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Cashless new year

The task of balancing our councils' budgets has been made even harder after last month's finance settlement contained no additional funding, despite local authorities of all types and political colours facing severe cost and demand pressures.

The LGA continues to lobby for more support for hard-pressed services, particularly adult social care and children's services, and for shire district councils to receive the same average core spending power increase as other councils.

You can read a summary of our briefing on the provisional settlement in this edition of **first** (p10-11).

The Care Quality Commission starts to roll out the new adult social care assurance process this month, and we have compiled some useful learning from the experiences of the five councils that piloted the process (p16-17).

Elsewhere in the magazine, we discuss new research on financially challenged councils (p12), how the Council of Europe helps foster democracy and good governance (p14), safety concerns around 'large panel system' buildings (p19), and meet the contestants in this year's Local Government Challenge for council officers (p22).

Our lead comment is from Rebecca Evans, Minister for Finance and Local Government, on the Welsh Government's consultation on reforming council tax (p25).

Councillor Shaun Davies
is LGA Chair



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‘Outlook remains bleak’ for council services in Wales

The Welsh LGA has warned of “extremely turbulent times ahead” for local services in Wales, after councils were awarded a 3.1 per cent increase in core revenue funding in 2024/25.

Welsh local authorities will receive £5.7 billion from the Welsh Government revenue support grant and non-domestic rates, and no individual council will receive less than a 2 per cent increase.

With continuing inflationary pressures and rising demand in adult social care (pictured), children’s services and housing, the WLGA says councils face a £432 million shortfall after council tax rises.

Cllr Andrew Morgan OBE, Leader of the WLGA, said: “We knew this was going to be a challenging settlement, and we recognise the Welsh Government’s efforts in seeking to provide a degree of protection for frontline public services.

“But the outlook remains bleak for local services that are still being seriously affected by ever-rising costs. Even though inflation is slowing, it still means we all get less for our money now than we used to, and this is the same for councils too.

“The UK Government had a chance to address this funding gap in the last Autumn Statement but did not take it.

“No extra money for schools or social care meant that no consequential funding



flowed to Wales. Difficult decisions will have to be taken to ensure councils can meet their legal duty to balance the books and set a balanced budget.”

Rebecca Evans, Minister for Finance and Local Government, acknowledged that the overall funding settlement is “not sufficient to meet all pressures”, but said spending plans had been reshaped to “protect the core, frontline public services provided by local authorities like schools and social care”.

She added: “I appreciate the pressures

local government is facing and recognise that demand for services, along with the recent very high rates of inflation, mean local government will still need to make difficult decisions on services, efficiencies, and council tax in setting their budgets.”

A six-week consultation on the provisional settlement closes on 31 January 2024, see www.gov.wales/local-government-revenue-and-capital-settlement-provisional-2024-2025.

• Council tax, see p25

3G network shutdown ‘could hit local services’

Parking meters, alarm systems and telecare devices could be disrupted and left obsolete because of the upcoming switch-off of 2G and 3G mobile networks, the LGA has warned.

All mobile operators have agreed with the Government to switch off 2G and 3G by 2033, as these services are being replaced by faster 4G and 5G technologies, and some have already started to do so.

An LGA survey found that most councils are aware of the network closures and are making the necessary preparations, but almost two-thirds are still using devices and systems reliant on 2G and 3G networks to at least a small extent.

Adult social care (see p20), housing and environmental services are among the areas that could be affected, particularly



in rural parts of the country, where mobile signals are more patchy, the survey reveals.

More than half (57 per cent) of respondents said their highways, transport and parking services were still reliant on the older networks, with parking meters the main area that needs upgrading.

Environment and waste services were the second most impacted (45 per cent), with refuse collection vehicle in-cab displays among the devices affected.

Cllr Mark Hawthorne, LGA Digital Connectivity Spokesperson, said: “We need government and telecoms leaders to work together to raise awareness of the transition and what it means for those at the sharp end, including on how best to manage the move to the latest technology.

“Older, legacy infrastructure – ranging from parking meters and payment machines, to emergency auto diallers and sensors in social housing – may need upgrading or replacing to work on new, faster 4G and 5G networks. Time is running out if we are to avoid the fallout from the big switch-off.”



No extra funding for English councils

Councils in England still face a £4 billion funding gap over the next two years after no extra support was announced in the provisional finance settlement for 2024/25, the LGA has said.

The settlement, published just before Christmas, confirmed councils will have £64 billion to spend on local services in the coming financial year – but only if they increase council tax by the maximum allowed, at a time when they are acutely aware of the significant burden that could place on some households.

Before the settlement, almost one in five council leaders and chief executives surveyed by the LGA thought it 'very' or 'fairly' likely they would issue a Section 114 report this financial year or next because of a lack of funding to keep key services running.

Half were not confident they will have enough funding to fulfil their legal duties in 2024/25.

Cllr Shaun Davies, LGA Chair, said: "The settlement does not provide enough

funding to meet the severe cost and demand pressures that have left councils of all political colours and types warning of the serious challenges they face to set balanced budgets.

"Councils in England continue to face a funding gap of £4 billion over the next two years as the settlement does not change the funding gap.

"It is therefore unthinkable that government has not provided desperately needed new funding for local services in 2024/25.

"Although councils are working hard to reduce costs where possible, this means the local services our communities rely on every day are now exposed to further cuts.

"No council is now immune to the growing risk to their financial sustainability. The Government urgently needs to come up with a long-term plan to sufficiently fund local services through multi-year settlements."

• See p10-11

Local honours

Councillors and officers have been recognised for their extraordinary service and achievements in the New Year Honours List 2024.

Joanne Roney OBE, Chief Executive of Manchester City Council, has been made a CBE, while Marvin Rees (Lab), Mayor of Bristol City Council, and Cllr Abi Brown (Con), former Leader of Stoke-on-Trent City Council, both become OBEs – all for services to local government

Cllr Brown is an LGA Deputy Chairman and Chair of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board, while Mayor Rees chairs Core Cities UK and is a former Chair of the LGA's City Regions Board.

Other elected OBE recipients include Cllr Nigel Ashton (Con), former North Somerset Council Leader; Eunice Campbell-Clark (Lab), a former member of Nottingham City Council; and Cllr Carl Les (Con), Leader of North Yorkshire Council and a member of the LGA's Economy and Resources Board.

MBEs include Cllr Bill Gavan (Lab), Mayor of Sandwell Council, for political and public service, and to the LGBTQ+ community; Spencer Drury (Con), former Greenwich councillor, for political and public service; and Cllr Dr Simon Hancock (Lab) for services to the community in Pembrokeshire.

Ian Hughes, Director of Policy at the LGA, is also made an MBE.

And Policy Advisor Helen Walton (pictured) has been awarded a British Empire Medal for services to children in care and in poverty, after organising Rochdale Borough Council's annual Christmas toy appeal since 2013.



Housing targets 'advisory'

Housing targets will become an advisory starting point and councils will be given new powers to reject developments that significantly alter the character of an area or impinge on existing green belt.

The reforms were announced last month by Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Secretary Michael Gove, with publication of a new National Planning Policy Framework for England.

Cllr Darren Rodwell, LGA Housing Spokesperson, said: "People want their local area to have high-quality affordable homes built in the right places, supported by the right infrastructure, and councils stand ready to help government tackle local housing challenges.

"This is best achieved through a local planning system with public participation at its heart. So, we are pleased government has confirmed that housing targets will become

an advisory starting point that will take into account local circumstances. The reality is that planning is not a barrier to house building. Nine in 10 planning applications are approved by councils despite significant resourcing and capacity issues across the country."

The Government also announced that 180 local authorities have been awarded a share of £14.3 million from the Planning Skills Delivery Fund. For the financial year 2023/24, this includes 111 receiving funding for support with planning application backlogs and 36 for support with skills development.

In brief

Chief executives' hub

A new development framework and hub for local authority chief executives has been produced by the LGA and Solace, the membership network for local government professionals. Developed through extensive engagement with current chief executives and other key stakeholders, including councillors, the framework sets out seven core themes or 'foundations' that underpin the role. The programme – part of the LGA's government-funded Sector Support programme – includes publication of a new website for chief executives' development, the framework itself, and a series of pilot modules for chief executives in England. Evaluations of the pilots will inform a full programme for new chief executives. See [local.gov.uk/ceo-dev-hub](https://www.local.gov.uk/ceo-dev-hub)

Cancer risk varies by region

The risk of dying from cancer in England "varies massively" depending on where a person lives, according to a study published in the *Lancet Oncology*. In the poorest areas, the risk of dying from cancer was more than 70 per cent higher than in the wealthiest. Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "We need to ensure that cancer screening services can be accessed by all communities and that everyone, regardless of their social and personal circumstance, has an opportunity to make an informed personal choice about cancer screening."

Brownfield land

The third and final round of the Brownfield Land Release Fund 2 is open for applications, with up to £80 million in capital funding to support the release of council-owned brownfield land in England for housing and jobs. Cllr Shaun Davies, LGA Chair, said: "I am pleased the LGA continues its partnership with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Cabinet Office, helping councils to access the latest round of this fund, which provides much needed capital grants to bring surplus council-owned sites forward for housing." Applications close on 14 February, see www.local.gov.uk/our-support/one-public-estate

'Broken market' for children's social care placements

The number of children's social care placements costing £10,000 or more per week has increased twelvefold in five years, an LGA survey has revealed.

There were 120 such placements in 2018/19, rising to 1,510 in 2022/23, while the proportion of councils with at least one of these placements has increased from 23 per cent to 91 per cent over the same period.

The highest cost placement was £63,000 a week. For most councils the highest cost fell between £9,600 and £32,500 a week.

Nearly every council surveyed (98 per cent) said a lack of choice in placements was driving the high prices. More than nine in 10 (93 per cent) also highlighted children needing help with increasingly complex needs, including mental health needs or exhibiting challenging behaviours, as a factor.

The LGA has set out three key areas for government action: rolling out foster carer recruitment and retention programmes to all councils; expansion of children's homes; and work on inpatient mental health facilities and placements for children with complex mental health needs.



Cllr Louise Gittins, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "It is concerning that in many cases, a lack of choice means provision is not fully meeting children's needs. The astronomical costs of care placements mean there is less money available for councils to spend on earlier support for children and families.

"These findings are indicative of a broken market for children's social care placements, but it doesn't have to remain this way. With cross-government support, it is possible to make sure we have the right homes for all the children in our care."

600,000 children 'do no exercise'

Children and young people's overall activity levels were stable in the academic year 2022/23, and in line with those seen before the pandemic, according to a Sport England survey.

That means 47 per cent of children in England were meeting the Chief Medical Officer's guideline of taking part in an average of 60 minutes or more of sport and physical activity a day.

