

Local government first

Local
Government
Association

No.681 March 2023

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LGA Annual Fire Conference and Exhibition

7- 8 March 2023,
Crowne Plaza Hotel, Nottingham

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.

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Public service

Having just marked the first anniversary of the war in Ukraine, I wanted to personally thank you and your councils for all your efforts supporting new arrivals escaping the conflict. You can read more on this in this edition of **first** (p5, p24).

I also wanted to wish everyone standing in May's local elections good luck, and to thank you for your commitment to public service.

Elsewhere in this month's **first**, we look ahead to the Budget on 15 March, with an outline of the LGA's submission to the Treasury (p10).

We review progress on devolution and levelling up, a year since the Levelling Up White Paper (p12), and set out the LGA's response to the Government's implementation plan for reforms of children's social care (p13).

We also mark International Women's Day with the thoughts of women who are deputy leaders of councils (p16).

Our lead comment this month is from Clenton Farquharson MBE, Chair of Think Local Act Personal, on collective leadership of adult social care (p23).

Finally, if you're looking to recruit new graduate staff, please make sure your council signs up for the LGA's flagship National Graduate Development Programme by 31 March (p22).

Cllr James Jamieson
is LGA Chairman



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Circulation 16,900 (February 2023)
first is published online at
www.local.gov.uk/first at least a day
before the magazine. To unsubscribe,
email first@oscar-research.co.uk

Photography: Shutterstock and
Getty unless otherwise stated

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215,000 children missing out on free school meals

Nearly a quarter of a million children are missing out on free school meals worth nearly £500 per child because of the lack of an automated sign-up system, according to the LGA.

This is money that under-pressure families could be spending on other

essentials, amid record food prices and spiralling inflation.

A further estimated 800,000 children living in poverty are not entitled to free school meals (FSMs) because their household's income is just above the eligible £7,400 annual income threshold,

which has remained unchanged since its introduction in 2018.

The LGA says the approximate £470 given by government to cover the cost of each child's FSMs each year could be extended to many more children in need if the application process was simplified and made automatic.

Instead of parents having to formally apply to their local authority or via their child's academy school, automatic enrolment could benefit the estimated 215,000 eligible school children whose families have not yet taken up the offer.

This, in turn, would generate tens of millions of pounds in vital extra pupil premium funding for schools, which is allocated based on the number of agreed FSM applications per school. This would also help ensure funding gets to where it is needed, to narrow the attainment gap between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers.

The LGA is also calling for government to consider extending eligibility for FSMs, to ensure all children in poverty are entitled to at least one hot meal per day, including a review of the current income threshold.

Cllr Pete Marland, Chairman of the LGA's Resources Board, said: "Food inflation is at its highest for almost half a century and this is hitting the poorest households hardest.

"The near-£500 annual saving for a family for each child on free school meals can make all the difference, now more so than ever before.

"Encouraging those who are eligible to sign up, and automating the process, will help relieve this financial burden, freeing up family budgets and improving the next generation's health, education and prospects."

£421m for drug and alcohol treatment services

The Government has announced £421 million of funding to support council-commissioned drug and alcohol treatment services for the next two years.

The funding will enable the creation of more than 50,000 high-quality places in drug and

alcohol treatment, with 151 councils across England receiving allocations for the work they do in communities.

However, the LGA and councils have called on the Government to urgently publish their public health grant allocations for 2023/24, which

also go to fund support services. The announcement on the public health grant has been repeatedly delayed, with councils warning that they are being left in the dark about how to fund services such as sexual health clinics, health visiting and addiction support after April.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board said: "This additional funding is important in helping to support councils in addressing drug and alcohol dependency, and will make a real difference to transforming the lives of those

who need it in our communities.

"For many problem users, their first experience of treatment is the catalyst for getting the help they need. However, councils' allocations for the local public health grant from April, which also goes to fund local addiction support services, has still yet to be announced – leaving the future of many vital services in doubt.

"The Government should give these services long-term certainty by urgently publishing the public health settlement which helps councils plan for the future."

● See p14

Rising number of Ukrainians homeless

Councils have helped more than 160,000 Ukrainian nationals to settle in the UK since Russia's invasion just more than a year ago.

The first anniversary of the war, on 24 February, was marked by councils around the country observing a national one-minute silence, holding candle-lit vigils and memorial services, flying Ukraine's flag and lighting up civic buildings in its blue and yellow colours.

The LGA highlighted the hard work of councils and the generosity of individual local 'hosts' in supporting and housing more than 115,000 new arrivals under the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

But it has warned of rising numbers of people presenting as homeless because of sponsorships coming to an end.

Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: "Now is a good time to look back on the amazing work of councils in helping those fleeing conflict to settle in their new communities.

"Councils, often behind the scenes, have been working to ensure access to healthcare, language support, education, housing when sponsorships break down, and so much more.

"Although there are countless success

stories, we are incredibly concerned at the number of people presenting as homeless because of a sponsorship ending.

"We are pleased that the Government has been working with the LGA and councils on funding to help reduce homelessness risks, but we are also concerned that there is no funding beyond the first year for councils and that funding for arrivals in 2023 has halved.

"If numbers increase, we want to work with government to review funding to ensure all families are helped to find permanent homes, jobs and schools."

● See p24



More funding for vulnerable households

Nearly £850 million is to be given to councils to support vulnerable households with the ongoing cost-of-living crisis.

The Government has extended its Household Support Fund for another year, running from 1 April until March 2024.

Councils will be allocated the money, amounting to £842 million, to support anyone struggling with food and energy costs.

The LGA said protecting the most vulnerable from the rising cost of living is a crucial priority that councils share with government, and it is positive to see this fund extended for another year.

Cllr Pete Marland, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said councils know their populations best, using their local knowledge and expertise to target support in the

most effective way. He added: "Housing, employment, education and access to services such as debt advice and welfare benefits also all play a major part in improving our communities' overall health.

"Councils should have the resources and flexibilities to tackle these inequalities, alongside a sufficient mainstream welfare system, which ensures families have enough income to meet their essential living costs. This includes addressing the freeze in local housing allowance rates.

"The Government should also make the Household Support Fund permanent, alongside greater flexibility, to ensure it helps people in the greatest need and, crucially, shift focus from short-term crisis support to investing in prevention."



In brief Pay offer

Council employees have been offered a pay increase of at least £1,925 from 1 April – equating to 9.42 per cent for the lowest paid, currently earning £20,441. Cllr Sian Goding, Chair of the National Employers for local government services, said: "The National Employers are acutely aware of the additional pressure this year's offer will place on already hard-pressed council finances, as it would need to be paid for from existing budgets. However, they believe their offer is fair to employees, given the wider economic backdrop." National Employers negotiates pay on behalf of 350 local authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland that employ around 1.5 million staff.

Dental health

There has been an 83 per cent increase in children having teeth extracted in hospitals because of decay, with children in deprived areas five times more likely to have hospital extractions. Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Oral health inequality is expected to grow owing to the scale of backlogs in primary care, which limit the chance to catch problems early. The Government should use the upcoming Spring Budget to recommit to vital measures to combat diet-related ill health and childhood obesity, such as the sugar levy, which has helped cut down the consumption of drinks with high sugar content."

Urban summit

The LGA's second annual Urban Summit takes place on 22 March in London. This free event, hosted by the LGA's City Regions Board, will bring together urban leaders, academics, think tanks and others with an interest in the future of cities to discuss three questions: What are cities? What do we need our cities to be? What is the difference and how do we get them there? The summit will hear from Andy Haldane, Chief Executive Officer of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA), before offering attendees the opportunity to get involved in discussions, hear from other speakers and shape the debate. See www.local.gov.uk/events to book your place.

'More' damp and mould in private housing

More than half of private renters – including 1.6 million children – are living in excessively cold, damp or mouldy homes, according to Citizens Advice.

It found that 2.7 million households, or 58 per cent of private renters, were struggling with at least one of those three issues.

That compares with 3 to 4 per cent of social homes in England having notable damp and mould, with less than 0.2 per cent having the most serious problems, according to initial findings published last month by the Regulator of Social Housing.

Most social landlords understand the extent of damp and mould in tenants' homes, the survey found.

The regulator asked all larger social landlords to submit evidence about the extent of damp and mould in homes, as well as their approach to tackling it where needed, following the coroner's report at the end of 2022 into the tragic death of Awaab Ishak.

Two-year-old Awaab died in December 2020 from a severe respiratory condition caused by extensive mould in his flat.

Cllr Darren Rodwell, the LGA's Housing Spokesperson, said: "Councils continue to fully support efforts to inspect homes and drive up standards in both the social housing and private rented sector.

"While this study shows that the vast majority of social housing is safe and decent, councils are determined to improve housing conditions for all social and private tenants.

"The LGA continues to work with professional bodies, as well as the Government, to discuss possible solutions on improving housing standards – including those relating to damp and mould in tenanted properties."



Bus funding extended after council warnings



The Government has temporarily extended funding support for bus services after the LGA warned that thousands of local routes could be lost without it.

The Department for Transport announced that £80 million would be made available to bus operators until the end of June to support routes that have seen passenger numbers fail to recover since the pandemic.

The Government also announced it

would extend its £2 fare scheme, designed to incentivise more people to use the bus, for another three months.

The move comes after the LGA joined forces with transport groups to warn that an alarming number of bus routes would have to be cut because of passenger numbers remaining 15 per cent lower than their pre-pandemic levels.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Transport Spokesperson, said: "The LGA has been calling on the Government to urgently step in to ensure thousands of vital bus routes are not lost in April, and so we are pleased that both the £2 scheme and the operator grant has been extended.

"Buses act as a lifeline for so many people in our local communities.

"They are one of the keys to getting people out of their cars to save money, tackle congestion, and improve poor air quality.

"However, our bus services cannot survive on a hand-to-mouth existence.

"The Government must use the time this funding buys to work with councils and operators to develop a long-term, reformed bus funding model with significant new money.

"Only this will help the delivery of the Government's ambitious National Bus Strategy, to which councils are fully committed."

'Crisis' in preventative care for older people

The crisis in the NHS is "largely a crisis in older people's preventative care", according to a report from the charity Age UK.

'Fixing the Foundations' says that an "underfunded and overstretched" NHS and social care system is struggling and sometimes failing to cope with the needs of older people.

Longstanding problems – predating the pandemic but exacerbated by it – are piling pressure on families and carers and leaving the NHS in constant crisis mode, contributing to ambulances stacked up outside hospital emergency departments and long waits for people of all ages to access urgent care.

