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first

the magazine for local government

"Whoever is in power after the election **needs to put social care at the top of the domestic policy agenda**"

Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board

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#OurDay thanks



Good luck to councillor colleagues of all political persuasions who are standing in the General Election, or who are out campaigning.

And thank you to our busy electoral services staff, who will be working hard to ensure polling runs as smoothly as ever on 12 December (p24).

Meanwhile, councils are carrying on as usual, providing 800-plus vital services to local residents, as they do every day. I was delighted that so many of you were able to take part in our annual #OurDay tweetathon, celebrating the work of the sector (p4).

There was also a good turnout at our annual National Children and Adult Services Conference in Bournemouth, from which we issued a joint letter calling on the next government to prioritise adult social care funding reform (p4). We also called for more investment in children's services, as part of our Bright Futures campaign (p5).

Elsewhere in this month's **first**, we have guidance on governance for members of fire and rescue authorities (p10), and on promoting digital connectivity locally (p30).

And outgoing Welsh LGA Leader Baroness Wilcox of Newport calls for more civility in public discourse, if we are to encourage a more diverse range of people to stand for election (p23).

Cllr James Jamieson is LGA Chairman

Editor **Karen Thornton**
Design & print **CPL** www.cpl.co.uk
Advertising dale.lawrence@cpl.co.uk

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

Email first@local.gov.uk
Tel **editorial** 020 7664 3294
Tel **advertising** 01223 378 045

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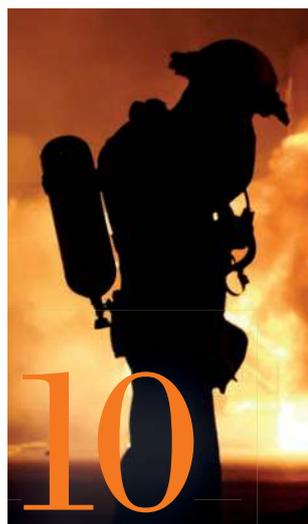
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Social care 'must be post-election priority'

Adult social care and support needs to be at the top of the next government's agenda, according to the LGA and a host of other organisations and charities.

Urgent action needs to be taken on funding reform and changes to the adult social care system to combat rising costs and demand pressures, and ensure older and disabled people and unpaid carers have timely access to the support they need.

In a joint open letter led by the LGA, 15 signatories including Age UK and NHS Confederation warn that over the past two decades political parties of all colours have failed to deliver changes to how care is funded and what individuals are expected to pay.

This General Election is a chance for the incoming government to finally "grasp the nettle" and find a lasting solution.

Whoever is in government after 12 December must commit to clear reforms as soon as possible. In return, the letter's co-signatories pledge to use their combined influence to support a much-needed national

debate to help raise awareness of the issues, including a positive rationale for change and the costs and benefits.

Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "As the number and range of signatories on this letter demonstrates, whoever is in power after the election needs to put social care at the top of the domestic policy agenda.

"People should be able to live the lives they want to lead in their local homes and communities. Councils are committed to ensuring adults of all ages who need it have access to high-quality care and support, but rising costs and demand pressures mean incredibly difficult decisions are having to be made about this vital service.

"This is one of the major issues facing society, and councils have played their part in keeping the debate on the public agenda. What we and our partners are calling for is action and certainty to secure care and support for the long term, for all those who use, and work in, social care."

Public service celebrated

More than 7,700 people posted nearly 24,000 tweets as part of the LGA's annual 24-hour social media marathon on 19 November, celebrating the work of councils across the country.

#OurDay trended on Twitter at number two in the UK for the majority of the day (behind International Men's Day) and trended 13th worldwide, reaching more than 22.4 million people on Twitter alone.

Councils once again went above and beyond for #OurDay, showcasing their achievements and stories from the past year.

Northumberland County Council shared residents Ollie and Michelle's story about how registrars Anthony and Lyn helped them overcome extreme weather to conduct their winter wedding and give them the day of their dreams.

Calderdale Council gave us a magical mystery tour of its council offices with help from a friendly member of staff. Meanwhile, Breckland Council's Maxine O'Mahony and Broadland District Council's Hannah Ralph gave the #OurDay '10-second challenge' a go – trying to explain what local government meant to them in under 10 seconds (#Boom).

Councils are the backbone of their local communities, providing efficient, effective and consistent services on a daily basis. #OurDay is the one day in the year when we all get to say thank you to those who keep our communities running.

Cllr Peter Fleming, Chairman of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board, said: "Council officers are often the unsung heroes ensuring that residents have the best advice and access to all services provided by a council.

"Local councils are best placed to deliver the services their communities depend on and #OurDay is a chance to reflect on 24 hours in the life of a council."



'Invest in children'

The next government needs to invest in children's services so councils can fulfil the ambitions of the Children's Act, the LGA has said.

The 1989 Act puts children at the centre of any decisions that affect them, with councils given the role of safeguarding and promoting their welfare.

At the National Children and Adults Services Conference in Bournemouth last week, the LGA set out the next stage of its children's services funding campaign, Bright Futures.

This call for funding would ensure councils can deliver their legal duties, protect preventative services and improve the lives of children and families.

Investment in early help family support services can result in fewer children entering care or needing more intensive interventions,

saving money and improving outcomes for children in the long run. The council-run Troubled Families programme has seen a 32 per cent reduction of children going into care and fewer children have received custodial sentences and convictions.

The estimated cost of intervening too late is nearly £17 billion per year, or £287 per person. Councils' share of the bill is £6.4 billion, with the NHS picking up £3.4 billion and the Department for Work and Pensions £2.7 billion.

Bright Futures also calls on the next government to set out its ambitions for children and to work across Whitehall, recognising that all departments impact on the lives of children and families.

Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "The Children's Act and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child were landmarks and we owe it to every child and young person to fulfil their visions.

"For this to happen, the next government needs to make sure children and young people are not forgotten by putting them at the centre of all decision-making."



Hardship behind demand for services

A rise in family conflict and hardship is behind the heightened pressure on child protection services, according to a new LGA survey of councillors responsible for children's social care.

Councils have seen a 53 per cent increase in children on child protection plans in the past decade, while 88 children are now taken into care every day to keep them safe.

In the LGA poll, more than 80 per cent of lead councillors surveyed said problems such as domestic violence, substance misuse and offending were behind rising demand for services in their area, while 70 per cent said that poverty, poor housing and debt played a part.

Nearly two-thirds (64 per cent) said

the number of children and young people receiving child protection support or being taken into care has increased "to a great extent" since 2015/16.

The LGA is calling for the next government to fully fund children's services and invest in preventive services aimed at helping struggling families stay together and thrive.

Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "Councils want to make sure that children can get the best, rather than just get by.

"Yet, funding pressures are coinciding with huge increases in demand for support because of problems like hardship and family conflict, which is making it increasingly difficult for them to do that."



Home-to-school transport costs rising

Unsustainable costs and demand pressures are set to push councils' bill for providing free home-to-school transport to £1.2 billion a year by 2024, new analysis reveals.

Around 550,000 young people currently receive such transport each year, of which around 145,000 are pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

A new report by the Isos Partnership, commissioned by the LGA and County Councils Network, reveals the cost to councils of providing home-to-school transport increased by £66 million between 2014/15 and 2017/18. It projects it may rise by a further £127 million to reach £1.2 billion a year by 2024.

The LGA has also found that children and young people with SEND now account for 69 per cent of all home-to-school transport expenditure.

Councils have reduced spend by 12 per cent and cut discretionary transport spending by 27 per cent to meet the rising costs of providing transport for children. Despite these efforts, many continue to have to tighten eligibility even further or strip back discretionary support altogether.

Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "Councils are working as hard as they can to ensure suitable travel arrangements are in place for children who could not reasonably be expected to walk or would otherwise find it difficult to attend school because of distance, mobility, SEND or the routes they have to take."

Cllr Keith Glazier, Children and Young People Spokesman for the County Councils Network, said: "These services are a lifeline for those pupils. With the scope for further savings narrowing, this has meant that county authorities have significantly scaled back what they provide for other young people."

news in brief

More children at risk of violence

Up to 690 children in England are at risk of domestic violence every day, according to the charity Action for Children. It also found that two-thirds of councils say their services for children are at risk in the long term because of limited funding, based on interviews with 30 councils. Cllr Katrina Wood, Vice-Chairman of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: "Tackling domestic abuse is an issue that councils take very seriously, which is why we support further measures to improve work with local partners to help support more victims and stop this horrendous crime. The next government needs to ensure councils have long-term and sustainable funding to help protect children and families from harm."

Digital inclusion

Ten councils will receive a share of £200,000 to help residents who lack the skills, infrastructure and confidence to go online by providing them with support, assistance and one-to-one mentoring. The funding is from the LGA's Digital Inclusion programme, part of its sector-led improvement offer. Cllr Peter Fleming, Chairman of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board, said: "Councils are improving the lives and employment prospects of their residents through digital inclusion programmes. Despite facing significant funding pressures over the past decade, they have shown willingness to innovate to improve the lives of residents."

