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Association

No.699 November 2024

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LGA annual conference

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communities”

Cllr Louise Gittins, LGA Chair



The Budget 2024

An encouraging start but significant pressures remain **p10**

Abuse of councillors

One in five faced a threat of death or violence **p20**

Wrap it up

Producers must bear the costs of waste packaging **p21**



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All change

It's been a busy time, with the Government's first Budget, the LGA's annual conference (p12) and Care Leavers' Week all taking place (p4).

You can read about the LGA's initial response to the Budget in this month's edition of **first** (p10). With councils still facing a precarious financial future, the LGA will continue to make representations on their behalf in the run-up to next month's finance settlement and next spring's spending review.

We also have lots of coverage from our amazing annual conference in Harrogate, including on the Innovation Zone (p15), children and young people (p18), and our Debate Not Hate campaign against abuse of councillors (p20).

Thank you to all who attended and contributed to making it such a success; I'm already looking forward to next year's conference in Liverpool!

Elsewhere, we look at the 'extended producer responsibility' scheme intended to make packaging producers more responsible for their waste (p21); and proposals from the Law Commission aimed at updating legislation to better support disabled children (p22).

We are also urging councils to respond to Change NHS, a government consultation on the future of the NHS (p23). This is our chance to highlight councils' vital role in improving the nation's health. ●

Councillor Louise Gittins
is LGA Chair

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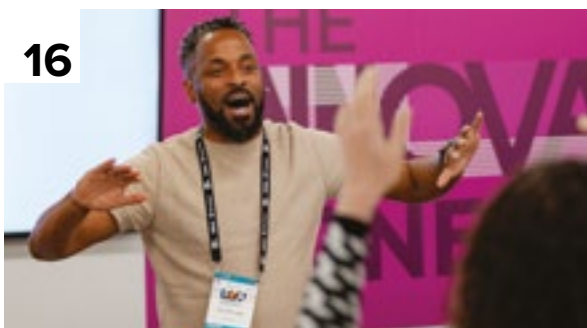
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'Exempt care leavers from council tax' – LGA

The LGA is calling on the Government to fund a national council tax exemption for care leavers up to the age of 25.

It says this will help prevent them from falling into financial hardship when they leave care and support their transition to independence.

The LGA also says care leavers should be exempt from paying for prescriptions, NHS dental treatment and optician costs.

More than 11,000 young people become care leavers each year, and councils, as 'corporate parents', are responsible for ensuring they and those in care have the best possible start in life.

The LGA's call for a nationally funded council tax exemption came during National Care Leavers Week, which ran from 28 October to 3 November.

Care leavers are more financially vulnerable than their peers, with 83 per cent of care-experienced young people struggling to afford essentials, according

to a survey by the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum.

Many councils already have council tax exemptions or reductions in place, but a nationally funded exemption would ensure there is a consistent offer across the country, and lessen the 'postcode lottery' for care leavers, including for care leavers who live outside their 'home' council area.

Cllr Louise Gittins, LGA Chair, said: "Avoiding financial hardship is vital for care leavers to make the successful transition from care to independence.

"We have set out a programme of change that we urge the government to consider, to guarantee a more consistent offer for care leavers across the country and continue promoting the best possible outcomes for our children leaving care.

"Providing nationally government-funded exemptions will ensure no care leaver goes without access to services they rely on to stay healthy and well." ●

● See p19, p28



SEND system 'not financially sustainable'

A report by the National Audit Office has found that England's special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system is not delivering better outcomes for children and young people.

It also warned it is not financially sustainable and is in urgent need of reform.

The report said there has been "soaring demand" for support for children with SEND, with a 140 per cent increase in children with education, health and care plans between 2015 and 2024.

Over the past decade, councils' 'high needs' funding has increased by more than half (58 per cent) to £10.7 billion in 2024/25, while councils' dedicated schools



grant deficits could reach £4.6 billion by March 2026.

This is when accounting arrangements stopping these deficits impacting councils' financial position come to an end. The NAO warns that

this will leave two-fifths of councils at risk of issuing a section 114 notice, indicating they cannot set a balanced budget.

The LGA has called for high needs deficits to be written

off to ensure councils are not faced with having to cut other services to balance budgets through no fault of their own, or their residents.

Cllr Arooj Shah, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "With councils currently able to keep these [deficits] off their balance sheets, we have serious concerns that many will face a financial cliff-edge when this flexibility ends in March 2026."

She added: "The NAO report is yet another indictment of a failing SEND system that is not meeting the care and support needs of children with special needs." ●

● See p18

Councils overspending on adult social care

Around 81 per cent of councils expect to overspend their adult social care budgets this year – up from 72 per cent last year, according to the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS).

ADASS's annual autumn survey of adult social care directors in England also found that 35 per cent are being required to make further in-year cuts, with an estimated total overspend of £564 million.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "While the additional £600 million [announced in the Budget] is helpful, rising

costs from National Living Wage and employer National Insurance increases are likely to absorb much of the grant.

"Many councils will have little left to address urgent care challenges, such as long assessment waits or delayed care packages.

"As this vital report highlights, serious concerns that councils have been raising for years remain and a vast majority of councils are now struggling to balance the books.

"Immediate adequate investment is needed to address unmet and under-met need, and ensure timely access to social care for all who need it." ●

Local government 'still faces precarious future'

The Government has announced an extra £1.3 billion for councils in England next year – including £600 million for social care.

Chancellor Rachel Reeves also allocated an additional £1 billion for supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in her first Budget, published last month.

LGA Chair Cllr Louise Gittins said the Budget was a "step in the right direction", with some

positive announcements, but that councils and the services they provide to their residents "still face a precarious short and long-term future".

"Ahead of the Budget, the LGA made the case for government to address the cost and demand pressures that have pushed many councils towards the financial edge," she said.

"It is encouraging that the Chancellor has responded by providing £1.3 billion extra funding for the next financial year, which will

help meet some – but not all – of the significant pressures in adult and children's social care, and homelessness support.

"Only with greater funding certainty through multi-year settlements and more clarity on financial reform, can councils protect services, meet the needs of residents and work in partnership on the Government's priorities, from social care to housing, inclusive economic growth and tackling climate change.

"The Government also needs to give explicit clarity on whether councils will be protected from extra cost pressures from the increases to employer National Insurance contributions.

"We look forward to continuing to work in partnership with the Government to address these issues for councils and communities." ●

● See p10-11 and p28-29

Cladding targets 'may be missed'

The Government may miss its 2035 target for removing unsafe cladding from buildings because of slow progress, a report from the National Audit Office (NAO) has revealed.

The NAO stated that up to 60 per cent of buildings with dangerous cladding remain unidentified, suggesting that the current pace is insufficient to meet the deadline.

The report also raised concerns about fraud, with potential losses more than £500,000, prompting a review of anti-fraud measures.

Following the Grenfell Inquiry's findings, the Government allocated £5.1 billion to address cladding issues across affected buildings.

While remediation work has accelerated, only about a third of projects have been completed, with some buildings still awaiting removal or replacement of cladding.

The report highlighted challenges with funding and enforcement, suggesting further steps may be needed to improve outcomes.

Building Safety Minister Alex Norris acknowledged the slow pace and has announced plans to tackle it, while Chancellor Rachel Reeves recently committed more than £1 billion in additional funds for cladding removal.

Cllr Adam Hug, the LGA's Building Safety Spokesperson, said: "Councils are determined to ensure that residents are safe and feel safe in their homes, but face significant barriers in accessing existing funding schemes.

"It's positive that the Government has listened to councils and the LGA and intends to address this issue. We look forward to seeing the details, which need to include long-term funding certainty if they are to be effective." ●



News in brief

State of care

The NHS in England is failing children and young people, particularly in mental health services, according to the Care Quality Commission's annual report. The health watchdog noted that accessing quality and timely NHS care "continues to be a struggle for many". Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Rising demand, alongside pressures on the workforce, are having a negative impact on people's ability to access the support they need to live a good life. This reinforces the importance of investing in local government given the role many council services play in promoting and improving population wellbeing."

Mpox cases

As **first** was going to press, the UK Health and Security Agency (UKHSA) had confirmed the first handful of cases of Clade 1b mpox detected in the UK, all connected to a single household. Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board said: "Local public health teams are working closely with the UKHSA. Surveillance, contact tracing, accurate information from trusted sources, vaccines, treatment and support are key to stop the spread."

Brownfield funding

Fifty-four councils in England have been awarded £68 million under the Brownfield Land Release Fund 2 to help turn surplus land into 5,200 new homes. The funding – which helps cover the cost of decontamination, clearing disused buildings or improving infrastructure – will mean councils can clear empty buildings, former car parks and industrial land. Cllr Louise Gittins, LGA Chair, said: "This is an important fund for English councils to unlock smaller sites and provides the flexibility for councils to deliver the types of homes their community needs at pace."

'Devolve sugar tax to councils'

The LGA has renewed calls for the soft drinks levy to be devolved to councils.

It comes as new figures show the prevalence of obesity in children in reception class (aged four to five) has increased from 9.2 per cent in 2022/23 to 9.6 per cent in 2023/24.

The annual National Child Measurement Programme data also

shows that it has fallen in Year 6 children (aged 10-11) from 22.7 per cent in 2022/23 to 22.1 per cent in 2023/24.

For children living in the most deprived areas, obesity prevalence was more than twice as high compared with those living in the least deprived areas.

The LGA says councils should be given the powers to decide how the levy, also known as the 'sugar tax', is spent.

It says the levy should be targeted at areas with severe child health inequalities, such as higher levels of deprivation, and greater rates of childhood obesity, tooth decay and physical inactivity.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "The soft drinks industry levy was a crucial step in the battle against child obesity.

"We are urging the Government to grant councils control over the levy's revenues and allocate funds to address the most pressing child health inequalities.