The report found that half of all people arriving in A&E by ambulance are aged over 65 and a third are over 75.

Meanwhile, the proportion of older people feeling supported to manage their health condition has fallen by a fifth in relative terms since 2016/17, and one-in-five over-80s have some unmet need for social care.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Preventative care and support is an absolutely crucial part of our social care system. Delivering the right care at home doesn't just reduce the need for hospitalisation, it also allows people to live an equal life with the dignity they deserve.

"Too often there is too much focus on the back door of hospitals, when we need just as much focus on preventing people entering through the front door in the first place."



Tougher rules needed to tackle underage vape sales

The LGA has called for strict new measures to regulate the display and marketing of vaping products in the same way as tobacco, to crack down on a rise in stores selling to children.

These measures include: vapes to be in plain packaging and kept out of sight behind the counter; mandatory age-of-sale signage on vaping products; and a ban on giving out free samples to people of any age.

Penalties for breaching these rules should be the same as those handed out under tobacco-display regulations.

Many local areas have seen a spate of incidents where shops have been caught selling vapes to youngsters, with councils having to step up enforcement activity to deal with the issue.

In a Chartered Trading Standards Institute survey, 60 per cent of local trading standards services said high street shops selling illicit

vapes or vaping products to children was the enforcement issue that most concerned them.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "It is not right that stores are able to prominently display vaping paraphernalia for all to see, often in bright, colourful packaging that can appeal to children.

"Vapes should only be used as an aid to quit smoking.

"While research has shown vaping poses a small fraction of the risks of smoking, it is deeply worrying that more children – who have never smoked – are starting vaping.

"Vaping is by no means risk-free, so it is very alarming that young people are getting access to, and using, e-cigarettes.

"This is why we are calling for tougher and stricter regulation of vaping products, to tackle the growing cases of children getting hold of them."

Councils' role in preventing radicalisation

A "broad and joined-up approach" is required to stop terrorism, the LGA has said, following a review of Prevent, a programme designed to stop people from being radicalised.

Following publication of the Independent Review of Prevent, Home Secretary Suella Braverman has pledged to overhaul the programme, and act on the review's 34 recommendations. It warned the threat from terrorism is becoming more complex, with the extreme right becoming an increasing concern, but that Islamist terrorism remains the primary and deadliest threat in the UK.

Cllr Nesil Caliskan, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: "As this report acknowledges, councils play an important role in preventing radicalisation and tackling extremism. However, the removal of funding for councils' counter-extremism work, budgetary pressures on all council services, and long-standing uncertainties about how national policy on extremist threats will change has had a significant impact on what councils are able to achieve.

"We have long argued that stopping terrorism requires a broad and joined-up approach. Investing in a long-term approach – which includes a multi-agency support offer for those at risk – is vital in addressing some of the wider issues that may create tensions in our communities and contribute to individuals becoming radicalised."

She added: "The Government should commit to continued investment in the Prevent and wider counter-extremism space, including providing resources for local training and funding for the Special Interest Group on Countering Extremism, and provide clarity on the provision of funding for Prevent and wider interventions in the coming years."

Rising demand for mental health services

Millions of people with mental health needs are still not accessing services, with some facing lengthy waits for treatment, says a recent report from the National Audit Office.

Demand on mental health services is increasing, despite funding and staffing increasing and more patients being treated.

The report also acknowledges "strong concerns" from local government and other stakeholders about a continued lack of funding for preventative services.

Local authorities deliver a range of statutory and non-statutory mental health services in the community.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Public mental health services run by local councils lack the sufficient funding they need to cope with increasing demand.

"Investment in preventative mental health services can not only transform the lives of the people who rely on them, but also

relieve pressure on our overburdened health and care systems.

"Announcements on councils' public health grant, which funds these and other vital local services, have continued to be delayed, with councils and their communities being left in the dark about their future. The Government needs to give councils the clarity they need so they can increase investment to protect the health of our local communities over the coming months and years."

In brief

Finance settlement

The final Local Government Finance Settlement for England, published in February, confirms an increase in local government core spending power. LGA Chairman Cllr James Jamieson said this will help councils deal with inflationary and other cost pressures in the next financial year, but assumes all councils will raise their council tax by the maximum permitted without a referendum. "Many councils are still grappling with significant challenges when setting their budgets and trying to protect services from cutbacks. They want to work with government on a long-term funding plan that ensures they have adequate resources, certainty and freedoms and can deliver world-class local services," he added. ● See p10

Recognising apprentices

Councils have until 5 May to register their apprentices for the LGA's Local Government Apprentice of the Year 2023 (see www.local.gov.uk/local-government-apprentice-year-2023). From 24-25 May, participants from across the country will compete to win this accolade, and the event is an excellent opportunity for apprentices to learn, network and showcase their skills and expertise. They will work in virtual teams to experience the opportunities, risks, and challenges involved in delivering successful local government services, with the chance of winning an award.

Nature positive

The Government has announced that new housing, commercial and infrastructure developments in England will be "nature positive" from November, and it is providing £16 million, plus guidance, for local planning authorities to support the new approach. Developers will have to deliver 10 per cent 'biodiversity net gain' (BNG) when building new developments. The LGA has an e-learning module on biodiversity for councillors and officers (www.local.gov.uk/biodiversity-e-learning-councils) and its Planning Advisory Service has resources on BNG and nature recovery (www.local.gov.uk/latest-news-pas).

'Urgent support' needed for sport and leisure

A coalition of more than 200 bodies and individuals from the worlds of health, sport, recreation, and leisure – including the LGA – has written to the Prime Minister calling for urgent intervention and greater support for grassroots facilities and clubs, amid the ongoing energy crisis.

Research from ukactive, which represents the sector, highlights that 31 per cent of council areas in England remain at risk of losing their leisure centres or seeing reduced services from 1 April. Around 350 facilities nationally have already seen service restrictions, and temporary and permanent closures, since October 2022.

The letter warns that a failure to identify bespoke support for the sector as part of the Government's Energy Bills Discount Scheme will be the "final straw" for many facilities and services – especially swimming pools.

Without national intervention, essential

local services – including swimming lessons for children, multi-sport offerings, mental health services, and programmes for older citizens, ethnically diverse communities, women and girls, and disabled people – will be lost, it warns.

The LGA is lobbying for the Energy and Trade Intensive Industries Scheme and Energy Bills Discount Scheme to be extended to leisure centres and swimming pools. As **first** was going to press, the Minister for Sport was expected to attend a meeting of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board.

The LGA is encouraging councils to write to their MPs about the pressures on local leisure and sport facilities (email ian.leete@local.gov.uk for a template letter), and has an online hub outlining its lobbying and support on this issue – see www.local.gov.uk/urgent-support-public-sport-and-leisure-services.

● See p19 and **first** 679

Funding for active travel

Councils can apply for a share of £200 million to help improve walking, wheeling and cycling in their areas.

The funding – from Active Travel England, the government executive agency responsible for increasing walking, wheeling and cycling – could be used to provide more paths in rural areas, new routes for children to walk to school, and more inclusive street designs to support people using wheelchairs and mobility scooters.

As part of their projects, councils have been urged to take into account women's safety when walking alone at night.

Government figures show 46 per cent of children aged five to 16 walked or cycled to school in England in 2021, with the target to make this 55 per cent by 2025.

Cllr David Renard, LGA Transport Spokesperson, said: "Transport is the biggest source of carbon emissions in the UK and thousands of people are prematurely killed every year from traffic-related pollution.

"As a country, we can't meet our climate-change targets and clean our toxic air without increasing levels of walking and cycling within our local communities.

"It's helpful that the Government recognises capacity constraints that councils face and this funding will support them with efforts to get more people out of their cars and using greener forms of transport.

"However, funding must be delivered to where it is needed the most, not based on costly competitive bids between areas."



PARLIAMENT

Effective procurement

The LGA has been working to ensure new legislation empowers councils

In December 2020, the Government set out its proposals for reform of public procurement in the Green Paper, 'Transforming public procurement'.

Since then, the LGA has been engaging closely with ministers and civil servants to help them understand the way that councils procure goods, works and services, and to ensure the Procurement Bill – currently working its way through Parliament – creates an effective regime that works for local government.

While the LGA was broadly supportive of the Government's proposals, which aim to create a simpler, quicker and less bureaucratic procurement regime in UK law, there were several issues.

We worked with officials to address many of these before the Bill was introduced to Parliament, including steering government away from removing the 'light touch' regime.

When the Bill was introduced, our primary concern was that the legislation would significantly limit councils from using the current 'horizontal' and 'vertical' procurement exemptions.

These enable local authorities to deliver effective public services and significant savings through collaborative and 'in house' arrangements.

The Bill included a new 'reasonableness' test, which stipulated that the exemptions could only be used if "the goods, services or works representing the main purpose of the contract could reasonably be supplied under a separate contract".

As it is often the case that public services could "reasonably be supplied" by a provider that is not a public entity, the legislation could have been interpreted in a way that would, in effect, close down the exemptions.

We engaged extensively with government and worked closely with parliamentarians to make the case that the wording risked adverse, unintended consequences.

At report stage in the House of Lords, Lord Moylan (Con) tabled an LGA amendment to remove the reasonableness test, which garnered cross-party support.

The Government subsequently agreed to revise the wording to avoid ambiguity and brought forward two amendments in the Commons.

It is now beyond doubt that the vertical and horizontal exemptions will not be subject to the reasonableness test, and local authorities can continue to use them with confidence.

Another key issue for councils that we have been raising through the parliamentary process is that Section 17 (1) of the Local Government Act 1988 currently prohibits local authorities from reserving contracts, whatever their value, to local suppliers,

small and medium-sized enterprises, and voluntary and community organisations.

We have been making the case that this flexibility is vital to allow councils to shape their places, drive economic growth and achieve wider objectives, such as reducing carbon emissions and boosting supply chain resilience.

We are therefore pleased that the Government has listened to our calls and has committed to amending the 1988 Act in secondary legislation. This will become 'live' at the same time as the Procurement Act.

It was also good to see the Government's plan to introduce a single digital platform, where all public procurement opportunities will be published and viewed in one place.

To make the platform a success, we continue to raise that it will be necessary to tidy up existing pieces of legislation and guidance that specify where and how public bodies publish procurement information.

As the Bill approaches its remaining stages in Parliament, we continue to work with government to ensure it empowers councils to deliver for their communities.



