

first

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the magazine for local government

Interview

“Domestic abuse will never be top of anyone’s list **if it’s not a statutory responsibility**”

Dame Vera Baird QC, Victims’ Commissioner for England and Wales

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Recycling export markets.

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China is set to ban all fibre imports by 2020 with other countries implementing tighter quality requirements.

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Our Paper

Let's get paper and card sorted

Queen's Speech



The first Queen's Speech in just over two years has put devolution back on the agenda.

It set out plans for White Papers on adult social care and devolution, and included 26 bills – several of interest to councils (see p5, p16-17, p26).

Elsewhere in this month's **first**, we take a look at the key issues facing children's services (p10) and adult social care (p12), ahead of the National Children and Adult Services Conference in Bournemouth in November.

The LGA is supporting a campaign to review local housing allowance levels, so that benefits such as housing benefit and Universal Credit cover the actual costs of the cheapest private sector rents in all areas (p15).

We have features on charging points for electric cars (p18), and how to manage you town centre at night to encourage visitors and support local businesses (p19).

Our interview this month is with Dame Vera Baird, the recently appointed Victims' Commissioner (p22-23), while Local Government Ombudsman Michael King looks at how councillors can use complaints data to improve scrutiny of local services (p30).

You can also hear from Cllr David Williams, Leader of the County Councils Network, ahead of its annual conference in November (p25).

Cllr James Jamieson is LGA Chairman

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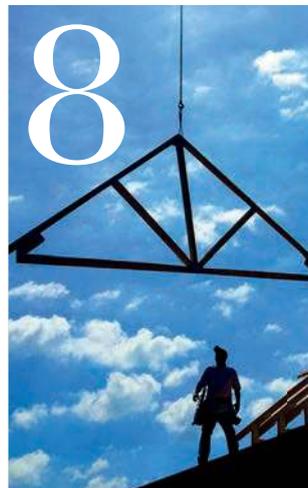
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Care services help cut hospital bed delays

Adult social care services have helped save more than half a million bed days over the past two years, by ensuring that people fit to leave hospital, but who need follow-on support, are able to do so safely and on time.

The Government provided an additional £2 billion for care services in the 2017 Spring Budget, through the improved Better Care Fund (iBCF). This was used to help meet adult social care needs and support the local care provider market. It also set councils targets for reducing delayed transfers of care attributable to social care. LGA analysis shows there was a reduction of 513,773 days in such delays between July 2017 and June 2019, freeing up hospital beds and improving people's lives by making sure they did not stay on wards for longer than necessary. There was a 40 per cent reduction in the average number of people delayed per day, while the NHS reduced its own delayed days by 17 per cent.

Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "No council wants to see someone stay in hospital for a day longer than necessary.

"Thanks to the hard work of councils' social care teams, the NHS has seen delayed transfers of care attributable to social care fall dramatically.

"This means more people living independently, much-needed beds freed up for those who urgently need them and pressure reduced on the NHS.

"This is clear evidence of the human value of investing in the social care services that support millions of people every day and the vital role it can play in alleviating pressure on the health service."

He added: "Extra funding next year will help, but pressures will continue to rise until a long-term, sustainable funding solution for adult social care is found that allows councils to focus equally on preventing people going to hospital in the first place."

● Despite funding pressures, quality ratings across social care have been maintained overall, with 84 per cent of providers now rated as good or outstanding, according to the Care Quality Commission's annual State of Care report.



Child slavery referrals up eight-fold

Referrals by English councils of potential child victims of modern slavery have soared by 800 per cent in five years, the LGA has warned.

It said the spiralling referral rates are being fuelled by an increasing awareness of modern slavery and the growing issue of young people being exploited by county lines drugs gangs, which is putting council services under increasing and significant pressure.

Latest National Crime Agency statistics show the number of council referrals of suspected child victims to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) – the UK's framework for referring and supporting victims – has risen from 127 in 2014 to 1,152 in 2018, up 807 per cent.

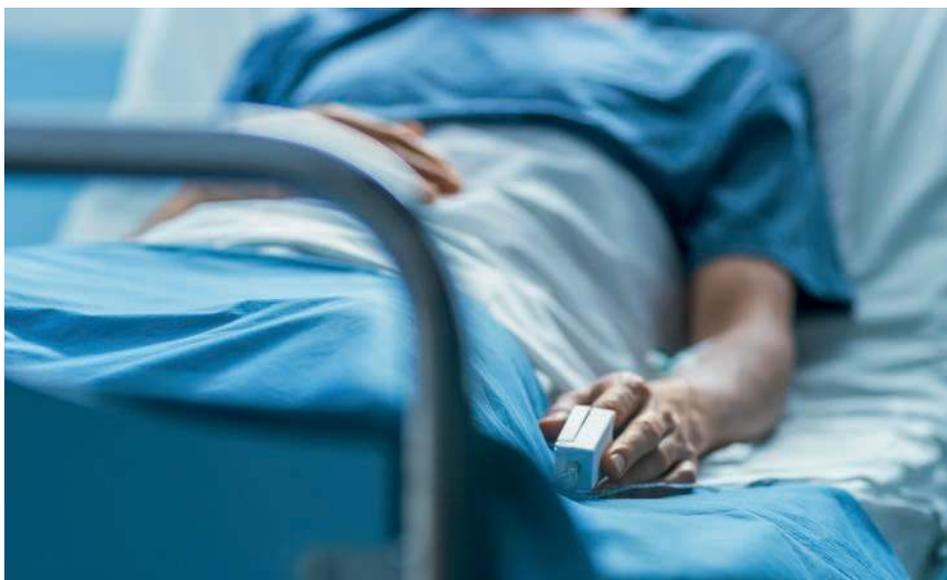
The rate of these child referrals has increased by 67 per cent in a year, from 690 in 2017, with children accounting for 92 per cent of all referrals made by English councils in 2018.

The LGA is warning that the rapid year-on-year increase in child referrals is further evidence of the current huge pressures on children's services. Alongside that, the rising number of adult victims is adding to demand for housing and adult social care.

No specific funding is given to councils to support victims of modern slavery, who may have suffered terrible abuse, been forced to live in squalor and, in the case of many adult victims, been paid shockingly low wages as a result of exploitation by criminal gangs.

The LGA is urging the Government to use next year's Spending Review to ensure there is long-term and sustainable funding to help tackle modern slavery and support its victims.

Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: "Extra funding next year will help but government needs to ensure councils have adequate long-term resources to tackle this abuse and support its victims, as well as creating a sustainable NRM system in the long term."





Call for EU funding certainty

Councils urgently need to know how the UK will replace billions of pounds of vital EU regional aid funding, the LGA has warned.

The Government committed to consulting on its plans for a successor scheme – the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) – in July 2018. More recently, it said it would “set out its commitment” to the fund in an English Devolution White Paper, announced in the Queen’s Speech.

EU funding has been a lifeline for local economies, but without replacement funding, communities could miss out on millions of pounds of additional private investment.

Local areas have put the £5.3 billion they have received from the EU since 2014 to good use, providing targeted training and job support for residents and businesses, especially for vulnerable groups that experience additional barriers to accessing the workplace.

The LGA wants elected mayors and local leaders to have the opportunity to help co-design the UKSPF, ensuring any future growth funding is more accessible, based on local need and distributed over the longer term.

Cllr Kevin Bentley, Chairman of the LGA’s Brexit Taskforce, said: “Councils desperately need long-term certainty around how the UK will replace vital EU regional aid funding. A fully funded, locally driven UKSPF is central to improving people’s lives, supporting local businesses and boosting the national economy.

“Without further clarity, growth and investment in local areas is at risk.

“Councils want to work with the Government to ensure the UKSPF is developed quickly and to make sure no area is left without investment into their communities and all parts of the country can benefit from the growth they so desperately need.”

Devolution and social care in Queen’s Speech

White Papers on English devolution and adult social care were among the announcements in the Queen’s Speech, as the Government set out its legislative proposals for the next parliamentary session.

There were also new bills proposed on building safety, the environment, serious violence, sentencing, the NHS, health service safety investigations, broadband and trade, while the Domestic Abuse Bill was carried forward from the last parliament.

The Queen’s Speech (see p16) also committed to ensuring that all young people have an excellent education. But there was no mention of the urgent challenges facing children’s social care services (see p10).

With no new devolution deals agreed in the past two years, LGA Chairman Cllr James Jamieson said councils would want to work with government on how to reignite the process. He added: “It is encouraging that the Queen’s Speech has signalled a renewed energy in favour of English devolution. Taking decisions over how to run local services closer to where people live is key to improving them and saving money.”

The promise of a White Paper on adult social care comes after the LGA published its own green paper last year.

Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA’s Community Wellbeing Board, said: “The Government’s proposals on the future of adult social care need to be substantive and must be brought forward as soon as possible. We know what the issues are – now is the time for answers.”

Responding to plans for a Building Safety Bill, Lord Porter, the LGA’s Building Safety Spokesman, said: “Reform of our broken building safety system cannot come soon enough.

“The new system must be properly funded, and residents have to be able to raise concerns and know they will be listened to.”

● Chancellor Sajid Javid has announced he will deliver his first Budget on 6 November, subject to progress on Brexit, which was ongoing as **first** went to press. The LGA will be making a submission on behalf of members, by the 30 October deadline. Please help us by emailing your council’s submission to finance@local.gov.uk

New homes at risk from loan rate rise

Housing, regeneration and infrastructure projects across the country could be cancelled after the Treasury unexpectedly raised borrowing costs from the Public Works Loans Board by one percentage point.

The LGA said the move could cost councils an extra £70 million a year for borrowing. It has expressed concerns over the impact this will have on the financial viability of capital schemes.

A spokesperson said: “It presents a real risk that capital schemes, including vital council house building projects, will cease to be affordable and may have to be cancelled as a result.”

The Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) is a statutory body operating within the

United Kingdom Debt Management Office, an executive agency of HM Treasury. Its function is to lend money from the National Loans Fund to local authorities and to collect the repayments.

In a letter to chief finance officers, the Treasury’s local government and reform team says the interest rate rise is in response to some local authorities substantially increasing their use of the PWLB in recent months, as the cost of borrowing has fallen to record lows.

It adds: “The Government will monitor the impact of this change and keep rates policy under review. As always, the Government will continue to work with individual authorities on a case-by-case basis if they have concerns over their financial position.”



news in brief

Top award for council housing

A street of council-owned terrace houses in Norwich has won the Stirling Prize for the best new building in the UK – the first time it has gone to social housing. The 93 homes in Goldsmith Street have been built to Passivhaus standards – ultra-low energy buildings that need minimal fuel for heating or cooling. Cllr Gail Harris, Norwich City Council's Cabinet Member for Social Housing, said: "Winning this prestigious award shows that it is possible to build fantastic new council homes, despite the challenges posed by central government cuts and restrictions around Right to Buy receipts."

Membership survey

The LGA wants to know what you – its members – think of the work it is doing on your behalf, to help inform its future plans. It has commissioned BMG Research to undertake its 'perceptions' survey, and is urging councillors approached by researchers to share their views on the LGA's offer and current provision, communications and methods of engagement, and the support offered to member councils via sector-led improvement. The survey will only take around 15 minutes to complete and will run until late November. Please contact Jamie.Lawson@bmgresearch.co.uk to book an appointment. If you have any queries about this research, please email kate.cooper@local.gov.uk

Finance consultation

The Government has published a technical consultation on the local government finance settlement for 2020/21. It sets out how it will allocate the additional funding announced in September's one-year Spending Round, including £1.5 billion extra for children's and adults' social care. The document also sets out the current position on finance reforms, such as increasing business rates retention, and council tax. The consultation closes on 31 October, see www.gov.uk/government/consultations/local-government-finance-settlement-2020-to-2021-technical-consultation



'Empower councils to lead on climate change'

Local government will need further powers and sustainable funding to deliver national policies that have an impact on climate change locally, the LGA has warned.

