

Local government first

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Association

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Welcome events for newly elected councillors

Tuesday 16 July 2024, 5.00pm - 7.00pm

Following the elections in May, the LGA is pleased to invite all newly elected councillors to attend our annual welcome event on 16 July 2024.

LGA Senior Vice-Chairman Cllr Kevin Bentley, Chief Executive Joanna Killian and a panel of experienced councillors will offer advice on how to navigate the complexities and challenges of your new role.

At this virtual event, funded by UK Government, you will hear about the work and priorities of the LGA and the national issues affecting local government. We will also share how we can support you in your role now and as you develop throughout your time as a councillor.

Register online www.local.gov.uk/events

LG Inform

Track and compare your local authority's performance across over 10,000 metrics with LG Inform – our free data benchmarking tool.

Our themed reports show you all the latest data on a comprehensive range of topics including:

- homelessness
- children in need and care
- planning
- fly-tipping
- financial hardship.

local.gov.uk/lginform

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White paper for councils

Councils are uniquely placed to bring stakeholders together around the needs of residents and to address big issues on housing, transport, net zero and public services.

That's why the LGA has launched a Local Government White Paper, setting out how the sector can help solve the national challenges we face as we head towards the 4 July general election (p8).

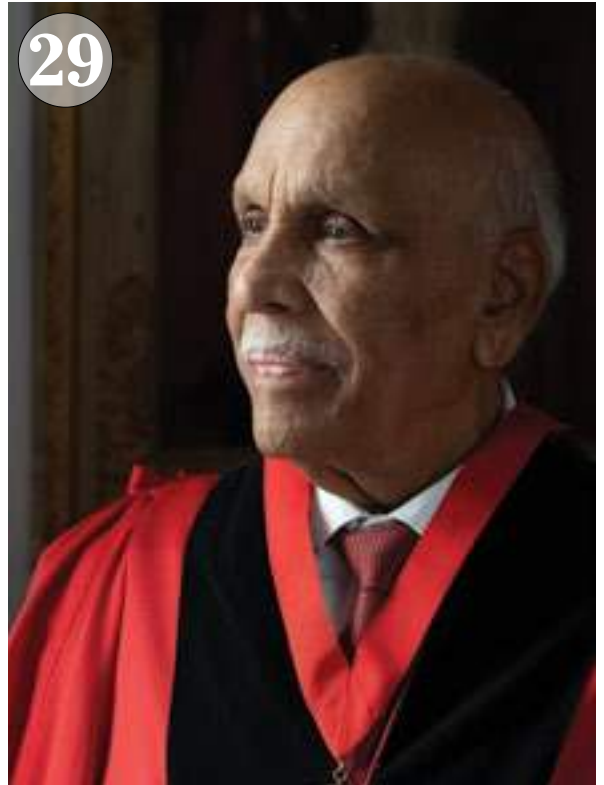
It's not that long since the local elections (p30) and, as ever, the LGA has an extensive support programme for the newly elected, as well as career development for the recently promoted (p12).

Elsewhere in this month's **first**, we take a look at devolution in England, and the roll-out of combined authorities and combined county authorities (p14); mark a decade of the Care Act 2014 (p16); look at how councils can provide more effective adoption services (p18); and review an LGA toolkit aimed at tackling abuse and intimidation of councillors (p19).

Our lead comment is from Skills for Care, on a workforce strategy for the adult social care sector (p25).

And if you have Ofsted or the Care Quality Commission visiting, you might want to check out our communications advice on how to respond to inspections (p23).

Councillor Kevin Bentley is LGA Senior Vice-Chairman



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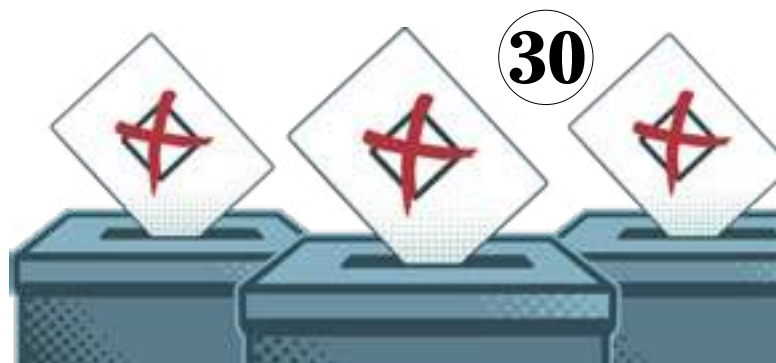
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Legal duties on social care ‘may not be met’

A third of councils are not confident of being able to meet all their legal duties under the Care Act 2014 by 2025/26 – a decade after the introduction of the landmark legislation, designed to improve access to vital care and support.

This is despite eight in 10 councils forecasting having to cut spending on other community services to try to protect care services, according to a report and survey of councillors published by the LGA to coincide with the 10th anniversary of the act receiving Royal Assent.

The act pulled together a patchwork of legislation on adult social care and placed duties on councils, including the need to focus on people’s wellbeing and ensure the provision of preventative services.

However, the act has coincided with a rise in people needing to draw on care and support and cuts to funding that have left councils under increasing pressure to do more with less.

The LGA’s report says that in addition to severe funding shortages, the biggest issues facing the sector include

recruitment and retention, more people with more complex needs, and the inability to invest in preventative services.

Ahead of the general election, the LGA said all parties need to end the politicisation of adult social care, put the national interest first, and work on a cross-party basis to secure the future of care and support so that people can live the lives they want to lead.

Cllr David Fothergill, the LGA’s Social Care Spokesperson, said: “Councils are doing all they can to ensure they meet their duties under the Care Act, including cutting spending on other neighbourhood services. But many still fear they will not be able to cover the coming years.

“This simply isn’t good enough. It isn’t good enough for people who draw on care and support and it isn’t good enough for the care workers who work incredibly hard for very little financial reward.

“Adult social care needs urgent attention. This must be top of the in-tray for whoever forms the next government.”

• See p16



‘Targets needed to build more social rent homes’

The range of financial pressures facing social housing providers has led to fewer social homes being built and exacerbated a chronic social housing shortage in England, according to MPs.

A report from the cross-party Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee, published before the announcement of the general

election, called on ministers to invest in the sector to ensure that 90,000 new social rent homes a year can be built, and to re-examine how much funding is allocated to social rent homes.

The report said government should publish a target for the number of social rent homes it intends to build each year.

It also recommended using land value capture and reforms to grants and funding to support social housing, and help the sector deliver energy efficiency, decarbonisation, and fire safety improvements.

An LGA spokesperson said: “There are currently not enough affordable homes to meet demand, with more

than 1.2 million households on council waiting lists in England and over 100,000 households living in temporary accommodation – this is a record high.

“The LGA has set out a six-point plan to spark a council house building renaissance, which must include urgent reform to Right to Buy.

“Long-term certainty on powers and funding could help councils deliver an ambitious build programme of 100,000 high-quality, climate-friendly social homes a year.”

LGA annual conference cancelled

As first was going to press, the LGA Board was meeting to discuss whether the organisation's annual conference will be rescheduled.

The Board decided not to proceed with the LGA Annual Conference and Exhibition – due to take place in Harrogate from 2-4 July – following the announcement of the general election on 4 July.

An LGA spokesperson said: "The LGA Annual Conference and Exhibition is an important part of the local government calendar, offering a great opportunity for the sector to come together to learn, to meet colleagues from across the country and to discuss issues of vital importance."

"We know this will be disappointing for our members,

partners, exhibitors and supporters – as well as our staff, who have worked hard to produce a great programme."

The LGA is exploring options for members to reconvene later in the year.

The LGA's Annual General Assembly, on 2 July, will go ahead and will be conducted remotely. New details will be circulated to members shortly.

Councils face £6.2bn funding gap

A new relationship between central and local government – providing long-term financial certainty and empowering councils – is the only way to solve the issues facing the country.

So says the LGA in its new Local Government White Paper, which also reveals that councils face a £6.2 billion funding gap over the next two years.

The gap is being driven by rising cost and demand pressures on adult social care, children's services, homelessness support and home-to-school transport for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

The LGA is calling on all political parties to commit to a significant and sustained increase in funding in the next spending review, alongside multi-year funding settlements and reform of the local government finance system.

The white paper also calls for a major review of how all public services can work together within their local communities on a joint approach to prevention and reducing demands on costly, high-need services, such as adult and children's social care.

Focusing on how councils, when given the powers, can shape their local areas, the white paper makes clear that economic growth can only be achieved if every local economy is firing on all cylinders.

Cllr Kevin Bentley, the LGA's Senior Vice-Chairman, said: "We all rely on local government to keep our streets clean, collect our bins, fix our potholes, build more homes, create jobs, keep children safe, and support people of all ages to live fulfilling lives.

"However, a £6.2 billion funding gap over the next two years means a chasm will continue to grow between what people and their communities need and want from their councils, and what councils can deliver.

"On 5 July, the next government will be faced with many challenges, whether it is building more affordable housing, improving care for adults and children, reducing homelessness, boosting inclusive growth or tackling climate change.

"Local government's offer to the next government is huge. Respect us, trust us and fund us. By working together as equal partners, we can meet the fundamental long-term challenges facing our communities."

• **Local Government White Paper, see p8**



In brief

LGA political balance reviewed

Labour remains the largest political group at the LGA following the 2 May local elections, so it retains the right to nominate the organisation's chair. Labour is on 38.8 per cent, the Conservatives on 31.4 per cent, Liberal Democrats on 15.5 per cent, and Independents, Greens and Others on 14.3 per cent. The make-up of the LGA Board and the LGA's policy boards and committees have been recalculated to reflect the LGA's revised political balance. The chair and the new LGA Board will be elected at the LGA General Assembly's virtual annual meeting on 2 July. Over the summer, the political group offices will confirm their appointments to all other formal roles ahead of the start of the LGA's new political year on 1 September.

Staff pay offer

Council staff have been offered a pay increase of at least £1,290 from 1 April 2024, equating to 5.77 per cent for the lowest paid.

Cllr Tim Roca, Chair of the National Employers for local government services, said: "For the lowest paid (currently earning £22,366 a year), the offer means their pay will have increased by £5,323 (almost 30 per cent) over the three years since April 2021. For those on all pay points above the top of the pay spine, an offer of 2.50 per cent has been made.

"The National Employers are acutely aware of the additional pressure this year's offer will place on already hard-pressed council finances, as it would need to be paid for from existing budgets. However, they believe their offer is fair to employees, given the wider economic backdrop."

The National Employers negotiate pay on behalf of 350 local authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland that employ around 1.5 million staff.

The increase to the national pay bill resulting from this offer would be £731.70 million (4.03 per cent).

Separate national pay arrangements apply to teachers, firefighters, chief officers, chief executives and craftworkers.

Framework 'to provide accountability'

A new improvement and assurance framework – designed to help councils check that they have the right controls in place and identify where they need to become more effective – has been published by the LGA.

Developed following extensive engagement with local authorities, professional bodies and other stakeholders, the framework will help councils understand how all the different elements used to provide assurance and accountability fit together, and signpost to related support and guidance.

Ultimately, the framework will support authorities to develop the effectiveness of their own assurance and to reduce the risk of failure.

It highlights factors that make a difference to councils, including being transparent and open to external challenge – such as through an LGA corporate peer challenge – and having political and managerial leadership that visibly prioritises 'doing the right thing'.

Cllr Abi Brown OBE, Chairman of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board, said: "Councils do many and varied things to keep themselves 'safe' and check that what they are doing is lawful, in line with professional standards and appropriate performance targets.

"This process of checking – or 'assurance' – should be evidence-based and accurate, and enable others, such as the public, to hold the council to account for the services that they deliver.

