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JOIN Mobile^{UK} AT THE LGA ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND EXHIBITION 2024

TACKLING DIGITAL EXCLUSION – BRINGING INDUSTRY AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT TOGETHER FRINGE EVENT

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22 OCTOBER
6:30PM – 7:30PM

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Bringing together thought leaders from the mobile industry and local government to discuss the importance of needed connectivity.

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Belinda Fawcett
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Director of Property &
Estates at Cornerstone



Hamish MacLeod
Chief Executive at
Mobile UK



Mark Hawthorne MBE
Digital Champion at Local
Government Association



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generates **£5** for
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by mobile operators



Councils with a Digital
Champion are **3x**
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digital connectivity as
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area



5G will provide
£159 billion
boost to the UK
economy by
2030

Failing To Plan, Planning WILL FAIL

The following polices will improve the planning system and the rollout of mobile infrastructure:

- 1 Urgently increase funding for planning services
- 2 Recognise the importance of mobile infrastructure in the planning system
- 3 Hire Digital Champions to support the planning process
- 4 Do more to attract and retain talent
- 5 Improve planning policy frameworks
- 6 Foster proactive digital leadership from councils

Read our six-point framework:



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Grenfell tragedy

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry published its final report last week, setting out the chain of events that contributed to the tragic loss of 72 lives in the fire that engulfed the block on 14 June 2017.

As we all pore over the report's recommendations and what they mean for our communities and the services we provide, our thoughts continue to be with those who tragically lost their lives, the survivors, and the wider community so profoundly affected by this tragedy (p5).

As **first** arrives on your doormat, the party conference season will be in full swing, with the Green Party gathering behind us, and the Liberal Democrats heading to Brighton this weekend. The LGA will be using the conferences, including Labour's and the Conservatives', to promote its work on securing the future of local services (p10).

Elsewhere in the magazine, we look at the Government's proposed overhaul of planning (p12), introduce you to the elected members who set the LGA's strategic direction (p16), review our annual sector support report (p18), set out our expanded support for councillors involved in change programmes (p21), and discuss the importance of encouraging young people to stand for election (p22).

Councillor Louise Gittins
is LGA Chair



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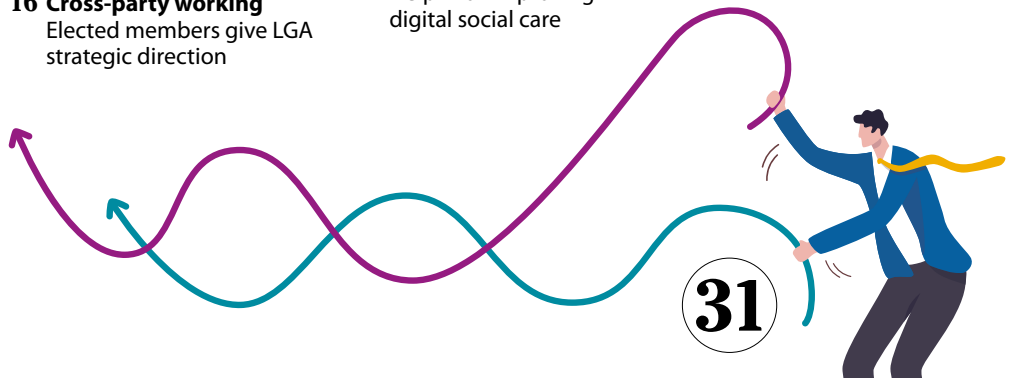
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New unit 'needed to tackle abuse'

The Government should establish a permanent central unit to deal with abuse and threats against councillors and make them safer when performing their elected roles, the LGA has said.

Priorities for the unit would include bringing forward legislation allowing councillors to withhold their home addresses from the public register of interests, and reviewing the preparedness of the police and the Crown Prosecution Service to respond to online abuse of councillors.

The LGA also wants the Government to improve public understanding of the decision-making role of councils and councillors, help reset the tone of public discourse, and reinforce expectations of respectful debate.

The proposals are outlined in a 'Civility in public life' motion from the Association of North East Councils, proposed by North Tyneside Mayor Dame Norma Redfearn DBE and Cllr Amanda Hopgood, Leader of Durham County Council, which was adopted as LGA policy over the summer.

Cllr Marianne Overton, Chair of the LGA's Civility in Public Life programme, said: "Amid continuing concerns for the safety and wellbeing of councillors, this new motion commits the LGA to pursue significant action from the Government to tackle the rising challenge of abuse and intimidation. It builds on the work of the Civility in Public Life programme and our Debate Not Hate campaign, which have yielded tangible results.

"Through them, we successfully lobbied for the inclusion of councillors in the Home Office's Defending Democracy Policing Protocol, which extended police support for councillors, and secured £31 million in additional funding for local police forces."

• See www.local.gov.uk/debate-not-hate for information, resources, toolkits and training



Support for struggling households extended

The Government has extended its support for struggling households over the winter, following an LGA campaign.

The LGA had warned that ending the Household Support Fund at the end of September, as originally planned, would result in a 'cliff-edge' of support for people struggling to buy food, pay bills and cover other essentials.

An LGA survey found that nearly 60 per cent of councils would not have been able to provide any additional funding for local welfare assistance if the fund had ended this month, and only 1 per cent said they would be able to match the lost funding.

However, the fund will now run until April 2025, with an additional £421 million for local authorities in England, and £79 million for the

devolved authorities in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Cllr Pete Marland, Chair of the LGA's Economy and Resources Board, said: "It is very positive the Government has acted in response to our campaign to extend this vital fund, which will help millions of vulnerable households at a time when demand for support is expected to increase over winter.

"Local government stands ready to work with the Government on a long-term plan for local welfare support that shifts away from short-term, crisis support, so councils can instead invest in preventative services that address the underlying causes of poverty and that, crucially, are underpinned by a sufficiently resourced national safety net."

Fear of pharmacy 'deserts'

Rural areas of England are at risk of becoming 'pharmacy deserts', with nearly all seeing at least one close in the past two years, according to the National Pharmacy Association.

In a new report, it said people in the countryside were particularly impacted because rural areas rely on only one or two pharmacies.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Councils want every local area to have a strong community pharmacy network, particularly those in deprived areas with the greatest health needs, or rural communities

with the furthest distance to travel.

"People rely on their local pharmacy, not just as a place to get medicines, but also as somewhere to go for informal health advice and information. If this lifeline is removed, it would mean more people having to travel longer distances to GP surgeries and adding to existing pressures.

"Pharmacies have an important place in our local economy. They are vital to ensuring diverse and vibrant high streets, which can otherwise be dominated by betting shops, takeaways and charity shops. Losing our pharmacies could leave gaps in high streets that may never be filled."

Call to review temporary accommodation subsidy

Government subsidies towards councils' temporary accommodation costs – currently stuck at 2011 levels – need to be “urgently addressed” in the face of rising homelessness, the LGA has warned.

The latest quarterly statistics show that, as of 31 March 2024, 117,450 households were in temporary accommodation, an increase of 12.3 per cent from 31 March 2023. Households with children increased by 14.7 per cent, to 74,530, and single households increased by 8.5 per cent, to 42,920. Compared with the previous quarter, the number of households in temporary accommodation had increased by 4.3 per cent.

An LGA spokesperson said: “The shortage of affordable housing means that more and more people are having to turn to their local council for support, and these figures worryingly show councils

are supporting another record-high number of households living in temporary accommodation.

“The temporary accommodation subsidy gap, currently stuck at 2011 levels, needs to be urgently addressed, as this is driving ever higher spend on temporary accommodation and limiting the resources available for homelessness prevention.

“The Government’s ban on ‘no-fault’ evictions, which are driving rising homelessness rates, also needs to be brought forward as quickly as possible.

“Councils want to turn the tide of rising homelessness.

“A genuine cross-departmental approach to tackling this crisis, as part of a long-term government strategy, is key, with councils given the powers and resources needed to address the national shortage of affordable housing.”



Cultural services ‘under threat’

Councils’ spending on culture in England remains under threat because of the multitude of funding streams and wider funding pressures, LGA infographics have revealed.

Local government remains the largest single funder of culture, spending £1 billion a year, but the LGA’s research reveals that this has fallen by £2.3 billion in real terms since 2010/11.

This is in part because of rising demand for adult social care, children’s social care and homelessness services, alongside a 24 per cent real-terms reduction in core spending power since 2010/11, which has squeezed all budgets.

The research also lays bare a cultural funding landscape that includes multiple bidding pots, some of which are very small and more than 90 per cent of which are available for three years or fewer.

Clr Liz Green, Chair of the LGA’s Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, said: “Cultural services help to boost local economies by driving high street footfall, supporting creative industries and the visitor economy.

“They also promote better wellbeing and support educational outcomes, while bringing joy and hope to people across society.

“However, our analysis shows that funding pressures, exacerbated by a complicated and time-consuming system for bidding for funding, has left councils increasingly unable to protect budgets for cultural and leisure services from cuts.

“By reducing the fragmented nature of culture funding, the Government can ensure that local government remains a vital part of public culture funding and our cultural services face a brighter future.”

Grenfell Inquiry publishes final report

Campaigners and survivor groups called for police to accelerate the criminal investigation into the Grenfell Tower fire after a report found that companies operated with “systematic dishonesty” and that all 72 deaths were avoidable.

A seven-year public inquiry culminated last week in a report that laid bare “decades of failure” by central government and “egregious behaviour” by a string of manufacturing firms.

A total of 58 recommendations have been made by the inquiry, chaired by Sir Martin Moore-Bick, including for the construction industry, the Government, and firefighters.

The Government has pledged to speed up the removal of unsafe cladding, block Grenfell companies from winning government contracts, reform the construction products industry, and ensure social landlords are held to account.

Clr Louise Gittins, LGA Chair, said: “Our thoughts are with those who tragically lost their lives at Grenfell Tower, the survivors, and the wider community so profoundly affected by this tragedy. It is hard to comprehend the unimaginable loss and trauma so many have experienced following that fateful day – a pain that, unfortunately, will never go away.



“The report makes for sobering reading for anyone delivering services to the public.

“The disaster that unfolded at Grenfell Tower must never be allowed to happen again, and the LGA and councils will take time to properly consider this vital report and its recommendations.

“Local government stands ready to work with the Government on improving building safety and ensuring no one has to live in fear about their safety, be that in the buildings they live, work, or visit.”



New parental leave policy for councillors

The LGA has adopted its first model parental leave policy for councillors, providing a practical starting point for councils wanting to address this grey area for elected members.

As councillors are not employees, they have no automatic right to maternity, paternity or adoption leave unless their council proactively puts in place formal or informal arrangements.

Uncertainty over entitlements for councillors can act as a barrier to seeking election or re-election, particularly among groups who are underrepresented in local government, including women, younger people, and those with caring responsibilities.

The new cross-party policy builds on one promoted by the LGA Labour Group and which has been adopted by a significant number of councils across England. It provides guidance for maternity, paternity, shared parental, adoption, and baby loss leave, in line with standard employment rights.

It also addresses specific issues that arise for councillors, such as payment of special responsibility allowances, cover for special responsibilities during leave, and being able to return to the same roles in cabinet or committees at the end of a period of leave.