However, significant inequalities remain, with black and Asian children and young people and those from the least

affluent families still less likely to play sport or be physically active, and girls less likely to be active than boys.

Meanwhile, the number of children doing no activity at all has increased to more than 600,000, according to Sport England's 'Active lives children and young people survey'.

An LGA spokesperson said: "Councils have been working hard to prioritise public sport and leisure facilities for their communities and work in partnership with charities, the NHS and schools and use public resources to keep services going.

"However, without additional funding, councils will have to make increasingly tough decisions about which services to prioritise.

"We urgently need a strategic approach across government departments to identify and tackle the barriers to children and young people and the least active groups to increase their activity levels."



'Worrying' new trends in drug use

There has been no change in the overall level of illicit drug use in England and Wales in the year to June 2022, compared with the previous year, according to new statistics.

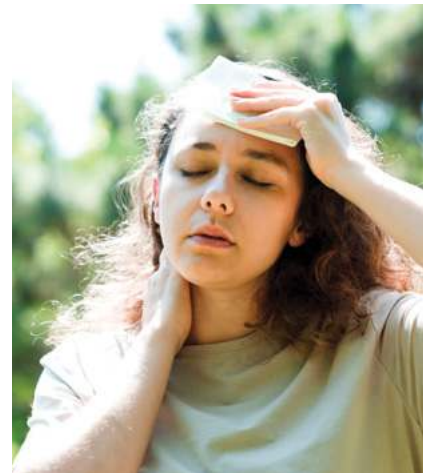
However, while drug misuse rates have remained stable, the LGA is concerned this is masking new trends, including an increase in the use of new – and more dangerous – synthetic drugs.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Although it is encouraging that rates of drug misuse have remained stable, this is masking worrying new trends in drug use.

"We are particularly concerned to see a rise in the use of new synthetic opioids and benzodiazepines that substantially raise the risk of incredibly serious harm to the user and are believed to be linked to a number of drug-related deaths.

"Councils want to see greater regulation of the sale of substances online that often enter the UK in the post and increased surveillance to alert authorities to the types of drugs people are taking."

Data from the Office for National Statistics shows that, despite a fall in use of some drugs, the use of ketamine and new psychoactive substances increased between 2020 and 2023.



Climate change 'already affecting health'

The health impacts of climate change are already being felt locally and globally, and these risks will accelerate, says a recent report from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA).

The report warns of major impacts on mental and physical health from, for example, increasing temperatures, and that the changing climate will exacerbate existing health inequalities.

However, many of the anticipated adverse impacts on health in the UK are still avoidable through mitigation measures, while others are preventable if the necessary adaptation measures are introduced, according to Professor Isabel Oliver, UKHSA's Chief Scientific Officer.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "It's clear from this stark report that climate change could have a serious impact on the health of our local communities.

"These changes include a much greater risk of flooding, extreme heat and the spread of vector-borne diseases transmitted by organisms such as ticks and mosquitoes.

"This report shows that many people could be affected by extremes of weather in our communities. The impact of climate change on individuals will vary, with the worst effects on disadvantaged and vulnerable populations, which could widen health inequalities further.

"Despite the best efforts of councils, we know climate change will intensify into the future and councils are concerned that people and places will be left increasingly vulnerable without further preparation.

"They need further support to prepare their communities for the impacts of climate change before it is too late."

'New burdens' funding needed for social care assurance



New social care assessments are time and energy-intensive and have created additional workload for councils, which needs to be funded, the LGA has said.

Five local authorities piloted the Care Quality Commission's new assurance process for adult social care last year.

The LGA, in partnership with the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS), interviewed directors from the trial local authorities, who reported "the workload is immense and adult social care departments will not have experienced anything like this for a decade".

Consequently, the LGA is calling for a guarantee of adequate 'new burdens' funding for the process, and sufficient advance notice of the assessments for councils. The roll-out of the scheme in England begins this month.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "While councils are very willing to participate in this process, the current precarious

position of adult social care must be recognised.

"Despite unmet and under-met need remaining concerningly high, councils received no additional funding for adult social care in the Autumn Statement [nor the provisional local government finance settlement].

"The added workload these assessments are causing for councils must be addressed and councils should be given appropriate additional funding and support in order to participate in them effectively."

Cathie Williams, ADASS Chief Executive, said social care teams are already under pressure with growing numbers of people needing care, budgets under severe strain and high levels of vacancies.

"To ensure assurance doesn't take away from support going to people who need social care, the Government must provide local authorities with additional funding and resource to carry this out."

• **See p16 for more on the CQC assurance pilots**

In brief

Smokefree 2030

The LGA has reiterated its support for the Government's move to raise the legal age of sale for tobacco products in a consultation on the proposals. It has also made the case for restricting vape flavours and keeping vapes 'behind the counter' to reduce their availability to children. Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Councils work hard to help long-term smokers quit and so are fully supportive of the Government's smokefree 2030 ambitions."



Low traffic neighbourhoods

Local authorities are not always working with the industry to ensure low traffic neighbourhoods do not restrict bus services, according to the Confederation of Passenger Transport, which represents Britain's bus and coach operators. Cllr Darren Rodwell, LGA Transport Spokesperson, said: "Councils are on the side of all road users and residents, and are working hard to tackle congestion, make our air cleaner and improve the quality of life in their communities."

Equality duty

The Government Equalities Office has published revised guidance for public authorities on implementing the Public Sector Equality Duty (see www.gov.uk/government/publications), replacing previous guidance issued in 2011. The guidance sets out how the Government expects public bodies, including councils, to demonstrate that they are complying with the general duty in their decision-making processes. It additionally sets out the specific duties larger public authorities need to fulfil, including publishing equality objectives, general duty compliance and gender pay gap data.

Assurance framework views needed

The LGA has launched the second phase of its engagement on how the improvement and assurance framework for local government can be improved.

Last summer the LGA spoke to councils, professional bodies and other stakeholders, seeking feedback on a draft framework.

This has also been informed by a sounding board with representation from the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (Solace), the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and Lawyers in Local Government.

The LGA is now seeking the sector's views on the principles of assurance and accountability, examples of good practice, and on revised diagrams showing the elements of the improvement and assurance framework, and asking for ideas

on how the framework can be improved.

These views will be gathered through meetings with councils at local and regional levels, relevant professional bodies and other stakeholders until the end of February.

The consultation feedback will be used to inform a revised version of the framework and also help with the development of the LGA's improvement support offers to councils.

Cllr Abi Brown, Chair of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board, said: "It's important we hear the views of all councils, partners and all other stakeholders and I encourage everyone to engage with us, for the benefit of the whole of local government and the wider public."

See www.local.gov.uk/our-support/council-assurance-and-peer-support for the consultation.



Thousands of refugees at risk of homelessness – LGA

The scale and pace of asylum decision-making – without appropriate data-sharing and funding for councils – has led to significant pressures on asylum seekers and councils, including homelessness and rough sleeping, the LGA has warned.

The Government has announced that the pre-June 2022 'legacy backlog' of asylum cases has been cleared, and while councils agree that it is right that people receive certainty on their asylum claim, costs have effectively been pushed from central to local government.

There remains a significant 'flow backlog', with more than 90,000 decisions still to be made, and the LGA therefore expects that large numbers of people will continue to turn to councils for support.

The LGA continues to press for further flexibilities and more support for councils, given that the impact of asylum cessations is compounded by chronic housing shortages,

the cost-of-living crisis and extreme funding shortages for councils.

Cllr Shaun Davies, LGA Chair, said: "Demand for temporary accommodation is already at an all-time high with councils struggling to source suitable accommodation and cater for current needs.

"Pushing tens of thousands of refugees out of Home Office accommodation onto councils will overload the system and mean they simply cannot provide for these vulnerable people's needs.

"The Government must provide councils with more funding both immediately for this programme and in the future for their ongoing support for refugees, alongside better data, to help councils protect and provide for refugees.

"Asylum seekers need as much notice as possible before they have to leave their accommodation so they have time to find work and a new place to live."

Local policing

Police and crime panels are integral to the governance of blue light services

The first police and crime commissioners were elected in 2012. So, more than 10 years since their introduction, what's the verdict?

The LGA has consistently highlighted that, to a degree, the effectiveness of a police and crime commissioner's (PCC) oversight of local policing depends on the individual.

The PCC model, beyond the core policing role, should be flexible, reflecting that what is right for one area may not be appropriate for others, depending on local circumstances and other governance structures.

At an inquiry on PCCs back in November, the LGA shared with the House of Commons' Home Affairs Committee how more work is needed to raise awareness of the PCC role, give the public the tools to judge performance, and, by doing so, ensure genuine democratic accountability at the ballot box.

Good governance, robust scrutiny and strong supportive partnerships are essential for communities that rely on excellent police and fire and rescue services, a fair criminal justice system and effective blue light collaboration.

They are also important for a vibrant local democracy.

Police and crime panels (PCPs) – which provide support and scrutiny to PCCs – have an important role to play in these arrangements.

Any conversation about PCCs is incomplete without mentioning PCPs, and since 2012, panels have shown that they are able to play a constructive role in providing challenge and support to PCCs.

They are an intrinsic part of a network of relationships and processes, and integral to the governance arrangements for policing.

However, the key determinant of a panel's influence with the PCC is often



the nature of the relationship between the panel and the PCC, alongside the receptiveness of the PCC to the role of the panel.

The Home Office should consider how training and membership requirements could be used to help strengthen the work of panels, as well as ensuring that it consistently emphasises the importance of the role of panels, rather than downplaying it.

The LGA has also received comments on the lack of tools available to PCPs. Many panels have highlighted the limitations in their powers to require PCCs to respond to their concerns.

The panel's power of veto is a clear illustration of this. Panels are able to veto the PCC's first proposed council tax

precept, or proposed appointment of a chief constable, but then powerless to require changes beyond this, even if, in the case of the precept, the PCC makes only minor changes.

Some panels have therefore suggested that the power of veto could be strengthened to include a second power of veto, or a requirement for majority panel support following an initial veto.

The idea of pre-scrutiny of major decisions by the PCC has also been proposed. Some panels have introduced innovative ways of questioning the PCC. Government support for sharing these innovations would be appreciated.

The LGA would welcome reform of the PCC model in a range of areas, including: funding of PCPs; raising public awareness of the role of PCCs; consideration of powers around veto; guidance on the complex complaints system; and consideration of a recall process for PCCs.

We will, as ever, continue to work with the Home Office to ensure that the sector has the support it needs, delivered in the most appropriate way.



i See www.local.gov.uk/parliament to find out more about the LGA's parliamentary work

Financial strain

Local services face further cuts

December's provisional local government finance settlement did not provide enough funding to meet the severe cost and demand pressures facing councils in England, the LGA has warned.