"This framework has been designed to support this.

"It's more important than ever that councils, in the current financial context, are using all of the elements of this framework effectively, to identify and manage risks to performance and corporate governance."

• See bit.ly/3wZ1HYb



New programme for local leaders launched

The LGA has launched a new programme for local leaders, exploring the various complex and demanding challenges they face – ranging from crisis management to political changes.

Designed with consultants Shared Service Architecture, Leaders Plus will build on the LGA's existing leadership programme and explore local government challenges through a 'VUCA' lens – 'volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous'.

Participants will hear from experts in other sectors about how they have responded to VUCA scenarios and situations, and the impact on people, organisations and systems.

The programme takes place via residential modules, including keynote speaker sessions and one-to-one coaching with accredited executive coaches, and an online platform, where council leaders can access all the programme materials.



Leaders Plus will initially draw on the expertise of 12 to 15 council leaders from across the political spectrum to help pilot and shape the programme. Participants will direct where the VUCA lens will be focused, so that it is always anchored around what is important for the group.

An LGA spokesperson said: "Whether it be an external crisis situation or complex internal changes within our councils, we need to ensure our present and future generation of council leaders know how best to handle whatever comes our way.

"Leaders Plus seeks to push the boundaries for council leaders with many years' experience, who want to continue to develop and grow. We are working in the first instance across party groups, to define the first cohort and develop the programme."

The residential modules will take place from 7-8 November 2024, 23-24 January 2025 and 27-28 February 2025. To find out more, go to www.local.gov.uk/our-support/leaders-plus-programme

Apprentice of the year

Sara Jenner-Akehurst has been named as the 2024 Local Government Apprentice of the Year.

A Business Support Apprentice and a Level 3 Standard Business Administrator at Cambridgeshire County Council, Ms Jenner-Akehurst won the award by competing in a day of virtual challenges designed to showcase participants' skills, expertise and initiative.

Now in its fourth year, the one-day national event was designed and delivered in partnership, by the LGA, South West Councils and the East of England LGA, with 119 Level 2 and 3 local government apprentices taking part from across England and Wales.

Ms Jenner-Akehurst said: "I was really nervous when I went into the event, but I was assisted throughout by the organisers who made it really accessible for my disabilities.

"To think that I had given it my all and really connected with people I had never met was a big achievement, let alone be crowned the Local Government Apprentice of the Year 2024."



An LGA spokesperson said: "This award is a great opportunity to express our thanks to, and recognise the achievements of, our fantastic local government apprentices who, as our winner Sara demonstrates, approach their work with dedication and skill."

The LGA's Apprenticeship Support Programme enables councils to deliver successful apprenticeship schemes to help people into training and employment, as part of its sector support offer – see bit.ly/3V74kPv

Watchdog warnings on biodiversity scheme

A new scheme that requires developers to boost nature has been launched without having all the elements in place to deliver it, the National Audit Office (NAO) has warned.

'Biodiversity net gain' (BNG) requires developers to finance the creation of habitat that not only replaces what has been lost to development but boosts habitat overall by 10 per cent.

Under the programme – which applies to England and started to come into force in February – the gains for nature should ideally be on site.

If that is not possible, they can be delivered off-site by the developer, or purchased through a new private market for 'credits' to pay for work elsewhere.

The NAO warned that the Department

for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs was relying on a private sector market for biodiversity credits emerging, so developers could purchase them to meet their obligations.

But the department did not know how rapidly the market could scale up or if it could satisfy demand, with just two sites offering 35 hectares (86 acres) of habitat gain on the official register by May.

The NAO added councils had not received additional funding for compliance and enforcement.

An LGA spokesperson said: "It is important that councils are properly funded and that measures are quickly put in place to ensure the land is available for BNG off-site, for instance by allowing BNG on council-owned land in the short term."



New sexual health strategy needed as STIs rise

The LGA is calling on whoever forms the next government to launch a new 10-year sexual health strategy.

It comes as the latest statistics reveal a rise in new sexually transmitted infections (STIs) diagnosed in England.

According to data from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), there were 401,800 diagnoses of new STIs in England in 2023 – an increase of 4.7 per cent since 2022.

The UKHSA data also showed there were 85,223 gonorrhoea diagnoses – an increase of 7.5 per cent, while there were 9,513 cases of infectious syphilis, up 9.4 per cent.

The figures also show a 5 per cent increase in the number of consultations delivered by sexual health services in England in 2023 compared to the year before – increasing from 4,392,466 to 4,610,410.

The LGA says a long-term strategy is needed to help prevent and treat infections by addressing issues around sustainable funding, workforce challenges and fragmentation of services.

There hasn't been a new strategy since 2001.

Councils blame a perfect storm of problems accessing contraception and spiralling demand for driving up infection rates.

CLr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Councils want to continue encouraging more people to visit their local sexual health clinic, in particular under-served communities.

"However, these figures show sexual health services continue to face rising demand pressures.

"This is why we are calling for a new 10-year strategy to tackle infection rates, and ensure that sexual health services are properly funded and resourced in the long term."

More to do on fire service culture

The fire and rescue sector has made some good progress nationally but government needs to press ahead with reforms, according to the chief inspector of fire and rescue services.

In his latest 'State of Fire and Rescue' annual report, published last month, HMCIFRS Andy Cooke found that urgent improvement is needed to values, culture and the management of misconduct.

Fire and rescue service leaders also need to take a strategic approach to service improvements; and the inspectorate needs additional powers to ensure action is taken on its recommendations – for example, by legally requiring fire and rescue authorities to publish a response to inspection reports.

CLr Frank Biederman, Chair of the LGA's Fire Services Management Committee, said the report showed the "fantastic job" firefighters do in difficult circumstances, against the background of a challenging financial picture.

He added: "Improving culture and values is of paramount importance to the sector, and the report makes clear that further work must be done on this important issue. This work is vital to the sector, and there are still too many incidents of unacceptable behaviours that must be addressed.

"Before any wider systematic changes are made to inspection, it is vital that the sector is given the resources it needs to progress the issues highlighted in the report, such as reduced workforce capacity, which is hampering the ability to fully address increasing risks such as wildfires and lithium battery fires.

"Unless these financial issues are addressed, the recommendations in this report will have little to no impact if implemented."



A new hope

The LGA's Local Government White Paper sets out how to deliver more and better for residents



Councillor **Kevin Bentley** is Senior Vice-Chairman of the LGA

Local government is the key to solving many of our biggest national challenges. We work at the front line of people's daily lives. We shape places, provide vital services that hold our communities together, keep people safe, and create the conditions for prosperity and wellbeing.

Yet there has never been a more difficult time for local government.

Rising demand and costs have meant the toughest of choices, with less to spend on the services that communities value, such as fixing the

roads as fast as we would like and repairs to street lamps. Nonetheless, the sector continues to show great resilience and to innovate.

With a general election in July, now must be a time for change and new hope.

In that spirit, the LGA's Local Government White Paper sets out how – with a new, equal and respectful central-local partnership – we can provide long-term sustainability to councils, deliver local and national economic growth, and support our people and places.

The LGA has consulted widely, including with more than 200 local authority leaders and 150 local authority chief executives across England. Their messages are clear: we start from a strong base.

Rooted in a democratic mandate, councils are inherently close to their local communities and can deliver tailored services to address specific needs. This has been seen recently in the sector's universal response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

Offering more than 800 services and working with a broad range of partners, councils can convene tailored solutions for our residents, including people of all ages who

National challenges 1

Delivering inclusive growth

Devolution that supplies long-term financial certainty, financial flexibility and additional powers can enable councils and combined authorities to make the best decisions for their places. Specific white paper proposals include:

- A long-term and place-led economic strategy setting out a joint vision for inclusive growth and prosperity.
- A place-based employment and skills offer to improve outcomes for young people and adults, support employers with their skills needs, and develop a culture of lifelong learning.
- Action to stabilise the existing growth-funding landscape, to ensure continued investment and develop an integrated multi-year growth fund.
- A stronger focus on data to inform local and national strategies around growth and prosperity.
- Investment in local economic development capabilities to boost council capacity and expertise.

access council services to help live their best life.

Local government has what it takes to deliver inclusive growth in partnership with the next government. We are ambitious for our communities and know that many more residents can be supported back into work.

Sustainable funding is essential for local government's important, wide remit. We now need bold, creative solutions. And we must get



National challenges 2

Building the homes we need

With the right reforms, local government can play a central role in dealing with the housing crisis. LGA proposals include:

- Powers for councils and combined authorities to build more affordable, good-quality homes at scale, quickly, where they are needed.
- Reform of Right to Buy to avoid continued net loss of housing stock.
- Abolition of permitted development rights and reform of viability assessments for proposed housing developments, with all planning applications required to deliver affordable housing requirements as per Local Plans.

- New legislation to ban Section 21 'no fault' evictions of renters.
- Further investment in social housing by allowing local government continued access to preferential borrowing rates through the Public Works Loan Board.
- A commitment to uprate local housing allowances rates to the 30th percentile of local rents beyond 2025/26.
- The rollout of five-year local housing deals by 2025 to areas that want them.
- Government support to set up a new local Housing Advisory Service.
- Publication of a cross-departmental strategy setting out national commitments to prevent homelessness.

National challenges 3

Supporting our children and young people

Local government plays a critical role in supporting children and young people who draw on care and support – those in care, in need of protection, and those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Our proposals include:

- Writing off of all Dedicated Schools Grant deficit.
- Pausing Ofsted and Care Quality Commission SEND area inspections and refocusing the inspectorates’

activity on identifying the national, systemic issues with the SEND system, and using their findings to inform how it can be improved.

- Action to build capacity in mainstream education to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND.
- Starting work on a cross-government plan for children, supported by improved budget sharing at a local level.

- A review of early years education and childcare.
- Significantly improved access to children’s mental health and wellbeing services.
- Access to appropriate placements for children in care and secure settings.
- The introduction of a separate judgement on inclusion in the Ofsted school inspection framework.
- Reform of the SEND statutory framework.

“We must stop wasting public money by only intervening at the point of crisis”

back to longer-term settlements, end the proliferation of funding pots, and have straightforward accountability based on outcomes for residents.

We are pressing for immediate change so that local government can start to build back straight away for communities. This means practical action on the biggest challenges, including better support for children, homeless families, adults who draw on care and support, and on climate change and housing (see panels).

We also have a plan for longer-term reform. It is time to give local government the powers needed to deliver our ambitions for place-making, with new powers to bring partners together to get services working better, drive inclusive growth and regulate failing markets.

We represent local residents and are uniquely placed to bring agencies together around their needs. We work together to provide support to places facing the biggest challenges.

It is time to give prevention the focus it deserves. Through community services (including housing) and joint action with the NHS, we can help people stay well from early years to later life. This is as much about supporting mental as physical health.

As a nation, we must stop wasting public money by only intervening at the point of crisis. It is time to prioritise innovation and freedom from bureaucracy – ending bureaucratic reporting and exploiting the full potential of technology, including artificial intelligence (AI). ➔



National challenges 4

Reforming and sustainably funding adult social care

Adult social care is one of local government’s biggest areas of spending, and the financial position is seriously challenging, historically and currently. LGA proposals include:

- Adult social care funded adequately, sustainably, and with trust in councils as democratically accountable bodies.
- Support for the voluntary sector and unpaid carers.
- More therapeutic-led reablement – intensive short-term interventions with follow-up support – which support

recovery after time spent in hospital.

- Increased care worker pay to help tackle the serious recruitment and retention issues facing the sector.
- Joint work with government, and better joint working between the NHS and local government to support people.
- Focus on prevention and recovery services, including steps to support the voluntary sector to provide fast, low-level support.
- Investment in primary and community services and intermediate care.



