

No.632 February 2019

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# first

the magazine for local government

## Children's care cash crisis

"Nine in 10 councils are being forced **to spend more than they had planned to on children's social care**"

Cllr Anntoinette Bramble,  
Chair of the LGA's Children and  
Young People Board

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## Finance reform



The Government is consulting on important proposals for reforming local government finance, which will affect where our funding comes from and how it is distributed between our councils.

You can find out more about the reviews of 75 per cent retention of business rates and relative needs and resources in this edition of **first** (see p10-11).

Elsewhere in the magazine, we take a look at developments around children's mental health, including pledges on increased funding and improved crisis care set out in the recently published NHS Long Term Plan (p14-15).

Our annual culture and tourism conference takes place in March, and we have a sneak preview of our new research on culture-led regeneration, which will feature at the event (see p16-17).

We hear from West Sussex on its solar energy projects (p19); Hackney on contextual safeguarding (p20); and from children in care in Sheffield, who have developed an award-winning board game and training package that helps social workers and carers think about what makes a good home for a looked-after child (p21).

All **first's** stories can be found on our revamped website, [www.local.gov.uk/first](http://www.local.gov.uk/first), where you can also sign up for the new **first** e-bulletin, if you are not already receiving it. **Lord Porter** is Chairman of the LGA

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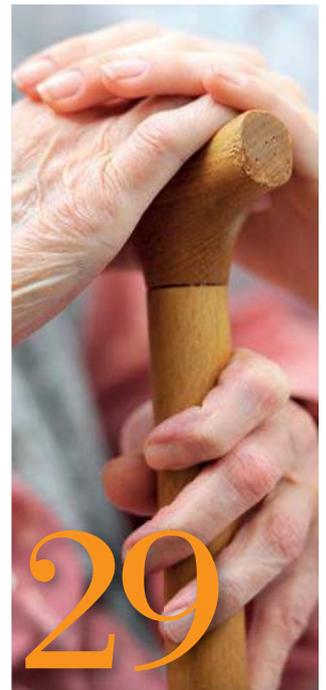
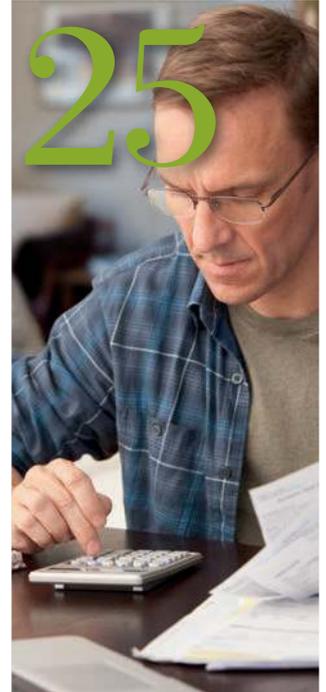
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# news

## Children's social care services 'over-spent'

**New analysis by the LGA has revealed that nearly nine in 10 councils spent more than they had planned to on children's social care in the last year.**

The LGA says the number of councils spending more than they budgeted for – 133 out of 152 (88 per cent) – indicates the severe pressure they are under to support vulnerable children and young people, and emphasises that this is now an issue affecting all areas of the country.

It estimates that children's services already face a £3.1 billion funding gap by 2025 just to maintain the current levels of service, and is calling on the Government to provide desperately needed new money into the system.

Cllr Anntoinette Bramble, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "This should be a wake-up call to the crisis we are facing in funding services to protect vulnerable children and young people, which, as these figures show, is now being felt in all towns and cities across the country.

"The fact that the overwhelming majority of councils are now being forced to spend more than they had planned to on children's social care highlights the urgent need for the Government to provide new and long-term

significant funding for children's services."

Separately, the National Audit Office has published a report on the pressures on children's social care.

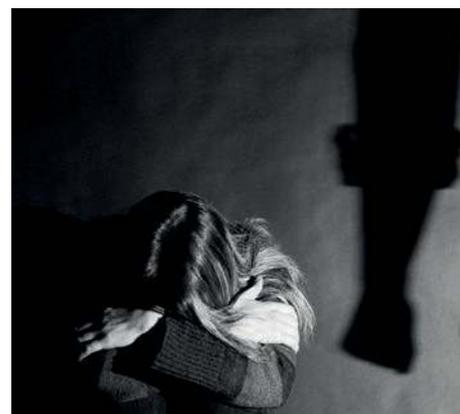
It concluded that the Department for Education does not fully understand what is driving demand for children's social care, nor why there is such wide variation between councils in their children's social care activity and costs, as it has not yet done the work to tie together available sources of information.

The NAO added that until recently, the Department did not consider this a fundamental part of its responsibilities.

Responding to the NAO report, Cllr Bramble said: "There is no right amount for councils to spend on children's services and, as our own research has found, the majority of spend variation is as a result of wider economic or geographic circumstances largely outside their control.

"It is clear that the most urgent and pressing issue is not variability but the very real funding crisis facing vital children's services across the country. It is vital that the Government uses the upcoming Spending Review to deliver a long-term strategy that enables councils to meet the growing need for support from some of the most vulnerable children in society."

## New measures to support domestic abuse victims



Economic abuse will form part of a new legal definition of domestic abuse, as set out in a draft Government bill published in January.

The draft Domestic Abuse Bill also proposes a new office of Domestic Abuse Commissioner, and a duty on local authorities to cooperate with the commissioner.

Other clauses seek to ensure that, where a local authority, for reasons connected with domestic abuse, grants a new secure tenancy to a social tenant, this must be a secure lifetime tenancy.

The LGA supports measures to help victims of domestic abuse but has warned that legislative changes must be properly funded.

Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: "Tackling domestic abuse is an issue that councils take very seriously which is why we support further measures to improve work with local partners to help support more victims and stop this horrendous crime.

"However, the ability of councils to fund services for victims is constrained by pressures on their budgets, with local authorities increasingly being forced to prioritise spending for those at immediate risk of harm, rather than on vital earlier support services and prevention schemes that help stop domestic abuse occurring in the first place.

"With local government facing a £3.1 billion funding gap in 2019/20, any legislative changes in this bill must be matched with adequate resources and funding."

Other measures in the bill would stop abusers cross-examining their victims in person in the family courts (and prevent victims having to cross-examine their abusers), and force perpetrators into behaviour-changing rehabilitation programmes.



See **p25** for more on economic abuse

# 'Failures of governance' at academies – MPs

**A series of high-profile academy failures has damaged children's education, according to a critical report from MPs.**

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) says it found serious failures of governance and oversight, and that some academy trusts have misused public money through related-party transactions and paying excessive salaries to staff.

The committee has called for stronger governance at academy trusts and for the Department for Education's oversight to be more rigorous.

Cllr Anntoinette Bramble, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "This damning report raises serious questions around academy financial governance and will be hugely concerning to parents and teachers across the country.

"The findings reinforce our call for councils to be allowed to step in and oversee failing

academy finances, as they do with council-maintained schools that face financial challenges.

"It is now clear that the Department for Education does not have effective oversight of spending in more than 7,000 academies.

"Councils, which have vast experience running large budgets, are best placed to do this. Not only would this ensure democratic accountability, it would give parents the certainty and confidence in knowing that their child's school is able to deliver the best possible education and support, without risk of financial failure."

Meg Hillier MP, Chair of the PAC, said: "When things go wrong in schools, pupils can be badly affected. Parents, and the wider community, are entitled to proper access to transparent information about their local academy schools. They must have confidence that when issues arise, robust measures are in place to deal with them."



## £20 million for cultural development

Five locations across England will receive a share of £20 million to invest in local culture, heritage and creative industries to help drive economic growth.

Grimsby, Thames Estuary, Plymouth, Wakefield and Worcester were named by Culture Secretary Jeremy Wright in an announcement on the Government's Culture Development Fund in January. It is expected that the funding will create more than 1,300 new jobs, benefit 2,000 people through skills training, and support more than 700 businesses. Through match-funding, an additional £17.5 million will be invested across the five areas.

The LGA believes the benefits of culture-led regeneration should be felt in every part of the country, but has warned that funding cuts are putting pressure on local cultural services.

Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson, Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, said: "Culture, heritage and arts help to make places where people want to live, work and visit, with councils playing a leading role in supporting this. This new funding will help bring these benefits to more areas and their communities.

"However, the impacts of culture should be felt in every community across the country, whether small or large, urban or rural, economically successful or struggling to attract business.

"Councils face an £8 billion funding gap by 2025, and our core cultural services like libraries and museums will come under increasing financial pressure unless local government finance is put on a sustainable footing."

● See page 16



## Spending Review to look at human capital, Truss tells LGA

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury made the case for devolution, investing in human capital and early intervention in a recent speech at the LGA.

Liz Truss MP was speaking about the Government's 2019 Spending Review at the LGA's annual finance conference in Smith Square. She told delegates the Treasury was doing a zero-base review of capital spending but would also, for the first time, be looking at human capital.

"It's very easy to assess the value of a bridge or a piece of broadband. It's less easy to look at the spending on areas like education and health and say exactly how is that going to help somebody's opportunities.

"I want to get better at measuring that, so that we can make sure every extra pound we're spending is achieving the maximum possible result, because there are parts of this country where, frankly, our aspirations are not what they should be... we're not giving everyone the opportunity they need to have."

Ms Truss was keen to learn from local government's experience of what works, and said that central government has much to learn from councils. She also championed early intervention as a way not only of saving money across public services but "more importantly" getting better outcomes for people.

The Spending Review also has to be about making more decisions locally, she said.

"One of the main reasons that people voted to leave the EU was they were frustrated by decisions being made by bureaucrats in Brussels. We're not going to satisfy the demand for people to have more control over their own lives if those decisions get made by bureaucrats in Whitehall," she told the conference.

Also speaking at the event were James Brokenshire MP, Housing, Communities and Local Government Secretary, who talked about business rates retention and the fair funding review; and Andrew Gwynne MP, Shadow Communities and Local Government Secretary, who talked about Labour's plans for local government finance.

