



# Government response to the COVID-19 Committee's Living in a COVID World: A Long-term Approach to Resilience and Wellbeing report

Presented to Parliament  
by the Secretary of State for  
Levelling Up, Housing and Communities  
by Command of Her Majesty

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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities  
Fry Building, 2 Marsham Street  
London SW1P 4DF  
Tel: 0303 444 0000

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# Introduction

The Government welcomes the House of Lords COVID-19 Committee's Living in a COVID World: A Long-term Approach to Resilience and Wellbeing report following their inquiry. The report was published on 16 March 2022. We are grateful to the Committee and all those that provided evidence.

## Recommendations

### Recommendation 1

**Building on existing work exploring the relationship between health outcomes and socio-economic factors, we want to see the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities working with other Government departments and devolved administrations to assess lessons learned during the pandemic about the socioeconomic determinants of health, and within that, racial disparities in treatment, care and outcomes. Co-ordinated Government policy should prioritise narrowing the gap in healthy life expectancy so that no one group is left behind. (Paragraph 35)**

The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) works with the whole of Government, the NHS, local government, industry and wider partners to deliver change.

Improving Healthy Life Expectancy and reducing health disparities is a priority for the whole of Government, evidenced by our Levelling Up mission for health which sets out our commitment to narrow the gap in Healthy Life Expectancy between local areas where it is highest and lowest by 2030, and increase Healthy Life Expectancy by 5 years by 2035.

The Levelling Up White Paper also announced our commitment to publish a Health Disparities White Paper (HDWP) later this year, which will allow us to go further to address our mission. The HDWP will particularly focus on disparities related to place, ethnicity and socio-economic background and will consider health disparities at each stage at which they arise, to ensure that everyone has the chance to live a healthy life.

### Recommendation 2

**Renewed efforts to build trusted relationships between the state and all groups within society, including racial and religious groups, young people, disabled people and others. Resilience requires us to recognise the different needs of these communities when it comes to building trust, and investing in building relationships over the long-term. The Department of Levelling Up and Communities should conduct an assessment of the relationship between both the national and local state and communities, and develop a plan for improving trust over time. (Paragraph 36)**

The government puts fairness at the centre of its policies and is always improving the quality of evidence about the barriers that different groups face. As part of its new approach to equality, the

government considers socio-economic and geographic groups as well as groups that share a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.

In the Levelling Up White Paper, the government recognised the importance of social capital in communities across the UK, the presence of which can amplify wider economic benefits. It also recognised that the absence of social capital and community engagement can have negative impacts on local crime, economic growth and feelings of well-being and pride.

The government has already taken action to build the trust of local communities. For example, the government established vaccination centres in 50 religious venues, worked with ethnic minority celebrities & influencers, launched two Community Champion schemes, and provided a further £7 million to partnerships in areas with health inequalities.

## Recommendations 3, 8 and 21

**Major efforts to build social capital through community-level public service innovation. This should start with a new wave of devolution to return power to local government, and beyond to local communities. The Department for Levelling Up and Communities should move to a three-year rolling financial settlement for local authorities, enabling them to plan more effectively and plan for the transformation of services, in partnership with community-level organisations. (Paragraph 37)**

**A longer-term approach to funding public services and local government. In particular, we recommend in our Towns and Cities report that local government should move as swiftly as possible to a rolling three-year funding settlement. (Paragraph 45)**

**The UK Government introducing three-year rolling local government financial settlement, at an increased level; and (Paragraph 96)**

The Government believes that strong and dynamic local leadership, that can understand how complex issues come together in a place, tailor policy to local priorities, attract investment and seize each area's opportunities, is critical to levelling up. Strengthening local leadership through devolution will give local politicians control of the levers they need to level up and deliver better outcomes and services for local residents.

That is why Government has announced the biggest ever transfer of power away from Westminster to local government in modern times. Building on the 2019 manifesto commitment to full devolution across England, the UK Government is setting itself a mission that, by 2030, every part of England that wants one will have a devolution deal, with powers at or approaching the highest level of devolution, with a simplified, long-term funding settlement.

To help achieve this mission, for the first time Government has published a devolution framework which sets out a clear menu of options for places in England that wish to unlock the benefits of devolution. The devolution framework is designed to be a dynamic one that can evolve and be informed by devolution deal discussions over the coming years.

We will spread the benefits of devolution beyond our city-regions through ambitious pathfinder

County Deals, a new model of devolution that will give local leaders in English counties the tools they need to deliver for their communities, such as increased control over transport, infrastructure and skills. We will seek to establish a new form of combined authority model, to be made up of upper tier local authorities, to provide a single, accountable institution across a functional economic area or whole county geography.

Government recognises that devolution is a process, not a one-off event. We plan to deepen the devolution settlements of the most mature institutions, to support them in delivering further benefits for local residents. Deepening devolution will give areas more autonomy, with greater powers and flexibility being devolved in return for greater accountability and performance.

In announcing negotiations with Cornwall; Derby and Derbyshire; Devon, Plymouth and Torbay; Durham; Hull and East Yorkshire; Leicestershire; Norfolk; Nottingham and Nottinghamshire; and Suffolk for early County Deals, a new Mayoral Combined Authority deal for York and North Yorkshire, an expanded Mayoral Combined Authority deal for the North East, and Trailblazer deals which will deepen the devolution settlements of West Midlands Combined Authority and Greater Manchester Combined Authority, we are making significant progress towards achieving our 2030 mission.

Government agrees that a stable funding environment ensures local authorities can plan effectively. The Government therefore recognises how important multi-year certainty is to local authorities, and we aim to provide that whenever possible.