National challenges 5

Supporting place-making

We know from experience that you cannot build a safe and thriving high street from a desk in Whitehall. We need a new approach to maximise the value of place by allowing more variation, not less.

We need devolution that transfers powers to communities, and that recognises local authorities and their leaders are best placed to make decisions for their places, combined with sufficient funding so they can deliver local priorities that go beyond their statutory obligations. Only then can councils deliver on this crucial place-shaping role.

From previous page

And it is time for a new model of equal partnership between local and national government, backed by statute and based on international best practice. We have so much to offer. This must be a relationship based on trust, where people are at the heart of everything we do.

Our white paper expands on these priorities for driving change, sets out, in detail, the challenges and opportunities we face, and calls for honest, open dialogue about what local government needs to be.

What is the scale of support we want to be able to provide, and how should it be delivered? Are we to be the local safety net or is our future role broader? Now is the time for radical thinking to prepare for a new future.

To support this dialogue, whoever forms the next government should:

- establish a new partnership model for working with local government and delivering the recommendations set out in this paper
- commission a major new review of how public services can work together to transform places, including through invest-to-save models of prevention
- work with us to bring together learning across government departments on ‘what works’ to increase cost-effectiveness and innovation, enabling the development of cross-cutting solutions. We will support this by contributing learning from existing sector-led improvement support and best practice from local government.

The LGA will be undertaking a significant programme of work to take forward the ideas in our white paper.

“The paper calls for honest, open dialogue about what local government needs to be”

We will be publishing new pieces of research and establishing cross-sector working groups to focus on the longer-term solutions.

Ahead of the general election, we will be talking to all the major political parties about resetting the relationship between local and national government, and the offers we can make to work with the next administration to take forward a new sustainable future for public services, and support inclusive economic growth. We want the next government to be able to drive partnership action to start tackling the immediate challenges right away.

We will also set out 100 specific actions based on the direction of travel set out in this white paper, to progress this in the first days of the new Parliament.

Working in this new way will build firm foundations for longer-term reform and the renewal of local government for the benefit of local people.

National challenges 6

Backing local climate action

A new approach can take advantage of local government’s role as community and place leaders, as housing, planning, transport, environment and health authorities, and as procurers, asset holders, land managers, conveners and enablers. Our proposals include:

- Work with local government on a renewed Local Climate Action Delivery Programme, to provide the step change needed for moving forward local climate action. This should focus on building a single national framework for mitigation and adaptation.
- Focus the Local Climate Action Delivery Programme on 10 local climate action missions to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change up to 2050, including building public trust and inclusivity, retrofitting social and fuel-poor homes, and delivering zero waste through the ‘polluter pays’ principle.
- Translate missions to reality through local climate action plans covering all areas.

i This is an edited version of the [LGA’s Local Government White Paper](#). To read it in full, please visit www.local.gov.uk/local-government-white-paper

From harm to hope

Reviewing progress on the national drugs plan



Councillor **David Fothergill** is Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board

People with untreated drug and alcohol dependencies have a disproportionate impact on our communities.

In a typical English secondary school, 40 pupils will be living with a parent with a drug or alcohol problem.

About one in six 'child in need' assessments carried out by local authorities last year recorded parental alcohol problems, with a similar proportion for drug use.

Problem parental alcohol or drug use was also recorded in more than a third of serious case reviews where a child died or was seriously harmed.

Almost half of homicides every year are drug-related, and, in almost a fifth, the suspect is under the influence of alcohol, while nearly half of 'acquisitive' crime – such as shoplifting, theft, burglary and robbery – is drug-related.

It remains a stark fact that more people die from drug misuse every year than from all knife crime and road traffic incidents combined.

Local authorities commission drug and alcohol treatment services through the public health grant.

It is a condition of this government grant that they improve the take-up of, and outcomes from, their drug and alcohol misuse treatment services, based on an assessment of local need and a plan that has been developed with local health and criminal justice partners.

These services, working in partnership with other local services, can and do help thousands of people to stabilise and turn their lives around every year – reducing the risks to the individuals concerned, their families and the wider community, and the burden on a range of other local services.



“Leadership of local authorities in this important agenda is crucial to success”

Every pound spent on drug treatment saves £21 over 10 years.

Three years ago, 'From harm to hope: a 10-year drugs plan to cut crime and save lives' – a cross-departmental government strategy – was published.

Both the strategy and the funding that accompanied it were welcomed, especially after years of reductions to the public health grant.

Underpinning the strategy is the important principle that combating drug use and harm is a priority for all relevant organisations, working as a single team.

At national level, a 'combating drugs minister' was appointed and a cross-government central unit has been established.

Mirroring this at local level has been the creation of 'combating drug partnerships', each with a local 'senior responsible owner'.

In our latest LGA publication, 10 councils tell us about their journeys to date, their successes as well as challenges. Common themes emerge, but also interesting differences.

Most heartening is the evidence of

local commitment and innovation.

The engagement and leadership of local authorities in this important agenda is crucial to success, and the report highlights key issues and interesting proposals.

As elected members, we are ideally placed to champion this investment into reducing drug and alcohol harm in our areas, by engaging the community and collaborating with officers.

Your understanding of local communities enables you to work effectively with officers to ensure that the existing and new funding is applied to meet the needs of local people.

This will be vital in achieving the ambition to radically reduce the harms that drugs and alcohol cause.

The provision of active involvement and ongoing and visible support will send a clear signal that tackling drug and alcohol problems is a priority for the local area.

The commitment and support of members will also help to ensure that sufficient time and resource will be available to maintain momentum.

i The LGA's report, **'Two years on: a progress review of "From harm to hope: a 10-year drugs plan to cut crime and save lives"'**, will be published soon at www.local.gov.uk/publications. See moredetails.uk/3KoBvcF for the Government's drugs plan

Making a difference

Top tips for new councillors

Congratulations on becoming a councillor!

Local government touches the lives of everybody, every day, and this is your opportunity to make a difference to your local area.

Councils deal with everything from schools to care of older people, from roads to rubbish, libraries and local planning.

Behind all of this is a web of legislation and bureaucracy that most people do not need to see. As a councillor, understanding how it works will help you to represent your local community.

Being a councillor is a rewarding experience, but it is also challenging work and you will have many separate roles to balance.

Everyone in your community has diverse needs and opinions, and will make different, sometimes conflicting, demands of you.

Every day, you will be expected to balance the needs of your local area, your residents and voters, community groups, businesses, your political party (if you belong to one) and the council – on top of your personal commitments to family, friends and workplace.

Balancing these competing demands and being effective as a councillor will require you to come to your own conclusions as to what is best and the decisions you feel are necessary.

Taking elected office is one of the most important civic duties anyone can perform. As a newly elected councillor, you hold a unique position and have the potential to make a real difference to people's lives.

It's daunting, but you're not alone. Your council, your political party (if you have one), and the LGA (including its political groups) all provide support for new councillors.

For example, the LGA's councillor induction e-learning module has been



designed to give you the information you need to get started in your new role.

It provides key information about what your role as a councillor involves, and how to work effectively with your local residents and communities.

It also explores some of the issues and challenges facing local government today and includes advice from experienced councillors.

It will provide you with an insight into some of the LGA's wider work around corporate governance, and with councils on civility in public life and codes of conduct for councillors.

In addition, it introduces you to the work of the LGA and how it can

support you as you develop your skills, decision-making abilities and experiences as a councillor.

All newly elected councillors are invited to attend the LGA's online national welcome event, on 16 July.

Funded by government, it also provides an opportunity to explore the national challenges facing councils, hear top tips from experienced councillors, and attend a breakout session with councillors from the same LGA political group as yourself.

We also have a series of introductory webinars for new councillors, including, 'Handling online abuse and intimidation for newly elected councillors' on 20 June, and 'What about the numbers? Understand them and use storytelling to get your messages across' on 11 July.

“Taking elected office is one of the most important civic duties anyone can perform”

From newly elected to new leader

The LGA can help you develop your council career

Councillors are unique in their role. They provide local services and local leadership to their communities and our country.

The LGA is here for you, to develop you and your career, and also to open opportunities for you as you lead your council and your communities.

We have a wealth of experience, training and resources that you can tap into, all available via our website (see www.local.gov.uk/our-support/councillor-and-officer-development).

For newly elected councillors, we have three key resources to support you in your role.

First, our community leadership offer includes face-to-face and distance learning resources, including 27 workbooks on topics such as charring skills, being an effective ward councillor, councillor-officer relations, scrutiny, and licensing.

Second, we have our new Local Leadership Framework for Councillors, which gives suggestions, prompts and resources to help you develop the skills to be a leader and work with your communities.

Third, we have a bespoke councillor e-learning platform that provides online events and distance learning modules, on subjects such as economic development, facilitation and conflict resolution, licensing and regulation, local government finance, and stress management and personal resilience.

If you have particular interests, you can subscribe to our LGA e-bulletins on the policy areas

in which you're interested, from children and young people to workforce (see www.local.gov.uk/e-bulletins).

Do also take a look at Leadership Essentials, our bespoke programmes on key portfolio and service areas, where you can meet and learn from councillors just like you.

And we have 'Focus on Leadership' events for black, Asian and ethnic minority councillors, LGBTQ+ councillors, opposition leaders and deputy leaders, and young councillors (those aged under 40).

For disabled councillors and candidates, we run bespoke programmes to increase representation and support your development to become leaders in local government.

As you continue in your role as a councillor,

there is the Next Generation programme, which supports and encourages you to be a bold, confident political leader and progress your political career to the next level.

Our Boosting Middle Leaders programme is delivered in collaboration with the Leadership Centre and is an opportunity for officers and members to learn together.

For councillors in senior leadership roles, we have the Leadership Academy – our flagship development programme for senior leaders, recognised by the Institute of Leadership.

We have so many opportunities for you as you progress in your role as a local councillor and community leader – see www.local.gov.uk/our-support/councillor-and-officer-development to find out more.

“We have a wealth of experience, training and resources that you can tap into”

“You hold a unique position and have the potential to make a real difference”

You can book your place on these events and webinars, and on future sessions we have planned on audit, licensing, and scrutiny, at moredetails.uk/4bEOlif.

Meanwhile, our councillor hub is the place to find out more about the LGA and its support for newly elected members (see moredetails.uk/4bXOf5N).

It is also your first port-of-call for learning, leadership and development opportunities that can help you progress your career in local government – and you can read about some of these here (see right).

The changing face of devolution

The number of combined and county authorities is increasing

Alongside a swathe of new councillors, May's local elections returned a record number of combined authority or 'metro' mayors in England.

In addition to elections in most of the pre-existing combined authorities, there were three new first-time mayors – in the East Midlands, the North East, and York and North Yorkshire.

In total, there are now 12 combined authorities with devolved powers and an elected mayor, together covering half the population of England.

The 12 include the Greater London Authority, albeit this was set up earlier, in 2000, and under different arrangements from the others.

But while mayoral changes dominated the news headlines around the 2 May elections, devolution is extending well beyond city regions, to English counties and unitaries.

The LGA has long argued that decisions about local services should be taken closer to the people, communities and businesses they affect.

There is clear and significant evidence that outcomes improve and the country gets better value for money when local government has the freedoms and funding to make local decisions.

The UK remains one of the most centralised countries in Europe and, without devolution – the transfer of powers and funding – from national to local government, decisions will continue to be made in Westminster, removed from the communities that they affect.

The early mayoral 'deals' with government had a common focus on driving local economic growth, providing for the decentralisation of powers over skills and transport



policy, the creation of a 'single pot' to support local investment, and the ability to raise additional revenue through financial instruments such as a mayoral precept.

