



## **Long-term recovery from Covid will be ‘seriously hampered’ without a reset of central-local relations**

Central Government needs to involve councils more in the co-design and co-production of measures aimed at stimulating recovery during the next stage of the response to coronavirus, local authority chief executives have urged.

A failure to do so will make it even harder for local authorities to help places successfully adapt once lockdown restrictions are eased early next month.

The call follows a series of issues councils have had to contend with in recent months when implementing Government policy announcements.

Worryingly nearly half (46%) of council chief executives and senior managers said they were doubtful over their ability to recover their local economies as councils look to play a key role in the next phase of the response to the coronavirus crisis.

The survey of more than 100 senior officers also found that nearly a third (30%) were doubtful of being able to help their places recover socially.

The survey was carried out by Solace, the leading members' network for local government and public sector professionals in England.

Joanne Roney, Solace spokesperson for Leadership & Learning and Chief Executive of Manchester City Council, said: “The biggest frustration officers, and politicians, have at a local level is the lack of involvement in the design and production of policies, guidance and announcements made by Ministers.

“Rather than bringing in expertise from local government partway through a process, such as the case with Test & Trace, central Government should call on the vast array of local expertise from the beginning. If the next stage of the response to the coronavirus crisis is to be a national success then we cannot repeat the mistakes of the past - local government must be at the heart of it.

“Councils have risen to the challenge of the coronavirus crisis freeing up more than 30,000 hospital beds so more lives could be saved, housing more than 5,400 rough sleepers, and processing more than £10bn in grants to help support more than 844,000 businesses, to name just a few of the many achievements.

“Despite this amazing response Government’s failure to honour its promise to cover all councils’ Covid-related costs will seriously hamper any long-term recovery and our ability to deal with a second wave of coronavirus.”



Other results from the survey showed that three-fifths (59%) of senior professionals expressed major doubts about their ability to implement local lockdowns in their areas, while more than a third (37%) had doubts about successfully delivering the Test and Trace programme in their areas.

More than three quarters (77%) said they were 'unsatisfied' about the level of funding being made available to councils to deliver/enforce local lockdowns.

The same number said they were 'unsatisfied' with the information and guidance coming out of central Government, while more than two-thirds (83%) said they were 'unsatisfied' about the national communications which should be used to support and underpin local communications strategies.

Thinking about the support provided by the Government to date on the delivery of this particular programme, more than three quarters (78%) were unsatisfied with the national communications to support/underpin councils' local communications strategies.

More than two-thirds (67%) were also unsatisfied with the information and guidance coming out of central Government and Public Health England.

Exactly two-thirds (66%) said they were unsatisfied with the funding they have been given to date too – 29% of which said they were extremely unsatisfied.

There is also widespread concern about data sharing arrangements with central Government and among local partners (e.g. health) with 63% saying they were unsatisfied with this element of the process – 28% of which were extremely unsatisfied.

One survey respondent said: "The local community understanding of the Test, Track and Trace system is extremely poor and presents a risk of fatally undermining the whole system before it has even started. The lack of data flow also fundamentally undermines the ability to deliver proactive targeted messages to prevent and meet community needs."

Another said: "We have no powers and a complete lack of clarity around the governance of taking actions."

### **Notes to editors**

Solace's survey of 112 serving council chief executives and senior directors/managers was conducted between 3 June and 19 June 2020.

Solace is the representative body for local government chief executives and other public sector professionals in the UK. More information can be found on our website:

<https://www.solace.org.uk/>