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No.700 December 2024

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Call for 10-year strategy for adult social care

700
editions

Prevention pays

Saving billions and improving lives **p13**

Love and fun

LGA's vision for children and young people **p14**

Place data

The power and value of accurate addressing **p27**

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Key issues for councils

Welcome to the 700th edition of **first**, marking 25 years of reporting from the LGA on the key issues facing councils (see p18).

It's been a busy few weeks, with publication of UK Government statements on local government finance in England and cladding remediation (p5), and the Get Britain Working White Paper (p4).

The LGA has been busy, too, highlighting the funding gap in temporary accommodation (p4), the need for more children's social workers (p6), and how investing in preventative adult social care services could return £3.17 for every £1 spent (p7, p13).

In this month's **first**, you can read about our response to the consultation on the next 10-year plan for the NHS (p5, p12) – which needs a 10-year plan for social care to run alongside it.

We also look at the LGA's vision for children and young people (p14), our work on transport and inclusive economic growth (p16), and the start of our Local Government Challenge 2025 (p20).

Our comments this week come from the County Councils Network (p23), the Rural Services Network (p29), and Geoplace (p27).

This is the last edition of **first** before the festive break, so I wish you all a peaceful and very happy Christmas. ●

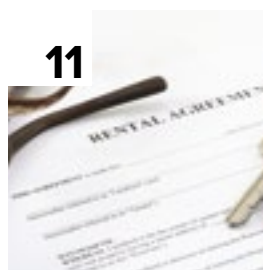
Councillor Louise Gittins
is LGA Chair



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£700m bill for temporary accommodation

The freezing of local housing allowance (LHA) rates over the past five years has left councils picking up more than £700 million in costs that they are unable to claim back from government for housing people in temporary accommodation, according to LGA analysis of official data.

Homeless households placed in temporary accommodation can claim housing benefit, which councils pay upfront and are reimbursed for by the Department for Work and Pensions.

But while households receive the full housing benefit to which they are entitled, the amount councils can claim back from government is currently capped at 90 per cent of LHA rates for 2011.

With rising rental prices, the amount councils can claim no longer covers the cost of temporary accommodation, leaving local authorities to cover the ever-widening gap. This gap is in addition to the huge sums of money that councils pay over and above housing benefit limits to meet the total cost of temporary accommodation, which reached £1.75 billion in 2022/23 alone.

The LGA says this gap threatens councils' financial viability and hampers efforts to reduce homelessness. It is calling on the Government to uprate temporary accommodation subsidy rates to 90 per cent of 2024 LHA rates and to reconsider its decision to keep LHA rates frozen for other



types of accommodation until at least April 2026, to protect councils from ongoing spiralling homelessness costs.

Cllr Adam Hug, LGA Housing Spokesperson, said: "Council housing budgets are being stretched to the limit and they must not keep being left to bridge the gap between rent and

the amount we are able to recover via housing benefit subsidy. We need urgent government action to address the subsidy gap, alongside the creation of a more effective housing and welfare system that reduces – and, ideally, eliminates – reliance on temporary accommodation in the long term." ●

'Place-based' approach to employment

Local government is to be given nearly £300 million to develop new ways of tackling unemployment and inactivity, as part of the Get Britain Working White Paper.

Initiatives include place-based 'trailblazers' that will trial new approaches to developing the 'youth guarantee', guaranteeing education or training for all

young people to help them find a job, and to joining up work, health and skills systems to reduce economic inactivity because of ill-health.

Cllr Liam Robinson, Chair of the LGA's City Regions Board, said: "The adoption by the Government of a place-based approach is positive and something the LGA has long called for

through our Work Local proposals (see www.local.gov.uk/work-local).

"This signals a commitment from government to work with all of local government, from mayors to councils, in delivering new approaches that work best for their areas."

Cllr Martin Tett, Chairman of the LGA's People & Places Board, said: "Councils

want to do more to address recruitment challenges, across all sectors, that affect their places, including through using a far more flexible new growth and skills levy.

"We look forward to further details from the Government, and to working with it to plan how these changes will work in practice." ●

● See p16

Adult social care ‘needs 10-year plan’

The Government needs to co-create a 10-year plan for adult social care for the upcoming NHS long-term plan to succeed, the LGA has said.

In its response to the Change NHS consultation, it says a standalone plan that prioritises and recognises the full value of adult social care is crucial to giving the Government’s long-term ambitions for the NHS the best chance of success.

However, years of underfunding and rising demand have left adult social care struggling. In 2023/24, 72 per cent of

councils overspent on their social care budgets, with many using reserves to cover the shortfall. Increases to employer National Insurance contributions will add significant costs for councils (see below).

Cllr David Fothergill, Chair of the LGA’s Community Wellbeing Board, said: “It’s good to see the NHS getting a long-term plan, but adult social care needs the same level of focus and commitment at the top of government.

“Councils are ready to play their part in creating a healthier and more independent society, but this won’t happen without proper funding and support for adult social care.” ●

● See p12

Government ‘must fund NIC increases’ – LGA

Changes made to employer National Insurance contributions in October’s Budget must be fully funded in the forthcoming provisional local government finance settlement, the LGA has said.

It has calculated that the rise in contributions will increase council wage bills for directly employed staff by £637 million and add up to a further £1.13 billion to the wage bills of external providers of council-commissioned services – including £628 million for adult social care services alone.

Other organisations, including the Association of Directors of Social Services and the Nuffield Trust, have also raised concerns about increased costs arising from the National Insurance changes, and the impact these will have on adult social care in particular. LGA Chair Cllr Louise Gittins said it was “vital” the provisional finance settlement – due to be published before Christmas – covers the increase in National Insurance contributions.

“Without action, councils will be forced to make further cuts to statutory services, and risk not fulfilling some of their most important duties,” she added.

The finance settlement is due out the week of 16 December, and is expected to reflect the Government’s recent local



government finance policy statement, published in late November.

The statement set out proposals for changing the way the sector is funded, and committed to multi-year funding settlements from 2026 – something the LGA and councils have long called for.

Cllr Gittins said: “We look forward to working with government as part of the relationship reset between central and local government to co-create the key services and outcomes for local authorities to deliver, in the context of locally set priorities and a robust system of accountability and oversight.” ●

● See p24

Deadline set for cladding remediation

A 2029 deadline for removing dangerous cladding has been set by the Government, as part of a new Remediation Action Plan.

The deadline means that, by the end of 2029, all buildings more than 59 feet (18 metres) tall with unsafe cladding, that are on a government scheme, will have been remediated.

By the same date, every building more than 11 metres tall with unsafe cladding will either have been remediated, have a date for completion, or the landlords will be liable for severe penalties.

The plan seeks to identify at-risk buildings faster and fix them quicker. It identifies the main barriers to remediation as landlord reluctance, constrained regulatory capacity, and funding, and outlines plans to legislate to give regulators new enforcement powers.

Cllr Heather Kidd, Chair of the LGA’s Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: “Councils are committed to keeping tenants and residents safe, and are keen to work with government to drive the pace of remediation. However, for local government to carry out enforcement and address cladding issues as effectively and quickly as possible, multi-year funding arrangements are needed.”

Separately, the Government has rejected calls by the LGA for the new building safety levy to be collected through the centrally administered residential property developer tax, rather than individually by 296 local authorities in England.

The LGA continues to work with government to ensure that the process is as streamlined as possible, to minimise the administrative burden, and that there is a mechanism for full cost recovery, see www.local.gov.uk/building-safety-levy. ●

Children's social care reforms announced

The Government is introducing new reforms to stop children's home providers in England from making excessive profits, by requiring them to share financial information or face limits on their earnings.

LGA analysis found that the biggest 15 private providers make an average of 23 per cent profit, with more than 1,500 children in placements each costing the equivalent of half a million pounds every year.

Further plans for funding for children's social care – including investment in preventative services – are due to be set out in the upcoming provisional local government finance settlement.

Cllr Arooj Shah, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "It is positive to see the Government... pursuing an approach rooted in what we know works for children and their families.

"We are particularly pleased to see an ongoing focus on early help and family networks, and a strong commitment to tackling profiteering and other problems in the market for children's social care placements.

"Moving forward, progress will be limited by the significant funding and workforce challenges within children's social care, councils, and among partners more widely.

"It is vital that the Government uses the forthcoming Spending Review to ensure that all those working to keep children safe and to help them thrive have the resources they need to do that well." ●

13,000 children's social workers needed – LGA

The number of children's social workers employed by councils will need to increase by 13,000 – nearly a third – over the next decade because of growing need and to reduce increasing reliance on agency staff.

So says new research by the LGA, which is warning that, without greater investment in early help for children, thousands more children and family social workers will need hiring.

There were 32,952 children and family social workers in post in 2023, a figure that the LGA predicts will need to rise to 45,989 by 2034 – requiring 3,500 people to start social worker training every year for the foreseeable future.

Cllr Arooj Shah, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "It is vital we invest in early help and support so that fewer children and families see their needs escalating and requiring support from children's social care.



"Without this investment, thousands of additional children and family social workers will need to be hired over the next decade.

"We are calling on the Government to work with us on a workforce strategy that focuses on both recruitment and retention, including a national recruitment drive, training

programmes and bursaries.