Councils have been working on various successful initiatives – including incorporating sustainability issues into their local development plans – to tackle climate change, with many of them working towards being zero carbon. At least 230 councils in the UK, along with the LGA, have declared a climate emergency. In a new Environment Bill, announced in the Queen's Speech, the Government is proposing to strengthen local powers in relation to air quality enforcement, and to set up an independent regulator to scrutinise environmental policy and law and take enforcement action.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Environment Spokesman, said: "We will work with the Government to ensure that the Environment Bill and Office for Environmental Protection are effective in addressing the concerns of communities."

"Councils want to lead the environmental improvement agenda, but national climate change expectations and air quality targets are unlikely to be met unless councils are given long-term funding, devolved powers and easier access to complex government funding pots."

Cllr Renard reiterated the LGA's offer to set up a joint national taskforce, comprising local leaders and relevant government departments, to determine the funding, legislation and policy changes needed to deliver zero net carbon emissions by 2030.

"A joint national taskforce led by councils would harness the critical partnership between local and national government to coordinate and drive climate change action for the benefit of communities, the country and the planet," he said.

● Wiltshire Council has topped a table of the most climate-friendly councils in England and Wales, based on research by Friends of the Earth, which called on councils to do more to cut carbon emissions and tackle climate change.

More funding for fast broadband

Hard-to-reach areas of the country could have better internet access as the Government has pledged to spend £5 billion on high-speed, full-fibre broadband.

The Chancellor's pledge was reaffirmed during the Queen's Speech, with a promise to accelerate the delivery of fast, reliable and secure broadband networks to millions of homes.

The Government has also committed to amending legislation so that building regulations require all new-build developments to have the infrastructure necessary to support super-fast, gigabit-capable connections.

The LGA has been making the case for councils to have this statutory backing, as currently they have no power to require developers take digital infrastructure into account when designing new homes.

Cllr Kevin Bentley, Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board, said: "It is good that the Government has pledged to invest in providing full-fibre broadband in hard-to-reach areas. Councils have long called for funding and support to bridge the digital connectivity gap so that rural communities are not left behind. Poor digital connectivity threatens the future success and prosperity of rural areas and therefore the UK as a whole."

He added: "Equally important is a decent mobile connection. With access patchy in some areas, it is critical the Government ensures good mobile coverage nationwide. This is why we are calling on the Government to work with Ofcom to launch a rural mobile roaming scheme allowing customers to roam onto any available network should 4G coverage not reach 95 per cent by 2022."

Spending on B&Bs rockets

New LGA analysis has found that councils are having to spend nearly 10 times as much on placing homeless households in 'bed and breakfast' accommodation as they were a decade ago, because of rising demand for support and a shortage of homes.

Councils only use 'B&Bs' as a last resort, but the continued loss of social housing is leaving many with no alternative in which to house homeless families.

Latest figures show that councils in England were forced to spend £93.3 million on B&B accommodation in 2017/18 – up from £10.6 million in 2009/10.

There are currently 7,040 households in B&Bs – up from 2,450 a decade ago.

The LGA is calling on the Government to give councils long-term funding to reduce homelessness and prevent it happening in the first place, as well as the powers to build more affordable housing and to replace homes being sold under Right to Buy.

It also says the Government needs to adapt welfare reforms to protect families at risk of

becoming homeless, by restoring local housing allowance rates to at least the 30th percentile of rents when the current freeze ends in 2020 (see p15).

Councils in England directly built 2,550 homes in 2018/19 – the highest figure since 1992/93 – but the LGA warns this risks being undermined by councils only being able to replace a quarter of homes sold under Right to Buy. Reform of Right to Buy is needed so that councils can set discounts locally and retain 100 per cent of receipts to reinvest in replacing homes.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Housing Spokesperson, said: "This analysis shows that, sadly, many councils are exhausting all their options and are having little choice but to use B&Bs more and more.

"Not only is this far from ideal for families, it is very expensive for councils. They would much rather use these scarce resources to build more affordable homes and prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place."



New investment in bus and road networks

The Chancellor has set out a series of measures to boost investment in roads and buses.

A new bus strategy will see the Government invest £220 million in services across England, which will fund new 'super bus' networks and expand the number of low-emission vehicles.

Sajid Javid also revealed the first projects to be included in the Government's road investment strategy.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Transport Spokesman, said: "With the number of bus journeys at the lowest level in more than a decade, a national bus strategy is an important step towards improving local bus services.

"While the £220 million earmarked to improve bus services will help, for it to succeed, it has to be backed by ongoing financial support to local areas.

"Councils face a £652 million funding gap in providing the concessionary bus fare scheme, which is putting nearly half of all bus routes at risk. It is vital this scheme is properly funded so councils can protect bus routes and reinvest in local networks."

In respect of roads, he added: "The Government spends 43 times per mile more on maintaining our national roads – which make up just 3 per cent of all roads – than on local roads, which are controlled by councils and make up 97 per cent of England's road network

"With councils facing a £9 billion local roads repair backlog, we also need to see government investment in national roads matched by at least the same investment in local roads, if we are to make the long-term improvements our country's road networks desperately need."

Warning over toxic skin creams

The LGA is warning people to avoid toxic skin lightening creams that increase the risk of cancer, after recent seizures of dangerous products by councils.

Criminals are exploiting a soaring market in skin lightening creams by making inferior illegal products that are being sold by rogue retailers, online and at car boot sales and market stalls, often at low prices. Many of the toxic creams contain the bleaching agent hydroquinone – described as the biological equivalent of paint stripper – while others can include potentially deadly levels of mercury. But the illegal products typically list their often harmful ingredients incorrectly, putting consumers at risk.

Hydroquinone can remove the top layer of skin, increasing the risk of skin cancer and causing

fatal liver and kidney damage. Mercury can cause similar life-threatening health problems.

Amid funding pressures and demand for services, councils have been forced to reduce trading standards budgets by around half since 2010. The LGA said councils need a long-term, sustainable funding settlement in next year's Spending Review so they can adequately provide the vital trading standards services that keep residents safe.

Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: "Councils have been targeting rogue retailers selling these banned creams and people should report any concerns so that town halls can take action to prevent anyone from buying these lotions, potentially ruining their looks forever."



Extremism call

The independent Commission for Countering Extremism has called for a complete overhaul of the Government's extremism strategy, and for it to take a "robust, victim-centred and rights-based approach".

Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said the commission's report "rightly recognises the importance of councils and their ongoing work in tackling extremism and promoting cohesion", and called for the voice of local government to be heard in its proposals for a taskforce to review the strategy.

He added: "The Government needs to ensure councils are sufficiently resourced and funded to tackle extremism in the long term, and to use next year's Spending Review to do so."

● The LGA is running free courses for councillors on Prevent, counter-extremism and cohesion from November to next March. For more information and to book a place, please email Grace.Collins@local.gov.uk

Kinship carers

Families and friends that take on responsibility for their loved ones' children are not recognised by law, according to the charity Grandparents Plus. It is calling for the Government to change this and provide more support for those who step in to help. Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "Kinship carers provide a vital service to society, stepping in to provide love and care for children who are no longer able to live with their birth parents. Extra funding for next year will help, but government needs to ensure that councils receive the long-term, consistent funding they need to make sure all children and families are able to thrive."

Cyber security

In partnership with the sector, the LGA has developed a new online self-assessment tool to help councils evaluate their cyber security on an ongoing basis. The tool will help local authorities assess what arrangements are in place, identify good practice within the council or shared service, and identify risks and areas for improvement. The tool is now open and will close at the end of November 2019. It will then be available twice a year. See <https://cs.esd.org.uk>

Concerns over planning reforms

Developers will be able to extend buildings upwards without planning permission, under changes to permitted development rules announced by the Government.

Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick MP said the reforms would make the planning system "faster and more efficient" and give families "greater freedom to extend their homes to meet their changing needs".

But the LGA is concerned the changes will take away the ability of local communities to shape their areas and ensure important local infrastructure is included in redevelopments. It could also result in the potential loss of affordable housing – as has happened with office-to-home conversions under permitted development rules.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Housing Spokesman, said: "Councils are committed to building the homes the country desperately needs; however, it is vital the planning process is allowed to do its job, by making sure that homes are built in the right places, are affordable to those who need them and supported by the right infrastructure.

"Limiting the application of planning rules also goes against the Government's commitment to implement the recommendations in Dame Judith Hackitt's report into building safety."

He added: "Planning is not a barrier to house building, with councils approving nine in 10 planning applications. It is essential that councils and local communities have a voice in the planning process.

"We reiterate our call for the Government



to give councils the powers to get the hundreds of thousands of homes with planning permission built more quickly."

It comes as LGA analysis has revealed a boom in barns converted into homes without needing planning permission.

Latest figures show the number of agricultural to residential conversions in England has risen from 226 in 2015/16 to 743 in 2017/18. The LGA is concerned that rural areas in particular are not being provided with the local services or infrastructure – and, in some places, affordable housing – that would normally be required in any development going through the planning system.

SEND services 'in crisis'

The Local Government Ombudsman has warned of a "crisis" in provision for children with special education needs and disabilities, with his office upholding nearly nine out of every 10 complaints about these services.

That compares with an 'uphold' rate of 57 per cent across all other complaints about council services.

In his latest report about the education, health and care (EHC) plan process, the Ombudsman identifies issues including long delays in issuing plans and a lack of oversight by senior staff, with some of the most vulnerable children in society not getting the right support at the right time.

Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "This report supports our long-term concerns that councils are in danger of being unable to meet their

statutory duties for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

"While we are pleased the Government has announced an additional £700 million for children with SEND, without certainty over funding for the future the situation will get worse as the number of children who need support continues to increase.

"This is why we are also pleased the Government plans to review the system, and we will work with them to get a clear picture of what more can be done to make sure vulnerable children can get the best support possible."

● The ombudsman's annual review of social care complaints has shown a slight decrease in the number of complaints and enquiries received – 3,070 in 2018/19 compared with 3,106 in the previous year. See p30.

OUR FOCUS IS ON THE PEOPLE THAT MATTER

We work across adult social care, children's services, health providers and increasingly with whole health and social care systems to deliver lasting change.

By working in partnership, we transform outcomes for people, improve ways of working for staff and realise significant financial savings.

ACHIEVING RESULTS IN PARTNERSHIP

We work alongside you, at the frontline, to make change happen. And we stick with you until the changes become the new normal.

On all our engagements, we put 100% of our fee at risk; we find this provides the basis of a relationship built on trust and confidence.

We have worked with a number of Councils and Health Providers across the country, helping to support the realisation of over £300M of annualised sustainable savings and positively impacting the lives of thousands of people.

OUR CLIENTS HAVE IMPROVED AND ESTABLISHED SERVICES AND WAYS OF WORKING TO:

- Reduce the number of people going to residential and nursing beds when they didn't need to by 75%
- Increase the effectiveness of their reablement service so it is 18% more effective at achieving independence
- Successfully move 41% of working age adults from residential care to supported living, shared lives and extra care
- Reduce child in need and child protection caseload numbers by 29%
- Increase staff productivity by 230%, allowing social workers to spend more time with service users
- Improve staff engagement so 95% of staff prefer the new ways of working
- Deliver in excess of 15% of net budget as annualised savings

features

Brighter futures

Children's services are about much more than just 'keeping children safe'



Councillor Judith Blake CBE is Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board

In November, lead members for children's services from across the country will meet in Bournemouth at the National Children and Adult Services Conference (NCASC) to talk about how we can give children the best possible future.