Government figures indicate that total core spending will rise by 6.5 per cent in 2024/25, to £64 billion.

However, this does not change the £4 billion funding gap that councils face over the next two years, according to the LGA's on-the-day briefing on the settlement, which warns of further cuts to local services as councils struggle to balance their budgets.

LGA analysis shows that, by 2024/25, cost and demand pressures will have added £15 billion – almost 29 per cent – to the cost of delivering council services since 2021/22.

Shire district councils – which provide vital services such as planning and waste and recycling collection – will see a lower core spending power increase on average next year compared with other councils. The LGA is calling for this to be addressed in the final settlement, expected in late January or early February.

It is also concerned that financial forecasts in the provisional settlement assume that councils



will raise their council tax by the maximum permitted without a referendum.

This leaves councils facing the tough choice about whether to increase council tax bills to bring in desperately needed funding, at a time when they are acutely aware of the significant burden that could place on some households in a year of economic uncertainty and increased costs.

The LGA has long highlighted that council tax rises – particularly the adult social care precept – have never been the solution to the long-term pressures faced by councils, particularly in social care, which is desperately in need of reform (see column, far right).

Increasing council tax raises different amounts of money in different parts of the country, unrelated to need.

The LGA has called on the Government to commit to the Fair

“Council tax rises have never been the solution to long-term pressures faced by councils”

Funding Review, reviewing both the formulas and the underlying data used for the assessment of relative needs and resources.

Transitional mechanisms attached to the outcome of the review should provide sufficient funding to ensure that no council experiences a loss of income. There should also be transitional arrangements for any business rates reset.

This is the sixth one-year settlement in a row for councils, which continues to hamper financial planning and their financial sustainability. Only with adequate long-term resources, certainty and freedoms can councils deliver world-class local services for our communities, tackle the climate emergency, and level up all parts of the country.



The local government finance settlement is the annual determination of funding to local government from central government. The LGA's full briefing on the provisional settlement, published just before Christmas, is available at www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses. Consultations on it close on 15 January, see www.gov.uk/government/consultations. The final 2024/25 settlement is expected in late January or early February 2024.

Children's services

With record numbers of children needing support, councils – with charities and campaigners – are united on the urgent need for funding to ensure all children and their families get the support they need, as soon as they need it.

Extra funding is urgently needed to stabilise the children's social care system before it is pushed to the brink. The lack of investment in the 2023 Autumn Statement and the 2024/25 provisional local finance settlement risks councils' ability to provide the critical care and support that children rely on every day, and risks diverting essential funding from other council services.

Rural services

The Government proposes to roll-forward the 2023/24 allocations of the £95 million Rural Service Delivery Grant for 2024/25. Councils in rural areas will support the continuation of this funding, even though it is a real-terms reduction.

Funding guarantee

As in 2023/24, the Government will pay a funding guarantee to ensure that all councils will see at least a 3 per cent increase in their Core Spending Power before any decisions about organisational efficiencies, use of reserves or council tax levels.

Councils receiving this funding will welcome the protection the guarantee offers, although this remains below high levels of consumer price inflation, which have only recently reduced to 3.9 per cent. The majority of councils receiving the funding guarantee are shire district councils and this emphasises the need for them to have access to the additional funding that a higher rate of 3 per cent and £10 council tax referendum limit would bring.



New Homes Bonus

The New Homes Bonus (NHB) makes up a considerable part of funding for some councils, particularly shire district authorities, and the LGA welcomed the confirmation of the provisional £291.4 million for 2024/25.

Councils need clarity on the future of the NHB, following a consultation in 2021, to be able to plan their budgets beyond next year and into the medium term. Any changes should come with transitional funding to ensure that local authority services on which residents rely are not put at risk.

Reserves

The provisional finance settlement notes that while local authority reserves are falling, they remain significantly higher than before the pandemic. The Government continues to encourage local authorities to consider, where possible, the use of their reserves to maintain services in the face of pressures.

The LGA's position is that reserves can only be spent once and using reserves is not a solution to the long-term financial pressures that councils face.

However, the extension of the flexible use of capital receipts to fund the revenue costs of reducing costs and improving efficiency to March 2030 is positive. We continue to call on the Government to make the arrangement permanent.

Education and early years

The previously announced additional £440 million, or 4.3 per cent increase, in council 'high needs' funding for 2024/25 is positive. But it does not go far enough in helping support all children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), when demand for education, health and care plans continues to rise year on year.

The LGA continues to call on the Government to write off all high-needs deficits as a matter of urgency, to provide certainty and ensure that councils are not faced with having to cut other services to balance budgets.

We are also concerned that the 1.9 per cent increase in per pupil funding for 2024/25 is not sufficient to address the funding challenges that schools are currently facing, including: increased costs from fuel, energy and food for school meals; staff pay rises; and a growing number of pupils experiencing disadvantage.

Education starts long before school, and a strong early years sector can maximise the life chances of all children as part of our shared ambition with government to level up communities and reduce inequalities across the country.

Recent funding announcements are welcomed, but these are based on a historic underfunding of early years entitlements leading to a volatile early years system, with providers leaving the market and parents without access to provision. It is not yet clear if the funding rates announced will be sufficient to reverse this.

Adult social care

The LGA is concerned and disappointed that the 2024/25 finance settlement provides no new investment for adult social care beyond the investment made in the 2022 Autumn Statement.

People who draw on care and support will be understandably worried about the continuing impact of significant pressures on the service.

The LGA continues to call for a long-term workforce plan for adult social care, equivalent to that for the NHS. Pressures on the frontline care workforce are acute, and challenges around recruitment and retention are well known.

Increases in the National Living Wage are therefore welcome, but providers will probably expect to see their increased wage costs reflected in the fees councils pay. This will pose a significant additional pressure on adult social care budgets, which are already considered by many directors to be insufficient to meet all statutory duties.

Effective financial management

LGA research looks at the underlying issues affecting financially challenged councils



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

Over the past two months, I have had the privilege of chairing a number of roundtable discussions with senior officers to discuss LGA-commissioned research into councils with experience of finance and governance challenges.

The research, by Human Engine, looks at councils where these challenges have led to either a Section 114 report or a capitalisation direction.

It was commissioned as part of the LGA's Finance Improvement programme in 2022/23 to help councils understand the issues that led to a Section 114 report being made.

The research responds to an increasingly critical issue; since it was commissioned, a further four local authorities have issued a s114 notice.

It outlines five themes identified in councils in the period before the issuing of s114s: the quality of risk management; scrutiny and reporting; delivery of savings programmes; commercial investments and arms-length bodies; and the treatment of demographic pressures.

In addition, the roundtables identified and discussed underlying themes relating to financial challenge across councils.

The culture and leadership within a council was regarded as integral to effective financial management and governance and underpinned several themes identified in the Human Engine research.

Discussions considered the importance of maintaining strong and effective officer-member relationships, transparent and open decision-making, and effective risk management and scrutiny.

Some participants proposed that a change in the narrative surrounding s114 reports could be beneficial.

With an increase in the number of councils issuing such notices, it was suggested that this should not be viewed as a way to blame the council, nor to treat it as if it has failed. Rather, an s114

could be recognised as part of a process to instigate real, positive change.

Participants identified financial

planning difficulties arising from the unpredictable funding landscape caused by short-term financial settlements for local government, which create a constant state of flux and uncertainty.

The challenges lie in the inability to make long-term plans, implement necessary savings, and facilitate transformation without stability.

Hollowed-out corporate capacity as a result of successive savings rounds makes it more challenging to formulate long-term plans, execute large-scale transformation programmes, and sustain effective governance.

Participants also noted major changes in the external environment, deepening internal difficulties faced by councils.

Spiralling costs associated with delivering statutory services, coupled with rapidly increasing demand, pose significant challenges. The heightened demand is attributed to demographic pressures, particularly in adult social care.

Some participants discussed how cuts in discretionary services, which previously enabled preventative activity, have intensified pressure on the provision of essential statutory services.

I found the roundtables a valuable opportunity to hear from a range of voices across the sector and understand how they are experiencing the challenges identified by this research.

It gave us useful insights into the support that is needed, and the role the LGA needs to play in delivering it.

We will use the learning from these discussions when planning the LGA's 2024/25 Sector Support programme. A note summarising the key themes from the roundtable discussions will be published to share the findings and learning with the sector in February.



To find out more about the [LGA's support for councils' financial resilience](https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support), please visit www.local.gov.uk/our-support

Uphill progress on climate change

Local government was influential in the COP28 negotiations



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

For the first time, local government had a proper seat at the top table with the other negotiators at the 2023 UN Climate Change Conference, and was saluted by many who now see the sector as at the heart of climate action.

I attended the 28th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP28) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Dubai late last year, as part of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), representing more than 100,000 councils across the whole of Europe.

On day one of COP28, world leaders agreed a landmark 'loss and damage' fund to help the world's poorest and most vulnerable countries cover the cost of the impact of climate-related disasters. There were calls by some to extend

this gesture, and for 'ecocide' to be a crime.

COP28 saw the conclusion of the first five-yearly global stocktake of countries' collective progress towards meeting the goals of the Paris Climate Change Agreement. The stocktake is designed to inform the next round of climate action plans – otherwise known as countries' 'nationally determined contributions' – which are due to be put forward by 2025.

The stocktake shows that only 15 per cent of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals are on track and carbon emissions are at a record high, with very damaging impacts from increasing weather extremes. We need to up our game.

Annual global spending on climate action rose to more than a trillion dollars in 2021, yet does not touch the sides. The amount spent on climate is just one-tenth of what was spent on COVID-19 fiscal measures.

Money can be made available for emergencies – and make no mistake, this is an emergency.

As part of CEMR, I facilitated a high-level meeting between United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) – the global network of cities and local, regional and metropolitan governments and their associations – and UNFCCC negotiators.

I contributed by presenting the CEMR's work on how local government

is financing its response to climate change, and I gave a presentation on the impact of climate change on mental health – for the first time part of the final COP agreement, recognising the connection between climate change, more extreme events and health.

I also did some work with the press, explaining how important it is for local government to be at the heart of decision-making on the sustainable goals and central to their implementation and delivery.

Local governments from across the world worked as a team, through Local Governments and Municipal Authorities (LGMA). We met with our own countries' delegations to seek their support in proposing our amendments. We as local governments are directly contributing to the international debate.

There was considerable controversy about the need to stop the use of fossil fuels and about holding the event in the United Arab Emirates. There were many stands on promoting renewable and nuclear energy, but also promoting natural gas.

Dr Sultan Al Jaber, the COP28 President, launched the Coalition for High Ambition Multilevel Partnerships (CHAMP) for Climate Action. A total of 65 national governments signed CHAMP commitments to enhance cooperation with subnational governments in the planning, financing, implementation and monitoring of climate strategies. Despite our best efforts, the UK has yet to sign.