"Councils are uniquely placed to direct resources where they are needed most, creating healthier, more resilient environments for our children." ●



Local government backs ambitions for smoke-free generation

The Government has introduced the Tobacco and Vapes Bill to Parliament, pledging to create a smoke-free generation, phasing out the sale of tobacco products to anyone aged 15 or younger this year.

It is also proposing to extend the indoor smoking ban to specific outdoor places such as children's playgrounds, and outside schools and hospitals.

The Bill includes measures to ban vape advertising and sponsorship, and restrict the flavours, display and packaging of all types of vapes.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of

the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "We fully support the Government's smokefree generation ambitions.

"Local government has led the way tackling the harms caused by smoking, whether that is calling for a ban on smoking in public places or funding smoking cessation services.

"Raising the legal age of sale for tobacco products is a progressive policy that will help reduce smoking prevalence and the damaging effects on health, while we strongly endorse the measures on vapes, to help reduce their appeal to children." ●

'Take control of devo agenda'

The LGA's former Chairman and Conservative Peer Lord Gary Porter enjoyed sharing some 'good' gossip at the LGA's annual conference.

Ahead of Local Government Minister Jim McMahon's confirmation that the Government wants mayoral combined authorities to cover all of England (see p13), Lord Porter advised delegates they were going to get them whether they wanted them or not – and to "get on board" and shape their own proposals for their areas.

Addressing small unitary, district

and county councils, he predicted "you won't be in the same place by the end of this Parliament", because of local government reorganisation.

Again, he urged delegates to make their own plans accordingly, rather than waiting for something to "come out of a drawer in Whitehall".

He also underlined the cross-party nature of local government – "it's you against national government, whoever you are" – and highlighted how, as Chair of the LGA, he had "criticised the blue ones when they were in charge".

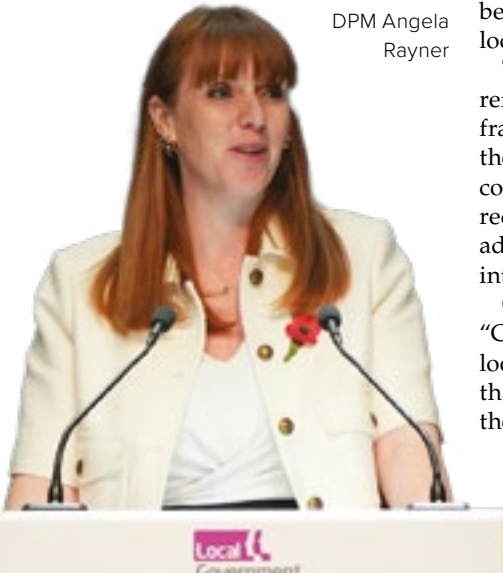
"My proudest moments were leading my council and being chair of the LGA... because everyone in local government does the right things for the right reasons." ●

DPM promises privacy on councillor addresses

Changes to virtual attendance of meetings, privacy of councillors' addresses, and standards for councillors were among the announcements from Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner at the LGA's annual conference.

She promised delegates "a new way of governing", "a government of public service", and a "partnership based on honesty and respect".

DPM Angela Rayner



But she warned there was a "shocking crisis in local government" and that the "dire public finances" meant it would take time and "hard graft on all sides" to ensure recovery.

A consultation on enabling remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings is now open, with the Deputy Prime Minister saying such flexibilities would help people with caring responsibilities or disabilities to become councillors and "have a stake in local democracy".

The Government will also consult on reforms to the local government standards framework, including a proposal allowing the suspension of members who violate codes of conduct; and will remove the requirement for councillors' home addresses to be published to help prevent intimidation and harassment (see p20).

Cllr Louise Gittins, LGA Chair, said: "Confirmation that the Government will look to legislate to put it beyond doubt that councillors should not have to publish their home addresses is good news.

"The LGA looks forward to working with the Government to ensure that the proposals... work and are in the interest of councils and their communities." ●



Cllr Vikki Slade MP

Call for 'real' devolution

'Real' devolution means ensuring local communities that choose not to be served by metro mayors have the same opportunities to thrive, delegates at the LGA's annual conference were told.

Cllr Vikki Slade MP, Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Housing, Communities and Local Government, said otherwise decisions would be made "even further" away from local people.

In a speech focused on councils' financial difficulties, the former Leader of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council highlighted three key pressure points – social care, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and homelessness and temporary accommodation.

These services "impact on the most vulnerable people in our society": finding solutions to the funding crisis therefore requires a focus on prevention, such as supporting people to get the right education and enabling people to stay in their own homes.

For example, SEND funding "needs fundamental reform to transform outcomes for young people".

"These children deserve the same chances as everyone else. They want to have friends, enjoy sport, have a job when they grow up, live independently... all things that will reduce their burden on the state," she said.

With more than 100 former councillors of all parties now sitting as MPs, she reassured delegates that "the issues you face every day are being championed in Westminster". ●

● Devolution, p13; SEND, p18

Residents still facing hardship, warns charity

Some people have faced significant hardship over the past few years because of the cost-of-living crisis – and things are getting worse, according to Citizens Advice.

Speaking at the LGA's annual conference in Harrogate, Cllr Craig Browne (Ind), Chief Executive of Citizens Advice North Staffordshire, told delegates that the charity was seeing people in full-time work, with mortgages and steady incomes, "living on the edge".

Cllr Browne, a former Leader of Cheshire East Council, said Citizens Advice's mission was to prevent people from reaching crisis point – and that the crisis people are currently facing is debt.

"For the overwhelming majority of people we see, it's hard to see how they can reduce their spending when their income doesn't cover the basics," he told delegates.

However, increasingly Citizens Advice's clients are also the clients of the gaming and gambling sector.

Cllr Browne called for continued partnership working between local government, Citizens Advice and other partners, given all are working for the same group of residents.

Citizens Advice saves both central and local government money, with its advice preventing or reducing pressure on health and housing services and stimulating the economy by helping people back to work, he added. ●



Cllr Craig Browne

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First meeting of Leaders' Council

The Government's Leaders' Council – bringing together local government leaders and ministers – met for the first time last month at the LGA's annual conference in Harrogate.

The council will consider key cross-cutting issues facing the sector.

Cllr Louise Gittins, LGA Chair, said: "We welcome the establishment of this new political forum. It was one of the key asks of our Local Government White

Paper and we recognise Secretary of State Angela Rayner's enthusiasm for bringing this to life.

"We'll be working with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to ensure it focuses on our members' issues, as well as making sure local government's voice is amplified across the Government's broader vision for devolving more powers to communities." ●

National recruitment campaign launched

People wanting to work in local government and make a direct impact on local residents' lives have the chance to find out more with the launch of a new national recruitment campaign.

'Make a Difference, Work for your Local Council' has been co-produced by the LGA, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (Solace), regional employers' organisations and councils, as part of the LGA's sector support offer funded by the UK Government.

Following a successful pilot in the North East of England, the campaign showcases the variety of meaningful and fulfilling roles on offer, such as in social care for adults and children, planning, environmental health, and financial management.

Councils across England have been provided with a new toolkit to help

promote recruitment in their area, alongside national advertising across radio, billboards and social media that aims to raise public awareness and encourage applications.

More than nine in 10 councils are experiencing recruitment and retention challenges, while facing unprecedented demand for services.

Cllr Abi Brown OBE, Chairman of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board, said: "There has never been a more important time to highlight the real difference that working in local government makes.

"We hope that talented individuals who are keen to progress their careers take up this opportunity to join their local council in delivering the vital services their communities use and rely on every day." ●

● See www.localcounciljobs.gov.uk

Digitally equipped places

LGA supports new APPG for digital communities

The digital age promises unprecedented opportunities for enhanced efficiency, service delivery and resident participation in society.

Yet, it also poses daunting challenges with budgetary constraints, outdated systems, and a lack of digital expertise delaying progress in local government.

With this in mind, the LGA's Cyber, Digital and Technology (CDT) team recently launched a digitalisation framework to help guide councils through their own digital transformation journeys (see [moredetails.uk/3Cm409L](https://www.local.gov.uk/moredetails.uk/3Cm409L)).

Despite challenges, there is much activity already under way to not only match community ambitions with emerging technologies, but to ensure that every place has access to the same infrastructure, connection and opportunities these offer.

The critical need to raise digital standards across the country is evident in both the economic growth and educational attainment potential. Yet there remain concerns about access and the reliability of access.

Rural areas continue to lag behind more densely populated areas in the roll-out of 5G, as well as wider infrastructure improvements.

Equally, businesses that are unable to pivot working models because of poor connectivity face the risk of being left behind, putting jobs on the line and impacting local economies.

Digital skills, equipment and reliable digital connectivity are all crucial to enable people to fully participate and engage in 21st century



education and employment systems.

There is no better time than the present for the new Government to update the national Digital Inclusion Strategy – now more than a decade old – to reflect these needs and match innovative digital services.

Building on the parliamentary appetite to improve digital connectivity for residents, and following the launch of the digitalisation framework, the LGA approached LGA Vice-President and key digital advocate Helen Morgan MP (Lib Dem) with an offer to help form an all-party parliamentary group (APPG) to explore the digital needs of our communities.

And last month, the LGA, Helen Morgan and various other parliamentarians met in Westminster to hold the inaugural meeting of the newly created Digital Communities APPG.

The APPG aims to promote the delivery of digitally equipped places that support and foster a connected, healthy and productive community.

This includes the creation and maintenance of sustainable digital infrastructure and providing residents with equal opportunity to thrive in a digital world.

At the inaugural meeting, Richard Foord MP (Lib Dem), Alison Taylor MP (Lab), and Viscount Camrose (Con) were elected as officers, with Helen appointed as Chair.

The APPG will now work to produce its first report; one that will take stock of the current digital landscape and put forward recommendations to government on steps it should take to deliver digitally enabled councils, digitally empowered residents, and digitally equipped places.