"We need to make people aware that a career as a children's social worker can be a very positive, enriching and rewarding role that makes a profound difference to children's lives. Sadly, it is often a role that only gets attention when things go wrong." ●

● See p14, p26

£740m for SEND building adaptations

The Government has announced a £740 million funding package to increase the number of places for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in England.

The funding will go towards adapting school buildings to make them more accessible to children with SEND, and to creating specialist facilities within mainstream schools that can deliver more intensive support adapted to pupils' needs.

Cllr Arooj Shah, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "To tackle the challenges within the SEND

system, any reform must focus on boosting mainstream inclusion, and we are pleased government has set out steps towards this.

"However, the rising number of education, health and care plans means councils are under ever increasing financial pressure, so it is vital today's announcement is followed up with urgent action to write off councils' high needs deficits.

"Otherwise, many councils will face a financial cliff-edge, and be confronted with having to cut other services to balance budgets through no fault of their own, or their residents." ●

Rising care costs for working-age adults

The cost of care for working-age adults could reach £17 billion by 2030, according to a report last month from the County Councils Network.

Its analysis shows that meeting the care needs of working-age and lifelong disabled adults now accounts for 63 per cent of adult social care spending, despite making up only 40 per cent of users. The report calls for increased funding, housing reforms, and better integration with education and employment to improve outcomes and manage future costs.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said:

"Adult social care is often seen primarily as a service for older people, but many who access it are younger, working-age adults with disabilities.

"While their aspirations – such as independence, relationships and hobbies – may align with those of older generations, supporting them effectively requires a distinct approach.

"This report highlights the urgent need for focused attention on this group as we address funding and reform.

"Ensuring adequate resources to support working-age adults equally must be a government priority." ●

Prevention in adult care 'could save billions'

Investing in preventative support in social care could significantly improve lives and save £3.17 for every £1 spent, according to a report from the LGA and sector leaders.

The study, published at last month's National Children and Adult Services Conference in Liverpool, estimates £11.1 billion in potential public savings if preventative measures are scaled nationwide.

It highlights and costs proactive interventions – such as housing-related support, advocacy, promoting physical activity, peer support, and social prescribing – that can help individuals maintain health and independence.

These measures enable people to live with dignity and avoid crises. However, funding limitations mean councils often focus on urgent needs, leaving little for preventative services.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Properly funded preventative services would mean councils, working closely



with partners and people drawing on support, can maximise the impact of their resources and address community needs.

"This will also drive down demand for more expensive acute health and social care support."

The LGA is calling for government investment during the upcoming Spending Review, to pilot innovative early support programmes.

While the Budget allocated £600 million for social care, rising National Insurance and other staff costs are expected to offset much of this funding (see p5).

The report underscores that embedding prevention into health and care systems could save money and transform lives, but achieving this requires a stable, long-term financial strategy. ●

● See p13

News in brief

Men's health

Health Secretary Wes Streeting has confirmed plans for a men's health strategy, to be unveiled next year after a call for evidence. The LGA called for a strategy in August, warning of a "silent health crisis", with men dying, on average, nearly four years earlier than women, and suffering high rates of cancers, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and suicides (see first 697).

Substance misuse

The latest adult substance misuse treatment statistics, for 2023/24, show the largest rise in adults accessing treatment since 2008/09 – but also an increase in drug-related deaths, particularly from opiates. "Councils are collaborating with the NHS, mental health services, housing, and community groups to ensure affected individuals receive the help they need. By supporting people to stay healthy, councils reduce pressure on the NHS, social care, and the criminal justice system," said Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board.

Fast-food ads

The Government has confirmed a pre-watershed ban on junk food advertisements, set to take effect in October 2025 and aiming to prevent 20,000 cases of childhood obesity. Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Greater powers for councils to tackle the clustering of takeaways and restricting junk food advertising near schools, alongside extra investment in council-run programmes such as those promoting physical activity and healthy weight, can play an essential part in helping to curb child obesity."

News in brief

Older and sicker

Low-to-middle income families across Britain have got older and sicker over the past three decades, but they are still more likely to be in work today, according to the Resolution Foundation. LGA Resources Board Chair Cllr Pete Marland said: "Councils are central to leading and creating communities where people don't just survive, but thrive. Decent, affordable housing, greater investment in employment and skills services, improving public health to enable people to live longer and healthier lives, and the need for financial security are all essential elements to achieving this."

Green spaces

The provision of just 1 per cent more green space in the most deprived urban neighbourhoods could lead to fewer preventable deaths in these areas, according to recent research published in the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health. Cllr Liz Green, Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, said: "Over the past decade, £690 million of funding for parks has been lost, yet frequent park use is projected to be worth more than £30 billion per year to the UK population, translating to at least £100 million per year in savings to the NHS from fewer GP visits. Investment in parks and green spaces is not only a cost effective way to promote and improve health and wellbeing, but is a priority for all councils."

TB up 11%

Tuberculosis levels in England increased by 11 per cent in 2023, new data published by the UK Health Security Agency shows. There were 4,855 notifications of TB in 2023, compared with 4,380 in 2022, but England remains a low-incidence country for TB.

Ofsted warns of 'huge challenges'

While there are many reasons to be positive about the future of education and children's social care, huge challenges remain. So says education inspectorate Ofsted in its annual report, which warns that education and care providers are struggling to recruit and retain skilled staff, while the school absence rate remains higher than it was before the pandemic.

The report also highlights the huge strain on the special educational needs

and disability (SEND) system, as the number of children needing support continues to grow.

Cllr Arooj Shah, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "We continue to call for urgent reform to the SEND system, and the need to improve mainstream inclusion in schools to address rising need. Ofsted should also pause SEND area inspections and, instead, focus on the national, systemic issues within the SEND system.

"We also share Ofsted's concerns around homes for children in care, especially those who need the most specialist support." ●

Youth services 'under threat'

The LGA has warned that youth services are "under threat" without fresh investment in local grass-roots provision for young people.

It is calling for the tens of millions of pounds that were previously spent on the National Citizen Service to be devolved to councils and invested in local youth services.

The warning came alongside an LGA survey that found two-thirds of councils have not increased spending on youth services in the past five years.

Nine in 10 councils said they needed government funding to support investment into youth services, while revenue expenditure for overall youth services has stayed the same, or decreased, in 61 per cent of councils.

Despite these pressures, councils are trying to secure investment into youth services. The research found that, over the next three years, 42 per cent of councils said they planned to increase the number of hours of youth service support offered.

Cllr Arooj Shah, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "Youth services give essential support to young people – providing them with a safe place, trusted relationships and positive life experiences; stopping them from being drawn into negative situations; and reducing demand for acute services further down the line.

"Without adequate funding, many local youth services remain at risk of being reduced or are in danger of being cut altogether. To protect these essential services, increased funding is urgently needed, such as reallocating resources from the National Citizen Service." ●



Better information sharing needed to tackle ASB

Incidents of antisocial behaviour (ASB) are taking longer to tackle because of inconsistent and insufficient information sharing between agencies, a new survey of councils has found.

The joint survey, commissioned by the LGA and community safety organisation Resolve, highlights how poor-quality information sharing – particularly from housing providers to community safety partnerships (CSPs) – can delay action to address instances of ASB.

Eight out of 10 councils (83 per cent) reported that current information-sharing agreements between agencies cause delays



in their investigations and acting against perpetrators; and 94 per cent thought that, to a great or moderate extent, a closer relationship between housing providers and CSPs leads to improved outcomes relating to ASB.

Most councils (85 per cent) said they would support a single information-sharing agreement, standardising the process across the country and bringing more organisations in to access the data.

The LGA and Resolve are calling on the Government to standardise the sharing of ASB information and enable housing providers to work more closely with CSPs to improve ASB intervention outcomes.

Cllr Heather Kidd, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: "Tackling antisocial behaviour is a key priority not just for government, councils and the police, but for our residents too. This survey shows very clearly what councils want and need to be more effective in tackling ASB. It does not help residents if we see a delay in taking action because of poor information sharing and duplicate reports to agencies that should be working together." ●

Consultation on Right to Buy reforms

Newly built social homes could be protected from sale through exemptions to the Right to Buy scheme, and tenants will have to wait longer before they can buy their homes, under reforms proposed by the Government.

A consultation on the proposals is also seeking views on targets for councils to replace stock sold with homes for social rent of the same size and in the same area; and on

increasing, from five to 10 years, the period in which councils have the right to ask for repayment of all or part of the discount received when a property is sold.

Fewer than 48,000 social homes have been built or acquired using Right to Buy receipts since 2012, while more than 124,000 council homes have been sold in the same period.

Cllr Adam Hug, LGA Housing Spokesperson,

said: "The LGA has long called for reform to Right to Buy as, currently, it does not work for local authorities and those most in need of social housing.

"Councils are keen to collaborate with the Government to increase affordable housing and help people on waiting lists and stuck in temporary accommodation."

The consultation – available on gov.uk – closes on 15 January. ●

News in brief

'Inadequate' accounts

The National Audit Office has refused to sign off the whole government accounts for the first time because of severe backlogs in the auditing of English councils. Cllr Pete Marland, Chair of the LGA's Economy and Resources Board, said: "It has been clear for a long time that local audit is in crisis. The LGA has been making the case for a pragmatic solution to the local audit backlog for some time."