Thanks to CEMR and LGMA for all their work organising and supporting us throughout our negotiations.



For more information about **COP28**, please visit www.cop28.com/en. See p29.

International learning

Fostering democracy and good governance across Europe



Councillor **Bryony Rudkin** is an LGA Regional Lead Peer and Leader of the UK Delegation to the Congress of the Council of Europe

I'm standing outside a primary school at 7am on an icy November Sunday morning in deepest Slovenia, alongside a Belgian councillor.

We're waiting for a polling station to be opened as we are official observers from the Congress of the Council of Europe.

It proves to be a remarkable day. We visited polling stations in schools, a library, a church office (where the presiding officer had already had a brandy before midday), a bar and a dance school.

It was a privilege to see democracy in action and to be part of the process. But how did I come to be there?

Perhaps a little-known aspect of UK engagement with our neighbours, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is the local arm of the Council of Europe (CoE). This was established after World War II to defend human rights, promote rule of law, and foster democracy and good governance across the whole of Europe.

You could say that the CoE was 'Made in Britain'. An initiative of Sir

Winston Churchill, the first meeting was in London. Many of its founding texts were drafted by UK civil servants and UK ministers participate in the executive decision-making that steers the organisation.

The Council of Europe isn't part of the EU. This is why we remain members – indeed, we are major players.

Since Brexit, the CoE is now the principal European organisation through which the UK can meet counterparts from 45 other countries to exchange experience and good practice, develop policies and partnerships, and conduct diplomacy at both national and local levels.

All European countries are members, from Iceland to Azerbaijan. Only two have ever left: Belarus and Russia.

The UK sends 18 members to the Congress, nominated by the four UK local government associations and devolved parliaments.

I am honoured to say I was recently elected as leader of the UK delegation and as chair of the Congress social inclusion committee, which addresses social rights, gender and diversity, migration, cultural identity and regional languages, youth policy and education.

The core task of the Congress is the defence of democratic values and governance at the local level

through missions such as that election observation in Slovenia.

It also conducts peer reviews of every country to ensure that central governments are implementing the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which guarantees administrative and financial independence of local authorities.

I've just been part of the team that reviewed France, again a fascinating piece of work and a privilege.

Each country is peer reviewed every five years. For the UK there was a mixed report card in 2022 – mostly positive, a case of 'could do better'.

Across Europe, certain themes keep repeating and are familiar: inadequate funding, excessive scrutiny, bureaucratic delays, increasing abuse and violence towards members.

How these are addressed in different countries might help us at home and vice versa.

My most recent mission was a visit to see how local authorities in Armenia are managing the influx of displaced people from Karabakh; another cold start the week before Christmas, but so important in maintaining the rights of our friends and neighbours.



You can find out about the **LGA's European and international work** at www.local.gov.uk/topics/european-and-international. See www.coe.int/en for more on the Council of Europe

Children and adults

Ofsted's outgoing chief inspector was among the speakers at a key local government conference

School inspections, adult social care assurance, profiteering in the childcare market, and workforce challenges were among the many topics discussed at the National Children and Adult Services Conference (NCASC).

More than 1,000 people attended the event in Bournemouth from 29 November to 1 December, which was jointly organised by the LGA, the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, and the Association of Directors of Children's Services.

The conference is aimed at those from local and central government, voluntary organisations and the private sector with an interest in the provision of effective services for children, young people, their families, and vulnerable adults, including health, social care and education.

Among the speakers was Amanda Spielman, Ofsted's outgoing Chief Inspector, who told councils and directors of children's services that she wanted to be "proportionate" during inspections.

Ofsted has come under increased levels of scrutiny following the death of headteacher Ruth Perry after an inspection at her school.

Ofsted's new Chief Inspector, Martyn Oliver, this month announced that inspections will be halted until assessors have been properly trained in protecting the wellbeing of school staff, and pledged to launch an inquiry into Ofsted's involvement in Ruth Perry's death.

Responding to NCASC delegates' questions on single-word judgements and the pressure of Ofsted inspections, Ms Spielman said: "I have been very clear that I want inspections to be done 'with', not done 'to'."

Ms Spielman did note the significant improvements that have been made by councils' children's services teams across the country, praising "ambitious local leadership" as driving improvements in the standards of care delivered.

"We're seeing local authorities working directly with families with



clear practice models. We're seeing ambitious leaders who are clear on their direction and expectations, and they are key to getting this right."

The former Ofsted Chief Inspector also echoed LGA warnings of the risks posed by a rise in the number of unregulated schools and children's homes. Last year, the LGA reiterated its long-standing call for councils to be given greater oversight of such settings, and powers to intervene and act where necessary.

Ms Spielman said that increasing demand for places meant that unregistered homes are being used as a stop-gap, with some particularly vulnerable children ending up living in them for long periods.

Meanwhile, Children's Minister David Johnston MP told NCASC delegates that the Government is looking at how the childcare market operates and the "extent of profiteering". His intervention came after new LGA analysis showed that the cost to councils of childcare placements has drastically increased since 2010 (see p6).

The minister also said that he "understood the pressures local government is under" and that he knew "demand was going up and the nature of the demand is very complex".

Also speaking at NCASC was Care Minister Helen Whately MP, who urged councils to view the new Care Quality Commission assurance programme for adult social care in England "not as a threat, but as an opportunity" (see p16-17). She said: "So much about what people know about care is anecdote... we need to know about what is happening and why."

She also addressed some of the workforce challenges impacting on the sector, saying that, although the health and care visa helped fill vacancies, in the "long term, immigration is not the answer for social care".

i Presentations from **NCASC 2023** are available at www.local.gov.uk/events/past-event-presentations. **NCASC 2024** takes place in Liverpool from 27 to 29 November, see ncasc.info

CQC assurance **begins**

Pilots provide valuable learning for adult social care services in England



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

For a number of councils, the taking down this month of office Christmas decorations may well be swiftly followed by the putting up of flipcharts, timelines and checklists on office walls.

That's because these local authorities have been, or will be over the coming weeks, notified that they are in the first tranche of councils in England to go through adult social care assurance, the new process of assessment led by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

It will be a busy start to the new year for these councils, and any resolutions to stop excessively long working hours may have to be put on hold temporarily.

At least they will not be starting from scratch. Thanks to five councils who piloted assurance in the second half of last year, and two 'test and learn' councils that partially tested the process in 2022, the councils kicking off full rollout will do so with valuable learning under their belts.

Partners in Care and Health (PCH), the improvement and support programme for adult social care and public health led by the LGA and the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, has done a great deal to capture this learning in recent months.

Most recently, PCH commissioned some rapid learning of the pilots' experience through interviews with the councils' directors of adult services. Each experience was unique to each council, of course, but some of the key learning will almost certainly apply across the board.

Ablly demonstrating local government's capacity for optimism at even the most challenging times, part of the learning points to the

need to embrace the process and the opportunity it affords to showcase adult social care at its best and identify or corroborate areas for improvement.

However, councils' optimism often sits alongside a healthy degree of pragmatism and realism, and the five pilots pulled no punches when it comes to the message that assurance is incredibly time-consuming.

Even before the on-site assessment, the councils had to submit hundreds of documents, run workshops for staff, hold mock interviews, pull together case-tracking material and produce a comprehensive self-assessment.

This, and considerable amounts of other preparatory work, culminated in the on-site visits by the CQC assessment team, which itself involved numerous meetings with council staff and the councils' many relevant partners, plus focus groups and wrap-up sessions with the inspection team.

It's not just councils that have benefited from the pilots' experience.

CQC has conducted an evaluation of the pilots, which has resulted in the regulator revisiting aspects of its assurance processes and methodology. Key areas of focus include clarity on scoring evidence (which leads to overall judgements), building in more time to digest material before on-site fieldwork, reviewing the information return, and changes to the final reports.

The pilots' experience has also informed a review and update of CQC's definitive assurance guidance for councils.

PCH is doing a huge amount of work to support councils with adult social care assurance. Whether you are one of the councils about to start full rollout or want to get ahead of the game, I would encourage you to take a look through the PCH pages of the LGA's website (see www.local.gov.uk/partners-care-and-health).

Here you'll find a significant amount of material to help you prepare for assessment, including details of upcoming events that you may wish to attend to learn more.

"Each experience was unique to each council, but some of the key learning will apply across the board"





“The pilots pulled no punches when it comes to the message that assurance is time-consuming”

While much of the focus at the moment is understandably on the operational rollout of assurance, we are pushing key policy issues on councils' behalf.

The absence of any new funding for adult social care in November's Autumn Statement and December's provisional local government finance settlement – despite mounting pressures that carry serious consequences for people who draw on care and support, and the workforce – means councils embark on assurance from a precarious position.

The extent to which this impacts on the single-word rating councils receive (which we continue to argue against) is something on which we will be keeping a close eye.

We are also mindful of the risk of government thinking adult social care has what it needs if overall ratings are, in the main, positive.

Perhaps of most immediate concern to councils is the serious drain that assurance will have on colleagues' time and capacity. This is an issue that surfaced time and again at the National Children and Adult Services Conference (NCASC) in November. We used the focus of NCASC to call on government to keep its 'new burdens' funding for assurance under close review, and to guarantee additional

resources if the experience of the first councils starting assessment shows it is needed (see p7).

Ever since assurance was introduced as a policy intention in 2021, the LGA has committed to working with CQC and the Department of Health and Social Care to ensure the process is fair and proportionate for councils.

Local government does not shy away from transparency and accountability, and is committed to ongoing improvement to services that support people who draw on care and support to live their best life. The voice of those people, encouragingly, feels to be at the heart of assurance, but whether the process helps strengthen the case for much-needed additional investment remains to be seen.

On its own, and through PCH, the LGA will continue to advance the policy, improvement and support interests of councils in adult social care assurance. We wish every council going through assessment this year the very best of luck for a positive and constructive experience.

Preparing for assurance – top tips

- Embrace the process positively and openly – be open about your weaknesses and areas for improvement and set out how you are addressing them. Even outstanding services will have challenges that they are working on.
- Resource the assessment process – the workload is immense. A dedicated core team with a lead officer are needed to prepare and coordinate the work on a full-time basis.
- Corporate and political awareness – secure corporate buy-in from senior leadership as well as political leaders. Provide regular briefings to cabinet on CQC expectations and how the council's performance will be measured in key areas and the significant risks arising from any adverse judgements.
- Maximise your business intelligence in advance – use available activity and performance data to inform your preparation. However, primarily focus on what your data tells you about care quality, impact, user and carer experiences and outcomes – not processes.
- Self-assessment and evidence – ensure these align to support your key assertions. Everything flows from the self-assessment questionnaire: it should establish your story.
- Staff need supporting – frontline staff were sometimes anxious and apprehensive about being interviewed by CQC during the onsite visits, but it is a chance to tell their story and the difference they make.
- Communications – think about how to communicate the results of the assessment once it is published to both internal and external audiences.
- Gather insights from partners and providers – the CQC assessment is likely to look for evidence of collaborative and co-operative working relationships with partners, and will comment on your organisational culture as observed or experienced by your partners.
- Be clear on co-production and responding to diverse needs – part of this is about knowing your place and community, but also understanding which groups or communities are more likely to experience poor care and support.



