through the national call centre or website.
- Assisted the rollout of the national system of weekly doorstep food deliveries by arranging emergency drops of food to tide people in the shielded group over until they receive a food package or provide more appropriate foodstuffs where necessary. Much of this emergency support has come from councils' own resources.

At the same time councils are building on their existing arrangements to support increasing numbers of vulnerable people outside the shielded group, who are struggling to obtain food due to the need to self-isolate or because of hardship.

Councils are working alongside government, the private sector (such as food wholesalers and retailers) and the voluntary and charitable sector to support non-shielded vulnerable people. Following feedback from councils, the LGA has identified some areas where councils need assistance to ensure vulnerable people in the community are supported.

- Extra funding to help vulnerable people access the food and other support they need, in order to meet the additional costs on council budgets.
- The flexibility to build on existing proven local arrangements, rather than extend the new national initiatives to include additional tasks.
- Continued assistance from MHCLG in joining-up engagement across Whitehall in relation to supporting vulnerable groups.
- Ongoing help from Defra to support engagement with food retailers, such as the main supermarkets. It is especially important to ensure those vulnerable people councils identify as requiring support, but can afford to pay, are prioritised for deliveries or click and collect arrangements or their shopping is undertaken by volunteers.

- To further support councils in this work, we are also calling for freedoms to relax the Sunday shopping rules for larger supermarkets. This will offer extended opportunities for shopping to vulnerable people and to front line staff.
- An improvement in the data quality and granularity in the information councils receive about the people in the shielded cohort. In particular, access to a standard single identifier, such as an NHS number, would greatly assist councils. This will allow them to support the vulnerable including when food deliveries have been made and reduce the amount of time councils are having to spend checking the accuracy of the information provided.
- The recent government confirmation that councils can make use of the volunteers who came forward through the GoodSam app was very welcome. However, there is still considerable confusion and concern amongst the voluntary and community sector about how the NHS volunteer scheme and established local VCS structures can work together. We continue to work with Government, national charities and the NHS to improve the alignment and coordination between national volunteering schemes and local coordination of local volunteers.

I would like to reiterate that this is a challenging situation and councils and their colleagues in government have been working tirelessly to ensure that those who need support can access it. We will continue to work together to ensure that the support systems we have put in place are maintained and improved throughout this crisis.

I hope that this information is helpful to the Committee, and if the LGA can be of further assistance, please do get in touch with jade.hall@local.gov.uk.

Best wishes,

Sarah Pickup
Deputy Chief Executive
Local Government Association