Family hubs

Low-income families are missing out on critical support because they face challenges accessing maternity, health visiting and family hubs, according to a report from the NSPCC and UNICEF UK. Services are often limited, hard to reach, under-resourced or unable to support the needs of families experiencing financial hardship. Cllr Arooj Shah, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "The most effective way to support low-income households and lift them out of poverty is through an adequately resourced national safety net, alongside sustainable long-term funding for vital council services."

Health checks

Fewer than half of eligible adults take part in NHS Health Checks, according to the National Audit Office. The checks are designed to help spot people at higher risk of certain health problems and offer tips on preventing them. Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "NHS health checks are a key part of many councils' health improvement programmes. However, since 2015, the public health grant has been reduced by £858 million, limiting councils' ability to fund the services."

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The Annual Fire Conference and Exhibition is a key event in the conference calendar for senior fire officers and members of fire and rescue authorities and provides an opportunity to meet in-person and discuss developments impacting the fire and rescue sector.

We will hear from a range of expert speakers about some of the key issues facing fire and rescue services and consider how we can meet these challenges.

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



Protecting renters' rights

New legislation will help reduce homelessness

Last month, a committee of MPs concluded its line-by-line consideration of the Renters' Rights Bill and will report back to the House of Commons shortly, giving all MPs the chance to debate this legislation.

The LGA has welcomed the bill, which aims to create a fairer, more secure, and higher-quality private rented sector for tenants and landlords alike.

Its measures include: abolishing unfair Section 21 'no fault' evictions; ending the system of assured shorthold tenancies; establishing a register of private rented-sector landlords, alongside a property portal, to drive up standards; and creating an ombudsman to resolve disputes between tenants and landlords.

During the last Parliament, the LGA raised strong concerns about delays and the removal of key measures from the previous government's Renters' (Reform) Bill (see **first** 693).

Most notably, we opposed a commencement clause that could indefinitely delay the ban on Section 21 evictions, the leading cause of homelessness presentations to local authorities and a key driver of the temporary accommodation crisis.

Since then, the LGA has lobbied extensively for meaningful reform, ensuring that the Renters' Rights Bill strikes the right balance between the rights of tenants and landlords.

We have engaged with government

ministers, MPs and Peers, and collaborated with organisations such as Shelter, Generation Rent, and Crisis.

This has included direct discussions with Housing Minister Matthew Pennycook MP, participation in ministerial roundtables, submitting written evidence to public bill committees, and briefing LGA witnesses to deliver oral evidence.

We have also coordinated briefings for parliamentarians, and regularly updated councils on the bill's progress and its potential impact.

In October, Cllr Adam Hug, Chair of the LGA's Local Infrastructure and Net Zero Board, gave oral evidence to the public bill committee, ensuring councils' concerns were clearly articulated.

This, alongside sustained lobbying, has helped secure significant amendments to the bill, which now incorporates nearly all of the LGA's priorities.

The updated bill delivers a definitive end to Section 21 evictions, providing much-needed protection for tenants and addressing a major cause of homelessness.

It also introduces safeguards against above-market rent increases and backdoor evictions.

By applying the Decent Homes Standard and Awaab's Law to the private rented sector, the bill ensures higher property standards and greater tenant safety.

Additionally, it bans discrimination against tenants in receipt of benefits or with children, which will assist councils in supporting vulnerable residents.

Crucially, the bill enhances enforcement powers for councils by expanding the use of rent repayment orders, giving local authorities more tools to tackle non-compliant landlords effectively.

These measures represent a significant step forward in empowering councils to address challenges in the private rented sector, reduce homelessness, and protect tenants.

The LGA remains committed to lobbying government and working with MPs across both Houses of Parliament to ensure the successful implementation of these much-needed reforms. ●



NHS reform

Adult social care needs a 10-year plan too



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

In last month's **first**, we updated you on Change NHS, the nationwide consultation on a 10-year plan for the health service, and encouraged you to respond. While the deadline for organisation responses has now passed, councils can still have their voices heard – see above, right, for how to get involved.

In its response to the consultation, the LGA has welcomed the three shifts that the Government set out in its vision for the NHS: analogue to digital; treatment to prevention; and hospitals to community.

These are the right things to do, but they are not new ambitions. We know that to truly deliver these shifts, improved

collaboration between health partners, local authorities and the voluntary and community sector will be vital.

No one organisation holds the levers to bring about the changes needed to tackle health inequalities and improve the years we all spend in good health.

Tackling health inequalities must be at the core of the plan, which means the vital role of councils in addressing the wider determinants of health – through our role in housing, green spaces, youth services and the local economy – must be too.

Adult social care, public health and children's services – planned, commissioned and provided by councils – are also all key to preventing ill health and improving overall health and wellbeing.

To meaningfully tackle the deepening inequalities we see in our communities, we need to truly embrace a shift in priorities and back this up with the necessary activity and resources. This must be place-based and build on the rich data and insight held across local services.

The LGA is also urging the Government to co-create a 10-year plan for adult social care, equivalent to the upcoming NHS long-term plan (see p5). A standalone plan that prioritises and recognises the full value of adult social care is crucial to giving the Government's ambitions for our NHS the best chance of success.

The 10-year plan, and the services and systems it sets out, must also be person-centred – designed around the individual and the outcomes that are important to them.

We are encouraged that the engagement process is putting the voice and

Workshop in a box

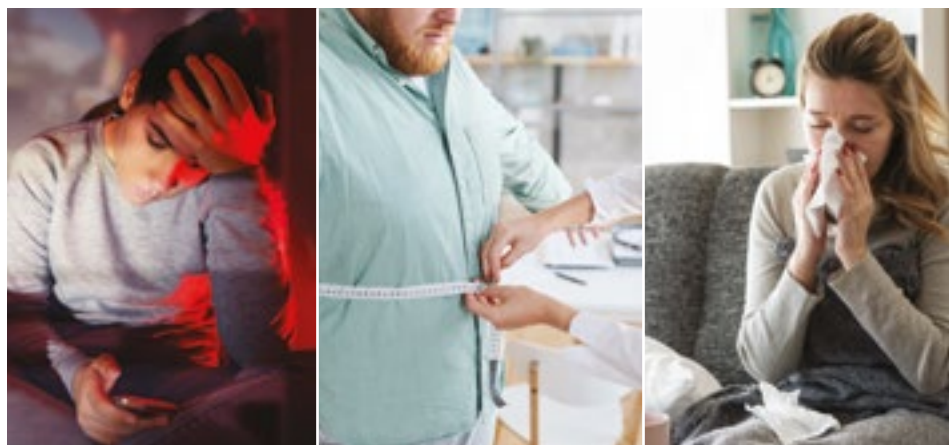
While the deadline for organisations to respond to the Change NHS consultation has passed, councils can still help residents to share their views and insights on health service reform by facilitating local workshop reform by facilitating local workshops. These are set to run until mid-January, with 14 February the deadline for submitting feedback. The Government has provided 'Workshop in a Box' resources to help with this – see [change.nhs.uk/en-GB/folders/community-engagement](https://www.change.nhs.uk/en-GB/folders/community-engagement)

experience of people who use and provide services at its core. This must continue to be an expectation going forward for all who commission and deliver services, to build in real and meaningful citizen engagement and service user feedback.

Services and the frameworks that sit around them must respond to people and their needs, and not those of the organisations that deliver and commission them. Consequently, the LGA's consultation response shines a light on some specific cohorts, given the scale of the challenges they face – including people with mental illness, children and young people, and children with special educational needs and disabilities.

The LGA will continue to share the views, and emphasise the crucial role, of local government in the NHS consultation and engagement process – so please help us by sharing your good practice examples, particularly around prevention and tackling health inequalities, by emailing healthandcare@local.gov.uk.

Finally, it's crucial that councils continue to shape the plan, so please encourage your staff and residents to share their ideas through the online platform at www.change.nhs.uk (see also above). Let's continue to ensure that local government's voice is heard. ●



The LGA's response to the Change NHS consultation can be read in full at www.local.gov.uk/change-nhs-have-your-say

Changing lives

Investing in prevention is key to healthier communities



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

Investing in prevention in adult social care is not just the right thing to do – it's the smart thing to do.

The LGA's latest report, 'Earlier action and support', developed in partnership with leaders across the social care field, shows that for every £1 we spend on early support, we could save £3.17 – potentially unlocking £11.1 billion in savings to the public purse.

But more importantly, we could change lives.

Prevention is about much more than numbers. It's about enabling people to live their lives with dignity, independence and purpose.

Whether it's housing-related support, social prescribing, or promoting physical activity, these interventions give people the tools to maintain their health and avoid crisis points.

Imagine a society where fewer people face homelessness, where older adults can stay active and engaged, and where families aren't stretched to

“Prevention is about much more than numbers. It's about enabling people to live their lives with dignity”

breaking point because of inadequate support. This vision is achievable, but only if we act now.

Councils like ours stand at the heart of these efforts. Through public health initiatives, social care, housing, and even green spaces, we are uniquely positioned to drive change.

Yet, despite the growing evidence of prevention's benefits, our resources remain stretched to the limit.

Increasing demand on frontline services often forces councils to prioritise urgent needs, leaving little room to invest in the very measures that would reduce these pressures in the long run. This funding imbalance is both frustrating and short-sighted.

