

Cllr Shaun Davies
Chair
Local Government Association

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By email

8th January 2024

Dear Cllr Davies

Local Government White Paper – call for evidence

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute evidence to the LGA's work on a Local Government White Paper. We fully support your ambition to set out a strong, cross-party case to the next government to demonstrate that a more empowered local government could:

- deliver the public's priorities more effectively.
- strengthen the value that the public place on the UK's democratic structures.
- help lead and reform local public services to deliver better services for our communities.

In this submission we describe who we are and what we do, briefly set out our strategic priorities, describe how we have translated these into our own manifesto asks, and give examples of good practice. We provide links to evidence we have of effective local delivery around the issues of climate change, levelling up, highways maintenance innovation, flood risk management, home to school transport, and leadership and workforce challenges.

Who we are

Place matters. Strong democratic local leadership of place is vital for our communities. The Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport (ADEPT) is the voice of place directors in strategic local authorities. We develop, support, and represent our members to make their places more resilient, sustainable, inclusive, and prosperous.

- Place directors are at the very heart of place-shaping, delivering universal services and leading partnerships to support their local environment, economy, and communities.
- They are responsible for providing day-to-day services such as local highways, waste and recycling, and planning.
- They develop the longer-term strategies, investment and infrastructure needed to make their places resilient, sustainable, inclusive, and prosperous.

Place services are universal and are of critical importance to the wider prosperity and wellbeing of communities. They have high public visibility and value, and they deliver critical co-benefits to other council services.

Place is where things get done. Place directors deliver solutions locally, to the benefit of the nation.

What we do

ADEPT supports its members to do this by:

- Building strong collaborative relationships with government, public agencies, corporate and commercial partners, and a wide range of professional and NGO organisations.
- Networking, learning and research and development to drive innovation and share best practice.
- Providing high quality leadership development, thought leadership and training programmes.
- Influencing and policy development to make the case for joined-up policies across government, improved funding for local authorities, and greater devolution of powers and investment.

Our priorities

ADEPT's 2023-26 Strategic Plan [Placing Communities First](#) is designed around three key themes – people, place and planet. The programmes and services for which place directors are responsible are inextricably linked, impacting, and affecting health and wellbeing, local infrastructure, and climate change. Using the three key themes to shape our work we have identified six current priorities:

- Ensuring resilience in local government structures and governance, getting the right powers and funding devolved to local authorities.
- Levelling up for people and place, with a focus on inclusion and wellbeing of the most vulnerable in society.
- Delivering green growth, with strong local economies and strong environments going hand in hand.
- Taking action on climate change, a place-based approach covering both mitigation and adaptation.
- Workforce development and diversity.
- Organisational excellence.

The first four of these reflect many of the key issues identified in the LGA's public opinion polling that formed the basis of the [Make it Local](#) campaign, launched at your conference last July. We

collaborate closely with colleagues at the LGA and will continue to do so to ensure that our aims and actions align.

ADEPT manifesto asks

ADEPT has launched its own call to political parties of all colours, [Manifesto for stronger places](#) (Autumn 2023). To emphasise the significance of local leadership in achieving national ambitions, we set out top priorities across our core areas – housing, planning and growth; transport and infrastructure; and environment and climate change. These build on our Strategic Plan, and include:

- Providing a financial regime that enables councils to build more, genuinely affordable and climate-ready new homes for social rent.
- Doubling or more the current level of capital funding to address the deteriorating local highway network.
- Unlocking grid scale infrastructure investment to enable renewables to connect more quickly.
- Introducing new Local Climate Action Agreements between national and local government.
- Committing to prompt implementation of the key reforms set out in the Resources & Waste Strategy.

On housing, we are engaging with Homes England, the National House Building Council and others as we aim to update our housing policy position in the next couple of months. In addition to an adequate financial regime, councils need an effective partnership with government to support housing delivery at scale, to provide the right tenure mixes to help people find homes, with appropriate and timely infrastructure development to make places resilient and sustainable.

Action on climate change needs a greater focus on resilience and adaptation. Many parts of the country have started 2024 with serious flooding, and homes, businesses, transport infrastructure and agricultural land under water again. Government has so far failed to provide proper leadership on adaptation, the third National Adaptation Programme is inadequate in its recognition of and support for the role of local authorities. We need a new relationship with central government that will provide strategic and cross-departmental leadership to help build resilience in our critical infrastructure, local services, and communities.

