

first

No.633 March 2019

www.local.gov.uk

the magazine for local government

#CouncilsCan

“The Spending Review **will be make or break for vital local services**”

Lord Porter, LGA Chairman

4, 10

Local 
Government
Association



12

Brexit preparations
Seeking best outcomes for councils



14

Fire inspections
Sharing best practice



27

Rural services
Pressures in rural areas

LGA

19

ANNUAL CONFERENCE
AND EXHIBITION **2019**

#LGAconf**19**

BOURNEMOUTH

2-4 JULY | WWW.LOCAL.GOV.UK/CONFERENCE

BOOK YOUR PLACE TODAY FOR THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT EVENT OF THE YEAR

**THE NATIONAL VOICE
OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

Cash cliff edge



The LGA has launched its campaign for sustainable funding for councils, ahead of the Government's 2019 Spending Review.

You can find out more about the campaign in this month's **first** (p10), in future editions of the magazine, and by visiting www.local.gov.uk/spending-review-2019. We also have our response to government consultations on business rates retention and fair funding reforms (p11).

Elsewhere, we take a look at Brexit and particularly the LGA and government resources available for councils preparing for all the possible scenarios (p12).

There are features on how fire and rescue authorities are responding to the new inspection regime (p14), the e-charging infrastructure needed to support electric cars (p16), and the performance of public health since it was returned to councils in 2013 (p20).

Our lead comment is from Sophie Walker, the outgoing Leader of the Women's Equality Party, who says don't wait for any Brexit deal to get on with the job of renewing local government (p23).

We also hear from Cllr John Fuller, Chairman of the District Councils' Network, on its recent annual conference (p26) and from Tees Valley Mayor Ben Houchen on the purchase of Durham Tees Valley Airport (p19).

Lord Porter is Chairman of the LGA

Editor **Karen Thornton**

Design & print **CPL** www.cpl.co.uk

Advertising john.wheaton@cpl.co.uk

Write to **first**: Local Government Association
18 Smith Square,
London
SW1P 3HZ

Email first@local.gov.uk
Tel **editorial** 020 7664 3294
Tel **advertising** 01223 378 042

Photography **Getty Images** and **iStock.com**
unless otherwise stated.

Circulation 18,200 (February 2019)
first is published online at www.local.gov.uk/first at least two days before the magazine. To unsubscribe email first@oscar-research.co.uk

The inclusion of an advert or insert in **first** does not imply endorsement by the LGA of any product or service. Contributors' views are their own and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of the LGA.

Local
Government
Association

contents

news

- 4** Spending Review campaign
Council tax support
- 5** Welfare safety net
Taxi licensing
Waste consultation
- 6** Social rent homes
Illegal tobacco
Parks funding
- 7** Concessionary bus fares
Shisha bars
Brexit funding



- 8** Asylum-seeking children
Early years education
Child obesity

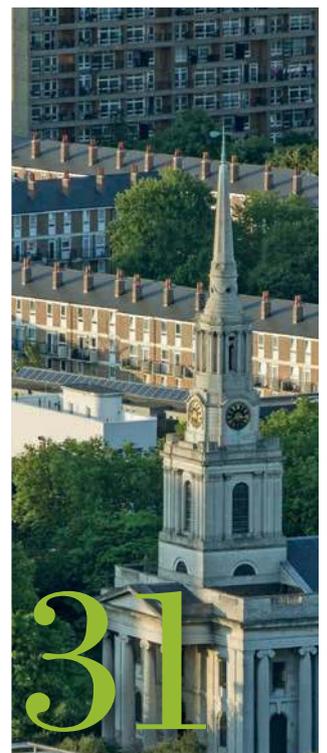
features

- 10** Spending Review
- 11** Fair funding
- 12** Brexit preparations
- 14** Fire authority inspections
- 16** Future transport
- 19** Airport investment
- 20** Public health



comment

- 23** Representation
- 24** LGA Chairman and group leaders
- 26** DCN conference
- 27** Rural services



regulars

- 9** Letters
- 28** Councillor
- 30** Parliament – FGM
- 31** Local elections

26

16

4

14

20

31



#CouncilsCan: LGA launches Spending Review campaign

The Local Government Association has launched its #CouncilsCan campaign to influence the forthcoming Spending Review by warning about the growing risk to vital local services if the Government does not take action to secure the financial sustainability of councils.

Between 2010 and 2020, councils will have lost almost 60p of every £1 the Government had provided for services.

Some councils are being pushed to the brink by this unprecedented loss of funding and an ongoing surge in demand for children's services, adult social care services and homelessness support.

The LGA has warned that cherished local – but discretionary – services such as the maintenance of parks, improving food hygiene and safety, certain bus services, cultural activities and council tax support for those in financial difficulty – face being drastically cut back by councils across the country to plug growing funding gaps.

It said that these services are vital in their own right as they help build communities people want to live in. Cutting these discretionary – often preventative – services is also a false economy as they can help alleviate pressure on statutory services.

However, the LGA said that, with the right

funding and powers, councils can continue to lead their local areas, improve residents' lives, reduce demand for public services and save money for the taxpayer.

LGA Chairman Lord Porter said: "If the Government fails to fund local government adequately then it will be our local communities and economies who will suffer the consequences.

"The Spending Review will be make or break for vital local services, and securing the financial sustainability of councils must be the top priority.

"This is the only way to ensure councils can meet their legal duties to provide dignified care for our elderly and disabled, protect children, and prevent and reduce homelessness and protect the wide range of other valued local services that also make such a positive difference to communities and people's lives."

The LGA warning was followed by the LGiU's annual survey into local government funding that found nearly all councils plan to raise council tax this year, while one in 20 councils – 22 councils in England – that they are concerned they will not be able to deliver the legal minimum service for residents.

● You can read more about the LGA's #CouncilsCan Spending Review campaign on page 10/11 and p24.

news in brief

Council tax support

Ninety per cent of English councils have reduced council tax support, new analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies found. An extra 1.3 million working-age households are sent a council tax bill and another 1.2 million are billed for more than they would have been. Cllr Richard Watts, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said: "Council tax support schemes are no longer fully funded, with almost £2 billion – around half of the original funding – removed between 2013 and 2020. The Spending Review needs to ensure councils have the full amount of funding required to provide council tax support to those who need it."

Government 'in denial'

The Public Accounts Committee has accused the Government of being in "denial about the perilous state" of council funding and used its latest report to urge it to do more to understand the impact of funding reductions on local services. Cllr Richard Watts, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said: "We are pleased the committee has reinforced our warning that funding cuts and demand pressures are pushing local services to the brink. Fully funding councils is the only way to ensure councils can continue to provide all of the valued local services that make such a positive difference to communities and people's lives."

Settlement confirmed

The Government has confirmed the final Local Government Finance Settlement with funding for adults and children's services, potholes and roads being given to councils. The settlement also confirmed that negative revenue support grant will be eliminated and a further 15 areas will pilot 75 per cent business rates retention. Lord Porter, LGA Chairman, said councils still face a funding gap of more than £3 billion this year. He added: "The upcoming Spending Review is absolutely crucial for councils. If we truly value our local services then we have to be prepared to pay for them."

Welfare safety net needed

Millions of low-income households facing financial difficulty, growing rent arrears and debt could improve their life chances if councils received the funding they need to provide a vital local safety net.

Councils used to receive specific government funding for local welfare schemes, but this stopped in 2015. It was being used to pay for short-term crisis support, to support people through change, for example moving on from a period of homelessness, and to prevent financial hardship.

Having lost 60p of every £1 it had from government to spend on services since 2010, providing crisis payments and in-kind support to those in need from local budgets has become a stretch too far for many councils.

This has led to many having either to scale back or close these schemes completely in recent years.

Councils have received £800 million to provide Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) to residents between 2015 and 2020. This is given by the Government to help support households affected by the removal of the spare-room subsidy, Universal Credit, the benefit cap, and changes to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates.

However, this funding is increasingly having to be used to make up systemic shortfalls and there is no guarantee that it will continue after 2020.

In 2017/18, councils reported spending 28 per cent of their DHP allocation on the benefit cap. In some areas this is significantly higher.

Cllr Richard Watts, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said: "Unless local support is effective, there is a risk that we entrench poverty and its associated problems.

"It is vital that the Government's forthcoming Spending Review recognises the importance of local support to achieving its wider aims of reforming the welfare system and improving outcomes for low-income households."

The LGA has published a new report 'Reshaping Financial Support' that sets out how councils are working with low-income households, improving advice provision and amending debt collection practices.

It plans to deliver some pathfinders with partners and councils later in 2019 to take forward the report's recommendations and further develop and explore local approaches to strengthening and delivering financial support. #Councils Can



Waste overhaul

The Government is consulting over proposals to overhaul the country's waste system, cut plastic pollution, and move towards a more circular economy.

It has given a 12-week window to seek views on its plans that will make up a key part of the upcoming Environment Bill, to be introduced early in the second session of Parliament.

This follows recent statistics showing UK waste recycling rates from households was 45.7 per cent in 2017, short of the EU's 50 per cent target by 2020.

The Government aims to introduce a consistent set of recyclable materials for collection across England; a Deposit Return Scheme; and a tax on plastic packing that does not meet the minimum threshold of 30 per cent.

New analysis published by the Treasury highlights the net benefit to the UK economy of the changes will be between £800 million and £1 billion.

Cllr Martin Tett, Environment spokesman for the LGA, said: "The LGA has long called for producers to cover the full cost of recycling and disposing of their packaging, and we are pleased the Government has listened to councils and outlined plans to do this.

"Councils are playing their part when it comes to improving recycling rates with our waste collection services diverting millions of tonnes of waste from landfill every year.

"But we recognise that by working with government, there is more to be done to boost recycling to reach national targets and even higher standards.

"We are clear, however, that any changes to waste services and additional cost burdens on councils, which are already under enormous financial pressure, need to be fully funded.

"With councils in England facing an overall funding gap of £8 billion by 2025, it is vital that the Spending Review fully funds the local services our communities rely on, such as waste and recycling."

Taxi licensing reforms

Updated taxi and minicab licensing guidance has been published by the Department for Transport, which contains many LGA recommendations.

The Government has pledged to legislate on national minimum standards for drivers, establish a national licensing database and look at restricting drivers operating hundreds of miles away from where they are licensed.

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

"Proposals to improve safeguarding, establish national minimum standards and create national enforcement powers are essential to provide safer journeys for passengers and fairer business for drivers. The need for legislative reform to taxi laws that date back to the 19th century is now urgent.

"Councils have been doing what they can to strengthen licensing processes, such as signing up to the voluntary LGA-commissioned National Register of Revocations and Refusals. We are delighted that government recognises



the value in mandating our initiatives and we look forward to working with government to develop them, including the issue of cross-border restrictions.

"However, given significant funding pressures on councils, government needs to ensure that licensing authorities can recover the costs of proportionate compliance and enforcement activity linked to these recommendations and other work, from driver and operator fees."



Parks funding

The Government has announced that councils will benefit from more than £13 million of funding to improve parks and green spaces.

There will be £9.7 million allocated for day-to-day maintenance costs, essential playground repairs and the creation of new green spaces. An additional £2.75 million will also be invested in the pocket parks plus programme, which will support communities to take the lead in transforming their neglected and derelict spaces.

Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson, Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, said: "The LGA has long made the case for the importance of parks and green spaces to people's health and wellbeing, so we are pleased that government has acknowledged this with this much-needed investment.

"Our public parks and green spaces are some of our most cherished local services, and this injection of money will boost councils' efforts to keep these open and in good condition, despite facing significant funding pressures.

"The money local government has to provide vital services such as parks and open spaces is running out fast, and huge uncertainty remains about how councils will pay for services into the next decade and beyond.

"With councils in England facing an overall funding gap of £8 billion by 2025, the forthcoming Spending Review will be make or break for local services and it is vital the Government uses this to put local government on a sustainable footing into the next decade and beyond."

Communities Secretary James Brokenshire MP said: "Our parks and green spaces are huge assets to our towns and cities, offering precious spaces for all of us to get together, to exercise and to play.

"This latest funding will support bold proposals to help renovate and restore existing parks and create new vibrant, safe green spaces for our communities."

Social rent homes would cut billions in housing benefit

New analysis commissioned by the LGA has revealed that building 100,000 government-funded social rent homes a year over the past two decades would have cut billions from the housing benefit bill, provided higher disposable income for tenants and generated significant economic returns.

The LGA said its new research shows why the Government should use the Spending Review to work with councils to ensure that the genuine renaissance in council house building – needed to increase housing supply, boost affordability and reduce homelessness – is a success.

The LGA commissioned Cambridge Economics to assess the implications if 100,000 government-funded social rent homes had been built each year over the past two decades.

It found that:

- Building 100,000 social rent homes each year for the past 20 years would have enabled all housing benefit claimants living in the private rented sector to move to social rent homes by 2016
- The housing benefit claimants that would have moved from the private rented sector to social rent homes would have

benefited to the tune of £1.8 billion in extra disposable income over the period

- Overall, the Government would have had to borrow an additional £152 billion in 2017 prices to build the homes over the 20-year period. With every pound spent on building homes generating £2.84 in return, the cost of investing in social housing would have been offset by additional tax revenues from the construction industry – as well as welfare savings from moving housing benefit claimants to lower cost social rent homes. The rising proportion of housing benefit caseloads in the private rented sector has cost an extra £7 billion in real terms over the past decade.

Cllr Martin Tett, LGA Housing spokesman, said: "Every penny spent on building new social housing is an investment that has the potential to bring significant economic and social returns.

"Now is the time to reverse the decline in council housing over the past few decades. This is the only way to help families struggling to meet housing costs, supply homes to rent and reduce homelessness while also offering economic growth and lowering the housing benefit bill." #CouncilsCan

Illegal tobacco harming efforts to cut smoking

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, while non-duty paid, or bootlegged, cigarettes are UK brands usually brought into the country from abroad and sold illegally.

In recent prosecutions, illegal stashes of cigarettes have been found in sophisticated hiding places in the walls and floors of shops and secret panels in cupboards. Many fake cigarettes contain even higher levels of toxic ingredients 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 that a

lit cigarette will self-extinguish if not actively smoked.

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."





Funding gap for free bus pass scheme hits £652m

The funding gap for the concessionary bus fare scheme in England, which gives free off-peak bus travel for older and disabled people, has grown to an estimated £652 million, new analysis for the LGA reveals.

Council leaders are warning that, unless government addresses this widening gap in the Spending Review, vulnerable residents could be left isolated and unsupported, particularly those in rural areas.

The National Concessionary Travel Scheme is a statutory duty administered by councils, that are increasingly having to fill the gap between the cost and government funding for the scheme with their own limited resources.

To try to do this, councils have been forced to reduce spending on supported bus services, which is now £122 million less than 2010 – a reduction of 33 per cent.

Currently, nearly half of all bus routes in England receive partial or complete subsidies from councils and are under threat.

The LGA is warning that the underfunding of subsidised bus routes, coupled with councils facing an overall funding gap of £3.1 billion

in 2019/20, means that local authorities will struggle to maintain current subsidies for bus routes which will continue to fall unless they are given the funding to protect them.

Cllr Martin Tett, the LGA's Transport spokesman, said: "Local authorities want to protect the bus services that are a vital service for our communities and a lifeline for our most vulnerable residents to go shopping, pick up medication, attend doctor appointments or socialise with friends and family.

"But, because of significant funding pressures and the underfunding of the national free bus pass scheme, councils have been forced to reduce or scale back these services and review subsidised routes, and even reduce spending on other vital services to plug the gap.

"Properly funding the national free bus pass scheme is essential if the Government wants councils to be able to maintain our essential bus services, reduce congestion and protect vital routes. If this is not addressed in the Spending Review it could lead to older people having a free bus pass but no bus to travel on." #CouncilsCan

Licensing powers needed to tackle rogue shisha bars

Licensing powers are needed to help councils tackle shisha bars that repeatedly flout smoking and fire safety laws – and in the worst cases are linked to organised crime, the LGA has urged.

The number of shisha bars has more than trebled in recent years, which has caused misery for residents living near rogue premises linked to persistent anti-social behaviour and has led to concern about the health impacts of shisha.

Shisha premises that illegally allow indoor smoking or allow those under 18 to smoke the flavoured tobacco can currently be tackled using smoke-free laws.

However, prosecutions are taking up to a year, and bar owners are increasingly undeterred by one-off fines of up to £2,500.

The true ownership of shisha premises is often deliberately secretive, which hinders the ability of councils and police to take effective action against them.

The LGA is calling for government to

modernise the list of activities councils can 'opt-in' to licence, including shisha bars. This would make it easier to monitor them and seize equipment or revoke licences for repeat offenders breaching conditions or breaking the law.

It would also strengthen the ability of town hall public health teams to ensure owners work with them to educate customers about the misconception that smoking shisha is safer than smoking cigarettes.

According to the World Health Organization, smoking a shisha pipe for one hour can be equivalent to smoking 200 cigarettes.

Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: "We would always rather work with shisha bars to ensure they operate legally rather than prosecute them, but café owners are more likely to obey the law if they knew they might lose their licence."

news in brief

Age UK research into social care

According to research by Age UK, "more than 50,000 older people have now died waiting for care during the 700 days since the Government first said it would publish a Care Green Paper".

It said that this demonstrates why the Government must come forward with proposals to reform and properly fund social care.

Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Work to find a long-term funding solution for adult social care has been kicked into the long grass by successive governments for the past two decades.

"Now is the time for answers. Every day that is spent further defining the problem and consulting on changes is another day in which people's lives are not being lived to the full."

Brexit funding

The Government recently outlined details of £56.5 million that has been made available for councils' Brexit preparations, including £20 million for this financial year.

Cllr Kevin Bentley, Chairman of the LGA's Brexit Taskforce, said: "It is positive that the Government has allocated additional resources to local government for Brexit preparations, and has listened to the LGA by making some of the funding available this year.

"Councils are taking a lead on preparations for Brexit and are as prepared as they can be given the gaps in information and uncertainty surrounding the process. We are pleased that the Government has confirmed that any additional responsibilities resulting in new financial pressures for councils arising from Brexit will be fully funded."

Rehousing action

As part of the Rough Sleeping Strategy, the Government has announced a further 42 local authorities will receive Rapid Rehousing Pathway funding. These interventions all work to help rough sleepers, and those at risk of rough sleeping, to access the support and settled housing they need to leave the streets for good.

LGA Housing spokesman Cllr Martin Tett said: "Funding for local authorities will help council efforts to try to tackle homelessness. Councils are determined to prevent homelessness from happening in the first place and support families affected."

Call for register

The Children's Commissioner is calling for a compulsory home education register, stronger measures to tackle "off-rolling", more support for families who home educate, and decisive action against unregistered schools.

This comes after it found almost 60,000 children in England are being home-schooled.

Cllr Anntoinette Bramble, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "Councils have long called for the powers and appropriate funding to enter homes or other premises to check a child's schooling.

"Placing a legal duty on parents to register home-schooled children with their local authority would help councils to monitor how children are being educated and prevent them from disappearing from services designed to keep them safe."

Childhood obesity

Pioneering approaches to tackling childhood obesity are to be spearheaded by a specially selected group of councils, each receiving an initial £10,000 funding.

The Childhood Obesity Trailblazer Programme will mean 13 local authorities from across the country trialling new approaches in their communities, with a particular focus on reducing the 'deprivation gap'.

Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "No child should be at a disadvantage in life because of where they are from and this programme aims to support councils to reduce this gap."

Ethical standards

The Committee on Standards in Public Life has recently published a report on local government ethical standards.

It includes a number of recommendations, including a call for the LGA to produce a code of conduct model and for tougher sanctions for councillors investigated for misconduct.

Lord Porter, Chairman of the LGA, said: "Standards across local government are very high and the LGA already works closely with councils and councillors to promote good conduct and leadership.

"A locally-led approach to standards – underpinned by a national framework – remains the right approach and the LGA is happy to play a leading role in updating a code of conduct to help guide our members."

Asylum-seeking children spend doubles in four years

The amount of money spent by councils on providing support for unaccompanied children seeking asylum has almost doubled in four years, latest figures show.

The LGA says councils are eager to build on their strong track record of supporting those resettling in new communities, including lone children seeking asylum. However, unprecedented funding pressures and growing demand are challenging their ambitions to give the best support possible.

It is calling on the Government to complete its long-awaited review of the cost to councils of supporting unaccompanied children, and for this to offer the long-term funding councils require to supply the care and support that children in their care, and those leaving that care, deserve.

Latest figures show that the number of asylum-seeking children and young people in care in England under 18 rose from 2,760 in 2014/15 to 4,480 in 2017/18.

Councils spent more than £152 million on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in 2017/18 – an increase of 95 per cent on the £77 million spent in 2014/15.

Meanwhile, councils are also seeing an increase of more than 50 per cent in two years in unaccompanied children leaving care when they turn 18, but remaining the responsibility of the local authority. There were 4,660 unaccompanied children leaving care in 2016, which went up to 7,130 in 2018.

These rising costs and challenges are contributing to the soaring demand pressures on councils' children's services, which face

a £3.1 billion funding gap by 2025 just to continue operating at current levels.

Cllr David Simmonds, Chairman of the LGA's Asylum, Migration and Refugee Task Group, said: "Councils have a strong track record supporting those resettling in the UK and are committed to providing the best support possible. However, given the significant financial pressures councils are under, achieving the level of support new arrivals are legally entitled to is becoming more and more challenging.

"This is why the Government needs to announce the findings of its long overdue review into the funding of support given by councils for unaccompanied children.

"This must pledge to properly fund the joint commitment to support unaccompanied children, young people and families starting a new life in the UK. We also need to see the Government tackle the wider funding shortfall facing children's services in the forthcoming Spending Review." #CouncilsCan



MPs warning over early years education

MPs have warned that the Government is failing to tackle social injustice in early years education.

The Education Committee is calling on the Government to reform the 30 hours' free childcare offer and target provision to early education for disadvantaged children.

It also says that maintained nursery schools should be fully funded, and that the Government should join up early years services and build on the success of children's centres.

Cllr Anntoinette Bramble, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "We are pleased the Education Committee recognises the important role maintained nursery schools play in supporting disadvantaged children and backs our call for them to get the funding they need.

"Councils have grave concerns about the

future of maintained nurseries if the current funding does not continue beyond 2020.

This could have a detrimental impact on disadvantaged children and those with special educational needs, for whom maintained nurseries supply a lifeline of vital support.

"This provision is now under threat unless government commits to an extra year of funding in 2020/21 as part of wider work to find a long-term sustainable funding solution in the Spending Review.

"Good quality early years education is vital in helping children get the best start in life, and despite the good intentions of the 30-hour free childcare scheme, insufficient funding is impacting on the quality of provision and support for children with special needs, as providers struggle to balance budgets."

letters



The facts about illegal tobacco

While many people working in health may welcome recent publicity by the LGA calling on the courts to take the issue of illegal tobacco more seriously (see **first** 632), we in local government need to get our facts absolutely right so we can speak loudly and clearly on this issue.

Trading standards teams up and down the country are helping to disrupt the supply of illegal tobacco and cigarettes in local communities, despite funding cuts and budget pressures, and the market in 2019 is actually smaller than it was two decades ago.

However, the trade in illegal cigarettes is about so much more than 'fake fags'. Illegal tobacco is a global trade and many of the biggest hauls have been genuine cigarettes that are non-duty paid, or specially made foreign brands for the smuggled market.

A timeline gives some perspective here. In 2000, one in five cigarettes in the UK was illegal, prompting the EU to impose legally binding agreements on tobacco companies in return for dropping a major smuggling lawsuit.

In 2013, the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee claimed British tobacco companies were fuelling the black market by deliberately oversupplying cigarettes to European countries with known smuggling routes into Britain and, in 2014, a major British tobacco multinational was fined for breaching anti-smuggling laws.

The ongoing focus on the health risks from 'fake fags' might make good headlines but ignores the complexity of the issue that local authorities are dealing with and the measures needed to tackle it.

There has never been any evidence that illegal tobacco is worse for health for one simple reason: the legal product is already filled with dozens of cancer-causing chemicals and kills half of lifelong smokers who don't quit. However well-intentioned, we must not and cannot convey a message that there is such a thing as a less harmful choice of cigarette.

I – and, I am sure, most of my colleagues – welcome the call for the courts to take illegal tobacco more seriously and stop treating this as a victimless crime.

But if we want to see greater progress, we also need a retail licensing system whereby the right to sell tobacco can be removed from repeat offenders who sell illegal tobacco or sell to children. It would also mean an automatic offence for anyone selling tobacco illegally in a pub, club, market or from their home.

Clr Jon Davies (Lab), Lambeth Council

sound bites

Clr Matthew Lee (Con, South Kesteven)

"This is why @southkesteven will bring forward plans to build council homes and affordable homes. @Kenthelyon our new Assistant Chief Executive, has just been recruited to deliver this promise."

<https://twitter.com/clrmatthewlee>

Clr Selina Seesunkur (Con, Waltham Forest)

"My tour continues in #Ealing Some great ideas from @SeemaStk on the regeneration of #HighStreets Ealing looks great and has come a long way since my sister lived there some years ago."

<https://twitter.com/selinathinks>

Clr Garry Bridges (Lab, Manchester)

"Houses going up at the Minehead site in Old Moat. New affordable rented housing and shared ownership mix in an affordable development with extra community facilities."

<https://twitter.com/GarryBridges>

Clr Andrea Wall (Lab, Halton)

"Thank you to Peter T, Charlie, Angela & Rachael for joining me on my Kingsway Ward community litter pick today. We managed to do Kingsway, Leigh Ave, Frederick St & Dickson St and collected four bags full of litter. #LitterHeroes #Community."

<https://twitter.com/ClrAndreaWall>

Clr Rabina Khan (Lib Dem, Tower Hamlets)

"This LGBT+ History Month, let us celebrate our identities and our freedom of expression. Let us embrace people from all communities and be proud of who we are. That is the Liberal Democrat way."

<https://twitter.com/RabinaKhan>

Clr Karen Walker (Ind, Bath & North East Somerset)

"Good meeting with #TrueSpeed this afternoon to discuss plans for public engagement event on Wednesday! Working with them on installation of internet at new community library. #LovePeasedown."

<https://twitter.com/Karenwalker3434>

Review funding streams

While details of EU succession funding, in the shape of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, remain uncertain, this is surely a unique opportunity to review all forms of local government funding streams and seek integration into single, place-based funds.

Currently, there are some 70 funding streams, worth £23 billion, managed by 22 separate government departments and agencies. If this were integrated into single, joined-up, devolved funding pools this would not only complement the development of local industrial strategies but support local enterprise partnerships in maximising returns in respect of growth, regeneration and skills.

Clr Clarence Barrett (Ind), Treasurer, LGA Independent Group, and London Borough of Havering



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

features

Time to plug funding gap

The Spending Review needs to help councils balance the books, safeguard services people rely on and improve lives

Earlier this month, we launched our campaign to influence the forthcoming Spending Review, reiterating our warnings of the growing risk to vital local services if the Government does not take action to secure the financial sustainability of councils.

While we don't know the exact date of the next Spending Review, our #CouncilsCan campaign kicked off by highlighting that the money local government has to maintain the services our communities rely on is running out fast and the Spending Review will be make or break for councils.

Councils have experienced disproportionately large reductions in government funding over this decade, in comparison to the rest of the public sector. Councils will have lost almost 60p out of every £1 the Government had provided for services.

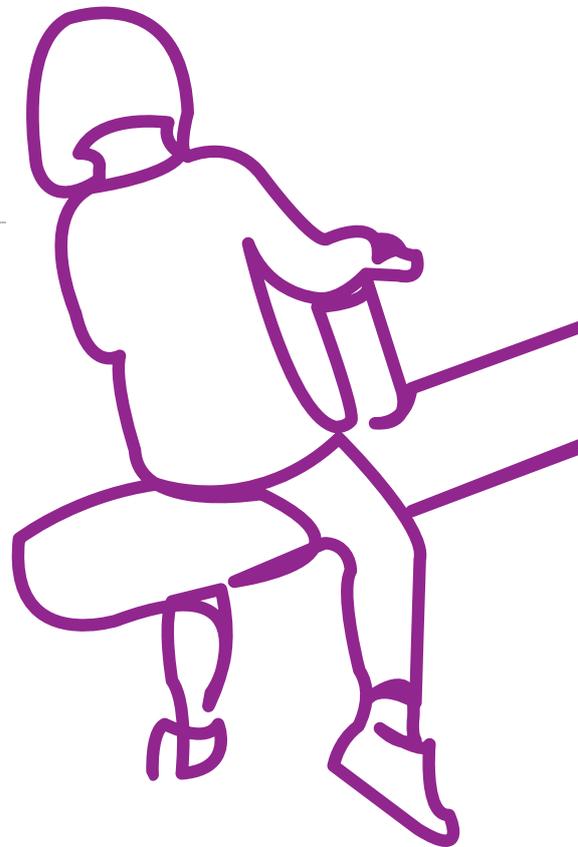
But what does this actually amount to? The bigger picture is that councils in England are now facing an overall funding gap of £8 billion by 2025. And this is just to stand still and incorporate additional demand – it

does not even take into account important improvements in local services and councils' prevention and early intervention work.

Councils are being pushed to the brink by this unprecedented loss of funding and an ongoing surge in demand for some legal duties, in particular to protect children, and supply adult social care support and homelessness services. This is on top of having to absorb other cost pressures, such as higher national insurance contributions, the apprenticeship levy and the National Living Wage.

It is unsurprising that more and more councils are struggling to balance their books. Money is increasingly having to be diverted from optional services, which help build communities people want to live in, to plug growing funding gaps, while some councils have already been forced to cut their services back to the legal minimum 'core offer'.

But, while the funding is critical, our campaign is not just about asking for more money – it's about highlighting how councils can achieve the best for their communities



with the right powers and investment. In many cases, councils already have proven track records of how they have managed to keep successful local services running through improvement and innovation, despite a lack of funding.

While these many examples show how councils are doing what they can with what they have, many efficiencies and savings have now been made, and the right powers and funding are needed for councils to make a positive difference to residents' lives and continue to reduce pressures on the rest of the public sector.

Without urgent changes, it is the people who rely on and value council services that will suffer. Councils make our communities places we want to live in and people rightly look to their council to support them and their family, and to be at the heart of their community. This campaign wants to put the issues councils are facing to the top of the Government's agenda. It is crucial it addresses these issues in the upcoming Spending Review.



See p30 for more on the LGA's work in Parliament. **For more information on the #CouncilsCan campaign**, please visit www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns



Making funding fair

The fair funding review and business rates retention reform need to be sustainable, evidence-based and improve clarity to help councils plan their budgets

This month, the LGA has responded to the Government's consultations on its review of local authority relative needs and resources (commonly known as 'the fair funding review') and its business rates retention reform.

The LGA has been clear that the current system of funding distribution is opaque, overly complex and out of date. It has been working closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on its review to try to ensure it is objective and transparent and that there is extensive engagement with local government.

The distributional consequences of the review mean that it is important to supply a robust evidence base behind the decisions

made. In its consultation response, the LGA said councils will want to know that all the factors suggested that affect their need to spend have been tested as part of the work. If some of these factors have been excluded or ruled out after analysis, there should be an explanation as to why that is the case.

The LGA also said a lack of clarity on formulas for adult social care, children and young people's services, public health, fire and rescue services, concessionary fares and home-to-school transport at this stage will be a concern for councils.

Fundamentally, the LGA is clear that the outcome of the review will not be sustainable unless it is delivered with sufficient additional funding because councils are facing an overall funding gap of £8 billion by 2025.

It argues that the review should be taking place in a revenue-neutral manner; the Government must give sufficient additional resource as part of the 2019 Spending Review.

Meanwhile, the Government has also been consulting on options for the reform of elements of the business rates retention system in England from 2020/21 onwards.

The LGA has responded on a range of issues from partial or phased resets, the safety net, tier splits, valuations and pooling, and again raised the need for the Government to introduce measures to tackle business rates avoidance. This includes willingness to explore phased resets (where growth is always kept for a certain number of years) and exploring an alternative way of administering the system and dealing with appeals.

It remains concerned about the lack of clarity over funding for local authorities. With further business rates retention, the results of the Spending Review and the outcome of the review of relative needs and resources all being implemented from April 2020, local authorities have no reliable basis on which to plan their budgets appropriately. At the moment it is unclear how much funding there will be from April 2020, how it will be distributed, and the means of delivery.

As a result, local authorities will have to make assumptions about future funding and, in some cases, this will result in unnecessary cutbacks to services that could be avoided with more certainty. This is unacceptable, especially at a time when councils will have dealt with a £15 billion reduction to their annual core government grant over this decade.



For more information or to read the consultation responses in full, please visit www.local.gov.uk/topics/finance-and-business-rates

Preparing for Brexit

Councils are working hard to be ready for any Brexit scenario, but questions remain about the longer-term agenda for post-Brexit local government



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



As our work continues to get the best outcomes for our sector from Brexit, and despite the uncertainty and gaps in information, communities and councils have all been working very hard to prepare as best we can for many different possibilities.

In addition to our longer-term agenda on EU funding, workforce issues, and shaping post-Brexit Britain, our immediate focus has been on 'no deal', as the Government has ramped up its own no-deal preparations. However, much of this work will also be relevant in the case of an agreed deal.

A key issue has been around information. We have been successful with our urging that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) launch a resource hub pulling together all the guidance and communications for local government (see www.gov.uk/guidance/local-government-brexit-preparedness). This sits alongside a broader Government hub for citizens and organisations.

The LGA has also been updating its own resources and information for councils (see

www.local.gov.uk/brexit), and we have highlighted some recent developments and issues around the longer-term agenda for post-Brexit local government below.

Funding

In late January, Communities Secretary James Brokenshire MP announced Brexit funding for local government. His ministerial statement outlined details of the £56.5 million that has been made available for council preparations, including £20 million for this financial year (see <https://bit.ly/2CTuT2q>).

This is an important example of how government has listened to the needs of councils. Addressing our calls for some of the funding to be available this year shows the commitment that the Secretary of State has towards local government and the important role we play. Additionally, the Government has confirmed that any additional responsibilities resulting in new financial pressures for councils arising from Brexit will be funded. Council chief executives will have received a letter from MHCLG with further details of the funding arrangements and expectations.

EU settlement scheme

The EU settlement scheme is the mechanism by which non-UK EU citizens register with the Home Office to remain living in the UK after the end of the withdrawal transition period. The scheme has undergone several pilots and is now going through a public pilot phase.

Information has been sent to directors of children's services as councils will have responsibility over completing applications for looked-after children. The LGA is working with the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services and the Home Office to push for clear communications to councils about their responsibilities for vulnerable adults.

Following LGA lobbying, the UK Government announced its aim to protect citizens' rights in the event that the UK leaves the EU without a deal. Some of the detail about how that will happen is now available, at www.gov.uk/guidance/european-temporary-leave-to-remain-in-the-uk, and the Home Office has published a toolkit of materials for councils and community leaders on EU Settled Status (see www.gov.uk/government/publications/eu-settlement-scheme-community-leaders-toolkit).



Official advice

The Government has published an array of Brexit-related guidance for councils and other public bodies and organisations, on everything from data protection to teacher qualifications, social care to food labelling, and local resilience to citizens' rights.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has published a consolidated list of guidance for local government at www.gov.uk/guidance/local-government-brexit-preparedness, and will be updating it regularly.

It has also established a network of nine local authority chief executives from across England. This group will engage with councils in their regions to share information on their Brexit preparations and also feed back relevant national policy that could have implications for local services, businesses and residents.

You can find out who your region's representative is at www.gov.uk/government/news/mhclg-eu-exit-local-information-sharing. You can also email the ministry via lgengagement@communities.gov.uk with any feedback on its guidance website, or with comments and suggestions.

These resources are designed to help you raise awareness of the scheme with residents and community groups, who may approach their local authority for information.

Councillors and candidates

After pressing for guidance from Government on behalf of councils, ministers confirmed late last year that EU citizens would be eligible to stand and vote in this year's local elections. Candidates who are validly nominated and elected on or before 2 May 2019 in England and Northern Ireland should be able to serve that term of office in full.

We continue to work with government on what will happen after May 2019 in respect of elections eligibility. We are also raising the need for clear guidance on the European 2019 elections, should there be a delay to Brexit resulting from an extension to Article 50.

Post-Brexit Britain

At the LGA's annual conference last year, we set out our vision of what post-Brexit Britain could look like, and some of the opportunities and risks for local government to address, in

our report, 'Brexit: moving the conversation on' (see www.local.gov.uk/moving-the-conversation-on/brexit).

Brexit offers the opportunity for devolution and a fundamental change to how decisions are made in Britain. Local government also has a lot to contribute to securing ambitious future trading relationships and deals that benefit local communities.

We continue to engage with Parliament to make the case for local government's role in post-Brexit decision-making, including trade. As part of my role as Chairman of the LGA's Brexit Taskforce, I appeared before the Commons International Trade Committee alongside Cllr Philip Atkins OBE, Leader of Staffordshire County Council.

I explained to MPs that the Government must continue to consult the LGA, Welsh LGA, Northern Ireland LGA and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities once we leave the EU, and that local government's role in the UK's future trade negotiations should be formalised.

The Select Committee's report, published late last year, was very positive about the role that councils could play and the proactive

contribution we could make to the UK's international trade policy. It suggested a key role for councils on the Strategic Trade Advisory Group, argued that local government should have a voice in all aspects of the trade policy process and that the Government, in its response to this report, should set out how it plans to facilitate this.

Meanwhile, the Government has secured the UK's participation in EU funding programmes (the European Structural and Investment Funds, ESIF) until 2020, something the LGA had called for. It has also committed to a domestic fund – the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) – post 2020. We have said this should be a localised, place-based fund at least equal in quantum to ESIF. We continue to raise concerns with government about delays in the consultation on the UK SPF and the impact this will have on councils' ability to plan.

We have secured guarantees from government for EU-funded projects to the end of 2020 in the case of no deal, but there is still further detail to emerge about how this will operate. We will continue to use our position on the Government's Growth Programme Board for ESIF to obtain more details.



Responding to inspection

Fire authority members have a duty to ensure that their service responds effectively to any concerns raised by inspectors



Councillor Ian Stephens is Chair of the Fire Services Management Committee

Last year the first inspections of fire and rescue services for 12 years took place. The inspections demonstrated that the sector is good at understanding the risks it deals with, good at preventing emergencies and good at responding to them.

They have also highlighted a lot of good practice in every area of activity. Now, one of the challenges for the LGA's Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC) and the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) is to ensure that the best of that good practice is effectively shared.

However, the generally positive verdict on the effectiveness of the sector should not distract us from the fact that this is the core business of the service, so there is no room for complacency here. The mixed results on efficiency suggest some services are struggling to deal with the current financial challenges and many of the results in the 'people' (workforce) inspection theme were poor.



For further information please contact charles.loft@local.gov.uk

We are good at recruiting the right people and our efforts to recruit a more diverse workforce – which will obviously take time to bear fruit – have been acknowledged. But there are less comforting results in terms of performance management, leadership development and a failure to promote positive values and culture.

Governance was not covered in these inspections, but it is the members of fire authorities who are legally responsible for the service. Fire authority members have a duty to ensure that their service responds effectively to any finding of inadequacy or requirement to improve as well as to specific causes of concern.

In order to fulfil their statutory role, fire authorities need to assure themselves that their chief fire officer has a plan in place to address any issues arising from inspection; that the plan is adequate; and that it is acted upon effectively. We need to give our chiefs the support they require to deliver improvement and we need to hold them to account for delivering it.

To support this process, the FSMC is in the process of commissioning a toolkit for all fire and rescue authorities (FRAs) to improve the way they scrutinise and challenge their services and, in particular, how they address and respond to the outcomes of the inspection.

We are continually adapting and modifying the LGA's peer support framework to reflect the changing needs and

improvement priorities of FRAs. Peer support can cover a broad or narrow range of issues and can be tailored to an FRA's needs and used to prepare for or respond to inspection.

Subject to the outcome of negotiations with government over improvement funding, the FSMC also plans to offer the equalities framework peer challenge free of charge to priority FRAs, adapt the LGA Leadership Programme to consider the relationship between FRA chairs, FRAs and chief fire officers, and to re-run the culture, inclusion and diversity events that have taken place this year.

We will continue to look at ways in which FRAs can share best practice, including learning from each other's experience of responding to inspection.

● Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services has inspected 14 fire services in the first of three tranches of inspections that will see every fire and rescue service in England inspected. A report on the first tranche was published in December (see www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/).

● The LGA's Annual Fire Conference and Exhibition takes place in Brighton from 12-13 March. Fire Minister Nick Hurd MP and Shadow Fire Minister Karen Lee MP will be among the speakers. To book your place, please visit www.local.gov.uk/events

Seeing the complete picture helps save lives



Connect teams, departments and processes
and streamlines HMICFRS Compliance and Reporting

Request a demo at www.firewatch.co.uk/demo
Visit us at LGA Fire 12th-13th March [@firewatch_IT](https://twitter.com/firewatch_IT)

© Copyright Infographics UK Ltd 2019

infographics
firewatch



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



Cars of the future

Councils should be at the forefront of the transition to electric vehicles and supporting the development of charging points



Councillor Martin Tett is Chairman of the LGA's Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board

There is a profound change coming in the way we fuel our vehicles.

Governments around the world have committed to phasing out petrol and diesel vehicles in the coming decades. Electric vehicles are becoming the vehicle of choice for car companies to develop. Established manufacturers have announced launches of more than 100 new battery electric vehicle models by 2024.

However, there are still barriers to the mass adoption of electric cars. The main one is the availability of charging points. There are compelling reasons why councils should be at the forefront of making this transition happen.

We all know the toll that vehicle emissions are taking on our residents' health. Vehicles contribute 80 per cent of nitrogen oxides at roadside and we need to find a long-term solution to exhaust emissions in order to tackle air pollution, especially in built-up urban areas.

Electric vehicles will also offer benefits for noise pollution. Anyone who has heard electric vehicles starting up will know how quiet their engines are. This will immediately benefit residents who live close to roads.

In the long term, as the freight industry

upgrades its engines, it may also allow us to look again at staggering deliveries into the evening and early in the morning. Staggering delivery times across the day and night could have important congestion benefits and if we could use quieter vehicles we would avoid some of the problems currently holding it back.

The transition to electric vehicles is taking place across the world and it is an important opportunity for the UK to demonstrate leadership in a technology that will have a global roll-out. Getting the transition to electric vehicles right is something everyone is seeking to do.

In the UK, we have the chance to develop a model that will benefit our local environments and residents, and has commercial opportunities for local government. After all, councils own a lot of the land that electric charging companies wish to access, such as car parks, roads and pavements. For example, Nottingham has installed charge points at key locations on its park and ride network through a concession arrangement.

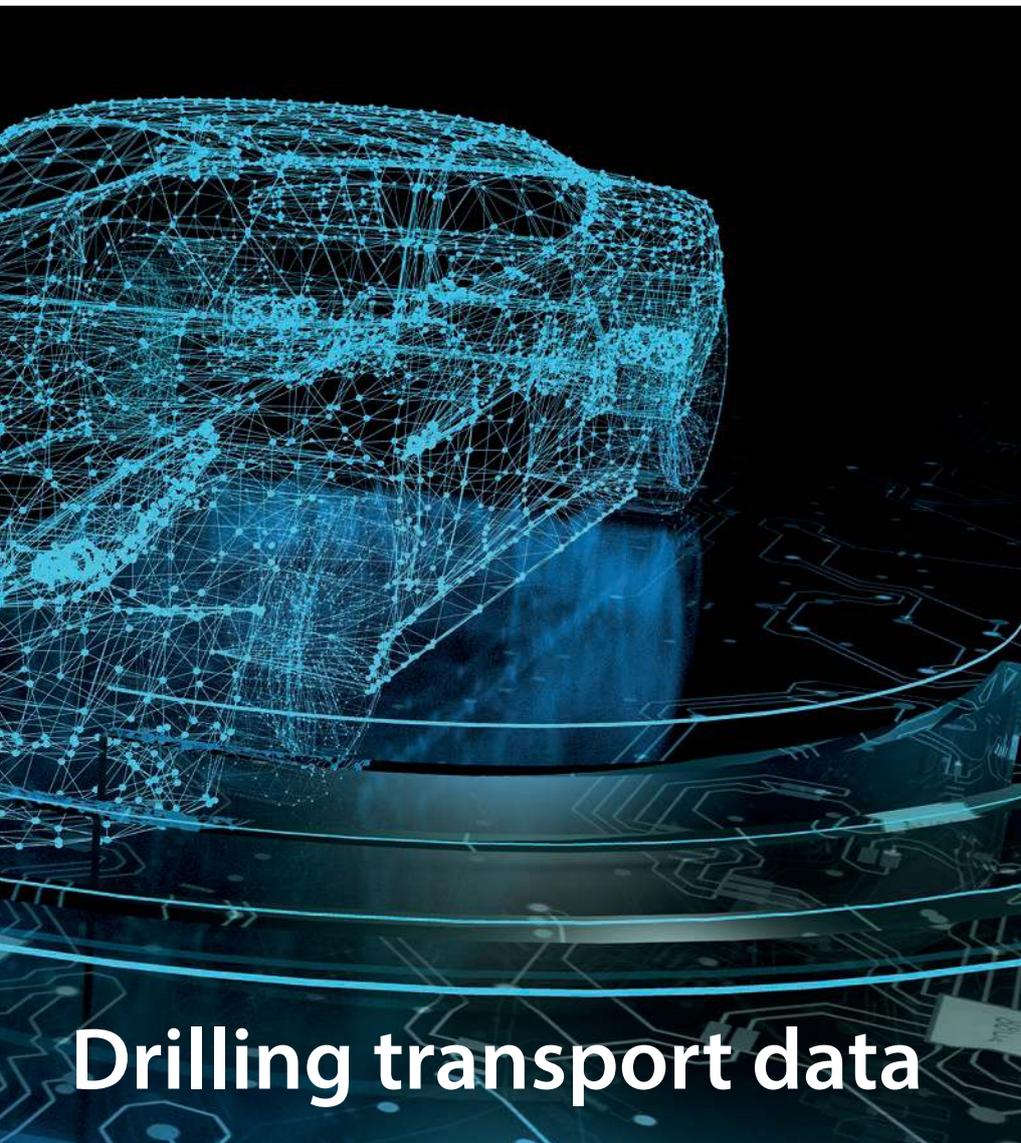
In our discussions with the charging industry, one of the practical steps that councils can take is clearly identifying a point of contact with each council at both member and officer level. Navigating what is often perceived as the complex hierarchy within councils can be one of the strongest factors inhibiting charging companies engaging on investment. Making a single point of contact publicly available can be helpful and is a practical step councils can take with little difficulty.

The LGA has been working closely with the Energy Saving Trust to generate more practical guidance to local authorities. In the coming months, we look forward to complementing this work with our own advice on making the case for councils to support electric vehicle charging.



For more information about **future transport**, please visit www.local.gov.uk/topics/transport/clean-connected-transport





Drilling transport data

Data is one of the most vital commodities that we generate and councils across the country produce immense quantities of it every day.

However, data will never be useful on its own. We must become smarter in how we use and analyse the data we have. The insights we can generate about our residents can be invaluable at predicting where we need to target our services and providing a better service when we do.

This is not something new to transport. So many decisions that councils have taken over the past few decades have been guided by the data we have collected.

Traffic data has informed decisions about network enhancement, inspection data has dictated where we should repair and renew infrastructure, and traffic modelling has determined how and when new development should be allowed.

We are now approaching a point where this data, which was arduously collected by traffic counts and other labour-intensive methods, is about to be overtaken by vast

quantities of automatically generated, real-time data produced by connected vehicles interacting with our network.

Councils, such as Norfolk, have already replaced manual traffic surveys with real-time congestion data generated by drivers' mobile phones. This is just the start of a coming data revolution, for which councils need to prepare.

Councils need to know what data they hold, what is likely to be generated by changes in transport technology and how they will be able to get the most possible value from it. The whole of local government needs to focus on this emerging trend. It will disrupt existing service models and the most appropriate response to the insights may be to completely re-imagine what we are doing.

It is clear that the data revolution in transport will give us the ability to take decisions in real time and understand how our decisions and processes are affecting the network as we carry them out. However, this data will not make decisions for us and the LGA intends to do more work in the near future on how councils can be better prepared.

Autonomous projects

Autonomous cars have gone from science fiction to just around the corner over the past few years. Removing a driver from a car has the potential to revolutionise the way we think about transport and travelling.

Given the important role councils have in managing our transport networks, it is unsurprising that local authorities have been at the forefront of alliances designing and testing new autonomous technologies.

Transport for the West Midlands (TfWM), through its links with the automotive sector, has been pioneering autonomous vehicle testing, with live tests on roads across the region in rural and urban settings. It has learned important lessons about how autonomous vehicles are likely to interact with its network.

The authority's innovation has also seen it pioneer mobility as a service through its partnership with the Whim app. This service joins up providers of transport to create an entire journey for the user, with the ability to purchase all the necessary tickets for the route. It is the long-term ambition of the authority to offer a seamless and integrated transport experience across the West Midlands.

The experience of TfWM was highlighted at our recent conference on future transport – 'Clean, connected and in control'. The feedback given to delegates was that an authority's greatest asset, as a public body, was the ability to provide a forum for collaboration. It encouraged private organisations to collaborate on innovation by offering a neutral forum, as well as the odd cup of coffee! This highlights that councils' ability to shape this agenda is not based upon money or other resources but on our ability to facilitate collaboration.

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

Taking flight

The Tees Valley Combined Authority has bought its local airport as part of a 10-year investment plan to create jobs and boost the economy

When I stood to be the first Tees Valley Mayor in 2016, I presented my bold ambition to take back Durham Tees Valley Airport – still known to most as Teesside International – into the hands of the people, for the people.

Why? The answer is simple. Our residents deserve an airport that is committed to transforming the region's economy and shouts that the Tees Valley is a great place to invest, work, live and visit.

The people of the Tees Valley have fond memories of the airport in its heyday – memories I share. I believe that, as well as playing a part in our history, with the right care and leadership, it can play a vital role in our future by once again giving people access to holidays on their doorstep and act as a beacon for businesses.

With Peel, the owners, making it clear it wouldn't have a life past 2021 and with more than 700 direct and indirect jobs facing the axe, something drastic needed to be done.

If we were to put the biggest single financial investment the Tees Valley Combined Authority has ever made into a project, it had to be considered alongside all our other commitments.

That is why my proposals formed part of a bigger 10-year Investment Plan for the Tees Valley, worth more than half a billion pounds, which was unanimously approved by the Combined Authority Cabinet.

We're not just buying an airport, we're also buying 819 acres of surrounding land that has planning permission for 350 homes. Stopping this development is crucial to our plans.

This is the first step in our robust, public 10-year business plan put together with the help of an experienced operator, who will run



“As well as playing a part in our history, the airport can play a vital part in our future by acting as a beacon for businesses”

the airport on a day-to-day basis. The detailed scheme outlines how the airport could help create more than 7,500 jobs and add £421 million to the economy by 2027.

To do this, we're targeting a low-cost airline to offer flights and help raise passenger numbers tenfold to more than 1.4 million. But I have always said that our airport in public ownership won't just be about changing its name back to the instantly recognisable Teesside International, or flights to Alicante. We also need to attract commercial investors to get our airport back into profit.

That's why I've been in talks with energy firms SSE and Equinor, which are currently working on the world's biggest offshore wind farm, Dogger Bank, about the opportunities our airport has to offer, including creating a helipad to service the development.

The Tees Valley is a UK leader in businesses operating in the offshore oil and gas, wind, decommissioning and subsea sectors, with hundreds more in the supply chain.

The planned helipad will enable engineers and support staff to fly from the airport, helping to create even more high-quality, long-term jobs in the sector, with a huge knock-on effect for our companies.

There are countless more opportunities out there, and I'm determined to do all I can to ensure investors the world over are aware that Teesside International Airport is open for business.

This isn't the end of the road. This is just the start of the journey to secure new carriers to popular destinations, to take advantage of the opportunities, and to make the airport – and by extension Teesside – truly international.



For more information about the Tees Valley Combined Authority, please visit www.teesvalley-ca.gov.uk/

Improving the public's health

Local authority delivery of public health is effective, accountable, efficient and offers great value for money



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

Good public health, drawing imaginatively on all of local government's functions, can make a real, large-scale difference to individual and population health.

It can promote the independence of people with long-term, chronic conditions; prevent ill health and therefore reduce pressures on social care and the NHS; improve people's lives and wellbeing; and reduce health inequalities.

Public health teams, working across councils, are tackling persistent problems such as adult and childhood obesity, mental illness, alcohol and drug misuse, sexually transmitted infections and the health impact of isolation and loneliness in old age, as well as addressing some of the serious health inequalities that still exist within and between communities.

Despite these challenges, the changes to public health over the last six years should be seen as an exemplar of public sector reform. Good practice from individual councils shows what potential there is for public health, if properly resourced, to make inroads into improving health and wellbeing, and to do it efficiently.

There is no magic wand for England's main public health challenges, the immediate causes of which remain tobacco use, poor diet, mental health, physical inactivity and substance misuse. Each is driven by a complex web of socioeconomic circumstances that the NHS alone cannot address.



But with comprehensive strategies, we are making a difference, according to LGA analysis of official government and Public Health England data. Teenage conception rates have plummeted, and youth smoking and drinking rates are lower than they've been for decades. Other improved outcomes include reducing premature deaths, cutting new cases of sexually transmitted infections and a drop in adult smoking (see box, far right).

We have, in a number of areas, delivered better outcome at less cost since 2013 when councils took on responsibility for public health.

We know there is more work to be done to make sure improvements are consistent across all councils, and the data we have pulled

together should not mask the areas where we have seen a worsening in health outcomes and in performance.

But it demonstrates that a number of key health outcomes have improved since responsibility for public health transferred to local authorities, despite the spend in several areas falling, primarily because of government reductions to local authority budgets.

The NHS alone cannot deliver improvements in population health. It needs what local authorities do to meet its objectives.

The reward of thriving early years for our children, improved incomes for the low paid, healthy and productive ageing, good quality work opportunities and high-quality places is at the core of the local government mission. Now, the challenge for local



'Improving the public's health: local government delivers' can be downloaded free at www.local.gov.uk/publications. **The LGA/ADPH annual public conference and exhibition takes place in London on 21 March. Speakers include Public Health Minister Steve Brine MP and Mental Health Minister Jackie Doyle-Price MP.** For more information and to book your place, please visit www.local.gov.uk/events



councils is to break the generational cycle of disadvantage that drives health inequalities.

The rationale for a local government lead in public health is unchanged: that the greatest impacts on health are the circumstances in which we live, employment, education, environment and the effects of the social gradient of health – that is, equality or the lack of it. Local government can certainly impact more on these factors than the NHS, and many in public health are responding positively to the opportunity to influence population health.

However, despite all the excellent work, there have been significant reductions in the resources available for public health work. Councils' public health grant funding is being cut by £531 million in cash terms between 2015/16 and 2019/2020.

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

They have also taken some decisions that the NHS simply could not, or would not, make. Significant modernisation of sexual health services, for example, have coped with the substantial increase in demand for services despite a reduction in funding. The same can be said for health visiting: outcomes have held up while funding has reduced. Local government relationships with providers and partners have helped achieve this.

The recognition that the transfer of public health to local government was absolutely the right decision, and that our confidence in local leaders was well placed, was confirmed by the Commons' Health Select Committee in its report, 'Public health post-2013'.

It endorsed local government as the best home for the local leadership of the public's health.

Of course, there remains an important role for national policy making but this cannot be a substitute for local leadership and local responsibility for improving the health of local people. It is right that those decisions are being made locally as this is where the action really happens.

A picture of public health

- The public health outcomes framework (PHOF) tracks 112 health indicators. In the past six years, 80 per cent of those have been level or improving.
- Rates of premature deaths from all causes in England have fallen steadily.
- Between 2012 and 2017, the prevalence of smoking among adults in England fell from 19.3 per cent to 14.9 per cent.
- Attendances at sexual health clinics are up and diagnoses of new sexually transmitted infections are down.
- The conception rate in teenagers has dropped by 23 per cent since 2013/14.
- Local authority-commissioned services measured more children than at any time in the past 10 years.
- Almost all (98 per cent) of adults in contact with drug and alcohol services were able to access drug treatment services within three weeks, and 100 per cent of children.
- Spend per resident on public health is more than three times higher in England's most deprived upper tier local authorities than in the least deprived, reflecting the poorer health status of its population.
- Even in the area of greatest need in the country, spend per resident on public health in 2017 was less than a fifth of the combined spend per resident on children's and adults' social care.
- The percentage of children achieving a good level of development at the end of reception (school readiness) has increased from 51.7 to 70.7 per cent since 2012/13.

LG Inform Plus

The essential guide to your area

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.

The service provides instant access to data about your ward or your neighbourhood in addition to more detailed performance and contextual data. It includes direct support, online tools and a data feed to use in your corporate systems and external apps.

LG Inform Plus gives you the detailed information you need to make informed decisions and with its report writer, a much easier way to present this.

With more than **1,000 data items**, covering **58 million people**, from birth rates to employment patterns, health to housing.

New GDPR Record of Processing Activities (RoPA) service saving you both time and effort.

And direct access via our data feed for your reports, apps and systems. **Take a closer look.**

comment

A crisis of representation



Sophie Walker is former Leader of the Women's Equality Party

The paucity of new ideas in Westminster has never been more obvious or dismaying.

The negotiation, manipulation and general head-scratching over what might actually have been meant by the Brexit vote has caused a crisis of confidence in politics, a delay to crucial legislation on domestic affairs and near-bankruptcy for public services, already starved by austerity and now further ignored as all eyes focus on UK-EU relations.

But politics doesn't only happen in Westminster. For communities and councils around Britain, the current emergency offers an opportunity to do politics differently.

By recognising that this crisis of ideas is a crisis of representation, we can set about finding the next generation of campaigners and politicians whose fresh perspectives and talent can lead us all out of this mess.

Anyone who cares about our democracy must act in recognition that it has collapsed because its key institutions are failing in their main duty – to represent the voting public. With women making up only a third of councillors and 17 per cent of council leaders in England, and Black, Asian and minority ethnic people making up only four per cent of all councillors, the crisis is just as real at local level as in Parliament.

But we don't have to wait for a Brexit deal to get on with the job of renewing government at the local level.

The Women's Equality Party is preparing and recruiting candidates to stand in local elections in England this spring and next because we understand that putting women at the centre of politics – women from all backgrounds and experiences – is key to unlocking better politics for all.

Local government funding has been cut

precisely because so much of it buys the social infrastructure that women disproportionately work in and rely on. The predominance of white, male decision-makers at all levels of government means those institutions consistently make financial choices that don't see or hear women; and that gives women no choice at all but to

“We don't have to wait for a Brexit deal to get on with the job of renewing government at the local level”

take on more and more unpaid and unvalued care responsibilities.

This is catastrophic not just for those women, who are sliding ever deeper into poverty, but also for the economy, business and society – at every level.

We understand that care is an investment, not an expense, that builds thriving local

communities. We understand that having more women in local government means increasing the number of people who know and use local services such as childcare, community centres and libraries. We understand that you can't foot the bill for bin collections and deepening potholes without investing in all of the lives of local women too.

Radically different approaches to policy and investment are not an indulgence but a necessity. When the country's leaders are out of strategies, it's time for anyone and everyone else in a leadership position to rethink what is required by the role.

In January, I resigned as Leader of the Women's Equality Party – a job I have loved for four years – in order to tip this model upside down and build from the bottom up. Leadership means inspiring and innovating. Sometimes the best way to do that is to make space for new leaders' voices to be heard.



For more information about the Women's Equality Party, please visit www.womensequality.org.uk



Time to reform council funding

“It is essential that the Spending Review provides additional funding based on a proper evaluation of high-needs funding arrangements”

There is no doubt that the Government's consultations on Business Rates retention and Fair Funding, alongside the impending Spending Review, present much-needed opportunities to review and reform local government funding.

Councils are struggling to balance their books and the LGA predicts the funding gap will reach £8 billion by 2025. I believe the Fair Funding Review must recognise the changed nature of demand for council services, particularly adult and children's social care (which, combined, account for about 70 per cent of expenditure). It is essential funding is allocated in a transparent, evidence-based manner.

Moreover, although the localisation of business rates is an important opportunity for

the sector, it needs to reflect fully the true costs of the services that are transferred, while also incentivising local growth.

The Spending Review is an opportunity to both put local government finance on a sustainable long-term footing and remove the unnecessary bureaucracy that councils face.

For instance, one of our major financial challenges is high-needs funding. While, in theory, the introduction of education, health and care plans will offer better joined-up support for children with special educational needs (SEND), there needs to be adequate funding to make this vision a reality.

The number of children with SEND statements has increased by 35 per cent since 2014 and more are now being educated outside



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

of mainstream schools, which is, of course, much more expensive. Therefore, it is essential the Spending Review provides additional money based on a proper evaluation of high-needs funding arrangements, including home-to-school transport. We also need to look at why the increase has been so great and address these issues, such as the incentive for schools not to be inclusive.

Building on the success of the return of public health responsibilities to local government, I believe councils have shown they can make a real difference when they deliver key services locally, provided they are properly funded. A point I will continue to make in my meetings with government ministers across a range of departments.

chairman's comment

Councils can



Lord Porter
is Chairman of the LGA

While we await the timetable for the 2019 Spending Review, the LGA has already launched its campaign for more funding for councils.

Our #CouncilsCan campaign aims to influence the review and highlight the growing risk to vital local services if the Government does not take action to secure the financial sustainability of councils.

We kicked off our campaign by highlighting the threat to popular – but non-statutory – services if the £8 billion funding black hole we face by 2025 is not tackled. We warned that our communities may lose leisure and cultural facilities and subsidised bus services, and see fly-tippers

go unpunished, unless government invests in local services.

We have highlighted how successful the transfer of public health to councils has been, with most outcomes as good as, or better than, when the NHS ran everything – despite cuts to local government public health grants.

We've also flagged up how billions of pounds of housing benefit could have been saved if successive governments had helped us build more social housing over the last 10 years. The construction work would have helped generate economic growth, and tenants would have had more cash in their pockets.

But our campaign isn't just about asking for more money – it's more positive than that. We know that with sustainable funding and powers, councils can continue to lead their local areas,

improve residents' lives, reduce demand for public services, and save money for the taxpayer.

We are a good investment. We have continued to deliver vital, quality local services – despite losing almost 60p out of every £1 of government funding over the last 10 years – because we have been efficient and innovative.

However, the tipping point has been reached. Even if we scale back all our discretionary services, we will not be able to fill the funding gap facing children's services, adult social care and homelessness, nor meet rising demand for these statutory services.

It's now time to invest in our people and our places.

“With sustainable funding and powers, councils can continue to lead their areas, improve lives, reduce demand for public services, and save taxpayers' money”

group leaders' comments



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

Another ton of innovations

"We are proud that, once again, our plenary speakers were well balanced, with 11 of our 18 speakers women"

This month's LGA Labour Local Government Conference saw Labour councillors from across England and Wales come together in Warwick.

The conference was a huge success – we were joined by more than 400 councillors, a dozen members of the shadow frontbench including Jeremy Corbyn MP and Tom Watson MP, and we hosted 16 breakout sessions on issues ranging from planning and public health, to austerity and support for the LGBT community. We are proud that once again our plenary speakers were well balanced, with 11 of our 18 speakers being women.

At conference, the LGA Labour Group launched its new publication '100 More Innovations by Labour in Power'. It is a testament to the ingenuity and energy of Labour councillors that we are able to launch our second edition of '100 Innovations', proving that, in spite of the crippling cuts to council budgets from this Conservative Government, Labour can still deliver creative solutions that support the most vulnerable in our communities.

You can download a pdf version of the booklet from the LGA Labour Group website, or visit www.LGALabourInnovations.com to see the full range of submissions.

Thank you to all those who attended the conference and made it a success. We look forward to seeing you all again at the Labour Local Government Conference 2020, which will be held in Nottingham. Bookings will open in autumn 2019.



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

Bus services are in crisis

"Nearly half of all bus routes in England receive some sort of subsidy from local government"

Bus services, if you can call them that, are in crisis across the country. This was brought home locally to me as one of my own communities' key bus companies could be up for sale after it failed to post a profit.

In England, particularly outside London, numbers and frequency are down, and reliability is poor to say the least. This should not come as a shock.

There is less public money being spent on both urban and rural services, and the private market is never going to offer a solution. Post-16 school transport, companion-free travel, or assistance for young person's travel are also being axed.

Nearly half of all bus routes in England currently receive some sort of subsidy from local government. The LGA warns that underfunding of subsidised bus routes has hit crisis levels. These routes get people to work, to hospital, school, and family and friends.