It was deeply disappointing to see no specific funding in the recent Budget for preventative health and social care initiatives.

While the £600 million announced for adult social care is helpful, it's nowhere near enough to address the challenges we face.

Rising costs, such as increases to the National Living Wage and employer National Insurance contributions, will consume much of this funding, leaving little for the transformative work that prevention requires.



We need a stable, long-term financial framework that enables councils to invest in preventative services consistently.

Piloting innovative early support programmes in local areas is a great start, allowing us to assess what works best in different communities. However, these pilots must be backed by sustained funding, not fleeting grants that vanish before real change can take root.

The upcoming Spending Review is a crucial opportunity for the Government to reverse this trend. We need investment in prevention to be embedded at the core of health and care systems, not treated as a luxury that only materialises when budgets allow. This means funding services that boost life chances, prevent illness, and delay the need for costly acute care.

I am proud of the coalition of

support we've built around this report, including individuals with lived experience and partners across the sector. Together, we're sending a clear message: prevention isn't an optional extra – it's an essential component of a thriving, sustainable health and care system.

Councils, working closely with our partners and the people we serve, could maximise resources, reduce the need for more expensive interventions, and create healthier, more resilient communities. It's time to act, to invest in prevention, and to give people the chance to lead the lives they deserve. ●

i 'Earlier action and support: the case for prevention in adult social care and beyond' can be read in full at www.local.gov.uk/publications

Love and fun

The LGA has published its vision for children and young people



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

The LGA has laid out a transformative roadmap to create supportive environments in which children can thrive, underpinned by the things that children and young people themselves have told us are important to them.

Launched at the National Children and Adult Services Conference (NCASC) in Liverpool late last month, 'Our vision for children, young people and families' states that, while childhood can be joyous and exciting, it also comes with challenges that shape resilience and growth.

By addressing key needs and building on local councils' expertise, the vision outlines a comprehensive strategy based on five key pillars: love, fun, a chance to learn and grow, safety, and health.

At the heart of the vision is the recognition that love is essential for every child. Loving homes and relationships are fundamental to nurturing confidence, emotional security, and resilience. This principle underscores the need for policies and services that support families to provide stable, affectionate environments for children.

Fun is also a crucial part of childhood. Opportunities for play, leisure, and creative exploration not only contribute to a child's happiness, but also foster social skills and cognitive development.

To support this, the vision calls for investment in local cultural and recreational activities, including parks, sports facilities, libraries, and museums. These resources, coordinated by councils, create vibrant communities where children

can safely enjoy themselves and form lasting friendships.

Education – the chance to learn and grow – lies at the core of personal growth and future independence. However, the report acknowledges that the educational landscape has become fragmented, presenting challenges for equitable access to quality learning.

It calls for councils to play a co-leadership role, alongside schools and other educational providers, to ensure every child receives the support they need, including children with special educational needs and disabilities.

The report also emphasises the importance of tailoring education to individual needs, preparing children not just for academic success but also for meaningful employment and lifelong learning. It urges reforms to make schools more inclusive and adaptable, ensuring all children have a chance to thrive.

Whether ensuring secure housing, addressing child homelessness, or protecting vulnerable children in care, safety is a recurring theme throughout the report. Children must feel – and be – safe to explore the world confidently, including online.

The report also highlights the importance of tackling discrimination and systemic inequalities that undermine safety and wellbeing for marginalised groups, including black children, LGBTQIA+ youth, and children with disabilities. By creating inclusive and non-discriminatory services, councils can foster environments where all children feel valued and protected.

Finally, the report places equal emphasis on physical and mental health, advocating for timely access to healthcare, preventative services, and mental health support. It acknowledges the critical role of addressing the wider determinants of health – such as housing,



“Children must feel – and be – safe to explore the world confidently, including online”

nutrition and poverty – while also calling for better integration between health and social care services.

Rising demand for mental health support also underscores the need for accessible and tailored support for children and young people.

The report highlights that delivering on these five major themes requires collaboration across all levels of government, as well as with private, public and voluntary organisations.

Councils, as leaders of their communities, are seen as critical to designing and delivering services that reflect local needs.

To achieve the vision outlined, the report makes several key recommendations, including for a cross-government strategy for children, and on funding, workforce, housing, education, and data

“Homelessness and reliance on insecure accommodation must end”



their needs, as well as to a safe, warm and stable home with enough space to thrive. Homelessness and reliance on insecure accommodation – such as hotels or bed and breakfasts – must end.

Homes should be adaptable to meet the needs of children with disabilities and provide suitable environments for children in care.

Health starts early, and universal preventative services such as health visiting and school nursing are critical for identifying risks and providing early interventions. Long-term investment in these services improves children's school readiness, resilience, and future employment prospects.

Every child must have access to high-quality healthcare, including NHS dentistry and mental health support.

For children with chronic conditions or disabilities, integrated health and social care services should ensure timely, appropriate care and smooth transitions into adult services.

Mental health support requires a whole-system approach. Inclusive schools, accessible leisure activities, and early intervention can prevent issues from escalating. Mental health support teams should be available in schools and communities, with rapid access to specialist services for children in care or seeking asylum.

Families must be able to afford nutritious food, and free school meals should be easily accessible to eligible children. Education on cooking and budgeting promotes lifelong health.

Climate change action at all levels safeguards children's futures, addressing risks to health and homes while supporting mental wellbeing.

Together, these measures lay a foundation for every child to thrive and live to their fullest potential. ●

and partnerships. It says the Department for Education must lead on a cross-Whitehall ambition for babies, children and young people, informed by children themselves and with the role of each department clearly articulated, along with the introduction of 'children and young people impact assessments', to ensure the voices and needs of children are central to all new policies and legislation.

Additionally, every service supporting babies, children and young people needs long-term sufficient and sustainable funding that prioritises both early intervention and universal services, reducing the need for crisis interventions.

Recognising shortages in key professions such as social work, teaching and health services, our vision calls for a workforce plan for children's services. We need investment in training, recruitment and retention to build a robust workforce dedicated to supporting children and families.

A clear housing plan is essential to eliminate child homelessness and provide stable accommodation for children in care; and councils, schools and other providers

should work together to create inclusive educational environments that nurture every child's potential.

Improved data sharing and partnerships between councils, schools, health services and other agencies are also key to delivering coordinated support and achieving better outcomes for children.

A major theme in the vision is the need to tackle inequality and discrimination head-on. It calls for comprehensive measures to address disparities in education, health and social services, ensuring that no child is left behind because of their background or circumstances.

So, where do we want to get to?

Our vision is one where no child grows up in poverty. Families must have sufficient resources to live healthily, with welfare systems and local support networks enabling financial resilience and supporting parents to work where possible.

Access to flexible childcare is vital for working families, alongside high-quality early education for children.

Every child deserves access to a good local school with the right support to meet

Driving economic inclusion

A new LGA report makes the case for council powers on transport



Councillor Liam Robinson is Chair of the LGA's City Regions Board and Councillor Martin Tett is Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board

Local transport is too often a barrier to economic inclusion. Jobs on industrial estates that can't be reached either by bus, on foot or by bike safely; shifts that start before the first bus leaves or finish after the last bus has left; travel to college

courses, which is expensive and time-consuming.

People in the lowest income groups are the least likely to have a car, so must rely, at least initially, on public transport, walking and cycling to access training and job opportunities.

Better local transport systems, integrated with devolved skills support, provide an opportunity for a place-based, user-centred approach to support economic inclusion and deliver on two of the Government's five key missions: growth and opportunity. So says a new LGA-commissioned report from Pragmatix, which concludes that the



benefits to individuals, local communities and the wider national economy of better local transport are substantial, especially at a time of tight budgets and labour markets.

The Government's own 'return on investment' tool shows that helping someone back into work provides a £3,500 boost to their income, while national government benefits by £11,400 and wider society by £23,000.

Modelling for the report, based on UK data, finds that a 1 per cent improvement in public transport journey times could support a 0.91 per cent reduction in employment deprivation (that is, the share of people who are either looking for work or would look for work with the right support or offer). Reducing the share of households without access to a car could support a 0.77 per cent reduction in employment deprivation.

However, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to local

transport, as the demands for transport vary across place – just as there is no one-size-fits-all approach to supporting someone into work.

Case studies included in the report ('Local transport and economic inclusion for growth', see www.local.gov.uk/publications) highlight how transport challenges vary across places. For example, in South Staffordshire, many smaller communities are not connected to bus or rail routes, making it difficult for residents to access education, employment and training.

In Northumberland, the number of workers in sectors with different shift patterns, and the mismatch between public transport schedules and the needs of workers, is a major concern.

In Nottingham, 7 per cent of 16 to 17-year-olds are not in education, employment or training. While the city enjoys frequent and efficient transport links serviced



“Local government is the cornerstone organisation to convene local employers, transport operators and skills providers”



by both buses and trams, the persistent challenge of expensive transport, especially for the most disadvantaged, is a concern.

In the London Borough of Lambeth, which is served by good bus, underground and rail links, day-to-day difficulties reaching work were not identified as a common challenge. The research highlighted other issues for residents, including concerns about safety and affordability.