"Flexibility is vital to allow councils to shape their places and drive economic growth"



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

On 15 March, the Office for Budget Responsibility will provide its next set of public finance forecasts and Jeremy Hunt will deliver his first Budget as Chancellor.

The LGA's four political group leaders and I have written to the Chancellor setting out where public finance interventions would help councils remain financially sustainable and deliver on shared priorities in this highly uncertain time.

A key area is **children's social care**, where we have a record number, and a record proportion, of children in care in England – over 15,000 more than 10 years ago.

Council spending on placements with independent providers grew by 57 per cent between 2016 and 2021, compared to a 15 per cent increase in looked-after children.

LGA analysis, prior to the current high levels of inflation, indicated an existing shortfall of £1.6 billion a year simply to maintain current service levels.

Councils are pleased to have the opportunity to work with government on much needed reform, but the system must have resources to change. Last year's Independent Review of Children's Social Care recommended investing at least £2.6 billion over four years, prior to inflation (see p13).

In respect of **housing**, the future sustainability of housing revenue accounts (HRAs) remains a concern for councils.

LGA-commissioned research shows that the 7 per cent cap on social housing rents, compared with the usually permitted 'consumer price index plus 1 per cent' limit, will amount to a cumulative deficit of \$664 million after two years.

This, alongside expenditure pressures, will impact councils' ability to deliver key maintenance and improvement works and retrofit existing stock in pursuit of net zero goals and energy-efficient homes.

Recent analysis by Savills estimates the additional costs to deliver net zero is £23 billion over 30 years. While the \$3.8 billion Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund is welcome, it falls a long way short.

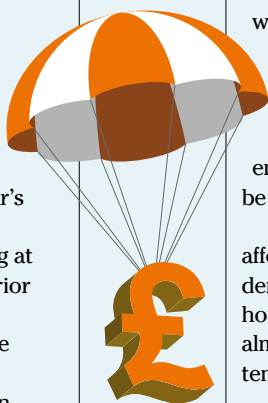
Long-term funding certainty would enable councils to support the rollout of an ambitious national retrofit programme across all tenures. This could be helped by 'blended' finance models, using energy cost savings to help fund investment in net zero.



Councillor **James Jamieson** is Chairman of the LGA

Budget submission

The LGA has written to the Chancellor setting out local government's priorities



The Building Safety and Fire Act, while welcome, introduces significant additional expenditure.

LGA-commissioned research estimates that the cost to achieve compliance with the Act across the entire HRA council housing stock will be £7.7 billion between 2023 and 2030.

Meanwhile, there are not enough affordable homes to meet current demand, with more than 1.2 million households on waiting lists and almost 95,000 households in temporary accommodation.

Councils need long-term certainty on powers and funding to help support an ambitious build programme of 100,000 high-quality, climate-friendly, affordable homes a year.

Not only would this provide safe, secure homes for those most in need, it would improve the public finances by \$24.5 billion over 30 years, including a reduction in the housing benefit bill and temporary accommodation costs.

With the number of private rented evictions increasing, the cost of living continuing to rise and more Ukrainian arrivals presenting as homeless, councils are increasingly concerned about a national **homelessness** crisis.

Latest figures for England show 120,710 dependent homeless children living in temporary accommodation, with 2,320 of these in bed-and-breakfast places.

Councils are warning us that these numbers are set to rise if ministers fail to address housing shortages. The Government needs to review local housing allowance rates, prioritise a

significant increase in social housing, and develop a cross-departmental homelessness prevention strategy that addresses the drivers and levers of homelessness.

The Government used its 2022 Autumn Statement to provide extra funding for **adult social care** and accepted the LGA's ask for funding allocated towards the now-delayed charging reforms to be used to address inflationary pressures facing councils.

Local government has always supported the principles underpinning adult social care reform and wants to deliver those changes effectively, but underfunded reforms would exacerbate significant ongoing financial and workforce pressures.

Ultimately, the new funding falls significantly short of the £13 billion we have previously calculated is needed to address the severity of the pressures facing the service.

These go beyond inflation and delayed discharges and include rising demand and the need to ensure councils can meet all of their statutory duties under the Care Act 2014.

It was also disappointing that the Government continues to rely on council tax and the social care precept to increase funding for adult social care.

Public leisure and culture services play a vital role in the health and wellbeing of communities, targeting the most vulnerable and those in areas of highest health deprivation.

While many universal services face challenges from the rising cost of living and energy prices, pressures are felt



acutely in the leisure sector: 40 per cent of council areas are at risk of losing or seeing reduced services at their leisure centres before the end of this month, rising to nearly three-quarters before the same time next year.

Closures and reduced services would have a significant knock-on effect on other services, in particular the NHS and social care, and risk supportive investment during the pandemic being wasted.

The Government must acknowledge that the public leisure, sport and physical activity sector is an energy-intensive, vulnerable sector; provide financial support towards energy and cost-of-living rises; and increase capital investment to create modern and energy efficient buildings.

Devolution to local leaders, with real power genuinely devolved and backed by sustainable funding, is the most efficient and effective way to address the current fiscal crisis and secure a path to long-term prosperity.

The Government should pilot a new approach to public service investment, building on the experience of whole-place community budgets and the

*“Significant uncertainty remains **beyond 2024/25** that continues to hamper planning”*

troubled families programme, by asking areas to come forward with radical proposals to bring together budgets and public services under the leadership of local government (see p12).

For example, the current skills and employment system is fragmented and unable to adequately address current labour market and productivity challenges, with £20 billion spent on at least 49 nationally contracted or delivered schemes or services, managed by nine Whitehall departments and agencies.

Giving democratically elected local leaders the power to join up careers advice and guidance, employment, skills,

apprenticeships, business support services and outreach in the community could save millions of pounds, improve people's skills and help more into work.

Net zero is creating a new era of opportunity and councils want to act decisively and quickly to seize the opportunity across housing, transport, energy and nature recovery.

UK Research and Innovation found that council-led approaches to hitting net zero targets cost a third of a centralised approach and deliver twice the social and financial returns.

The Government should now accelerate action by bringing forward and consolidating funds into single place-based allocations for all councils linked to an agreed set of local net zero actions, free of national restrictions.

And a package of support is needed to bolster councils' capacity and capability to meet their aspirations for local climate action, including working with the LGA to expand how the sector can lead its own development.

Finally, the Government has said it will not implement the Review of Relative Needs and Resources and a reset of accumulated business rates growth in this Spending Review period, and that it remains committed to improving the **local government finance** landscape in the next Parliament.

When the review does happen, it needs to consider both the data and the formulas used to distribute funding. The Government also needs to ensure that overall local government funding is sufficient to ensure that no council sees its funding reduce as a result.

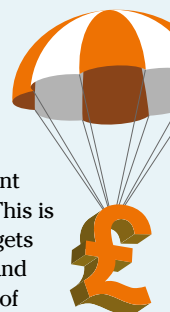
The Spending Review 2021 and Autumn Statement 2022 provided some welcome assurances on future funding levels at a national level for the next two years.

But significant uncertainty remains beyond 2024/25, which continues to hamper councils' financial planning and financial sustainability.

Councils need a multi-year settlement that supplies sufficient funding for statutory services. This is crucial for councils to plan budgets effectively, manage future risk, and improve the financial resilience of local government.

There should also be a move away from piecemeal pots of funding allocated through wasteful competitive bidding processes.

Government should instead adopt a place-based approach in which funding is aligned with local needs and opportunities.



This is an edited version of the LGA's letter to the Chancellor ahead of the Budget. See bit.ly/3jO6FQQ for the full version

Levelling up

The LGA continues to provide support to councils on devolution



Councillor **Kevin Bentley** is Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board

Just over a year ago, the Government published its long-awaited Levelling Up White Paper, setting out its vision for tackling inequality across the country.

At the time, the LGA responded positively to the White Paper's devolution framework proposal and the commitment that every area that wants a devolution deal will be offered one by 2030.

We also welcomed confirmation of councils' role in shaping the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the replacement for the European Structural and Investment Fund.

But we were cautious about the proposal to create a new independent data body, stressing that local government has a very strong track record of data transparency (see p15).

A lot has happened since then.

Deals were first struck in North Yorkshire and the East Midlands, and the autumn brought new devolution proposals for Norfolk, Suffolk, Cornwall and the North East of England. There is also a great deal of anticipation surrounding the forthcoming 'trailblazer' deals for Greater Manchester and the West Midlands, with the Autumn Statement suggesting department-style financial settlements as part of the next Spending Review.

In response, the LGA has continued to develop and deliver support to councils by: expanding our devolution hub (see www.local.gov.uk/devolution-hub); running a series of successful webinars; providing independent advice to councils going through the process of negotiation; and sending our monthly devolution bulletin to more



"We have called for a new approach to public service investment"

than 3,000 subscribers. If you're not already receiving your copy, sign up at www.local.gov.uk/e-bulletins.

Elsewhere, the cause of devolution and local leadership received a further boost from former Prime Minister Gordon Brown's Commission on the UK's Future.

This included proposals that would legally require decisions to be taken as close as meaningfully and practicably possible to the people affected by them, and a new constitutional requirement protecting the political and financial autonomy of local government.

The LGA has explored the case for greater independence for councils before, and will be watching carefully to see how these plans develop.

On the question of funding, while the White Paper committed to streamlining local growth funding by reducing the number of individual funding pots, the recent experience of the Levelling Up Fund shows there is still some way to go (see **first** 680).

The LGA has called for levelling up funds to be allocated based on robust

evidence, not costly competitive bids between local areas.

Moreover, as part of our letter to the Chancellor ahead of this month's Budget (see p10), we have called for a new approach to public service investment. This would build on the experience of whole-place community budgets and initiatives such as the Troubled Families programme, and ask areas to come forward with radical proposals to bring together budgets and public services under the leadership of local government.

Finally, the LGA's policy boards continue to explore the opportunities for devolution and place-based leadership.

As Chair of the People and Places Board, I'm pleased to launch the final report of the LGA's Levelling Up Locally Inquiry, which I co-chaired with Mayor Marvin Rees, Chair of the LGA's City Regions Board, on 14 March.

On 22 March, Mayor Rees is hosting the Second Urban Summit as part of the LGA's Future of Cities project.

You can sign up for both events at www.local.gov.uk/events

Children's social care implementation

Strategy requires additional funding for all councils



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

On 2 February, the Department for Education published its long-awaited children's social care implementation strategy for England – its plan to reform services to ensure children are able to grow up in safe, loving, stable homes.