It is fitting that in this same month we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Children Act 1989 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – two milestones that shaped children's services today.

We often think of children's services as existing to keep children safe – and that is vital. But simply 'keeping children safe' fails to encompass their breadth and ambition. The Children Act and the UNCRC put children at the centre of policy-making, ensuring their voices were heard, their safety protected and their freedoms safeguarded. They called on councils and governments to make sure children had what they needed to grow into happy, healthy and successful adults.

Many children can get this support from their families and communities, especially with help from invaluable universal services such as health visitors and youth services.

But one in 10 children needs some extra help on top of this, and that's where children's

social care steps in. It can be something simple, like a parenting course or support with transitions. Or more intensive support might be needed to keep everyone in the family safe and well, whether that's support around domestic violence or providing respite care for children with complex disabilities.

For a minority of children, giving them the best chance will mean taking them into care. In those cases, finding children stable, loving homes with support to overcome any earlier trauma is vital, and we know that where this works best, children go on to thrive.

These are not 'other people's children'. No family is immune to life's challenges, and every family should feel safe in the knowledge that, if they need it, help is there to get things back on track.

The children who need help from social care are in every school and community. Councils have been trusted with making sure these children have the same chances as every other child, and that is a responsibility they take very seriously.

But we know that despite the enormous efforts of the entire children's workforce – from early help practitioners and social workers to foster carers – things could be better. That's why, in 2017, the LGA published Bright Futures, our seven-point plan for coordinated action across the public, community and voluntary sectors

"The children who need help from social care are in every school and community"

to drive the improvement necessary to consistently offer the brightest future for children and families.

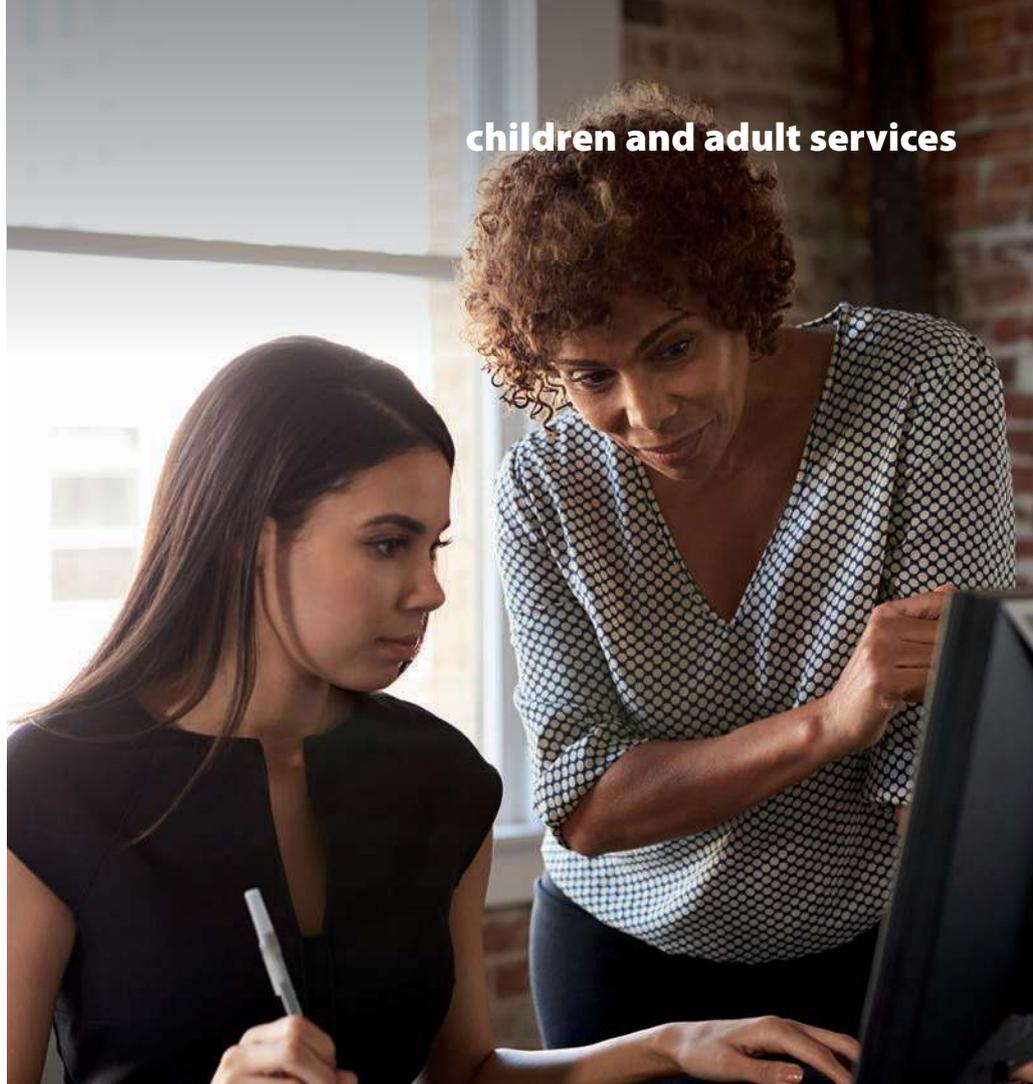
Since then, we've seen more government funding for innovation and improvement, better Ofsted ratings, and children's social care rising up the political agenda.

But the job is far from finished. At NCASC, we'll be publishing an updated Bright Futures statement outlining what actions we'll be taking over the coming year. We'll be redoubling our efforts to ensure councils get the funding they need to provide the services children and families deserve; to be certain children are at the heart of local and national agendas; and to make sure the right help is available at the right time – before situations become critical.

The Children Act 1989 and the UNCRC were landmarks, and we owe it to every child and young person to fulfil their visions. By coming together across sectors, we can make that happen.



All Bright Futures documents can be found at www.local.gov.uk/bright-futures. To find out more about NCASC and book a place, please visit www.local.gov.uk/events



Casey Gavin went into care at 12. At 18, she got a flat through City of Wolverhampton Council but struggled to manage her finances and had to take out payday loans for essentials such as electricity, leaving her struggling with depression.

"It's not like you turn 16, 17, 18, and all of a sudden you are going to know how to be an adult. It doesn't work like that," she says.

For young people leaving care, it is even harder to make that difficult but crucial transition to adulthood as they often lack the family and social networks most of their peers can rely on for help, advice and encouragement.

Here at the City of Wolverhampton Council, we are proud of our care leavers and have high aspirations for their development into adulthood. As part of this commitment, we provide additional support over and above what we are legally required to give in our 'local offer' to care leavers, and have forged strong links with the Care Leaver Covenant.

Launched last October, the covenant encourages public, private and voluntary organisations to pledge their support for care leavers and offer them practical support – such as apprenticeships, work experience and mentoring.

We have been pivotal in developing the covenant's strategy: Emma Bennett, our Director of Children's Services, was involved in its early stages, and attended the ministerial launch along with care leavers from the City of Wolverhampton's Care Leavers Forum. We are a covenant 'champion' council.

In line with covenant strategies, our care leavers are guaranteed an interview if they apply for a council apprenticeship, and we have three, ring-fenced, paid opportunities as well.

We are developing a graduate trainee management scheme for care leavers, as we currently have 38 young people at university. And all our care leavers living in Wolverhampton are exempt from council tax up to the age of 25.

Working with the covenant, we are leading the way with a strategy around social value and procurement. For all council contracts exceeding £181,302, 10 per cent of the evaluation score assesses contractors' offers on social value – with the focus on opportunities for children and young people in care, and care leavers.

For example, our insurance provider, Zurich, has supported two, nine-month, paid work experience placements for our care leavers, to help them understand the insurance industry and the world of work.

And what about Casey? With the support of the council, she is now on track for a first at university and has a part-time job

Supporting care leavers

Working with the Care Leaver Covenant is improving support for looked-after young people transitioning to adulthood



Councillor John Reynolds is Cabinet Member for Children and Young People at City of Wolverhampton Council

with the council. She is also the face of a promotional video for Barclays' LifeSkills care leavers programme, which is a collaboration between the covenant and the bank to adapt its financial literacy materials for young people so they are more tailored to the issues

facing care leavers. Casey has also been involved with evaluating the programme's content.

Working with local partners and ensuring care leavers participate in the development of the services and support available to them are the main reasons why we have been successful in Wolverhampton in driving the range of opportunities available to our care leavers. We remain committed to further developing these opportunities, so that our many talented young care leavers achieve above and beyond that of other young people.

i To find out more about the Care Leaver Covenant, please visit www.mycovenant.org.uk/. You can view Casey's video at www.mycovenant.org.uk/caseys-story-with-barclays-life-skills

We don't yet know if we will arrive at this year's annual National Children and Adult Services Conference (NCASC) in the middle of a General Election. What we do know is that colleagues will arrive with passion and commitment to improve the lives of the local people they serve.

With that objective front and centre, what issues do we expect colleagues will want to hear about and discuss in Bournemouth?

Some will be the 'usual suspects' – not least, funding. Others will be new, reflecting developments over the past 12 months. All will matter in terms of how councils can continue to help support and improve people's wellbeing and independence.

The recent Spending Round may help shore up adult social care in 2020/21, but will it address all demand pressures next year – and what ground needs to be laid as we look ahead to 2020's multi-year Spending Review?

Then, of course, comes the perennial issue of whether the debate about the long-term future of care and support will have moved on. The Queen's Speech confirmed that the Government will bring forward proposals to reform adult social care. But will they be published by the time we meet at NCASC and, if so, will they be far-reaching enough to really secure the long term?

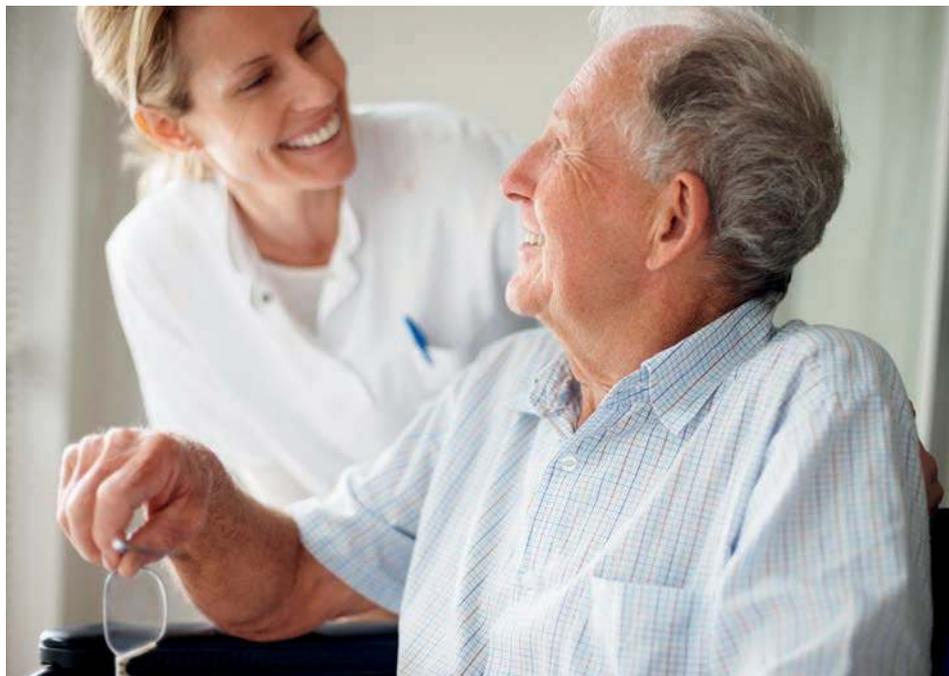
In the realm of public health, colleagues will be keen to consider the progress made over the past year to truly prioritise prevention. Can we confidently say we are starting to see a move away from a focus on hospitals and medical interventions that patch up people once they become ill, towards genuine investment in our local communities to address the wider determinants of health – housing, giving children the best start, and giving people access to a decent job? These are the most important factors in keeping people healthy, productive and resilient.

Last, and by no means least, what of the big changes afoot in the NHS as the Long Term Plan is implemented? All sustainability and transformation partnerships are set to become integrated care systems by 2021 and, at neighbourhood level, all GP practices are now part of primary care networks.

Colleagues will be eager to think about how best to ensure that councils are closely

Caring councils

Funding for adult social care, public health and NHS reforms are among the key issues facing councillors and officers



“Health and wellbeing boards provide continuity and accountability to their communities”



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

involved in planning and delivery at all levels. In particular, we know that health and wellbeing boards (HWBs) have a major role to play in improving health and wellbeing outcomes, improving care and support services, and achieving best value.

Especially now – amid the turmoil and change in the care and health system – HWBs

provide continuity and a vital anchor in place-based approaches, and accountability to their communities. They are the only forums that bring together political, clinical and community leaders to identify the biggest health and wellbeing challenges, and the action required to address them. But beyond local government – and particularly in the health sphere – is that the perception?

At a time of such uncertainty, upheaval and challenge, local government's skill set is more important than ever. Councils' resilience and innovation, combined with their willingness to work beyond strict party lines, makes them a trusted and essential component of public service across the UK.

NCASC will again offer an important platform for councils to share their knowledge and make the case for the funding and freedoms required to enable local government to continue making its vital contribution to health, care and wellbeing.



The National Children and Adult Services Conference takes place from 20-22 November in Bournemouth. To view the programme and book a place, please visit www.local.gov.uk/events



OurDay2018 participants: Zuby Hamard, Sport and Physical Activity Manager at Bradford City Council



Eric, LGBT Community Safety Officer at Brighton and Hove City Council



Megan from Dorset County Council



#OurDay is your day

The LGA's annual tweetathon, highlighting the amazing things public sector workers do for residents every day, kicks off on 19 November

Councils are the backbone of their local communities. Even during uncertain times, they continue to provide efficient, effective and consistent services.

In fact, local government delivers more than 800 services on a daily basis for their residents.

At the LGA, we think the work councils do should be celebrated. That is why we are delighted to announce that #OurDay will be returning on 19 November.

#OurDay is a chance for local government to come together to celebrate the people who keep our communities running. The annual 24-hour social media marathon offers an opportunity for everyone who works or volunteers in local public services to share their stories of how they improve the quality of life of local residents.

Last year, on Twitter alone, more than 10,000 people took part, posting close to 34,000 tweets, reaching more than 26 million people. As a result, #OurDay trended at No 1 in the UK all day, as well as fourth worldwide.

A variety of public sector workers got

involved last year, including tanker drivers in Tandridge, gardeners in Wigan, firefighters in Huntingdon, LGBT community safety officers in Brighton, homecare workers in Nottingham and park rangers in Camden, to name but a few.

This year, we are celebrating #OurDay on Twitter and, for the first time, on Facebook too. We want to make this year's #OurDay the biggest and best celebration of local

“We will be highlighting local government’s unsung heroes and the range of services they deliver on behalf of their communities”

government yet – but we need your help to do it.

There are lots of ways that you can get involved with #OurDay. Whether you are a councillor, a local government worker or a resident, we want you to get tweeting.

To help, we have devised a how-to kit to give you a few ideas that you can use in your area. In the toolkit, you can find a number of assets to use on social media, a list of ideas to make your content as engaging as possible, and a guide to how long this might take you to produce. You can find it all online at www.local.gov.uk/our-day.

As well as sharing your posts throughout the day, we will also be showcasing a number of videos, gifs, quizzes, threads, interesting facts and stories to promote the work councils carry out.

We will also be highlighting local government’s unsung heroes and the range of services they deliver on behalf of their communities. If you have an unsung hero in your council who has gone above and beyond to serve their community, please email ourday@local.gov.uk with a 30-second video of them explaining what they do, or send us their picture and a 200-word biography on their role.

Remember, #OurDay is your day, so get creative, get ambitious and get ready for the biggest day in the local government calendar! We look forward to seeing what you all get up to.



#OurDay 2019 takes place this year on Tuesday 19 November.

Visit www.local.gov.uk/our-day for free resources and a toolkit to help you get involved



Havering Council has embarked on one of the biggest and most ambitious housing regeneration projects in the capital. But for us, regeneration is about more than just building houses – we are building communities for future generations.

Working in partnership with national developer Wates Residential, our ‘12 Estates’ regeneration project will deliver approximately 5,200 high-quality homes, across 12 council-owned estates, in the next 12 to 15 years, doubling the council’s stock of rented accommodation and more than doubling the number of affordable homes.

We have already made excellent progress on the first phase of the project, with Napier and New Plymouth House in Rainham, and Solar, Serena and Sunrise Courts in South Hornchurch, currently being demolished. Rainham is a more deprived part of the borough, so beginning the 12 Estates project there will be a real game-changer for the area.

We held extensive public consultations to ensure planning for the Napier and New Plymouth site included the things that are important to our residents. Thanks to these consultations, children’s play areas and plenty of green space are included in the planning.

It is important that we put residents at the centre of everything we do, and – with an ageing population – vital that our regeneration creates homes that meet the needs of the community. So, the antiquated Solar, Serena and Sunrise Courts site will give way to a modern retirement village, with accessible design and social spaces creating a safe haven for elderly residents.

The social value of regeneration

An east London regeneration project aims to build communities as well as new homes



Councillor Damian White (Con)
is Leader of Havering Council

Our joint venture with Wates Residential is a 50/50 split, with the council contributing the land and the developers covering the costs of construction. In the past, we have struggled with opportunities for larger-scale regeneration because of depressed land values. As these have increased, we have been able to move on from piecemeal developments to comprehensive opportunities to rebuild whole communities for our residents, for our sons and daughters, the people who have made Havering their home.

We are ensuring that this investment in the borough goes much further than just creating new homes; we are committed to delivering social value. For us, social value is the added social, economic and environmental benefits that can be gained from regeneration – from education and skills

*“It is important that we put residents **at the centre of everything we do**”*

support through apprenticeships and our pop-up business school event, to engagement with communities through outreach events.

Local contractors Kilnbridge Construction Services and Downwell Demolition were appointed earlier this year for the first-phase demolition work, after Wates Residential held four ‘Meet the buyer’ events for local suppliers to learn about contract opportunities.

Through our supply chain initiative, ‘Meet the buyer’ events, training opportunities and apprenticeships, we can make sure this project benefits as many businesses and residents in Havering as possible.

The 12 Estates joint venture is just one element of the multibillion-pound Havering regeneration project, with further ventures on the horizon, masterplans for Havering’s town centres, and an improvement programme for housing estates not earmarked for regeneration.

It is such an exciting time to live and work in the borough, and to be part of this great legacy we are going to deliver.



For more information about Havering’s 12 Estates project, please visit www.havering.gov.uk/info/20057/building_new_homes_for_havering

Covering the cost of renting

The LGA is part of a campaign to prevent people being priced out of their homes



Councillor Richard Watts is Chair of the LGA's Resources Board

Everyone deserves a decent, secure and affordable home. That includes people who get support from housing benefit or Universal Credit to pay their rent in the private sector.

However, councils are increasingly concerned about people who are struggling to meet the cost of renting privately.

The local housing allowance (LHA) determines the maximum level of housing benefit, or support for housing costs within Universal Credit, that can be paid within a local area. In 2016, LHA rates were frozen by the Government, but are due to be reviewed at the end of this year.

The LGA is calling on ministers to take this opportunity to invest in LHA, so that it covers the true cost of renting.

This call is a key part of the LGA's support for homelessness charity Crisis's

Cover the Cost campaign, which is being supported by a coalition of charities, and housing and local government organisations – including Shelter, Homeless Link, the Residential Landlords Association, St Mungo's, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, London Councils, the District Councils' Network, Centrepoin, and the Chartered Institute of Housing.

The widening gap many people face between their incomes and the cost of rent has led many to experience financial hardship, in-work poverty and even homelessness. These serious issues are placing additional, unsustainable costs on councils in meeting their housing commitments and providing support.

Crisis's latest report shows that restoring LHA rates to cover the cheapest third of rents could prevent more than 6,000 individuals and families from becoming homeless, and lift more than 32,000

individuals and families out of poverty, including 35,000 children.

It proposes that a three-year investment to restore rates to the 30th percentile would bring wider benefits of £5.5 billion, including from reduced need for homelessness services and related services such as health, and further savings of £124 million from reducing the need for temporary accommodation.

In 2017, an LGA survey of housing managers found that 96 per cent of respondents were concerned that homelessness would continue to increase as a result of the LHA freeze. Councils also highlighted instances of private landlords withdrawing from renting to households in receipt of benefit, further constraining supply.

In 'The Homeless Monitor England (2019)' study, commissioned by Crisis and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, nine out of 10 councils warned more and more people on the lowest incomes in their area will become homeless because the freeze on LHA and

“The widening gap many people face between their incomes and rent has led to financial hardship, in-work poverty and even homelessness”

other benefits means they can't afford to pay their rents.

I would urge all councillors to collate and share their findings and concerns, so the Government has the impetus to design an effective approach to housing costs when the LHA freeze is reviewed this autumn.

We need ministers to restore fairness to the system, so that we can work together to deliver our wider shared ambitions to end homelessness and improve outcomes for low-income households.

Investment in social housing is a vital part of the long-term solution, and we are pleased that government is working with councils to increase supply. But we urgently need to ensure that households can meet their living costs now, and LHA is a crucial part of that solution.

It is vital that our welfare system works effectively to provide a safety net for all those who need it.



For more information about Crisis's Cover the Cost campaign, visit www.crisis.org.uk/get-involved/campaign/cover-the-cost. The LGA provides resources, research and support for councils on welfare reform, see www.local.gov.uk/topics/welfare-reform



The Queen's Speech

The Government has proposed 26 bills and promised white papers on devolution and adult social care in the next parliamentary session

As part of its #CouncilsCan campaign, the LGA has been calling for a new financial and devolutionary settlement for local government to empower councils to transform their local areas.

So it is encouraging that October's Queen's Speech signalled a renewed energy in favour of English devolution, and included some finance proposals.

Taking decisions over how to run local services closer to where people live is key to improving them and saving money. With no new devolution deals agreed in two years, councils will now look to work with government on how to kick-start this process in a way that works for all areas.

Councils are working to help their communities prepare for Brexit. They are as

prepared as they can be, but information and resource gaps remain.

EU funding has been critical for councils and others in creating jobs, supporting small and medium enterprises, delivering skills, building infrastructure and boosting local growth in all types of areas across the country. The detail of the UK replacement fund (UKSPF) and quantum of funding remains an outstanding concern and progress needs to be made urgently.

The Government also announced that it will finally bring forward proposals to reform adult social care – a long-standing LGA priority. The Government's proposals need to be substantive.

It is positive that the Queen's Speech committed to ensuring that all young people

have an excellent education. The recent additional money for council high needs budgets to support children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) will help councils deliver for children.

It is, however, disappointing that there is no mention of the urgent challenges facing children's social care services as the pressures facing them are rapidly becoming unsustainable. Government should act to ensure councils have the resources they need to keep children safe and support their wellbeing in years to come.

Reforming the building safety system is urgent so we are pleased that the Queen's Speech includes legislation to enshrine a tough new system into law. We need a partnership between the new building regulator, councils and fire services, with local authorities given effective powers, including meaningful sanctions.