Healthier lives

The LGA is working in partnership with the Health Foundation, an independent charity, on a new programme designed to tackle the wider determinants of health. The Shaping Places for Healthier Lives programme will support five local areas over the next three years to pilot innovative ways of approaching public health problems so as to improve residents' health. The learning from these pilots will be captured to allow these approaches to be applied in other areas and to wider health-related issues. Applications are now open to councils across England, and the deadline is 17 January. For more information, please visit www.local.gov.uk/shaping-places-healthier-lives



Rise in child abuse based on faith or belief

The number of children in England identified by councils as having been abused for reasons based on faith or belief has risen by a third in the past three years, according to LGA analysis.

Abuse of children based on faith or belief increased from 1,460 to 1,950 cases between 2016/17 and 2018/19, a rise of 34 per cent, with councils dealing with the equivalent of 38 such cases a week.

The new figures also show that the number of children identified as either having, or being at risk of, female genital mutilation (FGM) has reached a record high – with 1,000 such cases in 2018/19, up 6 per cent on the 940 cases in the previous year.

The National FGM Centre, a joint initiative between the LGA and children's charity Barnardo's, says both sets of figures are hugely worrying, and probably don't reflect the true prevalence of this 'hidden' crime.

The LGA said that council social workers have become better at identifying cases,

and that the work of the centre – which provides services for children and their families affected by FGM and abuse linked to faith or belief – is vital.

Cllr Anita Lower, the LGA's lead on FGM and Chair of the National FGM Centre's Advisory Board, said: "Rising cases of FGM and child abuse linked to faith or belief are extremely worrying and are destroying the lives of children and young people in communities across the country.

"Councils are determined to tackle the practice of FGM and work with partner organisations to do everything possible to protect and support children and young people.

"To support this goal, children's services departments need to have the funding to address the huge demand for help from children and their families and maximise the effectiveness of prevention and intervention work."

Young missing out on careers advice

Thousands of young people are missing out on vital careers support, the LGA has warned.

A second wave of 'careers hubs' is being rolled out over the next year, offering local, targeted careers advice and guidance to young people. The LGA is concerned the hubs will support only 1,300 schools and colleges and reach a fraction of young people, with many missing out on vital guidance – which could undermine their ability to make the right choice between academic and vocational routes.

It is calling on the next government to end the patchwork of careers activity in England by handing funding and control of national employment and skills schemes, including careers advice, to local areas. There are

currently too many organisations and providers involved in careers provision, leading to a fragmented skills service.

Localised support would enable councils and combined authorities to develop an all-age careers service and help reduce the number of young people not in education, employment and training (NEET) – which has reached nearly 800,000 across the country.

Cllr Kevin Bentley, Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board, said: "Too many young people are not receiving the high-quality, impartial and personalised careers advice they deserve. This leaves too many youngsters making unsuitable career decisions, which have a potentially devastating impact on their future. Councils are best placed to tackle this."

Grenfell inquiry 'should focus on building safety'

The 1,000-page phase one report into the Grenfell Tower fire has concluded that fewer people would have died in the 2017 fire if the London Fire Brigade had taken certain actions earlier.

However, LGA Building Safety Spokesman Lord Porter said it was wrong for the public inquiry to focus on the response of the fire service first before examining why flammable materials were allowed to be used on the building.

He said: "There are undoubtedly lessons that can be learned about how the fire service responded on that tragic night as it faced the worst fire in this country for more than half a century. However, the inquiry has made a fundamental error by examining the response to the fire before examining its causes.

"The consequence of this is to scapegoat the fire service while those responsible for the fire have yet to be exposed or held to account.

"It is clear that the fire was caused by a

catastrophic failure of the building safety system in England.

"This has been proven by the number of public and private buildings with flammable material and the number of modern buildings that are behaving in unexpectedly dangerous ways when they catch fire. Reform of this broken system cannot come soon enough."

The LGA said any new regulatory system must not only cover high-rise residential buildings, but extend to any building where vulnerable people sleep like hospitals, care homes and residential schools.

The second phase of the inquiry will focus on the wider circumstances of the fire, including the design of the building, and begin in 2020.

Meanwhile, the LGA will continue to work with the next government to deliver the much-needed regulatory reforms that will ensure the safety of local residents in their homes as well as in hospitals, care homes and schools.



Taxi reforms 'urgently needed'

The LGA is calling on the next government to strengthen taxi and private hire legislation to improve passenger safety as new figures show the number of licensed drivers and vehicles has hit a record high.

It follows the proliferation of app-based taxi and private hire vehicle (PHV) companies and increased out-of-area working, which councils cannot take enforcement action against. The total number of licensed taxi and PHVs in England increased to 291,800 in 2019, an increase of 58 per cent on the 184,500 licensed vehicles in 2005.

These figures have largely been driven by a surge in licensed PHVs, which have risen to 221,200 in 2019, a staggering increase of 83 per cent on the 120,400 PHVs in 2005.

Revamped taxi laws could make

enforcement easier by introducing a common set of licensing standards and be updated to reflect new technology that would help reduce the risk of child sexual exploitation, improve passenger safety, and create a level playing field for drivers by tackling out-of-area working.

The LGA is also calling for national minimum licensing standards for drivers of taxis and PHVs, and a mandatory national database of all licensed taxi and PHV drivers.

Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: "Reforms are needed to reflect the increasing use of mobile phone apps to book taxis and PHVs, and to give councils national enforcement powers so they can take action against any vehicles operating in their areas irrespective of where they are licensed."

news in brief

Adaptable housing

The Housing Made for Everyone (HoME) coalition of housing organisations and charities is calling on the next government to make all new homes accessible and adaptable, to ensure better provision for older and disabled people. Cllr Darren Rodwell, the LGA's Housing Spokesperson, said: "Councils need greater planning powers and resources to hold developers to account, ensuring that they build the right homes in the right places needed by different groups." The LGA is calling on the next government to fully fund the disabled facilities grant and find a long-term sustainable funding solution for adult social care.

Parking income

English councils made a combined 'profit' of £930 million from their parking activities in 2018/19, up 7 per cent on 2017/18, according to the RAC Foundation. Cllr David Renard, LGA Transport Spokesman, said: "Councils are on the side of motorists and shoppers when setting parking policies, which aim to ensure that there are spaces available for residents, high streets are kept vibrant and traffic is kept moving. Any income raised through on-street parking charges and fines is spent on running parking services and any surplus is only spent on essential transport projects, supporting concessionary bus fares to help cut congestion and transport projects that benefit high streets and local economies."

Housing advice

Fourteen council areas will receive up to £50,000 each to pay for independent housing experts to help them with specific projects aimed at addressing the housing crisis in their local communities. The Housing Advisers Programme (HAP), part of the LGA's sector-led improvement offer, has previously helped fund more than 100 council projects, including home building, reducing homelessness, planning for ageing populations, and increasing the supply of modular housing. Cllr Darren Rodwell, the LGA's Housing Spokesperson, said: "HAP has proven an excellent source of knowledge and expertise for councils, sharing innovative ideas and ways to improve."

news in brief

Trading standards

More than 20 million illegal products have been seized by local trading standards services in the past year, according to a report by the Association of Chief Trading Standards Officers.

The report found that local trading standards services prevented at least £42 million worth of consumer harm and prosecuted more than 1,100 people for criminal offences in 2018/19. Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: "This report shows that councils' trading standards teams work hard to protect the public from doorstep and online scams, rogue traders and loan sharks, and the huge impact this work has."

Electric charging

The Department for Transport has published a new league table of electric charging points across local authorities. LGA Environment Spokesperson Cllr Darren Rodwell called for the next government to address the lack of long-term funding for improving air quality and reducing carbon emissions. He added: "Air pollution is a public health emergency and councils are increasingly focusing work on protecting their communities from the impact of harmful emissions. Electric charging points are only a part of the solution. Councils will work with businesses and residents on such issues, but all areas will respond in a way that suits local circumstances."

Council tax

Outdated regulations are driving councils to use ineffective ways of collecting council debt, such as bailiffs, and pushing struggling households into further debt, Citizens Advice has warned. Currently, when people miss a single council tax payment, they automatically become liable for the full year's bill – regulations the CA wants changed. Cllr Richard Watts, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said councils "have a duty to their residents to collect taxes so important services are not affected", but added: "Councils would be in favour of it being made easier for them to recover money without having to go to the courts, and would support the removal of the requirement for the entire annual sum to become payable if an instalment is missed."



Clearer labelling to boost recycling rates

The LGA says clearer labelling on all products, higher charges for hard-to-recycle products and measures to force producers to pay the full cost of disposing of their waste are needed to help councils increase recycling rates and tackle a growing environmental crisis.

Councils have maintained household waste recycling rates at the current national rate of around 45 per cent in recent years, against a target of at least 50 per cent by 2020.

There are more than 20 different recycling labels that can appear on packaging, creating confusion among consumers and leading to many recyclables ending up in landfill. One council alone found that more than 40 per cent of household rubbish it sends to landfill could be recycled.

