

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Levelling Up,
Housing and Communities
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

Mark Kemp
ADEPT President 2022/23
Executive Director, Environment and Transport
Hertfordshire County Council
County Hall, Pegs Lane, Hertford SG13 8DE

12th December 2022

Dear Mr Gove

How can levelling up be better for people and places?

The Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport (ADEPT) has led a programme of work to explore how local authorities are levelling up through action to address disparities in multiple domains – public health, local environmental quality, exposure to climate risk and socio-economic deprivation.

This project was in collaboration with the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS), Association of Directors of Public Health (ADPH), Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and the Local Government Association (LGA), recognising the synergies between our work areas, and the links between wellbeing and place.

We have developed ten new case studies highlighting examples of local authorities leading action to level up locally. We have attached an overview of this work at Annex 1. Our work has demonstrated that local authorities are uniquely positioned to deliver levelling up, to identify local priorities, to bring partners together and to improve outcomes for residents.

We believe this is something government has also recognised through the devolution of the Levelling Up Fund to local authorities in rounds 1 and 2, and through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund being managed by local authorities.

Our work has highlighted where more can be done to enable and empower local authorities to tackle disparities. In particular:

- **There is an urgent need to increase long-term funding for councils to address local disparities and improve local infrastructure.** Our research shows that long-term funding can deliver real change, by providing the resource and certainty to develop more effective ways of working. We recognise the challenging national economic situation but urge the government to consider how it can support local authorities to do more, including through the allocation of UKSPF. We also strongly support the government's commitment to streamline and simplify the wider funding landscape for levelling up.
- **The levelling up and growth agenda must retain a focus on inclusion and improving well-being amongst the most vulnerable in society.** Children and adult services are currently under unprecedented pressure. A greater number of people in crisis and increasing costs are placing significant strain on all local authorities. This is being exacerbated by demand linked

to the wider impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. We welcome the measures announced in the Autumn Statement to ease financial pressure on social care services and to increase support to vulnerable people. Social care is not just about pressures, it is also about investment in good jobs and developing skills as part of a workforce plan alongside the NHS.

- **There is also an imperative to address the wider determinants of ill-health linked to social, economic and environmental factors.** We urge the government to recommit to publishing a white paper on the wider determinants of ill-health, with a clear focus on those that have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic
- **The Levelling Up White Paper contained only limited references to wider environmental imperatives including the climate and nature emergencies.** We believe this was a missed opportunity and would like to see the importance of valuing natural capital, a central part of the levelling up mission, recognising the links to people's health and wellbeing and local growth. This should include actions to reduce carbon emissions, to plan for the changing climate as well as to reverse the decline in habitats and species loss. There are also significant opportunities for new jobs and skills through actions in these areas. We welcome the Chancellor's recent announcement to increase investment in energy efficiency, and hope that this will provide more support to households of all tenures.

A short overview of our work is attached along with [links](#) for further information. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss this work and our findings in more detail.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Kemp, President, ADEPT

Sarah McClinton, President, ADASS

Jim McManus, President, ADPH

Cllr James Jamieson, Chairman, LGA

Annex 1: Levelling Up for People and Places: Overview

Over 2022, the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport (ADEPT) led a project to explore how councils are levelling up through action to address disparities in multiple domains – public health, local environmental quality, exposure to climate risk and socio-economic deprivation.

This project was in collaboration with the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS), Association of Directors of Public Health (ADPH), Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) and the Local Government Association (LGA), recognising the synergies between our work areas, and the links between wellbeing and place.

The project included a series of case studies which look across local government service areas. The case studies illustrate that every council area has disparities within it, and whilst the levelling-up agenda has had a strong focus on inter-regional differences, the need to address inequality is relevant to every place.

Common factors across these case studies show that local councils are:

- **Leading effective partnerships** across council service areas, with local NHS bodies, businesses, universities, community and voluntary groups.
- **Using local data** on deprivation, health outcomes and access to local services to target and prioritise investment to the areas in most need.
- **Working with local residents**, including those from under-represented groups, to understand their stories and experiences and involve them in service improvements.