Other proposed bills of interest to councils cover domestic abuse, serious violence and sentencing; the NHS, health service safety investigations, and mental health; broadband and trade; EU funding and immigration; and the Armed Forces Covenant, electoral integrity, infrastructure, rail reform and animal welfare.

Adult social care

- The Government will bring forward proposals to reform adult social care in England to ensure dignity in old age.

LGA view: “The Government must set out its thinking at the earliest opportunity. We need practical and workable proposals to secure social care for the generations to come so that adults of all ages are supported to live the lives they want to lead. This means ensuring the current system is adequately funded, as well as

introducing reforms that improve access to care and pool the financial risk so individuals do not face catastrophic costs.”



Domestic abuse

- The Bill aims to transform the approach of the justice system and other agencies to victims of domestic abuse.
- Proposals include defining domestic abuse and establishing the post of Domestic Abuse Commissioner.



LGA view: “Addressing all forms of domestic abuse is a high priority for councils and we support the Bill’s objectives of ensuring that people feel able to report abuse. There needs to be a greater focus on prevention and early intervention measures to tackle the root causes of domestic abuse and support more victims. This should include funding and investment for evidence-based perpetrator programmes and for key learning and best practice from domestic homicide reviews to be shared on a national level.”



This is an edited version of the LGA’s ‘Queen’s Speech 2019: on-the-day briefing’. To read the briefing in full, please visit www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/queens-speech-2019-day-briefing. For more on our #CouncilsCan campaign, see www.local.gov.uk/councils-can

English devolution



- A Devolution White Paper will “unleash regional potential in England” and enable decisions affecting local people to be made locally.

LGA view: “There is clear and significant evidence that outcomes improve and the country gets better value for

money when councils have the freedoms and funding to make local decisions. The future devolution of powers should not be contingent on the adoption of a mayoral governance model and areas should be able to propose their own governance arrangements. To enable meaningful and self-sufficient financial management, further fiscal devolution is necessary. This could take the shape of assignment of national taxation (such as a share of fuel duty or income tax), further powers over existing local taxes (such as the abolition of the council tax referendum threshold and full control over discounts) and powers to create new levies, such as a local tourism tax or an e-commerce levy.”

Building safety

- The Government will bring forward laws to implement new building safety standards, including a new safety framework for high-rise residential buildings.
- It will provide clearer accountability for, and stronger duties on, those responsible for high-rise safety; give residents a stronger voice; and strengthen enforcement and sanctions.

LGA view: “Reform of our failed building safety system cannot come soon enough. However, in designing the new regulatory framework, we must avoid creating a two-tier building safety system. A close partnership between the new building regulator, councils and the fire service will be essential in ensuring we can build safe



communities, towns and cities. At the core of this new partnership must be tougher enforcement powers for councils and the fire service.”

Serious violence

- A Serious Violence Bill will place a new duty on public sector bodies, ensuring they work together to address serious violence.
- The Bill will also ensure that serious violence is an explicit priority for community safety partnerships.

LGA view: “We support a public health approach to tackling serious violent crime, which has become an increasing priority for councils. Early intervention and prevention needs to be central to this work, as opposed to relying solely on a criminal justice strategy. In order to tackle serious violence in our communities, the funding cuts to local youth services,



youth offending teams and councils’ public health budgets need to be reversed.”

The environment

- Measures will be introduced to improve air and water quality, tackle plastic pollution and restore habitats so plants and wildlife can thrive.
- Legislation will also create new legally binding environmental improvement targets, and establish an independent regulator to scrutinise environmental policy and law, investigate complaints and take enforcement action.

LGA view: “We welcome the Bill’s intention to strengthen local powers in relation to air quality enforcement. Many of our powers are decades old and need to be reformed to fit with modern sources of emissions. Additional resources will need to be available for councils to deal effectively with environmental protection. Local government wants to see measures that reduce the amount of unnecessary and unrecyclable material becoming an issue in the first place. The LGA has long called for retailers and manufacturers to pay for recycling and disposing of packaging in household waste and we welcome the commitment to do this.”



In charge?



Councillor David Renard is Chairman of the LGA's Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board

Councils have a role to play in ensuring sufficient charging points are available to support the replacement of diesel and petrol cars with electric versions

Many councils have debated the issue of climate change and are putting in place plans to build on previous achievements to tackle this urgent issue (see **first** 640).

Transport is the second biggest sector for carbon emissions and we need to seriously consider all possible actions we can take to reduce its carbon impact.

Councils are also subject to legal requirements to improve air quality around their road network. Electrification could be a solution to both these problems, by reducing the environmental impact of cars.

'The Road to Zero' – the Government's strategy for reducing emissions from road transport – has set an ambition that no new conventional petrol or diesel cars will be sold by 2040. Meeting this ambition is going to require a step change in the availability of electric vehicle charging infrastructure. Charge points will have to become as ubiquitous as petrol stations to fuel most vehicles. This is a challenge that will be on the minds of many policy-makers in local government over the coming decades.

many councils are already showing that they have a role to play in catalysing this market and helping in its early stages.

The electric vehicle charging landscape can be a daunting area for many councils and councillors. There are many charge point providers out there, the technology involved can appear complex, and the potential role for councils is unclear.

It is also a non-statutory service and many councils, given current budgetary pressures, may find it challenging to invest in charging infrastructure. In my own council, we are currently consulting on a draft updated policy to require house builders to provide a minimum of one charge point per home where there is a requirement for parking spaces, making it even easier for people to own electric vehicles in Swindon.

Alongside our guide, we are also holding an event examining what role councils can play in building this network (see below for more details). The event will explore councils' long- and short-term role, and independent experts, leading industry representatives and councils will describe what kind of infrastructure is needed – and what policies are needed to support the transition. It's aimed at all councils, from small rural district councils to major cities.

This is an exciting and emerging area for councils. The LGA intends to lead the debate nationally on behalf of our members, to ensure that we can capture all the environmental benefits of electrification as quickly as possible, in a way that is affordable and financially sustainable.

“The electric vehicle charging landscape can be a daunting area for many councils and councillors”

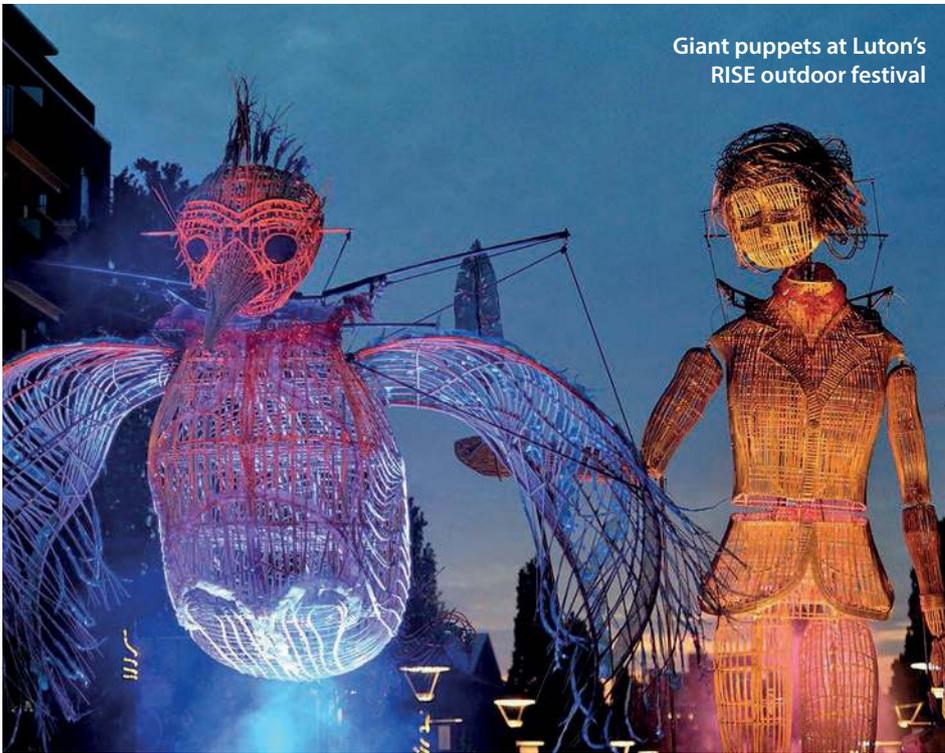
The LGA is helping councils respond to this emerging policy agenda. Over the summer, we published our new electric vehicle charging guide for elected members. 'Councils in charge: making the case for electric charging investment' is a guide to understanding why a council might consider investing in this area and some of the practical concerns that need to be addressed.

We do not anticipate that most councils either want, or need, to become the long-term default provider for electric vehicle charge points. For the transition to be successful, the commercial charge point market will have to strengthen. However,



You can download the LGA's report on electric charging, at www.local.gov.uk/councils-charge-making-case-electric-charging-investment. **'In charge? Councils' role in electric vehicle charging'** takes place on 24 March in London. To find out more and to book your place, visit www.local.gov.uk/events

Giant puppets at Luton's RISE outdoor festival



Diversifying the night-time economy

Town centres blighted by alcohol-related anti-social behaviour can be turned around by councils and their partners



Councillor Maria Lovell (Lab) is Deputy Mayor of Luton and the borough's Night Mayor

Luton town centre has experienced issues with alcohol related anti-social behaviour for a number of years.

Following the closure of two nightclubs, these issues were exacerbated and local bars and pubs saw an increased level of alcohol-related anti-social behaviour (ASB), which affected residents' perceptions of the town centre at night.

To tackle these issues, Luton Council led a programme of improvement jointly with local partners and overseen by a Strategic Town Centre Group.

The intention was to increase footfall,

improve perceptions of the town centre after dark, support businesses within the night-time economy and attract further investment. In particular, there was a desire to develop the arts and culture offer to diversify from the existing, alcohol-led, night-time economy offer and attract a wider audience.

The Strategic Town Centre group comprised a range of different council services including planning, licensing, community safety and street services, as well as local businesses. The group explored a number of options through which to drive improvement, opting to set up a business improvement district (BID) – a defined area in which a levy is charged on all business rate payers (in addition to business rates) and is used to develop projects that benefit local businesses.

Luton's BID, set up in 2015, has been a key driver for reducing crime and ASB,

and increasing footfall and the diversity of visitors, including after dark.

Alongside the council, police and others, it worked to achieve 'Purple Flag' status, an accreditation recognising a well-managed night-time economy.

BID funding was secured to pay for equipment such as security wands and a new digital radio network, which is used by the local shopping centre to ensure wider information sharing between businesses.

Partners have also worked hard to reinvigorate the town's events calendar, ensuring both new and existing events continue past 4pm to encourage visitors to stay into the evening.

Through licensing public spaces and routes throughout the town centre, the council has been able to facilitate additional events and activities, such as a giant puppet parade and an extended Diwali festival.

Since the launch of the improvement programme, our data has shown a typical increase of five per cent in footfall after 5pm. The town has received more positive coverage of the night-time economy offer and events.

Increased public confidence in the town centre has attracted inward investment. The council worked alongside the University of Bedfordshire to offer opportunities for incubator businesses, offering low rents and short-term lets in the town's historic hat factories.

The arts and culture offer within the town has also flourished through this work and the appointment of a cultural enabler, whose role is to drive the implementation of an artistic vision, working with artists and practitioners and the new Luton Creative Forum.

This allowed the delivery of a huge evening outdoor spectacular in July, to commemorate the centenary of the iconic Peace Day Riots, when Luton Town Hall was burned down during a riot by ex-servicemen unhappy with unemployment and other grievances. With live music, dance and performances, the event drew large numbers to the town centre.

The BID is continuing its vibrant programme of events – which most recently included the Polonia Festival, a celebration of Polish and Eastern European cultures – and is mandated to run until 2020.