● See page 10

## Call for more social housing

Housing charity Shelter has called for a 20-year programme to build 3.1 million more social homes and a stronger voice for tenants.

The final report of its commission on the future of social housing also proposes a new regulator covering social and private renting, permanent tenancies for private renters, and extending the social housing eligibility criteria.

Cllr Martin Tett, the LGA's Housing Spokesman, said: "There is an acute need to address the escalating housing crisis which would deliver huge benefits for families, communities and the economy. We have estimated investment in a new generation of social housing could return up to £320 billion over 50 years.

"Only by triggering a renaissance in council house-building can we put in place the long-term reforms that will help make homelessness a thing of the past and remove housing insecurities for current and future generations.

"The last time we built enough homes, councils built 40 per cent of them. We need to get back to those levels if we're to tackle our housing crisis, building a new generation of at least 100,000 high-quality social homes a year.

"However, every housing market is different and resolving the challenge must mean allowing every council to ensure that new and existing social housing best meets local need. Critical to this goal will be allowing councils to keep 100 per cent of their Right to Buy receipts and to set discounts locally."

Shelter estimates its 20-year programme will provide a return on investment in 39 years, and cost £10.7 billion a year on average – reduced to £3.8 billion when savings in benefits and increased taxes are considered. Annual spending on housing benefit is currently around £21 billion.

It is also calling for measures to reduce the cost of land for social housing, and steps to ensure new social housing is delivered as part of mixed communities.



## Permitted development rights – review needed



**The LGA and a host of other organisations are calling for an independent review of permitted development rights, which allow offices to be converted to homes without planning permission.**

Shelter, the Chartered Institute of Housing and the National Housing Federation are among the other co-signatories to an open letter to James Brokenshire MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, which raises concerns about the wide-ranging impacts of these permitted developments.

Since 2013, developers have had the right to convert office space into residential homes, and nearly 7 per cent of new homes have been provided in this way in the last three years. These homes are exempt from the full local planning process, and developers do not have to make any contribution towards affordable social housing or vital local infrastructure such as roads, schools, open spaces and community facilities.

Research by the LGA has calculated that more than 10,000 affordable homes have potentially been lost in the last three years because these office conversions did not go through the planning system (see **first** 631).

Cllr Martin Tett, the LGA's Housing Spokesperson, said: "As well as increasing the focus on affordability, new housing development should also provide homes that are high quality, well designed, and served by the necessary community infrastructure.

"These ambitions are currently in jeopardy, because of national policies that enable developers to avoid making such vital contributions. One of the most significant of these is permitted development rights allowing offices to convert to residential homes without the need for planning permission.

"We call on the Government to instead focus on delivering the affordable, high quality homes that people want and need through the local planning process. This would support the Government's own ambitions to improve the quality of homes and places, as outlined in the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission launched in November.

"We also consider that there should be an independent review of the wide-ranging impacts of permitted development rights allowing change of use into residential homes."

## Funding to tackle rogue landlords

More than 50 councils are to benefit from nearly £2.4 million to ramp up action against the minority of irresponsible landlords who make tenants' lives a misery.

The money will be used to boost short-term staffing and create new digital tools to help councils better protect tenants.

Funded projects include the use of drones and thermal mapping to identify problem properties in Walsall and coordinated work to tackle rogue landlords who operate across multiple local authorities in Greater Manchester and London.

The LGA said the announcement was good news, but reiterated its call for councils to have more freedom to set up local licensing schemes.

Cllr Judith Blake, LGA Housing Spokesperson, said: "The vast majority

of landlords are responsible and provide decent housing for their tenants. However the reputations of that majority are being tarnished by the small minority of landlords who exploit loopholes with no regard to their responsibilities.

"Councils want to support a good-quality local private rented offer in their communities, but can be held back by significant funding pressures and uncertainty. It is therefore good that the Government has announced a funding boost for councils to help ensure the small minority of rogue landlords improve standards.

"We ask that the Government now follows this announcement by granting more freedom for councils to establish local licensing schemes."

# Care funding key to success of health plan – LGA



**The NHS's plans for health care over the next 10 years can only be fully realised if councils' adult social care and public health services are properly funded, the LGA has warned.**

The NHS Long Term Plan, published in January, includes a focus on expanding community care, support and prevention to ensure that more people receive timely care, treatment, support and advice as close to their homes as possible.

It recognises that partners – in particular local government – have a leading role to play in promoting health, wellbeing and independence but the measures it outlines focus primarily on the NHS.

The need to fund adult social care adequately is acknowledged, but the plan sees this in terms of reducing pressures on the NHS. Health and care are inextricably linked, but the LGA is clear that social care needs to be seen as a vital service in its own right, helping people live independent and purposeful lives, and not as an adjunct to the NHS.

Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "We are pleased the NHS Long Term Plan sets out an ambition to build a new service model for the 21st century with health bodies working in partnership with local government.

"The plan has a much-needed focus on

prevention, early support and reducing health inequalities, as well as promising investment in primary, community and mental health services. The focus on giving children the best start and on caring for older people in their own homes is right and should complement social care and wider services provided through councils and others.

"However, the ambition set out can only be fully realised if adult social care and public health services in councils are also properly funded."

He added: "We feel this is a missed opportunity for the Government also to launch its long-awaited Adult Social Care Green Paper and proposals for the sustainable funding of these services.

"To help the NHS make its extra funding go further and alleviate the pressures on the health service, it is essential that the Government plugs the £3.6 billion funding gap facing adult social care by 2025 and reverses the £700 million in reductions to councils' public health grants.

"The current system of social care is unsustainable and will buckle under the weight of demand unless the Government urgently invests in these essential services, which protect health, prevent sickness and are the surest way to reduce hospital admissions."

## news in brief

### NAO report on NHS financial stability

The crisis in social care, staff shortages and growing waiting lists risk thwarting the ambitions of the NHS's Long Term Plan, the National Audit Office (NAO) has warned.

The NHS's ability to deliver the priorities of its new plan (see left) will be affected by government decisions on funding for other health and care services, according to the financial watchdog.

In a recent report, the NAO warns that, while the NHS is set to receive an average 3.4 per cent uplift in funding, spending in other key areas – including prevention initiatives run by Public Health England and local authorities – will be decided later this year in the 2019 Spending Review.

"Spending in these areas could affect the NHS's ability to deliver the priorities of the long-term plan, especially if funding for these areas reduces... In addition, without a long-term funding settlement for social care, local NHS bodies are concerned that it will be very difficult to make the NHS sustainable," says the report.

Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "A sustainable NHS is not possible without a sustainable social care sector and public health programme. If the NHS is going to thrive, we need to make sure that public health budget cuts are reversed and that our social care services are properly funded and sustainable.

"Reductions in public health funding undermine our ability to improve the public's health and to keep pressures off the NHS and social care."

### Delayed transfers

Delays in discharging hospital patients attributable to social care not being in place continue to fall, according to the latest statistics. Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Despite significant funding cuts, councils have worked tirelessly to reduce the average number of delayed transfer of care days attributed to social care since July 2017 by 37 per cent, freeing up more beds for those who need them. This highlights the important role local government plays in enabling the NHS to provide first-class medical care."

See p14 for more on the NHS Long Term Plan and children's mental health. For more on the LGA's work on health and care, including a briefing on the Long Term Plan, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/topics/social-care-health-and-integration](http://www.local.gov.uk/topics/social-care-health-and-integration)

## news in brief

### Scam warning

People with mental health issues, physical disabilities and those who are older and living alone are being targeted by fraudsters, according to analysis by Action Fraud and the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau. Between October 2017 and March 2018, nearly a third of people reporting advance fee fraud – where bogus cold callers impersonate legitimate organisations to persuade victims to transfer money – were identified as being vulnerable people aged over 60. Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chairman of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said more than two scams and attempted scams were being reported to some councils every day and urged carers, families and neighbours to look out for vulnerable older and disabled people.

### HIV drug trial

NHS England is to fund the expansion of a successful trial of PrEP to 26,000 participants by 2020, ahead of a planned national rollout. The drug is used by HIV-negative people to reduce the risk of getting HIV. Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said PrEP could significantly reduce levels of HIV, and called for a "clear process for routinely commissioning and funding PrEP on the NHS" to be agreed by the end of the trial. The LGA continues to campaign for the reversal of £700 million of public health cuts, which are affecting council-run sexual health services.

### Physical activity

A new quality standard covering how local authorities and health partners can encourage physical activity is out for consultation (see [www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)). Proposals include having physical activity champions and prioritising pedestrians, cycling routes and public transport. Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson, Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, said: "Councils have a long history of providing leisure facilities for communities, but over time this has developed into a role championing the importance of physical activity outside of the gym or swimming pool. This is why we are encouraging the Government to consider the impact further spending reductions would have on councils' abilities to provide these valued, high-quality services, such as parks and green spaces."



## 'Bigger fines needed on fake fags'

**Millions of cheap, illegal cigarettes are flooding the market, with criminals selling them on Facebook and rogue traders using sophisticated secret places to store them, the LGA has warned.**

It says the illegal tobacco trade is rife and undermining efforts to reduce smoking.

The LGA is calling for courts to impose bigger fines for selling illegal cigarettes that cost the UK economy more than £2 billion a year in unpaid duty.

Fake or counterfeit cigarettes are made to look like popular UK brands but typically have foreign health warnings and no picture health warnings. Non-duty paid, or bootlegged cigarettes, are UK brands usually brought into the country from abroad with foreign health warnings on the packaging and sold illegally.

In recent prosecutions, illegal stashes of cigarettes have been found concealed in sophisticated hiding places in the walls and floors of shops and secret panels in cupboards. Trading standards officers have previously found illegal hauls in toilet cisterns, boxes of sweets, behind extractor fans and in ceiling lights.

Many fake cigarettes contain even higher levels of toxic ingredients, such as tar, nicotine and carbon monoxide, than genuine brand-name cigarettes – which are still harmful to health.

Fake cigarettes also pose a greater fire risk as they do not include designs that ensure a lit cigarette will self-extinguish if not actively smoked. This reduces the chances of them starting a fire if they are left burning in an ashtray, are dropped, or if the smoker falls asleep.

Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: "The sale of cheap, illegal tobacco by rogue traders in shops, private homes and through social media is funding organised criminal gangs and damaging legitimate traders, as well as making it easier for young people to get hooked on smoking, which undermines councils' efforts to help people quit.

"Bigger fines need to be imposed by the courts to deter the sale of illegal tobacco to help councils' enforcement work against rogue traders, reduce crime in our communities and protect the health of children and young people."

## Cutting air pollution 'requires resources'

The Government has published its Clean Air Strategy 2019, which aims to reduce the harm to human health from air pollution by half.

It includes plans to further reduce public exposure to particulate pollution and to reduce wood and coal burning in homes, and promises powers "designed to enable targeted local action in areas with an air pollution problem" (see [www.gov.uk/government/publications/clean-air-strategy-2019](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/clean-air-strategy-2019)).

The LGA has been actively engaged in the strategy's development and supports its ambition, but has made it clear that councils will need further funding and powers if they are expected to undertake additional work on air quality.

Cllr Martin Tett, the LGA's Environment Spokesman, said: "Councils are determined to reduce the impact of harmful emissions

on the health of our communities but if the Government's air quality plans and any new local powers are to be successful, they need to be underpinned by local flexibility and sufficient funding.

"Councils also need local powers to tackle air pollution further, particularly with regard to moving-traffic offences; government support on planning and transport matters; and robust national action to help the country transition to low-emission vehicles and power generation."

Around 20 councils are planning to introduce clean air zones in town and city centres in a bid to reduce air pollution. Certain motorists, such as those driving heavily polluting lorries, coaches and taxis, will be charged to drive through the zones. Cars made after 2006 will be exempt, along with electric vehicles and most hybrids.

# letters

## Residents shaping high streets

Technology has had many positive effects, but it has been detrimental to our high streets because they haven't been able to adapt quickly enough.

Yet we need our high streets more than ever as a place to connect and mingle, not just shop. It's also important we remember the phrase 'high street' is synonymous with people's livelihoods; if a high street dies then people's livelihoods die along with them.

I believe high streets can thrive again, but they must change, just as people's shopping habits have changed – they want experiences rather than 'stuff', and high streets must reinvent themselves to become a place of social infrastructure where people can have experiences and connect.

Residents ultimately keep the high street alive, because it's they who shop there – only they can tell us why they do or do not visit and how their shopping habits have changed.

As part of the South Worcestershire Development Plan (SWDP) Review, Worcester City, Malvern Hills and Wychavon District Councils have commissioned a retail study that will include a telephone survey of 1,800 residents. They will be asked what they want from their high street now and in the next 20 years.

Reviving our high streets must be done strategically and the SWDP offers the perfect opportunity to do that. We are hoping our residents will tell us everything – warts and all – because it's only with their help we can develop a plan that truly supports our high streets.

**Cllr Melanie Baker (Con)**, Deputy Leader, Malvern Hills District Council, and Chair, South Worcestershire Development Plan Joint Advisory Panel

## Bucking the national retail trend

While the UK retail picture looks bleak, the latest footfall and vacancy rate figures for Ashford town centre show it is bucking the national trend and traders are positive about the new year ahead.

Footfall for 2018 was 5.8 per cent up on the previous year, and in December was up 27 per cent compared with December 2017, with 80,500 visitors the week before Christmas.

All town centres are facing challenging times, and we are not alone, but as part of our changing offer, we are seeing new faces and continued investment in the town.

The positive investment in the town is having a knock-on effect, with Ashford College bringing students into the town, the Commercial Quarter bringing in office workers, plus we have the Elwick Place cinema and new brewery adding to our leisure and night-time offer.

Town centres will need to be reinvented for life in the 21st century and if we don't repurpose and change the offer then we won't have a high street to worry about. I have always said I want Ashford town centre to be a fun place to visit.

An important part of what we offer is that fun element, otherwise we just end up with a town that is very lacklustre, and we have all seen a number of these up and down the country. Every town needs to keep working hard to improve.

**Cllr Graham Galpin (Con)**, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Property, Ashford Borough Council

## sound bites

### **Cllr Toby Savage (Con, South Gloucestershire)**

"On Feb 7-8, I will be riding 220km with @DownendCllrs to every school in #SouthGlos to mark @Place2Be #childrensmentalhealthawarenessweek. Exhausted after being put through our paces by #paralympic champ @Bladerunnerandy last night. Thanks to @ActiveCentres for hosting us!"  
[www.twitter.com/SavageToby1](http://www.twitter.com/SavageToby1)

### **Cllr Vince Maple (Lab, Medway)**

"@GwynneMP – thank you for speaking so openly about your personal circumstances. Statistics mean of the 7,000 @LabourCllrs 1,750 will suffer a mental health condition this year. Pleased the party is working on support for its elected members with more being launched in February."  
[www.twitter.com/vincemaple](http://www.twitter.com/vincemaple)

### **Cllr Paul Kohler (Lib Dem, Merton)**

"Our excellent police officers from Trinity Ward's Safer Neighbourhoods Team have arranged 10 drop in sessions over the next 3 months at different locations across the ward. These provide excellent opportunities to discuss policing issues and to get to know your local officers."  
[www.twitter.com/trinity\\_lib\\_dem](http://www.twitter.com/trinity_lib_dem)

### **Cllr June Player (Ind, Gloucestershire)**

"Oldfield Pk Stn is 90 years old on February 18 so John & I of the On-Board gardening group have been preparing for this celebratory event. Planning on putting in lots of plants next week."  
[www.twitter.com/JunePlayer1](http://www.twitter.com/JunePlayer1)

## Managing urban flood risk

Innes Thomson (**first** 631) is right to urge councillors to take part in the vital work of internal drainage boards (IDBs), to help to reduce their communities' risks from flooding.

IDBs tend to be concentrated outside urban areas, because they developed historically as part of agricultural land management.

But we cannot isolate the management of flood risk. What happens upstream and downstream of our towns and cities needs to be integrated into the management of urban flood risk.

There are formal ways of doing this through regional flood and coastal committees and various catchment partnerships.

But an effective way to develop a shared, joined-up vision for managing flood risk between rural and urban areas is through membership of the Association of Drainage Authorities.

The association has the ear of ministers and is a great forum for knowledge sharing. But its membership is dominated by IDBs and district councils.

I urge more urban authorities to join the likes of Leeds, Bury and my own Salford in becoming members of the association to help to create that shared vision.

**Cllr Derek Antrobus (Lab)**, Lead Member for Planning and Sustainable Development, Salford City Council



**What do you think?** Please submit letters for publication by emailing [karen.thornton@local.gov.uk](mailto:karen.thornton@local.gov.uk). Letters may be edited and published online

# features

## Balancing the books

Government proposals on business rates retention and fair funding for councils are out for consultation

Local authority finance professionals and lead members enter 2019 with many questions about their individual councils' future funding.

Three main questions need to be answered as soon as possible to add some clarity to councils' financial plans: how much funding will be available to English councils, what will the source of the funding be, and how will the funding be distributed?

The 2019 Spending Review will give some of the answers about the total funding that might be available. The LGA will continue to build the case for local government in the run-up to the Spending Review, highlighting the highly valuable services that councils provide, the effectiveness of investing through local government, and the funding gap which puts all of this at risk.

While the timing, scope and potential decisions of the Spending Review remain unclear, the Government is starting to give some indications on the questions of the source of funding and how it will be distributed from April 2020.

This has come in the shape of two significant consultations, on relative needs and resources, and business rates retention, published in December alongside the local government finance settlement.

On the face of it, these are highly detailed papers. However, the real-world implications of these seemingly technical government decisions can have significant consequences.

The business rates retention reform consultation focuses on the mechanism through which councils would collectively retain 75 per cent of English business rates that can be attributed to a local authority

area (see box, far right). This shift from a predominantly grant-funded system just 10 years ago to one based on business rates income is significant, and comes with its own challenge of balancing the risk of decline in business rates income with the reward of retained additional growth.

Factors that will affect this crucial balance include decisions the Government will have to take on:

- how to split business rates income in two-tier areas
- how to protect councils from the risk of business rates appeals or significant losses
- how often the system undergoes a 'reset', and how much growth can be kept locally at the point of such a 'reset'.

The Government's consultation on the fair funding review of relative needs and resources proposes a new method to distribute funding between individual local authorities. If the business rates retention reform is about how future business rates income growth and loss will be dealt with, the review of relative needs and resources is all about setting the starting point.



This review has been welcomed by councils because the current way of distributing funding is opaque, complex and no longer fit for purpose.

At the heart of this review lies a statistical exercise to build a new way to estimate relative cost and demand pressures faced by individual councils, and their relative ability to benefit from funding streams such as council tax. The new funding baselines will effectively be worked out by taking the former and deducting the latter (see box, below).

Relative need assessments normally work by segmenting a local authority's business into distinct service areas, and estimating relative needs to spend on those services separately – by finding which drivers (such as population, deprivation, density, sparsity, road length, and so on) explain the most difference

### Fair funding: the steps to calculate funding for individual councils

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{Relative needs} \\ \text{assessment score} \\ \text{(expressed as a cash amount)} \end{array} \quad - \quad \begin{array}{l} \text{Relative resources} \\ \text{assessment score} \\ \text{(expressed as a cash amount)} \end{array} \quad = \quad \begin{array}{l} \text{New} \\ \text{funding} \\ \text{baseline} \end{array}$$

(Potential transitional mechanism to manage the move from the current pattern)



## Business rates retention consultation: four things to watch for

### 1. Resets

The more often and more extensive the reset, the more protection against losses and divergence between councils; but the less the reward for local business rate growth.