For environmental improvement and nature recovery we need a statutory framework and associated funding to enable local councils to prepare evidence-based Local Environmental Improvement Plans that deliver local environmental leadership and support appropriate planning and development decisions. Plans must help meet national targets including net zero, improving nature, environmental quality, flood and drought risk, accessibility, and blue / green space.

Blueprint manifesto asks

ADEPT is also part of the [Blueprint Coalition](#) on climate change – a unique collaboration between local government, environmental and research organisations which first came together in 2019 to champion local place-based action on climate change and seek more support for local authority delivery (NB: while not a full member, the LGA supports the work of the Coalition). The Coalition has set out five priority asks, together with a longer list of detailed policy and funding changes needed from central government.

In readiness for the forthcoming General Election, these have now been presented as [Manifesto asks](#). The Coalition calls on all political parties to include the following in their manifestos:

- Recognition of the need for a place-based approach with adequate funding and support.
- Commitment to a genuine partnership with local authority leaders through a more effective Local Net Zero Forum.
- Commitment to reform and devolve funding streams, and increase flexibility, to enable local authorities to act at the scale and pace required.
- All future devolution deals should include ambitious plans for place-based actions to reduce carbon emissions, adapt to the impacts of climate change, and restore nature.

The Coalition sets out more specific asks around investment in low carbon and climate resilient transport and energy infrastructure, investment in training and skills to accelerate the transition to a net zero economy, upgrade our existing homes to ensure they are fit for the future and make all new housing zero carbon, increase funding for active travel, and accelerate nature recovery and improved green infrastructure.

Funding

Adequate funding and support for local authorities is a fundamental issue that is highlighted in these manifesto asks and will no doubt be one of the central themes coming out of your consultation. The financial sustainability of local government has never been so threatened. The failings of the current funding model are well known – short termism, uncertainty, inflexibility, competitive bidding, fragmentation, and simply insufficient resources to maintain core services and deliver the scale of change required. The solutions are equally clear, and the White Paper should put funding reform at the top of the agenda for the next government.

Evidence – local climate action

We supported our Coalition partners Ashden and Friends of the Earth in producing 40 invaluable case studies on [How local councils are acting on climate](#), with examples from a wide range of local

authority types and places. The projects highlighted cover nature, buildings, energy, transport, climate vulnerability, waste, decision-making, and finance.

Evidence – Levelling up

In 2022 we collaborated with fellow professional organisations the Association of Directors of Public Health (ADPH), the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADASS), the Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) and the LGA on the [Levelling Up for People and Place](#) project. ‘Levelling up’ as defined by the government has some critical gaps, but it also offers a real opportunity to ensure multiple outcomes across the key areas of environment, economy, social inequality and health and wellbeing.

Levelling Up for People and Place demonstrated how local authorities are already making a difference on the ground, bringing together a broad range of service areas to do so. The report included the following case studies:

- The provision of new leisure facilities in Calderdale
- Adapting to climate change in Cornwall
- Reducing exclusions from secondary schools in East Sussex
- Building natural capital in Greater Manchester
- Helping to provide good jobs in the care sector in Leeds
- Transforming the bus service in Milton Keynes
- Improving parks and green spaces in Birmingham
- Introducing green social prescribing in Surrey
- Tower Hamlets’ approach to parks and green spaces
- Retrofitting homes in the West of England Combined Authority.

We also published a [Levelling Up Good Practice Guide](#) based on the work of the ADEPT/Amey *Excellence in Place Leadership Programme* looking at what local government has learnt so far about levelling up locally. It identified three key areas of learning:

- The need for strong local leadership to deliver levelling up and draw out the unique characteristics and ambitions of each place.
- The use of data and evidence to understand a place’s specific challenges to enable targeted interventions and provide essential feedback loops, as well as to be able to measure progress against the levelling up missions.
- Creating effective partnership environments to enable co-design and co-delivery approaches to levelling up.

Case studies included in the document come from Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Norfolk County Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council and Tees Valley Combined Authority.

Evidence – highways innovation

ADEPT Live Labs 2: Decarbonising Local Roads in the UK is a three-year, £30million, UK-wide programme funded by the Department for Transport that will run until March 2026, with a five-year subsequent, extended monitoring and evaluation period. Seven projects, grouped by four interconnected themes, are being led by local authorities working alongside commercial and academic partners.