The 2022/23 Local Government Finance Settlement provides the resources and stability councils need, following the impact of pandemic and to support the levelling up agenda. This settlement makes available an additional £3.7 billion to councils, including funding for adult social care reform. We are providing an additional £1.6 billion of grant funding to councils in each of the next 3 years, including in 2022/23 an additional £636 million for the Social Care Grant and a new £822 million one-off 2022/23 Services Grant for all services. This new funding is the largest cash-terms increase in grant provided through the settlement for 10 years.

The Government is committed to ensuring that funding allocations for councils are based on an up-to-date assessment of their needs and resources. We will work closely with local partners and take stock of the challenges and opportunities they face, before consulting on any potential funding reform.

## Recommendation 4

**The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport should make a renewed commitment to digital inclusion, including increasing access to affordable devices and data, and increasing digital skills training. Training and support for excluded people and communities will be best delivered in partnership with community organisations. (Paragraph 38)**

The Government recognises that digital skills and digital access are increasingly required to fully participate in society, and that digital exclusion exacerbates existing inequalities and creates new ones. DCMS encourages departments to consider the needs of digitally excluded people when making policy.

DCMS is supporting access to digital services through: investment in digital infrastructure (Project Gigabit, the shared rural network and 5G testbeds and trials programmes); via libraries (providing access to devices and a connection via approximately 2900 libraries nationwide); and by working with providers to offer social tariffs (low cost landline and broadband services for those on Universal Credit as well as other means-tested benefits).

Government is supporting people to use computers and the internet by providing them with the relevant digital skills through the following:

DfE is providing essential digital skills training for adults through the digital entitlement. This will equip adults in England with a full range of essential digital skills needed for life, work, and further study, facilitating confidence for people to access appropriate digital skills.

- DWP is supporting claimants by developing their digital skills via the Claimant Commitment. To support adults who are online, but lack the essential digital skills for work, DWP is working to develop a framework to effectively identify claimants' digital skills level, and where appropriate refer claimants to foundation digital skills, essential digital skills qualifications, and Digital Bootcamps.
- DCMS has also created Local Digital Skills Partnerships (LDSPs) in eight regions in England to help increase digital skills capabilities across the country. LDSPs bring together cross-sector partners to tackle the regional digital divide, advance digital inclusion, and build thriving regional economies.
- DCMS continues to work with trusted partners and stakeholders from across the UK, including Good Things Foundation and FutureDotNow, to understand the challenges and opportunities facing the digitally excluded. As part of the government's Covid response, DCMS partnered with the Good Things Foundation to launch the £2.5 million Digital Lifeline Fund, which provided 5500 digitally excluded people a free device, data and digital support.

## Recommendation 5

**The Online Safety Bill is a welcome effort to bring greater regulation to the online information economy, and reduce the harmful impact of disinformation and misinformation. There will, no doubt, be pressure to dilute the impact of these proposals and the Government must stand firm in resisting such pressure. Alongside this, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport should work with platforms, media organisations and civil society to publish the lessons learned about our information systems from the pandemic, and build a public shared plan for industry, civic and Government approach in any future crisis. (Paragraph 39)**

The Government takes the issue of disinformation very seriously and we welcome the Committee's support for the measures set out in our ground-breaking Online Safety Bill. The Bill will force companies to remove all illegal mis/disinformation in scope of the Bill, including an offence that covers posts or messages where the individual knows the information is false but sends it intending to cause significant physical or psychological harm. This will tackle the most pernicious COVID-19 falsehoods designed to intentionally cause physical harm to someone.

Category 1 services, those with the largest audiences and a range of high-risk features, will also need to set out how they are dealing with content that is legal but harmful to an individual. This will include some types of harmful health misinformation and disinformation, such as anti-vaccination content. On top of this, companies whose services are likely to be accessed by children will also need to take steps to protect children from harmful disinformation and misinformation. These strong measures, which address the misinformation and disinformation threats related to the COVID-19 pandemic, have been designed to ensure user safety whilst promoting a thriving, inclusive democracy where freedom of expression is protected.

The Government recognises the importance of working cross-sector to improve our understanding of the information environment and our ability to respond effectively to online harms. That is why the Online Safety Bill will require Ofcom to establish an expert advisory committee of users, providers and experts to provide advice on how regulated services should deal with disinformation and misinformation, building on the information-sharing systems and relationships that were established during the pandemic response.

In addition, the DCMS-led Counter Disinformation Unit continues its existing work leading information-sharing systems and relationships across sectors by engaging with key stakeholders on the issue of misinformation and disinformation. DCMS meets regularly with platforms, researchers, and media and civil society organisations to understand evolving challenges, share lessons learned, and inform future approaches.

## Recommendation 6

**A new settlement between the devolved nations and the UK Government to better clarify roles and responsibilities, and build enduring agreements on issues that affect all the nations of the United Kingdom. (Paragraph 43)**

The Intergovernmental Relations Review published in January, and laid in both Houses, heralds a new era for effective joint working between the UK government and the devolved governments. It sets out new structures and processes to ensure that ministers at all levels of government have effective and formalised routes for discussion, with accountability grounded in shared secretariat and dispute resolution arrangements.

There is a new three-tiered structure for formalised ministerial engagement - and a new mechanism for avoiding or resolving disputes - and will be underpinned and facilitated by official-level engagement. These tiers are:

- Portfolio engagement at departmental level through interministerial groups (IMGs) to consider specific policy areas;
- Engagement on strategic and cross-cutting issues and oversight of portfolio-level engagement, including an Interministerial Standing Committee (IMSC) attended by UKG (SoS for Levelling Up) and devolved government ministers with responsibility for intergovernmental relations;
- The Prime Minister and Heads of Devolved Governments Council.