As with the independent reviews on which the strategy is based, there is a lot to welcome. This includes the focus on earlier help, support that recognises the strengths within a child's wider family network, and greater ambition for our children in care and care leavers, building on the outstanding work of many councils already.

The strategy also commits to taking action to better manage the children's social worker agency market, with a consultation focusing on key areas such as pay and quality. Too often, we see a high churn of agency workers, leading to poorer outcomes for children, while high costs mean cutting services elsewhere. Recommendations around recruitment and retention of social workers are helpful, though we'd like to see swifter action that also considers the wider workforce.

We believe that some of the proposed reforms need a far stronger evidence base and are pleased that the department is taking a cautious approach to these. Untested reforms could have unintended consequences for children and their families, so a test-and-learn approach is appropriate. We also welcome the Government's commitment to co-designing these reforms with councils and partners.

Children's social care does not operate in a vacuum, so we would have

liked to see more cross-departmental focus on issues that lead to more children and families needing support from children's social care, including financial deprivation and access to mental health services. We agree with the care review that, without addressing issues outside the remit of children's social care, "reforms to children's social care risk treating the symptoms and not the cause".

The strategy commits £200 million in additional funding. However, LGA analysis (predating current high inflation rates) indicates an existing shortfall of £1.6 billion a year simply to maintain current service levels. The care review recommended additional investment of at least £2.6 billion over four years to improve the system to better meet children's needs.

Furthermore, much of the additional funding will go to pathfinder and pilot areas, with very little being allocated

elsewhere. This means that in most areas, children will not benefit from the additional funding that is desperately needed.

While it is positive that there is now a clear direction of travel following last year's reviews, most of the changes signalled in this strategy will not deliver results quickly, and the system is in crisis now. Inflation and pressures on council budgets will only compound the difficulties facing services, while the impact of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis are increasing children's need for support every day.

If the Department for Education truly accepts the challenge posed by each of the three major reports on which this strategy builds, it must also accept that the challenge exists everywhere and there is an urgent need for immediate action. We already have a significant amount of evidence about what works, including that developed through the department's own innovation programme. Additional funding for all councils, not just those in pathfinder areas, can be wisely invested in stabilising the current system to ensure strong foundations on which to build future reform.



See p26

Our briefing on the strategy is available at www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/childrens-social-care-reform-implementation-strategy-and



Public health in local government

Good practice from councils shows the potential for reducing health inequalities – if properly resourced



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

Ten years of seeing local government and public health blend together, each using the expertise and reach of the other, has been a fascinating experience for me.

Despite the huge financial constraints under which local government, including public health, is now working, I have been constantly impressed by councils' enthusiasm to improve the health of their communities and to reduce the still shocking inequalities in health we see within and between them.

Public health, drawing imaginatively on all of local government's functions, can make a real, large-scale difference to improving people's lives,

promoting wellbeing and reducing health inequalities.

Working with partners, public health supports work to promote the independence of people with long-term chronic conditions and to prevent ill health, thus reducing pressures on the NHS.

Good practice from individual councils shows just what potential there is for public health, if properly resourced, to make inroads into improving health and wellbeing.

Public health teams, working with a 'health in all policies' approach across councils, are tackling persistent problems such as adult and childhood obesity, mental illness, alcohol abuse, sexually transmitted infections, and

the health impact of isolation and loneliness in old age.

However, the context for all this excellent work is the relentless reduction in the resources available for public health work.

Councils and their public health teams have put a brave face on the compromises they have had to make – working with the local NHS and voluntary sector, sharing public health initiatives and, sometimes, even public health teams across councils, and reorganising in an attempt to achieve more with less.

I take my hat off to their resilience and passion, but I want to reiterate my plea for properly resourced public health services across the country.

The public health function of local government cannot continue to maximise its role at the heart of councils while continually retrenching to make budget cuts.

We must not get used to the NHS and social care being in a permanent state of crisis.

Public health could help make this country one where people live healthy lives for longer, with less dependence on acute health and care services and a better quality of life, while reducing the public service budget in the long term.

We will be discussing these issues with leading experts and councils at the LGA's virtual annual public health conference on 21-23 March 2023, across three mornings (see below).



The LGA's eleventh annual public health conference, in partnership with the Association of Directors of Public Health and the Faculty of Public Health, takes place virtually on 21-23 March. Sessions include: **'Why a healthy nation is intrinsic to growth'; 'Regulatory services on the frontline'; 'Cost-of-living crisis: what is the impact on children and young people?'; 'Reframing men's mental health';** and **'Harnessing physical activity for the national good'**. To view the full programme and book your free place, please visit www.local.gov.uk/events. The LGA's annual public health report will be launched to coincide with the conference



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

Data for delivery

Co-design will be crucial to the success of the new Office for Local Government

It has been a busy start to the year so far for local government improvement, with government continuing to press on with the development of the Office for Local Government (Oflog). As a result, I've been actively involved in discussions to ensure that council views help to shape this body.

In recent weeks, I have met Local Government Minister Lee Rowley and Lord Morse, the interim Chair of Oflog, to underline how important it is that Oflog is co-designed with the LGA and that it meets the needs of the sector, the Government and the public.

I was pleased to hear the minister reflect many of the points we raised at a recent webinar, including a commitment to co-design with the sector, as well as the need to take into consideration contextual data and variability in the approaches and priorities set by councils.

Government has indicated that Oflog will aim to equip local leaders with data to help them deliver improvements for their places, while enhancing transparency and accountability by providing residents with detailed information about their local areas. We are also advised that it will provide government with an oversight of the sector.

We recognise that councils already provide and use extensive data on an extremely wide range of topics,



which the LGA supports through our award-winning and highly valued data benchmarking tool, LG Inform.

In working with government, our objective is to ensure that Oflog is complementary to LG Inform and can be useful to the sector – for instance, by making data available about what government and other parts of the public sector spend at council level, so councils can shape and influence what other partners are doing for residents and businesses.

A further key piece of work that I have been leading on in recent months, alongside the vice-chairs of the Improvement and Innovation Board (IIB), is the review of our peer support offer. The review confirmed that peers make a vital contribution to the LGA's sector support offer and are, on the whole, highly regarded for the support and value they provide.

Recommendations arising from the review are being implemented to enhance this offer, with IIB lead members taking forward an action plan that will, in particular, develop our member peer support offer. This will include looking at how we ensure we have the appropriately experienced, skilled, and diverse cohort of peers that councils require, while also looking at providing more training and support for our member peers.

The LGA's support to councils relies heavily on the expertise, experience and time of dedicated peers, because we are best placed to understand our sector. It's important, though, that we continue to develop our peers to deliver the best support possible to local councils.

As an LGA peer myself I know what a highly rewarding experience it can be, providing a fantastic opportunity to learn from other authorities.



To find out more about LGA peers, visit bit.ly/3IKbXNZ. For LG Inform, see lginform.local.gov.uk

Embracing equity

Councils have a key role to play in ensuring all voices are heard



Local government plays a critical role in reducing inequalities and enhancing inclusion and cohesion within communities.

But as councils gear up to mark the 115th International Women's Day on 8 March, it remains the case that the membership – and leadership – of many remains predominantly male.

Women make up around 35 per cent of all councillors in England and Wales, and just 21.5 per cent of leaders and 25.6 per cent of group leaders.

Within those figures are big regional variations. Just three out of 36 council leaders in the East Midlands (8.3 per cent) and three out of 21 in Yorkshire and Humber (14.3 per cent) are women, compared with 12 out of 39 in the North West (30.8 per cent) and 10 out of 30 in London (33 per cent).

The figures are a little better for deputy council leaders, with women accounting for 37.5 per cent of positions overall in England and Wales, and half in London and Wales.

As the contributions here (see right and over page) from women deputy leaders make clear, the gender gap on

councils matters, because male-driven policy may not be meeting the needs of all the communities councils represent.

Listening to and representing all residents can help make sure places are safe and inclusive, and provide new solutions to the problems they face – a common theme highlighted by our contributors.

The LGA provides a range of resources to help councils with their work on equalities, diversity and inclusion, including training for officers and councillors – see our equalities hub for more information (www.local.gov.uk/our-support/equalities-hub) – while our Be a Councillor campaign aims to improve the diversity of people standing for election (see www.local.gov.uk/be-councillor).

i **International Women's Day (IWD)** is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for accelerating gender parity. **Marked annually on 8 March since 1908**, this year's theme is **#EmbraceEquity**, and aims to drive worldwide understanding of why equal opportunities aren't enough – see www.internationalwomensday.com

'We need to listen'



Councillor **Rachel Carnac** (Con) is Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate at Canterbury City Council

I'm not sure being a deputy automatically leads to being a leader; it would be interesting to know how often that happens. I'm very happy being deputy leader but I have had some issues with 'imposter' syndrome, despite being in my 50s and co-running a business for 20 years.

I was appointed in autumn 2020 and it was straight into budget setting. I had had some involvement in that the previous year because I was chair of a strategic committee. Even so, I was thinking 'oh, can I do this?' But of course, you get over that and do the job. You have to think, 'why was I selected as deputy by the leader?' – presumably because they wanted to use my abilities and skills.

Women quite commonly say 'I don't know if I would be any good', but you need to look at what you do in your life – in work, as a mother or carer – because those are transferable skills.

Once you get to a leadership position, the issue is balancing your time – trying to do your job and go to lots of meetings in the council and your ward work and party work.

We definitely need to get more younger people coming in, and people of all backgrounds, not just women.

One of the important things about having women in leadership roles or people with different perspectives is that policy can be very male-driven at national and local level.

Even simple things like assisted bin collections, having more benches, how people travel – some in the community understand the need for those much more than others.

You have a minority of people who are always going to be active, but it's when you hear the voices of people who don't speak very loudly that you hear the issues they are struggling with. Those are the people we need to get hold of and listen to otherwise we are developing policy for a very narrow group of people.

We should all have our views represented and we should not be leaving anyone behind in our wards.

'Communities need **leaders with compassion**'



Councillor **Zoe Nicholson** (Green) is Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets at Lewes District Council

We are in a co-operative alliance with my Liberal Democrat, Labour and Independent colleagues here in Lewes, where leadership rotates between the largest groups (Green and Lib Dem).

I didn't come to local government politics with the intention of being leader or deputy leader, I came to the role of being a councillor, as I feel that our communities need leaders with compassion and ways of solving problems together that aren't present in our discussions and debates between the bigger two parties.

The problems facing our communities and planet won't be solved by polarised debate of 'I'm right and you're wrong'.