Whether it is supporting residents reliant on telecare services or upgrading their own platforms and services to be fit for a modern economy, councils are the linchpin to convening stakeholders and unlocking the digital potential of our places.

The APPG will be a key driver in facilitating these discussions.

A website for the APPG is under construction and will be shared on social media in due course.

If digital connectivity is an issue in your area, we encourage your local MP to join the LGA's new APPG. ●

i To find out more about the LGA's work in Parliament, please visit www.local.gov.uk/parliament

Budget 2024

Significant pressures remain despite funding increases for councils

When the provisional local government finance settlement for 2025/26 is published in December, it will contain an additional £1.3 billion in grant funding for councils in England.

The £1.3 billion – announced by Chancellor Rachel Reeves MP in her first UK Budget last month – includes at least £600 million for social care.

Together with council tax flexibilities and locally retained business rates, this will provide a real-terms increase in total core spending power of around 3.2 per cent.

In its initial response to the Budget, the LGA said this was “encouraging” and would help meet some – but not all – of the significant pressures in councils’ adult and children’s social care, and homelessness support services.

While councils will want to see more detail on the £600 million for social care, the Government needs to give clarity on whether councils will be protected from the extra cost pressures from increases to employer National Insurance (NI) contributions for directly employed and contracted out services.

Care providers will likely expect to see their increased NI costs reflected in their fees paid by councils – almost certainly absorbing all of the grant increase for many councils, leaving little or nothing to address immediate challenges such as long waiting times for care needs assessments or the start of care packages.

Other measures announced in the Budget for our sector – including the ‘extended producer responsibility’ scheme for packaging (pEPR), a funding uplift for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) support, the extension of the

Household Support Fund to March 2026, and funding for bus service improvement plans, local roads maintenance, homelessness pressures, and a kinship allowance pilot – represent more than £4.5 billion in additional funding.

Around £1.1 billion of that funding in 2025/26 will be for implementation of the pEPR scheme, to improve how packaging waste is dealt with from January 2025 (see p21).

The LGA has welcomed the pEPR and that funding for it will be treated as ‘additional’ income in 2025/26 (separate from the local government finance settlement). But in the longer-term, UK councils need to receive the full actual costs for delivering local waste and recycling services rather than estimates, as £1.1 billion may be lower than what is needed to deliver packaging waste services.

An extra £1 billion for children with SEND is positive but now needs to be followed by fundamental reform of the SEND system, focusing on improving inclusion in mainstream settings and writing off councils’ high needs deficits (see p4, p18).

The Budget confirmed plans to charge private schools 20 per cent VAT and remove business rates relief, but also to compensate councils and devolved governments for the VAT they are charged on fees for SEND pupils whose needs can only be met in a private school.

Private schools that are “wholly or mainly” concerned with providing full-time education to pupils with education, health and care plans will remain eligible for business rates charitable relief.

Reflecting the concerns of some councils



that these changes may result in children moving from fee-paying to state schools, the LGA has called on the Department for Education to monitor their impact.

The LGA was also pleased that the Government is providing extra funding to continue children’s social care reforms and to pilot a kinship allowance, and will set out plans to promote early intervention to help prevent children and families reaching crisis point in the first place.

Other announcements in respect of children and young people included an additional £1.8 billion to continue the expansion of government-funded childcare and help more parents, particularly women, stay in and return to work; more than £30 million for the roll-out of free breakfast clubs next year; and £69 million to continue delivery of a network of family hubs.

“Looking ahead to the spending review, it is critical that the Government provides a significant and sustained increase in overall funding for local government”



“The Government should roll out five-year local housing deals to all areas of the country that want them”

families in temporary accommodation and help to prevent rough sleeping, councils are spending more than £1.74 billion to support over 117,000 households in temporary accommodation in 2024.

The LGA is disappointed the Government did not use the Budget to address the temporary accommodation subsidy gap, currently stuck at 2011 levels, as this is driving ever-higher spend on temporary accommodation and limiting the resources available for homelessness prevention.

However, the £1 billion extension to the Household Support Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments, including Barnett impact for Wales, will help councils continue to provide welfare support to vulnerable households.

Elsewhere, the Budget commits to multi-year finance settlements from 2026/27 – something councils and the LGA have long called for to enable sustainable long-term financial planning.

It also promises a comprehensive set of finance reforms – including redistribution of funding through the local government finance settlement – to return the sector to a sustainable position.

In its response to the Budget, the LGA says the Government should provide certainty and clarity over financial reforms, making sure the sector is properly engaged, and consulting on any potential changes in a timely manner.

Looking ahead to the spending review due next spring, it is critical that the Government provides a significant and sustained increase in overall funding for local government that reflects current and future demands for services, including a new focus on prevention. ●

As set out in recent LGA research (see [first 697](#)), local authorities are particularly concerned about the childcare expansion in September 2025 and have long raised concerns around funding and support for the workforce.

Additionally, the Budget includes some positive measures that the LGA has called for, such as on Right to Buy reform and affordable housing, and funding of £500 million for potholes, which will help councils repair roads, build new homes and improve existing homes.

Measures include a £500 million boost to the Affordable Homes Programme to build up to 5,000 additional affordable homes; and reducing discounts on the Right to Buy scheme and enabling councils in England to keep all the receipts generated by sales.

The LGA has long made the case for reform of Right to Buy, and for councils to be empowered to build more affordable,

good quality homes quickly and at scale.

In the long term, the Government should roll out five-year local housing deals to all areas of the country that want them – combining funding from multiple national housing programmes into a single pot.

This will provide certainty and efficiencies and could support delivery of an additional 200,000 social homes in a 30-year period.

The Chancellor also announced £233 million of additional spending in 2025/26 on homelessness, taking total spending to £1 billion. While this will help to prevent increases in the number of

i For more on the issues raised here and the many other announcements in the Budget – including on asylum and resettlement, building safety, business rates, devolution, domestic abuse, flooding, local growth, mental health, net zero and clean energy, planning, skills and workforce, and transport – please read the LGA’s comprehensive briefing, available at www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses



LGA Chair Cllr Louise Gittins

The best of local government

Sharing our passion for serving our communities



Councillor Louise Gittins is Chair of the LGA

More than 2,500 people from the local government family and other public and voluntary sectors came together in Harrogate last month for the LGA's annual conference.

It was an absolute pleasure to welcome delegates to what proved to be an exciting three days, with a packed programme of speeches, panel sessions, workshops and, of course, our ever popular Innovation Zone (see p15).

And it was wonderful to see such a broad spectrum of local

government talent gathered together, with a shared passion for serving our communities.

All colleagues in local government work daily to bring about real change in peoples' lives.

Behind every statistic, announcement or headline, there are real stories of families, communities, and businesses that have been positively impacted by the work of local councils.

The LGA is delighted, as your membership body, to be able to support you in everything

you strive to achieve. In my speech to conference, I highlighted some of those joint achievements – including:

- 'Make a Difference', our national local government recruitment campaign
- the LGA's Step Ahead campaign helping councils strengthen their support for care leavers (see p19)
- the LGA's government-funded sector-led improvement programme, which saves local authorities tens of millions of pounds each year, and which 100 per cent of chief executives and 97 per cent of council leaders say has had a positive impact on their organisation
- our council leader-led call for continuing the Household Support Fund, which has now been extended by both a Conservative and a Labour Chancellor

“The LGA... is delighted to be able to support you in everything you strive to achieve”

- the LGA’s work with the Electoral Commission and the Jo Cox Foundation on protecting candidates from abuse during the local elections.

At conference, we revealed that more than a fifth of councillors have received death threats or threats of violence in the past year (see p20).

And, ahead of last month’s Budget, we published another survey in Harrogate that found one in four councils in England – and 44 per cent of social care councils – were likely to request exceptional financial support from government in the next two financial years.

As this edition of **first** was going to press, we were hopeful that the Government’s recent Budget will add up to a step in the right direction for councils – but were clear that local government still faces a precarious future (see p10).

All these are examples of what we can achieve when we come together as a sector and improve and support each other as one.

I cannot stress enough how critical our cross-party collaboration has been in achieving this. From Labour to Conservative to Liberal Democrat, Independent and Green councillors, we have all come together in the spirit of service to our communities.

It is essential to remember that national government on its own, regardless of party, cannot deliver without the support and expertise of local councils as equal partners.

Devolution and reorganisation

Government plans for devolution and local government reorganisation were widely trailed at the LGA’s annual conference and confirmed in last month’s Budget.

An upcoming English Devolution White Paper will set out the Government’s plans to widen devolution to more areas and deepen the powers of existing mayors and their combined authorities, ensuring they have the tools needed to boost economic growth.

The first integrated settlements – or ‘single pot’ funding – will be introduced for Greater Manchester and the West Midlands Combined Authorities from 2025/26, and the Government will simplify the wider local funding landscape by reducing the number of grants and consolidating them into the local government finance settlement.

According to the Budget, the white paper will set out more detail, including on working with councils “to move to simpler structures that make sense for their local areas, with efficiency savings from council reorganisation helping to meet the needs of local people”.

The LGA remains of the view that local government reorganisation is a matter for local areas to decide.

LGA Chair Cllr Louise Gittins told conference: “Council leaders are key to local decision-making and must be an integral part of our democratic framework, whatever arrangements are put in place by government.”

Also speaking at conference, Local Government Minister Jim McMahon said the Government wanted to see combined mayoral authorities covering all of England, and that this was the “only way to achieve that power



Local Government Minister Jim McMahon speaking in Harrogate

shift away from Westminster and Whitehall”.

“People want more power and control in the places where they live and want to be more optimistic about the future,” he added, saying the Government was “willing to work in partnership”.

Welcoming delegates to conference, Cllr Gareth Dadd (Con), Deputy Leader of North Yorkshire Council, outlined how it was the “first council ever to successfully pursue unitary status and devolution at the same time”.