This strong working and close co-operation has been vital in ensuring a joint response to recent issues such as the crisis in Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring that we deliver for people across the whole of the United Kingdom. We publish quarterly reports on Ministerial engagement and recently published our first annual transparency report on Ministerial engagement in 2021. In our annual report, we updated on the number of ministerial discussions on shared priorities and highlighted several case studies about how our strong intergovernmental relationships helped us respond to the unprecedented challenges, such as those presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Recommendations 7 and 9

**The Cabinet Office should pull together an interdisciplinary team to co-ordinate the development of long-term policy planning, and implementation. (Paragraph 44)**

**A new approach to efficiency, recognising the importance of some redundancy of provision in public services. In effect, the pandemic reminds us that surge capacity is an essential component of resilience, even if it looks expensive during normal times. This will require a major shift in our approach to workforce planning, in particular, which will need to continue to leverage volunteer and community capacity in a systematic way, alongside formal provision. In effect, we need to move away from a “just in time” model of provision to a “just in case” model for many services. (Paragraph 46)**

The Cabinet Office established interdisciplinary teams to manage the response to the COVID-19 pandemic including the COVID-19 Task Force which brought together policy, delivery and analytical expertise to support the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and to work closely with Departments.

While Government departments led the delivery of their respective policy portfolios throughout the pandemic, the Cabinet Office helped facilitate departments’ delivery priority, brokered issues where responsibilities sat across multiple departments, and escalated risks where necessary. The Cabinet Office also supported the Prime Minister and relevant Cabinet Committees with policy advice.

The Cabinet Office continues to work closely with DHSC and the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) to monitor COVID-19 and other potential health security threats. The UKHSA will play a lead role in resilience, emergency planning and response to help prevent and respond to future health threats.

The Cabinet Office is committed to harnessing the learning and capabilities from this experience by ensuring systems are in place to manage future risks from COVID or other health risks, and more broadly risks to the economy and public sector services. To support the Government in planning for future risks, the Planning and Analysis Secretariat (PAS) within the Cabinet Office is being established.

The Planning and Analysis Secretariat is interdisciplinary and brings together policy, data and analysis. The purpose of the Secretariat is to support the Prime Minister and Cabinet by:

- prioritising the key long-term domestic and economic risks to the UK, and developing strategies to plan and prepare
- providing first-class data and analytical support to decision making.

This complements the broader objectives of the Cabinet Office, working closely with relevant departments on emerging risks and vulnerabilities. The Cabinet Office continues to support the Prime Minister's priorities, convening Whitehall as required on cross-cutting issues.

## Recommendation 10

**We welcome the inclusion of life satisfaction, and disparities in life satisfaction across the UK, as an economic indicator in the recent budget and spending review. We recommend that the Treasury use wellbeing as the main indicator of societal and economic progress. (Paragraph 53)**

Wellbeing is an important consideration for the Government when making spending and policy decisions. HM Treasury's Green Book sets out how to appraise policies, programmes and projects. It requires all social, economic, and environmental benefits and costs to be considered in appraisal.

In July 2021, HM Treasury published wellbeing supplementary guidance covering how and where wellbeing can be included as part of the policy development process set out in Green Book. This supplementary guidance encourages officials to consider wider impacts such as life satisfaction, happiness, and anxiety within each stage of the appraisal process. The guidance outlines how, in some cases, wellbeing impacts can be monetised when undertaking cost benefit analysis. It also looks beyond present wellbeing to consider and assess the factors which may have an impact on future wellbeing, such as changes in the stocks of human, social, and natural capital.

Furthermore, whilst Gross Domestic Product (GDP) remains one of our most important economic indicators, the Government also recognises that GDP has its limitations and should not be seen as an all-encompassing measure of welfare – something it was never designed to be.

Sir Charles Bean's 2016 Independent Review of Economic Statistics acknowledged some of these limitations. The Government fully supported the recommendations of the Bean Review and, at the time, provided the Office for National Statistics with an additional £25m to help implement those recommendations.

As a result of this work, the UK developed world leading Natural Capital Accounts and, in recent years, the UK became one of the first countries to publish natural capital accounts as part of its National Accounts (The Blue Book). Additionally, the ONS has published human capital estimates for 2004-2018 as part of their wellbeing measures. More recently, in response to the 2021 Dasgupta Review, the Treasury provided further funding to the ONS to continue improving its natural capital estimates.

## Recommendations 16 and 17

**The pandemic-related acceleration of e-commerce, remote working and learning, online service delivery and business automation highlighted significant gaps in both our policy and legislative framework, and our preparedness as individuals and society for an increasingly online world. (Paragraph 76)**

Rather than tackle these issues piecemeal, or letting responsibility sit solely in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the Government needs to ensure that all departments are reviewing how the policy areas for which they are responsible have changed, and will change, as a result of this digital acceleration, including the impact on inequalities. (Paragraph 77)

The Government agrees with the Committee that digital policy and delivery plays a key role in all areas of public services delivery and has a real impact on the lives of citizens in every corner of the UK. It is therefore important for Government policy to be cross-cutting and coordinated.

DCMS remains the overall lead department for digital but necessarily works closely with all departments, including to consider digital issues when making policy.

Additionally, responsibility for Government's Digital Transformation sits with the Cabinet Office through the Central Digital and Data Office (CDDO). It is a priority for the CDDO to make services available and accessible for all so that citizens are able to access services and carry out tasks regardless of their digital capability.

The upcoming Digital Strategy will set out the UK's vision for harnessing digital transformation, accelerating growth, and building a more inclusive, competitive and innovative digital economy for the future.

The Digital Strategy will be an important milestone in the government's objective to ensure that the UK is the best place in the world to start and grow a technology business. The Digital Strategy will set out a vision for the digital sector which capitalises on its growth, to the benefit of the broader economy and society.

The Digital Strategy will reflect the cross-government activities necessary to ensure that the UK has the right foundations for citizens and businesses alike, support access to digital skills.