The initial cohort of combined authorities were set up around existing transport authorities and local partnership arrangements between their constituent councils. Once legislation allowed, these arrangements were developed further.

Trail-blazing Greater Manchester was formed in 2011, followed by West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, and Liverpool City Region in 2014; Tees Valley and West Midlands in 2016; West of England, and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, in 2017; and North of the Tyne in 2019.

These nine combined authorities in the main consist of all the councils

within their geographical areas. Most of those constituent councils have similar powers and are upper tier.

However, each combined authority is unique in its own powers and in the different arrangements with its constituent authorities – and any other lower-tier authorities that fall within the area.

North of the Tyne has since disbanded and reformed with County Durham to create the new North East Combined Authority, with its first mayor elected on 2 May 2024.

This year's other two new combined authorities – East Midlands, and York and North Yorkshire – also differ from the initial cohort.

The former consists of two counties (Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire) and two unitary cities (Derby and Nottingham). However, it cannot function without working in partnership with the 15 district and borough councils in its geographical area.

“The UK remains one of the most centralised countries in Europe”

“Devolution is extending well beyond city regions, to English counties and unitaries”

In North Yorkshire, the former county council went unitary, absorbing all its district councils in advance of its bid for devolution alongside the City of York.

York and North Yorkshire is also unique in being the first combined authority to take on police and fire and rescue services as part of its inaugural set-up. South Yorkshire has just taken on these powers and consequently its elections were brought forward to this year.

Next year, a further two new combined authorities (Greater Lincolnshire, and Hull and East Yorkshire) and two new county deals (Norfolk and Suffolk) will hold elections for their inaugural mayors or elected leaders.

Meanwhile, several other councils and areas have reached devolution deals that provide them with additional powers without the requirement for an elected mayor or leader.

These include Cornwall, which has



renegotiated its existing devolution deal to secure additional powers for the unitary council and its leader; Buckinghamshire, Warwickshire and Surrey, where the powers will reside with the respective county council and its leader; and Greater Devon (Devon and Torbay) and Lancashire (Lancashire, Blackpool, Blackburn with Darwin), where leaders will need to agree a combined authority and partnership arrangement.

Looking to the future, whether a combined authority has a mayor or works in partnership with its constituent councils' leaders, their main challenge will be to ensure that all the authorities that sit below the

upper tier ones are included and able to participate fairly.

The mayors' or leaders' key role is to build relationships with all their constituent and non-constituent local authorities – so everyone understands what a combined authority is and the benefits that it can bring to an area, and to ensure a holistic approach to developing the plans and strategies needed to deliver economic and social prosperity regionally and locally.

i To find out more, please visit the **LGA's devolution hub** at www.local.gov.uk/devolution-hub



first^{is} essential reading for councillors and chief executives in the LGA's member local authorities and both the magazine and wrapping are fully recyclable

But did you know that we publish all the stories from the magazine online each month, at www.lgafirst.co.uk?

If you're not already receiving it, you can also sign up for our fortnightly first e-bulletin, which links to key stories on the website, at www.lgafirst.co.uk/subscriptions

If you find these e-versions of first fulfil your need for information from the LGA, why not think about reducing our carbon footprint by unsubscribing from the magazine? Just email first@oscar-research.co.uk to let us know.



Promoting people's wellbeing

The Care Act remains a valuable framework for modern care and support



Councillor **David Fothergill** is Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board

The Care Act 2014 replaced a patchwork of previous legislation on adult social care and put at its heart a duty on councils to promote people's wellbeing.

A decade on from when the act received Royal Assent, the LGA has published a new report that examines the extent to which the aims of the legislation have been achieved and, where they have not, what more is needed to deliver fully on its ambitions.

These two key questions are answered through more than 30 articles penned by senior experts from across the adult care and support sector. Crucially, this includes people who draw on social care and members of the care workforce.

The expert articles help inform the LGA's conclusions and recommendations, many of which echo what lead members for adult services have reported in a new survey to accompany this publication (see p4).

They highlight: the consequences of funding pressures (including on other council services); the need to take a more preventative approach; the importance of tackling workforce challenges; and the need to change the

way we talk about adult social care.

With a general election approaching, we believe the report should be required reading for national politicians hoping to form the next government.

We will be using a variety of channels to promote the publication and its findings with organisations and people within the care sector, as well as decision-makers and the public.

In addition to the duty on councils to promote people's wellbeing, the Care Act 2014 introduced a range of other duties on issues such as prevention, integration, market shaping, assessment, care planning and safeguarding.

The act also contained provisions for charging reform, including a cap on care costs, an extension to the financial means test thresholds, and the option for self-funders to ask councils to arrange services on their behalf – thereby accessing lower council fee rates in the process.

The LGA's publication, 'The Care Act 2014: Ten years on from Royal Assent', charts the origins of the act, tracing its roots back to reviews by the Law Commission and the Dilnot Commission, and the Care Bill's journey through Parliament following pre-legislative scrutiny.

We also highlight some of the important inquiries and reports that have followed and consequently shaped thinking on the future of adult social care.

“The inherent value of adult social care and support in its own right comes to the fore”



80%
of respondents believe
the Care Act remains
fit for purpose

Context, of course, is everything. The report therefore explores three key developments that have impacted adult social care over the past decade: funding, integration between health and social care, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It also restates the LGA's commitment to the importance of working with and alongside people who draw on care and support in debates about the future of care and support.

In addition, our report includes a helpful, longer exposition from the campaign movement Social Care Future on why a reimagining of social care based on people – all of us – is needed.

Over the past four years, Social Care Future has done invaluable and



“The politicisation of adult social care by national parties is further hindering progress”

right legislation and that the principles the act is based on – of personalisation, choice and control, independence and dignity, and wellbeing – are as important today as they were a decade ago.

Yet, overwhelmingly, the articles are clear that the full ambition of the legislation has not been achieved.

While the exact reasons differ, most acknowledge a significant funding shortfall as a core issue.

Other roadblocks are also widely recognised: a strained care workforce; overburdened and unpaid carers; unstable care providers; lack of investment in preventative measures; and unmet or wrongly met care needs.

The politicisation of adult social care by national parties is identified as further hindering progress.

However, contributors are generous in their suggestions of ways forward.

A number of articles underline the need to shift to a narrative of hope around social care, and consider a future for adult social care in which possibilities are imagined.

They underline the negative impact that a pervasive ‘crisis narrative’ or ‘doom loop’ has on the sector. For example, Skills for Care’s Oonagh Smyth highlights that this could hamper our efforts to find and keep people in the workforce.

The former ministers and others call for a kinder and more collaborative politics. Many highlight that the legislation was significant in the way that it was developed collaboratively. People drawing on care and support, and the wider sector, were genuinely able to shape the legislation and build a broad consensus of support.

The articles highlight compelling reasons why investment in adult social care for people drawing on care and support and their carers is vital.

It is imperative that social care is seen as an investment that strengthens

the fabric of society and fuels future national prosperity.

The Care Act 2014 established a strong foundation, promoting a diverse care market, integration with health services, support for carers, and principles of user choice and control.

However, its full potential remains unrealised, and the full value of care and support untapped.

Drawing on the contributors’ views in the articles, we set out recommendations for change, which can be read in full in the report, but are broadly:

- Do not dispense with the Care Act – it remains a well-supported and valuable legal framework for modern care and support.
- Adult social care must be funded adequately, sustainably and with trust in councils as democratically accountable bodies.
- An immediate injection of funding is crucial to continue tackling the issues in social care.
- There is no such thing as a ‘standard care worker’ and a comprehensive, long-term plan for the care workforce must be developed.
- Be bold and ambitious with prevention. Pump prime preventative activity with significant new investment, but give local government and its partners the freedom to determine how investment will be used.
- End the politicisation of adult social care; put the national interest first, and work on a cross-party basis at relevant points to secure the future of care and support.

With the general election now taking place on 4 July, we look forward to continuing our work to influence, inform and better understand the priorities of all the political parties and the funding envelope they will set themselves.

We are clear that the future of adult social care must be at or near the top of the next government’s in-tray.

This publication serves as a starting point, offering evidence and insights on the past decade since the Care Act.

comprehensive work to understand what language resonates most with different audiences (and what does not) when we talk about adult social care.

We are delighted to have articles from so many prominent figures, from organisations across the sector, in our report, including the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, Skills for Care, King’s Fund, Social Care Institute for Excellence, Ipsos, and Carers UK.

There are also articles from four former ministers from the period – Phil Hope (joint with Sir David Behan), Paul Burstow, Norman Lamb, and Alistair Burt.

The voice of lived experience is prominent, too.

The articles make for an absorbing read, and while each contributor comes at the questions from their or their organisation’s own unique perspective, there are some strong and common threads.

Throughout the publication, the inherent value of adult social care and support in its own right comes strongly to the fore.

Contributors across the board also feel the legislation remains broadly the

100%
of respondents agreed that the current system of health and social care places **too much emphasis on treating sickness** and not enough on **preventing or reducing people’s needs**

i To read ‘[The Care Act 2014: Ten years on from Royal Assent](#)’ in full, visit www.local.gov.uk/publications/care-act-2014-ten-years-royal-assent

Ensuring effective adoption services

Two recent reports provide insight for councils



Councillor **Louise Gittins** is Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board

There has recently been significant focus on how councils can ensure the right homes for children in their care, as well as how kinship arrangements can be strengthened to help more children stay safely with their wider families.

These conversations are very positive. However, an area that has been less at the forefront of the discussion is adoption.

While many children in care experience permanence through foster care or a return home, for thousands of children each year adoption is the opportunity to experience a lifelong connection, a sense of belonging and a feeling of psychological permanence with a new family.

What actions can councils be taking to make sure that adoption services are as effective as they can be, for those children for whom adoption is the right choice – but also for birth families, adopters and adopted adults?

Two recent publications offer some insight.

Adoption England, a collaboration of regional adoption agencies (RAAs), has recently launched its 2024-27 adoption strategy for England.

It seeks to improve and modernise adoption services and systems, and give children a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging.

This is in the context of falling numbers of adoption orders and adopters being recruited, including significant regional variations.

The new strategy considers: how to recruit adopters from diverse communities; how to ensure that all those affected by adoption have a voice in the system; helping adopted people to maintain relationships with those important to them; reducing delays in the system; and making sure adopted people and their families get tailored help when they need it.

This includes specific actions for regional adoption agencies – so, as corporate parents, councils might wish to look at these and consider their own practices.

The strategy follows an Ofsted thematic inspection of RAAs that has important findings for councils.

Ofsted reported that day-to-day adoption practice broadly

remains strong, with good support for prospective adopters, thorough assessment processes and strong family-finding and matching.

Leadership of RAAs was also stable, with leaders having a good understanding of their agencies' strengths and weaknesses.

However, the inspection also found that some of the challenges that led to the regionalisation of services remain unresolved. These include difficulties recruiting enough adopters, especially for some groups of children, while some RAAs have struggled to recruit and retain suitably skilled and experienced staff.

There were also challenges in some areas with support services for adoptive families, including difficulty in planning the right support because of the short-term nature of some funding.

Councils will want to particularly consider Ofsted's findings in relation to governance. The inspection noted that councils relied heavily on self-reporting by RAAs to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of services provided on their behalf. This meant some were unaware of significant shortfalls in the experiences of adopters, children, adopted adults or birth parents.

Where adoption is the right choice for a child who can no longer live with their birth family, it is vital that services are available to meet the needs of everyone involved.

With most councils now operating adoption services through regional arrangements, it is more important than ever that councils have good oversight to ensure the best possible outcomes for children and families.