As well as clearer labelling to increase recycling rates, the LGA is also calling for the next government to charge manufacturers more to cover the end-of-life costs to councils of packaging that is more difficult to recycle, which would encourage manufacturers to

switch to recyclable alternatives. The resulting revenue could be invested in waste collection and recycling services, and green initiatives.

Manufacturers also need to pay the full cost of recycling their packaging to incentivise them to use packaging that is fully and easily recyclable, and councils need to be adequately funded so they can expand their services.

Cllr David Renard, LGA Environment Spokesman, said: "Councils want to increase recycling rates. Clearer labelling and increased charges for hard-to-recycle products would help councils, manufacturers and the public be part of a vital recycling revolution.

"More importantly, manufacturers need to reduce waste at the point of source to stop unnecessary and unrecyclable material becoming an issue in the first place."

● All major supermarkets have announced they are on the verge of eliminating hard-to-recycle black plastic from their own-brand products, which is something the LGA has long called for.

Teaming up to tackle loneliness

The LGA has teamed up with the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), which represents town and parish councils, to help tackle loneliness.

The two organisations have published 'Reaching out', a guide to how councils and local organisations can work together to reach out and improve individuals' wellbeing, as well as relieving some of the pressure on already overburdened council and health services. Loneliness affects millions of people and has far reaching implications, not just for the individual, but for families, the wider community and local services.

LGA Chairman Cllr James Jamieson said: "Councils across all tiers are increasingly

recognising the added value in reaching out and working together, because it is in our interests to tackle the significant impact of loneliness and other public health challenges.

"Working together and toward a common goal we can build connected communities equipped and resourced to respond effectively to a wide range of needs."

Cllr Sue Baxter, Chair of NALC, said: "In order to take forward the national strategy on loneliness, we must recognise local activity already under way and re-double our efforts to work more effectively in partnership across local government if we are to see real change in ending loneliness."

● See www.local.gov.uk/reaching-out

letters



Buses versus roads

I do welcome extra money being granted for bus services, the Cinderella of Britain's public transport network that so many rely on outside London ('New investment in bus and road networks', **first** 641).

But unlike Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Transport Spokesman, I don't want to see a vast government investment in roads "to make the long-term improvements our country's road networks desperately need".

Instead, given the welcome concern shown about climate change (230 councils have now declared a climate emergency, according to the same edition of **first**), we should be pressing for more trams and light rail systems to provide our country's future transport needs.

Cllr Tim Mickleburgh (Lab), North East Lincolnshire Council

Making first greener

first needs to pull its socks up and get with it. Why is it delivered in a polythene sleeve? I thought starch-based wrapping, which is compostable, was the way forward? Can we also have fewer sound bites and more letters, or do people not write letters/emails?

Cllr Mark Rhodes (Con), Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council

Editor's note: We are reviewing **first's** packaging as part of a contract retendering process. All **first** content is available online at www.local.gov.uk/first, where readers can also sign up for the **first** e-bulletin, and opt out of receiving the magazine. We will shortly be refreshing **first's** design, and one change will be dropping the sound bites from the letters page. We are always keen to hear from readers – email your letters or ideas for stories to karen.thornton@local.gov.uk

Home education register

I note that the LGA website article, 'Government urged to toughen up home education plans' (16 July), coincided with the Department for Education's rejection of "councils' pleas to have greater oversight over home-schooled children".

The conflation of children's education and their safeguarding is an all too common mistake. Local authorities already have robust safeguarding powers that can be employed in instances of concern over a child's safety,

sound bites

Cllr Garry Bridges (Lab, Manchester)

"Great to join staff and governors at **@Lancasterians** to celebrate their Ofsted and the great progress made at the school. Nice to get to chat to people about the school and their work. Also enjoyed some pork pie!"

www.twitter.com/GarryBridges

Cllr Sharon Thompson (Lab, Birmingham)

"Wonderful to be able to share **@SpringHousing** 5th Anniversary with them yesterday. Such an outstanding organisation who contribute hugely towards solving the housing crisis across the region and challenging pathways. Thank you to Dom & the team for all you do in Birmingham."

www.twitter.com/SThompson_JP

Cllr Charlotte Leach (Con, Cheshire East)

"Honoured to lay a wreath on behalf of **@CheshireEast** at this morning's service at St Wilfred's in Mobberley. Heartwarming to see how many people from the village attended!"

#MobberleyRemembers #WeWillRememberThem."

www.twitter.com/CharLeach24x

Cllr Simon Ashall (Con, Woking)

"Great that **#surrey** County Council have chosen **#Woking** as their new home. Residents though will be interested not in what this says about Woking but what it says about the county council. New leadership - new location - continued new culture of smart delivery."

www.twitter.com/simonashall

Cllr Gill Neal (Ind, St.Helens)

"I was chatting to residents this morning on Lingholme Road about the heavy fall of leaves on the pavements and the gutters. We all know it's the season but blocked gullies cause flooding and leaves cause slippery pavements so I've asked for them to be cleared this week."

www.twitter.com/StHelensGill

which apply to both those in school and those being home educated.

As well as a right to education, a child also has a right to privacy and lack of intrusion into their family life. Many home educators view a council register [of home-educated children] as "a further step down the path of unwarranted intrusion into family life by the state" (Guardian, 17 July).

Councils are not mandated to check the quality of education which home-educated children are receiving. Their actual remit under current legislation is to act when they are aware of children not in receipt of an education. It is all too easy for councils to be over-zealous and exceed their brief. Does attendance at school automatically guarantee "a suitable education" for every child? Recently, the Children's Commissioner has expressed concern that a young person may spend 15 years of their life in full-time education, yet emerge without the qualifications to enable them to move ahead in life.

Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb, LGA Vice-President



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

features

Leading the fire sector

Effective oversight of fire services is key to improving them

Fire and rescue authorities have always played an important role in keeping their local communities safe by providing oversight of the performance of their local fire services.

In the past, this was relatively straightforward and involved securing assurance that a fairly narrow range of core statutory services were meeting nationally prescribed standards. This is no longer the case. As the sector has had to respond to individual incidents, government policy change and an increasingly restrictive financial environment, the role of services and authorities has evolved.

Members of fire and rescue authorities (FRAs) must now grapple with a range of challenging issues coming out of the recent inspections by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, alongside new requirements that are likely to result from the outcomes of the Grenfell Inquiry.

To support members in this work, the LGA has launched a new guide, 'Oversight of fire and rescue performance', written by ex-Chief Fire Officer Andy Fry, of Greston Associates.

The Government's National Framework for fire and rescue includes a specific requirement for FRAs to hold their chief fire officers to account, and, ultimately, responsibility for each service rests with the corresponding authority. In the fire context, members are heavily reliant on senior officers' advice to set policy tailored to the needs of local communities. This relationship is therefore key to members' ability to lead change and effect improvement.

The LGA's guide gives a valuable insight into the complexities of the fire landscape, the role of fire and rescue authorities in that context, and how members can make a difference to that environment. In particular, it focuses on how members can cultivate an effective relationship with their senior officers characterised by openness,



honesty, mutual respect, high levels of trust and constructive challenge.

'Oversight of fire and rescue performance' also uses real examples to demonstrate the value of constructive challenge. For example, in 2017, County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority commissioned an independent review of its governance arrangements. The review was designed to ensure that the authority was aware of its strengths and weaknesses, and that its governance arrangements were driving performance improvement.

The review focused on several key areas, helping to strengthen governance and focus the minds of elected members on their key roles and responsibilities. In particular, the fire authority's constitution was amended to ensure that it better addressed the expectations set out in the new National Framework.

The guide has been developed to help elected members to scrutinise and oversee the work of their senior officers. Whether an experienced fire and rescue authority member or someone a bit newer to the role, councillors should find the guide useful and informative.

Support for fire services

'Oversight of fire and rescue performance' is part of a range of support the LGA offers fire authorities and their members, and it can be downloaded free at www.local.gov.uk/publications.

For more details of our support offer – including our fire authority members' guide, the Leadership Essentials programme, and the fire peer challenge offer – please visit www.local.gov.uk/topics/fire-and-rescue.

The LGA holds a series of training events for fire authority members throughout the year, with sessions on 'Leading in the fire sector: culture, diversity and inclusion' kicking off in the new year, and its annual fire conference and exhibition taking place in Blackpool from 10-11 March – see www.local.gov.uk/events



Katy Turner, a graduate trainee at Doncaster Council

Grow your own managers

The National Graduate Development Programme is helping councils nurture the talent they need to develop the next generation of inspiring managers



Ros Jones (Lab) is the elected Mayor of Doncaster

It's been 15 years since Doncaster Council got involved with the National Graduate Development Programme for local government (ngdp) – that's 24 national management trainees (NMTs), from 10 cohorts.

As a council, we are always looking for innovative approaches and we continue to be excited to be a part of the ngdp, as it represents the future of our sector. It equips our graduates with the leadership skills and experience necessary to excel in their careers.