## Recommendation 19 and 20

**Our report makes a number of recommendations, many of which would merit future follow-up. In particular, given the relative lack of attention these issues seem to have received elsewhere, we would draw the House's attention to: (Paragraph 79)**

**How well both initial training and Continuous Professional Development is preparing teachers and medical professionals to deliver online; (Paragraph 79)**

Since September 2020, all courses offered by initial teacher training (ITT) providers have been aligned to a mandatory core content framework (CCF), which was published in November 2019. The framework sets out a minimum entitlement for all trainee teachers. We recognise that the

underpinning evidence does not stand still. Therefore, we have committed to updating the Initial Teacher Training Core Content Framework in line with the best available evidence from this country and internationally, assured by the Education Endowment Foundation.

To support our vision of a golden thread of evidence-informed training, support and professional development that runs through each phase of every teacher's career, in December 2021 we announced a set of reforms to ITT. Applicable to all ITT courses leading to QTS from September 2024, the reforms are centred around a new set of 'Quality Requirements'. These requirements include new expectations around trainee curricula, mentoring, trainee assessment, and quality assurance across ITT partnerships. To deliver ITT from September 2024, existing and prospective ITT providers must demonstrate their potential to deliver high-quality ITT that meets these new requirements in a rigorous accreditation process. The delivery of these reforms will be supported by £35.7 million funding.

The Early Career Framework (ECF) underpins what all Early Career Teachers (ECTs) should learn about and learn how to do based on expert guidance and the best available research evidence. It covers five core areas: behaviour management, pedagogy, curriculum, assessment and professional behaviours and is designed to work for all Early Career Teachers regardless of subject, phase and / or school. The ECF is explicit about the importance of providing opportunity for all pupils to experience success by teachers adapting lessons, whilst maintaining high expectations for all, so that all pupils have the opportunity to meet expectations.

National Professional Qualifications are part of a wider set of teacher development reforms which together will create a 'golden thread' of high-quality evidence underpinning the support, training and development available through the entirety of a teacher's career. They are designed to provide training and support for teachers and school leaders at all levels. Through the qualifications, participants will explore the best available research to understand the challenges faced by the education sector, and develop the skills needed to overcome these barriers. The delivery of NPQs encourages participants to continuously apply their learning to their own settings, to support enhanced pupil outcomes in a range of circumstances. NPQs support teachers and leaders to ensure processes and systems are well designed, and to make best use of well-designed resources, to reduce unnecessary workload.

## Recommendation 21

### **Whether patient's rights need to be strengthened in relation to accessing both online and in-person health services; (Paragraph 79)**

The NHS Constitution sets out the rights of the public and patients to access NHS Services as well as the right to privacy and confidentiality that ensures information is safe and secure.

Organisations throughout the NHS are working together to support patients' access to both online and in-person health services, in addition to making sure that public information, particularly health-related data, remains safe and secure. This being while they seek to deliver greater levels of innovation and higher levels of care.

In recent years, a number of new digital services have been designed to empower people to take greater control over their health and care. This has expanded secure access to clinicians, offered

more personalised health information, more digital tools and more advice which can help people better manage their conditions.

95% of GP practices currently have online consultation capability in place, with recorded online consultation submissions standing at a weekly rate of close to 10 submissions per 1,000 GP registered population. Millions are using our GP Connect Appointment Booking service and we are also supporting tens of thousands of people at home with remote monitoring solutions.

The NHS App provides a simple and secure way for people in England to access a range of NHS services digitally on their smartphone or tablet, such as booking GP appointments, ordering repeat prescriptions, or viewing their health record. Over 27 million people are now signed-up with the NHS App and between January and May of this year it has been used to order more than 5.9 million repeat prescriptions and book over 463,000 GP appointments. This has saved valuable time for patients and clinicians and we will continue to improve the numbers of adults in England using the NHS App.

It is the ambition of the NHS to continue to develop its services and provide users with a multi-channel experience. By offering people more choice in terms of how they interact with the NHS, including by continuing to offer face-to-face options to those that need them, the organisation will remain responsive to the needs and preferences of individuals.

## Recommendation 22

### **How digital healthcare interventions (in both physical and mental healthcare) are being approved and evaluated; and (Paragraph 79)**

The MHRA is responsible for the regulation of medical devices in the UK. They develop and apply the regulatory framework to ensure that medical devices, including digital health interventions (where they qualify as medical devices), are acceptably safe and meet their intended purpose.

The MHRA also has a central lead on the development of new regulations for medical devices in the UK using the powers in the Medicines and Medical Devices Act 2021.

In February 2021, NHSX introduced the Digital Technology Assessment Criteria for Health and Social Care (DTAC). This followed a beta launch period with over 800 innovators, buyers and commissioners of digital health technologies and stakeholders from across the health and care system.

The DTAC brings together legislation, NHS standards and good practice into a baseline question set that is applicable for all Digital Health Technologies (DHTs). It focuses on ensuring compliance with clinical safety as well as standards for data protection, security, interoperability, accessibility and usability. It is designed to be used by all NHS organisations piloting, procuring or using DHTs to ensure that products that support patients meet the standards that we would expect.

Adoption of DTAC has been high, with the majority of assessments being undertaken by the local procuring NHS organisation due to the liability under the GDPR and clinical safety legislation being held locally.

DTAC intentionally does not measure efficacy, or request evidence of effectiveness as part of the assessment process; this is the role of NICE. However, work is underway to provide additional support and resources to buyers and commissioners in this area.

Currently NICE assesses DHTs via its technology appraisal and diagnostics guidance programmes. In these cases positive guidance means that a technology is clinically and cost-effective compared to standard care. Alternatively, DHTs can be assessed via NICE's medical technologies guidance programme, where the claimed benefits are that using the technology is cost-saving or resource-releasing while maintaining or improving clinical effectiveness, when compared to standard care in the NHS. Positive recommendations are made when the evidence is found to support these claimed benefits.