‘The return of the regulator: what adult social care needs to know’, a summary of learning from the adult social care assurance pilots, is available to download for free at www.local.gov.uk/publications/return-regulator-what-adult-social-care-needs-know. See www.cqc.org.uk/publications/evaluation-la-pilot-assessments for the CQC's evaluation of the pilots

Cabs to cosmetic procedures

Council licensing teams can look forward to a busy 2024



Councillor **Clive Woodbridge** is one of the LGA's Licensing Champions

This year is already shaping up to be another significant one in licensing, with important announcements expected in a range of key areas.

Many of these will be discussed at the LGA's annual licensing conference on 6 February, which will give delegates an opportunity to reflect on some of the key developments that can be expected to affect councils' licensing committees and teams in 2024.

For example, colleagues from the Department for Transport will be joining us at the virtual conference to give an update on their work relating to taxi and private hire vehicle (PHV) licensing.

We will hear from officials about the recently updated 'Taxi and private hire vehicle licensing best practice guidance for local authorities in England'.

We also look forward to hearing more about 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.

We expect the department to begin consulting with stakeholders

soon. To inform the LGA's response, we will be surveying district councils and hosting a roundtable with some county councils, so please look out for further information on that.

Colleagues from City of Wolverhampton Council, Manchester City Council, and Worcestershire Regulatory Services, will participate in a panel discussion at conference on issues around 'out of area' working – where drivers licensed in one council area work in another – and possible solutions.

We will also hear from the Department of Health and Social Care on a proposed licensing regime for non-surgical cosmetic procedures. If introduced, this will be a significant new responsibility for council licensing teams.

The LGA responded to a government consultation on the proposals last autumn. While we support its objectives, we would like the proposed regime to take a more comprehensive approach and for government to take action to boost the capacity of regulatory services teams ahead of this new responsibility being implemented.

Conference delegates will also hear from Home Office colleagues about

their priorities for the year ahead, particularly regarding plans in relation to the results of their recent council survey on licensing fees.

Securing an increase to the fees set under the Licensing Act 2003 remains a core LGA lobbying priority.

There will also be a wide range of expert speakers covering other topics such as effective approaches to member training, incorporating health considerations into licensing decisions, and the new permanent pavement licensing regime.

In other licensing news, the LGA continues to enhance its support offer to help with the process of inducting new members onto licensing committees.

We have recently produced a series of tip sheets on the different areas of licensing, as well as co-producing a suggested training standard for committee members with the Institute of Licensing.

This complements our series of scenario-based licensing videos, e-learning module, licensing handbooks and Licensing Leadership Essentials course for chairs and vice-chairs of committees. You can find these resources on the LGA's website at www.local.gov.uk/licensing-committee-training-resources



To book your place and view the programme for the **LGA's annual licensing conference**, taking place on Zoom on 6 February, please visit www.local.gov.uk/events. For more information about the **LGA's licensing work**, please email jade.hall@local.gov.uk

Ensuring building safety

New council case studies stress the need for checks on LPS buildings

In 1968, a gas explosion in an 18th-floor flat at Ronan Point in east London led to the building's partial collapse and the death of four people.

The tower block had been built using the 'large panel system' (LPS), whereby prefabricated concrete walls, floors and ceilings, called 'panels', are produced in factories and assembled on site to make a building. This was a popular construction method from the 1950s to the 1970s, and it is estimated that there are more than 500 LPS tower blocks still in existence. Most of these will be in council or housing association ownership.

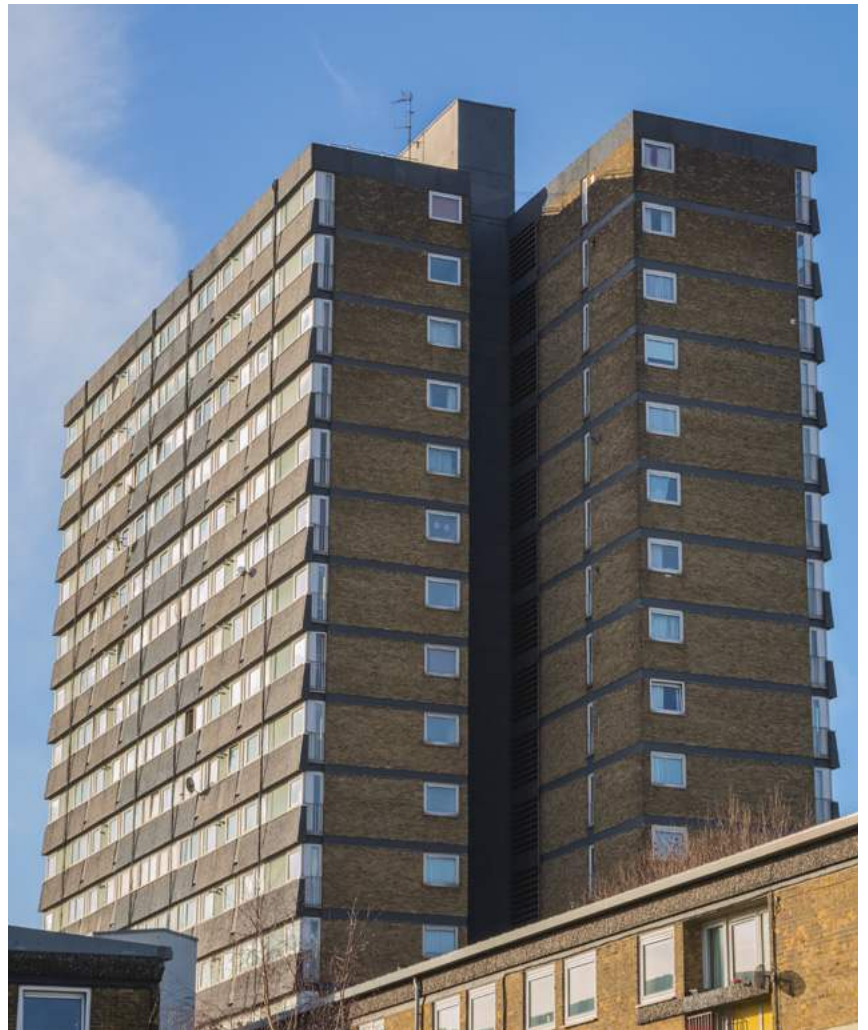
Following the Ronan Point disaster, national concerns over the risk of partial or full collapse in an explosion, high wind or serious fire led to a programme of strengthening LPS blocks.

However, when Ronan Point was demolished in the 1980s, evidence emerged that the original construction and the strengthening work had not been carried out properly.

In addition to these structural issues, some LPS buildings have been found to have gaps between floor and wall panels, which means fire is unlikely to be contained in the flat of origin, undermining the building's fire safety strategy.

Following the 2017 Grenfell Tower disaster, residents raised concerns about the safety of their buildings.

The then Department for Communities and Local Government wrote to councils in 2017, to ensure they were aware of the importance of knowing the structural history of their



LPS buildings, and that their condition and continued structural integrity were understood and monitored (see tinyurl.com/4xvpn4yu).

Subsequent investigations have left little doubt that owners cannot rely on previous strengthening work or surveys that are now out of date.

Several local authorities have decanted residents from blocks following structural investigations, highlighting the growing concern about the structure of LPS buildings.

The LGA has now produced case studies showing how local authorities have investigated issues with their LPS blocks. These show how assumptions about the state of the buildings and the quality of construction need to be challenged through inspections, engagement with external experts, and collaborative working with local fire and rescue services.

They also emphasise the importance of engaging effectively with tenants through an open and transparent approach.

Under the Building Safety Act 2022, all residential buildings more than 18 metres high require a safety case

to be submitted to the new Building Safety Regulator (BSR) by April 2024. A key part of this plan will be an understanding of any structural issues a building may have, including whether or not it is LPS.

The LGA is advising its members, including local authorities with arms-length management organisations, to check whether any of their buildings are LPS blocks and, if they are, to ensure that appropriate safety checks are carried out – and not to rely on historic surveys in assessing their safety.

For buildings more than 18 metres high, this will need to be part of the safety case required by the BSR, but the checks should also be carried out on buildings with four to six storeys.

We are sharing this information with other social landlords and urge members to proactively share relevant historical records with current owners where the stock has been transferred.



See www.local.gov.uk/case-studies for the **LGA's case studies on investigating the safety of large panel system buildings**

Digital switchover

Are your residents prepared?



Councillor **Mark Hawthorne** is the LGA's Digital Champion

How we make and receive telephone calls is changing. By 2025, most telephone providers will close their traditional copper lines – known as the public switched telephone network – and update to a digital line.

Communications providers have already started moving customers to new digital telephone landlines, and this change should be straightforward for most people.

However, this switchover impacts the technology-enabled care sector, and the two million people who rely on those services in the UK.

Devices such as fall detectors and personal alarms connect to a landline, so care is needed to make sure these are not disconnected.

Digital landlines also cannot carry a power connection, so in the event of a power cut they will not work. Mobile phones can still be used, but if people do not have any other means of calling

the emergency services, their telecoms provider must offer a solution for them.

Councils have a critical role to play in the digital switchover, which is fast approaching and will impact on a whole range of vital services, including in adult social care.

Unless action is taken now to support councils to help residents and suppliers with this change, we face the prospect of serious disruption to people's lives including, most urgently, those who use personal healthcare devices to stay safe in their own homes.

Expanding high-speed digital access is essential to economic growth, but it should not be at the expense of those who are older and more vulnerable.

Our digital switchover hub – part-funded by our Partners in Care and Health programme, a partnership with the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services – has a range of valuable resources for councils.

These include a telecare checklist, which provides risk-mitigation guidance and future planning to authorities, plus advice for councils to raise awareness of and mitigate criminal scams.

Also on the hub is a toolkit for councils and partners to raise awareness of the digital switchover with their residents and communities.

“The digital switchover will impact on a range of services, including in adult social care”

Most services and providers should be checking in with their clients before the switchover, but we are supporting councils to ensure they can reach residents, too.

The toolkit contains social media resources, printable leaflet templates and draft copy for websites and bulletins.

We are also developing and testing future resources to support councils to understand if they are ready for the digital switchover and the impact this has.

It covers business cases, communications, and implementation. We will be developing this work over the next financial year.