The climate, ecological, and now cost-of-living crisis won't get solved by the same thinking that created it, so we need community leaders who are prepared to work collaboratively with others to find new solutions to the issues we face.

With that as the backdrop for standing in May 2019, I have found myself co-leading the creation of an alliance of groups to run the council.

It's been a privilege and honour to serve my community in this way, and humbling to see the way our community responded with such

compassion and resilience to the pandemic and now the cost-of-living crisis.

It's not been without its challenges; many times, I have been one of two or three women leaders among other leaders in public and private meetings.

With women representing only 35 per cent of all councillors, it still shocks me that I am often surrounded by so many more men.

Having had a long career in the NHS where women are often in visible leadership roles, I have sometimes been taken aback by both the age and gender imbalance that exists in local government.

We need to make the role of councillor attractive to women of all ages and backgrounds, by supporting them with child care payments; setting allowance

levels appropriate to the role; thinking about the scheduling of council meetings; and providing flexible roles for women in cabinet positions.

Most of the women I have worked with are also working councillors; juggling family, work and so many other commitments, they are busy and successful community activists and leaders.

My role as leader/deputy leader is in many ways my most fulfilling role to date: with my officer and councillor colleagues, we have been able to steer a path with our community that creates a greener, fairer community for all.

I do hope more of my fellow women leaders in communities will join me in this deeply satisfying and important role as councillor and leader.



'The element of surprise'



Councillor **Liz Leyshon** (Lib Dem) is Deputy Leader and Lead Member on Finance and Human Resources at Somerset County Council

The best thing about being a councillor is the title.

To my knowledge, no one has come up with a feminisation of 'councillor'. Nothing annoyed me more when I was working as a theatre and cinema manager than being called the manageress.

I've been Deputy Leader at Somerset County Council since May 2019, and am Lead Member for Finance and HR. Fortunately, I had four years as opposition spokesperson on finance and that has helped my understanding as we have worked so hard to propose a balanced budget.

Anyone in an upper tier authority knows that the financial situation is what's generally

called challenging, and it's not looking any easier from 2024 onwards.

So how has it been to be a woman at this time, when many of the executive members for finance are men with work experience in financial services, and/or long experience as a councillor?

Clearly, it's not easy, but is that because I'm a relatively inexperienced woman?

Personally, I've always found my work easier as a woman, partly because it's easier to care about other people and be accepted in that role, and partly because it gives you the element of surprise.

I have fond recollections of the reaction of some big-name performers at my middle scale theatre in Somerset when they found out it was me who negotiated the contracts.

In my lighter moments I refer to local politics as being very similar to working in a theatre: lots of amateur dramatics and a bit of stand-up comedy. But it's very serious right now. While I have no ambition

to be leader, I have huge ambition for my home county, and want us to rise above everyone's expectations as we approach Vesting Day and the creation of the unitary Somerset Council.

I would say that the relationships in theatre and film between director and producer best describe my position. The director has the vision, the producer makes it possible.

The producer/lead member for finance needs to be the check and balance to the director/leader of council, working mostly behind the scenes to keep things under control and being most successful when they are least seen.

Of course, we are not elected to be officers of the council. We are there to give political direction and work with our group to establish and deliver the ambition. That's my job now, supporting Cllr Bill Revans, Leader of Somerset County Council, soon to be Somerset Council.

'A safe and inclusive place'



Councillor **Aicha Less** (Lab) is Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Protection at Westminster City Council

I have always lived and worked in Westminster; it is part of my DNA.

What I love about the city is its rich history and how so many different people from so many backgrounds call this place their home.

I was first elected in 2016, holding various positions including deputy leader of the opposition.

Then, in last year's local election, Labour gained a momentous win – the first in the council's history. It was a night full of emotion and even after a well-earned rest, it still took a few days for that realisation to sink in.

That's when the hard work really started: working out how to deliver our manifesto pledges while getting a grip with all aspects of council services.

As a group we were new to this, but we

had waited for such a long time for this moment and making a real difference to our communities is still such a motivating factor.

I was elected as Deputy Leader, alongside Cllr Tim Roca, and offered the role of Cabinet member for Communities and Public Protection. Both areas cover frontline services, something important to me, and it is brilliant that we have already delivered several of our pledges.

I am dedicated to making Westminster a safe and inclusive place that really listens to the opinions and ideas of our residents. After all, they know their communities better than anyone else.

Tackling inequality, ending violence against women and girls, and ensuring our residents are safe is especially important to me.

Now more than ever, it is crucial to come together and empower women of all communities to stand up to the perpetrators and make that real difference.

Empowering women to become



leaders in their communities, homes, and work, and fight for what they believe in is something I am truly passionate about.

I hope that when young women see me in one of London's biggest local authorities, they can see themselves achieving similar things in politics.

In my role, no two days are the same and I continue to grow and learn each day. There are challenges along the way, but there is always a solution and that's what makes me take pride in my work.

I am so proud of how much we have already achieved since May and having a cabinet that is reflective of our residents is a step in the right direction to making a fairer Westminster. But we are only just getting started!

A better quality of life

Culture, sport and leisure services can help boost high streets and improve wellbeing



Councillor **Julie Jones-Evans** is a Member of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board

The pandemic generated a lot of innovation, and services are continuing to innovate as they support communities with the cost of living, as well as their own financial pressures from high energy costs and a squeeze on discretionary income.

Even as we respond to these new issues, it is important for us as leaders of place to pause and reflect on what worked, and what didn't work, during the pandemic period.

What ways of working should we perpetuate and mainstream? What do we need to retire now the world has moved on?

The LGA's improvement offer is helping councils to do this through Leadership Essentials programmes for culture and sport lead members, culture and library peer challenges, and leadership programmes for culture, library and physical activity lead officers.

These programmes support leaders to develop good practice and systemic thinking, and to connect with other councils to share case studies and sector knowledge.

We have heard how councils are using culture and leisure services to help:

- reinvigorate the high street and manage empty shops
- bridge the attainment gap for children who have missed out on formal schooling during the pandemic
- address rising levels of mental ill health and loneliness
- ensure local people have the skills they need to find high-quality, sustainable work



- communicate messages about climate change and prompt behaviour change in this area. Culture and leisure infrastructure is what creates places in which people want to live and work. It can rebrand towns and cities, draw investment, create jobs and strengthen communities through a sense of local pride. It can be a tool for communicating new ideas.

More importantly, it contributes to a better quality of life for communities.

Councils run a wide range of cultural facilities, including 3,000 libraries, 350 museums, 116 theatres and numerous monuments, historic buildings and heritage sites.

They also run 2,607 health and fitness facilities, including 924

swimming pools; and around 20,000 parks and green spaces.

These facilities are embedded in local communities and provide a ready-made network of community engagement opportunities at a local level. It is essential we work with partners and communities to co-create sustainable solutions to complex issues.

For example, my own Isle of Wight Council works closely with the Island Collection, a strategic partnership of cultural organisations who work together to establish the island as a significant cultural environment and destination, for all those who live here, and for those who visit.

We are still lucky enough to run our own leisure centres but, like all operators, are dealing with the shadow of the pandemic and the impact of energy costs.

As leaders we need to:

- encourage creative ideas for opening up services and getting the public involved
- advocate the way in which culture and sport contributes to wider social outcomes, particularly regarding economic renewal, health and wellbeing and climate change activity
- work collaboratively to build relationships with partners across place.

It is essential that culture and physical activity are embedded in councils' wider strategies and that leaders advocate for cultural services and physical activity to leverage opportunities and partnerships.

i To find out more about the LGA's improvement support, please visit www.local.gov.uk/arts-culture-and-libraries-2023. **The LGA Annual Culture, Tourism and Sport Conference 2023 (hybrid) takes place on 15 March.** To find out more and book your place, see www.local.gov.uk/events

A look ahead in licensing

Announcements are expected on taxis and PHVs, gambling and alcohol



Councillor **Clive Woodbridge** is Deputy Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board

It was great to be able to get together for the LGA's annual licensing conference in February to discuss and reflect on some of the key developments that will impact councils' licensing committees and teams over the coming year.

We heard from expert speakers who covered a wide range of issues, including licensing and counterterrorism, how to secure alignment between licensing and planning regimes, and best practice in fee setting.

This is already shaping up to be another significant year for licensing, with important announcements expected, including: the long-awaited outcome of the Gambling Act Review;

the Department for Transport's best practice guidance consultation on licensing taxis and private hire vehicles (PHVs); and several Home Office consultations relating to alcohol and entertainment licensing.

We were pleased to hear from Local Transport Minister Richard Holden, about his plans for taxi and PHV licensing. The Government's Levelling Up White Paper, which contains a proposal to transfer control of taxi and PHV licensing to both combined and upper-tier authorities, was of particular interest.

The minister said work on this will begin later in the year and that the department is keen to hear the views of councils. The LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board has expressed initial concerns about safeguarding and reduced local accountability in relation to these proposals.



For more information about our licensing work, please contact jade.hall@local.gov.uk

Cllr Jeanie Bell, one of the LGA's Licensing Champions, also gave a presentation on how to link licensing into your council's priorities. Cllr Bell shared how her authority, St Helens Borough Council, sought to tackle unemployment following the pandemic by launching a 'Ways 2 Work Scheme'. This offers potential taxi and PHV drivers a fully funded level 2 qualification and a number of financial support incentives. Cllr Bell also shared how St Helens has secured greater alignment between licensing and community safety. For example, licensing was moved into her remit as Cabinet Member for Safer, Stronger Communities and St Helens' licensing manager sits as a key partner on anti-social behaviour meetings and the community safety executive, and works closely with partners on joint enforcement and compliance visits. This has proved to be invaluable in sharing intelligence and ensuring greater alignment of work.

As well as reaffirming the importance of licensing in keeping our communities safe, secure and healthy, the conference gave us a chance to highlight how the LGA has updated its support offer to assist officers with the process of inducting new members onto licensing committees. We have refreshed our licensing e-learning module, which provides an overview of the role and responsibilities of a member of a licensing committee, and have developed an accompanying series of scenario-based licensing videos, which cover the main areas.

The LGA is also running a bi-annual Licensing Leadership Essentials course. This two-day interactive course is aimed at chairs and vice-chairs, and focuses on how good committees are run. The course is fully funded by the LGA and has received excellent feedback.

You can find these and other resources on our website at www.local.gov.uk/licensing-committee-training-resources



SENsational story and play

Libraries in Dorset are engaging young children with special needs and their families



Councillor **Laura Beddow** (Con) is Portfolio Holder for Culture, Communities and Customer Services at Dorset Council

In the spring of 2022, Dorset Library Service undertook an LGA remote peer challenge on its early years' service.