## Recommendation 23

**The need for employment rights to be suitable for the digital age, including the need for new legislation to provide platform workers with defined and enhanced employment rights, consideration of a right to switch-off and exploration of the use of workplace monitoring and surveillance. (Paragraph 79)**

We agree that employment rights need to keep pace with the digital age as part of our commitment to building a high skilled, high productivity, high wage economy.

We are committed to strengthening workers' rights and ensuring all employees can enjoy a fair work-life balance. We have already consulted on making flexible working the default, unless employers have a good reason not to.

We are aware that increased remote working can raise issues relating to employee wellbeing. It is in the interest of both employers and workers to support wellbeing at work, prevent burnout and set the right conditions for employees to perform at their best.

The Flexible Working Taskforce has provided advice to employers so that they can better support remote working. This included considering the issues associated with an employee's ability to disconnect from work and the role of management in creating a supportive culture.

We continue to consider the business practices, opportunities and risks associated with remote and semi-remote (hybrid) working, as some employers choose to embed these ways of working more permanently.

We will continue to monitor the trends in this area, and consider where we can go further, to help deliver on our ambition to make the UK the best place in the world to work and grow a business.

## Recommendations 24 and 25

**The way that the pandemic confined many families to their houses, and restricted interactions with friends, family and services, has had severe consequences for some. There will be a lasting legacy of increased need for mental health services, domestic abuse services, Local Authority Children's Services, third sector family support services and**

**others, but the evidence we received suggests these services are nowhere near having the capacity to respond to this. (Paragraph 86)**

**The Government should commit to working with service providers to monitor and forecast the gap between need and capacity over the coming months and years, and to providing the additional funding that will be required to meet that gap. (Paragraph 87)**

We know that the pandemic has had, and will continue to have, an impact on the mental health and wellbeing of many people.

Last year we published our Mental Health Recovery Action Plan, backed by an additional £500 million for 2021/22, to ensure that we have the right support in place. For example, this has allowed around 22,500 more children and young people to access community health services, 2,000 more children and young people to access eating disorder services and a faster increase in the coverage of mental health support teams in schools and colleges. We have also commissioned an additional 113 high intensity therapists to manage complex cases in our talking therapies services (also known as 'IAPT' services), whilst continuing to maintain our waiting times targets.

This is on top of the investment in mental health services through the NHS Long Term Plan, which will see an additional £2.3 billion a year in mental health services by 2023/24. This funding will support an additional two million people in England.

The Government has also launched a public call for evidence to support the development of a new cross government ten-year plan for mental health. This is a key part of our commitment to level up and improve unequal outcomes and life chances across the country.

At the Autumn Budget in 2021, the Government announced £500 million to support families and children across the country.

£302 million of funding will be used to transform 'Start for Life' services and create a network of family hubs in 75 upper tier Local Authorities in England. This programme will be delivered jointly by the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC).

A breakdown of the £302 million investment is:

- a network of Family Hubs (£82 million)
- local areas to publish their Start for Life offer (£10 million)
- parent-infant mental health support (£100 million)
- breastfeeding support services (£50 million)
- parenting programmes (£50 million)
- trials of innovative workforce models in a smaller number of areas to test approaches to improve the support available to new parents (£10 million).

DfE and DHSC are currently working with the 75 eligible local authorities on the programme's requirements and implementation. As part of this, there has been a series of engagement sessions to enable eligible local authorities to hear more about and share their thoughts on our initial thinking around the programme's design.

The £500 million funding announced at the Autumn spending review included an additional £200 million to expand the Supporting Families programme delivered by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), working closely with the DfE. This takes total funding for the programme to £695 million and will enable local authorities and their partners to provide help earlier and secure better outcomes for up to 300,000 families across all aspects of their lives. It will also prevent high-cost statutory interventions such as children going into care.

The number of social workers in the workforce is increasing every year, up over 14% from 28,500 in 2017 to 32,500 in 2021, with average caseload numbers falling from 17.8 in 2017 to 16.3 in 2021.

While we recognise this may not be the picture some local authorities are seeing on the ground, we are working closely with local authorities to recognise and understand their workforce pressures and using central programmes and funding to respond to local authority needs.

The quality of the work environment is the key to recruitment and retention, including effective professional supervision, wider support and caseload levels. Our reforms seek to address a number of these points directly.

We are supporting the recruitment and retention of social workers through our investment in the fast track and professional development programmes to improve leadership. We are also seeing some innovative practices from local authorities that are driving down agency rates and stabilising their workforces.

Our COVID-19 Recovery Action Plan aims to stabilise and strengthen children's social care as we transition out of the pandemic, so we deliver well for children and young people and provide a strong foundation for longer-term reform, informed by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care.

## Recommendation 28

**Staff working in early years settings do not have the training or resource to respond to the different and more challenging needs of those they will now be looking after. The Government should commit to providing adequate funding to support pre-school children to recover from the pandemic, in the same way as it has for school aged children. It should also commit to an ongoing research programme to monitor the impact on these children over the coming years, so that the long-term consequences are fully understood and can be responded to. (Paragraph 90)**

We know that the earliest years are the most crucial stage of child development. Attending early education supports children's social and emotional development and lays the foundation for lifelong learning. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the outcomes gap and set back children's learning and development.

We are determined to build back fairer from the pandemic by recognising the impact on the youngest children's social and personal skills, as well as their early literacy and numeracy.



Improving training for early years practitioners is one of the key levers for driving up quality in early education settings. That is why we are investing up to £180 million of recovery support in the early years sector. We will build a stronger, more expert workforce, enabling settings to deliver high quality teaching and help address the impact of the pandemic on the youngest children, particularly those in the most disadvantaged areas.