In East Lindsey, meanwhile, a lack of transport options means residents cannot readily access healthcare

and, therefore, become economically inactive because of ill health for longer periods.

The Government has just opened up automatic franchising powers to all councils, beyond the mayors empowered by the Bus Services Act 2017, and the new Buses Bill will make the franchising process easier, improve statutory ‘enhanced partnerships’, and enable the creation of new municipal bus companies. But current funding arrangements restrict councils’ ability to use their powers to tailor local transport investment and spending to



local need and opportunity.

Similarly, the employment and skills system is centralised and fragmented. This makes joining up policies difficult across a place.

Despite this, councils are working within the confines of a patchy system to bring services and strategies together to provide place-based integration of local skills interventions, spatial strategies and economic development that put the user at the centre of policy.

Local government is the only constant in an ever-changing employment and skills landscape. We are the cornerstone organisation to convene local employers, transport operators and skills providers to support users.

The LGA has set out its Work Local offer to improve employment and skills services locally, to boost growth and widen economic inclusion across all ages (see www.local.gov.uk/work-local).

We want to see councils given equivalent control and flexibility over local transport policy, for which they have similar responsibilities but not the requisite powers or funding to deliver.

The LGA’s local transport report calls on the Government to help councils bring down

“Councils are working within a patchy system to bring services and strategies together”

the barriers to economic inclusion by providing:

- sufficient devolved and flexible local transport funding, so councils can invest in transport to respond to local circumstances and opportunity, rather than reflect central government funding pots
- devolved and flexible funding for employment and skills to deliver Work Local
- multi-year funding settlements to enable ambitious plans and effective coordination among local partners
- a comprehensive settlement for councils to address complex local challenges, including economic inclusion, across transport, employment, skills, and beyond. ●

i Please visit www.local.gov.uk/topics/employment-and-skills to find out more about the LGA’s work

Putting local government first

The LGA's membership magazine has clocked up **700 editions**

The more things change, the more they stay the same – or so said French writer Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr in 1849.

It can certainly feel like that when you look back over 700 editions of the LGA's **first** magazine, and reflect on the local government priorities and issues highlighted in the stories they contain.

Adult social care, children's services, housing, funding and finance, the environment, devolution, inequalities and social justice have been recurring challenges over the 25 years since the first edition of **first** was published, in October 1999 – but, between the lines, progress and improvement is there to be seen.

Back then, **first** reported that recently appointed Health Secretary Alan Milburn had set out his "vision for the future of social services", including the "need for all levels of government and different agencies to work together".

All eight regional development agencies had presented their strategies for generating economic prosperity in the English regions to Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott.

Shadow Education Secretary Theresa May was due to speak at the LGA's annual education conference in Kent, following a Conservative Party conference at which "the Tories unveiled a new approach to LEAs".

Members of the LGA's waste and environmental executive were calling for funding from government to help councils with the "laudable aim of moving from landfill to more sustainable methods of waste management recycling".

Some councillors were worried about the introduction of the 'mayor and cabinet' style of decision-making to local government. And the LGA

700
editions



was proudly announcing the opening of the business centre in its new Westminster headquarters. This was "set up expressly with councillors in mind", with a message service, LGA publications, Audit Commission reports, the day's newspapers, and – "for the more technologically minded" – provision for laptops, fax and copying facilities...

A hundred editions and 16 months later, in February 2002, key stories included: Will Young polling more votes in ITV's Pop Idol than two of the three major parties received in the previous general election; the lessons to be learned from the inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié; and the naming of the 10

pathfinder councils undergoing the Audit Commission's first comprehensive performance assessments.

In **first 200**, published in April 2004, the cover story was about the latest round of beacon council awards, with 63 local authorities in England recognised for their delivery of high-quality public services.

Employers and the Fire Brigades Union were "nearing the end of a complex two years of negotiations arising from the national fire service dispute in 2002", with the Audit Commission's first inspection of fire authorities showing that most were improving.

The Leadership Development Commission, a local government partnership led by the Employers' Organisation and the Improvement and Development Agency, launched the sector's first national leadership strategy.

The Welsh Assembly announced that means-tested grants would be reintroduced for students in higher and further education. And the LGA and the County Councils Network published new research urging councils in England to "act now" to make sure they got the best deal for local people if referendums, planned for the autumn, led to the election of regional assemblies.

In the end, only one referendum went ahead, in the North East, which rejected a regional assembly by a 77.9 to 22.1 per cent, marking the end of the then Labour Government's devolution plans for England.

By issue 300 and June 2006, councils in England were "on course to deliver £1.3 billion of efficiency gains", as part of the Gershon efficiency drive to reduce bureaucracy and free up funding for frontline services or keep council tax increases down.

Over the years, national political leaders and ministers of all political colours have featured in first, in interviews, contributed articles and reports of their speeches at LGA annual conference, see pictured...



Ed Davey



Angela Rayner



Hilary Benn



Greg Clark



Rishi Sunak



Caroline Lucas



John Healey



Jim McMahon



Michael Gove

Sir Michael Lyons' government-commissioned independent inquiry into local government funding, the function of the sector and its future role, was also in full flow, with Sir Michael due to speak at the LGA's annual conference.

first decided to blow its own trumpet in November 2008, with a montage of previous front covers celebrating its 400th edition. Stories inside reflected on the chronic under-representation of ethnic minority women in local government, an investigation by council trading standards officers that had found patients' health was being put at risk by inaccurate hospital scales, and an LGA call for a legal loophole to be closed so councils could prevent the spread of lap-dancing clubs.

By **first 500**, in May 2011, the magazine was being published fortnightly, the LGA had rebadged itself (briefly) as the

Local Government Group, and Baroness Margaret Eaton – the LGA's first woman chairman – was nearing the end of her term. Key concerns included: a localism bill that provided for an "inordinate number of powers for the secretary of state to issue regulation and guidance"; a local government resource review looking at reforms to the business rates system; and LGA calls to cut burdens and reduce costs by reducing the amount of "nannying guidance" issued to councils.

Five years later, in June 2016, **first 600** – now a monthly publication – led on the previous month's local election results, and how "the two main parties continue to have more than 80 per cent of the councillors in England". Other stories included: 'Doing more with more?' – on councils having to take on more responsibilities in return for retention of local business rates; an LGA

call for evidence on ways of improving the reputation of local government with residents; and a round-up of how the LGA had influenced legislation over the previous parliamentary year.

A quarter of a century from that first edition, this 700th issue continues to reflect on key themes for local government: funding, children and young people, sustainability, improvement, economic inclusion, adult social care, housing, and preventative services.

If **first** magazine continues to be published 10 times a year, as now, it will be 2034 before we hit our 800th edition. Given the political turmoil and flux of the past decade, it feels hard to predict what will be happening in two years' time, never mind 10. But if local government has anything to do with it, there will be many more 'firsts' and successes. ●



Tackling frontline issues

Ten officers are taking on the LGA's latest Local Government Challenge

Meet the contestants



Mike Campbell
Senior Transformation Programme
Manager, London Borough of
Waltham Forest

"I applied because I am eager to test my strengths and develop areas that will help me become a more impactful, modern public servant. I look forward to learning from the innovative work other councils are doing, and bringing those insights back to benefit the residents of Waltham Forest."



Angelo Da Costa Mengowako
Commissioning Officer, London
Borough of Tower Hamlets

"This is a unique chance to delve into diverse local issues across the country, promoting collaborative problem-solving with peers. I am excited to work alongside this year's cohort to identify and implement solutions that enhance our communities, deepening my understanding and practical application of public policy."



Adeel Hussain
Registration and Nationality Services
Manager and Proper Officer, Surrey
County Council

"The LG Challenge presents an exciting and ambitious step in my journey towards senior leadership within local government. It is a unique opportunity to develop critical leadership skills, test innovative ideas, and contribute meaningfully to local government's evolving landscape."



Rebecca Dentith
Business Change Analyst, North
Yorkshire Council

"LG Challenge is a unique opportunity to work with, and learn from, people across different authorities and services areas, and to work collaboratively to address real issues affecting the public sector. I look forward to learning from my cohort and furthering my knowledge and understanding."



Amy Liple
Senior Policy and Insights Officer,
Basildon Borough Council

"I applied for the LG Challenge to further develop my leadership and innovation skills in a high-stakes environment. The opportunity to tackle real-life challenges across diverse councils excites me, as I believe it will enhance my ability to create impactful policies and empower communities."



Shohum Dave
Senior Auditor and Fraud Analyst,
Fareham Borough Council

"I applied to the LG Challenge as I saw it as a great opportunity to help me develop my leadership and problem-solving skills. I thought it would be a great way to meet new people and to discover innovative ways of dealing with challenges that can benefit Fareham Borough Council and the local community."

The LGA's popular competition, Local Government Challenge, is a development programme for aspiring local government leaders.

The programme takes a cohort of 10 officers to five real-life challenges at councils across the country. It culminates in a final event at the LGA's annual conference, in Liverpool (1-3 July), where the four finalists will pitch project proposals of their own design to delegates and a judging panel.

They will be vying for the prestigious £10,000 Bruce-Lockhart Scholarship, which enables the winner to fulfil their

proposal back at their home council.

For the challenges, the officers work in teams and are encouraged to step out of their comfort zone, putting forward fresh ideas and perspectives on the real-life issues with which the host council is grappling – all the while establishing a network of peers for the future.