The beauty of this scheme is that each of the graduates has had a diverse and fantastic impact on the business of our authority. We, in turn, have developed our approach to the programme, learning from the expertise of other councils and bringing in national best practice to influence graduates' future careers and ensure

they have the best experience possible.

Our trainees have gone on to forge diverse careers within the council, in a variety of roles and directorate areas, and we currently employ seven people who are ngdp alumni.

As a national scheme delivered locally, we have had a real opportunity to adapt this flexible programme to meet the strategic needs of our council, and to have graduates

deliver borough-wide transformation and change.

Both the council and the borough have benefited from their work, with each graduate playing a real part in modernising our services. Whether through undertaking projects as part of Doncaster Growing Together, our vision for the borough, or providing essential support during flood-recovery efforts, they have consistently gone the extra mile for us. We are proud that our aspirations match their ambitions.

The new and diverse perspectives that the NMTs bring is incredibly beneficial and an invaluable resource for us. We encourage and value their comments and challenges, which inspire our teams to think differently about the way we carry out our work, relate with our communities and partners, and shape services to meet the future needs of local government.

Our confidence in the scheme has grown and we have increased our intake from two graduates every other year to three graduates every year. It's been the best decision we could ever have made.

ngdp for councils

The two-year ngdp, the LGA's flagship management trainee programme, offers councils a unique opportunity to grow their own local government leaders. It is the only national graduate programme specifically for local government.

As well as recruiting from our diverse national pool of the brightest and best candidates, you can 'grow your own' rising stars who already work for you, recruit specifically from your local area, and work collaboratively with partner authorities to host graduates

The ngdp can help you: create the pipeline of talent you need for the next generation of managers; attract a diversity of candidates; place graduates in the most challenging areas of your organisation; become part of a national network; and offer an accredited learning and development programme for your trainees.

Contact the LGA's ngdp team by emailing ngdp@local.gov.uk, to discuss what it could mean for your organisation. You have until March 2020 to take part in the recruitment of the next cohort of trainees, who will start work in October 2020.



Making a difference

Disabled people need help to overcome the barriers they face when campaigning to get elected

It is important that public offices, from the UK Parliament to local government, reflect the diversity of the UK population.

Currently, though, the number of disabled people in elected positions is not proportionate to the one in five in the general population; the LGA's 2018 councillor

census found 16 per cent of councillors had a long-term health problem or disability that limited their daily activities.

Ahead of last May's local elections, the EnAble Fund – provided by the Government Equalities Office (GEO) and administered by Disability Rights UK and the LGA – aimed to

level the playing field for disabled people, at least during their election campaigns, by providing grants for 'reasonable adjustments'.

These adjustments included help with delivering leaflets; companions or assistants to help with canvassing and knocking on doors; British Sign Language interpreters; specialist equipment; and banners to help with 'static' canvassing at community events or outside train stations.

The EnAble fund helped 31 disabled people from across the country, with a range of political affiliations, with their election campaigns. Of those, 19 were successfully elected on 2 May, and you can read some of their stories on the facing page.

The funding from the GEO – which also leads work on policy relating to women, sexual orientation and transgender equality, and is responsible for a range of equalities legislation – will also be available to help disabled candidates campaigning next May to become police and crime commissioners.



To apply to the EnAble Fund for help to become a candidate in the 2020 police and crime commissioner elections, please contact Disability Rights UK (DRUK) on 0330 995 0400 and selecting option 1 or emailing enablefund@disabilityrightsuk.org. Users of British Sign Language can use the text-to-talk service through the ngts.org.uk app or by dialling 18001 followed by 0330 995 0400 (option 1) and the handler will relay between the caller and DRUK



I am a 41-year-old and I am registered blind. I felt that it was time for a new challenge in my life and decided to stand in the 2019 local elections.

The first challenge I was going to face would be my election campaign. I looked at the cost of getting a flyer designed prior to sending to a printer and then the cost of getting leaflets delivered to residents, which were two things

I was going to struggle with because of my disability.

I heard about the EnAble Fund and made enquiries. With the help of Anna from Disability Rights UK, applying for the fund was easy and the money could be used to overcome both of my initial challenges. The challenges for me include not seeing trip hazards in people's gardens or being unable to locate letter boxes.

My application to the EnAble Fund was approved and the costs to overcome these issues was granted, so I stood for election and I was successfully elected as a councillor.

Councillor Richard Cunningham, Independent, East Lindsey District Council



Earlier this year, I was selected as a candidate in the borough council elections despite being only able to walk short distances. The run-up to the election is always hectic, involving door knocking and leafleting my entire ward street by street.

Without the help provided by the EnAble Fund, this would have been an impossible task given my limited mobility – there simply would not have been sufficient time to allow me to get round to everybody. The fund provided with me with a mobility scooter, which greatly reduced the amount of walking.

I was able to ride the scooter along each street to each resident's gate. From there, I was able to manage to walk the short distances to front doors and engage with my prospective constituents. I am pleased to say I was duly elected after a tense day at the count. I'm sure I wouldn't have been successful without the help and support from the EnAble Fund. Its help made it all possible and for that I am truly grateful.

Cllr Mary Stirzaker, Labour, Wyre Council



We all look forward to local government elections with mixed feelings, as they can be a time of great excitement, but also a time of very hard work delivering leaflets, wearing out the shoe leather by knocking on doors, and canvassing support in an attempt to get elected into office.

This is made much more challenging when you face the additional hurdle of doing all this with a life-changing disability, especially a significant physical disability such as cerebral palsy, which I suffer from and have done since experiencing a complication at birth.

At election time, we need all the help we can get; logistically and psychologically, it's never easy standing for election.

Having the benefit of the EnAble Fund helped me enormously with the logistical nightmare of how to run an election campaign, and just how the hell you deliver literature to 3,000 or so homes when you can't walk!

The fund is a valuable way to 'pay' for additional support, whether it be specialist equipment, extra office space or, in my case, enabling me to purchase stamps to stick on letters in order to get my message out.

In case you were wondering, I won my election to the newly created East Suffolk Council and was appointed by the new leader as a member of his cabinet – wow! It doesn't get more exciting than that. None of this would have been possible for me without the help and support I received from Disability Rights UK and the LGA. Thanks guys!

Councillor Stephen Burroughes, Conservative, East Suffolk Council



Many politicians, both local and national, take on delivery rounds and door-to-door canvassing as an essential part of the election campaign.

As a blind candidate, now councillor, with a guide dog, I have had to adapt to doing things a little differently, while at the same time trying to share the workload with the other successful Liberal Democrat candidates in the Torquay ward we were elected to represent.

The EnAble Fund permitted me to fully participate in the 2019 local elections. Although my guide dog Pepsi is excellent, she is not able to assist me visually.

The fund allowed me to have a companion when out canvassing, informing me of the little things that make all the difference – such as identifying if an adult or child answers the door, whether they are male or female, whether they are smiling and welcoming or exuding aggression.

Additionally, the EnAble Fund allowed me to arrange delivery of leaflets, which is something I cannot do. As a candidate, I always felt a little guilty that my fellow candidates were having to "carry me" with this activity and that it put more on their shoulders. It was fantastic that I was able to take on my full share of delivery during the campaign.

I believe there is no greater satisfaction when knocking on doors than to be met with the words: "You don't need to introduce yourself, we know who you are, we have seen you around and seen your leaflets". None of this would have been possible without the EnAble Fund which, in essence, makes it a level playing field for those with disabilities alongside those without.

Councillor Mandy Darling, Liberal Democrat, Torbay Council



Shifting the dial on equalities



Councillor Sharon Taylor is the LGA's Lead Member for Equalities

Workforce equality and diversity needs to be an intrinsic part of every council if we want our staff to be the best they can be and our communities to thrive

We recently held a very successful event on workforce equality, diversity and inclusion at the LGA, of which I am extremely proud.

But when I was asked to review the day, it made me wonder: what difference do these events really make? It's not enough for a group of like-minded people to meet and agree that "this is a really important thing" or "something needs to change".

We've had events like these before in local government and yet the data shows that we are still not representative of our communities and still not providing equality of opportunity at senior levels, so a level of cynicism could be justified. Nevertheless, I do think it is important to join forces at events like these.

Something special happens when people who are passionate about a subject come together, hungry for change, and more confident in knowing that they are not alone in trying to make change happen.

While chairing the event, I saw our delegates engaging with passion and being inspired to think about new ways of doing things. And while listening to our speakers, one key message stood out to



Workforce support

The LGA's Workforce Team supports councils and their partners to help create a workforce able to respond to major changes within the public sector.

Recent work includes publications such as our new guidance for councils, 'How can we be more inclusive employers?' We are also sharing good practice from councils, for example about their work on supporting good mental health or managing the menopause.

me: those organisations that have become more diverse and inclusive employers had achieved this by understanding the issue not as an equality strategy, but as a business strategy.

These organisations have changed their focus from simply hitting equalities targets to striving to achieve the benefits of diversity and inclusion to deliver the purpose of the organisation.

