

Rt. Hon. Yvette Cooper MP
Secretary of State
Department for Health and Social
Care

Sent via email

Executive Leader
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Dear Secretary of State,

Congratulations on your appointment as Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.

I am writing because I believe there is now a fundamental conflict between your Department's ambition to reform adult social care and the Government's programme of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). I respectfully urge you to intervene with your colleagues in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government before irreversible decisions are taken that will make successful social care reform significantly more difficult to achieve.

The Prime Minister has rightly recognised that adult social care requires fundamental reform. Baroness Casey's Independent Commission represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to design a system capable of meeting the challenges of the future, addressing fragmented accountability, workforce shortages, the divide between health and social care and the long-term sustainability of care provision.

It is therefore deeply concerning that, before that work has concluded, Government is requiring local authorities to begin one of the largest structural reorganisations in local government history.

In doing so, Government is redesigning the organisations responsible for delivering adult social care before it has decided what adult social care itself should become.

That sequence is, in my view, fundamentally flawed.

If Baroness Casey recommends a National Care Service, new governance arrangements, greater integration with the NHS, different commissioning models or revised statutory responsibilities, LGR risks creating a new generation of councils based upon assumptions that may be obsolete before they even come into existence.

In effect, billions of pounds will be spent restructuring local government and social care authorities around today's system only to require those same organisations to reorganise themselves again in order to implement the reforms your Department wishes to deliver.

More immediately, LGR will absorb exactly the leadership, financial resources and

organisational capacity that will be needed to implement those reforms.

Across England, councils will be forced to devote senior leadership, programme teams and financial resources to abolishing existing authorities, creating entirely new organisations, restructuring services, replacing systems and delivering one of the most complex organisational changes ever attempted in local government.

Those are precisely the people who should instead be focused on implementing the future of adult social care.

There is a further consequence which I believe deserves particular consideration. If your Department's objective is a system that is more integrated, more consistent and better connected with the NHS, LGR moves in precisely the opposite direction.

Across England, county-wide adult social care services will be broken apart and redistributed across dozens of new unitary authorities. Instead of creating a more coherent system, LGR will fragment it further by requiring each new authority to establish its own statutory leadership, governance arrangements, commissioning functions and organisational structures.

That fragmentation comes at a time when Government itself recognises that the existing system already struggles to recruit and retain experienced leaders. Every new authority will require its own Director of Adult Social Services, alongside the wider statutory and senior leadership arrangements needed to discharge its legal responsibilities. Yet there is already a limited national pool of suitably experienced individuals, and it is difficult to see how those posts can realistically be filled across so many new organisations without weakening leadership elsewhere.

The consequence is that leadership capacity will become more dispersed just when Government needs strong, stable and experienced leadership to deliver the reforms that you and Baroness Casey are working to achieve.

More fundamentally, LGR risks embedding further organisational fragmentation into a system that Government has already concluded needs to become more joined-up. It creates more organisations, more governance arrangements, more boundaries and more interfaces between services at precisely the moment your Department is seeking greater integration around the needs of those who rely upon care.

That is why I believe LGR is not simply an unfortunate distraction from reform. It risks taking the structure of adult social care in exactly the opposite direction to the one your Department is seeking to create.

Equally concerning is the scale of public expenditure involved. Government has accepted that adult social care requires fundamental reform. Yet, instead of directing billions of pounds towards delivering that reform, vast sums will instead be consumed by the costs of LGR.

Those resources will fund organisational change rather than care reform. They will pay for restructuring rather than improving services. Every pound spent abolishing and recreating

councils is a pound unavailable to improve care services, strengthen the workforce and implement the reforms your Department wishes to see.

I therefore believe LGR is now one of the greatest strategic risks to the successful reform of adult social care.

The timing makes this especially urgent. Government intends elections to the new councils in May 2027, with vesting day on 1 April 2028. Structural Change Orders will therefore need to be made within the coming months. Once that happens, councils will have little practical choice but to divert their leadership, resources and attention into delivering LGR.

There is therefore only a short window in which Government can still change course. Many councils, including existing social care authorities, have commenced Judicial Reviews against the Government's proposals and implementation is already falling behind timetable.

I therefore respectfully ask that you raise this issue urgently with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

I do not believe it is sensible to dismantle and recreate the organisations responsible for delivering adult social care before Government has determined what the future of adult social care should be. Nor do I believe it is possible for local government simultaneously to deliver the most significant structural reorganisation in decades whilst also implementing the most significant programme of social care reform for a generation.

Those two programmes compete directly for the same people, the same leadership capacity and the same financial resources.

If Government is serious about delivering a National Care Service and the reforms Baroness Casey is considering, it should first ensure that LGR does not undermine those ambitions before they have even begun.

I therefore urge you to lobby your colleagues in MHCLG to stop the current programme of LGR until the future model of adult social care has been determined. Only then can local government be organised around the system Government actually wishes to create, rather than one it has already accepted requires fundamental reform.

Thank you for considering these observations. I hope you will use your position around the Cabinet table to ensure that one of the Government's most important domestic reforms is not compromised by another programme that risks pulling in precisely the opposite direction.

With every good wish,



Councillor Dan Swords

Executive Leader of Harlow Council