



Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP

*Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and
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**Department for Levelling Up, Housing and
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To all LA Chief Execs and Leaders

22 December 2021

Dear Colleagues,

LOCAL GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR COVID-19 RESPONSE

First, I would like to recognise and commend you for the heroic commitment and dedication local government has shown in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic over the last twenty-two months. It has been an immense challenge for us all, but at the heart of this national effort has been the strength of local leadership and resilience of local communities.

For that, I am truly grateful to you all.

Unfortunately, the fight is not over. The emergence of the Omicron variant, and rising cases, now presents a significant new challenge.

On 12 December, the government announced a new vaccination challenge to make sure every adult is offered a booster by the new year. This is a national mission. An extraordinary effort is now underway to meet this ambitious target and local government is playing a vital role in this.

I'm clear that the response will vary across the country depending on existing local arrangements, and I'm grateful that local authorities are now working with their local NHS partners to agree what is possible.

Asks of Local Government

As set out by Dr Emily Lawson at the webinar my department hosted with councils last week, we understand that many local authorities are already providing support in line with 6 key requests from the NHS:

- Establish/promote transport offers through social care employers and carer networks to get the workforce and carers to their booked appointments/walk-in centres
- Establish outreach and drop-ins for social care staff and carers and promote through networks
- Establish/promote transport offers in areas of high deprivation
- Establish outreach, signposting and drop-ins your most underserved communities including at Job Centres, food banks, local markets, etc.

- Provide resources and tools to local community organisations so they can conduct outreach and signposting ahead of Christmas
- Agree a joint plan with Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) and Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) for additional targeted pop-ups in w/c 27 December that would have the biggest impact on underserved communities

We also refer to the recent email sent to your chief executives from Eleanor Kelly – the senior local government representative on vaccines - which outlined operational detail on how to access finance and workforce through CCGs.

Throughout the pandemic, we have seen that COVID-19 has impacted some groups disproportionately. Whilst the vaccine programme has been hugely successful, there remain disparities in vaccine uptake between communities across the country.

Funding Support

To help address this, I'm pleased to confirm that we are providing up to £22.5 million to local authorities in England to fund the [Community Vaccine Champions scheme](#). This will provide funding to 60 areas most in need of support to enhance vaccine uptake. Officials will be writing to these 60 councils shortly to set out more detail.

I am also pleased to announce the launch of our [Protect and Vaccinate](#) scheme, a new funding package to provide accommodation and increase uptake of vaccination amongst people sleeping rough, which we have also written to you about separately.

A total of £25 million will be made available to all local authorities in England to find appropriate accommodation and, most importantly, to use this as a way of boosting vaccination rates across this vulnerable population. We are asking local authorities (subject to individual assessments) to make offers of safe and appropriate accommodation to people who are sleeping rough now and to do all that they can, working with partners in the NHS, to make sure that everyone in this cohort gets vaccinated. This will involve focussing on the most vulnerable people sleeping rough, particularly those who are clinically vulnerable, as well as those with a history of rough sleeping.

We have also announced a £3.2 million vaccination incentivisation package. This will comprise of funding direct to local authorities, working with their partners in the voluntary and community sector, to be used flexibly to encourage the uptake of vaccination amongst people sleeping rough.

We understand the additional pressures that the spread of the Omicron variant and cold weather pose for local authorities in terms of rough sleeping, and we know that you are already working hard to make sure protections are in place. Thank you again for all your hard work to protect this vulnerable group.

Business Rates: COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund

Last week my department confirmed funding for the business rates COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund and published [guidance](#) for local authorities who will be delivering the relief. This £1.5bn scheme will provide vital support to businesses affected by COVID-19 but not eligible for existing support linked to business rates. The funding we have provided is substantial and the methodology adopted for distribution should ensure that money reaches the areas where it is needed most.

Yesterday, the Chancellor announced additional support will be available for businesses who have been impacted by the Omicron variant. The government is providing one-off grants of up to £6,000 per premises for businesses in the hospitality and leisure sectors in England. Around 200,000 businesses will be eligible for business grants which will be administered by local authorities and will be available in the coming weeks. To support other businesses impacted by Omicron – such as those who supply the hospitality and leisure sectors – the government is also giving a more than £100 million boost to the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) fund for local authorities in England. Further details will be available shortly.

Being close to those impacted by COVID-19, you will know how important it is that the support reaches ratepayers as quickly as possible. Therefore, I would welcome your support in ensuring that this funding reaches those that need support swiftly. In the case of the Additional Relief Fund, I know that local authorities must devise and approve their own local relief schemes. In normal times this is a process which can take weeks but for some businesses that may be too late. **I would like councils to consider what steps you can take to streamline the approval and delivery process for this relief urgently.**

I am pleased that we have been able to confirm that resources for the vaccination challenge can be sourced and deployed to support delivery with immediate effect. Where costs are agreed between the local authority and ICS, local authorities should invoice the lead CCG for their ICS system and continue to report costs incurred to the Department to support appropriate accounting and analysis. I'm acutely aware, however, of the wider pressures currently facing local authorities and want to assure you that we are doing everything we can to address them.

In particular, I have heard loud and clear the concerns you have about adult social care services. I would like to thank those working in local authorities who are already going above and beyond to support the most vulnerable at this time. The adult social care sector is under enormous strain in the same way as the NHS and I truly appreciate all the efforts you are making in stepping up the delivery of vital booster jabs to care workers and on halving discharge delays to support the NHS. I know you are also drawing on contingency planning commensurate to the significant scale of the challenge and again, I thank you for doing so. I have written jointly with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to further emphasise this point.

Ongoing Engagement

Information sharing between local and central government has been critical during this period. My department, and the wider government, is using its extensive existing networks to gather your current and emerging issues across a range of critical service areas. My officials will continue to work with you and your teams through the usual channels.

You will also note the NHS letter on 13 December asking local authorities to actively engage with their local CCGs and ICSs to provide offers of support.

Your Directors of Public Health also have clear points of contact with the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), through their Regional Partnership Teams (RPTs) and Department of Health and Social Care where operational, public health concerns can be escalated promptly. The teams are also well placed to convene partners across the system to help address local issues and will continue to coordinate regional and national support where required. This will help make sure that local partners have the clarity and support they need to deliver at the speed that is needed.

In addition, my department is working with other government departments to re-prioritise regulatory services work. We plan to write to you shortly with steers on what activities you could deprioritise.

I value greatly my engagement with the local government sector, and I look forward to continuing to work closely with you now on this important task, and in the future, so that we can continue to provide the best outcomes for our communities up and down the country.

Thank you again for everything you have done and continue to do throughout the pandemic, and for working with your communities during this difficult time. Your efforts to keep vital services running whilst supporting the national campaign to deliver booster doses, is critical to us achieving our target of offering every adult a booster by the New Year.

With every good wish,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Gove". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations**