

first

No.629 November 2018

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the magazine for local government

"It's great that
**government has
listened to us
and scrapped
the cap"**

Lord Porter, LGA Chairman

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Housing win



I was delighted to hear the Prime Minister announce plans to remove the cap on councils' housing borrowing, which will free us to build more of the homes our communities need.

The announcement was the high point of what was a very successful party conference season for local government, and you can find out more about the LGA's work at these events in our Parliament section (p29).

Elsewhere in this month's magazine, you can read about our submission to the Budget, ahead of the Chancellor's statement on 29 October (p13), and we take a look at the Government's contingency plans in case of a 'no deal' Brexit (p12).

We are also launching a Skills Taskforce, to press the case for the localisation and integration of employment and skills services and ensure we have the right people with the right skills to help promote local economic growth (p10).

Finally, I hope you can find the time to take part in #OurDay, the LGA's annual tweetathon, on 20 November (p15). This is our chance to let the world know about all the wonderful work going on in councils and other public services, day in, day out, to help our residents and improve our local areas.

Lord Porter is Chairman of the LGA

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LGA secures housing win with lifting of borrowing cap

The LGA secured a huge political win this month, when the Prime Minister announced the full lifting of the Housing Revenue Account Borrowing Cap at the Conservative Party Conference. The move is one the LGA has long campaigned for – Chairman Lord Porter has spent 15 years calling for it.

It has been met with widespread acclaim across the housing sector, alongside cross-sector praise for the efforts of the LGA and Lord Porter in getting the move to happen.

Delighted Lord Porter was in the hall for the PM's speech. He said: "Today's speech by the Prime Minister shows that the Government has heard our argument that councils must be part of the solution to our chronic housing shortage.

"It is fantastic that the Government has accepted our long-standing call to scrap the housing borrowing cap. We look forward to working with councils and the Government to build those good quality, affordable new

homes and infrastructure that everyone in our communities need.

"Our national housing shortage is one of the most pressing issues we face and it is clear that only an increase of all types of housing – including those for affordable or social rent – will solve the housing crisis. The last time this country built homes at the scale that we need now was in the 1970s when councils built more than 40 per cent of them.

"Councils were trusted to get on and build homes that their communities needed, and they delivered, and it is great that they are being given the chance to do so again."

Councils are determined to ensure the promises become detail in the Chancellor's Budget as soon as possible. The LGA will be campaigning over coming weeks to ensure that local authorities are able to borrow to build, free from restrictions, so the renaissance in council house building we need becomes a reality."

● Read Lord Porter's comment piece on p24.

Social care funding for winter pressures

The Government has announced it will give an additional £240 million for the adult social care system to tackle winter pressures.

It says the investment will help councils reduce pressures on the NHS by getting patients home quicker and freeing up hospital beds across England.

The money, which was announced at the Conservative Party Conference, is enough to provide 71,500 domestic care packages or 86,500 're-ablement' packages, although councils also have the option to spend it on adapting housing.

Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "The LGA has been at the forefront of efforts to highlight the significant pressures facing adult social care and secure funding for the system.

"We are pleased that the Government has acted by providing an injection of desperately needed funding to help tackle winter pressures.

"Councils and providers cannot simply turn services on and off as funding ebbs and flows. Putting in place the right services and workforce requires forward planning and longer-term contracts. Adult social care services still face a £3.5bn funding gap by 2025, just to maintain existing standards of care."

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Matt Hancock, said: "We will use this money to get people who don't need to be in hospital, but do need care, back home, back into their communities, so we can free up those vital hospital beds, and help people who really need it, get the hospital care they need."

Growing 'care injustice' warning

The Care Quality Commission's annual State of Care report shows that most people are still getting good care – when they can access it. However, it warns of growing "care injustice", with access increasingly dependent on how well local systems work together.

The latest report for 2017/18 says overall quality of health and social care in England has been maintained, and in some cases, improved from last year. This is despite continuing pressures around demand and funding, and the challenge of recruiting and retaining staff.

But the CQC says that people's experience of care varies depending on where they live and is often determined by how well different parts of local systems work together.

Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "This report raises important concerns and highlights the brilliant work across the system to maintain quality of care, something that becomes harder each year as the consequences of pressures build further. It provides more evidence of a system under significant pressure and in desperate need of securing a long-term and sustainable solution for how, as a country, we pay for social care.

"With people living longer, increases in costs and decreases in funding, adult social care is at breaking point and its potential for helping people to live the lives they want to lead is at risk. The Government must use the Budget and Spending Review to inject desperately needed funding into adult social care and use the green paper to secure the long-term sustainability of the system."





Councils could lose £1 billion in EU funds

Local government could lose out on up to £1 billion if the Government does not speed up allocations of money available to councils to claim under the European Social Fund, the LGA warned this month.

Just 48 per cent of the £3.1 billion that the UK has been allocated of the fund has been claimed, five years into the seven-year spending period. With just £1.5 billion allocated, £1.6 billion is left to spend and, if the current pace of allocation was to continue, £914.5 million risks being sent back to Brussels.

Cllr Kevin Bentley, Chairman of the LGA'S Brexit Taskforce, said: "The current situation with the European Social Fund is leaving local areas facing huge financial shortfalls, as a result of a lack of investment.

"This funding has been used by local areas to create jobs, support small and medium enterprises, deliver skills training and invest in critical transport and digital infrastructure and boost inclusive growth across the country.

"To help ensure we have an economy fit for the future, we urge the Government to act urgently to ensure that local communities are getting the investment they desperately need, as well as learn from this experience in developing the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

"Without action, there is a risk that nearly a billion pounds of investment into our communities will be lost and local areas and economies will be denied desperately needed funding."

A spokeswoman for the Department for Work and Pensions said: "There is an agreement that funding can continue beyond 2020 as long as the application is received before then. There is a huge amount of interest in the European Social Fund and there are more and more applications coming in. There is no issue with the ability of the department to process those applications."



£1.3 billion cut will 'tip many councils over the edge'

Main government grant funding for local services will be cut by a further £1.3 billion (36 per cent) in 2019/20 despite many councils already struggling to balance their books, facing overspends and having to make in-year budget cuts, the LGA has warned.

Almost half of all councils – 168 in total – will no longer receive any Revenue Support Grant funding next year.

The LGA is calling on the Chancellor to use the Autumn Budget to tackle the immediate funding crisis for local government in 2019/20, as well as setting the scene for the forthcoming Spending Review to deliver a sustainable funding settlement for local government.

As part of its Autumn Budget submission, the LGA has mapped the likely impact of a further year of central government funding cuts and growing demand on the local services provided by an average upper-tier council.

The 'AnyCouncil' modelling shows residents living in a council area which sits in the mid-range in relation to current funding, levels of deprivation and outlook for economic growth should expect to see key local services further dramatically reduced in 2019/20.

Millions of residents are living in areas where their council will have to consider similar measures.

The LGA said the financial viability of some councils is now under threat and many others are increasingly unable to provide dignified care for our elderly and disabled, protect children, boost economic growth, fill potholes, build homes and more.

Cllr Richard Watts, Chair of the LGA'S Resources Board, said: "Losing a further £1.3 billion of central government funding at this time is going to tip many councils over the edge. Many local authorities will reach the point where they only have the funds to provide statutory responsibilities and it will be our local communities and economies who will suffer the consequences.

"In his Spring Statement in March, the Chancellor said he would invest in public services if public finances improve as recent forecasts have suggested. It is, therefore, vital that the Government addresses the growing funding gaps facing councils in 2019/20 in the Autumn Budget.

"If the Government fails to fund local government adequately there is a real risk to the future financial viability of some services and councils."

Report backs LGA taxi reform plea

Several LGA recommendations to improve taxi licensing legislation have been included in a report submitted to government.

The report, published by the Task and Finish Group on Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing, calls for taxi and private hire vehicle (PHV) legislation to be urgently revised, with national minimum standards for drivers and journeys to start and/or end within the area that issued the relevant licence among other recommendations.

Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: "Councils have long-called for existing outdated taxi laws to be updated and strengthened, so we are pleased that many of our recommendations have been supported in this report.

"Proposals to tackle out-of-area working, improve safeguarding and establish national minimum standards are essential to provide safer journeys and fairer business for drivers.

"Further recommendations to set minimum numbers of wheelchair accessible vehicles and install CCTV in licensed vehicles, while desirable, need to be considered alongside necessary funding to facilitate this.

"Local councils must continue to be central to the licensing process. We are pleased that the report recognises the importance of retaining local flexibility in taxi and private hire vehicle licensing, and of drivers being required to work in the area where they are licensed.

"The need for reform is now urgent. Councils are doing what they can to strengthen licensing processes, such as signing up to the new National Register of Revocations and Refusals commissioned by the LGA, but we have always said that the best way to strengthen safeguarding is to update legislation, which only government can do."



Ban on combustible cladding



The Government has announced a ban on combustible materials in external cladding systems, including the type used to refurbish Grenfell Tower, being used on buildings more than 18 metres high.

It had consulted on whether changes were needed to current regulations, which, in the LGA's view, lacked clarity on what materials could or could not be used on high-rise residential buildings.

Speaking at the Conservative Party Conference, Housing Secretary James Brokenshire said the shock of the "unimaginable horror" of the Grenfell Tower fire, which saw 72 people die, "underlined the need to do all that we can to see that such a disaster cannot happen again".

The ban will cover all combustible material being used to clad new residential buildings, schools, hospitals, care homes, and student accommodation in England and Wales, with a small number of exemptions (primarily materials where no alternative is available that is rated as A2 or better).

It is expected to be implemented in building regulation changes, which will be brought forward as soon as possible. The ban will not be applied retroactively to

high-rise buildings that have already been clad in this type of material. However, if the proposals in Dame Judith Hackitt's report are implemented, building owners will have to satisfy regulators that their buildings are safe and the ban will inevitably influence the safety criteria on which this judgement will be founded.

The ban represents a significant victory for the LGA, which has consistently warned that there is increasing evidence that the BS8414 test – which tests the fire performance of external cladding and insulation systems – cannot be relied upon.

It had strongly urged the Government to ban the use of any combustible materials – including cladding panels, insulation and other materials – on the external walls of high-rise and high-risk buildings.

Lord Porter, LGA Chairman, said: "The tragedy that unfolded at Grenfell Tower must never be allowed to happen again and we must ensure that those who live, work and visit high-rise and high-risk buildings are safe.

"It is great that James Brokenshire has listened to our calls for a ban on the use of combustible materials on complex and high-rise buildings."

Retailers breaking law on knife sales

Eight out of 10 retailers are breaking the law on underage knife sales in some areas, the LGA has found.

The worrying findings come as latest official figures show a 40 per cent rise in recorded knife crime in England and Wales in the past two years – from 28,664 offences in 2015/16 to 40,147 in 2017/18.

The LGA is calling for plans in the Government's Serious Violence Strategy to tackle knife crime to be brought forward as soon as possible, including the pledge to give councils dedicated funding to support trading standards prosecutions.

As government has only committed to the Prosecution Fund for two years, and with trading standards budgets and staffing having been cut by around half since 2010, the LGA is calling for this important service to receive long-term and sustainable funding

to support underage purchasing tests and prosecutions to ensure the worst offenders are brought before the courts.

Council leaders are also calling on the retail industry to fund underage test purchasing of knives and work more closely with councils to help improve compliance levels.

The LGA says greater fines and tougher sentences are needed for irresponsible retailers selling knives to anyone under the permitted aged of 18.

Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: "The Prosecution Fund announced in the Serious Violence Strategy will help councils prosecute retailers for blatant breaches of knife sale laws but needs to be introduced as soon as possible to help tackle the knife crime epidemic."

Councils feeling impact of China waste ban

At least a fifth (20 per cent) of councils have felt a direct impact from China's restrictions on imports of mixed paper and certain types of plastic over the last year, a snapshot poll by the LGA has revealed.

Some of the councils that have been most impacted warned that their recycling costs have increased by £500,000 on average over the last year as a result of the restrictions.

This is due in part to increased costs for processing materials for recycling. The fee charged to councils to process materials from kerbside collections at a materials recovery facility (MRF) is said to have increased from £15 to £22 per tonne over the last year.

The fee has increased to £35 a tonne compared with £29 a tonne for contracts signed in the past year.

Council leaders are calling for manufacturers to contribute more towards local authority costs for processing recycling and to reduce the amount of material, such as black plastic trays, entering the environment in the first place.

The LGA is also urging the Government to

address the longer-term impact of the China ban in its forthcoming Resources and Waste Strategy.

Cllr Martin Tett, LGA Environment spokesman, said: "It's clear that the ban by China on imported waste, which could soon be implemented from other countries, could have a marked impact on councils' ability to recycle.

"Councils want manufacturers to play their part in the battle against unnecessary and unrecyclable waste.

"We are keen to get around the table with them to reduce the amount of material entering the environment that can't be recycled.

"With the markets to sell unrecyclable material shrinking, it is essential that this is tackled as soon as possible.

"It is essential that the Government takes the opportunities of the upcoming Autumn Budget and publication of its Resources and Waste strategy to assess the financial impact of these bans on councils thoroughly, and encourage manufacturers to take up more of the responsibility for dealing with these unrecyclable materials."

Children's mental health referrals increase

The number of children referred to mental health services in England has risen by a quarter over five years, according to a new report by the Education Policy Institute.

It also found that as many as one in four children referred to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) were rejected.

While average waiting times for treatment have fallen, they remain twice as long as the Government's new standard outlined in its children's mental health Green Paper.

The report also said that a quarter of councils have phased out vital support services, including school-based mental health services, family counselling and support for those living with domestic abuse.

Cllr Anntoinette Bramble, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "This report reinforces the urgent need for a root-and-branch overhaul of children's mental health services, and for the NHS to work with councils to develop a system that says yes, rather than no, to children when they ask for help.

"Councils across the country work hard to ensure children and young people can access the



support they need, but with children's services facing a £3 billion funding gap by 2025, this is getting increasingly difficult.

"As a result, many councils are being forced to cut early intervention work, including youth services, which helps children avoid reaching crisis point, perform better at school and avoid mental health issues in later life.

"This has been compounded by government cuts to councils' public health funding, which also helps young people to get the best start in life."

news in brief

Loneliness strategy

The Government has unveiled a new cross-party strategy to tackle loneliness, described by the Prime Minister as "one of the greatest public health challenges of our time".

Funding will be made available for GPs to direct patients to a variety of activities such as cookery classes and walking clubs. Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "For too many people, loneliness is their reality all year round. They are often less able to look after themselves and are more likely to become reliant on public services sooner. With local authorities facing a £7.8 billion overall funding shortfall by 2025, investing in community care and preventative public health initiatives that can support lonely people has never been more essential."

Home adaptations

Only seven per cent of UK homes meet basic national accessibility requirements, a report by the Centre for Ageing Better revealed this month.

The centre argued that it was "imperative" the Government continued to fund the Disabled Facilities Grant so that home adaptations could be put in place, as they are cost-effective and reduce the pressures on the health service.

Cllr Ian Hudspeth, the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Councils are committed to keeping people at home and independent for as long as possible. As the report highlights, councils and partners are using a range of forward-thinking initiatives to adapt and improve homes, to ensure homes are accessible."

Youngsters 'at risk'

Thousands of children, including infants under the age of one, are at risk because of an unprecedented lack of funding for children's services, a new report by the Children's Commissioner has claimed.

The report found that more than 50,000 children – including more than 19,000 babies under the age of one – were living in an environment where abuse, mental health issues or addiction placed them at risk.

Cllr Anntoinette Bramble, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "While it is absolutely vital that councils are able to support families and help children who are at risk of significant harm, they also need to be able to intervene before problems escalate to that point. But, this is being put at risk by significant financial pressures."

news in brief

Government launches FGM awareness campaign

The Government has launched a campaign to help raise awareness of the harmful health consequences of female genital mutilation (FGM) and reinforce that the practice is illegal in the UK.

Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chair of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board at the LGA, which runs the National FGM Centre in partnership with Barnardo's, said:

"Councils are determined to help stamp out FGM from our local communities, and work alongside police, the NHS and charities to make sure we do all we can to protect women and girls from this horrific form of abuse. We are pleased the Government has launched this campaign to raise awareness of FGM, which we urge to make use of the invaluable work of the National FGM Centre."

Apprenticeship levy

The Chancellor Philip Hammond has announced a package of reforms to the apprenticeship levy, which will give businesses and employers more flexibility. An extra £90 million will enable employers to invest a quarter of their apprenticeship funds on people working for businesses in their supply chain. Cllr Mark Hawthorne, Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board, said the announcement is "a positive sign that the Government is listening to council concerns around the need for flexibility to ensure the levy is genuinely effective".

Measures to tackle serious violence

The Government has announced new measures to address violent crime in the UK, including a consultation on a new legal duty to underpin a public health approach to tackling serious violence and a £200 million fund, aimed at 10 to 14-year-olds, to build the evidence for early intervention.

Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chairman of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: "This funding is a positive step to help the multi-agency approach needed to identify and tackle the main drivers and risks of people committing serious violence, such as acid attacks, knife and gun crime, robbery and 'county lines' drug gangs."

Music lessons under threat

Councils are calling on the Government to cover the cost of the teacher pay rise to include music teachers, warning that music lessons in schools could be under threat.

The Government announced in the summer that it would fully fund the pay rise for all classroom teachers, yet it has since emerged that this will not apply to centrally employed teachers (CETs), the majority of whom provide music tuition.

The LGA is seeking assurances from the Government that it will meet the cost of the

additional 1 to 2.5 per cent salary rise for CETs – estimated to be £5.5 million – for which councils will not have budgeted. The LGA says this burden cannot fall on local authorities.

If councils, which face a £3.9 billion funding black hole in 2019/20, are left to pick up the cost, then some would have little choice but to reduce CET services, such as music tuition.

There are currently 4,900 CETs in England who either give direct teaching to children and young people or play key roles in supporting education professionals, at least half of which are in music services.

While the majority of these posts are within music teaching, other roles affected include: support for children from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and traveller heritages; supporting disabled children; teaching outside schools such as within secure units; and supporting schools in early years provision.

Cllr Annetonette Bramble, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said:

"The UK has a proud history of musical excellence and many of the most well-known artists in the world over time would have benefited from music lessons. For many young people, it is a vital part of their education and future life opportunities, but this could be at risk unless the Government commits to fully funding the pay increase for all classroom teachers, including music teachers."



Stop 'dining in the dark' in England

Half of businesses (51 per cent) in England do not display their food hygiene ratings in their premises, councils have revealed.

The LGA is calling for all businesses serving food to customers in England, including online food delivery outlets, to be forced to display food hygiene ratings to drive up hygiene standards and protect people from harm.

It is also calling for healthy food choices to be incorporated into the food hygiene ratings system to help tackle the obesity crisis.

The LGA is calling for a change in legislation following the success of the mandatory display of food hygiene ratings in Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as a rise in phone 'apps' and online menus people are using to order takeaway food.

Council environmental health teams score food outlets from zero to five based on factors such as kitchen cleanliness, cooking methods and food safety management.

Businesses in Wales and Northern Ireland are legally required to display their rating. However, in England, businesses do not have to display their rating, which means customers could be unaware of food hygiene levels when choosing where to eat or buy food, either at food premises or online.

Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said:

"With more people ordering takeaways online or on their phone, it should be mandatory for businesses in England to display food hygiene ratings on their menus online and on 'apps', as well as in their premises.

"Making the display of hygiene ratings compulsory in England would incentivise food outlets to improve or maintain high hygiene standards, reduce the risk of illness for customers, improve consumer confidence and save taxpayers' money by reducing the need for – and cost of – enforcement action by councils."

letters



Body cams for frontline staff

Central Bedfordshire Council is investing in cutting-edge technology to help us serve our local communities better, and keep them – and our frontline staff – safer.

We are providing our community safety and traffic and parking officers with new wearable body cameras, to help improve their evidence gathering, inspection and monitoring procedures, as well as increase their safety and wellbeing.

The cameras will be worn overtly on a lanyard or fitted to the officer's jacket, but they will only be activated when necessary. The camera has a screen that is clearly visible to the person being spoken to, and which displays the live footage being taken by the camera lens. The public will also be advised by the officer that a recording is being made.

The cameras will allow frontline council officers to gather first-hand video and audio evidence of an incident. They will give staff confidence when dealing with confrontational individuals, and will help to increase public confidence in the way we collect evidence.

Body cameras are increasingly used by the police and by other local authorities. They are not intended as a replacement for other methods of gathering evidence, but are an additional tool to support our investigations.

Footage can help to show clearly the impact and extent of antisocial behaviour, which can otherwise be difficult to describe in a written statement.

Cllr Ian Dalgarno (Con), Executive Member for Community Services, Central Bedfordshire Council

People's vote

Hounslow Council is set to become one of the small, but rapidly growing number of councils calling for a People's Vote on Brexit, after the council's 51-strong ruling Labour Group supported my motion to back a referendum on the final Brexit deal.

Some might say that councillors should not be wasting their time lobbying on international concerns far beyond their borough boundaries, that they should be protecting vital public services and sheltering vulnerable residents suffering from almost a decade of cuts.

But it is for precisely those reasons that all councillors must campaign for a People's Vote. Brexit will be a catastrophe for the British economy, whatever deal Theresa May is able to cobble together.

Every one of our councils has already had to make heart-breaking decisions in the face of central government slashing our budgets. Theresa

sound bites

Cllr Emma Dawson (Con, Kent)

"Lifting the cap to council borrowing is a big step forward, councils must build council houses with social rents. People need lifting out of poor housing conditions, which they are obliged to accept due to lack of homes. We must put health & wellbeing first."

www.twitter.com/cllrdawson

Cllr Oonagh Moulton (Con, Merton)

"Great afternoon at Merton Abbey Primary School with @nigelbenbow and pupils in Year 4 discussing what we do and how the Council works for #LocalDemocracyWeek"

www.twitter.com/oonaghmoulton

Cllr Joel Charles (Con, Harlow)

"Great evening celebrating everything #Harlow at the @heart4harlow #BigUpHarlow awards dinner with @HarlowTory, @halfon4harlowMP, @SimonNickCarter and the @HarlowTories team."

www.twitter.com/JoelRCharles

Cllr Matthew Bennett (Lab, Lambeth)

"Fantastic turnout last night @NationalTheatre for the launch of @lambeth_council new Creative & Digital Industries Strategy for Growth – how we'll support and champion creative industries and entrepreneurs right across the borough."

www.twitter.com/CllrMattBennett

Cllr Celia Hibbert (Lab, Wolverhampton)

"Just been to inspect the prototype for Sprint Shelter; WestMids Transport Authority is certainly getting ready for 2022 Commonwealth Games coming to our Region & I'm proud to be a part of this!"

www.twitter.com/CeliaHibbert

Cllr Liz Green (Lib Dem, Kingston Upon Thames)

"Delighted to be at @KingstonCOC business awards. So many great businesses and voluntary organisations in @RBKingston #kingstoncelebrates."

www.twitter.com/CllrLizGreen

Cllr Sarah Bevan (Ind, Bath and North East Somerset)

"Putting plans together with Cllr Karen Walker for our Poppy Planting Day in November. 20,000 seeds ready to be sown! #lovePeasedown."

www.twitter.com/SarahFBevan

May says austerity will end after Brexit. But her own Chancellor has already admitted that more cuts are almost certainly on the way after we leave the EU – cuts that will swell the queues at food banks and force ever more people to choose between heating and eating.

As local councillors, we are the most immediate champions of our residents' wellbeing. And to watch the Government march us off a cliff without giving those residents a choice would be a dereliction of duty. That is why I have asked our council to back a People's Vote and why I urge all councillors across the country to do the same.

Cllr Salman Shaheen (Lab), Hounslow Council



What do you think? Please submit letters for publication by emailing karen.thornton@local.gov.uk. Letters may be edited and published online

features

Closing the skills gap

Devolving and localising employment and skills services would help deliver the Government's Industrial Strategy



Councillor Sir Richard Leese is Chair of the LGA's City Regions Board and Councillor Mark Hawthorne is Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board



Last year, we launched Work Local, an ambitious but practical vision for a devolved and integrated employment and skills service (see **first** 614).

It made a compelling case for reform to address the shortcomings of the current system – not least, the widening skills gap in the UK workforce that threatens to undermine economic growth.

We estimated that the Work Local proposals, if implemented across an average-sized combined authority, could each year result in 8,500 more people in work and 6,000 increasing their skills, adding up to £280 million of benefits to the public purse and a £420 million boost to the economy.

The LGA is now looking to create more waves to get Work Local on the radar of the Government, Opposition and a range of influential stakeholders.

As part of this work, we have set up a new Skills Taskforce to refocus Work Local as a way of providing placed-based solutions to some of the challenges and opportunities arising from Brexit and the Government's Industrial Strategy.

It will engage a range of stakeholders on our key Work Local recommendations through a series of roundtables, and look to build relationships with them on key skills policy issues that we, collectively, are trying to influence. After all, flexibilities in the

apprenticeship levy were only achieved by a range of stakeholders raising concerns with the Department for Education. So we know alliances can have a powerful impact.

We want stakeholders and representatives to bring their own industry expertise to the table – for example, in construction, retail and engineering.

The taskforce roundtables taking place between December 2018 and March 2019 are expected to focus on the following themes:

- Are we all pulling in the same direction to address local skills gaps and shortages?
- How can we collectively develop a local all-age careers advice and guidance service (see opposite page)?
- How are sector-specific skills challenges (arising, for example, from technological change or Brexit) playing out in the local economy?

Our aim is that, by building alliances with a range of stakeholders, we can work together more collaboratively and, next summer, bring together the conclusions from taskforce discussions, and renew and update our Work Local recommendations.

Alongside this, we are in the process of developing a new relationship with government on post-16 skills for all areas, and have proactively engaged with Skills Minister Anne Milton MP on how this can work on a practical level.

This is a good start, but we have a long way to go if we are to make the current national skills and employment system more integrated and localised and before local government and our local economies begin to benefit from a devolution deal process offering real freedom and flexibility.



For more information about Work Local, please visit www.local.gov.uk/work-local. The LGA is holding a conference on 'Skills, employment and inclusive growth: can we deliver what our local economies need?' on 27 November in London. To find out more and book your place, please visit www.local.gov.uk/events

A careers service for all

Locally commissioned careers provision could help improve skills levels and boost productivity

It's almost a year since the Government published its plan for raising the quality of careers provision in England.

'Careers strategy: making the most of everyone's skills and talents' aims to support people of all ages to make the right choices when it comes to acquiring the skills and qualifications needed to pursue a rewarding career. It promotes a culture of providing the 'right advice' in the 'right place' at the 'right time', supported by experiences from employers.

The LGA welcomed the Careers Strategy, but it is an ambitious plan, which depends on a strong partnership between government, employers, the education sector and the careers community to make it work.

We believe its success is at risk because no-one is coordinating this activity and, in many areas, councils are plugging the gaps in provision (see case studies, below).

Councils and combined authorities recognise the pivotal role good careers provision plays in ensuring employers can find local people with the skills they need to

improve productivity, and they want to help government fix the current system.

However, careers provision in England remains patchy, complex and confusing, for both young people and adults. Across any one local area, there are a number of organisations and providers involved, including The Careers & Enterprise Company, the National Careers Service, Jobcentre Plus, councils, colleges and schools, plus myriad funding streams.

For example, The Careers & Enterprise Company will be spending £5 million over two years on rolling out up to 20 'careers

hubs' – groups of schools and colleges, located in the same geographic area, working with universities, education and training providers, employers and career professionals to improve careers support.

The 'careers hubs' will cover 710 schools and colleges across the whole of England, but exclude nearly 3,000 schools and colleges. Councils are concerned that this will result in many young people who will simply not benefit from this initiative, and this is a disservice to them.

We want to help government fix the patchwork careers provision and create a joined-up careers offer for people of all ages. But it can only do that by working with councils and combined authorities, and enabling them to develop a locally coherent and locally commissioned, all-age careers service, with requisite funding.



Councils and careers

Essex County Council is working in partnership with Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock councils, business and education partners to build a local skills offer that meets the needs of local employers and gives residents the tools they need to prosper.

This work is driven through the Essex Employment and Skills Board (ESB, www.essexesb.co.uk), which has created an 'Essex skills evidence base' to help identify priority sectors, sector skills needs, and vacancies. This has helped highlight that many of the area's priority sectors have an 'image problem', and that good quality and accurate localised labour market information is hard to find.

Consequently, ESB established a new careers information brand called 'What's Your Thing?' (pictured) to inform young people and their parents about the amazing careers that are available, the skills needed, and the salaries that could be earned in Essex. For more information, visit www.whatsyourthing.org.uk

Somerset County Council has developed a series of 'Talent Academy' programmes, to support schools to engage with local employers and offer young people opportunities to learn about specific industry sectors.

Each Talent Academy is designed around a key Somerset employment sector – such as manufacturing, aerospace, nursing and health. Employers are engaged to deliver workshops, and mentors help students build and develop their 'soft' employability skills.

This year, more than 500 students will be taking part, with EDF (Hinkley Point C), Rolls Royce, Mulberry, Yeo Valley, Styles Ice Cream, Taunton Fabrications and TBM Patterns among the national and local employers involved so far. For more information, contact Julie Young at JAYoung@somerset.gov.uk

Brexit contingency planning



Councillor Kevin Bentley
is Chairman of the LGA's
Brexit Taskforce

The Government has published contingency plans for if Britain leaves the EU without a deal

The UK's exit from the EU will have a significant impact on local government, creating challenges that need to be addressed, but also opportunities to do things differently.

Over the summer and autumn, the Government published a series of technical papers outlining the impact of a 'no deal' exit from the EU and how the country should prepare for such a scenario.

The Government and the EU have both stressed that 'no deal' is the least-preferred option. However, the LGA and councils up and down the country have been taking a lead on Brexit preparations because our residents and local businesses expect us to be ready.

In advance of the technical papers, the LGA produced a briefing, 'No deal and local government', which aimed to advise and influence the Government's own preparations, and to ensure the concerns of local government are heard.

So far, the Government's technical papers have explored a wide range of extremely important issues to local government, including the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, procurement, state aid, organic food production and labelling, and the import and export of animals.

Important issues such as EU nationals' voting rights and their right to stand in the 2019 local elections and beyond remain unanswered. The LGA has sought clarity from the Cabinet Office on this issue.

The most urgent issue is the 2019 local elections. While we are assuming that the tenure of EU nationals already elected will remain, councils need to understand the rules for those voting and seeking election next year. The deadline for the delivery of nomination papers is 3 April 2019, a few days after we leave the EU.

While we await clarity on the residency and employment rights of EU nationals living in the UK under a 'no deal' scenario (many of whom are in key local government jobs), we should assure our communities that their rights will be protected, as per the



Prime Minister's statement in September.

The technical papers have provided assurances with regards to EU funding, with the Government committed to ensuring there is no gap in funding for regional growth, and guaranteeing all European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund projects agreed before Brexit.

State aid rules will be transposed into UK legislation through the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, with enforcement and supervision carried out by the UK's Competition and Markets Authority from 29 March 2019.

On procurement, the Government has said there will be a UK replacement for the

current EU system, and that the UK will accede to the World Trade Organization's agreement on government procurement.

However, more detail is needed on how to deal with ongoing procurement procedures in the handover period between the two systems.

Brexit will ultimately be judged as a success or failure by local areas: real people in real communities. The LGA will continue to lobby the Government extensively on these and other issues, to ensure that councils are as prepared as they can be for the impact and opportunities that Brexit presents – whether there is a deal or 'no deal'.



For the LGA's 'No deal and local government briefing', please visit www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/no-deal-and-local-government-briefing-august-2018



A budget for local government

The Chancellor should invest in local services to help reduce pressures on other parts of the public sector

The LGA's submission to this year's Autumn Budget sets out how investment in local services, and in prevention and early intervention work, can ensure councils continue to make a positive difference to their residents' lives.

It will also help to reduce pressures on the rest of the public sector, save money for the public purse, and contribute to the wider prosperity and wellbeing of the nation.

The Autumn Budget, on 29 October, offers a crucial opportunity for the Government to take urgent action to tackle the immediate funding crisis facing our local services, as well as setting the scene for the 2019 Spending Review to deliver a sustainable funding settlement for local government.

Unprecedented funding pressures and demand for key services are pushing councils to the limit. They have strained every sinew to play a vital role in supporting local economies and communities through a difficult few years.

Local government has sustained disproportionately large reductions in central government funding over this decade, in comparison with the rest of the public sector. Between 2010 and 2020, councils will have lost 60p out of every £1 the Government had provided for services.

In 2019/20, councils' revenue support

“Local government has sustained disproportionately large reductions in government funding in comparison with the rest of the public sector”

grant is due to be cut by a further £1.3 billion and councils face a £3.9 billion funding gap. The LGA's submission to the Chancellor's 2018 Autumn Budget is calling on the Government to close this gap in 2019/20, and commit to funding local government fully after a complete assessment of the overall needs of the sector in the 2019 Spending Review.

Our submission also calls on the Government to: accelerate work on further business rates retention and the fair funding review; allow councils to keep 100 per cent of Right to Buy receipts from council house sales; and provide clarity over its plans for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, which is to replace EU regeneration funding after Brexit.

As part of its submission, the LGA has mapped the likely impact of a further year

of central government funding cuts and growing demand on the local services provided by an average upper-tier council.

The 'AnyCouncil' modelling shows that residents living in a council area that sits in the mid-range in relation to current funding, levels of deprivation and outlook for economic growth should expect to see key local services further dramatically reduced in 2019/20. Millions of residents are living in areas where their council will have to consider similar measures.

Based on cash and inflation figures alone, AnyCouncil will have had to deal with funding cuts and inflationary pressures totalling more than £50 million per year, which is equivalent to about a quarter of its current spending. This £50.7 million is equivalent to £215 for each resident.

Based on national averages, the services that AnyCouncil could fund each year with the £50.7 million it has lost would be more than one million hours of home care provision, more than 12,500 weeks of care for the elderly, at least three average-sized libraries kept open, and more than 130,000 potholes filled.



The LGA's full Budget submission can be viewed at: www.local.gov.uk/moving-conversation-lga-budget-submission-2018



A bond worth forming

The United Kingdom Municipal Bonds Agency is ready to issue its first bond and councils are being encouraged to sign up to make it a success



Sir Steve Houghton is Leader of Barnsley Council and Director of the United Kingdom Municipal Bonds Agency

The LGA and more than 50 local authorities have worked hard to develop the idea of an alternative borrowing agency to the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB). That vision has been turned into a reality and the United Kingdom Municipal Bonds Agency is ready to issue its first bond.

So, what will the bond agency be able to offer?

The initial bond available will be a short-length bond for 10 to 15 years at a rate competitive with the PWLB. The minimum loan for an individual council will be £1 million.

The intention is to go to the market early in 2019 but, in order to do this, firm expressions of interest from councils will be needed within the next few months.

To take advantage, councils will also need to formally accept the Agency's

framework agreement. This is something that has already been done by 23 councils and can form part of the annual treasury management strategy and policy process that councils go through as part of the annual budget-setting process.

This is an essential requirement of the bond-issuing process and we have created a template report to help make the process as easy as possible for interested councils.

But why should a council borrow from the Bonds Agency instead of the PWLB?

First, the Agency will aim to beat the PWLB on price. So, in times of ongoing funding pressures facing all councils, every penny counts to protect vital local services.

Second, it will be as secure as it can be. The Agency will carry out due diligence on

all potential borrowers and the results of this will be shared with your finance director. The bond will be covered by a joint and several guarantee from borrowing councils.

Lastly, councils who borrow will be helping to ensure that local government is as resilient as possible in the future.

The UK Municipal Bonds Agency was created by local government, so we could secure our own source of borrowing. We're now ready to issue our first bond and, as one of the councils that signed up to borrow, I would encourage others to join us to make the first transaction a success.

This is really a one-off opportunity for local government to help itself and help each other.

It is a win-win if you borrow from the Agency. The borrower gets a cheaper rate and the alternative to the PWLB is in business.

LGA Chairman Lord Porter said:

"We know that councils in England are borrowing between £400 million and £700 million a month.

"If they can capture just a segment of this borrowing they can make a success of a first issue and gear up the bonds agency to be a low-cost alternative to the Public Works Loans Board, helping councils to raise funds to help support their local areas."

"Councils who borrow will be helping to ensure that local government is as resilient as possible in the future on housing"



For more information about the United Kingdom Municipal Bonds Agency, please email Vitaly.Voytenko@local.gov.uk

#OurDay is your day

The LGA's annual tweetathon will again celebrate the thousands of unsung heroes working for councils and fire services who keep our communities running

OurDay is a chance for everyone who delivers local public services to showcase the huge number of ways in which they support and improve the quality of life of our communities, every day.

Last year's event was bigger than ever, with a huge national and international reach: 14,000 contributors posted more than 45,000 tweets, reaching more than 31 million people.

As a result, #OurDay trended at No 1 in the UK and was also first worldwide in the English language – but we need your help to make this year's tweetathon an even bigger success.

Ahead of this year's event, on Tuesday 20 November, we are asking councils, councillors and officers to tell us about their work and why they're proud to be part of the local government family.

We'd love to hear about the teams who collect the rubbish or keep the streets clean, come rain, wind or shine; the dog wardens who go the extra mile; the councillors who are always there for their residents; the carers who provide compassion and dignity; the volunteers who give up their time for free; and the social workers who change young

lives for the better. The list goes on and on and on.

There are many ways you and your council can celebrate the work of local government and other local public services. For example, you can:

- Spread the word – tell other people about #OurDay and share the date in a post on Facebook or Twitter. You can download lots of branded assets from our toolkit, available at www.local.gov.uk/our-day
- Take part on the big day – tell the world what you and your council are doing from 00.01 until 23.59 on Tuesday 20 November by using the hashtag #OurDay. Our toolkit has lots of tips and advice on how to get your messages out there, as well as templates and draft press releases to save you time.

Cllr Peter Fleming, Chairman of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board, said: "#OurDay has gone from strength to strength in recent years, and we know we can make this the biggest and best yet.



"It is an opportunity for councils to highlight and shout about the amazing work they do for the public and their communities. It showcases a day in the life of local government and shines a light on all the different things that councils do over a 24-hour period.

"Councils work on behalf of their communities, providing a huge variety of services – many hidden – every day to support people and make lives better. This is a great chance for the community to go behind the scenes and hear the stories behind the services."



i For more information about #OurDay 2018, please visit www.local.gov.uk/our-day and keep up to date on Twitter by following @LGAComms. If you'd like to share your ideas with us or let us know what you have got planned, then email ourday@local.gov.uk

Our digital council

An LGA project has helped fund the expertise needed for a district council to provide more of its customer services online



Councillor Simon Tagg (Con) is Leader of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council

Digital technologies have the potential to transform and enhance the way services are delivered to residents, while generating efficiencies and reducing pressure on council taxpayers.

Within the complex and shifting world of local government, my council remains committed to preserving face-to-face and telephone contacts for those customers who don't find it easy to fully engage with the digital world.

However, for those who have access and a desire to use our services digitally – whether that is via a mobile phone, laptop, tablet or computer – we are committed to making this as easy, efficient and effective as we possibly can, so people don't have to come and see us in person or ring us up.

This council prides itself on working with partners to achieve better outcomes for our residents, and the LGA's Productivity Experts programme is a great example of that approach. The funding, together with the LGA's support and expertise, helped us at a time when we were getting our digital journey out of the starting blocks.

We faced a challenge to encourage greater take-up of online services while, at the same time, improving the customer journey. The council did not have the staff to carry out the technical work needed to transform back-office functions so that residents could deal with the council online, from start to finish of their query or transaction.

The money we received from the Productivity Experts programme paid for business analyst expertise from our customer portal provider, Jadu. It led the initial re-engineering work and trained our staff to

develop their own skills in this area, to ensure future sustainability.

We benefited from making contacts with neighbouring councils – in particular Lichfield District Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council – which were embarking on the same path as us, with the same product.

The support of colleagues at these two authorities helped us trim many hundreds of hours off the procurement process, which, in turn, resulted in a dramatic speeding up of our own journey. We believe sharing in the Lichfield process secured a notional 'officer time' saving of at least £29,850.

An informal user group with partners has now been established, with the aim of sharing lessons learned on work already undertaken, as well as on future development commitments to ensure there is no duplication of effort.

We identified our biggest customer volume service area – recycling and waste – as the first area for attention.

We organised workshops with the service, which identified improvements to the online customer journey for all service requests, ranging from missed bin collections to ordering new containers to bulky waste collections.

We have learned that testing, testing and testing again with users is absolutely vital if we are to make this process work for our customers in a way that enables them to benefit from an improved service – and the council to benefit from efficiency savings.

The council has a work programme in



place, which outlines the order in which the digital team is to work with services and develop their online presence.

In the current financial year, a savings target of £50,000 has been included in the council's budget. We expect to save more than £500,000 over the coming four years as we introduce digital end-to-end services for a range of key areas.



“Testing, testing and testing again with users is absolutely vital if we are to make this process work for our customers”



For more information about this project, please email Phil Jones, Head of Communications, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, at phil.jones@newcastle-staffs.gov.uk



Sharing services

A spin-off of the Productivity Experts programme, the Shared Service Expert Programme can help connect your council with others wishing to start a new shared service. It can also assist in enlarging existing shared service arrangements through options appraisal, facilitation, brokerage, mediation, negotiation and mentoring support.

For example, Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council has joined Rochdale, Stockport, and Trafford councils in becoming a partner in their shared procurement service, STAR Procurement.

Because of the scale of change in bringing on a fourth partner, STAR successfully secured funding from the LGA for a shared service expert, who carried out a cost-benefit analysis to highlight the opportunities of gaining a new partner. They also helped with some of the practicalities of bringing them on board.

Established in 2014, STAR has saved more than £20 million of taxpayers' money

when procuring a wide range of supplies and services for its councils' use and for their local communities.

Nearly 1,000 contracts, worth £1 billion, have been secured by the STAR Procurement team.

Cllr Bill Fairfoull (Lab), Tameside's Deputy Executive Leader, said: "STAR Procurement shows that sharing services, expertise and resources delivers results. We are excited by what STAR will be able to deliver with us and our partners."

Cllr Mike Cordingley (Lab), Executive Member for Finance at Trafford Council, and Chair of the STAR Procurement Joint Committee, said: "We are excited about our future direction and the results we have produced, and will achieve, through collaboration.

"Procurement is so much more than putting contracts in place. It's about trying to ensure that we find ways to boost local economies and ask our suppliers to be socially responsible when they do business with us and for us."



For more information about the LGA's Shared Service Expert Programme, please visit www.local.gov.uk/our-support/efficiency-and-income-generation/shared-services/shared-service-expert-programme

Expert advice

The Productivity Experts programme supports councils to make savings and/or generate income against a backdrop of decreasing funding and increasing demand for services.

The LGA grants £7,000 to councils, who then commission an LGA-recommended expert to provide 12 days of direct, bespoke advice and support. Over its lifetime, the programme has worked with more than 100 councils, contributing to more than £130 million of savings or income generation for these councils.

Councils, fire and rescue services, and national parks can all apply for help from the programme, and can apply with other councils and public sector organisations at any time during the financial year.

We can help with any service, and applications should be ambitious, with the potential for significant savings or income generation. The recommended experts have a proven ability to work with councils and to deliver results.

For more information about the LGA's Productivity Experts programme, please email productivity@local.gov.uk or visit www.local.gov.uk/productivity-experts-programme. For the LGA's full range of efficiency and income-generation programmes, offering help and support to councils, please visit www.local.gov.uk/our-support/efficiency-and-income-generation

Praise for the programme...

"The programme, funded by the LGA, empowered us to review our procurement operations. This ranged from complying with regulations to developing an appropriate business case, updating systems and processes, and ensuring we consider any impact on contract management. With input from key stakeholders during the programme, and set against future financial challenges, we were able to take this fantastic opportunity to update our procurement strategy."
Senior Management Team member, Pendle Borough Council

"The Investment Property Strategy approved as a result of this work expects a gross yield of 7.5 per cent from new investments. After factoring in capital financing costs and other costs, the indicative annual income on a property portfolio of £20 million has been determined to be £350,000 per annum."
Corporate Director Resources and Commercial, Harrow Council

LG Mutual

The launch of the Local Government Mutual will be a cost-effective alternative to traditional insurance, governed and led by its council members who will reap the financial benefits

Brian Roberts and Ian Rogers are Directors of the Local Government Mutual

We are delighted to be able to provide an update on progress towards the launch of Local Government Mutual, which aims to offer a cost-effective alternative to traditional insurance.

We know local government is always looking for innovations that can improve the ways in which councils serve our communities within ever tighter budgets.

The LGA joined a group of innovative councils to establish the new Local Government Mutual (LGM). It is drawing on best practice from other mutuals and will offer a cost-effective alternative to traditional insurance. It will use local government capabilities and resources more effectively to manage and, where possible, reduce the cost of risk while continuing to work with the insurance market to procure cost-effective risk transfer cover for large losses.

LGM will be governed and led by its local authority members, and is legally obliged to act in their best interests. It will support improved risk management by using tried and tested sector-led improvement methods to help reduce the number and cost of claims, and it will be the local authority members themselves who reap the financial benefits – not private shareholders.



What is a mutual?

A mutual is owned by its members who have control over how it is run.

The LGM will be a hybrid discretionary mutual, which means there are two levels of protection:

- The mutual pools sufficient contributions from its members to cover the cost of the low-level, expected losses.
- A programme of insurance protection is arranged to protect against larger unexpected losses and accumulations of losses.

The mutual board can also use its discretion to approve claims that fall outside a member's cover if it considers this to be appropriate.

“I believe the mutual will make a valuable contribution to sector-wide efficiencies and financial stability.”

Cllr Richard Watts, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board

The mutual is managed by LGM Management Services Limited, a joint venture between LGA Commercial Services and Regis Mutual Management. They are now putting in place the mutual's strategy and operations for handling claims, pricing members' contributions and have initiated the procurement for the mutual's 'wrap-around' insurance to protect against additional costs. They will ensure compliance with procurement regulations and other legal and regulatory requirements.

Cllr Richard Watts, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said: “The LGA has been keen to support a new mutual as it offers the prospect of affordable, high-quality risk transfer and risk management through a mutual structure for the benefit of local government. I believe it will make a valuable

contribution to sector-wide efficiencies and financial stability.”

Cllr Andrew Western, Leader of Trafford Council and Founding Member of the Mutual, said: “Trafford Council is delighted to be a founding member of the mutual. It offers an opportunity for us to be at the forefront of an innovation that could potentially save money over time and improve the way in which we manage the complex risks inherent in local government business.”

Cllr Matthew Lee, Leader of South Kesteven Council and Founding Member, said: “Mutuals have worked for hundreds of years all over the world. This is a sensible way to help local government take greater control over our own risks and finances, learning from experience in the UK and abroad, bringing additional choice into the market.”



For further information please contact the Company Secretary of Local Government Mutual, james.alexander@local.gov.uk



Councillor Sylvia Tidy (Con)
is Lead Member for Children
and Families at East Sussex
County Council

Using data to support troubled families

An IT project has helped save thousands of pounds and improve services for vulnerable residents

East Sussex County Council and its partners ran a very successful Troubled Families programme that attracted national attention from central government.

One of the issues we were keen to address in the programme's second phase was how we could give a more comprehensive picture about the needs of families earlier to frontline workers, ideally at the point of referral.

At the time, staff were handling data manually, using Excel spreadsheets, which was time consuming, and they couldn't deal with large volumes of data. We wanted to draw together the different bits of information held by us and a range of partners, including police and health services, to speed up the process of matching that data to individuals and families.

We recognised that this would help us better target valuable resources at those most in need, and to intervene earlier before families reached crisis point. It might also help us to identify and target families before a crisis, rather than waiting for a referral.

We had some experience of developing these kinds of predictive analytics because we had previously looked at mapping the risk indicators for those young people in danger of being not in employment, education or training (NEET). That work contributed to higher-than-average participation rates in education and training by 16 and 17-year-olds in East Sussex. But it was very time consuming, as it was done on a small scale without access to advanced data-matching computer programs.

We successfully applied for funding from the LGA's Digital Transformation Programme (see right), to develop a data-matching tool and employ a part-time information analyst to carry out the research and maximise the tool's use. East Sussex also carefully considered the data protection requirements of GDPR in relation to this work on matching data and developing predictive analytics. Our aim was to ensure we had all the necessary permissions to match data from a range of different sources.

None of these things run smoothly, of course. Staff changes, and a decision by the county council to change the system for making information about children available to staff, affected how the LGA-funded



project was delivered. But it has delivered – in multiple ways – saving an estimated £584,762 as of April 2018.

One example is that the analysis of the data confirmed there was a substantial cohort of families who could be turned around more quickly than the Troubled Families' average. This led us to establish a 'short-term team' focused on helping families

facing lower-level issues and preventing those problems escalating – saving £6,090 per family in avoided costs compared with those dealt with by the main teams.

By using internal staff, we have also improved our skills, knowledge, and ability to carry out similar projects in the future – as well as saving around £45,000 in consultants' fees.

Digital transformation

The Digital Transformation Programme was set up to help councils develop digital solutions to support their wider work on national programmes of transformation, including the integration of health and social care, troubled families, welfare reform and public health. The aim is to develop tools that can be reused by other councils and support wider public service transformation.

You can find out more at the LGA's Digital Showcase conference in London on 22 November – see www.local.gov.uk/events. A full case study on East Sussex's project will shortly be available at www.local.gov.uk/our-support/efficiency-and-income-generation/digital/digital-funded-programmes-and-case-studies. For more information about the Digital Transformation Programme, please email productivity@local.gov.uk



Prevention is better than cure

The partnership approach of landmark public health legislation, which significantly improved sanitary conditions and reduced disease, remains as relevant today as it did 170 years ago

The NHS has been celebrating its 70th birthday, but the anniversary of an equally important event is not being marked in quite the same way. The Public Health Act 1848 is now 170 years old but, unlike the NHS, its anniversary has passed largely unnoticed.

The Act was a key piece of legislation that saw improvements in sanitation, housing and water quality to help tackle the causes of multiple infectious diseases. It resulted in significant improvements to people's health.

Its purpose was to promote the public's health and to ensure "more effective provision... for improving sanitary conditions of towns and populous places in England and Wales". Such clarity of purpose is impressive.

The catalyst for reform was the anxiety caused by a new cholera epidemic sweeping Europe. The background to the Act was a remarkable piece of work on mortality and morbidity rates across the country. Its provisions were based on the findings and recommendations of social reformer Edwin Chadwick in his 'Report on the sanitary conditions of the labouring population of Great Britain'.

Chadwick's argument was economic, as he was convinced that if the health of the poor were improved, it would result in fewer people seeking poor relief; much poor relief was given to the families of men who had died from infectious diseases. Money spent on improving public health was therefore



Councillor Ian Hudspeth
is Chairman of the LGA's
Community Wellbeing Board

cost-effective, as it would save money in the long term.

Local boards of health became responsible for removing 'nuisances', such as refuse or bad paving, from the streets, and for drainage and water supply, as well as other sanitary actions. They were also empowered to appoint officers of health and inspectors of nuisances – forerunners to modern-day environmental health officers.

The legacy of the 1848 Act was one of enabling and encouraging partnership between national and local government in legislating, regulating, and creating the conditions necessary for longer, healthier lives.

The need for partnerships has never been greater – between communities, individuals, businesses and public agencies. These partnerships will flourish only with ongoing investment and through a commitment at all levels to developing a 'health in all policies' approach to policy making.

Both the Prime Minister and Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock have publicly prioritised prevention in the NHS Long Term Plan, describing it as "mission critical".

These priorities are very encouraging and will strike a positive chord with members who have long argued that the current social care and health system is unsustainable. They say it will buckle under the weight of demand unless we re-engineer our planning and service provision to promote healthy choices, protect health, prevent sickness and intervene early to minimise the need for costly hospital treatment and social care.

Local government has been unanimous in our support for taking leadership of public health and working with our local partners to achieve shared priorities. We really do think we can make a difference to the lives of our local population by helping them live longer, healthier and more fulfilling lives, but only if we do things differently and are resourced appropriately.

Although our health has improved immeasurably since 1848, some problems remain, such as poor air quality, inadequate housing, bad diet, and substance misuse; the Act's approach remains just as relevant today.

"The argument was economic... if the health of the poor were improved, it would result in fewer people seeking poor relief"



For LGA information and resources on public health, please visit www.local.gov.uk/topics/social-care-health-and-integration/public-health

Time to get the flu jab

A century on from the Spanish flu, local authorities remain key to mitigating the effect of modern pandemics

This is the centenary year of the Spanish flu outbreak, when the world experienced the greatest epidemic since the Black Death and possibly in the whole of human history.

Up to 500 million people – about one-third of the world's population – became infected with the influenza virus. As many as 50 million died, or one out of every 30 human beings on the planet. The outbreak claimed the lives of nearly 250,000 Britons.

The first wave of the Spanish flu struck in the spring of 1918. The majority of victims were adults aged 20 to 40 – the inverse of most flu seasons, when deaths fall most heavily on the elderly and the under-fives.

In many countries schools were closed, public gatherings banned and people encouraged to wear face masks. Health services were overwhelmed.

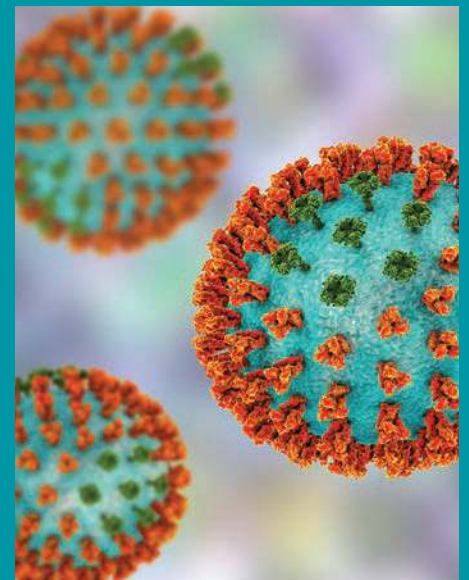
What is often missed, though, is the important role of local authorities. In some areas, they ran and owned the hospitals,

as well as keeping other essential services running – such as mortuaries, burials, shelters, food and water distribution, care for people left without carers or children without parents.

Although the world has changed beyond recognition in 100 years, and people are stronger, better nourished and better housed, with better-equipped hospitals and drugs to fight infection, we still rely heavily on many of the measures used in 1918 for our survival.

Now, central and local government and the NHS have a comprehensive pandemic flu plan setting out what should happen in terms of a national response for every stage of an outbreak.

The plan aims to ensure minimal disruption to daily society while we protect the health of the nation. The flu vaccine programme aims to reduce the impact of the disease, and is recommended for individuals at risk of severe consequences



from infection and for health workers.

Spanish flu was not the first pandemic and will not be the last. It is impossible to predict when the next one will hit; in the last 200 years, there have been an average of three every century. One thing is certain, the role of local authorities will be crucial in planning for it.



Conferences

Pathological Demand Avoidance 20 November, Manchester

Learn about strategies for education, management, communication and approaches to support children in the classroom.

10th Anniversary Autism Professionals Conference 7-8 March, Birmingham

Improving practice, improving every life

Join us to celebrate the 10th anniversary conference and learn from world-renowned specialists.

Find out more:

 www.autism.org.uk/professionals

The National Autistic Society is a charity registered in England and Wales (269425) and in Scotland (SC039427)



Annual Local Government Finance Conference 2019

Moving the conversation on

8 January 2019, London

As we approach the 2019 Spending Review, the implementation of greater Business Rates Retention and the Fair Funding Review in 2020, the challenges for local government finance are greater than ever. Our conference will address all these hot topics, as well as other issues that shape the broader local government finance agenda.



To find out more and to book a place please go to
www.local.gov.uk/events

Independent Group Annual Conference 2018

Members of the Local Government Association (LGA) Independent Group are invited to our annual conference to debate the big issues affecting local government.

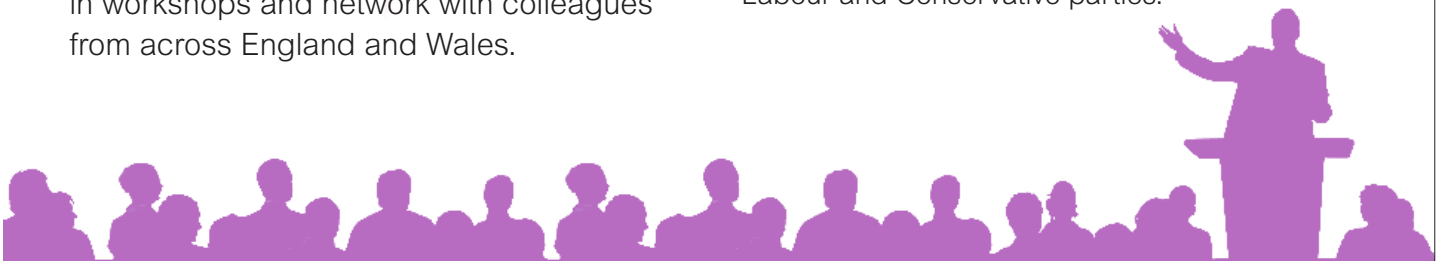
Hear from parliamentarians, policy experts and practitioners; take part in workshops and network with colleagues from across England and Wales.

Where: 18 Smith Square, London SW1P 3HZ

When: 23 November 2018

Time: 10.30am–5.00pm for the main conference, followed by a drinks reception

Who: Independent councillors and those outside the political affiliation of the Liberal Democrats, Labour and Conservative parties.



Find out more www.local.gov.uk/lga-independent/events or contact Sarah Woodhouse on sarah.woodhouse@local.gov.uk telephone 020 7664 3206

comment

How Remembrance can bring communities together



Steve Ballinger is Director of Communications for the think tank British Future

November 2018 marks not only Britain's annual Remembrance Sunday, but also 100 years since the end of World War One, the culmination of four years of centenary commemorations.

It comes at a time when our society feels more fragmented and anxious than any of us would want. Societal divisions revealed by the EU referendum campaign have yet to heal, and reported xenophobic and faith-based prejudice has increased.

British Future's discussions with people across the UK for the National Conversation on Immigration, the biggest ever public consultation on immigration, underlined the importance of getting integration right.

Those conversations, in 60 towns and cities covering every nation and region, found a worrying prevalence of anti-Muslim prejudice that needs to be countered. They also showed the importance of social contact: harmful stereotyping was much less prevalent in places where people from different backgrounds get to meet and know each other.

Finding shared moments and spaces that can bring people together across social and political, ethnic and faith divides, is more important than ever if we are to make integration work. November offers an opportunity to do just that.

There is increasing awareness that Remembrance could, should and does belong to all of us. The armies of 1914-18 looked more

like the Britain of 2018 than the Britain of their day.

British troops fought alongside soldiers from across the Commonwealth, including 1.5 million Indian soldiers, 400,000 of them Muslims from present-day Pakistan. This shared history of service and contribution is something we can all remember together in Britain today.

YouGov polling for British Future found that 80 per cent of the public feels telling this story would be good for integration. And while our World War One tracker survey shows an upsurge in awareness of the contribution of Indian soldiers, most people are still unaware that Muslims fought for Britain in 1914-18.

We can do much more to engage with this shared history and the role it can play in integration. The Remember Together initiative,

launched in October, brings people together to learn about the multi-ethnic, multi-faith armies of 1914-18, and to understand what remembering our history can mean for identity and belonging in our shared society today.

Backed by the Royal British Legion and by a range of civic and faith voices, it connects people from communities with little contact, to meet, learn and uncover what they have in common. Local events in Bradford, Derby, Waltham Forest and Birmingham will spark new contact and joint engagement in Remembrance. We hope to expand the project in local authorities across the UK in 2019.

For an issue of such salience, it is remarkable that there has been so little strategic leadership on integration at national level. The new Integrated Communities Green Paper is a welcome first step. Crucial to its success will be finding ways to put theory into practice – in the five pilot areas of Walsall, Peterborough, Bradford, Waltham Forest and Blackburn, and more widely across England.

For that to succeed, integration must be an 'all of us' issue that is meaningful to people from every background and community. Coming together to remember shared history could be one way to help make integration matter for everyone in Britain today.



“Remembrance could, should and does belong to all of us. The armies of 1914-18 looked more like the Britain of 2018 than the Britain of their day”



British Future is an independent, non-partisan think tank seeking to involve people in an open conversation about identity and integration, migration and opportunity. See www.britishfuture.org

Scrapping the cap

“The housing borrowing cap has hampered councils’ ability to play a leading role in tackling the housing shortage”

It was good to meet many colleagues at the Conservative Party Conference in October.

The Prime Minister closed the conference with a well-received speech that contained an unexpected, but very welcome, announcement – the scrapping of the cap on the amount councils can borrow against their housing revenue account assets.

It is hard to overestimate the significance of this announcement, which is something that the LGA – and, in particular our Chairman, Lord Porter – have long lobbied for on the basis that it has hampered councils’ ability to play a leading role in tackling the housing shortage.

There was also recognition of the pressures on social care with the announcement, by

Health Secretary Matt Hancock, of an extra £240 million to reduce delayed discharges.

This is a good first step – something I will be urging the Government to build on. I was also pleased to hear clear recognition from ministers of the need to focus on prevention.

Other key announcements were the creation of a £200 million fund to divert young people from crime and, noteworthy in the context of the LGA’s broadband campaign, the guarantee that, by 2020, everyone will have the right to minimum speeds of 10 megabits per second.

I was delighted to be in the auditorium to hear our Secretary of State, James Brokenshire, deliver his speech, which included important



Councillor James Jamieson
is Leader of the LGA’s
Conservative Group

announcements on the banning of the use of combustible materials on a variety of buildings and the creation of a New Homes Ombudsman, to champion homebuyers and hold developers to account.

It was also encouraging to hear James emphasise how closely he is working with Matt Hancock on the Social Care Green Paper, to put the system on a sustainable long-term footing and facilitate the better integration of services.

Despite these positive announcements, significant challenges remain. Ahead of the Budget, my colleagues and I are highlighting these issues, and continuing to argue for local government finance as a whole to be put on a sustainable long-term footing.

chairman’s comment

Borrowing to build



Lord Porter
is Chairman of the LGA

I have spent most of my time in local government, and in my 15 years in various roles at the LGA, campaigning for the housing borrowing cap to be scrapped. So to be in the hall at the Conservative Party Conference to hear that this is finally happening was fantastic.

We now need to get on with building those good-quality, affordable new homes and infrastructure that everyone in our communities needs, and are looking forward to working with you and the Government to deliver them.

But scrapping the cap was not the only win we secured for the sector over the party conference season.

The Government also announced £240 million in additional investment for adult social care, a long-awaited ban on combustible cladding and insulation systems, new funding to tackle serious violence, and reforms to the apprenticeship levy.

At the Liberal Democrat Conference in Brighton, Sir Vince Cable and his team focused on the need to address the funding and demand-led pressures facing councils. At Labour’s Conference in Brighton, Labour’s frontbench pledged new powers to councils, including over school admissions and the building of new schools. Our councillors also worked to ensure our voices were heard at the UKIP, Green Party and Plaid Cymru conferences.

Across all the conferences, our

politicians worked hard to raise the voice of local government in high-profile debates, discussions and meetings. There has been widespread praise from all the parties for the dedication of councillors, and support for councils having the powers to deliver for our communities.

Of course, none of this would have been possible without the work of our LGA member councils and the LGA staff who supported our councillors at the conferences, and I want to thank you all.

As the national voice of local government, we will continue to shout loud and clear about councils’ priorities on behalf of residents, in the run-up to this month’s Budget and beyond.

● See p29

“Across all the conferences, our politicians worked hard to raise the voice of local government in high-profile debates, discussions and meetings”

group leaders' comments



Councillor Nick Forbes
is Leader of the LGA's
Labour Group

More cuts means austerity isn't over

“Councils have lost 60p out of every £1 since 2010”

I don't think I was alone in being somewhat confused to hear the Prime Minister declare that 'austerity is over', given that the Government is still planning a further £1.3 billion cut to council budgets next year. Tory Treasury Minister Liz Truss must have been similarly befuddled, as she also declared that the Government is 'not making cuts to local authorities' – an early contender for 'Barefaced Lie of the Year 2018'.

Austerity has caused huge damage to communities across the UK, and now many council budgets are in crisis. The Tory government is entirely to blame; overall, councils have lost 60p out of every £1 since 2010. Now, Labour councillors are saying that enough is enough, and have launched the #BreakingPoint campaign.

More than 5,000 Labour councillors have already supported the Breaking Point petition. We are calling on the Prime Minister and the Chancellor to use the Budget to reverse next year's planned £1.3 billion cut to council budgets, immediately invest £2 billion in children's services and a further £2 billion in adult social care to stop these vital emergency services from collapsing, and pledge to use the Spending Review to restore council funding to 2010 levels over the next four years.

Labour in local government is speaking with one voice – now it is up to the Government to listen and to act, before it's too late.



Councillor Howard Sykes MBE
is Leader of the LGA's
Liberal Democrat Group

More homes for residents

“I hope council leaders across the country are rolling up their sleeves and taking a fresh look at building programmes”

We've had the speech from the Prime Minister – now let's see the borrowing cap gone for good.

It's the culmination of more than a decade's work by the LGA, campaigning for councils to be able to borrow in order to build more homes for their residents, uniting us across party lines. It was about time, and very welcome.

I now hope council leaders across the country are rolling up their sleeves and taking a fresh look at building programmes and how they take this opportunity. The Treasury needs to fulfil the Government's promise as soon as possible ahead of the Budget – there can be no backtracking, and no 'giving with one hand and taking away with the other' attitude.