The Government's "head in the sand" attitude to local government funding is not helped by the underfunding of the national concessionary fares scheme.

Free bus passes for our older population are a great idea but assumes there will be buses to ride on. This is not the case for an increasing number of our citizens.

Buses work in London – they are regulated and cash is spent on them. 'Simples' – the country needs the same.



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

Stand up and be counted

"Our members have gained inspiration and effectiveness through a host of development opportunities"

We soon enter purdah and then the planned group elections, so I wanted to thank you and wish you luck if you are standing locally in May.

Thanks to our members for your support and contributions to the success of the LGA's Independent Group over the past two years. We've achieved a great deal for our councils and communities by successfully lobbying government, especially on social care, housing, roads, infrastructure and high streets.

New funding is now available. We worked with local government across Europe on environmental issues. Our members have gained inspiration and effectiveness through a host of development opportunities. We are successful at the ballot box and continue growing our numbers through our "Be a Councillor" events.

As we set our budgets locally, our members are listening and putting forward well-researched alternatives. Eight in 10 councils believe current funding is "unsustainable", so our recent success is welcome, but more is needed. The Spring Statement is imminent, and we have started our campaign for better long-term funding in the next Spending Review. We make clear what councils can do and the value they bring.

So now is the time! With the big Westminster parties in disarray, it is time for our members to be recognised as shining examples of what we want from our local councillors.

I wish everyone in our group every success in your support of our communities.



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



Districts are delivering the difference

James Brokenshire



Councillor John Fuller is Chairman of the District Councils' Network

The distinct difference district councils are making in their communities was celebrated by more than 200 delegates from nearly 100 councils at the District Councils' Network's (DCN) annual conference.

The event, held in Kenilworth, heard how more than 10,000 district councillors from across the country are offering local solutions to national problems for those we serve – one family, one street and one place at a time.

The impact of district councils is gaining increasing recognition, not least from an impressive conference line-up of big-name politicians, local government leaders and key influencers, who recognised the integral role



Rishi Sunak

districts have in addressing the major challenges of house building, public health and adult social care, and the environment.

Indeed, this was highlighted by podium speaker Communities Secretary James Brokenshire MP, who said: "No-one is better placed to support a bright, positive future than district councils. . . District councils will be key to us delivering 300,000 homes a year, not just more homes, but better lives and stronger economies."

The Minister is right. As the housing and planning authorities, districts are delivering the lion's share of new homes, with almost 100,000 built last year and planning consents given even faster and in greater numbers than before.

There's also the £675 million High Streets Fund, which in district/county areas, is only available to districts. To incentivise bids, Local Government Minister Rishi Sunak told delegates that districts "are best placed to bid for the fund and deliver these proposals" to spearhead the transformation of our high streets for a new generation.

We also mustn't forget the landmark lifting of the Housing Revenue Account borrowing cap, to help councils manage housing markets better.

In a changing world and amid uncertainty around Brexit, the importance of district councils, making that difference to people's lives – day in, day out – has never been more important.

This was highlighted in our conference report, 'Shaping healthy places: exploring the district role in health', published in collaboration with the LGA. It details innovative prevention initiatives by district councils to keep people fit and well and out of hospital, saving money for the public purse. Housing and health are linked, and we are the best people to deliver it.

By being able to operate at a size and

"Amid uncertainty around Brexit, the importance of district councils, making that difference to people's lives – day in, day out – has never been more important"

scale that people understand and can relate to, districts are problem solvers rather than problem raisers. But district councils can do more with a fairer distribution of funding.

Of all councils types, districts have seen the biggest reduction in their spending power since 2015 and it's now time that this is addressed. We need more funding and we need to reset the relationship between local government and the state.

The Spending Review needs to ensure that powerful incentives to build new homes are retained and that £500 million of the New Homes Bonus already earned by districts is paid as promised.

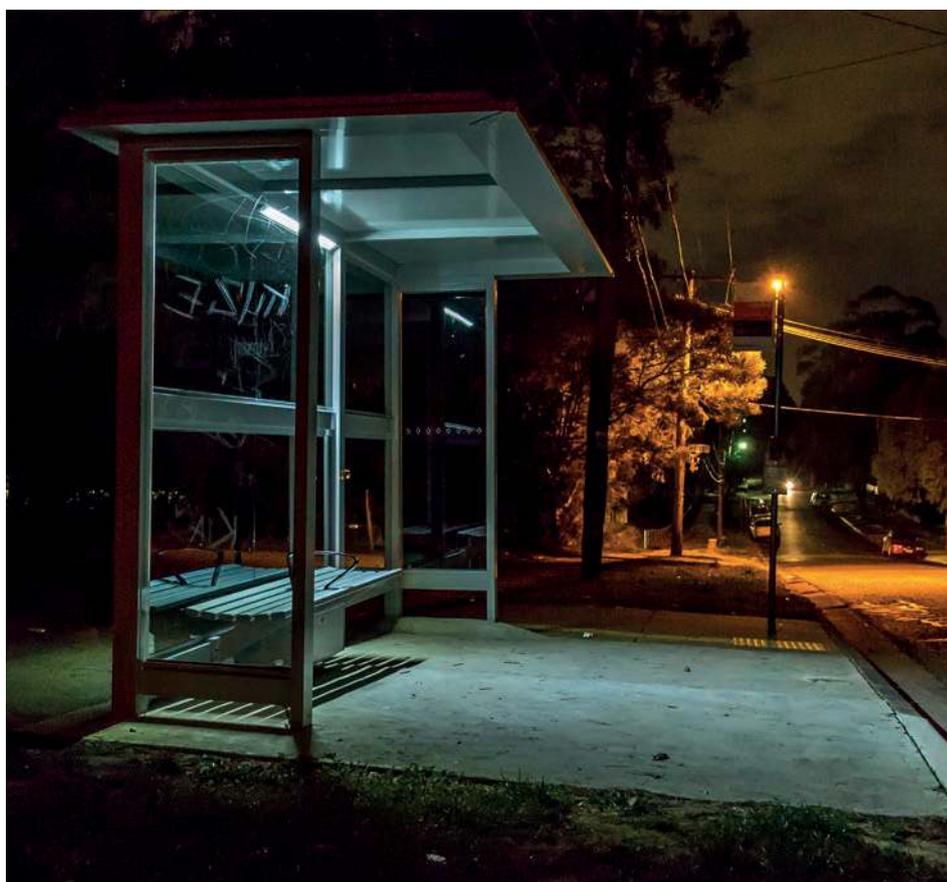
Communities Secretary James Brokenshire told delegates he will recommend housing growth is incentivised in the Spending Review, while Treasury Minister Liz Truss spoke of the need to reward local areas for new homes being built and "to give more freedom to local councils."

These are encouraging assurances on vital issues which we will continue to lobby on to ensure Districts are empowered to deliver the difference to improve people's lives.

Rural services in decline



Graham Biggs MBE is Chief Executive of the Rural Services Network



The way that services are delivered by providers and accessed by users is changing rapidly, with significant implications for the 9.4 million people who live in rural towns and villages.

Rural England, a not-for-profit research body, has released its latest 'State of rural services' report, exploring trends across varied services, including: rural transport; digital connectivity; hospitals; public health; libraries; youth services; and retailing.

The evidence shows many services are scaling back or withdrawing from rural areas, sometimes rapidly so. This trend is, perhaps, most evident where services are delivered by local government and their delivery is largely discretionary. Years of austerity appear to have taken their toll.

Subsidised rural bus services are a good example. In 2016/17, 202 services were withdrawn altogether in shire areas and a further 191 were reduced in some way. This follows years of similar figures and leaves a situation where four rural shire councils no longer hold a budget for bus subsidy. In

parallel, the number of bus passenger journeys made in rural areas has declined since 2014.

Another example is the provision of youth clubs or centres. Shire local government spending on young people's services has fallen 38 per cent in the space of three years, with the impact falling heavily on youth clubs and centres. In some places, these have found ways to survive outside the public sector, while others have simply folded.

Youth services can play a key role, offering those who use them positive activities and a safe environment. In that regard, analysis for the report found that young people from rural areas score badly on public health measures of risky behaviour, alcohol consumption, smoking and being bullied.

One finding common to almost every public service examined is that spending per resident is lower in rural than urban areas. Rural residents have 63 per cent less spent on them for bus subsidies, 36 per cent less for public health and 25 per cent less for library services. This cannot help their survival. It also poses interesting questions about the equity of rural provision and whether differences on this scale can be justified by patterns of need.

Unsurprisingly, fixed broadband and mobile phone networks have bucked the trend and extended further across rural areas. Around 76 per cent of rural premises can now access a superfast broadband connection (30 Mbps) and 89 per cent a basic broadband connection (10 Mbps).

Yet there remains some way to go. Turn those figures around and 11 per cent of rural premises, including many small businesses, are still without a connection that telecoms regulator Ofcom considers necessary for everyday applications. Mobile provision is arguably a bigger issue still, with a basic phone call not possible inside a third of rural premises on all four networks.

There is clearly a growing expectation of communities and volunteers to sustain rural services, from libraries and youth clubs to village shops and community transport schemes. These can deliver benefits, reshaping services around community needs by widening the service offer or improving opening hours.

They also come with risks, such as limits to volunteer capacity and a variable response where communities lack sufficient time or skills. Community-run shops, which can stand on their own two feet, have a high survival rate. Community-run services that rely on grant funding or similar may face a less certain future.

Solutions that involve communities and put more provision online can certainly pay dividends. But with funding constraints as they stand, it's hard to see the loss of services from rural areas halting any time soon.

"In almost every public service... spending per resident is lower in rural than urban areas"



The Rural Services Network is a special interest group of the LGA, see www.rsonline.org.uk

councillor



Holding the chair



Councillor Alan Connett (Devon) is National Lead Member Peer, LGA Liberal Democrats

And once again said a councillor: “Chair, the last three speakers have said everything I wanted to, but...” as they then repeat what has already been said. Perhaps we should model the chairing of meetings on the long-running radio comedy ‘Just a Minute’ – inviting councillors to speak without repetition, deviation or hesitation.

Undoubtedly, it helps to have a good measure of self-confidence when chairing a meeting, but chairing is a skill we learn and can improve our own practice by watching others.

For example, learning from others, I began to say who the next three speakers were, so they were ready to speak when called. Also, greeting members of the public or guest speakers in good time before the committee starts, and explaining the process, puts people at ease.

The harder part, of course, is managing members.

The LGA offers chairing skills support and I certainly recommend it. With new chairs almost certainly coming into the role this May, I am sure it would be appreciated.

Chairing skills

Of all the functions you might be asked to undertake in your role as a councillor, chairing meetings is arguably one of the most important.

Whether fulfilling your role as community advocate and arbiter at meetings of local community groups or in the more formal and structured environment of the council chamber, having the skills to do this effectively is essential.

Meetings are a traditional and essential component of local government. For councillors and officers, they serve as a forum for discussion and agreement, planning and monitoring, communication and leadership.

Used appropriately, meetings can challenge, inspire, illuminate and inform.