The 2022 York and North Yorkshire devolution deal meant more decision-making powers on a local level and millions of pounds of additional funding from government, while local government reorganisation is expected to help North Yorkshire achieve more than £40 million in savings, he said.

Yet, due to escalating demand for, and the rising cost of providing, council services, it is predicted North Yorkshire will still have an annual deficit of about £48 million by 2026/27.

“We all need a sustainable long-term funding plan without delay,” he added.

Since the general election, the LGA has worked tirelessly to ensure local government remains at the forefront of the national agenda, making clear in all our conversations with ministers, opposition spokespeople and all parliamentarians that local government is key to solving our biggest national challenges.

We have also stressed that without longer-term financial planning and a clearer, fairer

funding system for councils, as a nation, we will continue to constrain economic growth.

As we move forward, the LGA’s job is to help councils innovate for the future.

Whether it’s through artificial intelligence (AI), or securing a sustainable workforce, or creating flexible funding models, we will be here to support you every step of the way.

Together, councils of all tiers, and of every political

persuasion or none, will continue to make a difference for our residents, and I can’t wait to keep working with you all to help make our shared ambitions a reality.

Just as government can’t deliver without councils, the LGA can’t deliver without its members, so a heartfelt thank you to all who helped make annual conference such a success. I can’t wait to do it all again in Liverpool next year (1-3 July 2025). ●



Powering movement, empowering change.



We're on a mission to make the switch to EV a realistic option for all.

Zest is investing in large-scale EV charging projects that really make a difference. We're helping local authorities to deliver reliable charging experiences that prioritise clean air and net zero goals.

Find out more
zest.uk.com

How we're supporting net zero at a local level

With the growth in low-carbon transport and heating, local authorities have a key role in planning the infrastructure that will support the choices that will drive net zero. This is why we have made a commitment to supporting local net zero ambitions by:

- Hiring a team of net zero engagement specialists to help you make the best possible planning decisions
- Developing a dedicated software platform – the LENZA tool – so you can access all the information you need for effective net zero planning
- Launching a successful pilot programme where we've placed our graduates with local authorities to support their work towards creating Local Area Energy Plans.

SSEN's experience working with you is one of the reasons why we're calling for Local Area Energy Plans to be mandated, and for local authorities to be given the resources to develop them fully.



Inspiring conversations

The LGA's Innovation Zone was a hub of ideas



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

The Innovation Zone (IZ) at the LGA Annual Conference and Exhibition 2024 was bigger than ever, once again providing a significant platform for local authorities to showcase their innovative solutions to the sector's challenges.

We were thrilled to welcome more than 100 speakers from over 40 local authorities to share their work with so many engaged delegates.

Across our three stages, the IZ continued to be a dynamic hub of ideas and energy, often with more than 200 delegates in sessions at any one time.

We kicked off this year's programme with a panel highlighting support for care leavers, which I was delighted to chair.

The panellists showcased a range of support, including Hammersmith & Fulham's Care Leavers' Hub, the Office of Care Leaver Advocacy's 'Survival Guide', and both Wiltshire's One Council approach and Greater Manchester Combined Authority's approach to supporting their care leavers.

It was a privilege to open the IZ with such an inspiring conversation.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly a key interest for local authorities, demonstrated by a popular session highlighting North Yorkshire Council's use of AI to reimagine case management in children's social care, and a presentation on maximising AI's potential in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.

From Hertfordshire's assistive technology solution to support residents to remain at home for longer, to GeoPlace's and Nottingham City Council's work saving money through better use of data



Cllr Abi Brown with Gavin Jones, Lead Commissioner at Slough Borough Council, at the Innovation Zone session on corporate peer challenge

“More than 100 speakers from 40 local authorities shared their work with so many engaged delegates”

sets, digital innovation continues to be a salient theme across the zone.

On the second day of conference, I opened the IZ with a 'Spotlight on' session on delivering improvement and assurance through corporate peer challenge (CPC), alongside Gavin Jones, Lead Commissioner at Slough Borough Council, exploring how the LGA's strengthened CPC approach can support councils, including those facing significant challenges.

We heard from Cllr Liam Robinson and Andrew Lewis, Leader and Chief Executive respectively of Liverpool City Council, who reflected on their recent experience of CPC and advice to councils who are looking to have a CPC.

Several sessions were devoted to sustainability, including a 'Spotlight on' Manchester's journey to becoming a carbon literate city.

The council's mandatory approach to carbon literacy training has already seen 50 per cent of staff gain certification and they're now on target to meet their 2028

carbon targets – impressive achievements we can all be working towards.

Other fantastic sessions explored best practice in retrofitting, re-using tech, delivering green infrastructure, and building sustainable transport links.

Our sponsors, Newton, were once again a highlight of the IZ: both their steady supply of coffee to delegates and their hosting of several standing-room-only sessions, including 'How to innovate during a financial crisis', contributed to the buzz in the zone.

Our sincere thanks go to the incredible team at the LGA whose hard work made this year's IZ possible and such a success – including our member-led working group, who played a key role in shaping the programme.

For those who missed out or want to revisit some of the learning from the Innovation Zone, presentations will be available on the LGA's website in the near future (see www.local.gov.uk). ●

i To find out more about LGA support mentioned at the Innovation Zone, read our sector support offer or contact the principal LGA adviser for your region via www.local.gov.uk/our-support

LGA Annual Conference and Exhibition 2024

It may have been delayed by the general election, but the LGA's 2024 annual conference proved as exciting as ever, with more than 2,500 participants and dozens of influential speakers discussing the big issues facing local government.

Cllr Louise Gittins and Joanna Killian hosted their first annual conference as Chair and Chief Executive respectively of the LGA.

Keynote political speakers included Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner; former LGA Chairman Lord Gary Porter (Con); Lib Dem Spokesperson for Housing, Communities and Local Government Vikki Slade MP; and the Chief Executive of Citizen's Advice North Staffordshire, Cllr Craig Browne (Ind).

Delegates were moved to tears by Olympic medallist Fatima Whitbread's

experience of growing up in care (see p19) and inspired to sing and dance by TV presenter Mark De-Lisser, Founder of Singology Choir (pictured below).

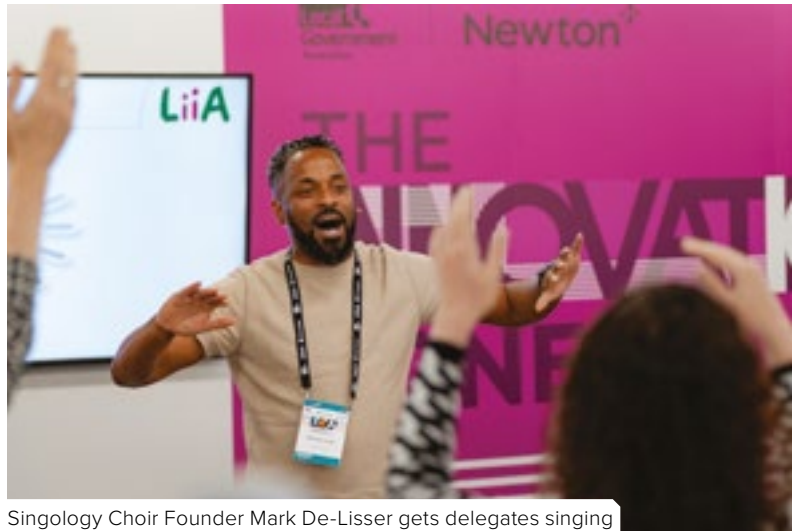
Thank you to all the sponsors, delegates, speakers, exhibitors and staff who contributed to the LGA buzz around Harrogate, and we look forward to seeing you in Liverpool for next year's annual conference. ●



Joanna Killian, LGA Chief Executive



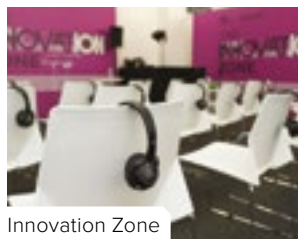
Newton's barista



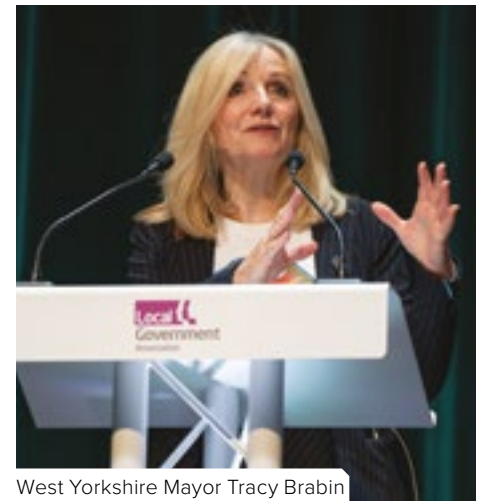
Singology Choir Founder Mark De-Lisser gets delegates singing



DCN



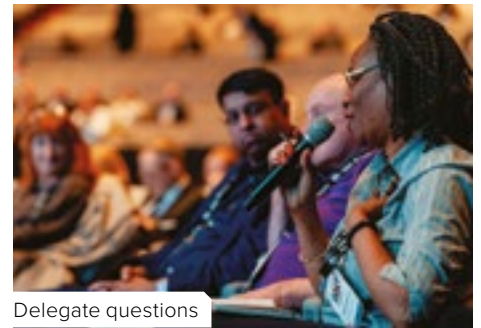
Innovation Zone



West Yorkshire Mayor Tracy Brabin



Local Government Minister Jim McMahon with LGA Chair Cllr Louise Gittins



Delegate questions



Stevie the guide dog at the Lib Dem stand



LGA Independent Group Leader Cllr Marianne Overton MBE



Conference registration



LGA Conservative Group Leader Cllr Kevin Bentley



Former LGA Chairman Lord Gary Porter



Local Growth Minister Alex Norris and LGA Labour Group Leader Cllr Bev Craig

A child-centred government

Children's minister promises SEND reform

Children's Minister Janet Daby has promised "a child-centred government" and to reset the relationship between local and central government.