This required the library service to collaborate with our local children's services and look at how they could contribute to Dorset Council's 'Our Children, Young People's and Families Plan 2020-2023', and our aim to support children to have the best possible start in life.

The percentage of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) has increased in Dorset each year since 2017, and there are 2,800 children with SEND supported through education, health and care plans (EHCPs).

Other research findings have also

flagged up a clear message that families in Dorset are looking for more groups and accessible support around SEND.

To respond to the challenge of creating more activities for the under-fives and their families, we needed to address the following issues:

- ensure that our libraries were welcoming and inclusive places, where young people with SEND can make friends and be included in community life
- discuss with specialists the layout and equipment that would best meet the needs of the children
- work on a training plan for library staff which would include specialist advice and support
- collaborate with partners to market the sessions and attract families.

We introduced 'SENsational Story and Play' sessions to enable the rollout of an inclusive early years' library activity and provide an opportunity for SEND children, their parents and carers to meet and make friends and help reduce isolation and loneliness.

The sessions were piloted across three libraries with a plan to gather feedback from families, library staff and 'Portage' services for pre-school children with SEND, and use this feedback to develop the sessions and continue a phased rollout across the council's other 20 libraries.

The feedback from families has been encouraging.

For example, staff have relayed that a parent talked about the benefits of having an activity for children with SEND because in other toddler groups she felt more anxious about her child's behaviour, felt that other parents were judging her and that she constantly had to intervene and explain.

She said she would like to make friends with other parents in the same situation.

Our children's services are supporting the sessions by running sign language training for library



"The feedback from families has been encouraging"

staff, and we are sharing our early years programmes and training with colleagues in the local speech, language and communication network.

A development librarian is undertaking Dingley's Promise Early Years Inclusion Programme, funded by Comic Relief, which aims to increase the number of young children with SEND accessing early years and childcare places.

It will help us to ensure that we are an informed service that can support the under-fives with SEND and their families through cascading information and training to all library staff.

Dorset Library Service's early years activities have also been added to the 'Balanced System' framework, a framework to help support children to develop their speech, language and communication pathways.

The SENsational Story and Play sessions are a fantastic addition to our library service.

It's important that we provide services that are inclusive and welcoming to all, and we've been delighted at the response from the children, parents and carers who can use our libraries to come together, have a nice time and also check out everything our service has to offer.



i You can read the full 'SENsational Story and Play' case study at www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/sensational-story-and-play



Diverse talent

The LGA's flagship recruitment programme brings together talented graduates and councils

"The NGDP scheme has been hugely successful for us, producing a rich supply of talented people every year who make a tangible and positive contribution to the work that we do, with many of them securing permanent roles either with us or our partners in the area. The calibre of applicants is impressive, and the scheme forms a key part of the approach to developing our leaders of the future"

Janet Atkin, Assistant Director of HR, Cambridgeshire County Council

Currently recruiting for its 25th cohort, the National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP) has brought more than 2,000 graduates into local government over a period of two decades.

It is the only national graduate scheme specifically for local government, offering councils the opportunity to recruit highly motivated and capable candidates to work on important projects over a two-year period.

It also allows participating organisations to effectively nurture talented staff and develop a pipeline of future leaders internally, and for the wider sector.

Every year, between 4-5,000

graduates from across the UK apply to the NGDP to fast-track their career in local government.

The NGDP attracts passionate, committed graduates who aspire to becoming senior leaders of the sector.

Applications for the 2023 intake closed in early January and we received almost 4,700 applications, demonstrating the huge demand from graduates.

The LGA manages a national marketing campaign and runs a rigorous, multi-stage recruitment process, ensuring only the highest-calibre candidates are selected for interview and ultimately appointed.

The NGDP attracts and recruits graduates from all regions of the country, from a range of backgrounds,

and having studied a variety of subjects from many different universities.

The most recently recruited cohort began their local government careers in the autumn of 2022, when 212 graduate trainees were placed across 75 councils – our highest number of partner councils yet.

This is also the largest and most diverse cohort to date, with 28 per cent of trainees being from a black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) background, 11 per cent declaring a disability, and at least 21 per cent identifying as LGBTQIA+.

In relation to socioeconomic background, 45 per cent of graduate trainees' parents were not university-educated, and 16 per cent of trainees were eligible for free school meals.

Graduate interest in the NGDP is increasing and the programme is expected to continue to grow.

However, to ensure that we can meet the demand from graduates – and continue to increase diversity to further reflect the communities that councils serve – we need to increase the number of places offered by getting more partner organisations on board. Councils are able to take on as few or as many graduates as they can, and we encourage them to tap into the NGDP as a key organisational development resource – and see first-hand the value it can bring.

What you need to know

It is quick and easy for councils to sign up for the NGDP via our website, www.local.gov.uk/ngdp. This year's deadline is 31 March.

The LGA manages the whole recruitment process, so all councils need to do once they sign up is hold interviews with candidates who have successfully passed all recruitment stages, and decide who they want to employ.

We also provide support for councils on

the programme and hold regular meetings to share best practice and guidance.

The NGDP is subsidised by central government funding and provides a unique and cost-effective solution to help combat the capacity crisis the sector is facing.

If you would like to find out how the NGDP could help your council to build capacity and develop future leaders, please email ngdp@local.gov.uk.

Collective leadership in social care



Clenton Farquharson
MBE is Chair of
Think Local Act Personal

Leadership is often seen as a hierarchy, but I want to move towards a collective approach.

How can we, as leaders, enable people who draw on care and support to be part of that collective leadership?

The leader's role is that of an architect, supporting the design of a health and social care system that is equitable and enables a meaningful life, while the operational or strategic roles make it happen.

The system currently looks from the perspective of interventions, needs, units of time – when it should be about supporting people to have a good, meaningful life.

So, how do we go about creating that meaningful life?

Care and support should be about connection and building relationships. It should explore ways that involve us as individuals in our communities, supporting us to make and maintain meaningful connections.

This support should be flexible and inclusive.

Inclusion requires us – the people drawing on care and support – to be involved in equal partnership in the conversations and decisions about us, our family, our care and our community.

The 'system' – and therefore us, as leaders – should be flexible, willing and able to adapt to people, not the other way around. We want care and support that is responsive and proportionate to what is needed.

For me, leadership is about understanding that your role as a leader is to develop a culture that values this.

We need to ingrain this approach, and there are good resources available for those wanting to learn how to start or improve this in their area of work.



Campaign movement Social Care Future's vision is key: "We all want to live in the place we call home with the people and things that we love, in communities where we look out for one another, doing the things that matter to us."

Think Local Act Personal's 'Making it Real' framework for how to do personalised care and support can help people towards this goal.

Making it Real is built around six themes. These describe what good looks like from an individual's perspective and what organisations should be doing to live up to those expectations.

The framework supports co-production between people, commissioners and providers. The role of leaders is massive, so we are going to add a 'well led' component to it.

Both Social Care Future's vision and Making it Real have been co-produced, putting the words, needs, wants and aspirations of people with lived experience at the centre – working out from their lives, not starting with the system

That's why I am pleased the Care Quality Commission is including Making it Real statements in its new single assessment

framework for inspecting local authorities, integrated care systems, and providers.

Co-production is about having people in the same room to agree on a solution together.

As a former rugby player, I know our captain had an important role, but success depended on all members of the team performing to their best when on the pitch. Leadership needs to be collaborative, compassionate, and caring about each other.

Your role as a leader is to consider these issues and the opportunities in your area.

Use them to design out the inequalities, lack of choice and control, and non-person-centred 'time and task' approaches to care and support, so that people can have the support that helps them to live a meaningful life.



Think Local Act Personal is a national partnership of more than 50 organisations committed to transforming health and care through personalisation and community-based support, see www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk

Investing in culture



Councillor **Izzi Seccombe** OBE is Leader of the LGA's Conservative Group

Following last month's reshuffle, I would like to congratulate Rachel Maclean on her appointment as Housing Minister.

Rachel is an experienced politician, having previously held ministerial positions at the Home Office, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Treasury, and I look forward to working closely with her on this important policy area.

Congratulations are also due to Lucy Frazer, who left the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to become the new Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

Given the importance of local

government to Lucy's department – English councils invest £1.1 billion directly in cultural services each year – it is good to have a former DLUHC minister in this key post.

In its engagement with Lucy, I am sure the LGA will be keen to highlight the various recommendations from 'Cornerstones of culture', the final report of our independent Commission on Culture and Local Government (see **first** 679).

The report highlights how local culture can support mental wellbeing, provide educational opportunity and boost the economy as part of our recovery from the pandemic.

It is a comprehensive and interesting read, and I am grateful to my colleague Cllr Peter Golds for so ably representing the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board on the commission.

I would also like to congratulate Greg Hands on his appointment as the new Chairman of the Conservative Party.

With the local elections fast

approaching, this is a particularly important appointment, and along with our colleagues at the Conservative Councillors' Association, the leadership of the LGA's Conservative Group is looking forward to working with Greg and his team to ensure that our councillors and candidates are given as much support and help as possible over the coming weeks.

Finally, just a reminder that if Conservative councillors have any issues they wish to raise, or if they require some advice, please do email the Conservative Group office at lgaconservatives@local.gov.uk and we will do our best to help.

"Local culture can support mental wellbeing, provide educational opportunity and boost the economy"



Councillor **James Jamieson** is Chairman of the LGA

Helping Ukrainian families rebuild their lives

Councils have a proud history of welcoming new arrivals, stepping forward at times of crisis with local partners and with local communities so families and individuals can be safe and supported.

Local government's hard work in supporting those fleeing the war in Ukraine should be celebrated, alongside the generosity of local residents who have opened up their homes and their lives to those in need.

It is, of course, a tragedy that this support is still needed because the conflict continues, more than a year since the Russian invasion on 24 February 2022.

Councils want to support families to rebuild their lives so it is concerning that we are seeing more people presenting as homeless to councils and, in particular, families facing the



uncertainty of temporary accommodation.

I know councils will continue to do all they can to help those who are owed homelessness duties, but this is not the best route for families to find permanent homes.

Ukrainians are entering an already log-jammed system where we just do not have enough housing and every council has significant council house waiting lists.

The Government has been working with the sector on homelessness reduction funding, but we urgently need further clarification on how the

£150 million it announced in December can be used by councils, particularly given the funding changes announced at the same time.