As well as adopting the new model policy, the LGA will lobby the Government to make some minor amendments and clarifications to the law, to help councils that are implementing parental leave policies on issues including whether cabinet members on parental leave count towards legal maximum sizes of executives.

• See the LGA's Equalities Hub at www.local.gov.uk/our-support/equalities-hub

LGA calls for men's health strategy

Men in England are facing "a silent health crisis", dying nearly four years earlier than women, while suffering disproportionately higher rates of cancers, heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

So says a new report from the LGA, which highlights severe inequalities, with men in deprived areas living up to 10 years less than their affluent counterparts and facing a 20-year gap in healthy life expectancy.

'Men's health: the lives of men in our communities' found socio-economic and behavioural factors, including higher levels of smoking and excessive drinking, were contributory factors. In addition, the report says four out of every five suicides are by men.

The LGA is urging the Government to implement a men's health strategy similar to the

women's health strategy of 2022. It wants men's health to be recognised as "a national concern".

It is also calling for local suicide prevention funding to be reinstated.

The £57 million fund, which goes to councils to provide vital support for those at risk of suicide, ended in March.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Men in England are facing a silent health crisis. We are calling for men's health to be recognised as a national concern, and for the Government to implement a men's health strategy.

"Innovative local initiatives led by councils are making strides, but national action is needed to help close the life-expectancy gap."

• See www.local.gov.uk/publications for the full report



Virtual meetings 'under review'

The Government is considering changes to the rules around councillors attending meetings virtually – something the LGA has been calling for since 2021.

In a response to a written parliamentary question, Local Government Minister Jim McMahon said allowing hybrid meetings "could be a helpful step" towards ensuring that local government is "modern, efficient, flexible and diverse", and towards breaking down barriers "that prevent people from seeking to serve their communities".

Cllr Louise Gittins, LGA Chair, called the statement "encouraging", adding: "Council meetings are an essential part of local

democracy. They are where decisions that impact residents' daily lives are made. So, we are glad to hear the minister's commitment to an evidence-based approach to any legislative change.

"The legal requirement for councillors to attend meetings in person can hinder some people from fully serving their communities as councillors.

"We've seen during the pandemic how virtual meeting technologies can support democratic decision-making in emergencies. Councils should be given the freedom and flexibility to choose whether and when to allow virtual attendance at their meetings."

Cross-party working

LGA Chair Cllr Louise Gittins met her predecessors over the summer to discuss “all things local government” and the importance of cross-party working.

She met her immediate predecessor, Cllr Shaun Davies MP, the former Leader of Telford & Wrekin Council, who was elected as Labour MP for Telford in July. In addition, she caught up with Conservative former LGA Chairmen Cllr Lord James

Jamieson OBE and Lord Gary Porter CBE, in Westminster.

Lord Porter tweeted: “Always a pleasure to talk about the importance of local government (and the great members and staff who work in the sector) to delivering the services our country depends on. Really good to touch on the vital role the LGA plays in holding Westminster to account for its promises.”



Cllr Louise Gittins with her immediate predecessor Cllr Shaun Davies MP...



... and with Lord Jamieson (left) and Lord Porter at Westminster

More ‘move on’ time needed to help house refugees

A snapshot LGA survey shows councils want more time between asylum seekers receiving a decision on their application and having to move out of Home Office accommodation.

The survey, which looked at the asylum decision backlog clearance programme between August 2023 and March 2024, asked councils about the ‘move on’ period – the time between an applicant receiving a decision and having to leave the Home Office-funded accommodation they were in while awaiting their outcome.

The findings show that the sudden ending of central government support for asylum seekers has impacted on nine in 10 councils financially and added to staff pressures.

A similar proportion of council respondents (89 per cent) said that the ending of central government support after ‘move on’ periods had contributed to a rise in homelessness presentations, and around

three-fifths said it led to increased street homelessness. When asked about the most effective way to reduce costs, 84 per cent of respondents said an “extension to the 28-day move-on timeframe to 56 days, in line with the Homelessness Reduction Act”.

Funding for councils to provide ‘move on’ support, including to help adults and families find new homes, was the other suggestion most frequently raised by councils.

With a new backlog clearance programme announced in July, councils want to work with government to develop a place-based approach that helps newly recognised refugees move on from asylum accommodation.

Cllr Louise Gittins, LGA Chair, said: “Increasing the move-on time to 56 days would bring this into line with best practice around supporting other vulnerable people to find homes, and reduce the risk of homelessness and destitution locally.”

In brief

Workforce awards

The LGA’s pilot local government recruitment campaign in the North East, ‘Make a difference, work for your local council’, has been shortlisted for two categories in the Local Government Chronicle’s workforce awards, taking place on 5 November 2024. The campaign, co-produced by the LGA with councils and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers, showcases the wide variety of rewarding and high-impact careers available in councils. A national rollout of the campaign is planned this autumn – see p24.

Local roads

More than half of drivers (56 per cent) say the state of Britain’s local roads is one of their top motoring concerns, according to the RAC. A record, and growing, proportion of drivers also report that the local roads they use are in a worse state than in the previous 12 months. An LGA spokesperson said: “As this report highlights, the new government should commit to maintain the previous administration’s spending plans for local highways maintenance, alongside the need for long-term funding certainty, to help better support resurfacing schemes and prevent potholes in the first place.”

Pay awards

The Government is to fund pay awards for parts of the public sector, but its announcement over the summer did not provide any additional funding for pay in local government. Cllr Peter Marland, Chair of the LGA’s Economy and Resources Board, said the sector was experiencing “huge workforce recruitment and retention problems”, and that these “must be addressed as part of the wider discussions we are having with government over funding”. He added: “Public sector workers do an incredible job to keep local services running day in, day out. Pay awards in local government are funded through council budgets. These continue to face severe and unprecedented challenges and so the pay offer needs to be affordable to the sector.”

In brief

BAME leadership

The LGA is celebrating 20 years of its annual leadership programme for ethnic minority councillors, with applications now open for its 2024/25 BAME councillors weekender events, taking place in October 2024 and February 2025 in Coventry. Designed to empower ethnic minority councillors and equip them with the skills and insights needed to excel in their roles, the weekenders will focus on 'developing your political brand' and 'developing your political leadership skills' respectively. To find out more, please visit bit.ly/3zaR1Xp and email grace.collins@local.gov.uk to book your place.

LGA staff changes

Sally Burlington, the LGA's Director of Policy and Deputy Chief Executive, is leaving the organisation to become Chief Executive of the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services. Sally joined the LGA in 2012, bringing wide-ranging experience from a career in policy and strategy development in the Civil Service and local government. Meanwhile, Alastair Campbell, formerly Interim Director of Communications and Engagement at Southwark Council, has started as Interim Director of Communications at the LGA for six months. He has considerable experience working in highly sensitive and demanding environments, including 10 Downing Street, New Scotland Yard, Cabinet Office, GCHQ and local government.

Audit backlog

The Government has announced measures to tackle the backlog in the auditing of local bodies' accounts, pending longer-term plans to fix local audit, expected this autumn. Only 1 per cent of local bodies published audited accounts on time last year. Cllr Pete Marland, Chair of the LGA's Economy and Resources Board, said: "We are pleased the Government has committed to overhauling local audit. There is an urgent need to restore confidence in the arrangements, and improve financial reporting. This needs to be progressed, with strong involvement from the local government sector."



LG Challenge finalists (l to r): Hannah Barton, Jack Pearce, winner Faith Scott Deuchar, and Marelize De Beurs

LG Challenge winner announced

Islington Council's Faith Scott Deuchar has won the LGA's Local Government Challenge 2024, with a project seeking to understand why some families disengage from early help services.

Created in 2009, the Local Government Challenge brings together talented local government officers to compete in a series of real-life challenges around the country.

Alongside nine other contestants, Ms Scott Deuchar tackled recycling and reducing waste in Newcastle, culture and tourism in Calderdale, the Household Support Fund in Wiltshire, stronger communities in Waltham Forest, and artificial intelligence (AI) in Telford & Wrekin.

She then joined three other finalists pitching their own project ideas to a judging panel, including representatives of the LGA, Essex and Kent County Councils, and the Municipal Journal.

Ms Scott Deuchar was presented with her award – a £10,000 Bruce-Lockhart scholarship to implement her project – by Cllr Kevin Bentley, Leader of Essex, and LGA Senior Vice-Chairman.

She said: "Taking part in the Local Government Challenge 2024 has been such a rewarding and enriching experience.

"Throughout the five challenges, I learned a huge amount from my fellow contestants and the host councils, and I returned to Islington each time with new ideas and renewed excitement for working in our sector."

The LGA would like to thank the host council members and officers who helped make the five challenges such a success.

Applications are now open for the Local Government Challenge 2025, until Monday 23 September – see www.local.gov.uk/lg-challenge

Warning on free childcare places

A quarter of councils are 'not very confident' that they will have enough spaces for this month's rollout of free childcare, according to an LGA report.

From September 2024, free childcare is being expanded to 15 hours a week for children aged nine months to three years.

The LGA's recently published survey, conducted in April, found that 70 per cent of responding councils were 'very' or 'fairly' confident they would have sufficient places, and nearly a fifth (18 per cent) said the number of early years childcare and education places had increased.

However, almost all respondents highlighted concerns about finding enough places for children with special educational needs and disabilities (93 per cent), and about early years workforce numbers (92 per cent).

Meanwhile, looking ahead to September 2025, when 30 hours of free childcare for children aged nine months to school age is due to roll out, half of the councils surveyed were 'not very' or 'not at all' confident that there would be sufficient places.

Cllr Louise Gittins, LGA Chair, said: "The extended childcare scheme is a positive step towards helping parents with the high costs of childcare.

"However, historic underfunding and wider council pressures have left local authority early years teams less prepared to support providers with the expansion, despite concerted effort.

"As the proportion of childcare places delivered through government-funded entitlements increases, councils need to be given the right levers and powers to manage local childcare markets."

After the riots

Building community cohesion requires a long-term strategic approach



Members of the Middlesbrough community come together to clean up their streets

© IAN FORSYTH/GETTY IMAGES



Councillor
Louise Gittins is
Chair of the LGA

While the emergency caused by the extremist and racist far right violent disorder over the summer has receded from the media headlines, the impact continues to be felt locally. It will take time for our communities to recover from the fear and distress caused, and even more time to address the longer-term underlying issues.

The LGA continues to offer support to councils as they bring their communities together. Our staff are embedded within a number of local authorities, particularly Sefton Council, home to Southport, where the horrendous stabbings of seven-year-old Elsie Dot Stancombe, Alice Dasilva Aguiar, aged nine, and six-year-old Bebe King took place on 29 July. The council is taking great care to support the families of the three girls and the other victims wounded, as well as the wider local community.

The LGA is also developing consensus on the ways in which government can work with the sector to support recovery in the short and long term, and internally

carrying out a rapid review of how we responded to events in support of our member councils.

Thank you to the 200 council leaders, chief executives, and directors from adults', children's and place-based services who attended our series of webinars following the unrest, and who continue to share their experience with the sector.

Themes across the three workshops – including one with Baroness Taylor of Stevenage, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government – included partnership working, communications, funding, cohesion, and building cross-party and political unity.