Speaking at the LGA's annual conference in Harrogate last month, Ms Daby also pledged to "deliver the change that is needed" to the system of support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Ms Daby was introduced by Cllr Arooj Shah, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, who said councils were looking for "adequate funding" and "powers and levers" to allow them to respond early to problems, instead of the "crisis approach" of the past 14 years.

Also speaking at the same session was Debbie Barnes, Chief Executive of Lincolnshire County Council, who called

for "hard powers" for local authorities to ensure schools are more inclusive.

Ms Daby, a former social worker and former councillor and deputy mayor of the London Borough of Lewisham, told delegates: "I'm not going to promise anything I can't deliver, but I can promise this is a child-centred government."

Outlining the Government's commitment to "change things for the better", she cited changes already in hand, including: new guidance on kinship care; the ending of one-word Ofsted inspection judgements; regional improvement teams to drive high and rising standards; the forthcoming Children's Wellbeing Bill; the national curriculum and assessment review in England; breakfast clubs; plans for 3,000 school-based nurseries; and work to improve recruitment and retention of social workers.

Referencing the National Audit Office's recent report on support for children with SEND (see p4), which found that, despite increased investment, the system is still not delivering better outcomes for children and young people, Ms Daby promised "no more sticking plasters" and a "greater focus on mainstream provision and early intervention".

She also highlighted the need to tackle children's social workers' workload, and the rising cost of children's care placements, adding: "Local authorities are facing rising costs to place children in care, with some private providers making excessive profits. That's unacceptable and we will change this."

The minister highlighted the "really excellent work" she had seen in visits to local authorities, and encouraged delegates to continue talking to her and each other to find new inspiration and ways of working together, concluding: "I want you to know that I'm on your side."

Debbie Barnes, Chief Executive of Lincolnshire County Council, said it was "refreshing" to hear about the minister's ambitions for children and young people, and said local authorities wanted to be "generous with our views and experience to help shape policy".

She said councils were ideally placed to act as convenors of local SEND systems but need certainty on funding, clarity on roles and responsibilities – including those of health services and schools – and levers and "hard powers" to hold schools to account for provision.

She also welcomed the Government's focus on reforming early years, but added: "We need a focus on workforce development in early years or we won't be able to deliver the reforms." ●



Children's Minister Janet Daby



Olympic medallist Fatima Whitbread MBE

Championing care leavers

LGA publishes new good practice guidance

Delegates at the LGA's annual conference gave a standing ovation to Olympic medallist Fatima Whitbread MBE.

The retired javelin thrower, who broke the world record in 1986 and is a European and World Champion, grew up in care, and her conference session focused on how to support children and young people with care experience.

People in the audience were moved to tears as she described being abandoned as a baby in a flat and "left to die": she was rescued after a neighbour reported her crying, and spent months in hospital recovering.

She was taken into care by her local authority and lived for 14 years in children's homes, with dozens of children living in each one.

Fatima spoke of looking out of the window and, whenever a car pulled up,

asking: "Is that my mummy coming to get me?"

She explained to delegates that one care worker, 'Aunty Rae', taught her what love was and was "the mother I always wanted".

Aunty Rae inspired Fatima's new picture book, *My Bright Shining Star*, which aims to share with children and families the importance of kindness and having "one bright shining star" on your side.

Fatima's life changed when she met a sports coach, Margaret Whitbread, at age 13. After learning she was in a children's home, Margaret gave Fatima her own boots and javelin and coached her, later introducing Fatima to her husband and sons, and taking her into their care.

Throughout Fatima's story, the message was clear about the importance of strong relationships and having people to advocate for and believe in you – a vital reminder for councillors and officers who

are all 'corporate parents' to children in care and care leavers.

In response to a question, about how councils can best support children in care and care leavers, Fatima was passionate about the need to centre the voices of children themselves – by asking them what they want and need, and listening to it.

Last month, local government marked National Care Leavers' Week and, as part of the LGA's Step Ahead campaign, we published 'Listening and engaging with care experienced individuals: a good practice guide' (see www.local.gov.uk/publications).

This was in response to feedback about poor experiences, such as people with care experience being asked to share their traumas with groups of people, or being the only people on conference panels who weren't paid to be there.

The guide was produced by the children's charity Coram, with the involvement of care experienced young people, and has lots of learning for anyone working with experts by experience. ●

i To find out more about the LGA's Step Ahead campaign, please visit www.local.gov.uk/step-ahead. See www.fatimascampaign.com to learn about Fatima's campaign to improve the UK care system. **See p28**



Cllr Hannah Perkin (l), lead for the LGA Liberal Democrat Group's Next Generation programme, and LGA Chair Cllr Louise Gittins (c); with (l to r) Cllr Bev Craig, Cllr Marianne Overton MBE, and Cllr Kevin Bentley, Leaders of the LGA's Labour, Independent and Conservative Groups, respectively



Baroness Sharon Taylor

Civility in public life

New protections for councillors announced

Councillors continue to face significant and serious threats and intimidation, according to an LGA survey published ahead of its annual conference in Harrogate.

The survey found that more than one-fifth of councillors (22 per cent) have received a death threat or a threat of violence in their time in their role, with 23 per cent experiencing abuse serious enough to report to the police.

Just under three-quarters of councillors (73 per cent) had received abuse or intimidation, with around half (49 per cent) saying they felt the issue had got worse in the past 12 months, and one in 10 reporting someone attending their home in a way that felt intimidating or inappropriate.

One positive finding was that 57 per cent of respondents reported that their local

authority's arrangements for protecting councillors were 'very' or 'fairly' effective.

The LGA's long-running Debate Not Hate campaign has been calling for councillors' home addresses to be withheld from public record and for the establishment of a new central unit in Whitehall to monitor and assess threats.

Speaking at a conference fringe on Debate Not Hate, Baroness Sharon Taylor, the Lords Minister for Housing and Local Government, confirmed that the Government would legislate "at the first available opportunity" to put "beyond doubt" that elected members do not have to publicly declare their addresses (see also p7).

She said the findings from the LGA's survey illustrated "the horrific price we pay for being in the public eye", with "toxic" debate discouraging

people from participating in local democracy, adding: "Abuse and intimidation aimed at our local politicians is completely unacceptable and has no part in our society."

Cllr Marianne Overton, Chair of the LGA's Civility in Public Life Steering Group, said the confirmation on not publishing home addresses was good news for councils, councillors and communities.

She added: "People must be able to represent their communities safely and without fear. We need cohesive communities that can debate differences in peace.

"Poor behaviour doesn't just impact the individual, it hurts everyone in communities, reducing the opportunity for open debate on important local issues."

Hannah Phillips, Civility Commission Manager at the Jo Cox Foundation, speaking

at the same fringe event, highlighted the impact of abuse on women.

In the May local elections, more than half of candidates experienced abuse, and over half of women candidates said they avoided campaigning alone, compared with 20 per cent of men.

This has "important implications for diversity and the representative nature of our democracy", she said.

Ms Phillips welcomed the continuation of the Debate Not Hate campaign, and also highlighted that costs arising from ensuring the safety of councillors are exempt from election spending limits. ●

i Debate Not Hate is part of the LGA's Civility in Public Life programme. See www.local.gov.uk/debate-not-hate to find out more

Good packaging is essential for keeping products fresh and intact, and producers are doing more to reduce waste and support recycling.

But everybody can see the levels of waste, across our shop shelves, delivered to our homes, and into our bins.

In 2023, households across England generated a staggering 5.6 million tonnes of packaging waste, according to a recent study from the LGA, County Councils Network, and District Councils' Network.

The analysis reveals that a substantial amount of this waste – 3.2 million tonnes – was sorted into recycling bins, while 2.3 million tonnes ended up in general or 'black bin' waste, and an additional 70,000 tonnes was incorrectly placed in food waste bins.

As local government gathered to discuss solutions to waste management challenges at the LGA's annual conference in Harrogate last month, the findings highlighted an urgent need for waste system reforms and raised questions about industry accountability for packaging waste.

The growing waste problem has become a significant concern for local authorities, especially as recyclable waste that goes in the wrong bins costs councils more to treat and also creates more emissions.

The LGA has called on the Government to take two critical actions: reduce

Wrap it up

Producers must bear the costs of processing waste packaging



Councillor Adam Hug is Chair of the LGA's Local Infrastructure and Net Zero Board

excessive packaging at its source; and ensure that the upcoming 'extended producer responsibility' (pEPR) scheme for packaging fully covers the cost of managing packaging waste.

Set to take effect in 2026, the pEPR scheme aims to shift the financial responsibility for waste disposal from councils to packaging producers.

This is in line with what our residents want, according to YouGov polling commissioned by the LGA, which found that the public is 12 times more likely to think costs in reducing packaging should be met by companies producing it

(48 per cent) rather than councils dealing with it (4 per cent).

Additionally, 85 per cent of people think firms should be required by government to reduce the amount of packaging used.

The Government recently reduced the fees facing the packaging industry – by 33 per cent for glass, 27 per cent for paper and card, and 17 per cent for plastics. The LGA has called for it to review this decision.

Councils stand firm on the need for the Government's pEPR reforms to cover the actual costs of managing local waste and recycling services fully, rather than relying on rough calculations that may underestimate the financial burden.

In last month's Budget, the Government announced that pEPR funding will be treated as 'additional' income in 2025/26, which is separate to the local government finance settlement. This is something we have long campaigned for and we look forward to seeing further details with December's provisional settlement.

However, meeting the costs associated with packaging waste is only one part of the solution.