If you are interested in taking part in testing the future resources, please email socialcaredigital@local.gov.uk



To access the **LGA's digital switchover hub**, please visit www.local.gov.uk/digital-switchover

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

Be a councillor

Can you help inspire the next generation of local political leaders?



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

Is there any more fulfilling role than being a leader within your community and council, working with the people we represent, advocating for them and creating impactful change?

Even more satisfying is knowing that you inspired others to become a councillor.

We all have a key role to play in reaching outside of the established routes into elected office, to raise awareness of the role, and support potential candidates.

People will naturally gravitate towards others if they feel like they can relate to them, and it is important for councils to be representative of our communities, ensuring that everyone's voice is heard, including hard-to-reach audiences, and bridging the gap to different community groups.

With diversity in leadership, comes diversity in knowledge, skills, and experience; insights and innovation; and creating a range of solutions to community problems.

It is also important, as councillors, to collectively highlight issues affecting under-represented groups and not rely on those affected to take the lead.

Using our knowledge and experience, we can nurture the next generation of councillors, provide insights into the role and build confidence in those who, for different reasons, might not have come forward.

LGA-commissioned research by The Young Foundation showed that low interest by people in becoming a councillor is partly down to a lack of understanding of the role – for example, what councillors' daily tasks involve, and their part in decision-making.

Raising awareness while interacting

Clr Maleiki Haybe (Green, Sheffield)



with the community either face to face or on social media can help motivate potential candidates.

The power of being asked more than once is well-documented – simply encouraging people to stand for election can be a valuable first step in helping people overcome real or perceived barriers.

An easy way to support this is by reposting tweets from the LGA's Be a Councillor campaign and signposting those interested to the campaign website (www.local.gov.uk/be-councillor). It describes a councillor's role in detail, shares case studies, and provides useful contacts for next steps.

The LGA is working to increase interest in – and the diversity of – people coming forward to become councillors to help ensure a continual pipeline of talented people ready to get involved and make a difference in our communities.

Our Be a Councillor campaign provides a range of informative resources for members of the public and offers bespoke support and resources to help councils run their own local Be a Councillor campaigns.

The LGA's political group offices also run a wide range of activities through their political networks (see panel below).

Support and information

Your council

For resources and bespoke support for councils to corporately run local Be a Councillor activities, please contact beacouncillor@local.gov.uk

Your communities

Members of the public can access information on the councillor role, FAQs, councillor case studies, and other useful resources, contacts and next steps at www.local.gov.uk/be-councillor

LGA Political Group Offices

Each political group office runs its own programme of activities, so please get in touch with your political group for more information:

- Labour Office: martin.angus@local.gov.uk
- Conservative Office: lgaconservatives@local.gov.uk
- Liberal Democrat Office: terry.stacy@local.gov.uk
- Independent Office: independent.group@lga.local.gov.uk

For a full breakdown on councillor diversity in England, please see the LGA's 'National census of local authority councillors 2022', at www.local.gov.uk/publications/national-census-local-authority-councillors-2022

LGA leadership challenge

The LGA's annual contest for aspiring senior officers starts next month

The Local Government Challenge is an annual competition and leadership development programme for local government officers.

Over six months, 10 officers undertake five real-life challenges at councils up and down the country, culminating in a final event at the LGA's annual conference in Harrogate (2-4 July), in which four finalists pitch

The contestants



Hannah Barton,
Policy and Projects Officer,
Stroud District Council

"The Local Government Challenge provides a unique opportunity to work with a diverse and talented group of officers and learn from their different approaches to tackling challenges.

"I believe it's important to embrace change to ensure we are prepared for the future and can face the unexpected.

"The LG Challenge will push me out of my comfort zone and provide me with skills and experience to innovate and solve problems creatively."



Ramisa Yazdani Biouki,
Strategy Officer,
London Borough of Barnet

"I believe in continuous self-development, achieved by throwing yourself in the deep end!

"I would love to grow my confidence, see how far my unconventional thinking takes me in scenarios across the country, and bring back best practice.

"I envision a long and impactful career in local government, and I want to develop the leadership and decision-making skills necessary to deliver efficient and compassionate services."



Kerry Challoner,
Principal Planning Officer (Team Leader),
Lichfield District Council

"I applied to take part in the LG Challenge to push me out of my comfort zone, build my confidence in my own capabilities and develop my leadership skills.

"I am interested to meet others, and get an insight into challenges other authorities are facing and how they are tackling them.

"I hope to not only enhance my existing skills, but also discover different ways of dealing with issues, to benefit my council and our residents."



Helen Gelder,
Head of ICT and Digital,
North East Lincolnshire Council

"I've worked in local government for just over 33 years and held numerous roles during this time, building my knowledge and experience of public sector services.

"I see this as a great opportunity to further develop through collaboration, problem solving and looking at new ways of tackling the current challenges. I am excited to experience new perspectives and work with others from a range of services and backgrounds."



Jack Pearce,
Senior External Affairs Officer,
Buckinghamshire Council

"I wanted to take part in the LG Challenge to broaden my skills, expand my networks, and gain insight into new areas of local government, including how other authorities with different political dynamics work.

"I am excited to tackle tasks that require thinking creatively and strategically, and to meet new people across the sector with similar ambitions to improve services and outcomes for residents."



Faith Scott Deuchar,
Strategy and Change Delivery Lead,
London Borough of Islington

"There were so many reasons I applied for LG Challenge, but one of the most important was the opportunity to test innovative solutions and solve problems in service areas with which I am not familiar.

"Public sector leaders today require more than subject-matter expertise, and I hope the programme will allow me to develop these skills, and learn from the experiences and approaches of colleagues."

their project proposals to delegates and a judging panel.

The winner takes away the prestigious Bruce-Lockhart Scholarship, worth up to £10,000, to realise their proposal back at their home council.

A unique learning and development opportunity, officers across different levels and service areas broaden their knowledge and hone the key skills required to succeed as a leader in local government.

Contestants are supported to step out of their comfort zone, generate transformational ideas, and inspire and motivate, as well as establish a peer network for the future.



Martin Chastney,
Head of Development,
Cheltenham Borough Council

"When the LG Challenge visited Cheltenham, it generated considerable excitement and interest that remains alive today.

"Having only joined local government relatively recently, I am particularly keen to see the challenges and solutions faced by other authorities, and find ways in which I can apply these in my current role.

"I also hope my experience of working in a variety of organisations may be helpful to others."



Marelize De Beurs,
Economy and Place Marketing Manager,
Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council

"In serving the people and businesses I see when looking outside my window, I am acutely aware of my duty to have a positive impact on people, place and planet.

"Grappling with real-world challenges beyond the scope of the day job, alongside talented officers from diverse backgrounds, will accelerate my understanding in a way that no course could, and result in learnings and connections that will last a lifetime."



Che-kwon Sterling,
Transformation and Change Manager,
London Borough of Hounslow

"This challenge offers a unique opportunity for personal growth, improving problem-solving capabilities, nurturing innovation, and aligning with my aspiration to become an inspiring leader for vulnerable individuals.

"My participation is driven by a profound commitment to making a positive impact, ultimately serving the council and the wellbeing of care leavers in our community."



Adam Towers,
Project Officer,
Wigan Council

"LG Challenge presents a unique opportunity for me to build on my skills, apply theory to practical challenges, possibly win the Bruce-Lockhart Scholarship, and, most of all, connect and learn from other local government officers.

"I am keen to visit different authorities, meet new people, and gain a deeper understanding of the many issues, strengths, and opportunities for development and growth across local government."

Host councils receive valuable consultancy by developing a challenge specific to a real-life local issue, drawing on the expertise of 10 officers who work together on innovative solutions and offer fresh perspectives.

We are delighted to launch the 2024 programme, reveal this year's cohort, and announce that the first challenge will be hosted by Newcastle City Council. There, our contestants will be tested on their ability to think on the spot, work as part of a team, and deliver results to a tight deadline.

Meet our cohort of talented officers who were recently selected from councils from Greater London, the North West, South East, South West, West Midlands, and Yorkshire and Humber (see left).

"Host councils receive valuable consultancy by developing a challenge specific to a real-life local issue"

i The Bruce-Lockhart Scholarship has kindly been supported by Essex and Kent County Councils since the inception of the **Local Government Challenge** in 2009, in memory of Sandy Bruce-Lockhart, a former Leader of Kent County Council and a former Chairman of the LGA. Follow the **#LGChallenge** journey on the LGA's YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/@LocalGovAssoc, on X at twitter.com/LGChallenge, and on LinkedIn at www.linkedin.com/company/lg-challenge

Future leaders

The LGA's flagship training programme helps councils build capacity

The National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP) is the LGA's flagship graduate scheme.

It has developed a pipeline of future leaders by bringing in more than 2,350 high-calibre graduate trainees to the sector over the past two decades.

Nearly 5,000 graduates apply to this highly respected development programme every year to fast track their careers in local government.

The LGA runs a subsidised and rigorous multi-stage recruitment campaign on behalf of councils giving them the opportunity to recruit highly motivated and capable management trainees to work on important pieces of work over a two-year period.



NGDP trainee Alexander Virtue (centre) with (from left) Helen Bailey, Chief Executive of Sutton Council; Cllr Colin Stears, Mayor; Spencer Palmer, Strategic Director of Environment, Housing and Neighbourhoods; and Cllr Ruth Dombey, Leader

NGDP trainees help build capacity in council workforces and the sector as a whole, working on high-level strategic projects.

Trainees rotate between three or four placements within their host

authorities and undertake a learning and development programme that includes a Chartered Management Institute qualification.

In addition, they benefit from a national network of more than 200 peers, through which they can regularly bring best practice and learning back into their organisations.

Through the NGDP, councils are able to invest in a valuable resource while providing a platform for ambitious graduates from which to springboard.

A recent survey found that 95 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the programme, and reported they now felt more confident in their ability to gain a management position in local government because of the NGDP.

See the panel (left) to find out more about the experiences of one NGDP graduate.



Alexander Virtue is in the second year of the NGDP's Cohort 24, and currently working in the Development, Growth and Regeneration Directorate at the London Borough of Sutton

Driving results

I have been working for Sutton Council as part of the NGDP since October 2022, and an early placement involved me rotating with several teams in the Environment, Housing and Neighbourhoods Directorate.

I love how I was able to use theories and the learning provided by the programme to drive results in my placement, while enhancing my own

professional development.

My favourite achievement so far has been working in the Climate Action and Sustainability Team.

This is where I led on the procurement and technical analysis to launch and advance the council's innovative Go Green Scheme, which is the first scheme in the UK that incentivises local businesses to adopt greener practices

in exchange for a lowered business rate. To date, we have almost 100 businesses signed up to the scheme.