“Partners have worked hard to reinvigorate the town's events calendar, ensuring new and existing events encourage visitors to stay into the evening”



The LGA's recent publication, 'Approaches to managing the night-time economy', includes several case studies and provides a useful tool for councillors, see www.local.gov.uk/publications

Making a difference

The Local Government Challenge's most recent winner is using his £10,000 scholarship to develop a project tackling summer learning loss among poorer children



Rob Comber is a Service Development Manager in Kent County Council's children, young people and education directorate

I had only heard a little bit about the Local Government Challenge from previous contestants, who all told me the experience had a positive impact on their work. I was hoping it would do the same for me.

After doing a bit of research, I became excited by the idea of working with others from different councils across the country

and learning how local government works outside of Kent. I was hoping there would be opportunities to bring new ways of working into my work and that of my team.

The first challenge didn't get off to a great start – my alarm went off at 5.15am, it was snowing, and the first train of the day was cancelled. I was slightly regretting what I had signed up to.

Three and a half hours later, I was meeting the other contestants (now friends) at a train station somewhere in Oxfordshire. Another hour later, and we were thrown into the first challenge. I can't speak for everyone, but by lunch I could see that taking part in the LG Challenge was going to be an amazing experience.

I can now say that the LG Challenge has changed the way I work. I, and my team, work in a much more collaborative and creative way, helping us to deliver better results.

I am better able and equipped to deliver presentations, although I have not yet plucked up the courage to deliver a role-play in any of them! I am more confident in working with senior managers and leaders to explore new and different ways of working.

In local government, with the pressures we face every day, it is very easy to always look internally. The biggest change for me is that I am now connected into a wider network that has opened up a much more diverse conversation for me when looking to address challenges within Kent. It has been invaluable to share ideas across a network and is already making a difference to the way I work and deliver services in Kent.

Having worked in children's services for eight years, the wellbeing of children is at the heart of everything I do. I had heard about the concept of summer learning loss and felt passionate about creating a solution that meant children did not need to be disadvantaged by the summer holiday break in learning.

The way I developed the proposal was a mix of desk-based research and engaging with young people and teachers around the issue. The feedback I got from speaking with young people was fundamental to my proposal and will remain fundamental as the project progresses.

LG Challenge is by far the best development opportunity I have been involved in during my career, and my advice to others considering applying would be absolutely to go for it.

But be prepared for incredibly hard work, late nights, early mornings, moving completely out of your comfort zone, pressure and delivering some of the most demanding work you'll ever be asked to do.

If you're prepared for that, what you will get is: an opportunity to deliver genuinely transformational work for other local authorities in a collaborative and innovative way; an opportunity to work with and build a network of inspiring individuals across our sector; and an immersive personal development opportunity that will enhance your career in the public sector.



Rob Comber receiving his £10,000 Bruce-Lockhart Scholarship from Lady Bruce-Lockhart



Could your council host a future challenge for the Local Government Challenge? Email lgchallenge@local.gov.uk or visit www.local.gov.uk/lg-challenge for more information.

“In local government, with the pressures we face every day, it is very easy to always look internally”

Alleviating loneliness

Standardising data could help lonely people access the services and information they need more easily



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



According to the Office for National Statistics, 6 per cent of adults in England feel 'always' or 'often' lonely. Sadly, some estimates put the number of people who feel lonely even higher – with loneliness said to affect one in five adults.

Always or often feeling lonely is harming too many people's health and wellbeing – it can be as bad as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

Loneliness also creates additional cost pressures on social care and other local services, with many patients attending GP surgeries in need of a friendly chat, rather than clinical services.

Councils are working hard to stop people feeling ignored and invisible. But a lack of good-quality, up-to-date and easily accessible information about local services and support all too often prevents lonely people, and those helping them, from finding the accurate and timely advice they so desperately need.

The LGA and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) have joined forces to tackle loneliness as part of a national £150,000 pilot project to 'standardise' how councils and local partners collect and publish information about local services. Together, we have launched an open data pilot that will run until March 2020 across Hull City Council,

Blackburn with Darwen Council and Elmbridge District Council.

Councils already publish data about their services and support for residents. The open-data pilot aims to kick-start a step-change in how people access services and support from councils and local partners, making it easier for people to get the help and advice they need and to drive efficiencies and savings.

As part of the LGA's sector-led improvement offer, we have created a 'standardised' way for local authorities and their partners – including voluntary organisations, community groups and health services – to work together to collect data that helps both residents and the sector to access information.

Bristol City Council and North Yorkshire County Council are already collecting local services data using this LGA standard. South Gloucestershire Council, working with Bristol, is also looking to publish services data to the LGA standard.

Publishing information about services in a standard way could have a far-reaching impact that extends beyond loneliness – from supporting ex-homeless households to settle into their communities, to finding local activities and services, and to publishing a public toilet map across the country.

Working in association with local health,

“Talking about data isn't always sexy, but standardising data has the potential to transform the way we deliver services”

voluntary and community schemes, each area will explore how best to capture and share information about local activities and support in an efficient and reliable way. The success of the pilots will be taken forward to encourage wider take-up.

Councils and local partners provide a wide range of services for the people and places they serve. Making their availability widely known, keeping information up-to-date and matching services to need and eligibility remains our biggest challenge. We also need the certainty of sustainable funding of local facilities and activities if these pilots are to be a success.

Talking about data isn't always sexy, but standardising data and making it accessible has the potential to transform the way we deliver services.

Loneliness affects millions of people across the country, and the open data pilots are a real testament to councils that are ambitious for their local communities and committed to supporting local areas to find solutions to their problems.



The LGA has published two guides for councils on tackling loneliness – visit www.local.gov.uk/publications and search for 'loneliness'. See www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-launches-governments-first-loneliness-strategy for the Government's loneliness strategy

interview

Looking after the victims

Local solutions are the best way to combat anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse, says Victims' Commissioner Dame Vera Baird



© LGA/ANDREW BAKER

Dame Vera Baird is looking forward to speaking at the LGA's anti-social behaviour conference, when we meet in early October.

She reflects on her "really happy experience" of working with local authorities as the former Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria, but warns she will be "moaning a bit" at the conference.

This is because the recently appointed Victims' Commissioner is championing her predecessor's last report, on anti-social behaviour (ASB), which was critical of police, local councils and housing providers for letting down victims.

The report found examples of police and council staff failing to appreciate the cumulative impact of persistent anti-social behaviour; a culture of playing down ASB as being 'low-level'; and that many police forces, councils, and police and crime commissioners make no reference to the statutory 'community trigger' mechanism that victims can use to help resolve ASB.

"People who've had three experiences of anti-social behaviour – who've made reports and haven't got a solution or had a satisfactory outcome – are entitled to press this trigger, which requires all the relevant authorities to come together to discuss how to put it right," says Dame Vera.

"My predecessor Baroness Newlove's report shows a 37 per cent increase in ASB. There has to be an annual report in each local authority and they are almost all nil

returns for the community trigger. It's just inconceivable that people don't want to seek further help if they are in this position. Inevitably, the conclusion is that they don't know about it – it's not being promoted."

Dame Vera is very clear that victims of ASB should attend the meetings they have triggered and that, ideally, these should be chaired by someone independent. Otherwise, victims may feel – wrongly or rightly – that the authorities are coming together to find a way of "getting rid of this nuisance".

She adds: "There is a lot of work to be done about ASB. You shouldn't talk about crime and ASB as if the second is a lesser version of the first.

"If somebody broke into my garden shed and stole my spade, that would be a crime. But it isn't going to cut me to the quick; it isn't going to fundamentally undermine my personality. But if I live in a house and somebody's kicking a ball against the wall, throwing stuff at my window, calling me names when I come out, drinking outside every Friday night and generally being monstrous, it would definitely undermine my personality.

"I think ASB is capable of being extremely damaging to a lot of people in the long term. So it's key that we get this right. By the time it's happened three times, people are getting in a state of worry and concern, so the community trigger is very important."

Aside from the trigger issue, Dame Vera is positive about the work of local authorities, and says she is keen to work with them on other common interests – domestic abuse, gangs and knife crime, and modern slavery.

Domestic abuse, she believes, "will never be top of anyone's list if it's not a statutory responsibility". But it has to be properly resourced, and it needs a renewed focus on preventative work.

"Refuges are constantly under threat because local authorities can't sufficiently fund them. Follow-on accommodation is a rare commodity," she notes.

"And you do need local authorities to be able to fund programmes for perpetrators. When I was a police and crime commissioner, I had six local authorities, and there were perpetrator programmes in five. Then they just declined, because these weren't a legislative requirement and they just couldn't be afforded.

"We got some money from the Home Office for a whole-system approach to domestic abuse, which included perpetrator programmes, so we funded them for a few years. They were pretty beneficial. You have to get the right people on them; if somebody is very advanced into coercive control, there is no point putting them on a perpetrator programme – there has to be a wholly different approach. But if you get them at the



“You shouldn’t talk about crime and anti-social behaviour as if the second is a lesser version of the first”

right level, these voluntary programmes can be quite effective.”

Local partners are key to identifying perpetrators, she says, citing an example of council housing staff picking up on punch holes in walls or broken front doors.

With the Domestic Abuse Bill carried forward from the last parliamentary session in the Queen’s Speech, Dame Vera wants to see the proposed reforms and changes “accompanied by a very powerful public information campaign, so that people can understand domestic abuse and try to change the culture”.

Much like the change in culture in respect of drink driving, she says we “need to get to the situation where, if someone says something about what they intend to do when they get home, or are criticising their partner in a demeaning way, other people say ‘hang on a minute’ and intervene”.

Dame Vera also predicts a “big drive” to get children recognised as victims – not just witnesses – of domestic abuse in the Domestic Abuse Bill. “It would have a powerful effect on how the family courts deal with domestic abuse cases,” says the former Solicitor General for England and Wales.

“There’s a presumption of shared contact now, which is consistent with the notion that you can be a domestic abuse perpetrator and still be a good father [it’s 90 per cent

men to women]. Whereas actually, children are damaged by domestic abuse and they need to be seen as victims.

“If they are, then the court will, I think, disabuse itself of that notion that you can be the two things simultaneously. And it will give children a lot more rights, and a lot more support at an earlier stage.”

Dame Vera takes a similar line on the issue of children caught up in gangs and ‘county lines’ drug-running activities.

“Domestic abuse will never be top of anyone’s list if it’s not a statutory responsibility”

“We were looking at the whole knife crime, gang crime thing. The first thing we realised was that it is our business, because victims and perpetrators are the same people,” she says.

“The perpetrator is someone who brings the kid in, and then the kid becomes a perpetrator, but they are also a victim of having been brought in, in the first place, and having nowhere else to go.”

She adds: “If you criminalise a kid, you’ve

lost them for a decade, so what you need to do is support them, and try to cut off the links that are making things worse.”

She cites an “absolutely fantastic” example of good, local authority-led partnership work on children in gangs – in Newton Abbot.

“What is significant is that nobody thinks this is going on in Newton Abbot; they think it’s in London, in Birmingham, maybe Liverpool, metropolitan areas. But, actually, it seems to be almost a bigger problem in small towns, in the sense that that’s not what they are used to, and they are a smaller population.”

The local authority, police and health sector had identified an issue with young people becoming more violent. When outreach youth workers were rebuffed – “the gang leaders were saying just don’t have anything to do with these people” – they persevered and brought parents together to help tackle the issues.

Some had to be told by social services how heavily their children were involved, but it proved to be a “galvanising force with local neighbours who are less ready to talk to your middle-class leadership types and more likely to talk to their own”.

Dame Vera concludes: “You can only really have local solutions to problems like these. It all has to be tailored through the local authority.