The 2025 cohort represents varying levels and service areas from across local government, and the programme will broaden knowledge and hone the key skills required to succeed as a leader.

You can find out more about our new cohort of LG Challenge hopefuls below, and we can announce that the first challenge will be hosted by Buckinghamshire Council in January.

Cllr Martin Tett, Buckinghamshire's Leader, said: "The challenge is a fantastic chance for participants to stretch themselves. I am a firm believer that councils should take every opportunity to learn from each other as part of how we continue to develop as organisations and as a sector as a whole."

The Bruce-Lockhart Scholarship has kindly been supported by Essex and Kent County Councils since the inception of the LG Challenge in 2009, in memory of Sandy Bruce-Lockhart, a former Leader of Kent County Council and Chairman of the LGA.

Follow the journey of the LG Challenge hopefuls on the LGA's YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/@LocalGovAssoc, and on LinkedIn at www.linkedin.com/company/lg-challenge. ●



Jess Finnin

**Cohesive Communities Manager,
London Borough of Havering**

"The breadth of services we provide with the resources available can sometimes be nothing short of monumental. Taking part will be an opportunity to tackle things head on and will give the opportunity to take that learning and those new connections back with me."



Aoife O'Gorman

**Regeneration and Place Programme
Officer, Warwickshire County Council**

"Visiting councils and tackling shared issues with a team drawn from across the country is a fantastic opportunity to engage with new ways of thinking, and to learn from each other. Above all, though, the LG Challenge seemed like a fun way to gain experience and push myself out of my comfort zone!"



Harriet Vitty

**Lawyer – Education and
Special Educational Needs,
Liverpool City Council**

"I applied to take part because it sounded like a unique and exciting opportunity to gain experience and acquire skills in areas that are not currently part of my day job. I consider that the LG Challenge will provide me with invaluable experience, making me a better local government lawyer."



Helen Potter

**Insight Manager, Telford &
Wrekin Council**

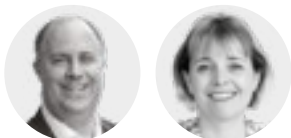
"I applied for the LG Challenge as a unique opportunity to get an insight into the work of other councils, to push myself out of my comfort zone into new challenges, gain inspiration from seeing other leaders in action, and to experience situations that I wouldn't encounter in my day-to-day role."

i To find out more about Local Government Challenge, please visit www.local.gov.uk/lg-challenge



Act local, impact global

The LGA has been promoting councils' work on sustainability



Councillor Adam Hug is Chair of the LGA's Local Infrastructure and Net Zero Board, and Councillor Abi Brown is Chair of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board

COP29 – the 2024 United Nations Climate Change Conference – took place in Baku, Azerbaijan, last month, with more than 100 political leaders from local and regional governments in attendance.

Although it was not in Baku, the LGA continues to influence local government engagement with COP through the Local Governments and Municipal Authorities Constituency (LGMA). This year, the LGA endorsed the co-created LGMA Joint Position, which has three clear asks:

- to accelerate inclusive, multi-level (international, national, regional and local) climate action that is responsive to agendas around climate, nature, pollution and sustainable development, by incorporating local and sub-regional governments into new, nationally determined contributions, adaptation plans and other national goals
- finance sustainable urbanisation and climate action to all government levels
- align the climate, nature, pollution, and sustainable development agendas by building on the COP28 Joint Statement on Climate, Nature and People.

For the duration of COP29, the LGA 'Act Local, Impact Global' campaign unfolded across social media to promote notable council good practice and the LGA's Sustainability Improvement programme.

Cllr Louise Gittins, Chair of the LGA,



welcomed the opening of COP29 in a video, and highlighted the key role that councils play in tackling climate change locally. The campaign shone a spotlight on the innovative sustainability work being done by councils.

For example, Newham Council has introduced the UK's first 'Just Transition' plan, shifting the focus from a purely decarbonisation approach to a wider stance of embedding core principles of increasing equity for residents and adapting to the worsening impacts of climate change.

Wirral Council's 'Active Wirral Energy Efficiency Programme' implemented a comprehensive range of interventions to target energy-intensive leisure services.

This resulted in £231,000 in avoided costs and 335 tonnes of CO₂ emissions saved, which is the equivalent of driving around the globe 10 times in an SUV.

Several councils are also leading in renewable energy, including Bristol City Council, which generates more than 3,000GWh from wind and solar, and Warrington Borough Council, which has taken a commercial approach to public sector investment in clean energy, and developed and acquired two large solar farms.

Last month, the LGA hosted a virtual

event on 'COP29: the importance of local government's role in sustainability', chaired by Cllr Linda Foley (Lab) from Manchester City Council.

Four speakers shared how their local authorities are addressing climate action, focusing on three key themes from the COP29 framework. They outlined how they are reducing greenhouse gas emissions at the local level to reach below the 1.5°C target; identified their role in enhancing ambition and enabling action; and highlighted the importance of inclusivity across climate work.

The LGA's Sustainability Improvement programme, funded by and delivered in partnership with the Crown Commercial Service, provides tools and opportunities to build councils' capability and capacity in sustainability and the environment.

The programme enables councils to learn from notable practice in the sector, showcased in our case study database.

Information on upcoming support offers for councils – such as carbon literacy masterclasses, virtual events and roundtables – can be found on the LGA's online Sustainability Hub (see information box, below), and you can keep up to date by signing up for our monthly sustainability e-bulletin at www.local.gov.uk/e-bulletins ●

i See www.local.gov.uk/sustainability-hub for more on the LGA's COP-related work, support for councils, and council case studies. To find out more about the LGMA, please visit moredetails.uk/3Vsmv35



Councillor Tim Oliver is Chairman of the County Councils Network

Last month, we welcomed the great and the good of the local government world to Buckinghamshire, for the County Councils Network's (CCN's) Annual Conference 2024. We met in Marlow under dramatically different political circumstances compared with recent history. But while it is all change in the composition of MPs in the Commons, CCN's approach to advocacy has not changed.

Irrespective of who is in charge nationally, the CCN has always been collaborative and constructive. Equally, however, we do not shy away from pointing out the proposals that our members believe to be detrimental to residents.

Since the general election, we have had a number of advocacy successes: first, on pointing out the dramatic (and unfunded) costs of the adult social care charging reforms, no matter how laudable they were.

More recently, we secured a pledge from this government to reform children's social care and the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system.

It was CCN's research that laid bare the financial challenge facing local government this Parliament, on the eve of the Budget, that contributed to the Chancellor taking action. In particular, the extra £1 billion 'downpayment' for SEND services ahead of substantial reform will be vital, as long as this funding comes direct to



Laying bare the financial challenges

councils, which bear the brunt of costs.

However, as I said in my opening speech at the CCN's conference, just days after the Budget, the devil will be in the detail.

Since then, it has become clear that upper-tier councils will face significant direct and indirect costs because of the National Living Wage and National Insurance contribution increases.

Worse still for county and unitary councils, the proposed distribution of an extra £600 million for local government via a 'recovery grant' is highly targeted and based on a deprivation formula. Despite CCN members being under intense financial pressure, it is likely very few will get any money at all from this grant.

Of course, we recognise

deprivation is a key indicator of need. That is why counties receive significantly less per head in the social care grant than other parts of the sector.

But, deprivation is not the main driver of the unsustainable rise in costs over the past few years, particularly in children's services and SEND provision. Government must address these short-term costs effectively if we are to succeed in reforming both.

Linked to funding, the Government's devolution white paper is also imminent at the time of writing.

We can expect reorganisation to play a big part in the document, with the Government attracted to streamlining local government as part of its reform of public service agenda.

Proposals should use

whole-county geographies as the starting point (for both reorganisation and devolution), with a minimum population limit of 500,000 for any new authorities.

Once these conditions are in place, the Government can expect us to be a pragmatic and collaborative partner.

Heading into 2025, there are many unknowns for local government, not least across finance, reorganisation and devolution.

Big changes – and decisions – are coming down the line, and CCN will ensure the county voice is at the forefront of the Government's thinking. ●

i To find out more about the CCN, please visit www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk

GROUP LEADERS



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

Devolve to councils as they are

We are in tempestuous times, with UK Government announcements expected in a white paper on devolution, local government reform, and the provisional finance settlement – all in the week before Christmas.

We have called for devolution of power and money to our councils as they are, but it seems it now has to come with reorganisation, which many of our members, in district councils especially, find unhelpful and unwelcome.

The LGA has lost more than 200 members in dissolving councils in just one area, and now it seems the Government is looking to repeat the process with up to 12 areas.

Also, the Government's plans for "strengthening the teeth" of councillor standards may be a good thing, but how do we ensure that it is not the bullies using the system to their political advantage?

There is a lot for us to work on.

The LGA's Independent Group is drawing on the experience and requests of its members with a devolution working group, and our fortnightly council leader forum and monthly opposition leader forum.

Our new constitution was successfully passed at our AGM in Harrogate in July. That meeting was also a heart-searching discussion of the way in which our Independent Group recognises and includes all of its member groups, and our group executive has now taken on this work.