### 2. Tier splits

The higher the share of local business rates kept, the stronger the reward – but this comes with a greater risk of unexpected loss of income needed to fund services.

### 3. Safety net

The more generous the safety net, the more protection for councils against losses – but it's potentially more costly as councils might have to fund it collectively.

### 4. Managing the appeals risk

Technical changes to calculating business rates growth and losses would strip out the effect of business rates appeals provisions, reducing the potential reliance on the safety net.

in either spending or some other measure of demand or cost.

The resultant formulas and their results are then combined back into a single 'score' for each local authority. These 'scores' are then compared between councils, and applied to a grand total national sum that is being distributed. They do not measure absolute need, but the need of one council in comparison with others.

One main proposal in the consultation is to simplify the assessment by reducing the number of formulas and introducing an overarching 'foundation' formula. This formula would be predominantly based on population, with adjustments for some unavoidable differences to general cost of business, like labour costs, rates costs, and sparsity and density-related cost differences.

In previous consultations, the Government indicated it was also exploring deprivation as a potential factor in this 'foundation' formula, but the current consultation proposes excluding it as a factor. Other formulas for specific services are likely to still include some measure of deprivation as a factor.

The adjustment for relative resources works in a similar way and normally focuses on council tax. The Government makes decisions on what counts as part of the 'tax base' – for example, which council tax discounts should be reflected.

The assessed tax base is then combined with an assessed local council tax level – which is normally a notional amount aiming not to penalise local authorities for their past decisions on council tax. Other adjustments, such as collection rates, can also be taken into account. The relative resources calculation could also reflect other income, subject to government decision.

Ultimately, the result of the resources assessment is deducted from the needs assessment to get to the funding baseline.

The consultation sets out the progress of the Government's thinking on these issues, as well as some early thoughts about transition arrangements to move from the current pattern of funding to this new starting point. While many decisions will be guided by clear evidence as far as possible, it is also important to ensure that judgement-based decisions are balanced and transparent.

We are developing our own consultation responses and urge LGA member councils to actively respond as well.

Some of the decisions made by the Government could have a very different impact on one council compared with another – so it is important that decisions are transparent and based on robust evidence.

We will continue our work to keep the Government's plans for reform open to input from all parts of the local government family. We will also continue to argue that none of these reforms, especially the review of relative needs and resources, can lead to a sustainable solution unless they come with significant additional resources.

We estimate that it would take about £8 billion by 2024/25 to plug the estimated funding gap in councils' spending, something that we hope will be addressed in the Spending Review.



For 'Fair funding review: a review of relative needs and resources', see [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/review-of-local-authorities-relative-needs-and-resources](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/review-of-local-authorities-relative-needs-and-resources). For 'Business rates retention reform', see [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/business-rates-retention-reform](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/business-rates-retention-reform). **The LGA has published a number of tools that allow member councils to explore the potential implications of various options covered by these consultations**, see [www.local.gov.uk/topics/finance-and-business-rates/business-rates-retention](http://www.local.gov.uk/topics/finance-and-business-rates/business-rates-retention). **Both consultations close on Thursday 21 February.** Please also send us your council's response, by emailing [lgfinance@local.gov.uk](mailto:lgfinance@local.gov.uk).



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# Passenger safety



Councillor Simon Blackburn is Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board

## Are cameras in cabs the way forward to protect passengers and drivers from harm?

This year is already shaping up to be another significant one for licensing, in particular for taxi licensing. Nusrat Ghani MP, Minister for Taxis, will be speaking at the LGA's annual licensing conference on 5 February, and we are hoping she will update us on the Government's plans to strengthen the regulation of taxis and private hire vehicles (PHVs) following recommendations made by a working group last autumn.

Also speaking will be Stacey Egerton, Senior Policy Officer at the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), who will be exploring some of the key issues around the use of cameras or CCTV systems in taxis and PHVs.

This is an area of increasing interest to councils, some of whom have already introduced a requirement for compulsory CCTV in licensed vehicles as a way to further safeguard both passengers and drivers.

For example, in Brighton & Hove, CCTV footage did not substantiate an allegation of sexual assault by a woman taking a taxi back to the university campus. All charges against the driver were dropped and the passenger



*“CCTV provides vital evidence in situations where otherwise it may have been one person's word against another”*

was warned for wasting police time. But in another incident, CCTV and audio recording supported a victim's account that a driver had been abusive and spat at her, and the council revoked the driver's licence.

The LGA has published guidance for those councils considering mandating CCTV in taxis and PHVs, developed with the ICO and the Surveillance Camera Commissioner. It brings together some of the questions authorities may want to consider if they are

thinking about introducing a mandatory CCTV policy for licensed vehicles in their area.

The use of CCTV in taxis – whether cameras or cameras and audio recording – has clear benefits for both drivers and passengers. The presence of CCTV acts as a deterrent to criminal or other poor behaviour, and it provides vital evidence in situations where an incident has been reported, which otherwise may have been one person's word against another.

There is, however, a balance that needs to be struck between passenger safety and privacy, an issue which the ICO as the key regulator has picked up and, in some cases, challenged authorities on.

Councils therefore need to think through the privacy implications of mandating CCTV, satisfy themselves that they have adequate justification for choosing this approach,

and ensure the requirements of relevant legislation are met.

For example, the ICO has said that requiring continuous camera recording in a cab – as opposed to only when the driver is working – is likely to be disproportionate to the safety problem it is trying to address. The ICO also considers audio recording to be more intrusive than video recording, and therefore requiring stronger justification.

Used appropriately, CCTV can be – and is – a legitimate tool for councils to use to enhance safeguarding in licensing work. The LGA's guidance provides advice on the practical issues that councils will need to consider, including considerations about privacy and proportionality. It gives a starting point for exploring some of the key issues and how these might apply at a local level.



'Developing an approach to mandatory CCTV in taxis and PHVs' is available free at [www.local.gov.uk/publications](http://www.local.gov.uk/publications). **The LGA's annual licensing conference takes place in London on 5 February.** For more information and to book your place, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/events](http://www.local.gov.uk/events)

# Young minds

Increased funding and improved crisis care were among the pledges for children and young people's mental health services in the NHS's recently published Long Term Plan

**T**he NHS's new 10-year plan includes a very welcome emphasis on children and young people, and particularly their mental health.

Funding for children's mental health services will grow faster than both overall NHS funding and total mental health funding; waiting times will be introduced for accessing services; crisis care will be improved; and community-based support expanded.

With one in eight children experiencing at least one mental health disorder, and almost a third of those still on waiting lists after a year, extra funding should help councils' children's services – which, at the moment, are increasingly having to step in to support vulnerable young people.

As it stands, clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) in England spend an average of 14 per cent of their overall budget on mental health, but just 0.9 per cent on child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS).

It is imperative that the additional funding is actually spent on CAMHS. The National Audit Office confirmed last November that NHS England cannot be certain that all the £1.7 billion funding allocated by government for CAMHS since 2015 has been spent as intended, or that data on CCGs' expenditure on children's mental health is reliable.

NHS England has said that it is only in the current financial year that it expects CCGs to spend their allocations on the purposes for which they were originally intended. This is one of the reasons why, given councils' responsibility for the wellbeing of children in



their area, the LGA has been calling for health and wellbeing boards – as the statutory bodies where local government, CCGs and the community come together – to have overarching governance of how funding on children's mental health is allocated locally.

The NHS Long Term Plan also pledges to improve crisis care, and to invest in and expand community-based support, with at least an additional 345,000 children and young people able to access support by 2023/24.

While we support improved crisis care, we do need to see preventative principles applied to children's mental health. We cannot continue to withhold access to

treatment until a child deteriorates to a level where they are deemed to have a clinically severe enough need. Investment is needed in early intervention therapies for children so they don't deteriorate to the level where they require more medicalised and crisis-based interventions. This makes sense, both from the perspective of cost and of children's wellbeing.

The NHS Long Term Plan includes the new mental health units. Each will be responsible for a cluster of around 20 schools and colleges, depending on their size. While improving links to schools is welcome, the LGA has been calling for the new units to work with councils as well, so that children



Children's Mental Health Week runs from 4-10 February and is a great opportunity to highlight the good work your local area is doing to get children and young people the early help they need. Please use the hashtag **#gettingthebest** on social media, so we can tell our stories together. **You can find out more about the LGA's Bright Futures campaign – our call to prioritise child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) – at [www.local.gov.uk/bright-futures-camhs](http://www.local.gov.uk/bright-futures-camhs) or on Twitter at [#gettingthebest](https://twitter.com/gettingthebest)**



who have been excluded, are home-schooled or move school frequently can also access this additional support.

We continue to call for independent counsellors in all secondary schools, a call that has been supported by young people themselves when asked what mental health support they need. We also need more co-production of services with young people, to determine the type and location of support they need.

These calls are reflected in the LGA's Bright Futures campaign on children's mental health, and you can find out more at [www.local.gov.uk/bright-futures-camhs](http://www.local.gov.uk/bright-futures-camhs)

The NHS Long Term Plan could go further, to recognise the wider role that local government and other services play in delivering the Government's healthy child programme and influencing the health of children and young people more widely. A joined-up approach to supporting children's health is crucial to delivering the plan and to creating future generations of healthy and happy adults.

## A place for us

Ahead of February's Children's Mental Health Week, first visited The Hive in north London to find out more about local services for vulnerable children and young people

For 18 of the young people who had Christmas dinner at The Hive last December, this was their only festive celebration.

But that's what The Hive does: it provides a place for young people to make the trusted connections they don't always have elsewhere, and helps build the confidence and self-belief that creates a healthy mind.

The Hive opened in Camden in 2015, following a design process that put young people at its centre. More than 500 were interviewed about their access to mental health services, leading to the establishment of a young people's board – still in place today – to guide the development of the new service.

The centre is a partnership between Camden Council, two NHS trusts, the Brandon Centre, the Anna Freud Centre, and Catch22, a not-for-profit business with a social mission, which designs and delivers services that build resilience and aspiration in people and communities.