The '[Adoption England Strategy 2024-2027](https://moredetails.uk/3K0BpaC)' is available at moredetails.uk/3K0BpaC. For Ofsted's '[Regional adoption agencies thematic inspection report](https://moredetails.uk/3WGVUAK)', please visit moredetails.uk/3WGVUAK

Ending abuse in public life

The LGA has published a toolkit to help keep councillors safe

The LGA's Debate Not Hate campaign aims to raise public awareness of the vital role councillors play in local democracy, promote healthy debate, and improve responses to the challenges they encounter.

Serving in public office is both a privilege and a responsibility, yet it comes with its share of challenges, which can include abuse and harassment from the public.

In England, 43 per cent of candidates in the May 2024 local elections reported experiencing some kind of abuse or intimidation, with 10 per cent describing it as 'serious', according to disturbing new research from the Electoral Commission.

The issue was particularly severe among women candidates, with 56 per cent saying they avoided campaigning alone (compared with 19 per cent of men) and nearly half that they avoided discussing controversial topics to keep safe (20 per cent for men).

While it's important to protect freedom of speech, there is growing concern surrounding the negative impact such behaviour can have on individuals, their families, and the integrity of local democracy.

Council officers, alongside political parties and other local agencies, play a crucial role in creating a culture of respect and support that enables councillors to carry out their duties effectively and safely.

The LGA's 'Ending abuse in public

life council self-assessment toolkit' is designed to aid local councils in tackling and mitigating the impact and risks of abuse and intimidation that councillors may encounter as part of their role, supporting them to be safe. Its primary objective is to guide councils in assessing their role and efforts to prevent and respond to abuse and intimidation against councillors.

The toolkit acknowledges the distinct roles and responsibilities held by councillors, councils and police in addressing instances of abuse and intimidation. It is crucial to acknowledge and understand the diverse spheres of influence within which each entity operates and that there are limitations to their ability to address certain issues alone.

By understanding their unique sphere of influence and collaborating with other stakeholders, councils can work towards meaningful solutions for many of these challenges. As such, this toolkit is designed to be realistic and flexible in its implementation.

The toolkit was developed by a specialist abuse and harm-reduction consultancy organisation, which worked closely with the LGA and a sounding group of council officers, and consulted with several national police colleagues.

It offers a structured and practical

approach to implementing five principles outlined in the LGA's 2023 'Debate Not Hate: ending abuse in public life for councillors' report. The principles are about creating supportive and informed spaces, a risk-led approach, infrastructure, connections, and a culture of safety and respect. These principles are interconnected, with each component reinforcing the others.

For instance, managing and responding to risks effectively relies on having robust policies and processes in place, such as those outlined in the 'infrastructure' section. Collaboration with external agencies, such as the police, as emphasised in 'creating connections', is essential to implement these measures effectively.

By recognising these interdependencies and ensuring cohesive implementation, councils can help prevent and mitigate the impact of abuse and intimidation.

The toolkit is designed to give councils a flexible framework for tackling these issues: it does not prescribe a one-size-fits-all approach,

By adopting a flexible and inclusive approach, councils can use the toolkit in a way that works for them, to create a safer and more supportive environment for councillors.



The toolkit is free to download at www.local.gov.uk/publications/ending-abuse-public-life-council-self-assessment-toolkit. To find out more about the **LGA's Debate Not Hate campaign**, please visit www.local.gov.uk/debate-not-hate

When he's not busy with his desk job, Dr Andrea Berardi is often found mucking out hen houses and taming unruly allotments. He is also one half of a novel partnership team between an academic institution and a local council.

In 2022, the senior environmental lecturer from the Open University partnered up with Spelthorne Borough Council to try and bring the community into the council's carbon cutting plans.

Together, the partners set wheels in motion for an ambitious food-growing project – one that is repurposing derelict land behind the train station in the town of Staines.

Spelthorne's is a challenge faced by many areas across the country: how to get residents truly invested in the council's climate change initiatives.

"We are not going to get to net zero without taking communities with us," reflected Spelthorne's then Climate Change Officer, Jilly Mowbray.

Yet they were acutely aware of cases where well-intentioned measures had not delivered the desired impact and had even sparked backlash from some members of the public.

Thankfully, the council had a powerful ally – a local climate action group – who could help them reach out to different groups in the community. It was that group, Talking Tree, that introduced council officers to Dr Berardi, whose professional expertise includes facilitating grassroots sustainability acts.

Together, the council-community-academic trio entered a capacity-building, grant-funded scheme called

A growth mindset

Cutting carbon and nurturing community



Freya Roberts is Project Manager at University College London's Climate Action Unit

the Net Zero Innovation Programme, run by the LGA a group of climate-action experts from University College London (UCL). The unit designs and delivers workshops to equip people with skills for partnership working.

Given the importance of getting the community's buy-in, the Spelthorne partnership decided to move away from top-down policy-making. Instead, its approach was to integrate the local community into the decision-making process from the outset.

It planned a scheme where local people suggest, evaluate and take the lead on implementing climate actions.

The 'Community-led Climate Initiative' began in January 2023 with a series of workshops. These partnered up around 40 members of the public with people from the council, including its climate change officer, biodiversity

officer, and a senior council leader.

By seating these individuals together at tables, side by side, the initiative enabled the individuals to exchange ideas over a cup of tea.

A major success was that participants were able to come up with desirable and realistic actions: ones that met the public's wants, but that were also feasible for the council to help deliver.

"Having council officers in spaces where they could engage directly was really crucial – it meant residents could appreciate the limits of what the authority could do," noted Mowbray.

The structured workshops, which were professionally facilitated, surfaced several target areas where the community wanted to see improvements. This included food growing, rewilding, rainwater harvesting, reducing air pollution, and increasing active travel.

Participants then agreed on a first, achievable action for the Spelthorne initiative. "We want to do something that will be an initiator; something that will attract more interest", said one local resident at the workshops. "We can do one thing and, if that works, do the next – it's not all or nothing in terms of size or time," responded another.

That one, first achievable action was to develop a community space beside the train tracks in Staines. The group was given access to a plot of derelict land by South Western Railway. The builders' merchants chain Jewsons gifted the initiative timber to construct planters, and volunteers from the group 'Incredible Edible Spelthorne' turned up to prepare the ground for cultivation.

Since then, plenty more action has followed.

The initiative has expanded its food-growing and wildflower and tree-planting activities into





two local schools. It has also been supporting community members to influence Spelthorne Borough Council's policies and actions, and established a network of volunteers to protect, improve and promote green spaces all across Spelthorne.

Beyond the obvious perks of residents having access to a new green space, free food and a sense of community, the initiative yielded other wider benefits.

For example, it provided the council with knowledge about the sorts of initiatives that had broad public support. This, in turn, meant the community was helping to shape future decision-making.

Additionally, for the council, it helped it deploy limited resources as effectively as possible.

The project's partners identified several ingredients to their success, including:

- **neutral, convenient meeting places** – Talking Tree, based on Staines high street, provided the

community and councils with a neutral, welcoming physical space to hold workshops.

- **access to the community** – the extensive networks and relationships of trust that Talking Tree had already cultivated in the local community helped maximise engagement.
- **a role for younger people** – six young people were trained to film and document the community deliberations. Their involvement helped the council engage across generations (and, as a co-benefit, created outputs to share with policy-makers).
- **covering the costs** – some of the grant funding the Spelthorne project received was set aside to cover participant expenses, helping ensure people on lower incomes were not excluded.

i See www.ucl.ac.uk/climate-action-unit to find out more about the work of **UCL's Climate Action Unit**

Resources for councils

Local leaders can improve their knowledge of climate change and wider environmental sustainability issues at an LGA sustainability masterclass on 16 July. This virtual event will hear about the new carbon literacy accredited training courses that the LGA has been delivering to local authority councillors and members from across England. See www.local.gov.uk/events to book your place.

The LGA's new Sustainability Hub has a number of resources to help councils reach their carbon-reduction and adaptation targets (see www.local.gov.uk/sustainability-hub).

From the hub, you can also subscribe to the LGA's sustainability bulletin, view our searchable database of sustainability and climate change case studies, and join the climate emergency knowledge hub – where councils and partners who have declared a climate emergency, or made any other type of commitment to reduce carbon and improve the environment, share information and experiences.

These support resources are delivered by the LGA, funded by and in partnership with the Crown Commercial Service.

Q&A with Dr Andrea Berardi, The Open University

What advice would you give to other regions wanting to do something similar?

Our approach is easily replicable in other areas if the right attitude and facilitation skills are available. We were successful because all the parties involved were genuine in their intent to listen to community members. But the most important ingredient was that we had an established community hub with excellent community networks. It gave participants confidence that they would be listened to and that someone would continue to champion whatever emerged from the project in the long term.

Every project encounters challenges: tell us about one and how you tackled it?

We initially had to manage a few participants who were using the workshop to air their frustrations with the council. We made it clear that we wanted a cultural shift in the relationship that Spelthorne Borough Council has with its residents. Rather than thinking of the council as a place you go to complain, we instead made clear we wanted it to be seen as a place to go to make things happen through community initiatives.

What factors helped your partnership function well?

Fundamentally, I think the individuals from each organisation just got on very well together. It was a group of genuinely nice, positive, can-do kind of people. Regular meetings gave us momentum and helped us to develop a team spirit – which really sustained us, given the amount of community engagement required to make this project a success.

Keeping 1.5 alive

Councils can access free tools to monitor their greenhouse gas emissions



Councillor **Andrew Cooper** is a former member of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board's Climate Change Working Group

A third of local areas in the UK experienced their hottest year on record in 2023, according to last month's edition of **first** (694).

For the first time, the global average temperature stayed consistently 1.5 C above pre-industrial levels.

'Keeping 1.5 alive' has been the goal of people working in the climate field since the Paris Agreement in 2015.

The fact that this goal is becoming more challenging means that we must all step up our efforts to respond to the climate emergency.

Thankfully, there was some good news on this front recently, when the UK's Third Carbon Budget (running from 2018 to 2022) was found to have been met with a surplus.

This was partly down to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy.

Under the Climate Change Act 2008, carbon budgets are the legal targets for UK greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions over a five-year period.

The Climate Change Committee, the independent body that holds the UK Government to account on emissions, congratulated it, but advised unequivocally that surplus emissions must not be carried forward to loosen later carbon budgets.

Councils have a hugely important role to play regarding the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK.

The build-up to the recent local elections will have no doubt involved many interesting conversations on doorsteps, as voters scrutinised what each party and what each individual councillor proposes to do when it comes to climate change.

The first step in reducing emissions is to identify the main sources of them, and then to look at those over which a council has control and influence.

Councils must look at GHG emissions produced by their own services, and those produced by other organisations in their areas.

Local Partnerships (the in-house public sector consultancy jointly

owned by the LGA, HM Treasury and Welsh Government), the LGA, and the Crown Commercial Service have provided free tools for councils to use to account for their emissions since 2020.

These can be found in Local Partnerships' resource hub at moredetails.uk/4401vat.

More than 280 councils have downloaded the tools, and over 100 have contributed to their development.

The aim is to achieve consistency in GHG accountancy across the public sector. If councils are using the same tools then it is easier to compare experiences and to share best practice.

There are two tools: one to account for GHG emissions across a wide spectrum, and one that is specific to emissions produced from the collection and disposal of waste.

The tools are updated based on user feedback, which can be sent to ghgaccounting@localpartnerships.gov.uk.

A virtual event discussing the latest updates to the tools, which I chaired, took place in May, and presentations from the event are available at www.local.gov.uk/past-event-presentations.



Critical council services are now being subjected to a more rigorous external inspection.