They're not putting effort into having the 'right' suite of HR policies and trendy initiatives with mandatory training courses. Instead, they are focused on achieving true behavioural change as an organisation.

They're doing this by, for example, having strong and authentic messages about the kind of organisation they want to be and testing every interaction with staff against these; by promoting leaders who model this behaviour; by having organisational policies that mirror this vision; and by employing managers with the right competencies to deliver those kinds of workplaces and services.

This goes beyond 'mainstreaming' equalities work, which implies attaching equalities considerations into other work. Instead it normalises it, makes it a key business priority, an intrinsic part of everything that the organisation is and does and stands for. I believe this is the change we need to help our inspired delegates make, back in the real world.

The LGA has a voice and a platform to support councils to shift the dial on equalities. I'm working with the LGA's Workforce Team (see panel) to help our sector think about different ways of valuing, involving and engaging their staff.

We will continue to promote this as a vital business goal, because we want our councils to be places where everyone can come to work and be able to be their best selves so that our communities can thrive.



Please visit www.local.gov.uk/our-support/workforce-and-hr-support to find out more.



Councillor Mike Haines is the LGA Independent Group's National Lead Peer

Taking an independent line

Climate change and leadership were among the hot topics at the LGA Independent Group's recent annual conference

lected members from across England and Wales convened in London recently for the LGA Independent Group Annual Conference.

Always a vibrant event, our conference gives LGA Independent Group members an opportunity to discuss the issues affecting our communities, attend skills workshops, network, and influence national policy.

This year, climate change and leadership were our two main themes.

We welcomed colleagues to our biggest conference to date, and outlined the important role the group's 2,770 members play in making sure our residents are heard and represented, not only locally but through the LGA on the national and international stage. The group's executive, lead board members and peers were introduced – demonstrating a strong team supporting our members across England and Wales.

Over the past year, the group has grown by more than 700 new members compared with the same elections in 2015. We're now leading more councils and have more representatives in Europe and Westminster than ever before. That means our peer team is extremely busy supporting new administrations, areas with no overall political control, leaders and cabinet members, as well as our backbenchers.

LGA Chairman Cllr James Jamieson and Chief Executive Mark Lloyd addressed conference, recognising the contribution made by our members to the work of the LGA, especially around the reshaping of the LGA's business plan, our climate change work and some of our key messages relating to housing, infrastructure and community.

We heard from the eminent Professor Tony Travers, of the London School of Economics and Political Science, on the changing face of British politics. Dr Ian Smith, of the University of the West of England, helped lead a workshop on climate change where members were able to share their best practice now that 60 per cent of councils, along with the LGA, have declared a climate emergency.

It is shocking that every year the Arctic loses an area of ice the size of Scotland and that extreme weather now has such a huge toll on human health, livelihoods and assets, as well as on ecosystems.

Our councils are at the forefront of the change needed to respond to the UN

Sustainable Development Goals and our members are leading the charge.

Broadcaster Tasneem Siddiqi led our 'working with the media' workshops while LGA Principal Advisers Helen Murray and Claire Hogan led sessions on leadership, whether in opposition or administration.

We also heard directly from our members during our regular Speaker's Corner slot. Councillors from across England and Wales shared their best practice, challenges and concerns, including the need for more affordable housing, a different approach to planning and an innovative Repair Café, as a way of addressing isolation while also

helping the environment by reducing waste.

After our conference we had a drinks reception where we heard from Frances Scott, founder of 50:50 Parliament, about its work to ensure greater gender equality, an ambition our group has supported for some time.

Conference proved to be thought-provoking and useful and members are already looking forward to the event next year, scheduled for 6 November 2020.

On behalf of the Independent Group's leadership team, I would like to thank all of those, including the office staff, who contributed to such an inspiring day.

EFFECTIVE OPPOSITION
Notes & Quotes

Claire Hogan
LGA Principal Adviser

Build a relationship with residents and communities

Use scrutiny as a resource

Authentic leadership

Get your forward scan right

Horizon scanning

Never underestimate the benefit of informal meetings

Styles/models of opposition
Constructive, co-operative

Theatrical, 'political warrior' (grandstanding)

Communication, debate, alliances

Helen Murray
LGA Principal Advisor
Being Effective in Administration
Know your colleagues

High trust

Low agreement

High agreement

Low trust

Honest opponents

Allies

Adversaries

Fair weather friends

Many different routes to get your voice heard and put your point across

If you act like a human being in a room of human beings, it can catch them off guard

ARTWORK:twovisualthinkers.info

i For more information about the LGA's Independent Group, please visit www.local.gov.uk/lga-independent



Cutting the cost of council borrowing

Local government's bonds agency can offer a cheaper source of funding for infrastructure and investment



Sir Merrick Cockell is Chairman of the UK Municipal Bonds Agency

In last month's **first**, the LGA warned that an unexpected increase in the cost to councils of borrowing from government could cost them an extra £70 million a year.

The Public Works Loan Board (PWLB), which lends money to local authorities and collects repayments, increased its interest rates by 1 per cent in October.

But there is an alternative and cheaper source of funding for councils wanting to finance housing, regeneration and other infrastructure projects – the UK Municipal Bonds Agency (UK MBA).

The agency was set up five years ago by local government, for local government, and the LGA is one of its shareholders.

Over the summer, the UK MBA has been undergoing a quiet evolution to reinvigorate its management, structure and product range. Fortuitously, this was completed as the PWLB raised its rates.

A number of councils were comfortable with the UK MBA's original structure and included its framework agreement into their treasury management strategy. But some had concerns about the 'joint and several guarantee' element of the offer.

We have listened and are simplifying the UK MBA's documentation, widening the product range and making a number of changes to the agency's structure, particularly the guarantee it requires.

The probability of a council defaulting on any debt is immeasurably small; none has done so since the Corporation of London was established in 1067.

However, there was the worry that should the unthinkable happen and a council fails to repay its loans to the UK MBA, another council may find itself liable for significant sums owed by others.

The agency's guarantee has now been restructured so that borrowers are liable for any default on a proportional basis. Gone is the risk that any council could be singled out disproportionately. Additionally, if a council has repaid its debts to the UK MBA, it is automatically 'off' the guarantee, with no prospect of being called upon in the future.

As an alternative to PWLB borrowing, the UK MBA is also offering short-term loans which provide low-cost finance, enabling councils to fund their immediate capital programme while the UK MBA prepares bond issues with a range of maturities.

The agency is also offering 'forward rate' loans, which guarantee the interest rate a council will pay on a loan taken out in the future, significantly reducing the risk of complex, multi-year capital projects.

With local government debt across the UK now more than £100 billion, every 1 per cent increase costs local government £1 billion per year.

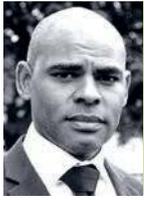
The UK MBA aims to be cheaper than other products available to most councils – and at lower risk – so the potential savings for the sector are significant. As well as being cheaper, our products and processes are also transparent and clearly understandable.

Now, more than ever, is the time for local government to make the UK MBA a success. With the positive changes made by the agency, local government can take greater control of its own future free from unplanned, disruptive and arbitrary changes to the capital finance that is critical to its long-term success.



The UK Municipal Bonds Agency has recently appointed PFM Financial Advisors as the managed service provider to the agency. PFM will manage all day-to-day operations of the agency, with the board remaining in overall control. The UK MBA remains owned by local government, for local government – see www.ukmba.org for more information

Delivering on sustainability



Marvin Rees (Lab) is the elected Mayor of Bristol

Bristol has been reviewing its progress against the United Nation's sustainable development goals and has produced a handbook to help other councils with the process

Back in July, the LGA declared a climate emergency and endorsed the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, at its annual conference in Bournemouth (see **first** 638).

When implemented, each of these goals has the potential to be transformative in moving our areas toward a more sustainable society. Many of them are best supported by local co-ordination and delivery through councils and their partners, and are inextricably linked to our local priorities – from tackling poverty, inequality, and climate change to supporting inclusive societies and access to health and education for our citizens.

In Bristol, we have undertaken a whole-city approach to delivering the sustainable development goals (SDGs). For example, the aspirations and visions in our One City Plan have been mapped against them.

The plan contains ambitious initiatives to help Bristol reach its goal of becoming "a fair, healthy and sustainable city". These aspirations align strongly with the targets of the SDGs and the partnership approach of Bristol's City Office, which encourages partners from across Bristol to come together and contribute to the immediate and long-term challenges it faces.

Bristol continues to lead the way on this agenda, with the launch of the UK's first 'voluntary local review' (VLR) into our progress against the 17 goals and a new VLR handbook that aims to help other local authorities with this issue.

The VLR, produced by independent researchers at the University of Bristol's Cabot Institute for the Environment, includes data on more than 140 indicators covering all 17 SDGs and information on the activities of nearly 100 Bristol-based organisations. These groups are working to make the city more economically, environmentally and socially sustainable.

In Bristol, the VLR has helped us make our own independent assessment against each of the SDGs and support conversations with partners across the city to shape our shared local and global priorities.