The Hive is open to anyone aged between 16 and 25 with a Camden postcode or GP. It offers a space where young people can just drop in to sit, chat and use the free Wi-Fi. There are activities every afternoon and support available for anyone needing help with education, employment, housing, sexual health and substance misuse.

What The Hive really offers, however, is a support network, a place to talk about the difficulties and challenges in a young person's life, and – for those who need it – more direct engagement, with one-to-one counselling and therapy.

Katie Clayton and Peter Day, the clinical leads for the service, say the biggest issue they see is social isolation: "Because of family breakdown, many of the children have no adults in their life they can turn to – no support networks. The most vulnerable come to us first."

The role of the centre is to help tackle problems before they reach crisis point, by helping young people to use their own resilience skills to manage their situation. For those who need it, there is help managing what is, at times, a perplexing system of appointments and referrals.

It's a solution that works. Whether because of word of mouth or more referrals by GPs, teachers or mental health professionals, demand has gone up over the past three years – a picture that is reflected across providers in Camden, where the level of diagnosis and the level of risk has increased at a time when resources are stretched.

As Jennie Mackeith, Strategic Commissioning Manager, Camden Council, explains though, much of what can be achieved doesn't necessarily cost. It's important to keep a flexible approach. The Hive is part of Camden's wider Minding the Gap service, offering support for young people transitioning between children's and adult services to reduce the risk of disengagement.

"Of course there are challenges, but the great strength is our collaborative approach," she says.

## Children's mental health

**1 in 8**

(12.8%) of five to 19-year-olds has at least one mental disorder.



Emotional disorders have become **more common**

All other types of disorder, such as behavioural, hyperactivity and other less common disorders, have remained similar in prevalence

**since 1999**



## Mental disorders

among five to 19-year-olds have risen from **9.7 per cent** in 1999 and **10.1 per cent** in 2004, to **11.2 per cent** in 2017.



**A quarter of girls aged 17 to 19**

have a mental health disorder. Of this quarter, more than half have self-harmed or attempted to take their own life.





# Culture-led regeneration

New LGA research revealing the value of a culture-led approach to regeneration will be the focus of its annual culture and tourism conference next month



Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson is Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board

Research has shown creating places that people feel connected to and inspired by leads to improved health outcomes, and social contributions like volunteering and voting can be higher.

More importantly, they become great places to live and work, where people want to stay and visit.

Building is a key priority for councils – so as we build the homes of the future, we need to make sure we are creating communities and

not just one-note housing estates that do not represent the best of what can be achieved. We also want to think about how we can bring new energy to existing communities.

Cultural activity can be critical to this. It can also significantly grow the local economy. But what is the key to an effective cultural strategy and unlocking those core benefits?

The LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board wanted to find out, so all types of places could set about achieving it. We were delighted that the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, an international cultural organisation, also recognised the importance of this research and helped co-fund it.

Only a few can become 'capitals of culture', 'cities of culture', or 'London boroughs of culture'. But the increasing calls for more and more 'titles' – a group of MPs recently called for a 'town of culture' award – show that politicians

and economists alike are waking up to the value that can be realised through a strong emphasis on culture.

But the benefits of culture can, and should, be able to be realised everywhere, without the need for a special status. For example, the culture-led regeneration approaches covered by the case studies in our research have:

- facilitated two million annual visitors to Portsmouth's Historic Dockyard, with £51 million of annual visitor spending
- increased community pride for 90 per cent of local audience members in Stoke-on-Trent, as part of the Appetite Creative People and Places programme
- created or safeguarded 1,300 jobs through the NewcastleGateshead Initiative in 2017, with 22 new businesses attracted by its inward investment activities
- generated more than £1.1 million of economic activity in Great Yarmouth through the Out There Festival.

It doesn't matter whether you are urban or rural, large or small, economically successful or currently struggling to attract businesses – with a bit of planning, every place is capable of culture-led regeneration.

The research identified a number of key findings to consider if you're starting out on regeneration, or looking to improve your current work. These include:

- A shared vision with community and partners is an important foundation.
- The cultural offer needs to be



For more information about the LGA's work on culture, tourism, leisure and sport, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/topics/culture-tourism-leisure-and-sport](http://www.local.gov.uk/topics/culture-tourism-leisure-and-sport)



Tyne Bridge, Newcastle

*“The benefits of culture can and should be realised everywhere, without the need for a special status”*

- authentic for your place.
- Councils may need to commit to cultural investment over the long term.
- Shorter-term investment for cultural festivals can enable the development of institutions that will yield longer-term sustainable impacts.
- Community involvement can be a powerful driver for culture-led regeneration.
- Positive outcomes can be achieved with limited budgets.

The findings of the LGA's culture-led regeneration research will be explored in more depth at its annual culture and tourism conference on 5 and 6 March at the City of London's Guildhall. Delegates will also have the opportunity to join study tours of Waltham Forest and Brent, the first two London Boroughs of Culture, as well as explore the City of London's 'Cultural Mile' or experience a guided tour of the British Library. To find out more and book your place, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/events](http://www.local.gov.uk/events)



### Thanet

Thanet's investments in Margate attractions, including the Turner Contemporary art gallery and Dreamland, an amusement park and entertainment centre based on a traditional English seaside funfair, have resulted in:

- 300 jobs
- one million new visitors to Margate since 2011
- 0.5 million visitors in one summer at Dreamland
- 19 per cent tourism growth between 2013 and 2015, with annual value rising by £47 million to £293 million
- 1,800 students and teachers from Kent and Medway entering artwork into the Turner's portfolio competition in 2018
- catalysing new investment leveraging £35 million private funding for Dreamland, and attracting other new town centre investment including Tracey Emin's new studio.



### Stoke-on-Trent

Stoke's partnership with Appetite, part of the Creative People and Places programme initiated and funded by Arts Council England, has resulted in:

- a 20 per cent increase in city centre footfall on the weekend of the Big Feast Festival
- 100,000 more day visitors to Stoke in 2016
- cultural and creative sector support for local artist development, supporting growth and development of these sectors
- 90 per cent of residents feeling an increase in community pride.



### Norfolk and Suffolk

Norfolk and Suffolk's work with New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership has resulted in:

- 349 individuals or businesses supported through the StartEast programme, a business support and grants programme for creative people planning to develop and grow a cultural business
- a 16 per cent increase in the number of cultural tourists visiting the region
- a comprehensive culture sector skills strategy
- networking and collaboration between cultural and technology sectors, facilitating cross-sector economic growth
- cultural sector leadership through development of a shared strategy and building connections with national organisation and funders.



### Great Yarmouth

Great Yarmouth's support of the Out There Festival of street arts and circus has resulted in:

- £0.8 million of additional visitor spending from 40,000-plus participants annually, including 2,000 overnight stays in paid accommodation
- more than £1.1 million of economic activity in 2017, including money spent by attendees and by the festival in delivery
- inspiration, networking and skills development for circus and street arts performers, particularly through new facilities
- enhanced town image and community pride.

# LGA/ADPH Annual Public Health Conference and Exhibition

Supporting resilient communities: helping people to feel good and function well

London, 21 March 2019

Our annual flagship conference on public health will explore and build on the challenging, innovative work being undertaken by local authorities, their partners and communities as they continue to make progress on improving the nation's wellbeing and tackling health inequalities. This year's conference will focus on developing and supporting resilient, healthy communities.

Join us at our most popular health conference of the year to hear the very latest thinking on key policy and improvement agendas. This is your opportunity to put your questions and comments to those involved in shaping and implementing them at strategic and community levels, and to network with your peers on the public health issues that matter to you locally.



Confirmed speakers include:

- **Professor Jane South**, Professor of Healthy Communities, Leeds Beckett University
- **Nathan Dennis**, Director and Community Engagement Consultant, First Class Legacy
- **Rob Trimble**, Chief Executive, Bromley by Bow Centre
- **Professor Dame Sue Bailey**, Consultant Child and Adolescent Forensic Psychiatrist and Professor of Child and Adolescent Mental Health
- **Professor Sian Griffiths OBE**, Deputy Chair, Gamble Aware and Associate Non-Executive Board Member, Public Health England
- **Andy Bell**, Deputy Chief Executive, Centre for Mental Health

To book your place visit [www.local.gov.uk/events](http://www.local.gov.uk/events)

# Blazing a solar trail

West Sussex has an ambitious plan to become a leader in renewable energy generation



Cllr Louise Goldsmith (Con) is Leader of West Sussex County Council



Local government is facing significant financial pressures at a time when environmental issues have become more of a priority. It therefore makes complete sense for us in West Sussex to make the most of our natural resources and under-used land to generate clean energy.

West Sussex is one of the sunniest counties in the country, so for us it seemed a natural choice to invest in solar energy. We have two solar farms near Chichester. Our latest is the first in public ownership to be built and operated without the need for government subsidy.

We opened our first solar farm (5 MW) on a former airfield at Tangmere near Chichester in 2015. Our second, at Westhampnett, is built on a county council-owned closed landfill site with no alternative use. The 26,000 solar panels at the 35-acre site produce enough clean electricity to power up to 2,400 homes.

By incorporating a number of large batteries into the design, we created an additional revenue stream that reduces the need for feed-in-tariffs. These government incentives to support renewable energy generation have been steadily reducing in recent years and will be withdrawn

completely for new solar developments at the end of the current financial year.

The batteries enable surplus energy to be stored on site and released to the local electricity grid when demand – and prices – peak. By offering this service, we help to balance energy supply and demand on the grid.

We have several potential smaller sites where more grid-scale batteries can be located away from energy generation facilities. We also plan to pilot smaller-scale battery solutions this year to reduce our bills, carbon emissions and exposure to fluctuating energy prices.

We are progressing well with a programme to install solar photovoltaic systems on the roofs of more than 70 schools. The systems are built and maintained by our appointed specialists at no cost to the schools and will reduce bills on average by approximately £1,000 a year per school at current energy prices.

Our energy strategy is ambitious and promotes the development of clean, affordable and secure energy for the county.