Achieving a zero-waste society will require meaningful investments in waste reduction programmes, robust legislative support and a renewed focus on reducing waste at its source.

The LGA will continue to lobby for reforms that address the realities of waste management and move the country closer to a sustainable, zero-waste future.

In the meantime, clarity in labelling and stronger industry accountability remain immediate priorities to curb mismanaged waste, lower emissions, and relieve councils of unsustainable costs. ●

“The LGA will continue to lobby for reforms that address the realities of waste management”



A baffling system

Updating the law to support disabled children



Councillor Arooj Shah is Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care was published in May 2022.

This made a series of recommendations to improve the children's social care system, including considering how the system worked for disabled children.

After hearing that many disabled children and their families struggled to access the right support, the review identified an "outdated legal framework" with a "patchwork of duties" that was making it hard for both families and professionals to understand what support should be provided.

The Government later accepted the review's recommendation that the Law Commission should review disabled children's social care law and consider whether it meets the needs of disabled children and their families.

The Law Commission started its review in September 2023, meeting individuals and groups with lived or professional experience of

disabled children's social care – from disabled children and young people and their parents, to social workers, local authority managers, lawyers and judges.

That review has led to a series of provisional proposals that the commission is now consulting on ahead of submitting its final recommendations for reform to the Government in 2025.

'Disabled children's social care law' refers to the legal rules covering whether a disabled child can get help from social services, what help they can get, and how they get it.

This includes everything from personal care in the home and short breaks, to home adaptations and direct payments.

The Law Commission has found that the current law is out of date – from offensive language to a failure to capture the nuances of neurodiversity – while the complicated set of relevant laws, regulations, policies and more is described as "a system of baffling complexity" that is difficult for families and professionals to navigate.

Engagement with parents and carers has further found that the current system tends to view disabled children as being in need of protection rather than help;



that the eligibility criteria for accessing services are often too high; and the needs of parents, carers and siblings are often forgotten.

The Law Commission is keen to hear from as many people as possible as part of its consultation on improvements. The consultation covers areas including assessments, eligibility, service provision, means testing and advocacy.

It also considers the intersection between disabled children's social care and health care, adult social care, and special educational needs and disability (SEND) provision.

Law reform involves simplifying and modernising the law and weeding out anomalies, but the Law Commission is clear in its work that the financial context cannot be ignored.

Its consultation includes an estimate of the costs of implementing its provisional

proposals and seeks views on this too to ensure it is as accurate as possible.

Disabled children deserve to be able to access the services they need easily, and part of delivering this is ensuring we are operating in the right legal context.

This consultation is an outstanding opportunity to make sure we get this right, so I encourage all councils to consider making representations before the deadline of 20 January 2025. ●

i Please visit <https://lawcom.gov.uk/project/disabled-childrens-social-care/> to take part in the consultation. The Law Commission is hosting a webinar for council officers or members who would like to learn more, ask questions and offer views, on Monday 25 November. Please visit <https://moredetails.uk/48GPQfA>

Change NHS consultation

Highlighting councils' vital role in improving the nation's health



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

A nationwide conversation about the future of the NHS has begun, and it is crucial that the local government voice is heard.

'Change NHS' is seeking views on three key shifts: from hospital to community, analogue to digital, and treatment to prevention.

While councils play a key role in reducing pressure on healthcare systems, it's equally important to recognise their role in working at place and neighbourhood level to improve health and wellbeing outcomes and address inequalities.

We know that health is about more than healthcare, and local authorities are vital in addressing the wider determinants of health through our role in housing, green spaces, youth services and the local economy.

We plan, commission, and provide essential services including social care, public health, and children's services – all key to preventing ill-

health and improving the overall health and wellbeing of our communities.

The NHS is one of local government's most important partners. What each side does can impact the other; often positively, sometimes not.

This national consultation exercise is therefore crucial for the future of health, social care and wellbeing locally.

The NHS plays a key role in helping us to live the lives we want to lead, but it cannot do it alone.

As the Government moves forward with plans for the NHS's future, including the creation of a neighbourhood health service, this must be matched by a long-term, well-funded plan for social care.

We cannot afford to let it fall behind.

This consultation is an opportunity to showcase the fantastic work that councils are already doing, especially in relation to prevention and tackling inequalities.

Those services that intervene earlier in people's lives and reduce the need for later acute and reactive spend are vital to people living fulfilled, happy and productive lives.

They are also vital to addressing the drag on our economy from socioeconomic inequality and poor health.

Ministers want to use the Change NHS consultation

to help shape their 10-year NHS plan (expected in spring 2025) and, recognising the important role of local government, LGA Chief Executive Joanna Killian is co-chairing one of the working groups, on mobilising change.

The Government has invited all of us – the public, health and care staff, and local government partners – to share our experiences, views and ideas.

You can help ensure the voice of local government is heard by submitting an organisational response by 2 December (see <https://moredetails.uk/3CoMotS>).

Please highlight successful initiatives and what you need from the 10-year plan to achieve even more.

We would especially encourage you to reflect on practical preventative interventions (including public health); neighbourhood hubs

and approaches that bring health and council services together; and ways of working between social care and NHS that promote 'home first'.

You can also encourage staff and residents to share their ideas through the online platform, <https://moredetails.uk/3NSL9Wv>

And you can partner with your local health and wellbeing board and integrated care partnership to submit responses (see <https://moredetails.uk/3YxtRmO>).

Finally, to ensure the LGA's response accurately reflects the sector's priorities and best practices, please also share your emerging responses to the consultation with us by emailing healthandcare@local.gov.uk so we can reflect these.

The more voices we have, the stronger our message, so let's ensure local government is heard loud and clear. ●



A trusted network

Support programme for adult social care has helped every council in England



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

All social care councils in England have received highly rated improvement support, courtesy of the LGA and the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services.

Working as Partners in Care and Health (PCH), we delivered a government-funded package of support from April 2023 to June 2024 that ranged from reports, publications and briefings to targeted support for councils seeking help with, for example, workforce challenges, digital transformation, and safeguarding adults.

PCH's first annual report demonstrates the local, regional and national reach of



our programme, the consistency and scale of support provided to councils, and the high levels of positive satisfaction with that support.

All 153 councils that have adult social care responsibilities received targeted support in 2023/24, offered on an individual

basis and developed to address the specific priorities or challenges they faced. PCH provided 616 such targeted support offers – which received an overall satisfaction rating of 96 per cent – and engaged with councils more than 1,600 times.

For example, we helped one London borough develop a workforce strategy that covered not only its own staff but those in commissioned services and working for external partners, enabling a more collaborative approach to developing the workforce over the next five years.

The council's strategic workforce lead described it as "the most helpful feedback I have received in a long time". See 'Right workforce, right care' (left) for more on this kind of support.

Additionally, we have published more than 40 reports, publications and briefings which are freely available via our webpages (see www.local.gov.uk/pch).

These range from a toolkit for staff and a 'must-know' guide for councillors preparing for Care Quality Commission inspections, to recruitment and careers

"The first annual report demonstrates the reach of our programme"

Right workforce, right care

Planning for your workforce ensures that you have the right capacity and capability to deliver great quality services and outcomes for people, both now and in the future.

Traditionally, workforce planning in adult social care focused on staff employed directly by councils. In fact, these people make up less than 10 per cent of the total adult social care workforce in a place, so the impact of these plans was therefore limited.

Adult social care is recognised as a complex system of interdependent parts.

Councils need to work together with the workforce – whether they are employed by councils, providers or partners – and people receiving care and support, to develop

workforce plans that make a difference.

This place-based approach provides an opportunity to affect real change and address the workforce challenges that many places are facing.

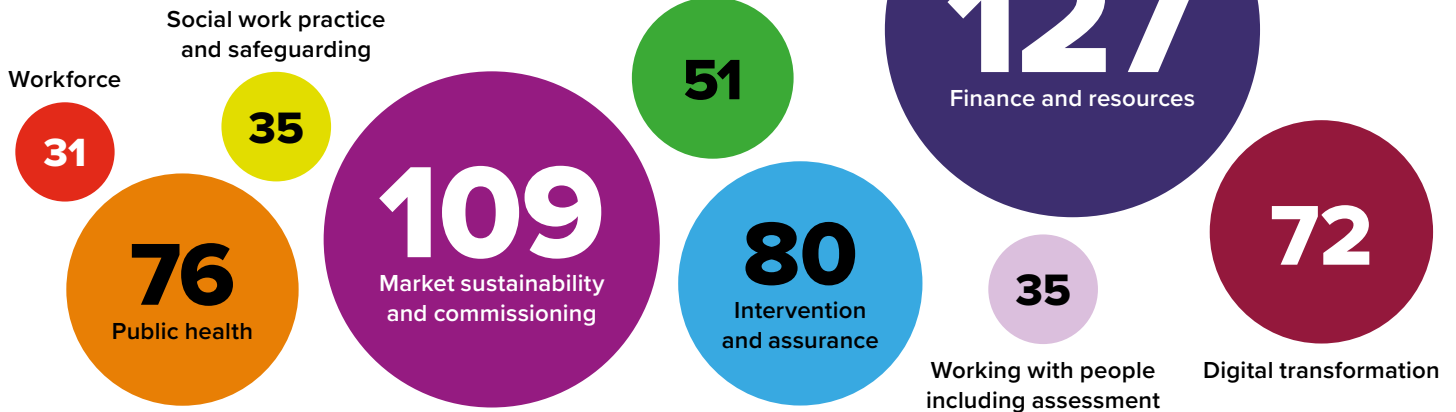
However, workforce planning in this way is new and it requires different approaches and skills from the people leading it.

The new PCH Workforce Planning Hub aims to support those seeking to develop high-impact workforce plans for a place.

The online hub will provide information at national, regional and local levels, share practical resources, and showcase good practice as it emerges.