For example, while we were able to identify good progress on the quality of education in the city, particularly in early years, the review indicated that we need to do more to eliminate child poverty and food insecurity.

As a result, one of the actions we have prioritised is a partnership approach to tackling 'holiday hunger' by providing fresh meals every weekday of the school holidays in the wards where the proportion of children receiving free school meals is highest, alongside more strategic actions to tackle the longer-term position.

Our new handbook, produced jointly by the Cabot Institute and Bristol City Office, with support from the British Council, draws from Bristol's experience of undertaking a VLR as well as discussions with other leading cities that have also undertaken VLRs.

The handbook details the variety of styles and types of VLRs that have been completed thus far around the world, and aims to facilitate greater uptake of the SDGs in other cities and local authorities in the UK.

Bristol is grappling with pressing local, national and global challenges. The SDGs give us a common language to describe the issues and solutions we find. This handbook shares the learning from our own and others' experiences to help support others in the achievement of our common goals.

This includes the recognition of the value and soft power in a common shared approach, and I invite other local leaders to share in this.



The VLR handbook and more information about Bristol's SDG work are available at www.bristol.ac.uk/cabot/what-we-do/sdgs/. Further information on the VLR itself and mapping of the SDGs through the One City Plan is available at www.bristolonecity.com/sdgs/

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



Parents under pressure

Child-to-parent violence can occur in any family anywhere, but parents are often too ashamed to seek help



Councillor Joan Atkinson (Lab) is Lead Member for Area Management and Community Safety at South Tyneside Council

While most people know about domestic abuse and its effects, less attention is given to child or adolescent violence against parents or carers.

To compound matters further, this issue is on the rise with figures suggesting reported incidents have doubled in the past three years. This is a serious issue for many families, which can be misunderstood or overlooked.

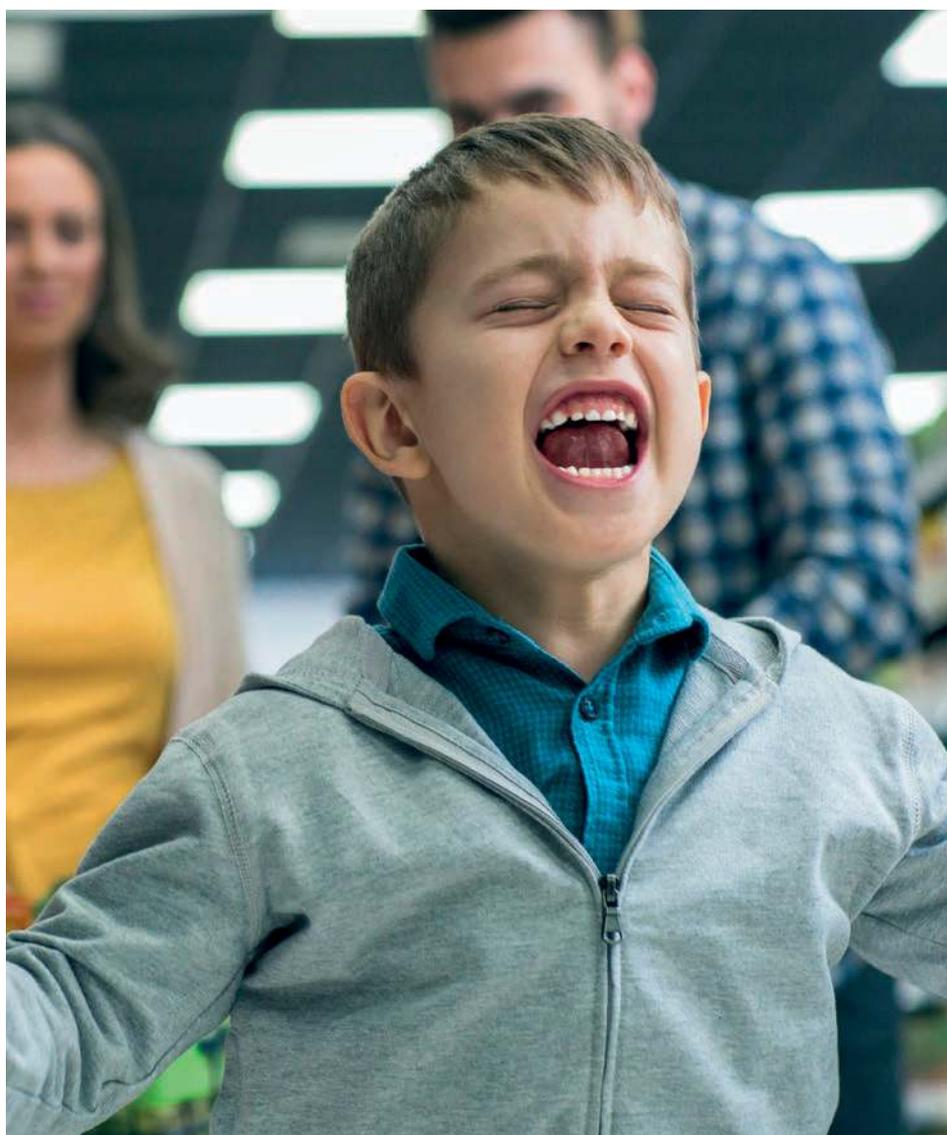
Although this issue is by no means unique to South Tyneside or, indeed the North East, we decided to take action.

As a starting point, council officers spoke to families who had experience of this type of behaviour. They found families were unwilling to ask for help, felt their views were not taken seriously, and that they were often 'judged' and made to feel humiliated by the professionals who should have been there to support them.

Our community safety team applied for funding from the Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner to deliver awareness-raising training on child violence against parents/carers across the Northumbria Police area.

This was rolled out to police officers, health practitioners and children's services at all levels across six local authority areas. To date, more than 500 police officers and 700 professionals have been trained across the region. The project continues to evolve, with police officers and safeguarding staff now routinely looking for evidence of child-to-parent violence when called to incidents.

We have developed a screening tool



consisting of a series of questions that identifies the level of risk faced by parents/carers. Families are then offered the appropriate support, which could include early help, social care or youth justice services. This can include taking part in a Respect for Young People course – a structured programme for the whole family for those who need additional support (see right).

A self-help booklet has been produced, offering reassurance and practical strategies to families, and contact details for further support and advice. A film, highlighting case studies of families living with this issue, has also been produced to raise awareness among different organisations to ensure an appropriate multi-agency response is provided.

There are many social reasons to explain why this type of abuse happens. The scope and complexity of these issues makes it even more important that we have a range of proportionate responses available to support these families.

Rather than take a punitive approach, we help families to feel more confident by giving them information and support to take control of the situation themselves.

Respect for young people

South Shields couple Sarah and Bob Burrough say the support they have received from South Tyneside Council has "completely changed their lives".

The couple asked for help for their son, now 13, who has a diagnosis of autism, and the whole family did the Respect for Young People course.

Sarah said: "The course helped us to give him other outlets for feelings rather than aggression. It has also helped him take responsibility for his feelings; he will now say sorry when his anger flares as a result of his autism or anxiety, which he never used to do.

"We thought it wouldn't work but as the weeks went on we stuck rigidly to the plan because we were desperate for help. At first he kicked back but I can honestly say the programme has completely changed our lives."



Part of the sculpture trail at Leavesden Country Park

Park life

Involving the community has helped create a country park shortlisted for a national award



Cllr Sara Bedford (Lib Dem) is Leader of Three Rivers District Council

What do a 19th-century asylum, a World War II aerodrome and the Harry Potter films all have in common?

The answer is Leavesden Country Park, in Abbots Langley, Hertfordshire. It was officially opened earlier this year, after a £1.2 million programme of investment in heritage, environment, arts and community facilities, funded by Three Rivers District Council, the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Warner Bros. Studios Leavesden.

The site has an intriguing history. The 'Leavesden Asylum for Idiots and Imbeciles' and St Pancras Orphanage/Workhouse opened in October 1870. It was 90 per cent self-sufficient for 2,085 patients, 639 orphans and staff, with a school, nursing college, gas works, sewage system, church, cemeteries and a 42-acre farm. By the 1950s, there were more than 3,500 patients and 1,200 staff at the Leavesden Hospitals. But following the

introduction of 'care in the community' in the 1980s, the hospital drastically reduced in size, finally closing in 1997.

Nearby Leavesden Aerodrome was acquired by de Havilland to build Mosquito fighter aircraft and Halifax bombers during World War II. After the war, the aerodrome and its huge hangars were taken over by Rolls-Royce to produce engines for aircraft and later helicopters. By 1994, the airfield and factory had closed and the site was disused.

But in 1995, EON Productions was looking for somewhere to shoot the latest James Bond film, *GoldenEye*, and converted the aircraft

one of the largest film studios in Europe and home to the Harry Potter Studio Tour.

This history was the basis for the development of the park into a destination attraction, showcasing the heritage and natural environment of the area. The key to the project's success has been largely due to community involvement, embracing the memories and aspirations of local residents, from the project steering group and artists' workshops, to many community activities and the growth of an active 'friends' group.