We have been inspired by the powerful insight from councils as they begin to recover from the disorder – albeit the language of 'recovery' feels difficult, as it implies a 'quick fix', when we know that addressing the root causes requires an overhaul of policies, practice, investment, and so much more. It is critical that we act on the longer-term issues of rebuilding community cohesion and countering extremism and disinformation.

Adequate government funding for these initiatives is essential, particularly in the most disadvantaged areas, where historical factors led to violence. Building community cohesion requires a long-term strategic

approach, and councils have struggled to fund preventative measures that might make a real difference amid ongoing funding pressures.

We also need to see greater investment in – and funding of diversionary activities for – young people, who, in some of the summer's incidents, appeared to be encouraged by older or non-local agitators.

In support of this work, the LGA has brought forward the publication of a new guide for councillors and officers on supporting youth in low-income neighbourhoods to stay active through sport, by working better with 'locally trusted organisations' – mainly hyper-local community organisations (see www.local.gov.uk/publications).

The many instances of councils and communities coming together to support each other and work together in the aftermath of the violence have provided hope. It is essential to remember that the extremists who seek to divide our communities are a tiny, unrepresentative minority.

Councils know their local places best, and the Government and other agencies need to ensure they make the most of local government intelligence, experience and expertise.

The LGA continues to support councils as they look to learn from the summer's horrendous events, and as they seek to rebuild trust and confidence in communities.

Party priorities

The LGA will be working to secure the future of local services at party conferences

There is never a dull day in politics, and that has been especially true over the past few months.

The general election in July returned a Labour majority government for the first time in more than 14 years, with an agenda to make Britain a clean energy superpower, kickstart economic growth, break down barriers to opportunity, build an NHS fit for the future, and make our streets safer.

Crucially, we were delighted here at the LGA that many new MPs have come from the local government family and have had first-hand experience of the acute pressures that councils are facing.

Securing the future of our local services will be a top priority. After all, it is councils that hold the local levers to the national challenges facing the Government, whether it is building more affordable homes, reducing

homelessness, improving care for adults and children, or boosting inclusive growth.

Among all this change, and with a new government still finding its feet, one thing remains the same: party conference season. Each conference, however, is expected to feel different from years past.

The Conservatives are halfway through a leadership election, with former Prime Minister Rishi Sunak remaining in post until his successor is chosen.

In contrast, Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Green Party will each use their respective conferences as an opportunity to celebrate their electoral successes.

This year, the LGA has organised a series of receptions and debates at all four party conferences.

As **first** was going to press, the Green Party was meeting in Manchester (6-8 September), with



conference celebrating the return of a record four MPs to Parliament following the general election.

At the LGA's local government reception, co-hosted with the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), attendees heard from: Cllr Marianne Overton MBE, Leader of the LGA's Independent Group; Carla Denyer MP, Co-Leader of the Green Party; Cllr Johnny Denis, Chair of the Association of Green Party Councillors and Cabinet Member for Arts, Culture, Tourism and Leisure at Lewes District Council; and the NALC's Justin Griggs.

Conference delegates were also invited to attend a panel discussion on 'How can local government and their partners provide everyone with a good home while also addressing the climate and nature crisis?'. Chaired by Cllr Overton, the panel speakers included: Cllr Caroline Jackson, LGA Independent Group Deputy Leader; and Cllr Diana Moore (Exeter).

In exploring the theme of housing, the panellists discussed the role of councils in creating healthy communities and homes while safeguarding the environment.

The LGA will next travel to Brighton and join the Liberal Democrats at the famous Grand Hotel (14-17 September).

Liberal Democrat local government speakers will feature across a number of debates, seminars, training sessions and roundtables hosted by

Liberal Democrat Conference

Brighton, 14-17 September



LGA Liberal Democrat Group and ALDC debate

'Community energy – powering the future?'

Sunday 15 September, 1pm to 2pm

The Pavilion, Grand Hotel

Speakers include: Pippa Heylings MP, former councillor and chair of South Cambridgeshire District Council's Climate and Environment Advisory Committee

Chair: Cllr Joe Harris, LGA Liberal Democrat Group Leader

LGA Liberal Democrat Group and ALDC local government reception

'Celebrating our success'

Sunday 15 September, 7.45pm to 9pm

Alexandra Room, Grand Hotel

Speakers include: Cllr Joe Harris, LGA Liberal Democrat Group Leader; Sir Ed Davey MP, Leader of the Liberal Democrats; and Cllr Prue Bray MBE, ALDC Management Committee Chair

LGA and Efficio

'Funding local government – the oncoming storm'

Monday 16 September, 1pm to 2pm

Alexandra Room, Grand Hotel

Speakers include: Helen Morgan MP, Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Communities and Local Government; Cllr Keith House, Leader of Eastleigh Borough Council; and Scott Collins, Consultant, Efficio

Chair: Cllr Lucy Nethsingha, Leader of Cambridgeshire County Council

a variety of partner organisations.

The LGA's Liberal Democrat Group works closely with the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors (ALDC) to arrange events across the conference agenda.

Sir Keir Starmer and his Cabinet will travel to Liverpool for Labour's conference (22-25 September). As the host authority, Liverpool City Council has helped facilitate a local government zone, in partnership with the LGA, in the Atlantic Pavilion, just outside the conference secure zone.

Throughout the conference, the LGA will work with partners and stakeholders to arrange multiple fringe events, including with Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and the Association of Labour Councillors.

The last event of the season will be the Conservative Party conference in Birmingham. While it will operate in the usual format (speeches, fringes, receptions etc.), there will be the added interest from delegates as the party works towards electing a new leader later this year.

Remaining candidates will be working the conference venue, meeting members and partners, all with the aim of shoring up support for their respective campaigns.

Party conferences are used to recognise months of hard

Labour Party Conference

Liverpool, 22-25 September



LGA debate

'Local climate action: delivering clean energy in place'

Sunday 22 September, 3pm to 4pm

Local Government Zone, Atlantic Pavilion

Chair: Cllr Adam Hug, Chair of the LGA's Local Infrastructure and Net Zero Board, and Leader of Westminster City Council

Association of Labour Councillors annual reception

Sunday 22 September, 8pm to 9.30pm

Hall 2H

Speakers include: Cllr Louise Gittins, LGA Chair

LGA and Efficio

'Building improved commercial excellence to deliver better outcomes and stronger financial sustainability'

Monday 23 September, 11am to 2pm

Local Government Zone, Atlantic Pavilion

Chair: Cllr Jane Scullion, Vice-Chair of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board, and Leader of Calderdale Council

LGA and National Housing Federation

'Getting Britain building: the role of councils and housing associations'

Monday 23 September, 4.30pm to 5.30pm

Local Government Zone, Atlantic Pavilion

Chair: Cllr Adam Hug, Chair of the LGA's Local Infrastructure and Net Zero Board, and Leader of Westminster City Council

LGA debate

'Devolution to support local growth'

Tuesday 24 September, 10.30am to 11.30am

(refreshments from 10am)

Local Government Zone, Atlantic Pavilion

Chair: Cllr Louise Gittins, LGA Chair and Leader of Cheshire West and Chester Council

LGA debate

'How can we create an effective and sustainable SEND system?'

Tuesday 24 September, 4.30pm to 5.30pm

Local Government Zone, Atlantic Pavilion

Chair: Cllr Louise Gittins, LGA Chair and Leader of Cheshire West and Chester Council


campaigning on the issues that matter to councils across England and Wales. The LGA's strength of attendance and calibre of events has been acknowledged and valued by its members and partners.

Across each of the Liberal Democrat, Labour and Conservative party conferences, beyond its usual suite of events, the LGA has partnered with global procurement and supply chain consultants Efficio to co-host a panel discussion related to procurement and financial stability of councils.

Ongoing financial pressures mean local authorities need to operate more commercially. Panellists across these sessions will discuss how more effective commercial and procurement approaches can deliver on council ambitions, improve outcomes for residents, and ensure long-term financial stability.

In this period of change, party conferences present an opportunity to reset the relationship with political parties and shape their offer to local government and the communities they serve.

All our events will be important in making the case for an empowered local government, particularly in the infancy of a new Parliament.

 For the latest information on the [LGA's events at the party conferences](http://www.local.gov.uk/party-conferences-autumn-2024), please visit www.local.gov.uk/party-conferences-autumn-2024

Conservative Party Conference



Birmingham, 29 September to 2 October

LGA Conservative Group reception

Sunday 29 September, 3.30pm to 5pm

Hall 8b, Birmingham ICC

Speakers include: Cllr Kevin Bentley, LGA Conservative Group Leader and Leader of Essex County Council

LGA Conservative Group debate

'What the next Conservative government needs to do to let councils facilitate local growth'

Monday 30 September, 3.30pm to 5pm

Sonata, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Birmingham

Speakers include: Steve Collins, Chief Executive, Rent Plus UK; Cllr Abi Brown OBE (Stoke-on-Trent), LGA Conservative Group Deputy Leader; David Simmonds MP, Shadow Parliamentary Under Secretary, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government; Cllr Lord John Fuller OBE (South Norfolk); Cllr Linda Taylor, Vice-Chairman of the LGA's Local Infrastructure Board and Leader of Cornwall Council

Chairman: Cllr Kevin Bentley, LGA Conservative Group Leader and Leader of Essex County Council

LGA and Efficio

'Building improved commercial excellence to deliver better outcomes and stronger financial sustainability'

Tuesday 1 October, 3.30pm to 5pm

Andante, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Birmingham

Speakers include: Cllr Abi Brown OBE, LGA Conservative Group Deputy Leader and Member of Stoke-on-Trent City Council; Cllr Jason Cummings, Cabinet Member for Finance, Croydon Borough Council; Scott Collins, Consultant, Efficio

Planning rules overhaul

Further measures are needed on affordable housing



Councillor **Linda Taylor** is Vice-Chair of the LGA's Local Infrastructure and Net Zero Board

We are in the midst of a housing crisis and urgent action is needed to ensure more housing is built to meet growing demand.

Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner's announcement, over the summer, of an overhaul of England's planning rules laid out some positive first steps towards addressing this issue – but the Government must go further if we are to tackle the lack of affordable housing properly.

Part of Ms Rayner's announcement was news of a forthcoming consultation on reforms to the Right to Buy (RTB) scheme.

While RTB can and has delivered home ownership for many, the current format no longer works, so this consultation has been warmly received by councils that have seen their housing stock diminish significantly under the scheme.

We are pleased to see the Government will implement some of the LGA's long-standing asks around RTB immediately, for a two-year period.

The increase in the maximum permitted contribution from RTB receipts to replacement affordable housing from 50 to 100 per cent, the use of RTB receipts – along with section 106 contributions – and lifting the cap on the percentage of replacements delivered as acquisitions

each year (currently 50 per cent) are all positive steps towards addressing the issues with the scheme.

The rising discounts and restrictions government places on councils' use of RTB receipts has meant that councils have been selling property at a discounted rate and the money raised from the sale is usually not sufficient to cover the building costs of replacing the property.

Last year alone, there was a net loss of 7,449 social homes because of RTB sales. Councils need to be allowed to set discount levels at which homes can be purchased, as well as retain 100 per cent of their receipts permanently if the Right to Buy scheme is to be manageable.

Reforming Right to Buy is only part of the solution, however.

Government should enable the rollout of five-year local housing deals by 2025 to all areas of the country that want them – combining funding from multiple national housing programmes into a single pot (see **first** 696).