“We are very interested in any way we can help, and any engagement that there can be with our core business – which is protecting and promoting the rights of victims and witnesses.”



To find out more about the Victims’ Commissioner, please visit www.victimscommissioners.org.uk



HC-One – At the National Children and Adult Services Conference 2019

HC-One ‘The Kind Care Company’ is a leading independent health and social care provider in the UK. We have a clear vision; to deliver the kindest care to our Residents and offer them the opportunity to enjoy life to the full. We currently provide a network of over 300 care homes in which we offer residential and nursing care to older people with wide ranging needs including frailty, dementia, complex general and mental health needs and terminal illness.

We want our homes to be consistently rated as Outstanding and accepted as valuable assets in the communities we serve. Our aim is to be the first choice care home provider in each of our communities we serve; for our Residents and Colleagues and for local health and social care professionals with whom we want to work in partnership.

We recognise the national priorities around wellbeing, innovation and technology in care and we are working in partnership with a significant number of Local Authorities and CCGs to deliver innovations and new services.



If you would like to find out more about HC-One, our plans for the future and potential partnership working, please contact HC-One, Southgate House, Archer Street, Darlington, Co. Durham, DL3 6AH.

T 0333 999 8699
E careline@hc-one.co.uk
W hc-one.co.uk



NICE National Institute for Health and Care Excellence

Guidance and support for social care from NICE



NICE produces evidence-based guidelines, standards and other support tools to help social care practitioners deliver high quality, cost-effective interventions and services. NICE offers practical ways to improve the quality of care, based on what works, along with resources to support delivery of care which is considered ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ by CQC.

NICE in the adult social care sector



Quick guides

Short, visually engaging, ideal for use in staff training www.nice.org.uk/quick-guides

Quality improvement resource: adult social care

Find NICE guidance mapped against CQC key lines of enquiry. Download and adapt to support improvement work and prepare for inspections. www.nice.org.uk/about/nice-communities/social-care/quality-improvement-resource

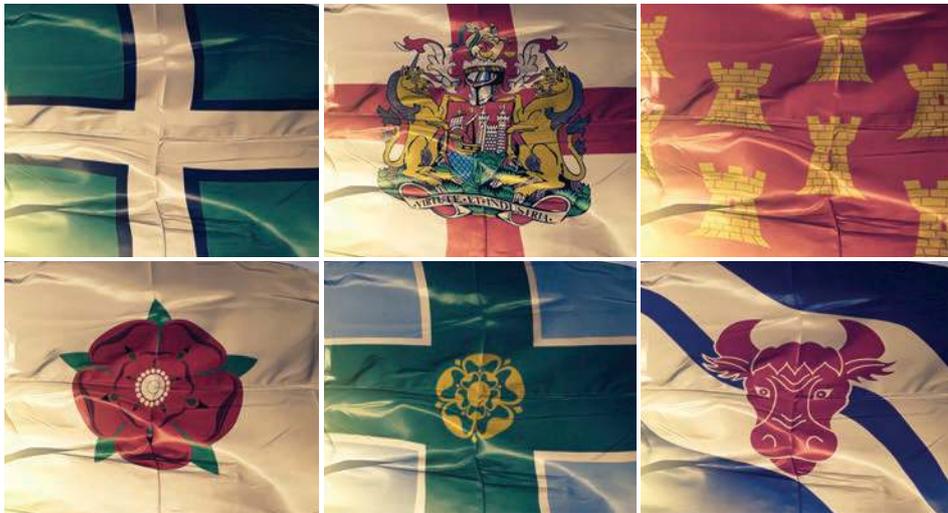
Social care newsletter

Keep up to date with our free monthly e-bulletin – visit www.nice.org.uk/social-care-newsletter to subscribe.

“We received really positive feedback during a recent CQC inspection after mentioning how we had used NICE guidance to ensure effective communication around medications.”

Devon Helping Hands

comment



Devolution for counties



Councillor David Williams (Con) is Chairman of the County Councils Network

We are just a few weeks away from the County Councils Network's annual conference in Guildford, where more than 200 delegates will hear from high-profile speakers and thinkers.

Last year, we all left the event feeling optimistic about the future of local government. Twelve months on, with the Spending Round behind us, it's fair to say it has been a reasonably successful year, advocacy-wise, for councils.

While long-term pressures remain, the new administration's recent interventions are clearly welcome and give us some important breathing space ahead of anticipated reforms to local government finance, coupled with a full Spending Review in 2020.

Therefore, we are going into this year's conference with short-term finance issues not the centrepiece of discussion – although clearly still important!

Instead, the backdrop is a rebooted

“We are determined to ensure that our areas see the investment opportunities and powers enjoyed by urban areas”

devolution agenda from the Government, with both the Prime Minister, the Chancellor, and Local Government Secretary Robert Jenrick making high-profile and enthusiastic statements on driving down powers and resources to the 'left-behind' parts of England.

Those areas are overwhelmingly located within England's counties, and we welcome the pledges as we await more details in a promised Devolution White Paper.

This is something we will look to influence and shape as we head into this year's CCN

conference, where the theme is 'unleashing the potential of counties'. The slogan is grounded in the acknowledgement that counties are doing hugely positive things in driving local, regional, and sub-national growth, but can do so much more with the shackles removed.

The centrepiece of the event will be the launch of new research on how county authorities are driving innovation across housing, infrastructure, and economic growth, working alongside local enterprise partnerships, the private sector, and district partners.

At the same time, it will illustrate how much of this potential remains underused – making the case for stronger strategic powers to support planning, infrastructure delivery and economic growth, contributing to vibrant sustainable communities where families can live, learn, work and grow. Watch this space!

With the Government clearly interested in devolving downwards and wanting to see inclusive growth across all parts of the country, it's a timely report. We are determined to ensure that our areas see the investment opportunities and powers enjoyed by urban areas.

Elsewhere, delegates can expect high-profile speakers and thought-provoking sessions on the major local government topics, including transformation in adult social care, presented by Newton Europe.

In recognition of children's services rising up the political agenda, we have several plenaries exploring issues within care for younger people, including what 'good' looks like for services, the link between children's and adults' care services, and the emerging issue of county lines.

With Brexit unavoidable one way or another, we look forward to the Institute for Government's thoughts on where we are nationally and the impact on local authorities, as well as a session looking ahead to next year's three-year Spending Review: it is important to begin our advocacy in earnest.

I hope to see many county colleagues at conference as we look to the opportunities – and challenges – ahead.



The County Councils Network's annual conference takes place in Guildford from 17-19 November. For more information and to book a place, please visit www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk

Welcome announcements in the Queen's Speech

“If we can get Brexit done, we will have the opportunity to focus fully on our domestic agenda”



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

It was great to see so many Conservative councillors in Manchester for our party conference in October.

The conference had a really upbeat mood, and the feedback that I received from councillors was very positive. There were lots of outstanding fringe events covering a wide range of policy issues that matter to local government, including devolution, housing, social care, homelessness, and domestic violence.

I am grateful to my LGA Conservative Group colleagues who spoke at many of these events.

The LGA hosted two events at the conference: our fringe meeting, which was titled, 'Why is the Queen's Speech important for local government?'; and our ever popular evening drinks reception.

The debate allowed us to publicise and discuss our key asks of the Government ahead of the Queen's Speech. Writing this a day after it was delivered, I am pleased that it contained a number of welcome announcements for local government, including a renewed focus on devolution in England, a commitment to bring forward proposals to reform adult social care, legislation to improve building safety, the announcement of a national infrastructure strategy, and measures to further protect the environment.

I was also delighted to welcome Robert Jenrick MP, our recently appointed Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, to our drinks reception. Robert thanked our councillors for their hard work on

behalf of their local communities and recognised the crucial role that they play within the Conservative Party.

Rishi Sunak MP, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury (and former Local Government Minister), and Andy Street, the Mayor of the West Midlands, were also present and received a warm welcome from our guests.

I believe that if we can get Brexit done, we will have the opportunity to focus fully on our domestic agenda, allowing us to build a country that works for everyone, with a strong economy and world-class public services.

With a General Election possibly only a few weeks away, I came away from the conference more motivated than ever for the fight that lies ahead.

Chairman's comment

Reigniting the devolution debate



Councillor James Jamieson
is Chairman of the LGA

It's been two years since the last new devolution deal was agreed in England – so the promise, in the Queen's Speech, of a White Paper on the subject is encouraging.

There is clear and significant evidence to back up our long-standing position that taking decisions over how to run public services locally leads to improvements, savings and better outcomes for residents.

The devolution deals of the past five years – mostly in urban areas – have demonstrated the benefits of giving local leaders greater powers and resources.

Any new approach needs to build on the work of mayoral combined authorities to develop a package of sustainably-funded

devolved powers that is available to all of English local government and can be delivered through flexible governance arrangements. The mayoral model is not appropriate for all places, and areas should be able to propose their own governance arrangements.

These new devolved powers need to be underpinned by statute so they, along with those already devolved through existing deals, cannot be rolled back by a simple change in government policy.

This is vital so that all parts of England have the opportunity and certainty to reap the benefits of having greater powers and funding to improve services such as housing, transport, and health and social care.

The Government has signalled that the return

of powers from the EU will lead to a significant increase in the decision-making powers of the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. But we are clear that local communities in England should also have a voice in law-making, and a share of power commensurate with that held by residents of the other three nations.

Devolution is important because, with adequate funding and the right powers, councils can help the Government tackle the challenges facing our nation and make a huge difference to their communities – by building desperately needed new homes, creating jobs and school places, providing care for older and disabled people, and boosting economic growth.

“New devolved powers need to be underpinned by statute, so they cannot be rolled back by a simple change in government policy”

group leaders' comments



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

A collective vision for devolution

“Outcomes improve and we get better value for money when councils have the freedoms and funding to make local decisions”

The lack of progress on sharing power to a local level has led most councillors to think that this government has forgotten what 'devolution' means.

So it was a pleasant surprise to see a Devolution White Paper in the Queen's Speech. But I fear it won't deliver what is really needed.

I've been working with Labour leaders across England and Wales to form a collective vision for how the next Labour government should forge a very different relationship with councils, based on mutual respect and partnership.

Local government is at the core of responding to some of the biggest challenges we face, including housing, social care, and tackling the climate emergency. There is significant evidence that outcomes improve and the country gets better value for money when councils have the freedoms and funding to make local decisions. This has already been seen in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, where councils have a say over everything from health services to skills and transport.

We need a Devolution Bill, but rather than a Tory-style top-down dictating to councils, Labour councillors want it to be co-produced between local and national government.

It should recognise the independence, autonomy, and equality of regional and local government, and aim to provide all parts of England with the powers and adequate funding to improve services and put local people and communities at the heart of decision-making.



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

A manifesto for the next General Election

“The Queen's Speech has recycled pledges to tackle crime that do nothing to deal with the root causes of crime in our communities”

A 93-year-old pensioner got dragged out in the pouring rain to deliver a speech she didn't write, with policies that won't be delivered, from a government without the numbers to govern, pushing an agenda that is ill-thought out and badly conceived.

The Queen's Speech was nothing more than the Conservative manifesto for the next General Election.

And by the time you read this column, we may have some idea of when that will be. Or we could have more of the farce that Parliament has now become.

The road to hell is littered with good intentions. The Queen's Speech has a lot of good intentions – if you can call them that.

It has references to yet another commitment to devolution, a possible replacement for the millions of pounds of EU funding that our poorer regions will lose, and yet another pledge on tackling the social care crisis.

It also has wishy-washy commitments to combat climate change and recycled pledges to tackle crime that do nothing to deal with the root causes of crime in our communities.

It was nothing more than a pointless speech for a Prime Minister with no mandate.

Sorry Liz – you shouldn't have been dragged out in the rain for this!