The frameworks for inspecting adult social care, children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and social housing have all undergone reform and are at different stages of implementation.

These new inspections all give councils a rating as part of the process.

There are clearly challenges if it is found that a council is failing to deliver its duties adequately and requires some kind of intervention.

However, there are also opportunities to communicate and celebrate the council's achievements and to help engage stakeholders internally and externally in further improving performance.

The most recent change is the introduction of new standards by the Regulator of Social Housing, which came into force on 1 April. The changes apply to all social landlords and councils with more than 1,000 homes will be subject to a programmed inspection every four years.

New Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) area inspections have begun following the introduction of a new framework for inspecting local arrangements for children and young people with SEND.

“A negative judgement can erode public trust in an authority’s reputation to deliver vital services”



Responding to the inspectors

Getting the communications right

Adult social care is also being independently assessed for the first time in 15 years. The CQC started its on-site visits this year and all English councils with adult social care responsibilities will be assessed before the end of 2025.

Although the methodology and approach are different for these inspection frameworks, the preparation, communication, and reputational considerations for councils will be similar.

Senior councillors and officers need to have the knowledge, advice and challenge to lead and communicate well from their communications teams.

Developing a robust communications plan for any inspection is therefore vital – regardless of what the expected outcome might be.

As part of that plan, a narrative about the service is also important.

This needs to articulate where the service has come from and where it wants to be; translate your service aims and planned-outcomes into compelling and emotional language that engages your stakeholders’ hearts, as well as minds; provides direction for what you want to achieve and how the organisation and staff behave; and focuses the efforts of staff around a shared understanding of where the organisation is going and how they can contribute.

The LGA is working with councils to support and share good communications practice around the different inspection frameworks.

Adult social care, SEND provision and social housing are all vitally important frontline services where councils are struggling to keep pace with the rise in demand.

They are also emotive subjects, where the users of the services and their families will understandably have strong views.

Councils are experienced in responding to inspections in areas such as children’s social care from Ofsted. A negative judgement can erode public trust in an authority’s reputation to deliver vital services – therefore, getting the communications response right is crucial.

Effective communications have an important role to play before, during and following any inspection to help your council embed a culture of quality and improvement.

This is not about ‘spinning’ the outcome – it is a vital part of good leadership and engagement with the users of vital services.

i To find about more about the LGA’s communications support, please visit our **Comms Hub** at www.local.gov.uk/our-support/comms-hub-communications-support



Making it **count**

The LGA provides support for councillors on finance, governance and audit



Councillor **Abi Brown** OBE is Chair of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board

The annual budget process is probably the single biggest, most complex exercise that any council undertakes as part of its annual work cycle.

Many councils start the exercise almost as soon as the previous year's budget is agreed and the process takes almost the whole year, involving every elected member at some stage and a considerable cast of senior officers as well as partner organisations.

Getting this process right is vital to the council's success and contributes significantly to what it achieves for the local area. Without a sustainable budget that supports long-term financial resilience, many other plans and aspirations may well founder.

This is why the LGA has recently published a 'must-know' guide on the annual budget process, which draws on experience and best practice to set out some pointers for a good, effective budget process.

As the Chair of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board,

I am passionate about supporting councillors to develop their skills.

The budget process guide is just one part of a suite of resources, publications, and learning and development opportunities that make up the LGA's support offer for newly elected and experienced councillors on finance, governance, and audit.

During what are increasingly challenging times for the local government sector, it is important that councillors have the skills and knowledge needed to deliver on their councils' priorities.

The LGA's support offer (see right) is designed to help you be effective in your role in regard to local government finance, good decision-making, and understanding and managing risk.

All of the programmes can be found on our website and are free – so please book soon to avoid missing out.



In addition to **finance, governance and audit, the LGA's development support** offer for councillors covers everything from being an effective ward councillor to advanced leadership skills, see www.local.gov.uk/our-support/highlighting-political-leadership

Finance improvement – our support offer

See www.local.gov.uk/our-support/finance

Finance without numbers

This virtual event – on 19 September and repeated on 15 October – is ideal for new councillors and provides an overview of local government finance without any numbers, focusing instead on roles, responsibilities, key terminology and processes. Register at www.local.gov.uk/events.

Leadership Essentials

Our popular Leadership Essentials programmes support councillors in chair or cabinet member roles. Most are held in person at Warwick Conferences, Coventry. They include:

- **Financial governance** – what effective financial governance looks like and councillors' role in ensuring that their council's systems, processes and culture are effective.
- **Finance leadership** – focusing on financial management and governance ahead of the next budget process.
- **Audit leadership** – discussing how councils' audit committees can be most effective.
- **Finance for non-finance cabinet members** – demystifying the financial elements of your portfolio or policy committee.
- **Risk management** – understanding the role of elected members.

For further details, please visit www.local.gov.uk/our-support/highlighting-political-leadership/leadership-essentials and/or email grace.collins@local.gov.uk.

E-learning

Expand your political leadership skills with our free e-learning platform for councillors that includes modules on local government finance and an introduction to audit committees – see www.local.gov.uk/councillor-e-learning.

Our 'Councillor workbook – local government finance' considers how councils receive their funding and highlights legal and best practice requirements in managing their financial affairs, see www.local.gov.uk/councillor-workbook-local-government-finance.

Regional audit forums

For audit committee chairs, we facilitate regional audit forums to help identify systemic audit issues and share good practice. Please contact ami.beeton@local.gov.uk for more information.

Current publications

See www.local.gov.uk/our-support/finance for:

- Must know guide: the annual budget process
- Must know guide: the statement of accounts
- Must know guide: working with auditors
- Ten questions for audit committees

See www.cfgs.org.uk/audit-scrutiny-and-risk/ for:

- Audit, Scrutiny and Risk (published by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny).

A workforce strategy for adult social care



Sir **David Pearson** CBE is Co-Chair of Skills for Care's Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy Steering Group

Last autumn, Skills for Care announced ambitious plans to develop a new and comprehensive workforce strategy for adult social care.

Social care is a fundamental part of our lives, our communities and our economy, and the workforce is a fundamental part of social care.

We know that we have a huge number of people working in social care – more than 1.5 million, accounting for 5 per cent of all jobs in England.

Without changes to the way services are delivered, however, we know we're going to need a lot more people working in care to meet future needs.

From our latest data, we estimate we will need up to an extra 440,000 posts in social care by 2035.

We also know that, while we need more people tomorrow, we don't have enough today (with 152,000 vacancies) and we lose too many people – 390,000 leave their posts each year.

Behind the data is a collection of individual stories, experiences, and lives.

When we can't get the people we need to support us to live our lives, or they don't stay in their roles, we have to keep building relationships with new people and we have to tell our stories again and again.

There are also the baton changes between health and social care when the systems aren't aligned.

The Social Care Future movement, hosted and supported by the charity In Control, says that social care is not just under-invested in; it's under-imagined. So, let's imagine something different in terms of our ambition for the workforce.

We owe it to the people being supported today and we owe it to all of us who will be supported in years to come.

This is why I and Oonagh Smyth, Chief Executive Officer of Skills for Care, have



“Social care is under-invested in and under-imagined. So let's imagine something different”

come together as joint chairs of its workforce strategy steering group to lead this conversation.

To deliver a multi-lever strategy that will achieve maximum impact, the development and delivery must be a collective responsibility, with strong collaboration and partnership throughout.

We've been exploring the opportunities that exist with leaders and people who can make change happen within their space to come together and pull in the same direction.

It's fair to say that this is being embraced with an incredible amount of positivity, excitement and passion from everyone involved.

We are developing the strategy in two phases: an evidence-led and practical first five years, plus an ambitious, vision-led five-to-15-year phase – and we're drawing on a range of data and expertise to help us form that.

A number of expert working groups

have been set up to focus on topics such as technology, artificial intelligence, science and pharmaceuticals, integration, prevention, new service models, recruitment and retention, skills and leadership.

We are working closely with colleagues in NHS England who developed, and are now implementing, the NHS Long Term Plan. There is a strong will to ensure alignment.

As well as some recommendations for government, the strategy will form the basis of a blueprint for integrated care systems, commissioners/local authorities, and employers.

Historically, voices in the sector can be fragmented: a positive by-product of the development of this strategy, which we are already seeing, will be a stronger collective view and strengthened responsibility to make change happen.

We're making great progress and will be launching the strategy in July.

i Skills for Care is the strategic workforce development and planning body for adult social care in England, see www.skillsforcare.org.uk

The **first** place to showcase your business. Contact Polly Boutwood at polena.boutwood@cplone.co.uk or call 01223 378 023

Impressive gains in local elections



Councillor **Joe Harris** is Leader of the LGA's Liberal Democrat Group

As I write this we are in the throes of a general election. But what a whirlwind local election season it was this spring!

In many places, we're now calling the shots, thanks to yet another round of impressive gains.

We've surpassed 3,100 councillors across the UK, with 39 majority councils and many more where we lead or are part of the administration.

A total of 505 Lib Dem councillors were elected in May, securing us second place in this round of elections. It's a clear reminder of both the Liberal Democrat revival and the dying days of the Conservative government.

We've seized overall control of two more councils – true blue Tunbridge Wells and, for the first time ever, Dorset has turned Lib Dem.

We held onto all 10 councils we defended, from Stockport to Eastleigh.

But the Liberal Democrat revival isn't just measured by the places where we take control; it's also about the places where we make breakthroughs after years of absence.

A year ago, there were no Liberal Democrat councillors on Dudley Council. Now there are three, and in a ward once held by a previous Labour chair of the LGA!

Our own group continues to grow, with Liberal Democrats now holding over 15 per cent of the vote at the LGA.

Looking ahead to the 2025 local

elections, we'll first tackle a general election. We're aiming for a significant boost in the number of Liberal Democrat MPs in the Commons to fight for a fair deal for local government.

The LGA is gearing up for a potential government change, but no matter who wins, we'll be ready to lobby and push for change.

With our increasing numbers and influence, we are in a strong position to advocate for local government and ensure that our communities get the support and resources they need.

It's been an extraordinary year for the Liberal Democrats, and the future looks even brighter as we continue to grow and make significant strides across the UK.

“With our increasing numbers and influence, we are in a strong position to advocate for local government”



Councillor **Kevin Bentley** is Senior Vice-Chairman of the LGA

Helping councils to deliver

Astonishingly, by the time you read this, we will already be half-way through the general election campaign.

At the LGA, we see the election as an opportunity to provide long-term sustainability to councils, deliver local and national economic growth, and support our people and places.

We will work immediately with whoever forms the next government to prioritise the services that our communities value and create a new, equal, and respectful central-local partnership – as set out in our Local Government White Paper (see p8).

It is also only six weeks since the May local elections.

We lost many hard-working local champions from across the political spectrum: my commiserations to those who were not re-elected and my thanks for their public service.

For those who were successful at the



ballot box – congratulations! It is a huge privilege to be a councillor because of the difference we make to the lives of our residents, and I look forward to working with you in support of our local places.

For many councils, the post-election period has been one of transition, because the results have meant changes in political control and leadership or moves to no overall control or minority administrations.

Every council will respond in their own way and in their own local context, but it can also be helpful to learn from others' experiences.

The LGA continues to talk to a range of leaders and chief executives whose

councils have experienced changes in political leadership, and their lessons inform our extensive programme of guidance and support (see www.local.gov.uk/changes-political-leadership).

Our support programme is there to help you be effective in your role as a councillor, cabinet member or leader, and get on with delivering good local services – whatever happens on 4 July.

Until then, I will be taking on LGA Chair Cllr Shaun Davies' duties as we work to ensure that the elections deliver on local government's priorities for the future, and I look forward to working even more closely with you and the team here at the LGA.