New research from the LGA has found that the rollout of five-year local housing deals by 2025 would lead to 200,000 additional social homes being built over the span of 30 years, resulting in a 21 per cent increase in social housebuilding.

The report also suggests that by moving towards a single long-term fund, there will be significant improvement in housing delivery by prioritising a strategic approach over short-term thinking, avoiding boom-and-bust cycles of housebuilding.

The findings suggest a programme of consecutive minimum five-year housing regimes would deliver net socio-economic benefits worth



£31 billion in today's prices over 30 years.

While much of the focus of planning reforms seems to be on ways to speed up planning permission, the reality is that planning is not a barrier to housebuilding. Nine in 10 planning applications are approved by councils, and there are more than a million homes allocated in local plans across England that are waiting to be taken up by developers. While these sites do not yet have planning permission, they have formally been identified as suitable for housing by councils.

Ms Rayner's more recent announcement of a new homes 'accelerator' to speed up the delivery of stalled housing sites would help councils deliver more homes and reduce their reliance on temporary accommodation.

Other measures the LGA has said would help councils support a

"By moving towards a single long-term fund, there will be significant improvement in housing delivery"



“Planning is not a barrier to housebuilding. Nine in 10 applications are approved”

faster buildout of schemes include urgently introducing a ‘stalled sites’ council-tax premium, as well as a streamlined compulsory purchase process to acquire stalled sites, or sites where developers do not build out to agreed rates.

Councils should also be given powers to direct diversification of housing products on sites, to speed up overall buildout.

A new government presents an opportunity to reset the relationship between national and local government. While national government can provide useful guidance on housebuilding and planning, it is local councils and

communities who know their areas best and are therefore the ones best placed to deliver on the housing needs of their communities.

We are clear that any changes to national planning policy should be suitably flexible to allow authorities to make judgement decisions on managing competing demands for housing uses in their local areas.

While we will look carefully at the changes proposed to planning policy and housing targets, local government stands ready to work with national government on its detailed delivery plans to ensure practical solutions to these long-standing problems are found.



For more on the [LGA’s housing and planning work](https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/housing-and-planning), please visit www.local.gov.uk/topics/housing-and-planning

Housing and planning

Key government proposals include:

- New, mandatory housing targets for all councils in England.
- The first port of call for development will be brownfield land.
- Councils will have to review their green belt land if needed to meet their own target, identifying and prioritising ‘grey belt’ land.
- A definition of ‘grey belt’ land, which includes land on the edge of existing settlements or roads, old petrol stations and car parks.
- Land that is safeguarded for environmental reasons will continue to be protected.
- Introduction of a universal system of strategic planning across England, to deliver on the Government’s manifesto commitment to plan for growth on a larger-than-local scale.
- More support for mixed-use sites, comprising a variety of ownership and rental tenures.
- New flexibilities in the Affordable Homes Programme to unlock housing delivery in London.
- Increased flexibilities on how councils can use their Right to Buy receipts, including:
 - removing the caps on the percentage of replacements delivered as acquisitions and the percentage cost of a replacement home that can be funded using these receipts
 - giving councils the ability to combine Right to Buy receipts with section 106 contributions.
- A wider review of Right to Buy, looking at eligibility criteria and protections for new homes, with a consultation in the autumn.
- Confirmation of a third round of the Local Authority Housing Fund, with £450 million for councils to acquire and create homes for families at risk of homelessness.
- Awaab’s Law will be introduced into the social rented sector.
- Proposals to reform the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects regime.



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Getting **women active**

Co-designing activities is key, according to councils



Councillor **Liz Green** is Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board

Earlier this year, the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board launched a call for evidence on supporting women and girls to be more physically active (see **first** 693).

The objectives were to accelerate learning by collating and sharing effective council practice, via case studies, and to gather evidence on the challenges and solutions, to help inform our future work.

When we started, we had no idea that, six months later, this work would position us effectively to contribute to several of the new Government's aims – including breaking down barriers to opportunity, taking back our streets, and building an NHS fit for the future.

Our work also supports the Government's aim of kick-starting the economy, because of the link

between inactivity, poor health and productivity.

The evidence we received clearly demonstrates some great work is taking place in councils, and these inspiring case studies can be read on our new Active Communities Hub.

You told us that key factors for successful interventions include engaging with women and girls to co-design and co-produce activities, as this encourages participation because people feel listened to and are personally invested in the activity. Others include: using local, convenient, but safe and comfortable venues; arranging activities at times when women and girls are already using these venues; and providing childcare and opportunities to socialise, bond and gain confidence.

Working with local charities, leaders, faith groups, female role models, volunteers and staff, parents, locally trusted organisations, the NHS and school partners to engage with women and girls can also increase take-up of physical activities.

However, while the evidence of what works is strong, the evidence we

received of what doesn't shows this work is being hampered by:

- limited and fragmented funding streams, which is affecting the sustainability of interventions
- workforce and training issues – specifically, too few female staff and volunteers to deliver projects
- an absence of a national strategy
- a lack of data and research on the barriers stopping women and girls from being active at each stage of their life.

These systemic barriers are resulting in fewer women and girls being supported to be active, and is affecting councils' and their partners' efforts to progress this agenda.

Research shows that more men participate in sport and physical activity than women, regardless of age, ethnicity and disability.

Closing the gender gap and tackling inequalities to enable more women and girls to be active in ways that suit them doesn't just improve their own physical and mental health. Women have a strong influencing role within their families and can positively affect the activity habits, health and wellbeing of future generations, too.

This is the first call for evidence in a two-year project commissioned by the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board to take an in-depth look at reducing inequalities in the least physically active groups. We will also be looking at children and young people, disabled people, the least active ethnic minority groups, and older people. We will share our findings, effective practice and learning in our new Active Communities Hub, where you can also read our full report on the call for evidence on women's and girls' activity levels.

The board will be discussing the findings in October, to agree our future lobbying activity to help tackle the barriers identified in the report.

“Systemic barriers are resulting in fewer women and girls being supported to be active”



i See www.local.gov.uk/active-communities-hub for more information

Cross-party governance

Elected members provide strategic direction to the LGA

The LGA is a member-led organisation, working by consensus between its four political groups.

The groups appoint councillors to the LGA's governance structures based on the combined political composition of member local authorities. The largest group nominates the chair.

The current political balance is: Labour, 38.8 per cent; Conservative, 31.4 per cent; Liberal Democrat, 15.5 per cent; Independent, 14.3 per cent.

The LGA's General Assembly elects its Board of Directors, consisting of the LGA's chair, senior vice-chair, vice-chairs and deputy chairs.

The LGA Board sets the organisation's strategic direction

in consultation with the Executive Advisory Board (EAB), and ensures that the organisation is properly managed.

The LGA Board forms part of the EAB, along with: the chairs of the LGA's policy boards; representatives from Wales, the nine English regions, the County Councils Network, District Councils' Network, and the Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities; and balancing members to make it politically proportionate.

The EAB discusses major cross-cutting and high-profile issues that are of importance to local government, and supports the LGA Board to set the LGA's strategic priorities. It ensures that the LGA is focused at all times on its member

councils and their communities.

The LGA is currently reviewing its governance arrangements, including the roles and remits of the different boards, how current structures work in practice to support the LGA to achieve its objectives, and what support its members need to carry out their governance roles.

A Governance Task and Finish Group, comprising one member from each LGA political group, is leading on this work, with a view to any changes being made in the next LGA governance year, starting September 2025.



Please visit www.local.gov.uk/about/our-meetings-and-leadership to find out more

LGA EXECUTIVE ADVISORY BOARD – Board of Directors (LGA Board)



Cllr **Louise Gittins** (Lab, Cheshire West and Chester) has been Chair of the LGA since July 2024. She previously served as Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board and Deputy Chair of its Community Wellbeing Board. She first became a councillor in 2011, becoming Deputy Leader of Cheshire West and Chester in 2015, and then Leader in 2019.

louise.gittins@local.gov.uk



Cllr **Kevin Bentley** (Con, Essex) became Senior Vice-Chairman and Leader of the LGA's Conservative Group in July 2023, having previously chaired the LGA's People and Places

Board. He was elected to Colchester City Council in 2002 and Essex County Council in 2009, and has been Leader of Essex since 2021.

cllr.kevin.bentley@essex.gov.uk



Cllr **Bev Craig** (Lab, Manchester) became an LGA Vice-Chair and Leader of the LGA's Labour Group in July 2024, having previously served as an LGA Deputy Chair. She was first elected to Manchester City Council in 2011, and became its first woman and openly gay Leader in 2021.

cllr.bev.craig@manchester.gov.uk



Cllr **Joe Harris** (Lib Dem, Cotswold) has been Leader of the LGA Liberal Democrat Group and Vice-Chair of the LGA since July 2021. He was first elected to Cotswold District Council in 2011,

aged 18, and has led it since 2019. He has also been a member of Gloucestershire County Council since 2013.

joie.harris@cotswold.gov.uk



Cllr **Marianne Overton** MBE (Ind, Lincolnshire) is an LGA Vice-Chair and has been Leader of the LGA's Independent Group since 2011. She has served on Lincolnshire County Council since 2001, and on North Kesteven District Council since 1995, where she is Leader of the Opposition.

cllr_marianne_overton@n-kesteven.gov.uk



Cllr **Peter Mason** (Lab, Ealing) is a new LGA Deputy Chair and Leader of the London Borough of Ealing. A trained town planner, he was first elected in 2014, and became Ealing's Leader in 2021.

peter.mason@ealing.gov.uk



Cllr **Bella Sankey** (Lab, Brighton & Hove) is a new LGA Deputy Chair and Leader of Brighton & Hove City Council. Formerly the director of a national charity, she was first elected in December 2022 and re-elected, then elected as Leader, in May 2023.

bella.sankey@brighton-hove.gov.uk



Cllr **Claire Holland** (Lab, Lambeth) is a new LGA Deputy Chair. First elected to Lambeth Council in 2014, she became Leader in 2021, and in July 2024 was elected Chair of London Councils.

cholland@lambeth.gov.uk



Cllr **Abi Brown** (Con, Stoke) is an LGA Deputy Chairman, Chairman of the Improvement and Innovation Board, and LGA Conservative Group Deputy Leader. First elected in 2010, she was

Leader of Stoke-on-Trent City Council from 2019 to 2023.

abi.brown@stoke.gov.uk



Cllr **David Fothergill** (Con, Somerset), a former Leader of Somerset County Council, has been Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board since 2021 and is an

LGA Deputy Chairman.
david.fothergill@somerset.gov.uk



Cllr **Izzi Seccombe** OBE (Con, Warwickshire), elected in 2001, became Warwickshire's first female Leader in 2013. An LGA Deputy Chairman, she was previously Leader of the LGA's

Conservative Group and Vice-Chairman from July 2019.
cllrseccombe@warwickshire.gov.uk



Cllr **Bridget Smith** (Lib Dem, South Cambridgeshire), an LGA Deputy Chair, is Leader of South Cambridgeshire District Council and a Lead Member on the Peterborough and Cambridgeshire Combined Authority.