My other key accomplishments include leading the activity around the 2023 National Hate Crime Awareness Week, and actively contributing to vital projects such as updating the council's Business Impact Analysis and Continuity Plans.

With the help of the NGDP and my host authority, I have also been fortunate and thrilled to have received two staff awards in the short time I have been here. My experiences on the programme have definitely sparked a long and hopefully illustrious career in local government.

i To find out how the NGDP could help your council build capacity and develop the future leaders of your workforce, please visit www.local.gov.uk/ngdp-councils or, for an informal chat with the team to find out more, email ngdp@local.gov.uk. Council applications for NGDP graduates close on 29 February

Wales continues to lead the way on council tax reform.

We're very proud of our achievements over the years, working in partnership with local government.

Council tax is more up-to-date in Wales than elsewhere, and we have an additional tax-band for the highest value properties.

We've delivered local powers to help manage empty and second homes, removed the threat of imprisonment for non-payment, taken a citizen-focus on people struggling with debt, and created a new exemption for young care leavers.

We have maintained a national scheme of support for low-income households, an important lever for tackling poverty.

Despite the excellent ongoing work of local government, wealth inequality persists.

Even with our achievements, council tax is now 20 years out of date and unfair. A relatively higher share of council tax is being charged to households living in lower-value properties.

The evidence is clear – achieving a fairer council tax could be one of the most beneficial actions governments can take towards a more equal nation.

In November 2023, we launched our phase two consultation on the reforms (see www.gov.wales/council-tax-reform).

This sets out our ideas for making the tax fairer and more progressive – a key commitment in our Programme for Government and the Co-operation Agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru.

The consultation outlines three possible approaches to reform, although the options are endless, and we welcome all ideas in response to the consultation.

Each of the possible approaches in our consultation includes a revaluation of 1.5 million properties – a major exercise in itself – and two include other proposals such as additional council tax bands.

We're pleased to have worked once again with the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which has released an independent report giving examples of how these approaches could look in different parts of Wales.

We're also asking for views on how soon we should introduce these changes –

“There is no doubt that council tax reform is complex; it requires real collaborative effort”

Shaping the future of council tax in Wales



Rebecca Evans MS is Minister for Finance and Local Government at the Welsh Government and **Cefin Campbell** MS is Plaid Cymru Designated Member



whether that's at our earliest opportunity in 2025, defer changes until the next Senedd term, or do it in stages.

The Welsh Government is also committed to regular updates to council tax in the future. We introduced a Local Government Finance (Wales) Bill into the Senedd on 20 November to provide that opportunity, making five-yearly revaluations a statutory requirement.

We are also reviewing the arrangements for discounts and reductions.

Nearly half of households in Wales currently receive a discount or reduction on their council tax bill, and this will not change as a result of this consultation. We are committed to retaining the one-adult discount and keeping the discount at 25 per cent.

It's important to emphasise that this is not about raising more money from council tax and changes are not going to happen overnight.

Reform of the system could lead to different areas being affected in

slightly different ways. We will consider mechanisms to address any such differences and how they may be mitigated.

There is no doubt that council tax reform is complex; it requires real collaborative effort, especially with local government. We're particularly grateful to council leaders and practitioners for their contributions so far.

With the launch of the phase two consultation, we are one step closer to creating a fairer and more progressive council tax for the people of Wales. We encourage people to respond to the consultation by 6 February 2024.

i The Welsh Government consultation on council tax reform is available at www.gov.wales/council-tax-reform. See www.ifs.org.uk/publications/assessing-welsh-governments-consultation-reforms-council-tax for the IFS's report on the consultation

Finance settlement ‘is a backwards step’



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

We have been making efficiency savings in our councils, putting up council taxes and charges, and doing innovative ‘invest to save’ projects.

Income tax is collected just the same, but the amount coming back for local services is too low for us to adequately support our residents, places and spaces.

A settlement that is the same as before, while we are pummelled with inflation and cost-of-living pressures, is really a backwards step – and it continues to rely on raising council tax by the maximum amount allowable.

The LGA strongly makes the case for the need for adequate funding through its

modelling and forecasts, setting out the £4 billion funding gap over the next two years – but empirical evidence doesn't seem to matter to this Government.

Without sufficient funds, services that our communities need and rely upon are put at risk, and, for some, will have to be reduced. We are seeing capital ‘invest to save’ projects being put on hold, causing a longer-term deficit.

A key point that our members have made during discussions on the LGA's proposed Local Government White Paper is the importance of longer-term financial certainty and multi-year settlements, so

“Without sufficient funds, services that our communities need and rely upon are put at risk”

councils can properly plan – otherwise, the focus is inevitably on the yearly last-minute quantum from government, which is riskier and more inefficient.

We had an excellent Independent Group Annual Conference at the end of November – held for the first time over two days at Wyboston Lakes in Bedfordshire – with the largest ever number of you attending.

We were very pleased to hear from Cllr Adam Zerny, as the new Independent Leader of Independent-run Central Bedfordshire Council, and Cllr Lara Davenport-Ray, as the local Green Party ward councillor.

We also heard from the Teal Independents in Australia, Independent elected Mayor of North Tyne Jamie Driscoll, and Professor Colin Copus on devolution, and developed ideas on artificial intelligence, special educational needs and disabilities, housing, climate change and green investments, and much more.

We look forward to growing our annual conference further and welcoming even more of you in 2024!



Councillor **Shaun Davies** is Chair of the LGA

Balancing budgets, planning places

The lack of extra funding for local services in last month's provisional local government finance settlement has left councils facing a growing financial crisis.

Given the rising costs and demand pressures just in adult social care, children's services, and housing and homelessness services, it was unthinkable that ministers did not allocate more resources for 2024/25.

In a pre-Christmas, post-settlement meeting with Michael Gove, Secretary of Secretary for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, I made clear that the lack of funding is unprecedented and that councils of all political colours and types are warning of the serious budget-setting challenges that lie ahead.

Many now face the prospect of being unable to meet their legal duty to set a balanced budget and having Section 114 reports issued, as per our recent survey (see p5).



Local government is the fabric of our country, with councils providing hundreds of services that our communities rely on every single day. For many people, these services are a lifeline.

If councils cannot thrive, then our communities cannot thrive.

If social care services that councils provide cannot cope with demand, then pressure on the NHS will grow further.

If council housing teams can't succeed, then all of our hopes for new homes will not succeed.

Meanwhile, the Secretary of State has announced that he will relax national house-building targets and give new powers to councils to reject

developments that significantly alter the character of an area or impinge upon existing green belt – but will take tougher action on councils without local plans.

While we are pleased that housing targets will become advisory, we all know that planning is not a barrier to house building, with councils approving nine out of 10 planning applications.

What we need is stability on national planning policy, additional tools to incentivise the build-out of approved housing sites, five-year local housing deals for all areas, and the powers and funding to scale up and deliver an ambitious build programme of 100,000 council homes a year.



Councillor **Nesil Caliskan** is Leader of the LGA's Labour Group

'Unprecedented' costs and pressures on councils

It is shaping up to be a busy year for local government in 2024.

At the end of last year, the provisional local government finance settlement was announced.

The LGA has forecast a £4 billion funding gap for local government over the next two years and has been calling on the Government to close this gap to support councils – but, unfortunately, there was no new funding announced in the settlement.

Local government is entering 2024 in a perilous financial situation, with councils facing unprecedented demand for services, as well as rising costs and inflationary pressures.

Almost one in five council leaders thinks it is 'very' or 'fairly' likely that they will need to issue a Section 114 report this year or next, following a decade of government cuts.

With a General Election looming, we will expect to see the political parties set out how they will reverse the growing crisis in local government.

"Local government is entering 2024 in a **perilous financial situation**"

Shadow Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Secretary Angela Rayner and her team have already set out a bold vision, proposing to devolve power from Whitehall to town halls, where local leaders can best address their communities needs.

May will also bring another set of local and mayoral elections, and I am looking forward to campaigning with Labour councillors across the country to see Labour continue as the largest party in local government, showing the good that comes from having Labour in power locally.



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

Keir Starmer – you're no Margaret Thatcher

Iwould like to wish everyone across the local government sector, officers and councillors alike, a very prosperous new year.

Just before the Christmas festivities, the Government released the provisional local government finance settlement for the 2024/25 financial year.

Following my election as Leader of the LGA's Conservative Group, I made it clear that I would always speak the truth to government to ensure the best possible deal could be achieved for Conservative councils and our councillors on the ground.

"The finance settlement falls short of the level of support that the sector needs"

Regrettably, this year, I feel that the finance settlement falls short of the level of support that the sector needs and which the LGA has lobbied for on a cross-party basis.

While I welcome the 6.5 per cent increase in funding, which will help to mitigate some of the pressures that councils are facing, the settlement fails to address the problems that all councils are facing – most obviously in relation to inflation and increases in the National Living Wage, as well as the specific challenges in areas such as adult social care, children's services, and housing and homelessness.

I will make this point, though. Following the release of the statement, we didn't hear any alternative proposals from the Labour Party, and I think it is important people realise that. It seems Keir Starmer is now trying to unleash his inner Margaret Thatcher to win the next General Election. But I say this, Margaret Thatcher wouldn't borrow £28 billion and risk increasing inflation. Keir Starmer – you're no Margaret Thatcher.



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

The downward spiral of council finances

The provisional local government finance settlement for the upcoming financial year, with its £64.1 billion funding package, may seem like a step in the right direction.

A closer look reveals significant shortcomings and, sadly, we have become used to government 'smoke and mirrors'.

While the Government claims a 6.5 per cent increase in Core Spending Power, some councils, such as Somerset Council, receive less, at just 6.1 per cent. It's disheartening for those in need.

Additionally, the provisional settlement falls short for 2024/25 because of grant reductions. This shortfall comes at a time when social care costs are soaring, leaving councils struggling.

A Zoom call I held with Liberal Democrat council leaders shortly before Christmas showed how colleagues now face budget gaps of millions of pounds as a result of this finance settlement.

Council tax hikes are proposed as a solution, but they are hardly fair, especially during a cost-of-living crisis. It's passing the burden onto already struggling households.

"We need a more **thoughtful and sustainable** approach for local services to thrive"

The absence of a long-term funding plan and continued one-year settlements create uncertainty in budgeting, hindering planning for the future.

This settlement falls short and, yet again, shows the downward spiral of local government finance we have seen over this Conservative Government. It doesn't adequately address council challenges or meet the needs of communities.

We need a more thoughtful and sustainable approach for local services to thrive and to ensure everyone has an equal shot at a brighter future.

I will continue to campaign for a fair deal for our local communities.

Credit their service



Bruce Holborn is Local Campaigns Manager at the Royal British Legion and **Andy Johnson-Creek** is Head of Communications & Public Affairs at Help for Heroes

The principles of the Armed Forces Covenant are that 'those who serve/ have served in the Armed Forces and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services'.