The case studies highlight the strong co-benefits of work to address multiple disparities.

They also reveal some of the obstacles to progress, with particular reflections around the need for long-term and secure funding for councils.

The need to compete for funding is resource intensive and many councils lack the expertise to compile bids. Short timescales for bidding and spending funding also reduces the range of projects coming forward and can inhibit delivery.

Contextual factors including the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on staff resource, and the impacts of rising costs for labour and materials are also having an impact on councils’ capacity to deliver and the success of projects.

We strongly support the government’s commitment to streamline and simplify the funding landscape for levelling up. We believe that this is essential to help more local places make progress in levelling up.

In the current economic climate, we believe the approach to funding should incentivise local authorities to work across services and to seek multiple outcomes from investment. Our case studies provide a series of examples of local authorities already doing this, but we recognise that some of the projects are at an early stage.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with government to explore how this way of working can be supported and encouraged through the further devolution of funding to local authorities.

Key points from our case studies:

- **Birmingham City Council** is investing more in local parks and green spaces to improve both the local environment and people's health and wellbeing. The Future Parks Accelerator Programme was key to supporting and generating Birmingham's City of Nature programme, funding a team of eight people. Work was led by the public health team with input from planning and operational teams working in parks. They combined public health and environmental data to map environmental injustice.
- **Calderdale Council** has delivered a series of regeneration projects in Halifax. In 2021 the council was successful in bidding for £12.2 million Levelling Up funding to build a new leisure and community health centre, recognising the contribution of health and activity levels to local productivity. The project has planning permission but is on hold due to rising construction costs, illustrating the current financial pressures on local authorities.
- **Cornwall Council** is leading work to plan for the changing climate, looking at impacts across the council's service areas, and contributing to the development of a new Local Climate Adaptation Tool. Cornwall Council's environment teams have benefited from long-term funding from the European Regional Development Fund, which will finish at the end of 2023.
- **East Sussex County Council** is leading work to support vulnerable young people, by improving multi-agency collaboration with the aim of reducing school exclusions. The council has maintained a focus on the wider contextual factors for exclusions including poverty, poor connectivity and more widespread social and mental health problems exacerbated by the pandemic and has sought to adjust provision accordingly.
- The **Greater Manchester Combined Authority** has led a programme of work to value natural capital across the 11 local authority areas and to identify opportunities to restore and improve the natural environment. The combined authority is supporting local areas by developing a pipeline of projects to contribute to local nature recovery.
- **Leeds City Council** is supporting a programme of work to create good jobs in deprived areas. The Good Jobs, Better Health, Fairer Futures programme aims to demonstrate that health inequalities can be improved through a joined-up and targeted approach to economic and health interventions. This project builds on a legacy of strong partnership work between the council and anchor institutions.
- **Milton Keynes Council** has delivered a new demand responsive transport (DRT) service, replacing the majority of the supported bus services. As well as saving services, the introduction of the DRT model has created a more sustainable financial model for local supported bus services, securing a net saving of £1 million per year.
- **Surrey County Council** is one of nine test and learn sites for Green Social Prescribing. The two-year pilot has brought colleagues together across the NHS and the council's environment, social care and public health teams. Green social prescribing projects are

generating outcomes across the environment sector and public health. There is an opportunity to do more to embed the learning and build a system-wide approach to green social prescribing.

- The **London Borough of Tower Hamlets** is taking an evidence-led approach to parks and open spaces, targeting investment to the areas of greatest need, drawing on evidence about deprivation, physical activity levels and the quality of local spaces. The Borough is building its corporate research function and is one of ten areas to receive funding as part of the Health Determinant Research Collaboration initiative.
- The **West of England Combined Authority** is establishing a project to provide support for households of all tenures to adapt their homes for energy efficiency. The Retrofit Accelerator project recognises the co-benefits of energy efficiency, including to tackle fuel poverty and support health and wellbeing, as well as the contribution to the local economy, generating new jobs and training opportunities.