Bridget.Smith@councillor.online



Cllr **Amanda Hopgood** (Lib Dem, Durham) is Leader of Durham County Council and an LGA Deputy Chair. She is Cabinet Member for Culture, Creative, Tourism and Sport on the

North East Combined Authority.
amanda.hopgood@durham.gov.uk



Cllr **Caroline Jackson** (Ind, Lancaster) is the Green Party Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness at Lancaster City Council, and an LGA Deputy Chair.

cjackson@lancaster.gov.uk

Board chairs, interest groups and balancing members



Cllr **Adam Hug** (Lab, Westminster) is Chair of the LGA's Local Infrastructure and Net Zero Board, Leader of Westminster City Council, and a former Director of the Foreign Policy

Centre thinktank.
leader@westminster.gov.uk



Cllr **Pete Marland** (Lab, Milton Keynes) is Chair of the LGA's Economy and Resources Board. He has been Leader of Milton Keynes Council since 2014 and on the board of Local Partnerships since 2020.

peter.marland@milton-keynes.gov.uk



Cllr **Liam Robinson** (Lab, Liverpool) is Chair of the LGA's City Regions Board. First elected in 2008, he has been Leader of Liverpool City Council since 2023 and is Cabinet Member for Innovation on the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

liam.robinson@liverpool.gov.uk



Cllr **Arooj Shah** (Lab, Oldham) is Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board and Leader of Oldham Council. A former 'Young Councillor of the Year', in 2013, she was the first Muslim woman council leader in the North of England.

arooj.shah@oldham.gov.uk



Cllr **Martin Tett** (Con, Buckinghamshire) is Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board. He has been Leader of Buckinghamshire Council and its predecessor county council since 2011, having joined the council in 2005.

martin.tett@buckinghamshire.gov.uk



Cllr **Liz Green** (Lib Dem, Kingston) is Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, and an LGA peer mentor. A former Leader of the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames, she is currently its Mayor.

liz.green@kingston.gov.uk



Cllr **Heather Kidd** MBE (Lib Dem, Shropshire) is Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board. Elected in 1996, she is a former Leader of the former

South Shropshire District Council and sits on Shropshire Council.
heather.kidd@shropshire.gov.uk



Cllr **Sir Stephen Houghton** CBE (Lab, Barnsley) was first elected to Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council in 1988, becoming Leader in 1996. He has been Chair of the LGA's Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities since 1999 and an LGA regional peer since 2006.

cllrstephenhoughton@barnsley.gov.uk



Cllr **Sam Chapman-Allen** (Con, Breckland) was initially elected to Breckland Council in 2007 and has been its Leader since 2019. He is Chairman of the District

Councils' Network.
sam.chapman-allen@breckland.gov.uk



Cllr **Tim Oliver** OBE (Con, Surrey) is the Leader of Surrey County Council and a former Leader of Elmbridge Borough Council, where he was first elected in 1999. He is Chairman of the County Councils Network.

tim.oliver@surreycc.gov.uk



Cllr **Andrew Cooper** (Ind, Kirklees) is Group Leader for the Green Party on Kirklees Council, and a balancing member of the Executive Advisory Board.

andrew.cooper@kirklees.gov.uk



Cllr **Tony Saffell** (Ind, North West Leicestershire) is Planning Portfolio Holder at North West Leicestershire District Council, and an EAB balancing member.

tonyc.saffell@nwleicestershire.gov.uk

Wales and regional



Cllr **Anthony Burns** (Lab, St Helens) represents the North West. He has been Leader of St Helens Borough Council since May 2024, and

is Cabinet Member for Net Zero on Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.
cllraburns@sthelens.gov.uk



Cllr **Rob Stewart** (Lab, Swansea) represents Wales on the LGA's Executive Advisory Board. He is Deputy Leader of the Welsh

LGA, and has been Leader of the City and County of Swansea since 2014.
cllr.rob.stewart@swansea.gov.uk



Cllr **Nick Adams-King** (Con, Hampshire) is Leader of Hampshire County Council, Portfolio Holder for Strategic

Regeneration and Partnerships (South) at Test Valley Borough Council, and Chair of South East Councils.
nick.adams-king@hants.gov.uk



Cllr **Graham Butland** (Con, Braintree) is Leader of Braintree District Council, Deputy Cabinet Member at Essex County Council,

and became Chair of East of England LGA in July 2024.
cllr.gbutland@braintree.gov.uk



Cllr **John Hart** (Con, Devon) was first elected in 1989 and is Chair of Devon County Council. He was its Leader from 2009 until earlier this

year, and has been Chair of South West Councils since 2013.
john.hart@devon.gov.uk



Cllr **Jason Smithers** (Con, North Northamptonshire) was first elected in 2018, became the first

Leader of North Northamptonshire Council in 2021, and sits on East Midlands Councils.
jason.smithers@northnorthants.gov.uk



Cllr **Alan White** (Con, Staffordshire) is the EAB's regional representative for the West Midlands. First elected in 2009, he is Leader

of Staffordshire County Council.
alan.white@staffordshire.gov.uk

• As first was going to press, there were a handful of vacancies on the EAB to be confirmed

Crucial support at a critical time

Improvement programme delivers high-impact, low-cost support



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

The LGA's newly published sector support annual report for 2023/24 shows we continue to play a vital role in delivering high-impact improvement programmes for councils at low cost.

The report sets out councils' positive feedback on, and across, our wide-ranging support offer, which includes: sector support (covering governance, leadership, finance, workforce and transformation); children's service improvement; Partners in Care and Health (adult social care); One Public Estate; the Planning Advisory Service; procurement; sustainability; communications; culture and sport; and cyber, digital and technology.

These offers reached every council across England in 2023/24, with the latest survey results showing that 100 per cent of chief executives and 97 per cent of council leaders say that LGA support has had a positive impact on their authority.

The report underlines the success of the LGA's highly valued peer challenge programme, which provided 1,500 peer days and challenge at no cost to recipient councils, contributing to at least £1.5 million of savings to the sector in 2023/24.

Corporate Peer Challenges (CPCs), governance and finance peer challenges (FPCs), and peer challenges spanning areas such as adult social care, children's services, communications and planning, are all part of this offer, with more than 140 peer challenges across this range of support taking place in 2023/24.

CPCs offer a focused look at the work of a council across five core themes: local priorities and outcomes; governance and culture; organisational and place leadership; financial planning and management; and capacity for improvement.

Expert councillor and officer peers, and regional teams, deliver the peer challenge programme, supporting councils to provide the best services for their communities.

Every council that had a corporate or finance peer challenge said it had a positive impact for their authority and 95 per cent reported feeling more confident about their

council delivering its priorities. All member and officer peers said their involvement in a CPC had a positive impact on their own learning and development.

Earlier this year, we launched our strengthened CPC offer, providing a greater focus on assurance across the sector support programme (see **first** 692). Building on these foundations, the focus of the programme is now on: improving the rigour, robustness and consistency of CPCs; ensuring all English councils have a CPC every five years; improving the preparedness for delivering CPCs to high-risk councils; continuing to improve the training and development of LGA member and officer peers; and improving the robustness, impact and consistency of CPC reports.

This sits alongside publication of a new improvement and assurance framework (see **first** 695), to help local authorities understand the various components of assurance and accountability in local government, and providing access to guidance and support to increase the effectiveness of assurance activities in the sector.

The consultation and mapping exercise for the framework involved more than 160 senior officers and members from across the country.

These developments are part of our ongoing programme of work to strengthen the focus on assurance within the wider improvement offer, including helping councils ensure they have the tools and support they need to deliver good governance.

This includes new 'assurance and support' discussions, offered to all councils not scheduled for a CPC or FPC in 2024/25, and wider support options for councils facing the biggest governance and finance challenges.

Alongside support from expert officers and peers, experienced finance improvement and sustainability advisers offer dedicated support as part of the LGA's finance improvement programme.





In 2023/24, this programme also featured guidance and resources, including ‘must know’ guides for combined authorities on sound financial management arrangements, and training and development opportunities, which 100 per cent of participants said improved their knowledge and skills.

The wide range of learning and development offers for members and officers have been shown to have positive impacts on professional development and delivery.

In 2023/24, more than 2,800 councillors accessed our political leadership programmes, making it a total of 13,000 since their inception, including more than 70 serving MPs.

The LGA, with the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers, has also launched a new chief executive programme, including a Chief Executive Development Framework. In 2024/25, this programme features a first-of-its-kind training offer, designed to help chief executives respond to the most pressing challenges facing the sector.

Elsewhere, in the context of 230 councils holding elections in 2023, the annual report notes the critical help provided by the LGA’s post-elections support programme – led by expert regional teams and peers – in smoothing political transitions for the 111 councils that experienced a change of control or leadership.

Meanwhile, more than 600 delegates attended our established

and highly valued ‘Civility in public life’ programme, which supports councillors to deliver the responsibilities of their role, and includes sessions on harassment and intimidation. These increasingly popular events have achieved an overall satisfaction rating of 97 per cent.

We supported local government innovation through programmes to build capability and capacity in response to issues of sustainability, environment and new technologies.

More than 230 councils accessed sustainability learning and development opportunities throughout the year, and our new Artificial Intelligence Network has connected more than 1,000 officers.

The LGA also developed a completely new offer to support councils in achieving their transformation goals (see p21) and deliver continuous improvement across a range of service areas.

The LGA continued to provide collective bargaining support, which resulted in pay agreements covering 1.5 million employees. It also provided wide-ranging support responding to the critical issues that councils across the country face regarding workforce capacity and skills shortages, in areas including children’s services, adult social care and planning.

Offers in these key service areas demonstrated incredible engagement, with Partners in Care and Health alone engaging with 100 per cent

of councils, while more than 530 councillors accessed children’s improvement learning events.

The LGA also piloted a new local government recruitment campaign to attract new talent to the sector, to be launched nationally this autumn (see p24), and set up new specialist graduate programmes for finance and planning – which attracted thousands of applicants in their first year.

These programmes sit alongside Impact: The Local Government Graduate Programme (previously known as the National Graduate Development Programme).

In 2023/24, this well-established programme recruited 270 graduates, as well as registering 106 councils to take part – on both counts, the highest numbers for the programme to date.

Our annual sector support report shows the difference that a sector-led approach can achieve.

Learning and successes from the past year are being carried forward to enhance offers, now and in the future, to ensure councils have the support they need to harness opportunities, and respond to today’s challenges and those that lie ahead.



‘Supporting council improvement: 2023/24 highlights’ can be read in full at www.local.gov.uk/publications. See www.local.gov.uk/our-support to access the LGA’s sector support programme for councils

LGASOLUTIONS **hub**

EMPOWERING COUNCILS FOR FUTURE SUCCESS

LGA Solutions is of the sector and for the sector, and we are passionate about working collaboratively with councils to help you achieve your ambitions.

We provide a range of comprehensive support services across various strategic and policy issues:

- Workforce
- People
- Place
- Leadership development
- Data and benchmarking
- Corporate



local.gov.uk/our-support/lga-solutions

Transforming services

The LGA is expanding its support for councillors involved in change programmes



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

In recent years, it's become increasingly clear that councils must change and adapt to meet the constantly evolving needs and aspirations of the people they serve.

To achieve this, councils have been innovating and implementing transformation programmes across their services, with the goal of becoming more efficient and able to react better to the issues of today.

Whether it's upskilling your workforce, introducing new technology, or making better use of data, the LGA's Transformation programme – with its wide array of offers, including peer support, benchmarking, learning and skills – is designed to help councils achieve their transformation goals.