This includes:

- Up to £153 million which will provide the opportunity for evidence-based professional development for early years practitioners, including through new programmes focusing on key areas such as speech and language development for the youngest children; and in addition;
- Up to £17 million for the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI); two thirds of primary schools have signed up for this proven programme.
- Up to £10 million for a second phase of the Early Years Professional Development Programme in academic year 2021/22 targeted to support early years staff in settings to work with disadvantaged children.

We are not undertaking recovery work in isolation. The early years foundation stage reforms set out what we know is essential for improving children's outcomes, strengthening early language development, supporting more effective early years curriculum and assessment, and freeing practitioners up from paperwork to spend more time with children. Our proposals to accelerate and embed real change are more important than ever in view of the impact of COVID-19 on the children and the sector.

We will continue to monitor children's outcomes through the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile.

## Recommendation 30

**The UK Government outlining, in its Levelling Up White Paper, its plans for further financial and legislative devolution of powers, to enable local authority leaders to deliver regeneration policies tailored to the needs of their specific areas; (Paragraph 96)**

The Government believes that strong and dynamic local leadership is critical to levelling up and regeneration. That is why the Levelling Up White Paper sets out a mission that, by 2030, every part of England that wants a devolution deal will have one. To help achieve our 2030 mission, we have published a devolution framework in the Levelling Up White Paper that sets out a clear menu of options for places in England that wish to unlock the benefits of devolution.

Devolution is a key means to delivering our levelling up missions, whether that is moving towards a London-style transport system to connect people to opportunity, improving local skills provision, or being able to act more flexibly and innovatively to respond to local need. The framework embeds a suite of powers that will enable local leaders to regenerate their areas, including:

- Ability to establish Mayoral Development Corporations (with consent of host local planning authority)
- Devolution of locally-led brownfield funding

- Strategic partnerships with Homes England across the Affordable Housing Programme and brownfield funding
- Homes England compulsory purchase powers (held concurrently)
- UKSPF planning and delivery at a strategic level
- Long-term investment fund, with an agreed annual allocation

While the framework is flexible and allows devolution to be tailored to the context of individual areas, it does place a strong emphasis on the importance of high profile, directly elected local leadership, strong local governance, and joint working across sensible and coherent economic geographies. While not all areas will want a directly elected mayor, those authorities with the stronger decision-making structures will secure greater powers. We are also delivering on the Prime Minister’s commitment to pursue a flexible approach to devolution. Nine counties have been invited to negotiate historic County Deals, a new devolution model that will spread the benefits of devolution beyond city regions and give local leaders more control over things like transport, infrastructure and skills. In addition, subject to an appropriate legislative opportunity we will seek to establish a new form of combined authority model to be made up of upper tier local authorities only (e.g. a county council and its associated unitary councils). A minimum population threshold of 500,000 has been chosen to ensure Combined Authorities and County Deals have sufficient economic and operational scale to be effective in driving levelling up. We expect upper-tier local authorities with a population of less than 500,000 to collaborate with their neighbouring authorities to agree a sensible geography for a devolution deal. We also want all existing Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) to achieve deeper devolution settlements.

The Greater Manchester and West Midlands ‘trailblazer deals’ will set the parameters of what deeper devolution could look like for other MCAs. Trailblazer deals will enable local leaders to present the case for the devolution of strategic functions and decision-making powers. We will consider equipping local leaders with the policy levers they need to deliver well-evidenced, locally tailored strategies, where there is a strong strategic case. This could involve, for example, exploring options to streamline the local funding landscape. Local leaders will get any further autonomy in exchange for demonstrating greater accountability and performance. We look forward to working with other areas soon, particularly those MCAs that have the strongest strategic case.

## Recommendation 32

### **The UK Government agreeing with the Local Government Association to create an improved resources equalisation scheme. (Paragraph 96)**

Through the Local Government Finance Settlement 2022/23, we have provided a further £80 million within the Social Care Grant to equalise the differences in the amounts raised from the adult social care precept for social care. The Government is committed to allocating its funding in line with our assessment of where relative need is. That is exactly what equalisation does.

This is a settlement that takes into account the different needs of councils across the country. The most relatively deprived areas of England (the upper decile of the Index of Multiple Deprivation) will receive 14% more per dwelling in available resource through this year’s settlement than the least deprived areas. Differing abilities to generate income from council tax increases are also taken into account when allocating funding through the settlement.

Furthermore, the Government is committed to ensuring that funding allocations for council are based on an up-to-date assessment of their needs and resources. We will work closely with local partners and take stock of the challenges and opportunities they face, before consulting on any potential funding reform.

## Recommendation 34

### **The UK Government providing financial support to local authority leaders to enable the establishment of work hubs, pop-up retail units and arts and culture provision in our towns and cities; (Paragraph 97)**

The Government recognises that the retail sector remains a key part of the high street and physical retail will remain an important route to consumers. On 15 July 2021, we published the Build Back Better High Streets Strategy, where we committed to continue working with the retail 7 sector, and the Retail Sector Council in particular, on its long-term strategic needs to ensure that businesses are profitable, resilient, innovative and support local economies in socially and environmentally responsible ways.

The Government is providing significant support to the arts, culture, heritage, and creative sectors to help them recover from the impacts of the pandemic. In 2020, the Government announced the unprecedented Culture Recovery Fund - the biggest arts funding package in history. Over £1.5bn has been allocated, including funding for the DCMS-sponsored national cultural institutions, totalling nearly 40 sites. The support has reached over 5,000 individual organisations and sites across the country.

Local authorities already invest significantly in their arts and cultural offer: councils in England spent £2.3bn revenue on Cultural Services in 2020/21.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the Government has provided more than £200m to places to strengthen their arts and cultural provision.