Nine sculptures, with their themes of 'Minds, movies and machines', carry significance to the community and its local history, and form a stunning heritage trail against the backdrop of the park. Each has its own interpretation board.

The Leavesden HIVE, a centre for learning, is supported by a specialist historical association, dedicated to the hospitals' history. The park ranger uses the HIVE as a base for a diverse activity programme for schools, individuals and community groups.

A meandering woodland walk has been established to enjoy the peace and quiet; a community fruit orchard is being developed; and a play area, weaving in the heritage and wildlife themes of the park, has been created. Within the park, there is also the Woodlands Café and Leavesden Cycle Hub.

The hard work and huge contribution of the community has now been recognised nationally, with Leavesden Country Park shortlisted in the community involvement category of the Local Government Chronicle Awards 2020 (results out in March). Three Rivers council is delighted and proud to have delivered this project, for the benefit of the community for many years to come.

“The council is delighted and proud to have delivered this project”

hangars into a working studio and the airfields to a backlot. Many major feature films made use of the site, including the first of the *Star Wars* prequels and the *Harry Potter* series. In 2010, Warner Bros. purchased the studio as a permanent European base and since then has invested over £100 million into the site – now



For more information about Leavesden Country Park, please visit www.threerivers.gov.uk/service/leavesden-country-park

Local enterprise

Combining a strategic location with public and private investment and the story of a real place has helped create jobs and bring derelict land back into use



Councillor Abi Brown (Con)
is Leader of Stoke-on-Trent
City Council

Think of Stoke-on-Trent and you will no doubt recall the potteries, and world-leading ceramics.

Success in ceramics has been mirrored in our approach in developing one of the fastest-growing enterprise zones in the country.

The Ceramic Valley Enterprise Zone was launched in 2016, and in that time has secured nearly 2,000 jobs, developed more than 500,000 square feet of commercial development space, seen the first speculative development happening in the city for years, brought back into use 89 hectares of brownfield sites (some of which had been derelict for up to 40 years), and attracted £82 million of public investment and £83 million of private investment.

We're not only crafting the clay under the ground into ceramics, we're turning rubble and derelict land into thriving employment and attractive investment opportunities.

Our vision for developing Ceramic Valley was to link a ribbon of six sites, spreading 140 hectares alongside key road and rail infrastructure links – realising the full potential of North Staffordshire's fantastic logistical location in the heart of the country, and recognising our strengths and using them for future growth.

This vision has meant we have a great story to tell of a real place and its history. Its prominent location and really visible signs of construction, development and growth reflect the resurgence and optimism in Stoke-on-Trent. We are no longer a hidden city, but now playing with bigger cities to secure national investment, and are regarded as one to watch.

We're a city that is making heritage cool and creativity sexy, putting edu-clay-tion back on the agenda and maximising our grade A strategic location.

One of the most pleasing aspects of Ceramic Valley is that its successes are being felt across the whole city, in towns and communities. A wonderful example of this can be seen in



Five newly completed units on the Tunstall Arrow site of the Ceramic Valley Enterprise Zone have already been let.

national manufacturer Tile Mountain, owned by a local entrepreneur who, as a schoolboy, took shortcuts across mounds of waste ceramics on derelict land on his way to class.

Now that same land has been brought back to life as a key location in the enterprise zone, the land remediated, units built and, in this case, occupied by Tile Mountain, giving the business the opportunity to grow in significant, new, purpose-built premises, keeping production in the city and safeguarding local jobs.

By demonstrating ambitious leadership and real delivery, we have turned Ceramic Valley into jobs and businesses, employing local people and raising aspirations among young people.

This leadership has brought key partners together. Ceramic Valley is recognised as the flagship project of the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, and the sites have a mix of landowners, developers and local authority partners.

Occupation of the sites is more than 73

“We are no longer a hidden city, but now playing with bigger cities to secure national investment”

per cent, and a pipeline of serious interest is spurring further planned developments and major infrastructure programmes to strengthen links with the A500 corridor that will open up access to further development land.

The enterprise zone has consistently contributed to the region's continued economic growth, bringing in high-value added sectors and raising productivity. New hotels are appearing, including a four-star Hilton Garden Inn in the city centre; visitor numbers have increased by six figures; and employment growth is the fourth fastest in the country.

The story of the enterprise zone is the modern story of Stoke-on-Trent, and we're excited about its future.



For more information about the Ceramic Valley Enterprise Zone, please visit www.stoke.gov.uk/info/20012/business/28/ceramic_valley_enterprise_zone

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comment

Diversity needs civility in public life



Baroness Wilcox of Newport is the Leader of the Welsh LGA

I have always been a passionate advocate for local government.

From the start of my teaching career more than 35 years ago to becoming the Leader of Newport City Council and the WLGA, I have worked alongside talented officers and committed councillors, who all work tirelessly to maintain essential local services and to improve lives in our communities.

The LGA's most recent polling on resident satisfaction found that 72 per cent of respondents trusted local councillors, rather than MPs or ministers, to make decisions about local services. As councillors who live and work in our communities, we are the people who are best placed to deliver for our residents.

The world around us has changed dramatically, though, since I was first elected to represent the Gaer ward in 2004, and the role of a councillor has also evolved.

In Wales, we play an active role as equal partners with the Welsh Government in governing the nation. We are leading on multi-billion-pound city and growth deals that have the potential to unlock unprecedented economic growth in all four corners of Wales. We have shown resilience in rising to modern challenges by collaborating and innovating, always with our residents' needs at the centre of all we do.

But while we've seen rapid change elsewhere, it remains stubbornly slow in achieving better representation in our council chambers. We all know that diversity drives better decision-making, and I know it is a priority I share with many other leaders and councillors across all parties and none.

“We all have a responsibility to stand together against the rising tide of toxicity in our public discourse and to protect our local democracy”

The advent of social media has transformed how we connect with our residents. But it has also given rise to a torrent of ugly and hateful abuse by faceless keyboard warriors who view people in the public eye as ‘fair game’.

Women are especially subjected to intimidation just for doing their job. Not only is such behaviour a concern to the personal safety

and wellbeing of councillors, it also undermines local democracy. How can we possibly expect to attract people from more diverse backgrounds to stand as candidates in local elections if this is the way they're going to be treated?

We all have a responsibility to stand together against the rising tide of toxicity in our public discourse and to protect our local democracy. I am particularly pleased that the LGA, with the WLGA, and our Scottish and Northern Irish counterparts, are about to embark on a civility campaign to challenge this abuse and offer support to those who experience it.

As my time as WLGA leader draws to a close, I pass on the baton with an enormous sense of pride and gratitude. I plan to keep close links with the WLGA and the LGA, and will continue to be a loyal supporter of local government within Parliament as I take on my new role as a working peer.

Councillors have the toughest job in the public sector, but time and time again have shown that they're more than capable of succeeding in rising to the challenge. I will continue to champion local government, and I wish you all the best running your councils in the current climate, as the road ahead continues to be full of challenges and seemingly insolvable problems.



As first was going to press, Baroness Wilcox was due to stand down as Leader of the WLGA, with an announcement expected on her successor. The LGA is running a conference on ‘Civility in public life’ in London on Monday 16 December. To find out more, please visit www.local.gov.uk/events

Councils need fair and sustainable funding

“Austerity has strangled the UK’s economic recovery and caused huge damage to communities up and down the UK, with devastating effects on key public services”



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

Local government was right at the front of the queue when the Government started to dole out austerity measures, with councils losing 60p out of every £1 that the last Labour Government gave to councils in 2010.

Austerity has strangled the UK’s economic recovery and caused huge damage to communities up and down the UK, with devastating effects on key public services.

Labour has consistently opposed the cuts to local government and we’ve lobbied our leader to ask that Labour’s manifesto will pledge to restore council funding to 2010 levels.

But the next government should also be more transparent in the way in which funding is allocated.

From fixing the formula for road repairs to the introduction of the rural services grant, this government have taken every opportunity to stitch up the distribution of funding for councils. This has further penalised the poorer communities represented by Labour councils. Combined with a deeply regressive council tax system and increasingly out-of-date business rates, the entire funding base for local government is now defective.

The next government must establish a fairer and more progressive system of property taxes, and establish a mechanism to ensure that revenue is appropriately redistributed according to deprivation and local need.

Perhaps most importantly, though, any

new system of local government funding needs to be protected from the vagaries of national government. Our broken system enabled the Government to make savage cuts to local public services and to asset-strip local communities for more than a decade without the consent of local people.

Councils need more financial independence from central government to ensure this can never happen again.

For true stability in local government, the Groundhog Day cycle of Labour investment followed by Tory cuts needs to be permanently ended by legislation that guarantees fair and sustainable funding into the future – whichever government is in power.

Chairman’s comment

Dealing with the unexpected



Councillor James Jamieson
is Chairman of the LGA

It has been heart-breaking to see people forced out of their homes by the extensive flooding across Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire.

Schools were closed; flooding on the tracks disrupted train services in the East and West Midlands; and hundreds of homes and businesses were submerged.