Following the success of the ADEPT SMART Places Live Labs programme (Live Labs 1) and its focus on innovation across local roads, Live Labs 2 concentrates on how to decarbonise local highways infrastructure and assets. ADEPT has developed Live Labs 2 to support the transition to net zero carbon local roads. Over the next three years we will be collaborating with ambitious, local highways authority-led partnerships from across the UK to develop and implement zero carbon and climate change focused local roads plans.

[Seven Live Labs projects](#) are working across the following four interconnected themes:

- UK Centre of excellence for materials – providing a centralised hub for research and innovation for the decarbonisation of local roads materials, developing a knowledge bank, real-life conditions testing and sharing and learning insights: North Lanarkshire Council (north campus) & Transport for West Midlands (south campus).
- Corridor and place-based decarbonisation – a suite of corridor and place-based decarbonisation interventions covering urban through to rural applications, trialing, testing and showcasing applications within the circular economy and localism agendas: Wessex partnership (Somerset Council, Cornwall Council and Hampshire County Council), Devon County Council, and Liverpool City Council.
- A green carbon laboratory – examining the role that the non-operational highways ‘green’ asset can play in providing a source of materials and fuels to decarbonise highway operations: South Gloucestershire Council & West Sussex County Council.
- A future lighting testbed – a systems-based examination of the future of lighting for local roads to determine what assets are needed for our future networks and how they can be further decarbonised across their lifecycle: East Riding of Yorkshire Council.

Evidence – Flood & coastal erosion risk management

The National Flood & Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy sets a vision for a nation that is resilient to flooding and coastal change, but this cannot be achieved without others. Local authorities, play a huge part in building resilience to flooding and coastal change.

ADEPT is working with the Environment Agency to raise awareness and understanding of adaptation pathways. The adaptation pathways approach helps us make practical, low-risk investments today while keeping flexibility for the future in an uncertain climate. The approach can empower local authorities to make timely, informed decisions, ensuring the effective use of resources for maximum benefit in creating resilient and thriving places.

Together with the Environment Agency, we have developed an introductory ten minute [video](#), which aims to assist local authorities in understanding and implementing the adaptation pathways approach to manage flood and coastal risk. It explores how they benefit local authorities, supporting placemaking and adaptive planning for all sources of flood risk, drawing on experience from some of the key locations in the adaptation pathways programme – the Severn Valley, South and West Yorkshire, and the Thames Estuary.

Evidence – home to school transport

We have been working with ADCS on home to school transport provision, particularly for children with SEND. We share a number of concerns about this particularly around the increasing cost pressures: the County Councils Network has reported that costs increased by 33% over the four years to 2020/21, and forecasts continue to rise significantly. We have now published a [joint policy position](#) with proposals to make the system more sustainable (updated legislation, appropriate funding and market reform, and travel solutions based on children’s needs) and the [ADEPT SEND Transport Toolkit](#) with good practice case studies from Hampshire and Leicestershire.

Evidence – Leadership development and workforce challenges

The workforce challenges facing local authorities are well known and have been highlighted by the LGA’s Local Government Workforce Survey. They include a crisis in recruitment and retention, and significant skills gaps among managers and management teams. For place services, these workforce challenges are also faced by private sector and NGO employers. ADEPT is working with its corporate and sector partners to develop programmes and tools to help. These include:

- The ADEPT/SOLACE [Leadership Development Programme](#) for people currently in a Tier 3 or 4 senior leadership level with aspirations to become a place director, this popular programme has been running for five years and we are now recruiting to two further cohorts for 2024.
- The ADEPT/Amey [PACE](#) place leadership programme aims to create space for senior place leaders to find strategic solutions to the wicked issues facing the public sector and support place leaders in driving change. This replaces the Excellence in Place Leadership programme with Amey, referenced above under Levelling up.
- The [Employee Retention Great Practice Guide](#) developed in partnership with Colas was launched at our 2023 Autumn Conference and features case studies and reflections on

different approaches from the public, private and community sectors to ensuring our people want to stay with us. Local authority case studies include Leicestershire County Council, Hertfordshire County Council, Derby City Council, and Transport for West Midlands.

- We are also working with Colas to develop further toolkits for recruitment of young people into local government, and equality, diversity and inclusion.

I hope that these examples are helpful as you develop the Local Government White Paper. We would of course be happy to provide any further detail needed. We look forward to further discussions in the coming months. This includes the ADEPT Spring Conference on 16th May, where we very much hope you will be happy to present the latest on the LGA's Local Government White Paper.

Yours sincerely



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