In celebrating this, we should not overlook the many district councils with extensive housing potential, often with suburbs surrounding the largest cities, which have transferred their own stock to registered social landlords. They don't have housing revenue accounts against which to borrow.

But the battle is not over. The Government must also allow us to keep 100 per cent of Right to Buy receipts, and have control over what, if any, level of discount there should be. We are elected by residents, and are accountable to them – unlike HM Treasury.



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

Inspiring speeches at conference

“People want the best possible council performance for their residents”

The exciting buzz of conference season is upon us again. UKIP, Plaid Cymru and the Green Party all saw an increase in members attending and we are optimistic for the Independent Network on 10 November and our Independent Group conference on 23 November at the LGA.

Our briefing on the work of the LGA and the Independent Group, and our 'Be a Councillor' events were popular and well received by keen and effective people, wanting the best possible council performance for their residents. I was made very welcome everywhere and was pleased to listen and to support our members.

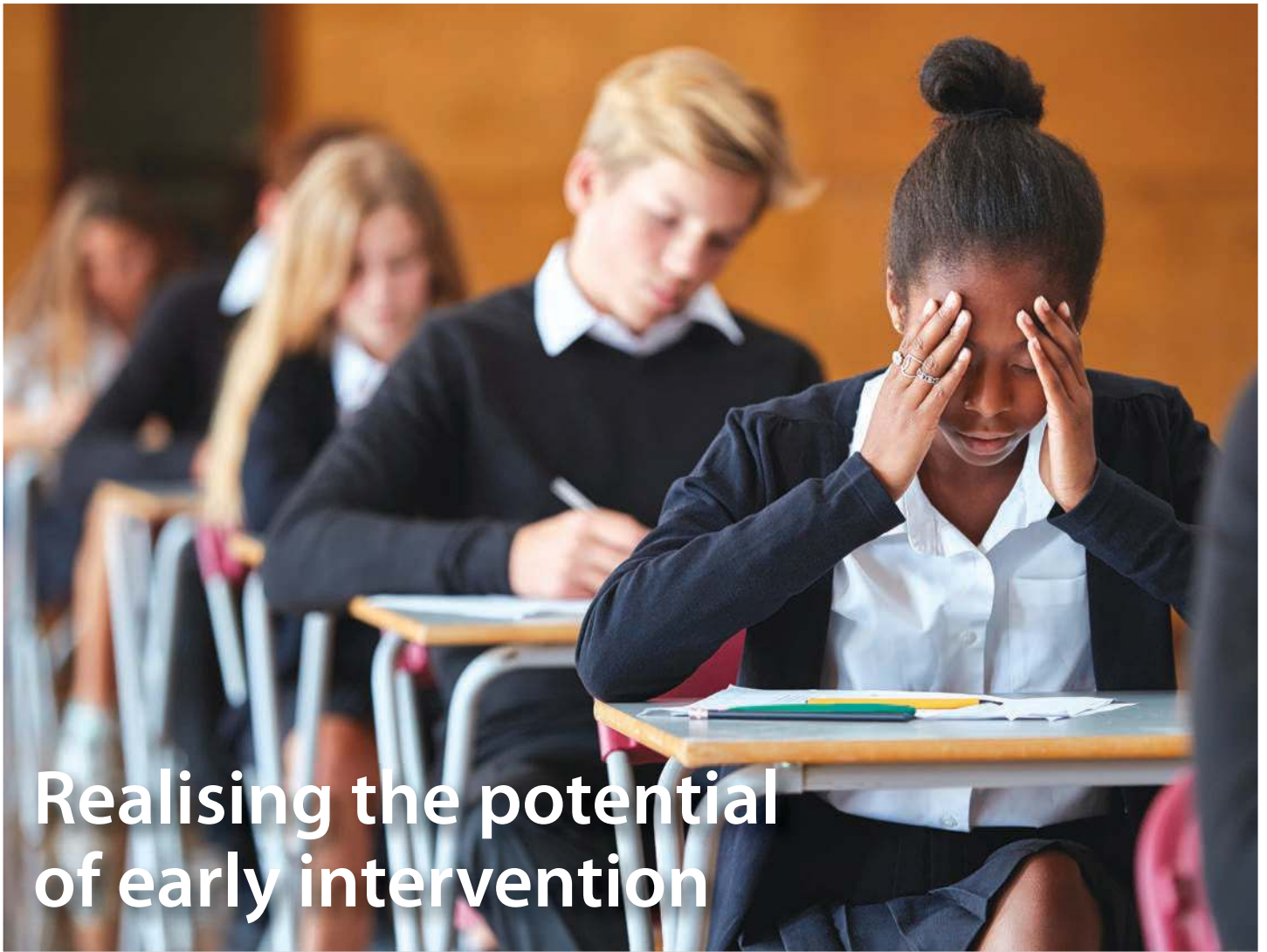
They contributed well at all the conferences, with inspiring speeches that were visionary, impassioned, thoughtful and backed by a substantial weight of data.

The Green Party and Plaid Cymru, both "remainers", are calling for a "People's Vote" on whatever Brexit deal is produced, and UKIP is offering an exit plan. Agricultural policy and the environment were hot on the agenda for all three parties and important for local councils, impacting our local economies and environment as well as the planet as a whole.

Plaid Cymru and the Green Party raised serious concerns about fracking, with calls to divest in fossil fuels, also raised by Independent members at our York regional conference this month. There were powerful calls to fund adult and children's social care properly, mental health, schools and policing. There was also a clarion call for better local control of planning, where housing is for genuine local need, with services and facilities to match.



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



Realising the potential of early intervention



Dr Jo Casebourne is Chief Executive of the Early Intervention Foundation

Maintaining a focus on providing early intervention or early help services can feel impossible to many councils right now. The context for this has changed immeasurably in recent years. Funding pressures mean councils are inevitably prioritising immediate needs and statutory duties over discretionary services with longer-term benefits.

Yet the need for the early intervention agenda is stronger than ever. We see daily reminders of this in newspaper headlines about rising levels of poor mental health among children and young people, school exclusions, youth violence and child poverty. The inescapable fact is that too many children in England face problems or disadvantages that affect their development and threaten their future health and happiness. Early intervention can offer these children and their

families the support they need to reach their full potential and, in so doing, generate wide-ranging benefits to society.

Next week, the Early Intervention Foundation will publish a major new report, updating the case for this kind of service in the current climate. Many local authorities and their partners have been trying to prioritise early intervention for some years now. There have been some successes, but many challenges too. Our new report sets out some of the latest evidence on what works, for whom and when, and suggests what needs to happen both locally and nationally to move this agenda forward.

We are hoping this will stimulate some debate among councils. Early intervention matters for local government. While it cannot solve all problems, it can substantially improve children's lives if it is based on good evidence, delivered to a high standard and directed to the children or families who need it the most. Approaches such as home visiting to support parents, school-based programmes to improve children's social and emotional skills, or family therapy for some of the most vulnerable children and their families, have all been shown to deliver wide-ranging improvements.

“Early intervention has to be looked at as an essential investment”

Benefits include improvements in children's mental wellbeing, school achievement, physical health and reductions in youth crime and antisocial behaviour, to name just a few.

We know that leaving issues in childhood unresolved has pervasive negative consequences for children's outcomes later in life, which all lead to extra costs to the public sector. While we need to be realistic about the likelihood of early intervention delivering short-term savings or immediate reductions in pressures on children's social care, it can have significant long-term benefits for individual children and their families, the wider economy and society. Early intervention has to be looked on as an essential investment, rather than any kind of short-term financial coping strategy.

While it may be difficult to estimate the scale of these benefits with accuracy, there

is a wide body of literature that plausibly shows that the pay-offs can be significant. It is clear that the value of these benefits to local communities, public services and our wider society and economy is likely to be considerably higher than the cost of intervening in the first place.

The way ahead is not yet secure or well mapped out. If early intervention is going to achieve its potential, we need a concerted effort and clear leadership at both national and local level. Nationally, politicians and policy-makers must commit to accelerating use of the evidence about effective early intervention and long-term testing of its impact. This requires political leadership, national infrastructure, new investment, and long-term planning beyond traditional parliamentary cycles.

There is a vital role for local government leaders here. The viability of early intervention rests, in part, on the need for local leaders to articulate a clear, long-term vision and strategy that is achievable and which mobilises partnerships. This should be realistic and not be founded on the promise of short-term savings or an immediate reduction in pressure on children's social care.

Local leaders also need to ensure that



The viability of early intervention rests, in part, on the need for local leaders to articulate a clear vision

evidence-based decision-making is an integral part of the vision and culture they create in their area and at the forefront of any review of non-statutory spending.

The improvements in children's lives that effective early help can deliver are all crucial to local government's interest in supporting

thriving local communities. This is an issue behind which we can unite across current political divides.

The case is clear: the long-term success of the country depends on us helping children reaching their full potential. If anything is worthy of long-term planning, this is.

i For more information about the Early Intervention Foundation please visit www.eif.org.uk



LGA Annual Fire Conference and Exhibition

12-13 March 2019, Hilton Brighton Metropole Hotel

The Local Government Association Annual Fire Conference and Exhibition is a key event in the conference calendar for senior fire officers and members of fire and rescue authorities.

The last year has seen widespread change in the sector. There is a new inspection regime in place, a new standards approach has been announced and there have been a number of changes in governance. There have been strides to improve the diversity of the service as well as issues around finance and funding. The sector's work on fire safety, inspection and enforcement as a result of the terrible fire at Grenfell is still evolving.

This event provides an opportunity to examine these changes, consider notable practice and examine how to develop this activity further.

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



Respect, responsibility and rights

Sandhurst is well known across the world for its military academy. Less well known is the town's thriving community, which continues to grow in size and diversity.

We work on many local issues, one being our 3Rs campaign – Respect, Responsibility, Rights – which started with children and young people, but has expanded into a community-wide programme.

Schools work hard to create a safe and inspiring place for children and young people to learn and develop their talents. But taking responsibility for their actions should not stop when they leave the school gate. If they are really to flourish, they need to apply these skills to their everyday lives, too.

We wanted to apply the same disciplines to our wider community as in our local schools. We engaged with more than 20 community groups, including the boys' and girls' football clubs, with many willing to get more involved to help our younger population. A working group was set up, and we invited local schools to design a campaign logo.



Councillor Jean Bettison is Vice-Chairman of Sandhurst Town Council's Leisure Committee and Strategy and Policy Committee

With the help of the Improvement and Efficiency Social Enterprise (IESE), a public sector-owned transformation organisation, we won a grant of £25,000 after showcasing the difference we could make.

A year later, resident satisfaction had increased and, from an already high base, we

saw local people treating each other with more respect, a drop in crime and anti-social behaviour, and a surge in the number of people wanting to volunteer.

The campaign continues to go from strength to strength. We have litter picks twice a year, which are well attended by the local Nepali community, showing community cohesion and displaying residents' pride in the environment.

The town council has also helped employ a youth worker to engage and support the young people of Sandhurst, and to encourage them to have a dream as they grow up.

People can't expect to have rights without earning the respect and responsibility that go with it. If our 3Rs campaign is working for us, then it can work for others.