We want to become one of the leading councils for renewable energy generation in the country. I am really proud of what we have achieved so far and excited about the difference West Sussex can make in generating sustainable energy solutions for the future.

## Your Energy Sussex

With the launch of its own energy supplier in February 2018, West Sussex County Council joined a number of local authorities working to encourage residents to switch and save money on their bills.

Industry figures show that the majority of householders still don't compare their energy costs regularly and many remain on their supplier's most expensive 'standard variable' tariff.

With 4,000 customers already on supply, Your Energy Sussex offers

consistently competitive prices, good customer service and 100 per cent renewable electricity – a small percentage of which comes from the council's own solar farms and installations.

Your Energy Sussex is a partnership between West Sussex County Council and Robin Hood Energy, a well-established, not-for-profit energy company owned and operated by Nottingham City Council. Further information is available at [www.yourenergysussex.org.uk](http://www.yourenergysussex.org.uk)



# Contextual safeguarding

## How can we protect children from the places that threaten them, as well as the people?



**Councillor Anntoinette Bramble (Lab)** is Deputy Mayor of Hackney and Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board

ate last year, I was honoured to welcome hundreds of social work professionals from across the country to Hackney Town Hall to learn about the groundbreaking work we're doing to keep our most vulnerable young people safe.

Our children's social care team has been working with Dr Carlene Firmin, of the University of Bedfordshire, on the principles of 'contextual safeguarding'. This approach builds upon existing social care principles and acknowledges that times have changed – as have the influences and risks young people face today.

Traditionally, social work has focused on the home environment, with a view that family members are the biggest factor influencing a young person's safety and welfare. However, young people today are more likely to be influenced by factors outside the home, including the places they spend their free time and on social media.

This is especially the case in Hackney, which is home to more than 60,000 children, in an incredibly diverse borough with some of

the most deprived areas in the country.

Our research showed that most incidences of harmful sexual behaviour took place in isolated public areas such as a quiet part of school, a stairwell, or a car park on an estate.

Our social care team started thinking about how we can identify areas of concern. How do we decide whether a young person is at risk and what level of support they need?

We may be a geographically small borough, but we're densely populated. So we thought about how social services work with other departments in the council, and with the community.

Initially, we got the traditional partner organisations on board – the police and local youth clubs – which were all very enthusiastic. But as we completed more mapping, we realised we needed to cast our net much wider.

The biggest hurdle we've faced is getting people to think about how different situations could put a young person at risk. It's about balance. We're not suggesting that a group of young people hanging out together is harmful, but we need to move away from seeing a group of young people misbehaving as being a nuisance, and think more about what could really be going on.

From Transport for London letting us know about any trouble on buses or at train stations, to residents' associations telling us about unlit areas where young people congregate – all of this information helps

us to paint a picture of where young people might be at risk, so that we can adapt our safeguarding practices appropriately.

We also established an advisory board of young people, who have been amazing in sharing their feedback in a very open and candid way.

Building these relationships is vital. Contextual safeguarding offers the perfect vehicle for us to work together as a borough to make sure all our young people are kept safe.

Social care departments were formed less than 50 years ago, but a lot has changed since then, and we think contextual safeguarding can help shape the next 50 years.

## What is contextual safeguarding?

**Contextual safeguarding is an approach to safeguarding children and young people that responds to their experiences of harm outside the home. It recognises that the different relationships they form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. Parents and carers have little influence over these contexts, and young people's experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine parent-child relationships. Therefore, children's social care practitioners need to recognise that they are a critical part of safeguarding practices.**

# A play on placements

An award-winning board game developed by looked-after children in Sheffield is helping carers and social workers think about what makes a good home

When members of Sheffield's Children in Care Council got together to think of ways to improve foster placements, they had the idea of creating a film and a snakes and ladders-style board game.

They wanted to show that if you had a very positive experience in a placement you would get further in life, and to develop a training package that they could deliver themselves.

The Placement game and its associated training programme have since received national acclaim, been shared at conferences with hundreds of professionals across the country (including the Children's Commissioner for England), and adopted by a number of other local authorities.

The game uses a series of statements to help foster carers, residential staff and social workers think about what makes a good or a bad placement for a child in care, and about all aspects of what makes a good home.

It was developed by a group of 13 to

18-year-olds, who have all experienced the care system. Some of the Children in Care Council members enjoyed a trip to London late last year, where the game won a national award from the magazine and website, Children & Young People Now.

Among them was 15-year-old Megan, who says they were shocked at the impact the game has had. "We only thought it would be very small and shown to very few people."

She adds: "We wanted to improve fostering services as we originally noticed some inequalities between children's homes and foster homes. We wanted every child in Sheffield to have a similar good experience of being in care."

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*"We wanted every child in Sheffield to have a good experience of being in care"*

"The game and accompanying film help train carers to know what we and many other foster kids think makes a good carer and what they can do to improve their placement.

"We used things such as good and bad question cards. A good card would be something like being allowed to have pets, whereas a bad card would be not respecting boundaries. The question cards allow room for debates among the players."

Megan says the group has seen changes as a result of the game, with some carers changing their rules, and residential workers realising how much time they spend on paperwork and instead trying to value their time with children more.

The Children in Care Council meets every other week and discusses aspects its members think are wrong in the care system, and tries to change them. It also uses events and surveys to gauge the views of younger children and those not on the council.

"The care council has helped me build my confidence as I can now comfortably give presentations and talks to larger groups of adults and I now find making friends much easier," says Megan.

"We have been doing a lot of training and work around the Placement game within the group and we have also been looking at mental health within care."

Cllr Jackie Drayton, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People at Sheffield City Council, said: "What our wonderful Children in Care Council members have created is outstanding. They've powerfully explained to others, through the easy-to-use Placement board game, what it's like to be a child in care.

"As a result of their skill and determination, they have now trained more than 200 Sheffield foster carers and residential workers as part of their ambition to improve the lives of children in care. Their work will be instrumental in helping children in care realise their full potential!"



At the House of Commons the day after the awards, with Paul Blomfield MP. From left: Angela Taylor and Clare Holdsworth of Sheffield City Council, Lily and Megan of the Children in Care Council

**i** For more information about the Placement game, please visit [www.sheffieldcicc.org/](http://www.sheffieldcicc.org/)



# A better start

Councils have a key role to play in ensuring the very youngest children get a good start in life

It is difficult to exaggerate the importance to babies and young children of getting off to a healthy start.

What happens to them from before they are even born through to when they start school, and particularly before the age of three, will have a huge impact on the rest of their lives.

Following the transfer of public health responsibilities to local government (in October 2015 for zero to five-year-olds), councils are busy investigating, planning, trialling and implementing a wide range of policies, initiatives and interventions around early years provision. In a context of major financial cuts, all are looking to secure more efficient and effective use of diminishing resources.

Some are focused on preventative programmes, with early identification of children and families in need of additional support and intervention; others on better integration of health, care and education provision for early years, to improve families' experience of services as well as outcomes for their children. And some are looking to do both, with plans reflecting their individual circumstances.

The LGA recently published 'A better start: supporting child development in the early years', which provides advice and guidance,

suggested questions to ask of your council and partners (see right), and case studies from councils around the country.

The case studies include Hertfordshire County Council's 'My baby's brain', which aims to convey to parents of very young children, in simple, accessible language, the importance of attachment to the development of a baby's brain.

Derbyshire County Council's work with parents and professionals on ensuring young children are ready to start primary school, and South Gloucestershire's work on improving early years development in Gypsy and Traveller communities are among the other examples featured.

While there has been steady growth in the proportion of children reaching a 'good level of development' in the early years, inequalities persist. The good news is that the recent rapid expansion of our knowledge about what good development in the early years looks like is leading to innovative improvement in the way services are commissioned and delivered by local councils working with their partners.



**'A better start:** supporting child development in the early years' is free to download at [www.local.gov.uk/publications](http://www.local.gov.uk/publications)

## Early years services – 10 key questions

- Does the health and wellbeing board have a sufficient focus on early years and early identification of needs?
- Have partners agreed a joint vision of how early years support is commissioned and delivered locally?
- How are vulnerable families who require additional support identified?
- What is the evidence base for early years interventions used in your area?
- How are intervention programmes and support services evaluated to ensure they are contributing to improving outcomes?
- What practical guidance and support is offered to parents, especially new parents, about the importance of their role and the difference that they make?
- How does the council and its partners ensure services avoid duplication and provide a 'seamless' experience for children and families?
- Do practitioners from different professions share a common understanding of issues, and use the same language and terminology in their interactions with children and families?
- Do systems allow for information sharing across agencies and is information routinely shared?
- What are the views of children and families on the early years support services provided? How are these views used to ensure services meet local needs effectively?

# Local skills, local people

Apprenticeships and basic skills were among the issues raised at a roundtable discussion aimed at improving local coordination of our fragmented employment and skills system

The LGA has set up a Skills Taskforce to help engage industry experts and stakeholders on our Work Local project – our vision for an integrated and devolved employment and skills system – so it is seen as a way of providing placed-based solutions to some of the challenges and opportunities arising from Brexit and the Government’s Industrial Strategy (see **first** 629).

To this end, 10 national organisations, think tanks and charities took part in a recent roundtable together with local councils and local enterprise partnerships (LEPs). All share a strong interest in making the skills and employment system as effective as possible and felt changes were needed, particularly in respect of apprenticeships, basic skills and funding, among others.

Apprenticeship reform was a key concern. Local areas are keen to ensure that as many people and businesses as possible can benefit from successful apprenticeships, but the LGA believes they must be given the power and funds to ensure there is a coherent vision for apprenticeships across their areas.

It was acknowledged that the objective is to create parity of esteem between technical and academic education; apprenticeships are now an alternative to university for school leavers, and also offer progression pathways, including degree apprenticeships, for existing employees.

However, at the end of the first full year of the apprenticeship levy (2017/18) there were 369,700 apprenticeship starts in England, down 125,000 on 2016/17.