For further information, please visit <https://moredetails.uk/40zB2gM>

Targeted support offers provided to councils in 2023/24, broken down by priority workstream



PCH: give your views

Partners in Care and Health (PCH) helps councils improve the way they deliver adult social care and public health services and helps government understand the sector's challenges. It is a trusted network for developing and sharing best practice, developing tools and techniques, providing support and building connections.

PCH has been delivering a sector improvement programme to councils with responsibilities for adult social care since November 2022, funded by the Department of Health and Social Care and offered to councils without charge.

Prior to this, the programme was known as the Care and Health

Improvement Programme (CHIP), delivering support for 10 years.

To help understand how the PCH brand is performing two years on, we have launched our first-ever communications survey.

This aims to measure current baseline levels of awareness and understanding of the programme, and it is also a chance for key stakeholders and audiences, including councillors, to help shape how our support offers are communicated and promoted.

The survey will run until 6 December at www.local.gov.uk/pch or scan the QR code using your phone.



to their current service delivery, so they can deliver outcomes that help councils help people access care that meets their needs, in a time and manner that suits them.

Meanwhile, I'm delighted that, earlier this year, PCH was awarded a contract by the Department of Health and Social Care to deliver sector-led improvement support in 2024/25, in partnership with the Social Care Institute for Excellence, following a competitive tender.

Through this partnership, we have committed to continue to provide relevant, effective and innovative support that empowers councils, providers and staff to deliver high-quality care that enables choice, control and independence for everyone.

In its prospectus, PCH sets out what this means for support offers at the regional, national and individual council level. Its offers are aligned to the Care Quality Commission's themes and quality statements; however, they are not the driver of the PCH's work.

One thing is for sure: if you choose to access PCH's support, your adult social care teams will benefit from the subject matter expertise, unique and extensive connections, and knowledge and skills of its advisers, senior advisers and associates.

Consequently, so will your residents. ●

guidance aimed at tackling workforce recruitment and retention issues.

We also held 82 events, attended by 9,650 people, which received an overall 93 per cent satisfaction rating.

Further events are taking place in November and December, including on autism (early intervention and prevention) and on an operating model toolkit for local authority assessments (see www.local.gov.uk/events to book your places).

The PCH's 2023/24 improvement programme was developed to support adult social care and public health services by delivering quality and innovative improvement support offers.

Our programme uses a sector-led

improvement approach to support lead members, health and wellbeing boards, officers and their teams.

In essence, this approach means setting clear, achievable goals with councils, regions and systems that are intelligence-led and driven by councils, as they are best placed to understand the support they need to enhance service delivery.

Offers have been designed to support councils to embed tangible improvements

i The PCH annual report and prospectus are available to view at www.local.gov.uk/pch. PCH staff and advisers will be attending the National Children and Adult Services Conference 2024 in Liverpool from 27-29 November. You'll find them at stand E11 between Newton and SCIE.

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

Welsh councils on cliff edge



Councillor Darren Price
(Plaid Cymru) is Leader of
Carmarthenshire County Council

Questions remain for Wales after Labour's long-awaited UK Budget.

Prior to the Budget, myself and other Plaid Cymru council leaders in Wales wrote to the Chancellor warning that a failure to act will mean many services that protect the most vulnerable in society will disappear altogether.

While appreciating that the challenges faced by the Chancellor are significant following 14 years of the Tories' disastrous economic policies, it is no exaggeration to say that

many councils find themselves on the brink.

The Welsh LGA estimates that local authorities in Wales face additional financial pressures of £559 million in 2025/26.

Without adequate levels of funding, our schools will continue to lack the resources they need to give pupils the education they deserve. As the National Association of Head Teachers stated in its report last month, spending per pupil has fallen by around 6 per cent in real terms – an unsustainable situation if we are to truly give learners the best start in life.

Without additional funding from the Welsh Government, local authorities would require a mix of council tax increases and further cuts to services and efficiencies. The pressure

is equivalent to a 26 per cent increase in council tax, or the loss of just under 14,000 posts.

I know that I speak for all local authority leaders in Wales when I say that the weight of responsibility when it comes to protecting the most vulnerable in our communities is felt more acutely than ever.

Considering the repeated pre-election pledges that two Labour governments working together would be of benefit to Wales, council leaders in Wales hoped for a fair deal from the UK Budget and that the consequential funding received by the Welsh Government would enable Welsh councils to receive the financial support we so desperately need.

While it wasn't all doom and gloom, important questions remain.

We've received no real

clarity on the long-term future of structural funds, and Wales was yet again denied the money it has long been owed – £4 billion in HS2 consequential funding, capital monies that the Welsh Government could use to transform public transport infrastructure, or invest in other capital schemes.

As a council leader, I believe that some of that £4 billion should be spent on improving our schools and highways. The UK Labour Government has let us down badly on that front.

Local authorities have no clarity either on whether they will be fully compensated for the hike in employers' National Insurance contributions, or whether it's a case of giving with one hand and taking with another.

With the Labour Welsh Government not setting its Budget until December, it leaves Welsh councils in a state of uncertainty for quite some time yet.

Currently, key services such as social care, children's services, schools and highways all require significant investment so that our communities can thrive.

If the Labour Welsh Government fails to adequately fund local government and address the deficit of around £0.5 billion, the consequences will be significant on our communities.

It is clear that Welsh councils are standing on the edge of a financial precipice. This is the Welsh Government's chance to step up to the plate – and after a general election campaign where Labour promised change for the better, they must deliver. ●



GROUP LEADERS



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

Local government 'remains on life support'

The first Labour Government Budget since 2009 has met with a mixed response among Liberal Democrats in local authorities.

For many it was a case of 'Meet the new boss, same as the old boss'.

Once again, local councils face increasing council tax, raising charges, and making cuts to vital services in response to insufficient government funding.

The sector remains on life support.

Despite the additional £1.3 billion in grant funding, it is at least £1 billion short of what the LGA has estimated is needed just for councils to stand still.

According to the LGA, councils in England need at least £2.3 billion next year just to maintain services at current levels.

The Government's offer falls far short of what's required.

There were some positive measures – for example, reform of Right to Buy and some support for carers, things that both the LGA and the Liberal Democrats have been calling for.

And while the £600 million extra for social care and the £500 million extra for pothole repairs are, of course, welcome, it is yet again the same trick used by the previous Tory Government: once again, central government has thrown enough money at local government to stop the system collapsing completely, but nowhere near enough to solve the problems we face in the long term.

"Despite the talk of change, austerity remains alive and well for local councils"

There was no extra funding whatsoever for local authority public health teams.

And the extra money for social care could, of course, be eclipsed by the hike in employers' National Insurance contributions, as businesses – such as care homes, which work with councils to provide care services – have to take account of the rise.

The LGA is calling for urgent clarity on this issue.

Despite all the talk of change from the new Labour Government, austerity remains alive and well for local councils. ●

i For more information about the LGA's political groups, see www.local.gov.uk

Caring for care leavers



Councillor Louise Gittins is Chair of the LGA

National Care Leavers' Week finished earlier this month, with councils around the country lighting up civic buildings in blue in support and recognition of their care leavers.

As ever, the week provided a vital opportunity to acknowledge the success and achievements of care leavers, while also raising awareness of the ongoing challenges our young people face as they transition from care.

As a councillor and therefore a corporate parent, supporting those leaving care is an enormous but thoroughly rewarding responsibility.

It is councils' job to ensure those in



care and care leavers have the best possible start in life and to prepare and support them as they take the first steps into independence.

Councils demonstrate a wealth of good practice every day when supporting care leavers, some of which was highlighted at the LGA's annual conference last week (see p15).

As part of its Step Ahead campaign, and with your help, the LGA continues to add to our collection of council case

studies, as sharing good practice can encourage and inspire us all (see www.local.gov.uk/step-ahead).

But while we continue to work to improve our support to care leavers, there is a need to consider changes that can be implemented on a wider, national level, that councils alone cannot deliver.

That's why, this month, the LGA called for government-funded exemptions from council tax and the costs of prescriptions, eye tests and NHS dental care for care leavers up to age 25 (see p4).

These measures form part of our 'National Care Leaver Asks' programme of change, which we urge the Government to consider to help ensure the best possible outcomes for our children leaving care.

I look forward to discussing this further with colleagues at this month's National Children and Adult Services Conference in Liverpool (27-29 November). ●

● See www.local.gov.uk/step-ahead



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

A government that 'gets it'

Like many local government leaders, I watched carefully the first Labour Budget in more than 14 years and the first Budget ever delivered by a woman.

Council leaders know the challenge of balancing the books and the damage we've witnessed by successive Budgets over many years.

There has been a £24.5 billion cut from our sector since 2010.

The challenge is enormous, but I came away seeing light at the end of the tunnel with a government that finally 'gets it' on the role local government has to play.

"The biggest change? A genuine offer of collaboration and co-production"

After fears there would be no new funding, it was heartening to see a £1.3 billion funding increase for local authorities to support the delivery of essential services, alongside an additional £1 billion for SEND, £650 million for local transport projects, a £500 million boost to the Affordable Homes programme, and a continuation in the vital Household Support Fund – a lifeline for so many of our residents.

The biggest change, though? A genuine offer of collaboration and co-production – with the Leaders' Council, initiatives bringing local expertise into Whitehall, and the commitment to deliver power and resource to let us deliver.

We know what our communities need, and we have a government keen to work with us, because only by working together with positivity, creativity and ambition can we deliver the change our country so desperately needs. ●



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

Expect seismic increase in EHCPs

The first Budget for any government is an opportunity to sell their agenda for the course of a Parliament.

The Budget presented by the Chancellor just over two weeks ago begs me to question what the Labour Government is actually trying to achieve.

Some parts of the Budget included positive items for which we in the LGA Conservative Group have long campaigned, for example the permanent 100 per cent retention of Right to Buy receipts.