And while the £500 million provided to increase housing supply is positive, it does not come with revenue funding to help families access it.

Councils have been at the sharp end of the rise in the number of people presenting as homeless and we need urgent solutions to pressing housing needs in the short and the long term, across all the schemes that welcome new arrivals to the UK.



Councillor **Shaun Davies** is Leader of the LGA's Labour Group

Take back control of council funding

There has been a lot of focus recently on oversight of councils, in light of serious financial failings at some councils, including Thurrock, Croydon, and Northamptonshire – all of which resulted in formal intervention from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

But there has been less discussion about the other major financial intervention involving DLUHC – with the Treasury recently removing the department's power to carry out any new capital spending.

This has reduced the limit DLUHC can spend without Treasury approval from £30 million to £0, leaving the absurd situation of the Levelling Up Secretary no longer having the power to sign off on the installation of a park bench.

How have we come to this?

There are concerns about the slow delivery of levelling-up funds, with only 5 per cent being spent in the first 12 months.

The National Audit Office said DLUHC "doesn't know whether billions of pounds of public spending has had the impact intended".

"The Treasury recently removed DLUHC's power to carry out any new capital spending"

It appears the Treasury now agrees the department is not delivering 'best value'.

The problem is the way these funding streams have been conceived – as a politically-motivated begging bowl for pet projects, instead of considered investment in place-based infrastructure led by local communities.

Under a Labour government, a new Take Back Control Act will provide the framework for genuine economic devolution to our towns and cities, with better accountability between national and local government.

This new way of governing will build a fairer, greener future for every part of our country.



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

Bus routes hanging by a thread

Bus operators face a double whammy when the Bus Recovery Grant, used to support certain routes when the pandemic resulted in passenger numbers plunging, finishes, alongside the £2-a-ride deal.

Both these will cease at the end of the summer, despite the extension of government support for a few months. Without a long-term funding commitment to keep buses running, cities, towns and villages will lose treasured lifelines that connect them to families, schools, jobs and essential services.

More than a thousand routes were lost last year, despite the best efforts of many councils to help from depleted budgets.

"Further devastating bus cuts will leave more people and places poorly served or with no public transport whatsoever"

The Government's own National Bus Strategy looks like it will fail before the bus has taken off its handbrake, because of the effects of increased fuel costs and pressures caused by bus-driver shortages.

The Government has, rightly, backed the bus in London through a funding deal for Transport for London.

We urgently need ministers to do the same in the rest of the country, otherwise we face the prospect of further devastating bus cuts, which will leave more people and places poorly served, or with no public transport whatsoever.

With every day that passes without a long-term decision on bus funding, we risk more cuts being hardwired into bus operators' plans for new timetables.

It's now time to turn the fine words of the national bus strategy into a firm commitment to continue to "back the bus" in the years ahead.



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

Identifying tensions in planning policies

The proposals to change our planning rules have been described by some as a dramatic return to 'old school' planning, with stronger control from central government.

The LGA's Independent Group is known for working directly with our members in developing our policy positions, rather than taking a central party line.

We develop our independent thinking in discussions in our policy think tanks, and at events to 'deep dive' into key issues.

Two think tanks met in February to review the proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), with consultations on those changes closing on 2 March.

The five-year housing land supply requirement appears to be replaced by a two-year 'delivery test', leaving the Government with all the necessary levers that were so unpopular in the previous proposals.

Members expressed their frustration at how the 'viability test' undermines local priorities, linked with retention of targets for housing numbers – locally led, but no doubt nationally guided.

"We need to be taking every legislative opportunity to empower councils"

The Chris Skidmore review into net zero confirmed the key role that councils play, including through their planning and place-shaping role, but this has not been reflected in the consultation.

While it tinkers with wind power, it doesn't connect with government legislation on reducing emissions.

This is a significant missed opportunity when we need to be taking every legislative opportunity to empower our councils.

Our members are very concerned about the tension between the apparent government objective for locally led planning and the statement that national management development plans take precedence over local and neighbourhood plans.

Improving outcomes for children in care



Dr Jo Casebourne is Chief Executive Officer of What Works for Early Intervention and Children's Social Care

At What Works for Early Intervention and Children's Social Care (WWEICSC), we focus on using evidence to understand what's likely to improve outcomes for children.

The Government's recently published implementation plan, in response to last year's Independent Review of Children's Social Care, includes some promising commitments.

I welcome the ambition that 'every child and family who needs it will have access to high-quality help.'

However, there's a lack of clarity on exactly what the Government means by 'good-quality family support', as well as the steps needed to make sure it's available.

We also shouldn't underestimate the efforts and resources that will be needed to make sure the strongest and best-evidenced interventions are offered as part of family help.

We know high-quality, carefully targeted support can help families to stay together, mitigate the impact of stress and adversity, and help children to thrive.

The approach of developing tailored and targeted 'pathfinders' on family help and other reforms in 12 local areas is a positive one. These pathfinders need to include robust pilots and evaluations throughout, with time for reflection and learning before changes are rolled out nationwide.

It's important not to start implementing interventions across the country without first establishing that those interventions work to improve outcomes.

The proposals to set a clear national strategy for children's social care, with clear accountability, fair funding and a focus on a learning loop for improvement with transparent data, are also helpful.



Providing a clear position about the goals of children's social care is an important step, and can be achieved through a new National Children's Social Care Framework.

Similarly, the move towards developing more consistent metrics for capturing progress against these objectives is useful.

I also welcome the commitment to develop practice guides, as these have the potential to significantly strengthen practice if backed by policy and funding.

WWEICSC is the new organisation formed by the merger of the Early Intervention Foundation and What Works for Children's Social Care, see www.whatworks-csc.org.uk. See page 13 **for more on children's social care reform**

Greening pension funds



Councillor **Wisdom Da Costa** (Residents Association) is a Member of the Berkshire Pension Fund Committee at the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead

Climate change, biodiversity loss and plastics pollution are among some of the most critical, existential issues facing humanity today.

In response, the Royal County of Berkshire Pension Fund has created a 'responsible investment' policy for 2022/23, which includes a focus on these issues and takes a direct approach to achievement using measured metrics to demonstrate success.

The policy also includes an inherent process aimed at increasing fund value alongside an increasing 'green' premium, and provides members and analysts with clear reports using critical metrics relating to climate change, biodiversity loss and plastics pollution. Keys to the long-term success of the policy are:

- the setting of key areas of focus, which also fall within the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

- the development of radical, but realistic, targets that allow us to discharge our responsibilities to future generations
- measurement of each of our investees' performance against targets using defined metrics and methodologies
- reporting on performance against targets using clear, relevant metrics. Additionally, through a process of



continuous improvement, the policy is responsive to the changing landscape, new data, and new developments in metrics and methodologies.

We are engaging with investees on targets that include achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions in line with the 2015 Paris Agreement and subsequent international agreements, including the setting of budgets that support limiting temperature increases to 1.5°C.

Other targets cover prevention of biodiversity loss – for example, by stemming current extinction-level losses, with the eventual aim of a role in biodiversity restoration – and minimisation, mitigation and avoidance of plastic pollution.

Pension fund professionals, fund managers and corporate managers crave a deeper understanding of their impact on key environmental, social and governance factors, such as climate change.

Our fund and key partners will look to include education and training as part of our engagement with investees and fund managers, to help them achieve and increase their green premium.

There is a long way to go before the tide turns, but we continue to aim for a greener pension fund.

● Cllr Da Costa is a qualified accountant and corporate treasurer



Linda Briheim-Crookall is Head of Policy and Practice Development at Coram Voice

Listening to children in care

In its recent response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, the Government stated: "We must listen to the voices of children in care and care leavers if we are successfully going to make the changes needed."

Ofsted has also recently expanded its inspection framework, introducing a new requirement for local authorities to show how young people will 'influence the services they receive'.

While professionals across the sector have long understood that listening to young people and involving them in service design is key to developing the right solutions, this approach should now be embedded in national social care practice.

Local authorities across the country should continuously be looking at how they can incorporate the views and lived experience of care leavers to respond to the national drive for improvement.

Coram Voice developed a three-year co-production programme, New Belongings, which supported eight local authorities across England (North Tyneside, North Yorkshire, Oldham, Stockport, Coventry, Hertfordshire, Wandsworth, and Dorset) to engage with young people to develop creative and innovative solutions for local care leavers.

A new report on the programme, 'The Story of New Belongings', found that the eight local authorities created a range of successful local service improvements together with their care leavers, in areas such as education and employment, emotional health and wellbeing, leaving care support services, and accommodation.

At the start of the programme, the local authorities were supported by Coram Voice to better understand the views and experiences of their young people using our 'Your life beyond care'



survey. In completing the survey, the young people sent a powerful message to their local authorities.

A third (32 per cent) reported that they did not feel safe where they lived; a similar figure (34 per cent) reported high levels of anxiety and one in five (20 per cent) said they struggled to cope financially.

The local authorities then used this baseline evidence to work with young people to co-produce solutions to the issues identified.

The report contains many examples of effective solutions that emerged from the New Belongings programme.

To improve emotional health and wellbeing, the London Borough of Wandsworth introduced specialist personal advisers with a background in mental health to bring a therapeutic approach to their work with young people experiencing acute difficulties.

To mitigate the 'care cliff', North Yorkshire developed the 'Always Here' scheme, to extend support to young people beyond the age of 25 in

recognition that some care leavers wanted to keep in touch with their workers to share their successes in life or have someone to talk to when they experienced difficulties.

The New Belongings programme shows what can be achieved when local authorities are committed to listening to their care leavers about what is important to them and taking action, together with young people, to develop local solutions to local issues.

Across England, we need to shift the focus of children's social care to embed participation and co-production with young people, to ensure that services offered meet the needs that young people themselves identify.

New Belongings is a structured and inspiring approach that can help local authorities on their journey towards improving services.



For more information, please visit coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/newbelongings



Allison Ogden-Newton

OBE is Chief Executive of
Keep Britain Tidy

From recycling to waste prevention

It used to be that we went out to shop and came home for a coffee, now we go out for coffee and do our shopping at home!

Instant consumption has made us a nation of thoughtless consumers.

Possibly one of the scariest things about this is that the public rarely make the connection between consumption and waste, and largely don't understand what we mean by preventing waste, as opposed to recycling it.

They are frustrated about packaging, if they are thinking at all from an environmental perspective, but they don't think about the impact of the manufacture of products or the distribution and delivery system that meant a small parcel could be delivered to their doorstep in less than 24 hours by a driver in a big van.