#### Questions raised included:

- Should apprenticeships be ‘rationed’ in the future, and how could this be done?



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



- Is the levy for all kinds of skills needs and employer-led, or to rebalance the bias towards training for people without a degree?
- Is the word ‘apprenticeships’ putting older people off accessing valuable training?

Another concern was the perceived failure of the basic skills system, given that nine million adults have low levels of numeracy and literacy. The number of adults in further education has halved (down two million) since 2005/06, and the number improving their literacy and/or numeracy has fallen by a third since 2010/11.

There was consensus that action on basic skills enables people to move up the career ladder and move out of poverty, making it vital in unlocking the full potential of local areas.

#### Points made included:

- There is free entitlement to this learning provision, but people are not accessing it.
- People with low skills are less likely to have an employer that is investing in

their skills; smaller employers do not see themselves as having that role.

- There is a fragmented approach to tackling basic skills: coordinated activity at a local level is needed to address that.

It was also felt that the current funding system should be reviewed. The separate pots of money are difficult to access, reflecting the fragmentation of policy making by different Whitehall departments; current provision is focused too much on the short term, when a longer-term approach is needed; and revenue funding would be useful in addition to existing capital skills funding.

The roundtable also considered the future of work, the role of councils, devolution and centralisation, and you can find out more in the full briefing on this session at [www.local.gov.uk/skills-taskforce](http://www.local.gov.uk/skills-taskforce).

We have two more events planned, on careers and retraining for a changing local economy, and the future of work, with a view to publishing a final report at the LGA’s annual conference in Bournemouth in July.

## LGA Annual Culture and Tourism Conference

London, 5-6 March 2019

Many cultural services provided and supported by councils also provide a driving force for the UK's visitor economy. This can extend our influence beyond local boundaries and even internationally through world-class events, festivals and heritage celebrations.

This conference will celebrate how very diverse authorities have used different approaches to successfully regenerate their areas through culture and tourism. Delegates will learn more about areas' major positive results in terms of economic growth, cohesion, and public perception and how to make the most of their local assets.

To book your place visit: [www.local.gov.uk/events](http://www.local.gov.uk/events)



## 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](http://www.local.gov.uk/events)



# comment



## Helping victims of domestic abuse



Dr Nicola Sharp-Jeffs is Director of Surviving Economic Abuse

**Many women experience economic abuse within the context of domestic violence. It limits their choices and their ability to access safety.**

So, as the only UK charity dedicated to raising awareness of economic abuse, we were pleased to see that the Government's draft Domestic Abuse Bill provides for a legal definition of domestic abuse that recognises economic abuse as a distinct form of coercive and controlling behaviour. This is important because economic abuse goes 'beyond' financial abuse, which is already reflected in current policy. We know that abusers don't 'just' seek to control, exploit and sabotage victims'

money and finances, but also their economic resources (food, transport, housing).

Many victims stay in relationships for longer than they want to because of economic barriers to leaving and will therefore experience more harm. This illustrates how economic stability and physical safety are linked. Women who experience economic abuse are five times more likely to experience physical abuse and, when economic abuse takes place in the context of coercive control, they are at increased risk of homicide.

Legally recognising economic abuse also serves to raise awareness; just two in five people know that domestic abuse can involve finances. Since research suggests that economic and psychological abuse commonly precede physical and sexual violence, this has important implications for prevention and early intervention work. Increased awareness should also translate into providing better support to victims. We are currently piloting a screening tool for economic abuse across four London

boroughs. Domestic abuse professionals report that this has helped them develop a fuller picture of the economic abuse that victims have experienced.

The screening tool sits within a 'conversation kit' about what economic abuse is. This helps victims make connections between the abuse they experienced and their economic situation. This challenges what the abuser may have told them – for example, 'you are bad at managing money' – enabling them to move forward with increased confidence in their abilities.

Increased knowledge about economic abuse should help ensure that perpetrators are held to account. Police officers rank economic issues nearly bottom in terms of importance when assessing risk in domestic abuse cases, while respondents to the government consultation on the draft Bill highlighted how paying universal credit for couples into a single nominated bank account risks increasing a perpetrator's economic control of their victim.

Local government can play an important part in reinforcing these key messages in its role as a commissioner of domestic abuse services. Councils can also encourage integrated working between domestic abuse and money/debt advice services, as well as local Citizens Advice Bureaux.

Finally, the Bill will ensure that where a local authority, for reasons connected with domestic abuse, grants a new secure tenancy to a social tenant, this must be a secure lifetime tenancy.

We are excited to be working on an innovative 'whole housing' pilot project across local authorities in London and Cambridgeshire that will develop the practice and knowledge of housing professionals in the private rented, privately owned and social rent sectors. This is funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and we look forward to working with partners, including the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance.



**Surviving Economic Abuse** is dedicated to raising awareness of economic abuse of women and girls and transforming responses to it, see [www.survivingeconomicabuse.org](http://www.survivingeconomicabuse.org)

### Parliament could learn from local leaders

*“Time and time again, Westminster has failed to tackle the long-term issues that our nation faces”*



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

The eyes of the nation have been fixed on Parliament, as it debated, voted on, and ultimately rejected the flawed Brexit deal presented by Prime Minister Theresa May.

Most people have been baffled by Parliament's inability to handle the pressing issue of Brexit, despite our EU exit being just weeks away.

If Britain really is sleepwalking towards a 'no deal' Brexit, it would be disastrous for our country and its communities. It's why I joined with Labour Metro Mayors Sadiq Khan, Andy Burnham and Steve Rotherham to demand that the Government immediately removes the threat of a 'no deal' Brexit.

Of course, the continued inability of the

Government and Parliament to work together to tackle a major challenge will be of no surprise to those of us in local government. We have watched time and time again as Westminster has failed to tackle the long-term issues that our nation faces – whether it is the future funding of adult social care, or a fair and sustainable model that properly funds the councils that deliver vital public services.

I can't be alone in thinking that it may have been different if local government leaders had been empowered to find real solutions to these problems, rather than Westminster politicians.

The way in which different political parties are able to work together to determine a

common position at the LGA should be a model to which Parliament aspires. The most vulnerable in our society can't wait much longer for Parliament to get its act together. If it continues to prove unable to solve the biggest issues faced by the residents we serve, it should give us the freedom and resources to get on with the job.

I look forward to seeing friends and colleagues at the Labour Local Government Conference in Warwick from 8-9 February. With a varied programme including speeches from Leader Jeremy Corbyn and Shadow Secretaries Angela Rayner, Andrew Gwynne, John Healey, Dawn Butler and many more, it is no surprise that this year we are fully booked.

## chairman's comment

### Local government finance



Lord Porter  
is Chairman of the LGA

I had the great pleasure of speaking at the LGA's annual finance conference last month – alongside two Cabinet ministers, a shadow secretary of state and two senior civil servants, as well as colleagues from across local government.

Liz Truss MP, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, made the case for devolution to county areas, investing in human capital, early intervention and prevention, and joined-up government, in a wide-ranging speech on the Spending Review.

James Brokenshire MP, Housing, Communities and Local Government Secretary, talked about business rates

retention and the fair funding review, while Andrew Gwynne MP, Shadow Communities and Local Government Secretary, talked about Labour's plans for local government finance.

The list of speakers served to underline that we have the ear of the Government and the Opposition, and that ministers and their shadows are listening.

Building on this platform, the LGA will continue to put a strong case for more funding for local government in this year's Spending Review. We will also offer constructive advice on fair funding and business rates reforms, which will affect where our funding comes from and how it is divided up between us (see p10-11).

With no firm plans yet in place for what

happens to council funding and finances after 2020, we could all do with some budget certainty – especially given the continuing uncertainties around the other B-word.

Meanwhile, I hope you enjoyed seeing LGA Vice-President Preet Kaur Gill MP waving last month's copy of **first** in the Commons, in a debate on local government funding. She kindly quoted me saying: "Next year will continue to be hugely challenging for all councils, which still face an overall funding gap of £3.1 billion in 2019/20."

I have no doubt we will rise to that challenge, as we always do in local government, because our residents need us to. It's time for central government to do the same.

*“With no firm plans yet in place for what happens to council funding and finances after 2020, we could all do with some budget certainty”*

## group leaders' comments



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

### The bureaucracy around mental capacity

*“It is in everyone’s interests that vulnerable people receive the best possible care”*

As a councillor, it is frustrating to see situations where bureaucracy or perverse financial incentives get in the way of doing the right thing.

While the sector definitely needs more funding, in some areas more joined-up thinking can deliver real benefits. An example of this is the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards process.

The system is unnecessarily complex and costly to councils. Many of those involved also feel that it fails to provide vulnerable individuals with the protection they deserve. The number of assessments is increasing every year, and during 2017/18, of the 227,400 applications, a staggering 125,630 were not completed.

I am pleased that as a result of LGA lobbying the Mental Capacity (Amendment) Bill was recently introduced in the House of Commons, giving an opportunity to bring about better outcomes for those people who sadly lack the capacity to make decisions about their own care, and reduce current burdens on councils.

The Government is proposing to make a number of important changes and I sincerely hope the provisions pass, since it is in everyone’s interests that vulnerable people receive the best possible care.

We are keen to explore other areas such as in special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and health, where financial perversities and unnecessary bureaucracy get in the way of delivering improved outcomes and financial efficiency.



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

### Improving children’s mental health

*“What have you tried to do to improve the mental health of the citizens you represent and especially young people?”*

It is Children’s Mental Health Week from the 4-10 February. So it is timely that a recent report from a committee of MPs has found that only a third of children and young people with mental health conditions receive the treatment they need from the NHS.

Its report found that many are turned away because they are not ill enough, others face long waits – and it could be years before that changes.

Last month, Prime Minister Theresa May and NHS England bosses set out a vision for the health service that focused on preventing ill health, which is welcome, but was sadly lacking in detail about funding.