The first round of the Government's Cultural Development Fund, administered by ACE, is supporting Wakefield, Grimsby, Worcester and Plymouth Councils, allowing them to invest in cultural provision, maximising culture's contribution to their local economy. The £24m second round uses creativity to make places more attractive to live, work and visit. In March 2022, DCMS announced seven Round 2 projects in Barnsley, Berwick, Isle of Wight, Middlesbrough, Rochdale, Stockport and Torbay.

Public libraries are a key element of a place's cultural and arts provision, as well as its social infrastructure. There are around 2,900 library branches across England, delivered as a statutory responsibility of local councils. We champion and invest in public libraries. The Libraries Improvement Fund helps libraries adapt to people's changing needs: 25 library services will benefit from £5m in round 1; with round 2 guidance published in April.

The Government also invests in local places' heritage, for instance, Historic England, the Government's statutory adviser on heritage, administers the £95m High Streets Heritage Action Zones programme in 67 town and city high streets, partnering with local authorities in places like Leeds, Leicester, and Ryde. The programme revives historic buildings and re-engages people with local heritage in their high street, galvanising economic and social regeneration.

<sup>1</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-authority-revenue-expenditure-and-financing-england-2020-to-2021-individual-local-authority-data-outturn](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-authority-revenue-expenditure-and-financing-england-2020-to-2021-individual-local-authority-data-outturn)

Local authorities run c.350 museums in England. These are key civic institutions. The Museum Estate and Development Fund (MEND) supports the provision of accredited regional museums in England, helping them with infrastructure and maintenance. Of the 31 museums awarded funding in Round 1 (£18.8m) in 2021/22, just under half were Local Authority-run. The fund can also help museums improve access and environmental sustainability. Round 2 of MEND launched in April.

Major events like the UK City of Culture competition help places use cultural provision to drive economic growth and regeneration and social cohesion, instill pride, and shift perceptions. Three quarters of visitors to Hull in 2017 during its stint as UK City of Culture said it changed their perception of the city for the better. As a commitment to supporting cultural provision and levelling up opportunities across the UK further, in 2022 - for the first time - DCMS invested £40,000 in each of the eight long-listed places in the UK City of Culture 2025 competition. In May 2022, Bradford was announced as winner of the UK City of Culture 2025 title. DCMS is providing £275,000 as seed funding to ensure Bradford's planning can get underway immediately, maximising their early impact, while the three runners-up will receive £125,000 to take forward some of the brilliant ideas in their bids.

Destination Management Organisations, 35% of which are run by local authorities, play an important role by developing and promoting their destinations' cultural and wider offer to visitors. The £45m Discover England Fund, administered by Visit England, supported DMOs to develop visitor-focused products, many of which promote places' culture and heritage.

## Recommendation 35

### **The UK Government working with local authorities to develop a blended approach to housing in our towns and cities; and (Paragraph 97)**

The government is committed to regenerating towns and city centres. Our Levelling Up White Paper makes a new offer to support local leaders deliver transformational regeneration in towns and cities across the country, creating new homes, jobs and communities. We've announced our support for the first three of those places – Wolverhampton, Sheffield and Blackpool.

The government is committed to supporting high streets and town centres and delivering the housing the country needs. In September 2020 we introduced a new Commercial, Business and Service planning use class (Class E) which allows uses listed within it to change between these uses without planning permission.

A new permitted development right has now been introduced to allow for the change of use from vacant buildings, or parts of buildings, in Class E to residential use to create new homes to buy or to rent. This means that a wider range of commercial buildings can now change to residential use without the need for a planning application. We have also legislated to ensure that all new homes delivered under permitted development rights must, as a minimum, meet the Nationally Described Space Standards and have access to adequate natural light in all habitable rooms. Together these measures support our high streets and town centres as places where people shop, use services, spend their leisure time and live.

The government strongly encourages the re-use of suitable brownfield land – especially for development to meet housing need and regenerate our high streets and town centres – and

we welcome the report's recommendations on utilising suitable existing town centre properties to boost housing supply. We are committed to making the most of brownfield land, in line with our policies in the National Planning Policy Framework which set out that planning policies and decisions should give substantial weight to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements.

DLUHC and Homes England regularly engage with urban areas to support delivery of homes on brownfield, and the government is providing significant financial support for the take-up and completion of brownfield redevelopment. This includes through the £4.3 billion Housing Infrastructure Fund; the around £5 billion Home Building Fund; the £550 million Brownfield Housing Fund; and the £75 million Brownfield Land Release Fund. The Chancellor announced at the 2021 Autumn Budget and Spending Review a further £300 million of locally-led grant funding that will be distributed to MCAs and local authorities to unlock smaller brownfield sites for housing and improve communities in line with their priorities.

Local authorities have a comprehensive range of levers to deliver housing that best fits the need of their local area. This includes a package of reforms which gives councils more freedom on how they spend the money they receive from selling homes through the Right to Buy, and the abolition of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) borrowing cap in 2018, enabling local authorities to borrow for building.

The Government's £11.5 billion Affordable Homes Programme will deliver up to 180,000 affordable homes, should economic conditions allow. In order to support delivery right across the country, more funding is available outside of London compared to the current programme (Affordable Homes Programme 2016 to 2022), up from 55% to 65%. The rules on social rent have been relaxed, so grant funding is now available for social rent anywhere in England, and with higher grant rates available in high-cost areas where it is needed the most.

DLUHC works together with BEIS on its clean heat programmes that involve local authorities as vital delivery partners. These include the delivery of heat networks through the Heat Network Transformation Programme and a number of grant funding initiatives such as the Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery scheme, Home Upgrade Grant, and Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. These schemes provide funding to support energy efficiency improvements and the transition to low carbon heating for low-income households.