Sharing home improvement services



Paul Smith is Director of Foundations, the national body for home improvement agencies

With local authorities across the country facing tough decisions to balance their budgets, shared services have been growing in popularity.

The 2018 LGA shared services map (see www.local.gov.uk/shared-services-map) lists 559 such arrangements that have delivered close to £1 billion of cumulative efficiency savings.

Last year, the Commons' Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee's inquiry into adult social care considered the delivery of disabled facilities grants. The select committee's MPs found it to be slow and cumbersome, hampered by the split in responsibility between district and county councils. Yet very few areas have taken the opportunity to remove this split by sharing these services.

One notable exception is the Home Environment Assessment and Response Team (HEART) in Warwickshire, a partnership between the county and district councils delivering an in-house home improvement agency (HIA) service.

Occupational therapists from the county are seconded to work alongside housing staff in the districts, delivering disabled facilities grants and other adaptations, equipment and repairs. It all keeps more people living safe, secure and warm in their own homes.

A similar HIA is operating across much of Hertfordshire, this time based in the county council. Again, this joined-up approach is speeding up the home-adaptation process, reducing the risk of falls and injury that come with living in an unsuitable home.

But it's not just about adaptations. With up to 80 per cent of older people still owning their home in some areas, HIAs can help with cold homes, gas safety, trip hazards, electrical faults and small repairs.

Many also help with making homes safe and suitable for people to return to after a stay in hospital, so it's not surprising that the select committee recommends every area should have its own HIA.



“Occupational therapists from the county are seconded to work alongside housing staff in the districts”



Foundations is funded by the Government to help local authorities consider the options and to provide support for the commissioning or reconfiguration of HIA services. Find out more at www.foundations.uk.com

parliament

Key wins at party conferences

The Prime Minister's announcement that the Government will scrap the cap on how much councils can borrow to build new homes was the culmination of a successful 2018 conference season for the LGA and local government.

Across the conferences, we helped deliver a range of events, including debates, roundtables and receptions. Our councillors debated topics such as economic growth, children's services, housing and adult social care, ensuring councils have a strong voice in policy discussions.

We hosted debates on the 2019 Spending Review at all three main party events, and our local government evening receptions were attended by Liberal Democrat Leader Sir Vince Cable MP, Labour Leader Jeremy Corbyn MP, and Housing, Communities and Local Government Secretary James Brokenshire MP.

Councillors from the LGA's Independent Group have also been speaking up for local government at the UKIP, Green and Plaid Cymru conferences, and the group holds its annual conference on 23 November, in London.

There has been widespread praise from all the parties for the dedication of councillors, and support for councils having the powers to deliver for our communities. This was demonstrated by the Government responding to the campaigning of councils and the LGA with a series of positive announcements – not least, on the housing borrowing cap.

LGA Chairman Lord Porter praised the Government for ensuring councils can be part of the solution to tackling our chronic housing shortage. Given that this has been a long-standing ask of councils, we know there will be a huge appetite for using these new borrowing powers to deliver the homes our communities need.

“There has been widespread praise from all the parties for the dedication of councillors”

We are encouraging the Treasury to move quickly to ensure current borrowing caps are removed and to confirm that councils will be able to borrow at prudential levels. Further details will be confirmed in the Budget, and we continue our work in the background to ensure there are no strings attached.

Other wins included an additional £240 million for adult social care this winter, announced by Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock. This will be allocated to councils based on the adult social care relative needs formula, and is aimed at reducing delayed transfers of care.

This injection of desperately needed funding recognises the role of councils in achieving a sustainable health and care system. However, the pressures facing social care are year round and continued short-term bailouts are not the answer. We continue to push for both sustainable funding for the short term and a long-term solution through our own social care green paper (see www.futureofadultsocialcare.co.uk).

Mr Brokenshire announced plans to ban the use of combustible materials for all new high-rise residential buildings, hospitals, registered care homes and student accommodation, and pledged to “bring about a change in culture on building safety”.

Home Secretary Sajid Javid, meanwhile, announced a new £200 million youth-endowment fund, focused on steering 10- to 14-year-olds at most risk of youth violence away from being serious offenders. There will also be a consultation on a new legal duty on councils and public sector partners to take action to prevent violent crime, and an independent review of drug misuse.

While this new funding and approach is positive, we continue to push the need to address the underfunding of children's services, for cuts to councils' public health budgets to be reversed, and for any new statutory duties to be fully funded.



i For more information about the LGA's public affairs work, please visit www.local.gov.uk/parliament
● See also p24

councillor

Scrutinising your budget

Opposition parties have a key role to play in scrutinising councils' budgets



Councillor Clarence Barrett is Group Leader of the Residents' Association on the London Borough of Havering

The most challenging time for any council is setting a balanced budget against the twin pressures of reduced funding and increased demand.

From an opposition perspective, your role in the budget-setting process is crucial. As important as setting a budget is the need to ensure that it stands up to scrutiny, is transparent, and is seen to be accountable. In addition, it is the role of any opposition to, where possible, provide an alternative.

Given the room for manoeuvre, the scope for change can be limited. But limitation can spark innovative thinking and offer an opportunity to challenge the more traditional approach to budget setting, often defined by 'salami slicing'

Of course, effective scrutiny of any proposed budget is about delving into the detail of the options, and assessing risk, deliverability and impact on service delivery. Too often, savings options are agreed only to be unachievable and to end up as an additional pressure in the next budget-setting round. This can often be the case where vague savings are agreed for future years, only to be totally undeliverable when the time comes.

Effective and constructive challenge can be usefully conducted by focusing on a set of initial questions. Do all the figures stack up? Does the budget reflect the priorities of the residents? How robust was the consultation process, or was it just a tick-box exercise? What and where are the unintended consequences? Is there scope to bring savings forward? Is there a clear business case for additional funding items?

For opposition groups, the budget-setting process also provides an opportunity to showcase priorities and objectives that are not necessarily shared

by the administration. This may mean removing a saving proposal (for example, turning off street lighting) and replacing it with an alternative saving option – or proposing additional resources for, say, street sweeping, again offset by comparable savings.

There may also be scope to review the composition of the capital programme to invest in schemes that may produce a revenue stream further down the line, but don't overlook the cost of capital financing.

However, a fundamental outcome for any alternative budget is that it needs to balance and stand up to its own scrutiny.

So here are some top tips for challenging your council's budget:

- You don't have to have a full recast of the budget – an alternative can be one amendment or 100 (sometimes less is more!).
- Make full use of the resources available and work closely with the S151 officer, who will have to apply a robustness test to any alternatives – make it balance!
- Communicate your strategy to residents; use the local media and involve community groups in the budget-setting process.
- Where there is more than one opposition group, work together to find common ground in developing an alternative budget strategy, so any amendments don't end up being split at the council's budget meeting.

Finally, be prepared! As Benjamin Franklin said: "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail." In particular, this applies to the budget-setting council meeting, where robust, constructive and informed presentation and debate will give credibility and integrity to any alternative budget strategy.

Local by-elections

Pembrokeshire, Pembroke St Mary North

IND GAIN FROM CON
18.8% over Ind Turnout 36.6%

East Devon, Ottery St Mary Rural

IND HELD
26.3% over Con Turnout 34.7%

Luton, Limbury

LAB HELD
20.7% over Con Turnout 24.6%

Suffolk Coastal, Wenhaston & Westleton

CON HELD
10.7% over Lib Dem Turnout 35.9%

Winchester, Upper Meon Valley

CON HELD
6.7% over Lib Dem Turnout 46.2%

Wyre Forest, Bewdley & Rock

CON HELD
17.3% over Lab Turnout 20.7%

Lichfield, Stowe

CON HELD
5.2% over Lab Turnout 23.4%

Nottingham, Clifton North

CON GAIN FROM LAB
13.9% over Lab Turnout 27%

Salford, Eccles

LAB HELD
30.4% over Con Turnout 20.9%

Chesterfield, Moor

LIB DEM GAIN FROM LAB
7.7% over Lab Turnout 34.4%

Cambridgeshire, Soham North & Isleham

CON HELD
18.8% over Lib Dem Turnout 21.2%

Hambleton, Thirsk

CON HELD
41.2% over Lab Turnout 20%

Adur, Southlands

LAB GAIN FROM UKIP
5.4% over Con Turnout 31%

Halton, Ditton

LAB HELD
58.1% over Con Turnout 15.7%

elections

Independents' Day

Independents took the honours during this year's party conference season.

A further three gains go into the wins column, which now stands at 18 set against nine losses since the last General Election.



Professors **Colin Rallings** (right) and **Michael Thrasher** are Directors of Plymouth University's Elections Centre



Each gain has a story to tell, beginning with Pembroke St Mary North ward. Conservative David Boswell was elected to the council by a margin of just six votes in May 2017. Months later, he was charged with child sex offences and suspended by his party. This June, he was found guilty and sentenced to 18 years in prison. It was against this backdrop that eight candidates contested the by-election, including six Independents. It was perhaps fitting that the winner, Jon Harvey, who lost so narrowly to Boswell, should triumph this time. The Conservative candidate finished sixth.

In Hartlepool's Hart ward, it was a case of battle recommencing. In 2018, one of the ward's two seats was won by Independent Thomas Cassidy, who defeated Labour's Aileen Kendon. Her colleague Paul Beck then resigned his seat, leaving the way clear for Kendon to have another go. Step forward Independent James Brewer, who contested the adjoining Rural West ward last time. Taking notes from Cassidy's victory, Brewer defeated Kendon by 55 votes.

When Kenny Watson, Chairman of Warrington Momentum, was selected as the Labour party candidate for Penketh and

Cuerdley ward, few expected that Independent Geoffrey Fellows, a local parish councillor, would snatch victory just weeks later. Watson even received endorsement from Warrington South MP Faisal Rashid. Labour won all three seats in 2016 by a margin of 300 votes, ahead of the Conservatives. The by-election attracted five party candidates, but none could thwart the Independent.

Labour suffered two further setbacks in the East Midlands. Defeat by the Conservatives in Nottingham's Clifton North ward was followed a week later by a loss to the Liberal Democrats in Chesterfield's Moor ward. For Roger Steel, the by-election win in Clifton North marks a return to representing the area after his own defeat in 2011. In Moor ward, the Liberal Democrat victory follows on from one in Holmbrook ward last year and suggests the party could stage a comeback.

Four defeats for Labour does not indicate a party preparing for government. But further south, there was a gain in Adur's Southlands ward. The vacancy arose after the resignation of UKIP group leader Paul Graysmark. The ward is a microcosm of UKIP's rapid rise and swift decline in local government. Graysmark was originally elected for the Conservatives, switched to UKIP and then called and won a by-election in May 2013. The party subsequently retained the seat but, in 2018, its vote declined, and it did not contest this vacancy. Labour's win is its first in the ward since 2004.

Hartlepool, Hart

IND GAIN FROM LAB
3.8% over Lab Turnout 21.2%

Warrington, Penketh & Cuerdley

IND GAIN FROM LAB
4.3% over Lab Turnout 25.9%

West Lancashire, Tanhouse

LAB HELD
52.2% over Ind Turnout 18.9%



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