With one in eight five to 19-year-olds having a mental health disorder and an increasing number of five to 15-year-olds suffering from an emotional disorder – currently 5.8 per cent – mental health issues are affecting the life chances of young people.

If not tackled, this will be a massive legacy, and will bite us on the bum big time. The question you need to ask yourself is what have YOU tried to do to improve the mental health of the citizens you represent and especially those young people?

As my good friend and colleague Norman Lamb MP said: “We cannot let mental health slide down the agenda because of Brexit.” The message is simple – do not let that happen!



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

### Party politics playing with local lives

*“The lack of attention to local issues means our long-term future remains uncertain”*

The once faithful party whip lies in tatters. The Conservatives called the EU referendum, called a General Election, lost their majority, and brought back from Michel Barnier, the EU’s Chief Negotiator, a Brexit deal so damaging that members won’t vote for it.

You couldn’t make it up.

Another General Election crashing through our local elections, as it did two years ago, risks swamping the important local issues that are our bread and butter. The lack of attention to local issues means our long-term future remains uncertain.

We have a provisional finance settlement that gave one-off sticking plasters where we wanted, but did not address the remaining £3.1 billion gap next year; an NHS Long Term Plan without a sustainable plan for social care, which is inextricably linked; and a Clean Air Strategy which is welcome, but lacks ambition and makes no attempt to tackle traffic emissions.

Local government runs or influences everything that affects the lives of our residents. It is too important to be derailed by playing politics.

We have worked well cross-party at the LGA – our Independent Group members are an effective force on the things that matter to our communities.

How toxic will those big party labels become as we approach May? All over the country, people are looking for a good alternative. Locally we are here and in good numbers.



For more information about the LGA’s political groups,  
see [www.local.gov.uk](http://www.local.gov.uk)

# LG Inform Plus

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The LG Inform Plus service, developed together with local authorities for over a decade, is your essential tool for shaping and running local services. Designed to run in tandem with LG Inform, it gives subscribers the power to drill down to the finer detail.

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# parliament



## Social care concerns

**While it may feel like 2019 has started where 2018 left off, with Brexit very much the focus of Parliament and the Government, work has continued on a number of important issues such as health and social care.**

The Government announced the NHS Long Term Plan on 7 January. We are pleased that it has a much-needed focus on prevention, early support and reducing health inequalities, and promises investment in primary, community and mental health services.

However, it is disappointing that the Government chose not to also launch its long-awaited Adult Social Care Green Paper and proposals for the sustainable funding of these services. This represents a serious missed opportunity.

Following the announcement of the Long Term Plan, Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of

the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, appeared in front of the Health and Social Care Select Committee.

He outlined the implications and practicalities of the Long Term Plan for local government, stressed that a sustainable NHS is only possible with a sustainable social care sector and public health programme, and called for greater clarity about how the plan will be implemented, with emphasis on engaging local communities.

Cllr Hudspeth told MPs: "The priorities there in a holistic way are very good, particularly talking about integration and looking at how social care can work with the NHS, because the two are not independent; they are intrinsically linked, and it is about making sure that we have a sustainable social care system.

"I would argue that, if we have cut the public health budget by £530 million over the

last few years – that is not protecting it. We need to increase it. If public health had stayed with the NHS and had the same increase as the NHS, there would be an additional £2.4 billion in the system, which would be devoted to preventative medicine and would be providing good health outcomes."

During the committee hearing, there was general agreement that the Government needed to come forward with its Green Paper, as well as praise for the LGA's decision to launch its own.

Cllr Hudspeth also appeared at several all-party parliamentary groups (APPGs), including one on Housing and Care for Older People where he discussed the importance of integrating health with care and how adapting older people's homes can prevent or reduce hospital admissions, which in turn takes pressure off the NHS.

At a meeting of the APPG on Ageing and Older People, Cllr Hudspeth outlined the need for the planning system to incorporate older people's housing into local plans.

During each session, the LGA's adult social care green paper was referenced and has been well received. There is widespread agreement that to address the problems we face in adult social care, it is imperative that the Government comes forward with its own Green Paper.

The LGA has been working extremely hard in Parliament to ensure that the local government perspective and the concerns of our members are heard during discussions of adult social care.

We will continue to make clear to the Government that the current system of social care is unsustainable and will buckle under the weight of demand, unless it urgently invests in these essential services, which protect health, prevent sickness and are the surest way to reduce hospital admissions.



For the LGA's parliamentary work, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/parliament](http://www.local.gov.uk/parliament). You can find out more about the LGA's adult social care green paper at [www.local.gov.uk/lives-we-want-lead-lga-green-paper-adult-social-care](http://www.local.gov.uk/lives-we-want-lead-lga-green-paper-adult-social-care)

# councillor



## Preparing for civil emergencies

**In 2017, local government colleagues faced the challenge of dealing with the most devastating emergencies we can imagine.**

The attacks in Westminster, Manchester, London Bridge and Islington were a terrible illustration of the ongoing terrorism risk we must remain vigilant to, while the fire at Grenfell Tower highlighted the importance of councils visibly responding to and leading their communities following a disaster. The Novichok incidents in south Wiltshire in 2018 also highlight that some risks can be extremely difficult to predict.

Based on the experiences and feedback of colleagues, the LGA has updated its guidance for councillors on civil emergencies. Intentionally, it focuses throughout on the themes of leadership and communication.

In an emergency, as with business as usual, councillors are not involved in the operational response led by officers but must play a leadership role that includes:

- political leadership – ensuring that their council is meeting its obligations under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, by

preparing for and responding to emergencies

- civic leadership – giving a focal point for the local area during an emergency situation
- community leadership – helping to increase community resilience, and supporting communities' emergency responses and the period of recovery.

The political leadership of a council should ensure that councils are managerially equipped and resourced to plan for, respond to and recover from emergencies.

This will involve making significant policy and funding decisions to help plan for emergencies, and promoting joint working and mutual aid arrangements with other local authorities and agencies.

In a response situation, it will include supporting officers to respond to emergencies, enabling them to defend key decisions and helping to minimise reputational risk to the authority.

Political leaders may also be required

to consider resourcing recommendations from the strategic or recovery coordination groups, or make representations to government for additional financial resources or other assistance. They must also ensure recovery functions are mainstreamed and that lessons learnt are addressed and shared more widely.

The emergencies that councils responded to in 2017 highlighted the critical significance of councils' civic leadership as a key feature of an effective emergency response and recovery.

This is about giving a visible focal point for the local area during an emergency, offering information, support, reassurance and comfort, and standing alongside representatives of different communities and organisations. Media and communications will be a critical enabler of the council's civic leadership role.

Visible and empathetic community leadership by ward councillors at a very local level is hugely important. Community leadership cuts across preparedness, response and recovery; councillors need to understand their communities, local vulnerabilities, community networks, assets and businesses to help develop their resilience, and then use this information and capacity to inform and support an emergency response if it becomes necessary.

The advent of social media has increased opportunities for effective communication with local residents, but can also create challenges for councils and councillors. Councillors should bear in mind general guidance on using social media, work closely with their communications teams and avoid pitfalls such as providing unverified information.

Community leadership will also be crucial as communities rebuild and move through periods of recovery, when ward councillors can act both as the voice of the community within the council, and vice versa.



'A councillor's guide to civil emergencies' is free to download at [www.local.gov.uk/publications](http://www.local.gov.uk/publications)

# elections

## Looking ahead to May's local vote

The large majority of the more than 8,350 council seats that will fall vacant in May's local elections were last contested four years ago on General Election day 2015.

With David Cameron poised to form the first majority Conservative government for almost a quarter of a century, his local government colleagues added 28 local authorities and more than 500 extra councillors to their tally.

By contrast, both Labour and the Liberal Democrats fell back, in keeping with their lacklustre General Election showing, whereas UKIP racked up more than 100 gains and finished in third place in votes (though not in seats) across all types of authority.

The party took majority control of its first council (Thanet) even as Nigel Farage was failing to get elected in its South constituency.

One upshot of these results was that the two largest parties (Labour and the Conservatives) became more dominant in English local government than at any stage since reorganisation in the early 1970s. They ran more than four in five of all councils and shared a party affiliation with 82 per cent of all councillors. That pattern has continued to this day and is unlikely to change much in May.

Instead, the focus will be on how far Labour can eat into Conservative territory, both to narrow the gap between them on the LGA's



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



boards and committees and to demonstrate that the party has a credible chance of winning a General Election.

Labour does not have much room to advance in the metropolitan boroughs, but it needs to up its share of seats significantly in the districts closer to the 20 per cent mark. That may sound paltry, but compares with 17 per cent in 2011 and just 15 per cent four years ago.

The direct comparison with 2015 should not be overdone, though. There are wholesale boundary changes in 56 of the 248 councils with elections and another 20 whose boundaries were revised in 2016 or 2018; no elections at all in districts within Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire pending reorganisation; and five newly amalgamated councils (two unitaries and three districts) holding their inaugural contests.

All this could yet be disrupted by Brexit. It is possible that a General Election will be held on 2 May itself, or even earlier. If the UK postpones implementation of Article 50, we might find ourselves voting in European Parliament elections on 23 May – and it is a sure bet that the local elections would be held over until then too, if that is the case.

Councillors will bemoan that this detracts attention from the vital choices that electors need to make about their local governance, but sadly that is but a minor blip among the current uncertainties.



### local by-elections

#### Charnwood, Anstey

CON GAIN FROM LIB DEM

1.6% over Lab

Turnout 18.8%

#### Cumbria, Kent Estuary

LIB DEM HELD

32.1% over Con

Turnout 44.2%

#### East Sussex, Bexhill West

IND HELD

20.3% over Con

Turnout 38%

#### Rother, Bexhill St Marks

IND HELD

28.9% over Con

Turnout 43%

#### South Lakeland, Arnside & Milnthorpe

LIB DEM HELD

27.5% over Con

Turnout 44.2%



For more information about these and previous local by-elections, including breakdowns of results by political party, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/first](http://www.local.gov.uk/first)

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