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

Speech covers critical issues for residents

“Much of what was announced has been around for a long time, as Westminster has ground to a Brexit-induced halt”

Much like September's Spending Round, this pre-election Queen's Speech promised much, but with little certainty of the current government actually having to deliver it.

Indeed, the Queen's Speech may even be voted down for the first time since 1924.

At the time of writing, there is still no knowing whether there will be a Brexit delay or a deal, and what might be in it! At the LGA, we are working hard with ministers right up to the wire, to try to secure the best possible arrangements.

Despite uncertainty, the LGA has worked hard on helping to develop better legislation and many of these issues are there, in the Queen's Speech, and critical for our residents.

Progress around domestic abuse legislation, business rates, funding for children with special educational needs and disabilities (albeit top-sliced from education), social care, the environment and building standards cannot be kicked into the long grass.

Plans on further devolution, post-Brexit, are also vitally important to get right, but detail is lacking and much of what was announced has been, in one form or another, around for a long time as Westminster has ground to a Brexit-induced halt.

So, while the plan for the next year may look positive, it is only meaningful if there is cross-party support, drawn together by sound leadership. Otherwise we're just left, once again, with words.



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

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Based in a host business, the interns participate in three department rotations throughout the year, receiving 800 hours of skills acquisition, while growing in confidence and independence.

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Local 
Government
Association
Independent Group

Independent Group Annual Conference 2019

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

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

Free to LGA Independent Group Members

Where: 18 Smith Square, London SW1P 3HZ

When: Friday 8 November 2019

Time: 11am (registration from 10.30am) – 5pm for the main conference, followed by a drinks reception

Who: Independent Councillors, Green Councillors and other elected members outside the political affiliation of the Liberal Democrats, Labour and Conservative parties.



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



Councillor John Fisher (Con) is Cabinet Member for Children's Services at Norfolk County Council

Getting the best for every child in care

Being a lead member for children's services is one of the biggest responsibilities and honours in local government. The lives of the most vulnerable children really are in our hands and we have the opportunity to make decisions that can, literally, transform lives.

The challenge facing children's services up and down the country is well-documented – demand is rising and budgets are falling. In Norfolk, we've got an ambitious £15 million 'invest to save' strategy, aimed at getting the right help to children and young people earlier, so that we improve their lives and reduce costs.

Like all authorities, we want to do what we can to help children live safely with their families and reduce the numbers coming into care. However, we can't do this at the expense of those already in our care. That's why we adopted Valuing Care, a specific tool developed by consultants IMPOWER, to help us better understand our looked-after children, their needs and their strengths.

As their corporate parents, we want to understand what will make the biggest difference to their lives and find them the placements that can help them to achieve their potential. The average council is spending £26 million per year on children in care. Despite this huge sum of money, we are not always getting the best outcomes for these children.

The Valuing Care tool, which is now

“The need to find safety quickly can mean that a child gets placed in the first available space”

fully embedded into our reporting systems, gives us a way of really understanding both individual children and wider groups of children and young people, providing a wealth of information that we can use when commissioning placements and services.

For example, our initial work found that needs around mental and emotional health were particularly prevalent in Norfolk and that children and young people needed more information about their life story – this gives us key areas to consider both when commissioning services and further developing social work practice. The findings also suggested that about 45 per cent of those in residential care – largely boys – could have their needs met in foster care, with the right carers.

We've found that, in the past, the need

to find safety quickly can mean that a child gets placed in the first available space. The system has been reactive, focused on risk over outcomes, with the cost of placements for children with similar needs differing hugely.

Using Valuing Care we can be proactive, influencing the market so that we have the right placements to meet children's needs and commissioning places based on what we know about our children. It also means we can give our foster carers or partners even more information to help them support children in their care to thrive.

We're not doing this work in isolation. We have changed our fostering recruitment techniques so that we also better understand who fosters, and target potential carers more effectively. We're creating an enhanced fostering service so that carers can get the dedicated support they need to look after those with a wider range of needs. We're also developing in-house, semi-independent accommodation for our care leavers, with 24/7 support on site, as our young people move to independence.

At a time when budgets are under strain, it's only by thinking differently that we will get the very best for every child in our care.



The National Children and Adult Services Conference takes place from 20-22 November in Bournemouth. To find out more, please visit www.local.gov.uk/events

councillor

Making scrutiny easier



Michael King is the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

Every councillor knows the importance of the role they play in scrutinising their authority and holding it to account on behalf of their constituents.

But how many are aware of the information already out there to help them do that – especially from their own ombudsman?

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman investigates complaints about councils and social care providers in England. Over recent years, we have released increasingly more information and become more transparent about our investigations.

We already publish lots of data, but admittedly it might have taken the curious inquisitor a little effort to translate what it all meant for their council. The recent launch of our interactive map – ‘Your council’s performance’ – is a small step along this journey, but a giant leap towards making our data more accessible and relevant for councillors.

With one click from our website homepage you can search for any English council, pull up all our data on it, and easily compare it with that of other similar authorities. This is some of the information you will find:

- Uphold rates – the simple number of complaints we receive is not such an intelligent way of judging local service quality. It is much more telling to see the type and proportion of complaints we uphold. Click through to see all the individual cases where we found the council at fault.



- Compliance data – we ask councils for evidence they have implemented the recommendations we’ve made to put things right in a complaint. See whether your council has complied with everything. If a council hasn’t complied, it may indicate poor corporate grasp and oversight.
- Suitable remedies – you can find the amount of cases where the council has provided a suitable offer to put things right, before we investigated. This can show a mature attitude towards accepting fault and making amends.

I have long believed the full value in investigating problems with local government services rests in the wider learning that can be shared from them. If we ask councils simply to fix things one case at a time, and in isolation, we risk not doing justice to the courage and persistence people sometimes show in pursuing their case with the council and then bringing it to us.

This is why our map especially focuses on the ‘service improvement’ recommendations we make, by detailing each one the council has agreed to. These are practical things such as changing policies, reviewing the cases of other people in a similar situation, or training

“Councillors can get a handle on what their local authority is doing to learn from complaints and improve services for everybody”

staff on correct procedure – all designed to stop the same problems recurring and other people suffering.

By looking at this information, councillors can get a handle on what their local authority is doing to learn from complaints and improve services for everybody.

We’ve already seen stories of elected members calling for a review of adult social care services after analysing their council’s data and realising we were investigating a larger number, and upholding a higher proportion, of complaints than other similar authorities.

There are many other uses. The key thing is that scrutineers can use it to assess easily the local impact of current national issues. It adds to the range of other resources we have for councillors, like suggested scrutiny questions for our national topic reports. I urge you to check your council’s performance.



See www.lgo.org.uk/your-councils-performance for the **Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman’s interactive map**

elections

local by-elections

Basingstoke and Deane, Bramley and Sherfield

IND GAIN FROM CON
25.1% over Con Turnout 30%

Canterbury, Chestfield

CON HELD
10.5% over Lib Dem Turnout 27.8%

Charnwood, Syston West

CON HELD
1.9% over Green Turnout 18.1%

Corby, Beanfield

LAB HELD
22% over Con Turnout 27.1%

Crawley, Tilgate

CON HELD
26.7% over Lab Turnout 29%

Essex, Clacton East

IND HELD
0.2% over Con Turnout 26.7%

Hammersmith & Fulham, Fulham Broadway

LAB HELD
19.9% over Con Turnout 31.7%

Ipswich, Alexandra

LAB HELD
30.6% over Lib Dem Turnout 21.3%

Liverpool, Old Swan

LAB HELD
41.3% over Lib Turnout 18.6%

Luton, Icknield

LAB GAIN FROM CON
1.4% over Con Turnout 27.2%

Rochford, Sweyne Park and Grange

CON GAIN FROM RES
12.3% over Lib Dem Turnout 21.9%

St Albans, Clarence

LIB DEM HELD
50.5% over Con Turnout 32.3%

A volatile electorate



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



The latest British Election Study report highlights just how volatile the electorate has become. When it began in the early 1960s, just one in eight voters changed their allegiance between General Elections; now some 50 per cent say they voted in different ways between 2010 and 2017.

This decline in unswerving party loyalties has long been evident in local government too. Although, to the dismay of purists, local elections do usually reflect overall national trends, a significant proportion of electors are now swayed by factors relevant to their community and make their choice accordingly.

Local issues, respected candidates, a reaction against unpopular incumbent councils, and simply a view that one party is more locally focused than its rivals can all play

their part. Even when general and local elections coincide there is ample evidence that many people choose different parties on the same visit to the polling station.

The moral from this is that we should not read too much about the possible outcome of one type

of election from actual results in another.

The recent comfortable Liberal Democrat victory in the Tudor ward of Watford, for example, will have been no surprise in an authority that has been under that party's control – and with a Lib Dem directly elected mayor – since 2002. However, it has never been able to turn that local dominance into victory in the differently drawn Watford parliamentary constituency.

The Liberal Democrats held the constituency of Taunton, Somerset, for most of 1997 to 2015 (latterly as Taunton Deane) and controlled the council throughout the 1990s. The new Somerset West and Taunton District Council was narrowly won by the Liberal Democrats at its inaugural elections in May and they have now added two gains in Taunton itself. Do not assume, though, that this means they are poised to overturn the Conservatives' near 16,000 majority from 2017.

A 16,000 Conservative majority is also the hurdle facing the Liberal Democrats in South Cambridgeshire. Current MP Heidi Allen has now defected to Jo Swinson's party and will be hoping to capitalise on her new party's local strength.

Following boundary changes in 2018, the Lib Dems took 30 out of 45 council seats, raising the possibility of a credible General Election challenge in a strongly Remain voting area. However, with some of the Lib Dems' best performing wards not actually in Ms Allen's constituency, her task looks Herculean even in these volatile times.

Somerset West and Taunton, Norton Fitzwarren and Staplegrove

LIB DEM GAIN FROM IND
15.1% over Con Turnout 25.9%

Somerset West and Taunton, Vivary

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON
29.1% over Con Turnout 32.1%

Watford, Tudor

LIB DEM HELD
24.3% over Con Turnout 30.5%

West Sussex, Three Bridges

CON HELD
22.2% over Lab Turnout 25%

Wiltshire, Ethandune

CON HELD
14% over Lib Dem Turnout 38%



For more details of these and previous local by-election results, please visit www.local.gov.uk/first

LGA Annual Fire Conference 2020

10-11 March, Grand Hotel, Blackpool

The annual fire conference and exhibition is a key event in the conference calendar for senior fire officers and members of fire and rescue authorities.

The fire and rescue sector is in the midst of a programme of significant change. The Government's Fire Reform Programme is progressing at pace with key areas of focus like inspection and the Fire Standards Board coming to fruition. The results of HMICFRS' first two tranches of inspection are beginning to inform improvement activity across the sector. The publication of the Grenfell Inquiry's first report in autumn 2019 and the final tranche of inspection reports in December 2019 will have an equally significant impact on the service.

Funding remains an issue, and with the delay of the next Spending Review it is vital that we continue to make the case for fire and rescue authorities to secure the funding they need to provide a service which is fit for the future.

The 2020 Fire Conference provides an opportunity to consider these issues further and look at the future of the service.

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

LGA Annual Culture and Tourism Conference

Portsmouth, 2-3 March 2020

Our annual culture and tourism conference offers delegates the chance to hear about the latest developments in culture and tourism from national speakers and funders, innovative and exciting practice from other councils, and discussion of some of the challenges and opportunities facing council culture and tourism teams across the country.

'Making the most of your heritage' is the theme this year. So, we'll be exploring how councils are restoring old assets such as civic buildings and industrial sites, using local heritage and culture to build a sense of place and identity, and reinvigorating the high street.

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