## Recommendation 36

### **The UK Government working with local authorities to develop a blended approach to public service provision in our towns and cities. (Paragraph 97)**

The government is already committed to ensuring the right blend of opportunities in its financial support for the provision of public services in town and city centres.

The government recognises the benefit of empowering local actors to deliver on local priorities and is working to identify the right opportunities for integrating their role in public service delivery. Directly-elected mayors in nine city regions have powers, budgets and responsibilities in many areas of public service provision with a strategic role for delivering services including in social care, adult education and housing and land use.

The Levelling Up White Paper sets out a new devolution framework for England. It also includes a mission to extend, deepen and simplify devolution across England so that by 2030, every part of England that wants one will have a devolution deal with powers at or approaching the highest level, with a simplified, long-term funding settlement.

The government is also committed to directing investment to those areas with greatest need, as reflected by the prioritisation of investment at Spending Review 2021. To name but two examples, the £4.8 billion Levelling Up Fund prioritises bids from places in highest need of investment in infrastructure. The government published an index which categorised places according to their need alongside the Levelling Up Fund prospectus, and supported local authorities most in need of levelling up to apply by providing around £20 million of capacity funding to support the development of their bids. Funding for the Supporting Families programme, at £695 million over the next 3 years in England, is also allocated based on need, ensuring that areas with higher levels of deprivation receive additional funding.

## Recommendation 37

**Developing a method for actively engaging with the different groups, communities and neighbourhoods within their towns and cities, and ensure that these views are acted upon in developing their regeneration plans; (Paragraph 98)**

The government agrees that it is important to engage with different groups and is clear that communities must be at the heart of planning and regeneration if we want to restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging.

To this end, we want to see more communities getting involved in neighbourhood planning, particularly in towns and cities where uptake is currently low. It means that communities have direct power to develop a shared vision for the future of their area and to shape development and regeneration.

In the Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill, which is currently in Parliament, we are seeking to introduce ‘neighbourhood priorities statements’, which will provide communities with a simpler and quicker way for communities to determine priorities for their area, in addition to the existing neighbourhood plan process. Through the Bill we are seeking to require local planning authorities to have regard to any neighbourhood priorities statements in force in their area when they are preparing their local plans. This will mean that more communities will be able to put their views across and make sure their preferences are taken into account. Neighbourhood priorities statements could also be a stepping-stone to preparing a full neighbourhood plan, a design code or pursuing other community initiatives.

The government believes digital engagement has the potential to increase the range of voices that can be heard, offering further opportunities for local communities to shape their local area. This is why we are accelerating the adoption of digital engagement tools and services by local authorities across the country. We have already funded 41 engagement pilots with a record level of investment into supporting the adoption of digital engagement tools and services across local authorities. This will help to make sure that developments are being influenced by more local

voices and better meet the needs of local communities. We will also produce new guidance on community engagement in planning, which will describe the different ways in which communities can get involved and highlight best practice, including the opportunities which digital technology offers.

In addition to the above, we are also putting communities at the heart of decisions about planning and regeneration in their local area through other proposals in the Bill. These include:

- requiring two clear periods for consultation during local plan preparation, before local plans are submitted for independent examination;
- commenting on and influencing mandatory design codes, allowing communities to be directly involved in making rules on how they want new developments to look and feel, with a much greater emphasis on environmental sustainability;
- allowing residents to propose development on their street and allow for a vote to be held to determine whether it should be given planning permission;
- allowing communities to determine the future name of their street, via a consultation, should the local authority seek to change it; and
- retaining the neighbourhood share in the new infrastructure levy, for local communities to make decisions on how a proportion of contributions are spent in their areas.

## Recommendation 38

**Ensuring that investment in housing, public transport, public services and green spaces in town and city centres, is matched by the same investment in housing, public transport, public services and green spaces in those neighbourhoods that risk being left behind; and (Paragraph 98)**

The government recognises that in the UK, talent is everywhere but opportunity is not and where people live unfairly affects their chances of getting on in life. The government's central mission is to reverse this unfairness and level up the UK by spreading the opportunity more equally across and bringing left behind communities up to the level of more prosperous areas.

The Levelling Up White Paper sets out a clear plan to level up every corner of the UK, underpinned by the 12 missions, which will be tracked over the 10 years by an annual report, allowing Parliament and the public to monitor the Government's progress and hold them to account.

The government is taking a data-driven approach to assessing geographic areas, ensuring that we are focusing our efforts on the places that need the most support and empowering local leaders and communities to seize their own destiny. This is underpinned by work to improve the quality and range of local data available to both national and local decision-makers, including through the ONS' Subnational Data Strategy and through the establishment of a new Spatial Data Unit in DLUHC, which will provide a centre of excellence for spatial data across government.

## Recommendation 39

**Developing a process for mainstreaming the consideration of inequalities when assessing proposals for improving housing, green spaces, public transport provision and public services, and ensuring that the views, and needs, of specific groups and communities are at the heart of the decision-making process. (Paragraph 98)**

To deliver substantive and sustainable change, local places need the power to create and deliver solutions to local challenges. With access to the right spaces, services and know-how, residents are empowered to take action and get involved in their community.

The Levelling Up White Paper sets out plans to work with partners in local government and civil society to co-develop a Strategy for Community Spaces and Relationships. It will explore the community infrastructure, local empowerment and building of trust that helps neighbourhoods to thrive. In the White Paper, we set out our intention to test approaches to Community Covenants, which will explore new approaches between councils, other public bodies and communities themselves to empower communities to shape their local areas and services. We will also be reviewing neighbourhood governance in England, looking at how to make it easier for local people and community groups to come together, set local priorities and shape the future of their neighbourhoods.