"Devolution now has to come with reorganisation, which many find unhelpful and unwelcome"

Our next event is huge – our LGA Independent Group annual conference in Berkshire from 10-11 January – which I know will be a happy and exciting event, focusing on our work for our members and residents (see www.local.gov.uk/events).

It is not to be missed and will have fundamental implications for our group and wider afield, as the devolution white paper should be out for consultation at the same time. Come along and make your voices heard! ●

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

Investing in prevention



Councillor Louise Gittins is Chair of the LGA

The Government's finance policy statement, published late last month, outlined its intentions for the provisional local government finance settlement for 2025/26.

The statement set out proposed changes to how local government is funded, and included a commitment to multi-year settlements for councils.

The LGA has worked hard to set out the benefits of investing in prevention, rather than a reactive, demand-led model to service spending, so it was positive that the paper also signalled a greater focus on funding for preventative services.



We now await the provisional finance settlement – which we expect to be published the week commencing 16 December – so we can fully understand the implications of the announcements for individual councils.

The extra funding in October's Budget will also help meet some, but not all, of the significant pressures in adult and children's social care, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and homelessness support.

However, it is vital that the provisional finance settlement also now fully funds the changes to employer National Insurance contributions included in the Budget.

Our new analysis shows that these additional costs will lead to a £637 million increase in councils' wage bills for directly employed staff, and up to £1.13 billion in indirect costs via external providers, including up to £628 million for commissioned adult social care services.

Without action, we know that councils will be forced to make further cuts to statutory services, and risk not fulfilling some of their most important duties.

The LGA remains clear that immediate financial support and long-term funding reform and certainty – alongside a focus on preventative spending – are essential to protect services and enable councils to help tackle our national challenges, from social care to housing, inclusive economic growth, and tackling climate change. ●



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

Councils let down by funding system

The local government funding reforms announced on 28 November are welcome.

In recent years, councils and their residents have been let down by an unsound funding system, which has resulted in some councils increasing their reserves while others struggle to deliver vital services.

This was not only an inefficient use of public finances, but it disproportionately negatively impacted those in greatest need.

The new, fairer system will match funding with need, while, overall, local government is expected to receive a real-term increase in core spending power of around 3.2 per cent, with no council seeing a reduction.

“The new, fairer system will match funding with need”

There is no quick fix to overcome the deep-seated problems in local government finance, but it is clear that this government is taking steps to fix the foundations for the long term.

The decision to target support is an example of a government unafraid to make strong, measured decisions and prioritise looking out for those who need it most.

I was particularly heartened to see that local leaders will be extensively consulted on this reform, demonstrating the Government's understanding of our role as a genuine partner to deliver change in our country.

We all know that reform is well overdue and that this Labour Government is taking steps to clean up the mess left by the Conservatives. I look forward to further productive partnership working in the future. ●



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

Ministers don't get it on National Insurance

My preliminary discussions with council leaders over recent weeks, ahead of February budget setting, continually brings to bear the reality of the Labour Government's seismic increase to employer National Insurance contributions.

Even a few months ago, local government hadn't considered the prospect of an increase in National Insurance contributions; why would we?

The Prime Minister and Chancellor repeatedly said during the general election that taxation would not go up under a Labour Government.

Analysis by the LGA confirms that the direct cost of Labour's job tax on directly employed staff for the 2025/26 financial year will be in the region of £637 million.

We know that some of these burdens may be refunded by the Treasury; however, for how long will councils be covered and what about the costs on our external providers?

Again, LGA analysis confirms that the

“Some of these burdens may be refunded, but for how long?”

indirect costs, including for commissioned adult social care services, could be around £1,128 million.

I am also concerned that the refund for the public sector from the Treasury will not include our colleagues in town and parish councils.

Our friends in town and parish councils do an enormous amount to reduce the pressures faced by upper-tier authorities. They are the cornerstone of our local communities and do so much to ensure the priorities of their residents are delivered. ●

GROUP LEADERS



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

Don't lose the 'local' in local government

As first was going to press, we were awaiting a delayed white paper on devolution. The Government's intentions may be to decentralise power, but I am concerned that some of its proposals will undermine local democracy, rather than empower it.

As Liberal Democrats, we have always championed genuine devolution that puts real power in the hands of local communities.

But as the LGA has often said, one size does not fit all. One of the main concerns is the potential threat to district councils.

Instead of empowering local areas to make a choice that is best for them, we

“People deserve leaders who understand the needs of their communities”

could see a move towards a model that prioritises regional efficiency over genuine local representation.

People deserve leaders who understand the specific needs and identities of their communities – not just one-size-fits-all solutions imposed from above.

If mayors are to become a central part of Labour's devolution framework, we need to ensure that these roles are truly accountable and reflective of local needs – not just token figures for centralised policies.

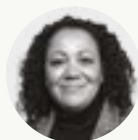
For example, district councils should have a seat at the table when working with mayors and holding them accountable.

Real devolution means respecting the voices of communities and ensuring that local government is shaped from the bottom up – not the top down.

We will continue to advocate for a devolution that strengthens, not weakens, the power of local people and their representatives. ●



Improving educational outcomes for care leavers



Denise Rawls is Executive Director of the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers

Young people with care backgrounds are a priority group for targeted support to increase their access to further and higher education. Unfortunately, national data confirms that young people with care experience achieve significantly lower educational outcomes than their non-care experienced peers.

Of the 10,000 young people leaving local authority care each year, only 14 per cent go to university by the time they are 19 and, once there, 36 per cent drop out, compared with 6 per cent of those without care experience.

While there are many individual examples of impactful and effective practice to drive up educational achievement for care leavers, the challenge remains to build a UK-wide, high-impact and consistent offer of support. This slow progress to educational parity for vulnerable young people is why, at the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL), we're excited for our partnership with the Greater

Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA).

Following a successful pilot, the GMCA has committed to becoming the first combined authority where all sixth forms, colleges and universities in the region are inclusive learning environments for people with care experience, demonstrated by achieving the NNECL Quality Mark.

This bold action signals GMCA's commitment to breaking down barriers to educational opportunity and building a society that supports the aspiration of every young person, regardless of their background.

Universities and colleges that gain our Quality Mark have demonstrated that they have caring, holistic and practical processes in place, including within the senior leadership team, to support students with care backgrounds so they are able to thrive while learning.

Building on the Care Leaver Covenant, encompassing the Gatsby Benchmarks and reflecting institutions' own access and participation plans, Quality Mark holders have put in place actions to tackle the well-evidenced impact of early childhood trauma, the stark difference in educational attainment between children in care and their peers, disrupted education and school moves, low aspiration from key influencers in a young person's network, and financial exclusion. As someone with lived experience of being in care, I recognise these hurdles well.

By working with all of Greater Manchester's post-16 learning spaces, we're building a strong and connected network of young people with care experience (a cohort of around 300 pupils), in an economic and pragmatic way.

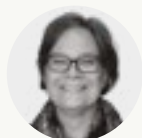
With the support of their corporate parents, young people with care experience in Greater Manchester will be able to access the dedicated support and guidance they need, when they need it, so they can flourish, achieve their full educational potential, and go on to successful and rewarding careers that will sustain them for life.

All of us at NNECL are incredibly proud of the Quality Mark, which was cited as good practice in Josh MacAlister MP's 'Independent review of children's social care' in 2022.

We will be publishing an independent evaluation of the Quality Mark in the next few weeks, as well as continuing to work with our dedicated members across the UK who share NNECL's ambition – to deliver positive lifelong change for young people with care backgrounds. ●

i The National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) is a UK-wide charity dedicated to transforming the educational outcomes of young people with experience of being in care: see www.nnecl.org

The power of accurate addressing



Marisa Hayes is Partnership Delivery Project Manager at Geoplace

At the LGA's annual conference in October, GeoPlace was joined by Nottingham City Council in the Innovation Zone, to demonstrate the immense value that data on addresses can bring to local government.

Each local authority maintains a Local Land and Property Gazetteer containing a unique property reference number (UPRN) for every addressable location. Similarly, the 'unique street reference number' (USRN) is used across highway authorities to maintain a comprehensive list of publicly and privately maintainable streets.

This highly accurate addressing data provides essential location information to emergency services, central government, banking, insurance, and other commercial buyers through the suite of Ordnance Survey products. By fully integrating address and street data, using the UPRN and USRN, local authorities can unlock tangible, calculable benefits.

For example, a single database of business rate payers can be linked to waste, licensing, customer

services, and fraud prevention using the UPRN, driving efficiency, improving customer satisfaction and minimising risk.

The LGA believes that UPRNs are key to almost everything that is delivered or achieved by councils.

Every authority has common focal points, such as housing, education, welfare and highways. When the UPRN is added to each department's data, the whole organisation benefits, as it becomes a simpler exercise to link inter-departmental information.

Clean, well-structured data is also imperative for artificial intelligence and machine learning: UPRN and USRN make this an affordable reality without the need for extensive technical expertise or process change.

GeoPlace and location strategy consultants ConsultingWhere worked closely with Nottingham City Council to quantify the return on investment from address and street data integration.

The findings showed that, for every £1 invested, the potential is to generate efficiency savings and increase revenue organisation-wide by up to £6 – with a predicted net present value of £5.7 million over the period 2023 to 2026.

Sarah Abbott, Geographic Information System Manager at Nottingham City Council, said: "Our investment in the UPRN has meant we



have demonstrated huge efficiencies and evidence of delivering a best-value service, with a positive return on investment.