Councillor **Abi Brown** OBE is Deputy Leader of the LGA's Conservative Group

Securing the priorities of Conservative councillors

With the general election now well under way, I am sure many of you will have already hit the doorsteps to support Conservative candidates standing in this election, including a number of brilliant Conservative councillors who are candidates.

Strong Conservative local government experience in the new Parliament will be so important, joining recent additions in the House of Lords.

Alongside this, the LGA Conservative Group has been busy lobbying hard to ensure the priorities of the Conservative local government family are reflected in the Conservative Party manifesto, when it is launched.

“We have been pushing hard on the pressures around housing, adult social care and children’s services”

In particular, we have been pushing hard on the pressures around housing, adult social care and children’s services.

We’re continually raising the need for the party to commit to multi-year financial settlements in these areas, alongside highways and regeneration.

One partial success already is the announcement by the Prime Minister that courts will be able to impose additional points on the licences of those drivers who are caught fly-tipping, removing central control over penalties.

But there is more to do to reassert the role of local government.

Along with other LGA Conservative colleagues, I’ll be out in various places campaigning, as well as here in Stoke-on-Trent, sharing the great work Conservatives in local government deliver.

I want to thank all of you for your campaign efforts on the ground over recent months and for putting forward the positive Conservative messages to our communities.



Councillor **Bev Craig** is Deputy Leader of the LGA's Labour Group

A serious and long-term plan for change

The general election is finally here, with PM Rishi Sunak finally bowing to pressure and giving the country the chance to change.

Many voters are cynical about whether politics can really make a difference, which is no surprise after 14 years of dreadful government.

But there is a clear choice at this election, with Labour offering a long-term and serious plan to change Britain.

The same might be said of local government, with many councillors of all parties despairing at the prospects for councils given the dreadful economic picture that the next government will inherit.

But here too Labour offers hope, with a new partnership between national and local government giving us the chance to work together to rebuild local services.

I’d also like to recognise May’s local elections.

“Many voters are cynical about whether politics can really make a difference”

Congratulations to councillors of all parties who were elected, and particularly to those of you who have been elected for the first time.

It is an honour and privilege to serve your local community as a councillor, and I hope you find it as rewarding as I always have done.

Commiserations to every councillor who stepped down or was not re-elected.

We are delighted with our results overall, with almost 200 new councillors, 10 new Labour-run councils, and four new Labour metro mayors.

The results show that after years of chaos voters are demanding change. I’m pleased that on 4 July, they will finally have the power to change our country for the better with a Labour government.



Councillor **Marianne Overton** MBE is Leader of the LGA's Independent Group

Independents have turned the tide

The general election is happening just after our stunning success in the local elections.

The tide has turned, and the ascent of Independent and Green councillors is nothing short of breathtaking, each with significant gains soaring beyond the previous tally.

Independents and those in Residents’ Associations gained 104 members and Greens increased by 74 members.

“The ascent of Independent and Green councillors is nothing short of breathtaking”

In total, the LGA Independent group saw 464 members elected, a gain of 183 seats, on a par with Labour and leaving the Conservatives with a loss of 474 seats.

In Wales, Plaid Cymru retained their police and crime commissioner seat in Dyfed-Powys.

In Solihull, history was made by the council welcoming its first Muslim Mayor, Green Party Cllr Shahin Ashraf MBE. And in Bristol, the Greens ended Labour’s historic rule over the city council and are now the largest party in the new committee system.

Around 50 councils are already led by Independent, Green and Plaid Cymru councillors and many more lead or serve in opposition.

Supported by our peer mentoring offer, we continue to grow steadily in number and power, building a reputation of working closely with residents to achieve shared success.

Ipsos MORI is showing our combined group at 28 per cent, second only to Labour and rising. It could well be that our new MPs will have a key role.

Congratulations again and thank you for standing and for supporting our residents. We have a great foundation set to make 4 July Independents’ Day in the UK!



Closing the accessible transport gap



Baroness **Tanni Grey-Thompson** is Chair of the Accessible Transport Policy Commission

The UK has a proud history of making transport more accessible for disabled people.

From the government-subsidised Motability scheme, which offers disabled motorists a chance to drive an adapted vehicle, to redesigning stations, trains and buses with lower steps, wider doorways, better signage and more priority seating, our country boasts one of the most inclusive transport systems in the world.

But millions of disabled people still find it difficult to use transport to get to school, commute to work, and get together with loved ones.

The successes of the past should be an ideal starting point for further breakthroughs, yet decades of progress appear to have come to a halt.

Accessible transport charity the Motability Foundation found that disabled people make 38 per cent fewer journeys than non-disabled people. This has been labelled the 'transport accessibility gap'.

The size of this gap has shown no signs of narrowing over the past 10 years, bucking the historical trend of gradual, but continuous, improvement in accessibility.

It shows that advances towards a more

inclusive transport system for disabled people cannot be taken for granted.

That's why I am leading a new cross-party group of parliamentarians to eliminate barriers to travel.

The new Accessible Transport Policy Commission includes MPs and Peers from across the political spectrum who share a commitment to making transport more accessible across the UK.

The commission is part of the National Centre for Accessible Transport (ncat), which was set up with a seven-year, £20 million grant from the Motability Foundation.

ncat aims to shape the future of transport by ensuring disabled people are part of transport decision-making and is equipped with a number of tools for change.

Its research programme will deepen our understanding of disabled people's experiences on the UK's transport systems.

One of these projects aims to understand the barriers disabled people face at the beginning, middle and end of their journeys. Another is exploring how we can make our streets easier and safer to navigate.

A third study will map out the different roles and responsibilities of local councils in making transport more accessible.

The centre's innovation funding programme will build on this evidence to help finance the creation of new technologies and service models, and ensure their adoption across the transport system.

Finally, the Accessible Transport Policy Commission exists to convene disabled people, transport professionals, local government officials and parliamentarians to ensure ncat's research and innovation programme is translated into legislative and systematic reform.

Local government is where many of the key decisions about the future of transport are made.

In March, we launched the Accessible Transport Charter, which aims to recruit councillors to this important cause.

It commits signatories to: helping secure disabled people's champions to all key transport decision-making bodies; set up accessibility panels of disabled people at transport providers; make sure accessibility and inclusion is integrated into public transport strategies; and make our streets free of clutter and accessible to everyone.

Councillors can register their commitment to closing the transport accessibility gap by visiting www.policyconnect.org.uk/news/accessible-transport-charter-local-and-combined-authorities.

Councillors who sign the charter will have the opportunity to participate in our commission's work, beginning with a special event at the end of the year.

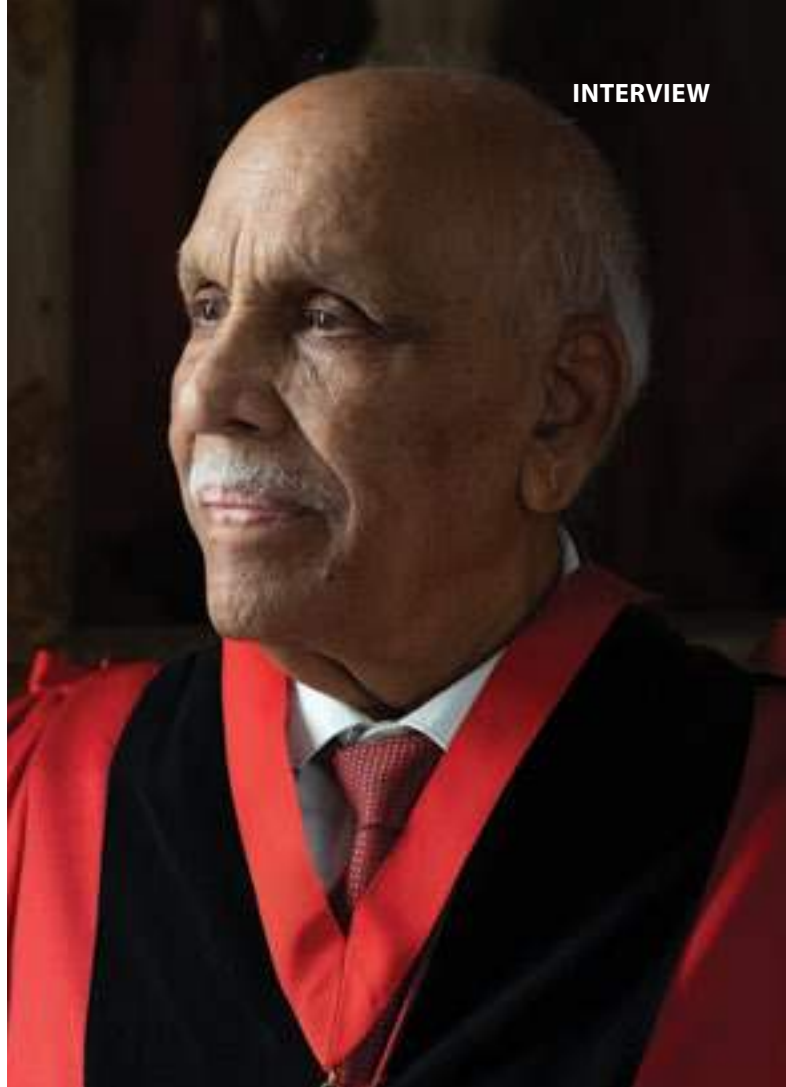
I look forward to working with you to make transport accessible for all.



See www.ncat.uk to find out more about ncat's work

60 seconds with... Councillor Jagdish Sharma

Councillor Jagdish Sharma (Lab), 89, a former Mayor, Leader, and Leader of the Opposition at the London Borough of Hounslow, is celebrating 50 years as a member of the council



PHOTOGRAPHS © CLLR JAGDISH SHARMA

Why did you become a councillor?

I came to England in 1965 to work, as did so many others, but the early 1970s saw a backlash against immigration. As an Indian, I wanted to integrate with and contribute to the local community. I believe this helps cohesion, as people learn to share ideas and see different perspectives. I believed that if I could improve people's lives, then our society would be more harmonious, and our contribution recognised and valued.

How are things better/worse than when you started?

Things are better in the council because the leader and the cabinet have more power and can make decisions quicker.

I think, now, that Hounslow is a better place to live. The council is more efficient and has provided better services over the years. That is not to say there are not problems, and citizens can feel aggrieved, but the council and its staff are dedicated, conscientious, hard-working, take great pride in their work, and try their best.

Have you enjoyed being a councillor?

I have enjoyed every minute of it. It has given me immense pleasure in serving the community and helping so many people, and making their lives better. I feel energised by the challenge. I feel so grateful



Clr Sharma with Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother

when members of the community appreciate what I and my colleagues have done.

Would you recommend being a councillor to others?

Yes, absolutely. It is a matter of great pride to serve your fellow brothers and sisters. For many people, life can be a struggle and to help them is a sheer joy.

What advice would you give to newly elected councillors?

From your actions show to people that you genuinely want to serve them. Win their confidence and support your new colleagues. Choose an experienced person as your mentor and be accessible to them. Study new books and ideas: the LGA has resources, and borrow whatever you need.

How do we encourage more people from ethnic minority communities to stand as councillors?

I have seen over time people of different communities become councillors, so I do not think this is an issue in Hounslow. The key, though, is that, as a councillor, they serve all communities and not just their own.

What is the one thing as a councillor you are most proud of achieving?

I have been able to help elderly people get a purpose-built day centre – the Wellington Day Centre. Elderly people come to play games there. Guest speakers also come to give advice on so many issues, from health to the community. Now people spend their time usefully and enjoy their leisure time in the company of others.

What needs to change to help local government?