In response to consultation with the sector, we are also now expanding our support for councillors involved in these projects, with a new set of our Leadership Essentials courses, networking opportunities, and a transformation toolkit.

The new and fully funded Leadership Essentials programme will help demystify transformation, and give councillors the confidence, tools, skills and capability to shape and lead their local change agenda.

The two-day courses are aimed at those in leadership positions, but also provide an opportunity to introduce newly elected councillors to the concept of transformation, giving them the skills to become the next generation of transformational leaders.

The Councillor Transformation Network will be launching in November 2024 and is primarily aimed at leaders, deputy leaders, and relevant portfolio holders/committee

chairs, as well as any councillor with an interest in the subject.

To successfully innovate and transform services, it is crucial that councillors can meet in a safe environment to hear how other councils have overcome obstacles and implemented transformation programmes.

Members of the network will learn from one another about what is happening in other councils; discuss emerging issues and trends affecting councils; identify barriers to, and facilitators for, implementing transformation; and hear from guest speakers on a variety of related topics.

We are also asking councils to nominate a councillor and officer to attend our 'transformation action learning sets'. This experience facilitates peer-to-peer support between participants, allowing them to explore their project area regardless of expertise or position.

The transformation focus can be wide-ranging, with previous sets featuring topics such as transforming

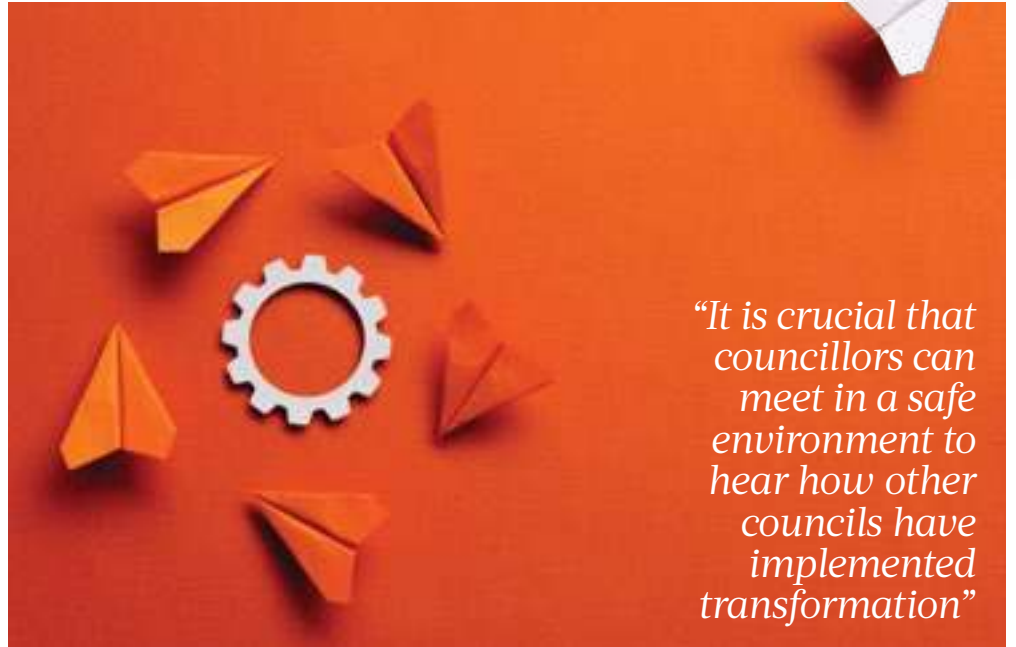
special educational needs and disability services, transport, digital transformation, and council transformation strategy.

Finally, our new Councillor Transformation Toolkit will be live at www.local.gov.uk/our-support/transformation at the end of September.

The toolkit sets out the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed for successful transformation in a practical and accessible way, providing an agreed and shared understanding of language competencies and levels required to lead, govern, and scrutinise transformation.

For more information about all of these opportunities, please see the information box below.

Whatever your change programme is – big or small, service-specific or council-wide – and wherever you are on the transformation process, the LGA's Transformation programme can help provide the support you need to get started, overcome hurdles, and keep going.



“It is crucial that councillors can meet in a safe environment to hear how other councils have implemented transformation”

i **Leadership Essentials: Transformation** sessions take place from October 2024 to March 2025, in Coventry, Leeds and online. For dates and to find out more, visit www.local.gov.uk/our-support/highlighting-political-leadership/leadership-essentials. To book your place, please email grace.collins@local.gov.uk. For all other **LGA Transformation** programme offers, information and support, please visit www.local.gov.uk/our-support/transformation and sign up for our transformation bulletin at bit.ly/4dGVHTM

Celebrating young leaders



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

This year's International Youth Day theme – 'From clicks to progress: youth digital pathways for sustainable development' – highlighted the opportunities for young people to bring their lived experience to creating positive outcomes for communities.

Their insight into using technology every day can contribute to digitisation and the benefits of embracing and embedding technology.

In local government, this topic resonates in various service areas, from creating efficiencies in corporate processes and engaging with residents, to driving innovation in data-informed decision-making for local transport, or considering the ethical use of artificial intelligence in improving adult social care services and outcomes.

The LGA's Be a Councillor campaign aims to inspire more young people and other underrepresented groups to contribute to their communities by standing for election



as a councillor. It also encourages councillors to recommend the role to others who might not have considered it.

This is mirrored in the following young councillors' stories. Most were mentored and encouraged to put themselves forward for election – which is an action we can

all take to help build the pipeline of talented candidates that local government needs.

Check our website to find out more about the Be a Councillor campaign and recommend the role to others who could make great councillors – see www.local.gov.uk/be-councillor.

'Turning passion into action'



Councillor **Vanisha Solanki** (Lab) is Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness at the London Borough of Redbridge

I became a councillor because I wanted to make a difference in people's lives, no matter how big or small.

Ensuring the voices of young people are heard and represented in our community has always been close to my heart, and being elected at 22 gave me the opportunity to turn that passion into action.

I joined the Labour Party at 18, and quickly immersed myself in local politics. Work experience for my local

MP deepened my understanding of the political processes, and becoming the Women's Officer for Redbridge Young Labour allowed me to advocate and connect with other young activists.

A key influence on my journey was my mentor, former councillor Varinder Singh Bola, who encouraged me to become more active in Redbridge Young Labour and, ultimately, pushed me to apply to be a councillor.

While studying at the University of Birmingham, I organised a visit to Birmingham City Council, where I learned that the average age of councillors is 60, which shocked me. I couldn't understand why more young people were not involved in local government. This realisation, coupled with my mentor's

encouragement, motivated me to stand for election. I knew that young people needed a voice in politics, and I wanted to be that voice.

As the Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness, I'm deeply committed to improving the lives of our residents, particularly those facing difficult circumstances. The role comes with its challenges, but the satisfaction of knowing that our efforts can lead to real, positive change makes it all worthwhile.

However, I've learned that trying to tackle everything at once isn't effective. My mum always reminds me that Rome wasn't built in a day, so I focus on two or three key issues at a time, ensuring I address them thoroughly before moving on to new challenges.

'Bringing tangible improvements to my community'



Councillor **Jacob Morton** (Con) is Executive Support Member for Digital Innovation at Breckland Council

I was elected in 2023, aged 19, and I've really enjoyed getting stuck into my role.

As well as handling issues such as housing and planning, I've helped our local football club secure £7,500, assisted a group with funding for tree planting, helped with getting a new community defibrillator, successfully campaigned for inclusive playgrounds, and represented residents experiencing issues with maintenance of open spaces.

I've also enjoyed other opportunities

to contribute to my community, including as a trustee of a youth charity and a school governor, which have allowed me to grow my skills and knowledge in a range of areas.

Being a councillor is an opportunity to bring tangible improvements to my community – not just to be something, but to do something – and my aim going forward is to bring greater youth provision to my town.

Before standing, I kept myself well-informed about local issues, learned how my local councils operate (I attended some public meetings), and built relationships with existing councillors. Once elected, I attended the LGA's Young Councillor Weekend, which was a great opportunity to network and learn from other young

councillors from across the country and political spectrum.

Within my political group, there are plenty of experienced fellow councillors to seek advice from – the key is to ask, ask, ask!

I work full-time alongside my role, which can be challenging, but I'm lucky to have a supportive employer – and if you're able to manage your time (and inbox!) efficiently, and prioritise, it's manageable.

As a young councillor, it's easy to feel a sense of imposter syndrome, but remember: you've been elected and entrusted by your community to represent and speak for them.

It's a big responsibility, but an immense privilege, where you can turn ideas into action and truly make a difference.

'So rewarding it doesn't feel like work'



Councillor **Rebecca Turner** (Lib Dem) is a Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Member at Liverpool City Council

I first got involved with my local party in 2019, and haven't looked back.

With a lot of convincing, I stood and got elected as a councillor in May 2023. One of my main hesitations was that I wouldn't have the time.

I'm currently doing a two-year, full-time MSc in radiography, and I worried that being a councillor on top would be too much. However, I have found it to be the complete opposite!

It's nice having something to do on top of my MSc that is so rewarding that it doesn't feel like work. It also helps to have such a supportive local party, never allowing me to feel that I am on my own or to feel overwhelmed.

Something else holding me back was feeling like I wasn't qualified enough to take on such an important role. I feel this is an issue many people face when thinking about getting involved in politics.

I'm sure anyone who knows me will agree that I'm not involved in politics for the policy debates. However, I love Liverpool, and I really enjoy being able to make a little positive difference in my city and community.

I think women and young people especially shy away from political roles because the bulk of what we see in the political arena is adversarial policy debates or 'tit for tat'.

Local government does have elements of this, but it can be much more collegiate. Being a councillor, to me, means standing up for local communities, helping at a local food bank, supporting vulnerable residents in times of need, or speaking up on a planning application that local people are concerned about.

You don't need to be a political anorak to be a councillor, you just have to be passionate about making a difference.

'Drive to take action'



Councillor **Nate Higgins** is the Green Group Leader at Newham Council

I've spent much of my life being the youngest person in the room. From starting my career as a software engineer at just 15, to being a general election candidate at only 20, I always seem to be in a hurry.

So it shouldn't have been a surprise that, in May 2022, I became the youngest councillor elected in Newham. But I didn't see it coming.

Despite having joined the Green Party before ever voting, attracted to its anti-poverty and pro-climate policies, I had no grand plan to build a political career. I still don't.

But I have never been the kind of person who, when they see a problem, waits for somebody else's permission to fight it.

I'm learning that this drive to take action is exactly the perspective so often missing in local government – and this is a trait that is frequently (but not exclusively) found in younger councillors.

Prior to being elected, I was already active in the community – organising food bank and winter coat collections, protesting a new road tunnel, campaigning for stronger protections for LGBTQIA+ communities and against racism.

But it took the encouragement of other Green Party members for me to understand that being elected could be a platform to increase the impact of the work I was already doing.

You can do the role your own way, and limited time will force you to prioritise and focus your attention where you can make the difference only you could have made.

Local government has an outsized impact on the life experiences of young people – more than most of us realise. Just a few more young councillors in your community (or any at all) could go a long way to ensuring your council delivers for everyone.

Making a difference

The LGA is launching a national recruitment campaign for local government

Working for your local council can make a real difference to people's lives, and there has never been a more important time to join local government and advance your career.