"Senior managers better recognise the value of our location data and understand opportunities for future improvements as resources allow.

"The council is connected through data – the UPRN is an enabler in so much of what we need to improve connectivity and underpin digital services.

"Resources and time are precious, but address data is an existing resource for all local authorities, with huge potential."

With hard evidence in hand, local authorities can now justify strategic investment in this area.

As GeoPlace is jointly owned by the LGA and Ordnance Survey, we are uniquely placed to advise on successful data integration, bringing the right people and resources together.

In fact, as part of our commitment to this cause, we are pleased to offer a free integration report for every authority in England and Wales.

To find out more about your readiness to take advantage of the UPRN and USRN, simply email support@geoplace.co.uk and quote 'LGAFIRST'. ●

i Geoplace is the central source of information for all UK addresses and streets. It is a joint venture between the LGA and Ordnance Survey, see www.geoplace.co.uk

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Rural prosperity requires fair funding

Recent Budget announcements have left many in rural areas feeling overlooked.

While certain measures – such as freezing fuel duties – offer some relief, the stark increase in bus fares has placed a disproportionate burden on those in remote communities, where public transport is often the only link to employment and services.

Moreover, while steps to retain Right to Buy receipts within councils and increase stamp duty on second homes are commendable, they barely scratch the surface of what is needed to ensure a sustainable influx of affordable housing in rural areas.

However, these challenges, though significant, present a crucial opportunity.

Through the Rural Services Network (RSN), we are not merely highlighting discrepancies, but actively pursuing a shift in policy that considers the unique circumstances of rural communities.

The establishment of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Rural Services is testament to our commitment. It enables direct dialogue with rural MPs, ensuring they are fully informed of the implications of their decisions for rural constituents.



Councillor Roger Phillips is Chair of the Rural Services Network

Our recent ministerial discussions with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs have shown a promising willingness to consider our recommendations for tailored, rural-specific solutions.

Measures such as addressing skill shortages and improving housing affordability for local workers are vital for unleashing the potential of the rural economy, which could bolster national prosperity significantly.

Meanwhile, the fiscal outlook remains a challenge, and the need for equitable distribution of resources cannot be overstated. A coalition of 57 local authorities recently joined the RSN in a unified call for equitable funding for rural areas in the forthcoming provisional local government finance settlement, amplifying

“Rural areas, often misconceived as uniformly affluent, face hidden deprivations”

our demand for a funding formula that truly reflects the needs of our communities.

Last month’s ministerial announcement on local government funding reforms clearly sets the scene, removing the Rural Services Delivery Grant and targeting money towards areas with greater need and demand for services, using deprivation as a proxy.

Deprivation is not a proxy for all service demands, however: our ageing rural population creates additional demands that will not be recognised through deprivation indicators, but must still be serviced.

Rural areas, often misconceived as uniformly affluent, face hidden deprivations and elevated costs in delivering basic services.

This should not be a policy debate that pits the stereotyped ‘poor urban areas’ against ‘rich rural communities’. Instead, it should recognise that we need a system that supports all of those in need, whether in villages or town centres, and that fairly compensates local authorities for the costs they face in delivering those services.

The RSN’s Delivering for Rural campaign is an integral part of this effort, addressing long-standing inequities that have resulted in rural areas receiving significantly less government support per capita compared with urban areas, despite higher local tax burdens and generally lower earnings.

The goal is clear: to ensure that rural communities not only survive, but thrive, contributing fully to the nation’s economic and social fabric.

This is a pivotal moment for government policy. By re-evaluating the metrics used to allocate funding, and by implementing a genuinely inclusive approach to national prosperity, we can ensure that all corners of our nation are equipped to prosper. ●

● The Rural Services Network is an LGA special interest group, see www.rsnonline.org.uk

Addressing health inequalities to tackle STIs



Kate Folkard is Head of Programme Delivery for Sexual Health and Blood Borne Viruses at the UK Health Security Agency

The rise in sexually transmitted infections (STIs) is a major and increasing public health concern.

In 2023, we saw the highest number of gonorrhoea diagnoses on record, and the highest number of syphilis diagnoses since 1948.

Rates of new STI diagnosis are consistently highest within certain population groups, including young people aged 15 to 24, black ethnic populations, people residing in the most deprived areas, and gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men.

These infections can cause serious health issues if left untreated. Furthermore, STIs are still the cause of significant stigma and emotional distress.

The nature of health harms and the impact of inequalities experienced between population groups make

STIs a significant and costly public health problem.

In conjunction with partners across the public health system, the UK Health Security Agency is working hard to address the harm caused by STIs and the inequalities that are becoming more pronounced. That is why we have now published the STI Prioritisation Framework (see www.gov.uk/government/publications/sti-prioritisation-framework).

This evidence-based framework – developed in consultation with stakeholders including the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV, the Association of Directors of Public Health and the LGA – will aid those who are planning and delivering sexual health services to refocus efforts on reducing the harms caused by these infections and tackle health inequalities.

The STI Prioritisation Framework is laid out in three clear stages, S, T and I: situation, target groups, and interventions.

This will encourage sexual health commissioners and providers to understand their local situation, before identifying which infections and which population groups to focus on, and then tailoring the necessary interventions



for those populations, such as vaccination, targeted testing and encouraging condom use.

By using our resources most effectively, we can ensure that we are having the greatest impact on the harm caused by these preventable infections and reduce health inequalities, and I would encourage people to make use of this valuable framework. ●

i To find out more about the work of the UK Health Security Agency, visit www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-health-security-agency

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

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Electoral lottery



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

Labour has lost a net 22 council seats in by-elections since July, with its average vote share in all such contests falling by more than 10 percentage points.

Between the 1992 and 1997 general elections, the Conservatives lost almost half their councillors and ended up in third place behind Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

Labour could face a similar fate unless it can turn things around – and that is by no means impossible, given the volatility that characterises party politics at present.

Take, for example, Labour's post-election gain from the Conservatives, in Blackpool Bispham, just days before Kemi Badenoch was confirmed as the new Leader of the Opposition.

It amounted to a warning shot for both parties: the Conservative share more than halved since the previous contest in 2023 and Labour slipped through the middle to win – despite its own vote also dropping sharply.

On the same day, and in nearby Marsh Mill ward in Wyre, the electoral lottery played out differently. Again, both major parties saw their vote shares drop – but this time, Reform UK scooped up enough of the fallout to win comfortably.

Reform, with just 10 councillors across England and Wales following the May 2024 local elections, has since added six to that total and, in November, contested more than two-thirds of the vacancies.

It prevailed in both the district and county contests in Leave-voting Dartford following the death of the previous Residents' Association councillor, and came within 10 votes of winning Woodhouse in Sheffield.

The formal result there is a Liberal Democrat gain from Labour, but the councillor whose death prompted the by-election had left Labour to join the Sheffield Community Councillors group.

That may explain the decline in Labour support in Woodhouse, with both the Liberal Democrats and Reform attracting new – if, presumably,

rather different – types of supporter.

The Liberal Democrats' other gain this month, also from Labour, was in the rather different environment of Chipping Norton, in Oxfordshire. The ward had elected Labour councillors for most of the past decade or more, and the Liberal Democrats have usually finished bottom of the poll. Volatile voters indeed.

The Lib Dems lost seats and vote share to the Conservatives in Denne, Horsham – where the Conservative and Liberal Democrat candidates shared the distinction of having been granted the Freedom of the City of London – and in Blackmoor Vale, Somerset.

Small signs, perhaps, that the 'blue wall' that party leader Sir Ed Davey took such pleasure in dismantling may be being repointed at least. ●



By-election results

Blackpool, Bispham

LAB GAIN FROM CON
0.9% over Reform | Turnout 31.4%

Dacorum, Bennetts End

LAB GAIN FROM IND
0.6% over Con | Turnout 16.2%

Dacorum, Hemel Hempstead Town

CON GAIN FROM LIB DEM
21.3% over Lib Dem | Turnout 13.4%

Dartford, Greenhithe and Knockhall

REFORM GAIN FROM RES
3.6% over Res | Turnout 16.1%

Derbyshire Dales, Calver and Longstone

CON GAIN FROM GREEN
4.4% over Green | Turnout 33.0%

Gosport, Harbourside and Town

CON GAIN FROM LAB
20.7% over Lab | Turnout 24.8%

Horsham, Denne

CON GAIN FROM LIB DEM
2.2% over Lib Dem | Turnout 23.1%

Kent, Swanscombe and Greenhithe

REFORM GAIN FROM RES
4.5% over Lab | Turnout 15.3%

Sheffield, Woodhouse

LIB DEM GAIN FROM LAB
0.3% over Reform | Turnout 24.2%

Somerset, Blackmoor Vale

CON GAIN FROM LIB DEM
20.8% over Lib Dem | Turnout 26.1%

West Oxfordshire, Chipping Norton

LIB DEM GAIN FROM LAB
1.6% over Con | Turnout 22.7%

Wyre, Marsh Mill

REFORM GAIN FROM CON
8.0% over Con | Turnout 30.3%

I Only results where a ward changed hands are shown here. For more information on all recent by-elections, please visit lgafirst.co.uk/local-by-elections

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