Yet, when it comes to locally administered benefits, many local authorities could be doing more to help by giving proper consideration to our veterans and their families.

Military compensation payments (known as War Pensions or Armed Forces Compensation Scheme) are made to veterans in recognition of the pain and disablement that their service injury or illness has caused them.

However, unlike civilian payments for workplace injuries, 80 per cent of British councils treat some or all of this as income, rather than compensation, when

applying for local benefits. This means that some veterans and their families are missing out on thousands of pounds every year.

This is why the Royal British Legion (RBL), in collaboration with Help for Heroes, is running the 'Credit Their Service' campaign.

This campaign seeks to work with councils to exempt Armed Forces compensation from means tests for housing benefit, council tax support, discretionary housing payments, and disabled facilities grants.

We estimate that more than 10,000 local benefit awards a year involve a recipient who also receives military compensation.

For individual local authorities, there will be very few cases where this is happening, meaning the costs to the council in disregarding this income will be



low, yet the impact on the veterans who will be able to retain their compensation could be life-changing.

We are calling on councils to use their discretionary powers to update their policies and make sure that they do not treat compensation as income for local support.

You can contact the RBL at councillornetwork@britishlegion.org.uk, or Help for Heroes, to find out if your local authority is treating Armed Forces compensation as income or not.



See www.britishlegion.org.uk and www.helpforheroes.org.uk to find out more about the work of the **Royal British Legion** and **Help for Heroes**



Is your council working on a transformation activity or programme?

With our Transformation programme, we're offering you tools, resources and support at every stage of your transformation journey, whatever service you are looking to transform:

- attend a Transformation masterclass or workshop series
- benefit from peer support through our Transformation matching service or our Transformation panels
- help us develop our Transformation and Innovation Exchange (TIEx) self-assessment tool, our Transformation Capability Framework and our database of Transformation case studies.

Get in touch at transformation@local.gov.uk

Find out more at local.gov.uk/our-support/transformation



Mike Biddle is
Executive Director for
Net Zero at Innovate UK

Helping councils decarbonise

As a country, as a planet, we must reach net zero carbon emissions – but that is certainly easier said than done.

At Innovate UK, our view is that the journey to net zero is a race against time, not against each other, because it's a race we all need to win. To do this, we have to do things differently – which means we have to innovate.

Innovate UK exists to make sure that happens, by inspiring, involving and investing in innovation and knowledge sharing across the country.

We want to help innovative businesses grow, and, to do that, we also want to help open new markets for that innovation. Work with consultants PWC, published in December, shows that local markets for decarbonising places across the UK could amount to £500 billion.

But there are significant barriers preventing the take-up and efficient deployment of decarbonisation solutions at a local level. Our aim is to help unblock these barriers.



Local authorities are at the heart of local decarbonisation of heat, power and transport. Done well, this work will create better net-zero places across the country. However, as you may well know, it is not easy to plan and deliver decarbonisation programmes right now. Why is this?

There are often gaps in knowledge, skills, resource, and evidence of approaches that work well in practical application. Structuring projects for financing remains problematic, and engaging local people in a positive way needs continued experimentation and learning.

All is not lost, however, and we can seize the opportunity to work together to share knowledge, skills, techniques and technologies to accelerate progress towards our collective goal.

That's why Innovate UK has issued a package of targeted support to help places all around the UK to tackle their individual challenges, prove what can be done, share experiences, and speed up their journey to net zero.

As part of our Net Zero Living scheme, we're working with around 50 local authorities on a two-year programme of practical support and shared learning, as they take the steps needed to become net-zero places in the coming years.

We have also recently announced that seven local authorities will each receive Innovate UK funding of between £2 million and £5 million, totalling £25m-plus, to run practical demonstrator projects, showing how the non-technical barriers to implementing carbon-cutting measures can be overcome.

All of this comes together through the Future Ready programme, which will provide technical help to councils in the form of training, skills building, and one-to-one support.

Future Ready will focus particularly on five areas most important for net-zero progress: visioning and citizen engagement; planning; finance and investment; data; and policy and regulation. Beyond technical help, it will create a strong community of practice across the UK as the councils work together, generating insights, sharing learning, helping each other, and coming up with new solutions.

The information and learning generated by the programme will also be made available to all local authorities across the UK, to help speed up their transition to net zero.

We encourage all local authorities to get in touch with Innovate UK to see how we can support you in your transition to net zero.



You can find out more about the **Net Zero Living** programme at iuk.ktn-uk.org/programme/net-zero-living



Dr **Toni Griffiths** is Senior Outreach Officer at the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust

Light the darkness

Has your council made plans to mark Holocaust Memorial Day 2024?

In January 2023, more than three-quarters of local authorities marked Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) and this year, with your help, that number can increase for 2024.

With just over two weeks to go, there is still time to get involved and to bring people together to mark this important day, online and in person.

HMD is the international day, on 27 January, to remember the six million Jews murdered during the Holocaust, alongside the millions of people killed under Nazi persecution of other groups, and in more recent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.

It is an occasion for everyone to come together to learn, remember and reflect.

HMD 2024 marks the 30th anniversary of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. Just 49 years after the Holocaust ended and 19 years after the genocide in Cambodia, the world stood by as Hutu extremists shattered the fragile freedom in Rwanda, following decades of tension and violence, culminating in the murder of more than one million Tutsis in just 100 days.

Each year, the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMDT) selects a theme for HMD and, this year, it is Fragility of Freedom (see www.hmd.org.uk/this-years-theme).

In every genocide that has taken place, those who are targeted have had their freedom restricted and removed before many of them are murdered. This is often a subtle, slow process.

Genocide never just happens. There is always a set of circumstances that occur, or which are created, to build the climate in which genocide can take place and in which perpetrator regimes can remove the freedoms of those they are targeting.

Despite this, in every genocide there are those who risk their own freedom to help others, to preserve others' freedom or to stand up to the regime.

On HMD 2024, we can all reflect on how freedom is fragile and vulnerable



to abuse. As we come together in communities around the UK, let's pledge not to take our freedoms for granted, and to consider what we can do to strengthen freedoms around the world.

HMD activities take place across the country from December to February, and there are many ways councils can mark the day, from staging a civic ceremony to reading the HMD Statement of Commitment at a council meeting.

Every council is also encouraged to join the Light the Darkness National Moment – when organisations light up their buildings in purple and people light candles in their windows at 8pm on 27 January, to remember those who were murdered for who they were, and to stand against prejudice and hatred today.

Visit the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust

website (see information box) to access free resources, including updated guidance for marking HMD 2024 and the 'Get Involved Guide for local authorities', and to order free stickers and booklets.

Remember to add your HMD activity to our interactive map to become part of the national picture of how the UK marks HMD 2024. Every activity and event counts, whether large or small, online or in person, internal or external.



To find out more, please visit the **Holocaust Memorial Day Trust's website** at www.hmd.org.uk. If you have any questions or queries, please contact Dr Toni Griffiths, Senior Outreach Officer, by emailing toni.griffiths@hmd.org.uk. The HMDT is funded by the UK Government to promote and support Holocaust Memorial Day

By-elections review 2023



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



Losing more than 1,000 councillors last May, and suffering regular by-election defeats, the Conservatives must be hoping fortunes improve as the next General Election looms.

But Labour is not taking full advantage of the Conservative slump because the Liberal Democrats continue to make the running, even taking a seat from the Greens.

That was in North Yorkshire's Sowerby and Topcliffe ward, where Dave Whitfield won in 2022 by just 81 votes in a straight fight with his Conservative opponent. A Conservative win would have given them a council majority, but it was Liberal Democrat Dan Sladden who prevailed, with the Greens relegated to third.

The Greens did rather better in Camden's Highgate ward when safely navigating the seat's defence, enjoying a 14-point swing from Labour in the process.

Three Liberal Democrat gains from Conservative came in quick succession, beginning in Hertfordshire where the party easily defended its vacancy in St Albans and took the county division of Harpenden Rural.

Billinghay Rural tends to be a North Kesteven ward that votes Conservative, when it votes at all, that is.

Last May, the Conservatives nominated two candidates who were duly elected. The long-serving Gill Ogden then sadly died creating this new vacancy. Despite having never contested the ward before, the Liberal Democrats stood this time with Adrian Whittle the surprising winner.

Following councillor resignations, the Conservatives were faced with three by-election defences in Warwickshire.

The county council's Dunsmore & Leam Valley division was retained, as was one of the seats in Rugby's Dunsmore ward, but the other fell to the Liberal Democrats' Jonathan Bennett who had finished third in the same ward only last May.

It was unsurprising that the Liberal Democrats would take a seat formerly occupied by an Independent in



Cambridge's Queen Edith's ward. Elected in 2021, Sam Davies was the only Independent on the council, but her resignation gave the Liberal Democrats the opportunity to secure all three ward seats.

Politics in the Middle East has produced tensions within the Labour party and it dominated campaigning in Newham's Plaistow North ward, where the census shows more than four in 10 adults are Muslim. Six candidates contested, with one of the two Independents, Sophia Naqvi, winning some 500 votes more than her Labour rival.

Overall in 2023, there were 162 by-elections for 165 seats, of which 64 (39 per cent) resulted in a seat changing hands. More than two-thirds of vacancies (111) were caused by resignations, and 51 resulted from the incumbent's death.

The Conservatives struggled to defend seats, although there were seven gains, four of which were from Labour. With 36 seats lost, the Conservatives lost more than six in 10 of those it was defending.

Although Labour performed best in the main May elections, it has struggled to make a real impact in by-elections. It won only 10 times contesting Conservative seats, and made an overall net gain of just two seats.

The best performance was by the Liberal Democrats, taking 18 seats from the Conservatives, accounting for half that party's total losses. There were also gains from Labour and, despite three defeats to the Greens, the party made a net gain of 22 seats.

The Greens made 12 gains (including seven from the Conservatives) and four losses.

Local by-elections

Cambridge, Queen Edith's LIB DEM GAIN FROM IND 3.1% over Lab Turnout 32.3%	North Kesteven, Billinghay Rural LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON 11.6% over Con Turnout 19.9%
Hertfordshire, Harpenden Rural LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON 28.0% over Con Turnout 22.6%	North Yorkshire, Sowerby and Topcliffe LIB DEM GAIN FROM GREEN 16.6% over Con Turnout 29.3%
Newham, Plaistow North IND GAIN FROM LAB 18.8% over Lab Turnout 25.1%	Rugby, Dunsmore LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON/CON HELD 1.0% over Con Turnout 24.2%

i Only elections where a seat changed hands are listed above. For all the most recent results and additional data, please visit www.lgafirst.co.uk/local-by-elections



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