How money is distributed between central government and local authorities is not fair and needs to be reviewed. With a fairer funding system, councillors will be able to perform their duties better and constituents will see real improvements in their lives. This, to me, is the purpose of politics.

Horses for courses



Professors **Colin Rallings** (l) and **Michael Thrasher** are Associate Members, Nuffield College, Oxford



The 2 May local elections saw the Conservatives hit their lowest number of councillors and councils controlled for a quarter of a century.

They slipped below the symbolic figure of 5,000 councillors in England and Wales, and have an overall majority in just 54 out of 339 local authorities in the two countries.

This may all, of course, be inevitable for a party that has been in power nationally for so long, but it is only three years ago that they were still gaining seats and councils.

Since then, they have lost more than 2,000 councillors and nearly 90 councils, with Labour, the Liberal Democrats, the Greens, and a range of smaller parties and Independents all benefiting.

That spread is interesting in itself.

It is clear that voters no longer think simply in terms of two parties, and the small minority (probably less than a third of the electorate this year) who do participate only serve to highlight the many more who are disengaged from – or even disillusioned with – politics.

With a general election just around the corner, all eyes were on Labour's local performance. The party had shown a degree of recovery in the 'red wall' last year, winning back councils such as Mansfield, Middlesbrough, North East Derbyshire, and Stoke-on-Trent.

This time, it added Hartlepool to

that list, as well as depriving the Conservatives of a majority in Dudley and North East Lincolnshire.

Indeed, at ward level, it seemed that the stronger the 'leave' vote at the 2016 EU Referendum, the greater the switch back to Labour.

Hartlepool also provides a fascinating example of how voters choose horses for courses. Each of the three elections held across the town produced a different outcome.

In the contest for the Tees Valley mayoralty (almost the only bright spot for the government in this entire set of elections), Conservative incumbent Ben Houchen polled a majority of votes; in the Cleveland police and crime commissioner (PCC) election, Labour comfortably beat the Conservatives in a two-party fight.

At the local elections, Labour won nine of the 12 seats falling vacant, with the Conservatives picking up just one.

With the Reform party on the ballot paper in all 12 local wards, the Conservative vote was less than half that which had been accorded to Houchen on the same visit to the ballot box! Labour's support, by contrast, was pretty solid throughout, giving further succour to those in the party who believe its 'red wall' woes have largely been vanquished.

However, perhaps the most satisfying victories for Labour came in

Results summary 2024 England*

	Seats	Councils
Con	-473	-10
Lab	+186	+8
Lib Dem	+104	+2
Green	+74	-
Other	+109	+1
No overall control	-	-1

*Compared with seats won in 2021 taking boundary changes into account

"It is clear that voters no longer think simply in terms of two parties"

a range of councils in the Midlands and the South, which it won directly from the Conservatives.

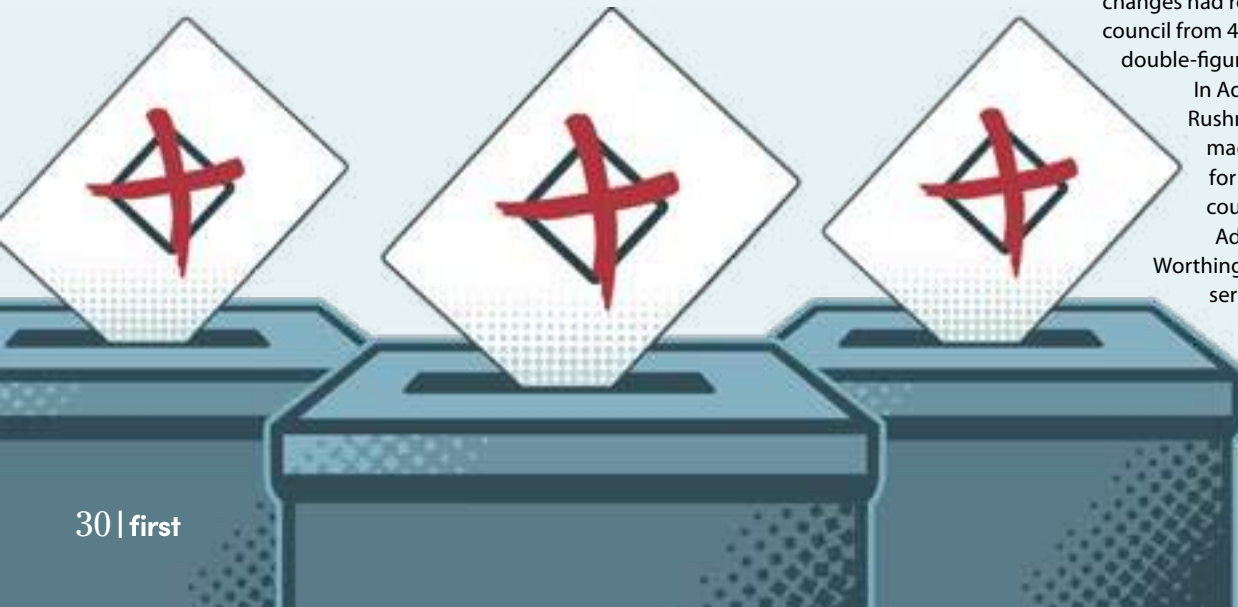
In both Nuneaton and Bedworth, and Redditch, all-out elections following boundary changes enabled the party to make dramatic gains.

In Redditch, it scooped up 21 of the 27 seats available; in Nuneaton it won an additional 15 seats to get over the line. In Cannock Chase, where boundary changes had reduced the size of the council from 41 to 36, Labour also enjoyed double-figure gains.

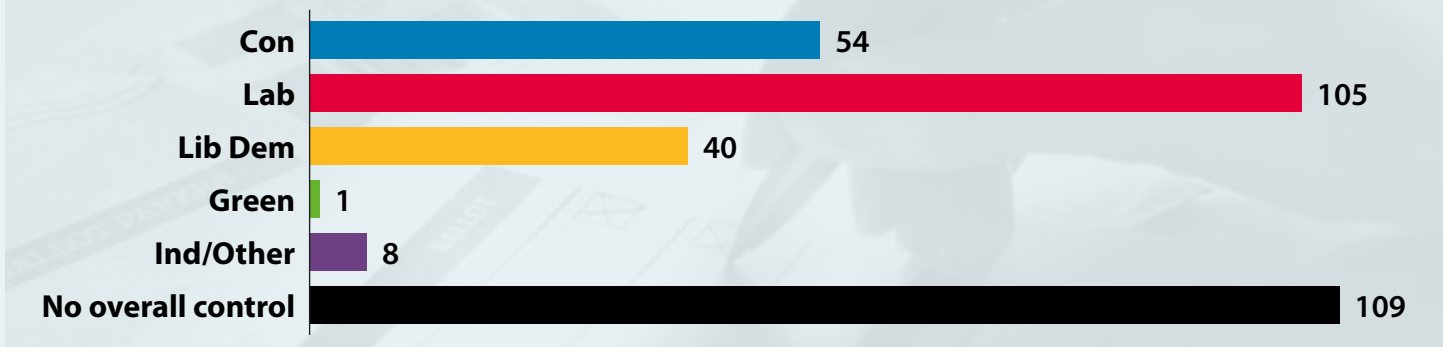
In Adur (Shoreham) and Rushmoor (Aldershot), Labour made history by taking control for the first time in those councils' 50-year existence.

Adur now joins neighbouring Worthing, with which it shares many services, and Brighton & Hove in forming a swathe of red on the Sussex coast.

Labour also gained previously 'hung' Milton Keynes for the first time



Councils controlled (England) 2024



“There was progress for independents and avowedly non-party political candidates”

since 2000, and is now the largest party in the Essex Brexit strongholds of Basildon and Thurrock. Parliamentary constituencies within all those councils, many of which Labour won during the Blair era, will now be a focus of attention during the general election campaign.

But Labour did not have it all its own way.

In the north of England, Labour lost its majority in Kirklees and in Oldham, as Independents took former Labour seats in a protest over the national party’s stance on Gaza.

In Burnley and Pendle, Labour had already been diminished by the defection of sitting councillors. There are now no Labour councillors in Pendle.

Looking at individual wards, it seems that the Labour share of the vote was down by almost 18 points compared with 2021 in places with a Muslim population in excess of 20 per cent of the total.

In Rochdale (scene of George Galloway’s recent parliamentary by-election victory), on the other hand, Labour retained 14 of its 15 seats, with Galloway’s Workers Party of Britain being successful in just two wards.

Elsewhere, Labour had already lost control in Norwich and Oxford following policy-led resignations by sitting councillors, and, in Hastings, it no longer had the numbers to lead a minority administration. In all three cases the situation could not be reversed.

In Hastings, it was the Greens who benefited from internal Labour dissension; in Oxford, the Greens again and, perhaps ironically, a group opposed to low traffic neighbourhoods won previously Labour seats.

For their part, the Conservatives can point to Walsall, where they lost no seats and retain a big overall majority, and to their narrow success in keeping Harlow out of Labour’s hands. But they too have been damaged by intra-party strife.

In Peterborough, they had controlled the council or been the largest party throughout this century, but now find themselves in third place thanks to inroads from the Peterborough First group, which contains several councillors originally elected as Conservatives.

In Tamworth, which Labour gained, the Conservatives were similarly weakened by discord in the ranks.

The Liberal Democrats picked up more than 100 extra seats and had slightly more councillors returned overall at these elections than did the Conservatives.

They also made some notable dents in the ‘blue wall’, winning control in Dorset, as well as in the home of the mythical ‘disgusted of Tunbridge Wells’.

Their already large majorities in councils such as Cheltenham, Woking and Winchester were enhanced, with the Conservatives wiped out in the first two cases.

The party’s representation in the LGA is now higher than at any point since the early days of its national coalition with

the David Cameron-led government.

The Greens continued to make incremental progress. They just fell short of a majority in Bristol, but now have 10 per cent or more of councillors in 50 local authorities. At these elections, they seemed particularly to attract support as a left-of-centre alternative to Labour.

The Reform party contested only about one in seven of all wards and had just two councillors returned – both in Havant.

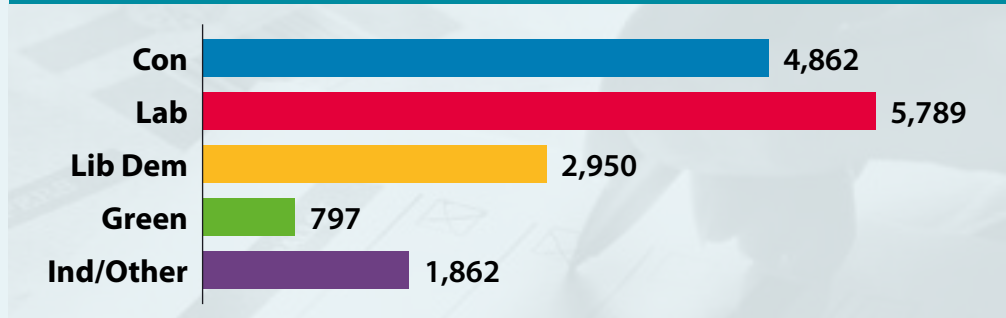
However, as in the Blackpool South parliamentary by-election, and as evidenced in Hartlepool, where it was present, it mostly ate into the Conservative vote.

There was also progress for Independents and, especially, avowedly non-party political candidates who stand under a label referencing a particular local ward, town or geographic area.

An extreme example of this trend was in Castle Point, in Essex.

Long a stronghold of the Canvey Island Independents, the non-party campaign spread its tentacles onto the ‘mainland’ and beat the Conservatives in every seat it contested there as the People’s Independent party. With all 39 seats now under their control, the two groups have joined together to run the council.

Councillors (England) 2024



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