Our new report, 'Shifting the public's focus from recycling to waste prevention', is the result of a long-term research project to establish what the public understand about waste and how that affects their behaviour.

The research showed clearly that while they have an understanding of recycling, many believed that simply by doing that, they were 'doing their bit' for the planet.

For the past two decades, the focus for behaviour change in local government, when it comes to the environment, has been to drive up recycling rates.

Putting the emphasis on recycling has had the unintended consequence of doing little to encourage people to buy less and thereby move up the waste hierarchy – to reduce and reuse.

The good news is that we are seeing some growth in the sharing economy, with online platforms and social media allowing people to easily advertise things they no longer want to sell or gift to someone.

But alongside this we have also seen a

massive growth in online purchasing.

This is why we launched 'Buy Nothing New Month', as a first step in educating the public about the waste generated by consumption and offering simple alternatives for people to try out during January.

I, for one, loved the month. I learned loads of life hacks from leading role models in low-carbon living and I dug out a few old favourites that I am truly enjoying.

It was a month of ideas, features and inspiration that really were life-changing, even for an environmentalist!

It was a digital campaign with those who registered getting regular emails with tips and ideas, coupled with a social media burst.

Initial reactions show that those who took part embraced the concept, with more than 70 per cent buying nothing new during the month and 69 per cent reporting that they will think more about what they buy in the future.

Obviously, this is one small campaign by one environmental charity – a drop in the ocean of consumption.

What we need is a concerted drive by all those with a role to play, if we are to move up the waste hierarchy and put a dent in the more than 200 million tonnes of waste generated in the UK every year, before we even account for the waste generated by production and distribution.

We hope our report and campaign are the start of a conversation with the public and with those whose job it is to create a more sustainable future for us all.



'Shifting the public's focus from recycling to waste prevention' can be downloaded at www.keeptidytidy.org/recycling-waste-prevention

Warm places



Councillor Mark Hunter

(Lib Dem) is Leader of Stockport Council and Chair of the One Health and Care Board

As we enter March, the cost-of-living crisis remains at the forefront of everyone's minds, with individuals and families still facing many difficulties as they try to make ends meet.

As we navigate through one of the most turbulent financial periods we have seen nationally for many years, we are working together with partners to support our local population here in Stockport.

We benefit from a strong position with our new integrated care system (ICS) structures. Our One Stockport Health and Care Board is a great example of solid relationships across all partners involved in health and wellbeing, including housing and voluntary sector partners.

We also have an active, regional cost-of-living group, where we work with partner authorities and others across Greater Manchester to share good practices and help shape our approach and response.

Highlights of Stockport's response so far include around 150 'warm spaces' and counting – 130 of which have received funding from the council totalling £117,000 – and an online cost-of-living support hub.

We have used our Household Support Fund allocation from the Government to

work with partners to identify and deliver targeted support to some of the borough's most vulnerable households.

We have also delivered 1,200 'warm packs' to vulnerable residents, working closely with Age UK, Stockport Homes and Disability Stockport. The packs include scarves, gloves, socks, thermometers, advice and guidance on our cost-of-living offer, and information on prepayment meters.

We have provided: free holiday activities, including food, for school children over the February half-term; pop-up money roadshows, helping residents with financial wellbeing; winter support vouchers for around 8,500 families, including 13,000 children; heated throws for Stockport's most vulnerable housebound and isolated residents; and supported 102 residents with applications for pension credit.

I'm particularly proud of our warm spaces initiative. These locations are so much more than just a warm space, with activities, hot drinks, free food, free Wi-Fi, social opportunities, and people on hand to share the latest cost-of-living support and advice.

We have just less than 150 across our

borough, with at least one in every ward and no resident more than 10 minutes from a warm space, all signposted on our easy-to-use interactive map.

We heard a heartwarming story from a resident who had not left her home for two years since the pandemic, but she came to a warm space to enjoy a hot drink and join in the community activities hosted there.

Last month, we approved 23 bids for 'top up' funding for our providers, totalling more than £21,000, to help them keep the doors of their warm spaces open and continue to provide community activities for everyone to enjoy.

I often say to anyone I encounter how proud I am of Stockport; we pull together in a crisis.

We may not have all the answers, but we use our strong, collective community spirit and passion to help all our residents, businesses and communities in their time of need.

We are making a real difference to those feeling the worst of this crisis.



See www.stockport.gov.uk/topic/cost-of-living-support for **Stockport's cost-of-living support hub**

Joining the nation in celebration



Kate Groves is Marketing Manager at Eden Project Communities

Following recent announcements from Buckingham Palace, we are excited that this will be another very big year for The Big Lunch, which is being brought forward to 6-8 May as part of the celebrations for His Majesty King Charles III's coronation.

Communities are being invited to hold street parties and get together over the bank holiday weekend for The Coronation Big Lunch, and local authorities are again being asked to cut red tape for road closures and support residents, to enable mass participation.

Communities can also join the fun in

June, and plan a Big Lunch as part of the associated 'Month of Community'.

Now in its 15th year, The Big Lunch has a proven track record of delivering a profound and lasting impact for the communities that participate. The impressive statistics for 2022 include:

- one in four (17.2 million) of the UK population participated
- more than 11 million people said it helped them feel less lonely
- 92 per cent of organisers reported it had a positive impact on their community
- almost two-thirds of participants said it increased participation in voluntary work.

More than 70 councils were recognised as 'Platinum Councils' in 2022, including Portsmouth City Council.

Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson CBE, Leader of the council and Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, said: "Councils are being urged to help support The Coronation



Big Lunch, and Portsmouth City Council is proud to be leading the way, following the great success of last year, when more than 100 Big Jubilee Lunch events were held city-wide. The crowning of our new king is a truly historic occasion and we want everyone to be able to join the celebrations.

"But these events are not just about the day; they have a lasting impact and help build stronger communities – which is why we are again waiving road-closure fees and covering the costs of insurance for all street parties in Portsmouth, and I call upon others to follow suit."

i For more information for councils about The Big Lunch, please visit www.edenprojectcommunities.com/the-big-lunch/councils. See bit.ly/3IAI1Hs for LGA information about how councils can support community events, including those to mark the Coronation weekend



LGA Annual Culture, Tourism and Sport Conference 2023 (Hybrid)

Wednesday 15 March 2023, London

The process of recovery from COVID-19 is firmly underway with levelling up, economic recovery and reducing inequalities at the heart of council recovery plans. But addressing the effects of the pandemic on communities and places, as well as the increasing impact of rises in the cost of living, will require a radical rethink of how services are viewed, valued and delivered.

Join us to hear from councils who are taking innovative approaches and from experts on the challenges facing the sector and how we can best harness the power of culture, tourism and sport to support our communities and places.

Book now: www.local.gov.uk/events



ELECTIONS

Casual vacancies



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



Most, though not all, by-elections now being held are in councils that do not have contests scheduled for May.

The guiding principle is that casual vacancies are not filled if the elected member who is to be replaced would have naturally completed their term within six months of the vacancy occurring.

So, in Hertfordshire, the county contest to fill the Hitchin North seat following the sad death of long-serving Labour and LGA stalwart



Judi Billing took place earlier in February, but the choice of a new representative in her Hitchin Bearton district ward awaits the forthcoming council-wide elections.

In Sefton, the resigning councillor's term was not due to end in May and he resigned more than six months in advance in any case; in Dartford, timings were thrown into disarray by the announcement of an additional bank holiday for the Coronation and the requisite two electors were able to insist a by-election was called.

The successful Conservative candidate, Eddy Lampkin, will now be obliged to seek the renewal of his mandate after just 12 weeks.

On the political front, each of four political parties made at least one gain, with the Liberal Democrats registering a net advance of three seats.

Two of their gains came within parliamentary constituencies that they held for many years until 2015, and which they will be targeting at the next general election.

In Cheltenham, Battledown was the only ward which the Conservatives won in last year's whole council elections. This time a 10 per cent swing to the Liberal Democrats saw them lose it for the first time since it was created in 2002.

The Cornwall division of Long Rock, Marazion & St Erth is in the St Ives parliamentary



"Things did not always go the Lib Dems' way"

constituency, and here the Liberal Democrats' victory appears to have come courtesy of sweeping up the vote previously garnered by an Independent candidate.

The absence of an Independent also aided the party in North Yorkshire, where its surprisingly comfortable margin in the Masham and Fountains division reduced the Conservative overall majority on the soon-to-be-inaugurated unitary council to just two.

It might, however, be germane to point out that the unsuccessful Independent candidate from 2022 herself stood for the Liberal Democrats this time and, in this still rather traditional part of the country, is also known as the Countess of Swinton.

But things did not go the Liberal Democrats' way in every case.

The former MP for Bristol West, Stephen Williams, attempted to get elected for the Hotwells and Harbourside ward in his old constituency.

He was narrowly defeated by the Greens by the same 26-vote majority as his predecessor had in winning the seat in 2021. Their gain made the Greens the largest party on the city council.

Local by-elections

Barnet, Golders Green

CON HELD
44.3% over Lab Turnout 27.2%

Bristol, Hotwells and Harbourside

GREEN GAIN FROM LIB DEM
2.1% over Lib Dem Turnout 32.4%

Cambridgeshire, St Neots The Eatons

LIB DEM GAIN FROM IND
12.3% over Con Turnout 25.5%

Cheltenham, Battledown

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON
15.9% over Con Turnout 35.0%

Cornwall, Long Rock, Marazion & St Erth

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON
17.2% over Con Turnout 32.1%

Dartford, Wilmington, Sutton-At-Hone and Hawley

CON HELD
44.7% over Lab Turnout 19.2%

Denbighshire, Rhyl Ty Newydd

CON GAIN FROM LAB
1.3% over Lab Turnout 25.6%

Hertfordshire, Hitchin North

LAB HELD
48.4% over Con Turnout 26.0%

North Northamptonshire, Northall

LAB GAIN FROM CON
8.3% over Con Turnout 25.7%

North Yorkshire, Masham and Fountains

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON
25.5% over Con Turnout 35.5%

Rotherham, Keppel

LAB GAIN FROM ROTHERHAM DEMOCRATIC PARTY
22.5% over Ind Turnout 19.9%

Torfaen, Llantarnam

IND HELD
7.1% over Lab Turnout 22.5%

Sefton, Netherton and Orrell

LAB HELD
72.7% over Con Turnout 13.0%

i For more details on these and other recent results, please visit www.lgafirst.co.uk/local-by-elections

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LGA 23

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