That's the central message of a new national recruitment campaign, co-produced by the LGA with councils and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (Solace), which aims to showcase the wide variety of rewarding and high-impact careers on offer in the sector.

Hundreds of essential services are provided every day by councils and combined authorities to keep our communities running, leading to a wide range of challenging, but rewarding, roles, ranging from caring for families and protecting children from harm to ensuring that local takeaways or restaurants are safe and our streets are kept clean.

Designed as part of the LGA's sector support offer, and funded by the UK Government, the 'Make a difference, work for your local council' campaign was piloted in the North East earlier this year, co-produced with local authorities in the region and supported by the North East Regional Employers' Organisation.

Backed by major advertising on billboards, radio and social media, the campaign highlighted the variety of roles on offer and the exciting opportunities to develop a local government career. It promoted what a difference people can make, while also complementing local councils' own recruitment activity.

Across all channels, the pilot campaign achieved impressive results



with more than 17 million impressions and 105,626 clicks generated to the North East Jobs portal, with visitors to the portal more committed to applying and applications up by 8.96 per cent year on year.

There was a good level of recall for the campaign in the region, and research respondents said it gave them a more positive image of their local council and as an employer.

The scale of the recruitment challenge facing local government cannot be overestimated. More than nine in 10 councils across the country are experiencing staff recruitment and retention difficulties, as demand for services continues to rise.

The local government workforce in England has reduced by a third since 2012, with turnover rates and vacancies increasing in recent years.

There are also particular shortages in certain professions because of a reduction in national supply and a lack of qualified people joining the sector.

Severe financial pressures faced by councils, and competition from other public sector employers, have also played their part.

All of this highlights the vital need to attract more people into the local government workforce.

Following the successful pilot in the North East, the Government has funded the national roll-out of the campaign to all English regions.

Partnering with councils and regional employers' organisations, the LGA is working to further develop and refine the campaign before its national launch in November. A comprehensive toolkit and ongoing support will also be provided to councils.

Working in local government is a great career choice. By extending this campaign nationwide, talented people from across the country have the opportunity to find out more and join their local council in delivering the vital services that their communities use and rely on every day.



i To find out more about the campaign, go to www.local.gov.uk/our-support/development-national-recruitment-campaign-local-government



Digital care

Councils can get help with improving their digital social care provision



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

Digital technology is a cornerstone in how councils can best meet the needs of their residents.

For councils with adult social care responsibility, embedding technology into care and support can be transformative.

Good 'digital maturity' is not just a buzz phrase. Care technology supports two million people to live independently, safely and well, connected with family and community. Everyday devices – including sensors, speakers and tablets – can provide reassurance and timely alerts to carers, enabling proactive support.

For councils facing budget and staffing constraints, investment in digital culture, equipment and skills also pays dividends through efficiencies and preventing admissions to hospital and residential care.

The LGA and Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS), as Partners in Care and

Health (PCH), developed the 'Digital working in adult social care: what good looks like' framework for the adult social care sector last year.

It is an aspirational framework that sets out what good digital maturity looks like within adult social care. It was co-designed with councils and the sector, and is the first time we have had a clear national digital framework.

A framework for digital working is the first step to enabling systematic improvement for councils. Yet a framework alone is unlikely to support improvement. To enable councils to move forward on their digital journey, they also need to be able to measure where they are and then address their areas for development.

PCH has created a comprehensive support offer for councils with adult social care responsibility, to identify and plan how to move forward to address their development areas.

Using the 'What good looks like' framework, councils are supported across the board: from being well led and building smart foundations, through to digital working that can enable safe practice, a supported workforce, improved care, empowered people, and a healthy population.

This support is split into three

levels, with something for everyone.

At the national level, all councils can complete PCH's 'What good looks like for digital in adult social care – self-assessment tool' and receive a comprehensive report on their digital maturity.

The tool not only sets out what 'good' would look like, but also what 'not started', 'in progress', 'well-established' and 'advanced' look like across each success measure.

At regional level, PCH works with ADASS to support councils within a region to: complete the 'What good looks like' tool; provide regional analysis and benchmarking; support regional agreement on digital improvement priorities; and facilitate peer-to-peer support within and across regions.

At council level, PCH provides direct support to individual councils on their digital journey by prioritising areas for improvement, creating a digital development plan or strategy, and helping review digital plans and strategies to ensure that councils meet their digital vision.

Currently, PCH is working with five out of the nine regions and is keen to ensure it can work with all regions who would be interested.

It also still has some capacity to provide direct support to councils for the 2024/25 year.

i If you think your council could benefit from our digital '**What good looks like**' support, you can find out more on the PCH website at www.local.gov.uk/partners-care-and-health or contact the team direct on socialcaredigital@local.gov.uk

Are officers in your council up for the LG Challenge?

Now recruiting its 13th cohort, the LGA is looking for **10 contestants** to participate in the Local Government Challenge 2025, in which a diverse cohort of local government officers tackle real-life challenges, hosted by five councils around the country.

Nominate an officer in your council to apply.

The application deadline is 12pm on Monday 23 September.

Problem solvers who are passionate about delivering the best for the residents they serve, LG Challenge contestants will come up with innovative solutions to the challenges faced by local government. With the £10,000 Bruce-Lockhart Scholarship awarded to the winner, contestants have an opportunity to make a real and long-lasting impact in their area.

Find out more and watch last year's challenge films:
local.gov.uk/lg-challenge
lgchallenge@local.gov.uk





Planning for health



Dr **Ed Kirton-Darling** is Senior Law Lecturer at the University of Bristol

How can we help to bring health into the development decision-making process, without placing yet another burden on already overstretched local government officers?

Health impact assessments (HIAs) can be a useful tool, and although there are no national requirements for them in development decision-making, they are increasingly used for planning applications.

However, we have come across many stories of HIAs being little more than a tick-box exercise – a hoop to be jumped through, with little attention to wider questions of health for the community.

As part of my research with TRUUD (Tackling the Root causes Upstream of Unhealthy Urban Development), we identified that just 38 per cent of local plans have an HIA policy, and that officers from across planning practice were looking for examples of their use and guidance from their peers.

In response to this gap, we commissioned a series of short films to help share experiences, including advice from five councils, the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, two planning consultancies, and Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board.

Participants in the nine films look at their own experiences of embedding requirements for HIAs in their local plans and share where they have seen positive impacts, and what could be improved (see truud.ac.uk/working-with-health-impact-assessments).

Contributions highlighted:

- creating usable green spaces rather than a 'tick-box' approach
- building confidence and buy-in between developers and planners
- future-proofing communities for generational living
- team working between public health and planning
- getting senior level buy-in to a health approach
- using HIAs to avoid technical language
- using HIAs to promote better community engagement.

In relation to local plans, we looked at 344 from 314 planning authorities across England, to see how HIAs were referenced and the triggers in place for their use. That research found a huge degree of variation in local plans where a HIA was required.

There will be published research from this work, but, in the meantime, I can offer the following tips for planners, public health officials and developers to improve HIA implementation:

- a clear statement of the HIA

requirement in local-plan policy wording

- an unambiguous trigger for an HIA within policy wording
- a clear scope for an HIA within policy wording
- be explicit about proportionality, with precision about the scale of HIA required depending on the size and/or type of development proposed
- consider setting out the HIA process
- consider the outcomes of HIAs
- include explicit metrics.

The main goal of an HIA policy should be to ensure that developers incorporate health considerations into their proposed developments, maximising the potential health benefits of development, reducing inequalities, and mitigating potential harms.

An effective HIA process should frontload responsibility onto developers (working in partnership with the local authority) to get health right.

In contrast, ambiguity in HIA requirements and processes risks health considerations being missed, misunderstood, or challenged by developers, creating more work for local planning authorities and developers, and losing opportunities to improve the health and wellbeing of people and communities.



For more, including tips for using **health impact assessments**, please see our briefing note at bit.ly/4e5GXxP and our blog at truud.ac.uk/health-for-development-decision-making

Local government needs more equal relationship



Councillor **Kevin Bentley** is Leader of the LGA's Conservative Group

All politics is local and that is precisely the message the LGA Conservative Group has been getting across to the candidates in the Conservative leadership election.

Our 'contract to back Conservatives in local government' has been launched and circulated to the leadership candidates.

Following engagement with our Conservative councillors, we have brought together a series of policy and organisational recommendations for the new party leader, to ensure that the Conservative local government family has a more equal relationship with our parliamentary colleagues.

Last month, we brought all six of the leadership candidates into the LGA's

Smith Square offices, to give them the opportunity to highlight their priorities for Conservatives in local government.

I was particularly pleased that several candidates confirmed they would give a Conservative local government representative a seat in the Shadow Cabinet. As we now sit in opposition, it is incredibly important that we feed intelligence to the party leadership on what is happening on the ground, and this can be best achieved through sitting in the Shadow Cabinet.

I wanted to place on record my concern about the Labour Government's plan to remove the VAT exemption on independent school fees. This policy will have enormous consequences for local government.

MPs need to remember that not every independent school is like Eton or Harrow. Many are small establishments that reduce the burden on the state.

Some parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities use the

private sector to educate their children, and the inevitable increase in fees will, I believe, result in even more pressure on local government to process new education, health and care plans.

The Government needs to understand that there is no financial gain to removing the VAT exemption on independent school fees. Indeed, the financial burden that will be placed on local government will only increase our lobbying for a better funding deal for councils ahead of the financial settlement to be published later this year.

It must reverse this insane and bizarre decision before the next academic year.

"It is incredibly important that we feed intelligence to the party leadership on what is happening on the ground"



Councillor **Louise Gittins** is Chair of the LGA

Prevention is better than cure

The Household Support Fund was a lifeline to councils and their communities when it was first introduced in October 2021.

It helped vulnerable people hit the most severely by the COVID-19 pandemic and, more recently, has supported struggling households with the increased cost of living.

Demand has proved so high that it has been extended several times, most recently this month, so it will now run until 31 March 2025.

The LGA had been campaigning vigorously for this latest extension, because three out of five of our member councils told us they would not be able to provide additional funding for local welfare assistance without it (see p4).

While it is positive that this support will continue, it needs to be part of a transition to a longer-term and sustainable preventative approach that helps stop people from falling into



poverty and hardship in the first place.

Councils want to see a shift away from short-term, crisis support so they can instead invest in preventative services that improve people's financial resilience and life chances.

This principle applies not just to the Household Support Fund and welfare, but to a plethora of vital local public services, such as adult social care, children's services, homelessness, and provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

As **first** was going to press, the LGA was finalising its submission to

the Government on its Budget (on 30 October) and its multi-year Spending Review (concluding next spring) – the first since 2021.

These key fiscal announcements provide an opportunity to start that much-needed transition from short-term emergency interventions to more effective and efficient long-term early prevention work, in partnership with local government.

This would not only save taxpayers' money in the long run, but it should also ensure a better quality of life for our residents, young and old.



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

Looking forward to conference

Since the new Labour Government was elected in July, no time has been wasted in taking decisive action to put local government on a stronger footing to support delivery of the Government's missions.

We have seen the commitment to introducing multi-year funding settlements, enabling councils to plan for the future, and earlier this month, the Household Support Fund was extended, with a commitment to looking at a longer-term solution to support the most vulnerable.