Committee meetings, in particular, and the procedures for conducting council business that accompany them, are a mainstay of the political management process. Getting the chairing of these meetings right is ever more important.

Unfocused and unproductive meetings only serve to waste the time of those who attend them. Open debate needs a degree of stewardship, to enable all views to be heard and conclusions to be based on reasoned arguments, consensus or compromise. This is the essential role of the chairperson or ‘chair’.

Effective chairing is important because it provides for clear leadership and direction – ensuring that discussions are held within some framework for debate, based on an agreed agenda, and that they adhere to established ground rules, standing orders or protocols for how the business should be conducted.

It also ensures that debates are focused and balanced – involving discussion from all of those who wish to articulate a view,

particularly where conflicting viewpoints are being expressed.

It enables decisions to be reached by helping participants to agree on the way forward and any further action that needs to be taken – for example, allocating resources to meet agreed priorities.

It contributes to group or teamworking, allowing people to build rapport and contribute to group/committee discussions. This can often help to inform, unite and inspire people. And it ensures that resources are used to best effect – saving time and energy and allowing information, views and evidence to be gathered in an efficient and timely manner.

The LGA councillor workbook on chairing skills looks at each of the key abilities needed for this role. It examines the key roles of a chair, such as that of the spokesperson providing a summary of other people’s views, and being comfortable to put these across to all kinds of people, including large groups. It also considers: the organisational skills needed for chairing; the key communication elements of the role; the ‘actioning’ role to ensure that meetings are not just a ‘talking shop’ but have a purpose; the need for mediation to seek the necessary compromise between people or conflicting ideas; being fair; and not letting your own feelings get in the way.

It also takes a look at some of the more ‘challenging’ personalities you might come across when chairing meetings and gives an insight into how to ensure they are not allowed to dominate or derail meetings.



‘A councillor’s workbook on chairing skills’ can be downloaded for free from www.local.gov.uk/councillor-workbook-chairing-skills



Standing up to scrutiny



Councillor Peter Fleming
is Chairman of the LGA's
Improvement and
Innovation Board

Councils take the need to make sound and transparent decisions extremely seriously.

Not only are we democratically elected in our own right, which brings with it the regular scrutiny of the ballot box, but we are subject to a whole range of other internal and external checks and balances.

Two recent reports by the National Audit Office (NAO), the public spending watchdog, have dwelt upon the quality of local governance and audit. Both show that, despite significant reductions in government funding, councils continue to provide high standards of governance.

In a report on the outcomes of the 2017/18 local audit, councils compare very favourably with NHS bodies. In all, 8

per cent of local government bodies have had some kind of qualification in their value for money arrangements, about the same as the previous year. The figure for the NHS is 38 per cent, up from 29 per cent in 2015/16.

The NAO's companion report on local council governance also reflects a system that is still working. A sizeable majority of auditors are satisfied that councils have adequate arrangements in place. For example, 83 per cent agree that councils have robust risk management overall.

The NAO also surveyed council chief finance officers and discovered that 98 per cent agree or strongly agree that they are able to give challenging advice to elected members.

This does not mean that we can rest on our laurels. Where councils have qualified conclusions, they need to act, and all of us need to make sure that we are taking on board the recommendations of our local external auditors if problems are to be nipped in the bud.

The NAO has recommended that

central government should collect more information from councils on their governance arrangements. This hardly seems necessary given that external auditors are providing oversight at local level and Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) is supervising the audit contracts and collecting and reporting information on how councils are doing.

With the levels of revenue support grant (RSG) councils receive from government dwindling away, and with 168 councils due to receive no RSG at all in 2019/20, we might even question whether the Government has any right to scrutinise our finances.

Faced with an overall funding gap that will reach £8 billion by 2025, councils in England are increasingly having to make difficult decisions about how to manage their resources, and look for new ways to reduce costs and generate income. It is, therefore, vital that our governance arrangements remain transparent and stand up to scrutiny.

parliament

Tackling FGM

As ever, this last month in Westminster has been busy for local government.

Parliament has seen a series of debates, questions and select committee evidence sessions on subjects ranging from children's services and council finances (see panel), to buses and violent crime.

Alongside this, the LGA presented at a range of events, including a film screening and panel discussion for MPs on the subject of eradicating female genital mutilation (FGM).

Cllr Anita Lower, Deputy Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, and Leethen Bartholomew, the Head of the National FGM Centre, participated in a panel discussion on how to eradicate FGM in the UK.

The discussion formed part of an event held in Parliament during Sexual Abuse and Sexual Violence Awareness Week hosted by Sarah Champion, the MP for Rotherham. The campaigners and parliamentarians who attended were also shown one of the new BBC Storyfile documentaries on tackling FGM in Tanzania, titled 'Defying the cutting season', which is due to have been broadcast just before **first** went to press.

This event and the invitation to participate in the panel came as a result of our increased engagement with Parliament on the work of the National FGM Centre. In light of recent confirmation from government that there are no further plans to fund the centre's work beyond 2020, this engagement work is becoming increasingly important.

In the discussion on 7 February, Cllr Lower emphasised the uniqueness of the centre and the challenge that it currently faces regarding funding.

Addressing a room full of anti-FGM campaigners, Cllr Lower said the recent first conviction for FGM in the UK was a "wake-up call for many that this crime is happening here and now in the UK... Sustainable funding is needed to safeguard children from this practice".

Much of the discussion in the ensuing debate focused on achieving a cultural shift in mindset towards the practice of FGM. There was consensus in the room that the work of the National FGM Centre, the health service and local partners will have a key role to play in delivering this.

The following week, LGA Vice-President Wera Hobhouse MP (Lib Dem, Bath), tabled an Urgent Question about the need for legislation to tackle the problem. During the debate, Ms Hobhouse argued that "we need greater

protection for girls at risk of female genital mutilation".

Responding to the debate, Lucy Frazer MP, Minister for Justice, confirmed that an amendment to the Children Act 2004 to improve the powers of the courts to protect children will be brought forward in government time.



For more information about the LGA's work in Parliament, please visit www.local.gov.uk/parliament



Local government finance

MPs formally approved the 2019/20 local government finance settlement on 5 February, confirming councils' funding for the next year.

The final settlement contained no major changes from the provisional limits outlined in December (see **first** 631), which included extra money provided through the Rural Services Delivery Grant and the New Homes Bonus. Also rubber-stamped by MPs was the one-off funding for children's services, adult social care, and roads repairs announced in last year's Budget.

In the Commons debate that preceded the vote, MPs were keen to raise the LGA's concerns over the growing funding gap facing local services.

Clive Betts MP, Chair of the Communities and Local Government Select Committee, was among those calling for the £3 billion funding gap councils are facing this year to be plugged. Closing the debate, Local Government Minister Rishi Sunak MP, paid tribute to "all the committed people who deliver for their communities every single day".

elections

A tale of two Hamlets

Tower Hamlets is one of the most interesting local authorities, electorally speaking, and two by-elections to dissect is a delight.

Labour held Lansbury ward, named after the party's leader during the 1930s, but lost Shadwell to Aspire. Both wards featured in the May 2018 elections because of competition. Lansbury's three seats attracted no fewer than 18 candidates – a ratio bettered only by Shadwell where 13 candidates stood for two seats.

Tower Hamlets' electoral map has undergone considerable changes since the turn of the century. Its internal politics gained further attention in October 2010 after Lutfur Rahman, a former Labour leader of the council, but now standing as an Independent, was elected as mayor after the first count. Following his re-election in 2014, however, a subsequent Election Court found him guilty of various offences and he was removed from office.

Rahman's followers then divided, with some joining the People's Alliance of Tower

Hamlets (PATH) led by Rabina Khan, while others joined Aspire led by the former deputy mayor, Ohid Ahmed. These two parties competed for votes at last May's borough elections. The effect of this was to assist Labour in re-gaining council control. Since then, PATH has been dissolved, its leader joining the Liberal Democrats.

In Lansbury, Aspire's vote rose by 10 percentage points but, with Labour's vote also increasing, it did enough to retain the seat.

Shadwell was another matter. Last May, the seats split between PATH and Labour, with Aspire in a relatively close fourth place. Again, Labour's by-election vote rose relative to last May but so did that of Aspire and the Liberal Democrats (unsurprisingly, since this is Rabina Khan's own ward). Aspire's successful candidate, Harun Miah, was formerly a colleague of Khan's when both represented the ward as councillors for Tower Hamlets First. Party politics is highly fluid in this borough.



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



Labour's second defeat came in Bradford's Bolton and Undercliffe ward. The vacancy followed the death of former council leader Ian Greenwood, who had only just returned to the council at the 2018 election. Indeed, Labour's success here probably reflects Greenwood's stature in Bradford's local politics since the ward has elected a Liberal Democrat in every election since the current boundaries were established in 2004. Normal service has clearly been resumed with Rachel Sunderland making a swift return as the ward councillor.

Some Labour compensation for these defeats came with success in Buckinghamshire's Totteridge and Bowerdean division. The by-election was called following the death of councillor Chaudhary Ditta. He was elected in May 2017 for the East Wycombe Independents but, before then, had served the division since 2005, mostly as a Liberal Democrat but initially for Labour.

At the last election, Ditta had a comfortable 15-point majority over Labour but much of this was a personal vote, a point amply demonstrated by the 14 per cent swing away from the Independents. Labour's Israr Rashid emerged a comfortable winner but he, like many of his fellow councillors, faces an uncertain future as the county and its remaining four district councils are consolidated into a single unitary authority in 2020.

local by-elections

Surrey, Warlingham

CON HELD
8.4% over Lib Dem Turnout 24.7%

Bradford, Bolton and Undercliffe

LIB DEM GAIN FROM LAB
17.2% over Lab Turnout 29%

Lambeth, Thornton

LAB HELD
12% over Lib Dem Turnout 27%

Tower Hamlets, Lansbury

LAB HELD
9.5% over Aspire Turnout 26.5%

Tower Hamlets, Shadwell

ASPIRE GAIN FROM LAB
3.4% over Lab Turnout 35.4%

Wokingham, Evendons

LIB DEM HELD
31.2% over Con Turnout 32.7%

Buckinghamshire, Totteridge and Bowerdean

LAB GAIN FROM EW IND
12.9% over EW Ind Turnout 30.3%

Vale Of Glamorgan, Rhoose

CON HELD
41.7% over Lab Turnout 34.5%



For all the latest by-election results in full, please visit www.local.gov.uk/first



BRITISH PARKING ASSOCIATION

Presents:
Europe's largest dedicated parking event

Parkex

2 - 4 April 2019
NEC Birmingham



- The BPA on hand to provide expertise, support and advice
- Network with peers and connect with new people
- Challenge perceptions about parking
- The return of the Local Authority Parking Summit
- A thought-provoking Hub Programme, encouraging new ideas and knowledge sharing
- Explore the products and services which are driving the sector forward on the Innovation Trail



Register free now at www.parkex.co.uk

Event Partners



Official Publication



Media Partners



Co-Located with

Traffex '19



PARKINGReview