

## The responsibility for failing local government lies at...

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The [FT has noted](#) that:

*At least 12 English councils have been in rescue talks with the government, in what could be the “tip of the iceberg”, according to experts, as the Covid-19 pandemic lays waste to local authority finances.*

They added:

*Rob Whiteman, chief executive of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, on Monday said 12 authorities are in talks with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government “in or around a section 114 position”.*

This is profoundly worrying. First, democracy without a local dimension is not democracy at all. There has to be local accountability for what happens in our communities and these measures will, in effect, remove that.

Second, Section 114 provisions crush the supply of services, reducing them to the most basic level. Since many of these services are critical care and support services this means real people suffer very badly as a consequence. This regime penalises the most vulnerable people through no fault of their own.

Third, whilst I know some authorities have been reckless with property speculation the proper sanction in that case is in their elected members (although the absence of any sanction on reckless ministers makes that hard to justify) and not on local populations.

Fourth, this was entirely predictable and is largely the legacy of Cameron and Osborne who outsourced their austerity measures to local authorities by massively reducing their funding with total indifference to the consequences. The current crisis is their responsibility.

What to do?

First, the revival of local democracy is key. Introducing proportional representation is

central to this. It is ludicrous that some councils are always completely controlled by single parties when that in no way reflects the range of opinion in their area.

Second, more money needs to be given to improving the quality of local decision making.

Third, the services local authorities supply must be given better support. Having had so many removed from them, what are left are vital for vulnerable people.

Fourth, the mentality that suggests that councils are mere contracting agencies for outsourcable services must end: this is contemptuous of local democracy, local people and local accountability.

Fifth, this requires a proper funding settlement.

The responsibility for these failings lies at the doors of a rotten government, a rotten philosophy, rotten economics and rotten indifference to people. It is time for something better.