As the autumn progresses, I am confident that we will see more such positive decisions.

"Conference is a unique opportunity to engage with each other and share ideas"

Parliament was briefly back from recess before the party conference season started.

Labour Party Conference is a real highlight of the year for me, providing a unique opportunity for so many broad organisations, groups, charities and political stakeholders to come together to engage with each other and share ideas.

Local government will have a strong presence at conference this year, including a packed programme of local government events organised by the Labour Party and the LGA, and a local government speech that I will deliver as Leader of the LGA's Labour Group.

Above all, it will be a chance to celebrate the hard work of so many over the past few years. The effort required to move on from suffering one of our worst election results in 2019 to winning the country's trust in 2024 should not be underestimated – we must now harness this trust to deliver real, tangible changes to communities across the country.

So, while we celebrate, the hard work has already begun.



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

The true party of local government

As this **first** hits your doormats, Liberal Democrats will be making their annual pilgrimage to the south coast for five days of policy and politics.

What a celebration this year's autumn conference will be, with the highest number of Lib Dem councils in more than a decade and the most Liberal Democrat MPs ever elected! We have a packed agenda, with a number of opportunities for us to firm up our rightful status as not only the true party of local government, but also the party of social care, while fighting against the abuse of our environment, too.

I hope colleagues will join us in supporting motions calling for a rise in the carers' allowance and reform of Sunday trading laws, and condemning the cruel decision of the Labour Government to refuse to scrap the two-child benefit cap – isn't it amazing how quickly the shine wore off?

We will be the 'Liberal conscience' of this Parliament as it is very clear no one else will be.

I also encourage colleagues to join us for the LGA and Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors conference fringes on community energy and local government

"Conference is not just a celebration; it is a chance to regroup, recharge and re-energise"

funding, and our local government reception.

Conference this year is not just a celebration; it is a chance to regroup, recharge and re-energise ahead of a bumper set of local elections in 2025.

Throughout the last Parliament, the Liberal Democrats chipped away at the 'blue wall'. At the general election, we smashed it. At the local elections, we intend to sweep away the remaining rubble.



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

Equality, civility and cohesion

Welcome to all our MPs, ministers and valued members.

For the first time, we have 19 elected, including six Independent MPs, four Green, four Plaid Cymru and five UK Reform.

Now our group can do even more for our residents and members – and government-proposed changes to planning are on the agenda this month.

Our crossbencher LGA President, Baroness Tanni-Grey Thompson DBE, was in Paris cheering on our Paralympic heroes and speaking up for equality.

"Councils are best placed to build resilient and cohesive communities"

The summer Olympics resulted in our talented athletes winning 65 medals! Major credit is due to their foundation in our schools and clubs, supported by our councils.

I was deeply saddened to see the tragic death of three girls in Southport and the violent disorder across the UK, fuelled by false information spread across social media.

At the LGA, we issued a statement condemning all violence and ran two successful webinar sessions for our council leaders, including one with government minister Baroness Sharon Taylor OBE.

I was proud to speak on civility in public life and how councils are best placed, alongside the voluntary and health sectors, to build resilient and cohesive communities.

As **first** was going to press, I was at the Green Party Conference in Manchester, to support our Green colleagues and chair a fringe session looking at how the new UK Government can meet housing targets while addressing the climate and nature crises.

I also hope to see many of you at the LGA's annual conference in Harrogate (22-24 October), and the LGA Independent Group's conference (10-11 January) – see www.local.gov.uk/events.

Investing in care leavers



Councillor **Emma Williamson** (Lab) is Statutory Lead Member for Children's Services at Cumberland Council

As we prepare to celebrate National Care Leavers' Week 2024 next month, it's vital to recognise the strength and potential of young people transitioning from our care.

The week (28 October to 3 November) is a great opportunity to raise awareness of the challenges faced, while honouring their achievements and individuality.

In the past two years, we have driven change at Cumberland Council, shaped by our young people.

We were the first council in the UK to formally recognise care experience as a protected characteristic. Alongside this, we have: launched a new Care Experienced and Cared For Strategy; enhanced our corporate parenting board, creating a wider membership while ensuring our partners, staff and elected members understand their role as corporate parents; and developed key partnership initiatives.

National Care Leavers' Week offers a significant reminder that behind the statistics lie unique stories, resplendent with hope and determination.

Leaving care is daunting, often fraught with uncertainties surrounding housing, employment and education. Despite these challenges, care leavers display remarkable tenacity, funnelling their experience into a source of strength.

This week also highlights the numerous accomplishments of care leavers, from pursuing higher education and vocational training to achieving meaningful employment.

Their stories inspire, proving that, with support from providers and community, they can overcome adversity.

Community support is crucial during this transition. Our partnerships in Cumberland are invaluable as we embark on initiatives to reduce adversity and increase opportunities, offering our young people the brightest of futures.

The Brighter Future Fund is one such transformative initiative, supporting care-experienced young people in Cumbria as they transition into adulthood, providing essential resources through personalised mentoring, life skills development, and work experience opportunities.



“Care leavers’ stories inspire, proving that, with support, they can overcome adversity”

Delivered in partnership with Cumbria Community Foundation, Cumbria Youth Alliance (CYA), and employability experts Inspira, the fund is informed by the lived experiences of participants to create a supportive ecosystem that enhances their employability and self-efficacy, reducing poverty risks while creating a community mentorship.

As we honour care leavers, let's remind them that their past is not the future. They each have immense potential and, with support, can shape tomorrow. It is our duty to create a safe, inclusive place where support is given to enrich their lives.

One initiative supporting this work in Cumberland is The Enrichment Fund, designed to empower care-experienced individuals to overcome barriers to independent living through financial assistance towards health, skills development and engagement in the arts.

The fund supports a range of needs, including work-related expenses such as transport and clothing, and providing access to courses, certifications, and creative classes. It also addresses unique challenges, such as helping with the cost of learning to drive.

Supporting this initiative, our young people have co-designed the delivery of a 'Stars of Tomorrow' ball with CYA and Inspira, to raise awareness of how local businesses can support and invest in the futures of our care-experienced young people.

Life is particularly challenging for care-experienced young people; many have faced trauma and instability. Research indicates they often achieve poorer outcomes than their peers.

By removing barriers and supporting them to aspire and believe, by creating pathways for success, we help young adults transform their futures while contributing within communities.

Investing in their potential is an investment for the future: with support, they will grow and prosper towards an adulthood of opportunity and fulfilment.

i **National Care Leavers' Week 2024** runs from 28 October to 3 November, see www.becomecharity.org.uk/national-care-leavers-week. For the LGA's care leaver campaign, please visit www.local.gov.uk/step-ahead

ELECTIONS

Voter volatility



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



Following a general election, especially one as dramatic as 4 July's, council by-elections can provide evidence about voters in the new political environment.

Labour's victory owed less to its own performance – barely increasing its vote share and polling half a million fewer votes than it did in 2019 – and more to a 20-point decline in Conservative support, triggering the loss of 251 seats. The Conservatives have been reduced to 121 MPs – their lowest ever total.

Sixty seats were lost to the Liberal Democrats. Reform UK and the Greens also won seats in England – five and four respectively. There were victories, too, for Independents, a rare event in parliamentary elections.

Voter volatility remains – abundantly clear at last May's local elections when record numbers voted for candidates outside the mainstream.

Despite their best parliamentary result since the 1920s, the Liberal Democrats lost overall control of Three Rivers after defeat by the Conservatives in Abbots Langley and Bedmond ward.

The vacancy arose following the resignation of the council's Deputy Leader, Matthew Bedford, re-elected in 2021 with more than half the votes.

A sign of an early Conservative recovery then? Not if the two results in Wychavon are examined.

In the two by-elections held there, the party's vote fell by more than 20 points. While one was retained, the Harvington and Norton seat – vacated by Bradley Thomas after his selection and subsequent election for the Bromsgrove parliamentary constituency – fell to an Independent.

Independents and smaller parties may thrive in the immediate post-general election period.

While the Greens retained Oxford's Marston ward, they did so by a margin of just 44 votes. The threat came from the Independent Oxford Alliance, whose website declares a desire to "bring common sense back into local politics".

An example of such is its opposition to the council's proposal for low traffic neighbourhoods.

Such policies, and probable changes to planning laws to assist housebuilding,

will promote local-issue groups in some areas.

It was only a single vote in Caerphilly's Aberbargoed and Bargoed ward that prevented that result from becoming Labour's first by-election defeat, barely a month after its landslide general election victory.

So, how short is Labour's honeymoon going to be? If the past is a guide, defeats will arrive shortly.

Since we began chronicling the ebb and flow of local votes in the early 1980s, there have been five general election landslides, with the governing party making net losses in subsequent local by-elections on three occasions.

Meanwhile, it is vital for Conservative morale that it recovers, winning in wards held by Labour and the Liberal Democrats. However, when Reform UK stands candidates, it is still attracting votes, and this will hinder Conservative progress.

More than 70 by-elections are scheduled over the next two months. They will provide important evidence about the state of electoral opinion.

By-election results

Caerphilly, Aberbargoed and Bargoed

LAB HELD
0.1% over Plaid Cymru
Turnout 10.6%

Hertfordshire, Bedwell

LAB HELD
24.0% over Con
Turnout 18.4%

Islington, Hillrise

LAB HELD
19.2% over Ind
Turnout 20.5%

Newham, Beckton

LAB HELD
7.9% over Newham Independents
Turnout 13.5%

Newham, Little Ilford

LAB HELD
6.4% over Newham Independents
Turnout 18.0%

Northumberland, Cramlington Eastfield

CON HELD
12.0% over Lab
Turnout 31.0%

Oxford, Marston

GREEN HELD
2.4% over Independent Oxford Alliance
Turnout 39.4%

Three Rivers, Abbots Langley and Bedmond

CON GAIN FROM LIB DEM
6.4% over Lib Dem
Turnout 29.5%

Wychavon, Badsey and Aldington

CON HELD
3.9% over Lib Dem
Turnout 23.9%

Wychavon, Harvington and Norton

IND GAIN FROM CON
17.2% over Con
Turnout 32.4%

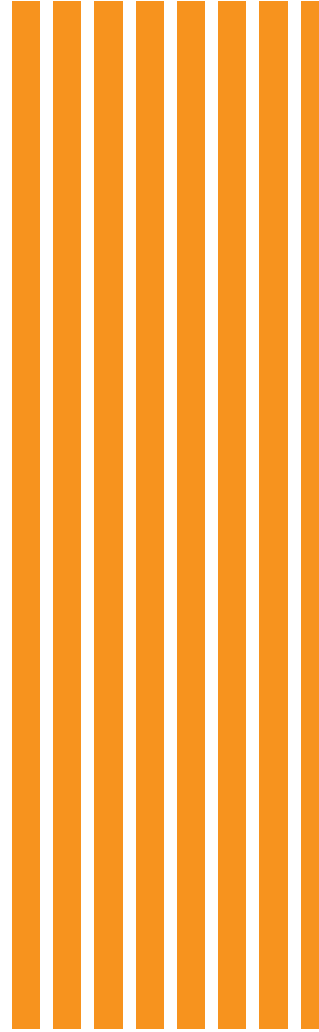


For additional data on these and other recent local election results, please visit www.lgafirst.co.uk/local-by-elections



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