However, I fear the Government has got its agenda entirely wrong with respect to businesses and children.

I don't believe it really understands the devastating impact its policy on ending the VAT exemption to independent school fees will have on councils: 99,000 children in private sector education receive special

"The Government agenda is entirely wrong on businesses and children"

educational needs and disability (SEND) support without an education, health and care plan (EHCP). We should be under no illusion that this policy will see a seismic increase in the number of EHCP requests on upper tier authorities.

Then we come to employer National Insurance contributions. At the time of writing, the Labour Government has been unable to confirm whether councils will be exempt from the increases to employer National Insurance contributions.

But even working on the assumption that councils will be, it is unlikely that local government contractors will be, and therefore the burden is going to coming back to councils regardless. ●

GROUP LEADERS



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

Budget delivers extra bill for employers

It was fantastic to meet so many of you at the LGA's annual conference, with a record number of Independent Group members attending.

The Independent Group respects diversity of thought of all our members, working together to make the best decisions and to be most effective.

I had useful discussions with Local Government Minister Jim McMahon and Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner, which, I hope, signals a better working relationship with government.

"We continue to have significant concerns about devolution and reorganisation"

Our members continue to have significant concerns about devolution and reorganisation, particularly that Independents and smaller parties start being included collectively.

Thank you to Cllr Craig Browne for his moving and important plenary session on Citizens Advice.

Ahead of the Budget, the LGA made the case for money to fill councils' funding gap of £2.3 billion and £1.3 billion has been put forward in core funding for next year.

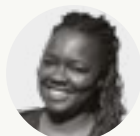
There is a little more for potholes, housing, special educational needs, schools and care. But we also got an extra bill for employers' National Insurance, rising to 15 per cent, and the National Living Wage rise to £12.21 from April 2025.

While we have clarity that staff directly employed by councils won't be subject to the increase, there could be significant implications, as more than 90 per cent of staff delivering adult and children's services are contracted or employed by external organisations. ●



Workers cleaning the beach at Playa del Carmen, Mexico

Local responses to global problems



Councillor Kemi Akinola (Lab) is Deputy Leader of Wandsworth Council

Sargassum is a seaweed causing significant socio-environmental and economic issues in the Eastern Caribbean Islands (EC), Mexico and parts of the USA.

While in the ocean, sargassum acts as a carbon sponge and floating habitat for marine wildlife. However, because of climate change, the past four years have seen excessive blooms, creating piles of dead and decomposing seaweed that wash ashore, and which contain toxic levels of chemicals detrimental to people living in coastal communities.

I was invited to the 2nd EU-Caribbean Global Gateway Conference on Sargassum in Grenada, by the Grenadian government, to learn more about how governments are tackling this issue.

While responsibility for a nation's health lies with national government, it is most often local governments that have to deliver on the tasks. In the Caribbean, this is no different.

Local governments across the EC basin are collaborating with local

people, researchers and business to develop local responses to this global problem. Sargassum not only affects the health of coastal communities, but prevents fisherfolk from earning a living. It clogs up nets and kills fish and any other wildlife that gets tangled up in it.

It reduces tourism by making the beaches unsightly and odorous. And across the EC, it costs around \$130 million to clear up – money smaller economies do not have access to.

Local solutions are focused on early spotting and clearing, and also high-tech surveillance using satellites to predict the seaweed's direction of travel and clear it before it reaches the shores.

There was an array of ideas at the conference on how to treat the seaweed and create end-use products such as chocolate, skin cream, industrial fertiliser and energy.

Finally, we discussed funding and the investment needed to bring these things to fruition.

While these innovations are greatly needed, there is the concern that the best solution would be to slow down climate change and stop the sargassum from dying in the first place. ●

i See <https://sargassumhub.org> to find out more about sargassum

Volatile electorate



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

Electoral volatility continues unabated: from a total of 54 recent by-elections, 24 (44 per cent) changed hands.

Labour faced 24 defences, losing half of them, including some where newly elected MPs had resigned as councillors.

Four parties took advantage, with the Conservatives winning eight.

One of those was Worthing's Heene ward, albeit by a margin of only 38 votes: last May saw Labour poll more than double the votes received by the Conservatives.

Other Conservative gains were assisted by the absence or intervention of candidates from other parties but mainly there was a straight switch from Labour to Conservative.

In both Swindon and South Ribble there was a 23-point swing, and marginally smaller ones in North East Derbyshire and Monmouthshire.

The Greens, having taken seats off the Conservatives, are now successfully targeting Labour, assisted to a degree by the intervention of Reform UK candidates.

In Leeds, the Green vote in Farnley and Wortley rose from last May but Labour's 23-point drop owes more to the fifth of voters who supported Reform.

More modest swings were in evidence when the Greens gained from Labour in Ashford, where the Independents did not contest but Reform did so.

Reform was rewarded when Labour's vote in Wolverhampton's Bilston North fell

“The Greens are now successfully targeting Labour”

46-points from last May: its only competition then came from the Conservatives.

The Liberal Democrats took just one seat from Labour (Shirley, in Southampton). However, an on-going battle for votes with the Conservatives saw three Conservative gains met with four seats transferring in the opposite direction.

Surrey saw the Conservatives recover Hershram Village ward in Elmbridge that had voted Liberal Democrat for the previous three elections.

This result was reversed in Surrey Heath, where the Liberal Democrats polled 45 per cent of the vote in what had formerly been a ward that selected from Conservative or Labour candidates.

The Conservatives should be delighted to capture a Liberal Democrat seat in St Albans and another in Stockport, where the Bramhall South & Woodford ward was the only one of three Liberal Democrat defences to change hands.

By the same token, the Liberal Democrats successfully squeezed both of the main parties to win



Ealing's Hanger Hill, with gains also in Westmoreland and Furness, and Bishop's Waltham in Hampshire.

In general, Independents lost ground, losing three seats to the Conservatives, but the Middleton Independents did retain their seat in Rochdale.

The Independent loss to Plaid Cymru in Powys was later counter-balanced when Plaid failed to retain Talybolion in Ynys Môn (Anglesey), after its councillor there became MP for the island. ●

By-election results

Ashford, Aylesford & East Stour

GREEN GAIN FROM LAB
0.6% over Lab | Turnout **20.6%**

Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, Muscliff & Strouden Park

CON GAIN FROM IND
24.7% over Lab | Turnout **18.4%**

Denbighshire, Prestatyn North

CON GAIN FROM LAB
6.5% over Ind | Turnout **24%**

Ealing, Hanger Hill

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON
26.6% over Con | Turnout **28.2%**

Elmbridge, Hershram Village

CON GAIN FROM LIB DEM
15.8% over Lib Dem | Turnout **27.1%**

Fylde, Warton

CON GAIN FROM IND
18.7% over Ind | Turnout **17.3%**

Greenwich, Eltham Town & Avery Hill

CON GAIN FROM LAB
17.4% over Lab | Turnout **28.0%**

Hampshire, Bishop's Waltham

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON
18.4% over Con | Turnout **28.9%**

Kirklees, Holme Valley South

CON GAIN FROM LAB
12.1% over Lab | Turnout **27.2%**

Leeds, Farnley and Wortley

GREEN GAIN FROM LAB
13.0% over Lab | Turnout **20.2%**

Monmouthshire, Town

CON GAIN FROM LAB
27.9% over Lab | Turnout **33.7%**

North East Derbyshire,

Clay Cross North
CON GAIN FROM LAB
21.9% over Lab | Turnout **22.1%**

Pembrokeshire, The Havens

CON GAIN FROM IND
22.0% over Ind | Turnout **45.6%**

Powys, Machynlleth

PLAID CYMRU GAIN FROM IND
5.4% over Ind | Turnout **44.2%**

Rochdale, North Middleton

MIDDLETON IND HELD
15.3% over Lab | Turnout **17.3%**

Southampton, Shirley

LIB DEM GAIN FROM LAB
15.0% over Con | Turnout **31.0%**

South Ribble, Middleforth

CON GAIN FROM LAB
13.9% over Lab | Turnout **19.6%**

St Albans, Harpenden North & Rural

CON GAIN FROM LIB DEM
8.6% over Lib Dem | Turnout **22.2%**

Stockport, Bramhall South & Woodford

CON GAIN FROM LIB DEM
4.4% over Lib Dem | Turnout **37.0%**

Swindon, Rodbourne Cheney

CON GAIN FROM LAB
14.6% over Lab | Turnout **21.7%**

Surrey Heath, Old Dean

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON
13.2% over Con | Turnout **22.6%**

Westmorland and Furness, Kirkby Stephen and Tebay

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON
65.3% over Con | Turnout **26.2%**

Wolverhampton, Bilston North

REFORM UK GAIN FROM LAB
9.7% over Lab | Turnout **19.4%**

Worthing, Heene

CON GAIN FROM LAB
2.2% over Lab | Turnout **27.0%**

Ynys Môn, Talybolion

IND GAIN FROM PLAID CYMRU
12.2% over Plaid | Turnout **31.9%**

i Only results where wards changed hands are shown here. For more information on all recent by-election results, please visit www.lgafirst.co.uk/local-by-elections



LGA Local Government Annual Finance Conference 2025

Thursday 9 January 2025
18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

The 2025 Local Government Annual Finance Conference will offer perspectives on the 2025/26 provisional local government finance settlement and what it means for local authorities, as well as look to the longer-term outlook for local government. The conference will provide an opportunity to cover issues raised in the Autumn Budget, and key current topics that local government finance professionals are addressing in their local authorities, departments, and organisations.

To book your place, visit: local.gov.uk/events



#LGAConf25

Conference and Exhibition

1-3 JULY | LIVERPOOL

local.gov.uk/conference

A decorative graphic on a green-to-purple gradient background. It features a large, white wireframe sphere in the center, with the text "LGA 2025" overlaid on it in a bold, white, sans-serif font.