At one point, there were hundreds of flood warnings and alerts in place, from Cornwall to Newcastle.

Among the many public services working together trying to mitigate the immediate impact of the floods on residents, I know that council leaders and ward members were out in force in their yellow

jackets, and council staff have been working around the clock to provide services and support, and to keep people informed.

Other councils rallied round to help neighbouring areas, for example by supplying additional sandbags.

When the waters recede, the blue light services leave and the national news agenda moves on, it will be local councils that continue to support local communities on the long road to recovery.

I’m very proud of the way local government deals with the unexpected and works together to provide mutual support – and not just in response to devastating floods.

Being there – being on the ground, and understanding our local communities – is key to

providing the right response to any local crisis. The next government needs to give us the powers and resources we need to support our residents, and make the local decisions that matter for our areas.

Talking of which, I know our electoral services staff will be working flat out to make a success of the General Election: candidates across the country can campaign safe in the knowledge that local government will ensure smooth electoral administration.

Following discussions with the LGA and the sector, the Government has confirmed all reasonable election-related costs will be reimbursed including for identifying alternative venues for polling stations to minimise disruption to Christmas events.

“I’m very proud of the way local government works together to provide mutual support – and not just in response to devastating floods”

group leaders' comments



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

A good record on managing the economy

*“We need a majority
Conservative government
to break the Brexit
deadlock and focus on
domestic issues”*

The General Election provides a great opportunity to elect a government that is capable of delivering a successful Brexit, has a good record on managing the economy and cares for its citizens' welfare.

Now more than ever, we need a majority Conservative government to break the Brexit deadlock and focus on domestic issues that need resolving.

Thanks to the Conservative Government's careful management over the past decade, our economy is growing and now we can afford to invest properly in the public's priorities. This year alone the Government announced £3.5 billion funding for local services in the Spending Round.

To provide the homes people need, the Government scrapped the housing revenue borrowing cap last year – a longstanding 'ask' of the LGA. The Affordable Homes Programme has been increased by £2 billion and the Government continues to support Help to Buy to make home ownership a reality for more people.

The Government is increasing school funding by £14 billion to give children the best start in life, and making our streets safer by recruiting more than 20,000 police officers.

The 12 December election is likely to be one of the most important in British history, and Conservative councillors will be working hard to return a majority Conservative government.

I would also like to extend my best wishes to those Conservative councillors who are standing as candidates for Parliament.



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

It's all about the money...

*“If we truly value
local community
services then we
have to be prepared
to pay for them”*

With less than two weeks left before we go to the polls (unless you have already voted by post), we must shout from the roof-tops that we need to fund local government and local services properly.

If we truly value our local community services then we have to be prepared to pay for them. Fully funding councils is the only way they will be able to make a difference to people's lives, such as caring for older and disabled people, protecting children, building homes, fixing roads, looking after our green spaces and collecting the bins.

The money councils have is running out fast and there is huge uncertainty about how they will fund services into the next decade and beyond.

All parties will need to look beyond headline pledges around more funding for the NHS, police and schools – important though these are.

On this, I am old fashioned. You do this by being honest with the public and telling them they need to pay more for quality public services.

So we need to challenge all the political parties in this election to come clean on how we are going to fund the services we need.



Councillor Mike Haines is
the LGA Independent Group's
National Lead Peer

Ensuring our messages are heard

*“Among our calls
are a sustainable
social care system
and greater certainty
around funding”*

We've recently had the LGA Independent Group Conference (which you can read about on p15), and Independent Group peers attended the LGA annual peer conference, where leadership, sector-led improvement and climate change were hot topics.

Councillors gathered to work cross-party (something MPs have repeatedly failed to do) to develop solutions and new ways of working. It was heartening to see how local government continues to innovate and respond positively to challenges despite the uncertainty we face.

With the General Election looming, we have been working with candidates to ensure our messages are being heard.

Among our calls for the next government is the need for a sustainable social care system; greater certainty around funding; devolution of power and money to the most local level; a commitment to environmentally friendly housing and planning policy; and a recognition that infrastructure and services are just as important as building new houses.

With the big parties in disarray, it is time for Independents and smaller parties to follow our success in May's local elections and challenge the status quo.

Putting residents before politics resulted in hundreds more councillors. Let's hope it means more LGA Independent Group MPs in Westminster come 13 December.



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

'Forces Connect'



Tim Woolmer is a Policy Manager at Kent County Council

As local authorities across the South East, we value the contribution our Armed Forces make to our region.

We are committed to supporting the entire forces community – serving, regular and reservist personnel, veterans, spouses and children – in accessing good quality public services, and upholding the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant.

Recently, through the Forces Connect South East partnership, we have developed bespoke packages of training aimed at councillors and frontline multi-agency staff.



For more information on the Forces Connect app, or on Forces Connect South East, please email FCSE@surreycc.gov.uk

We have established a 'champions' network across the public sector, and launched e-learning modules and mentoring schemes. We have embarked upon an engagement journey sharing toolkits and best practice around the UK. Lastly, we have developed the 'Forces Connect' app.

Working alongside our fantastic developers, the Wow Factory, we have designed this easy-to-use app targeted at the entire Armed Forces community, as well as the frontline staff who work with them. In four easy clicks, it signposts users to help and support from statutory and voluntary-sector organisations. It offers multichannel results and can be used offline. Best of all, it is free!

Now I know what you're thinking. There are a multitude of apps around, often going out of date rapidly and with huge amounts of duplication. Our app has been designed so it can be updated very quickly.

The content is drawn directly from, and maintained by, NHS England's Armed Forces Networks. This safeguards against obsolete information and enables the addition of new services. Ensuring ongoing sustainability was

critical to the design, making it as resource-light as possible to maintain.

The final element of the app design was supporting further geographical expansion, should other areas want to come on board. In addition to our fellow South East local authorities, we have recently welcomed Cambridgeshire and North Yorkshire to the app, with other regions – including London and Oxfordshire – due online imminently.

So if you work in areas covered by the app, or you might be interested in joining us, why not download it today. Search 'Forces Connect' in your app store now.



#LGACONF20

LGA ANNUAL CONFERENCE
AND EXHIBITION 30 JUNE – 2 JULY HARROGATE

To book your place, visit www.local.gov.uk | Sponsorship opportunities available, please contact amanda.spicer@local.gov.uk



Addressing challenges in public health through research



Professor Chris Whitty is the Chief Medical Officer for England

The stunning improvements in health over the past two decades are built on a strong foundation of research.

The evidence base, however, is often much stronger for clinical medicine in the NHS than the equally important area of decisions for public health and social care in local government. Over the past year, I have visited

local authorities across England to hear, first-hand, about the public health challenges they face and research that can help address them.

What struck me during these visits was the inspirational people who are working tirelessly to improve people's lives locally.

As well as being Chief Medical Officer for England, I lead the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), the nation's largest funder of health and social care research. One of the aims of the NIHR is to produce research evidence that can help shape new clinical, public health and social care interventions.

Despite learning about many remarkable innovations, I was surprised by the lack

of evidence around many public health programmes and the limited evaluation of their effectiveness.

Universities and the research sector are not as well integrated into local authorities as they should be. We must do what we can to make this easier. Many great ideas do not work as planned: others do, but without a formal independent assessment, it is unlikely they will be adopted elsewhere.

Two of the key challenges in generating evidence that is useful to local authorities are infrastructure and capacity. For clinical research, the NIHR actively supports linkages between universities and NHS trusts by funding research infrastructure and joint staff appointments between both.

This is something the NIHR is keen to address in terms of how local authorities and universities work together. As well as universities working with their local authorities, academic researchers across the country should be working with a broad range of local authorities to address public health challenges.

Not having a connection between universities and local authorities can have many impacts. On the most simple of levels, it means public health practitioners and policy-makers cannot access the evidence often locked away in subscription journals in university libraries.

In terms of the bigger picture, research carried out by academics at universities may not address the public health needs of the local authority where the research is being conducted. One of the best ways of tackling this issue is through the co-production of research – an approach in which researchers, practitioners and the public work together to shape a project.

I was accompanied on some of my council visits by Dame Anne Johnson, Chair of the Strategic Coordinating Body of the Health of the Public Research (SCHOPR) group. One of its key activities was to produce, at the request of the UK Chief Medical Officers, public health research principles and goals to guide funding decisions. The purpose of the principles and goals is to increase the impact of the UK's offer on health of the public research, so we are better able to tackle the public health challenges we face, now and in the future.

Our experience around the country has highlighted some of the fantastic research taking place, but the discussions really brought home that the NIHR needs to be doing even more with local authorities to support this work.

“I was surprised by the lack of evidence around many public health programmes and the limited evaluation of their effectiveness”

i For more information about the NIHR and public health research, please visit www.nihr.ac.uk/explore-nihr/funding-programmes/public-health-research.htm



Darryl Eyers is the President of the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT)

Well-connected places in a changing world

Being well-connected is fundamental to the success of our local communities.

For the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT), that means providing efficient transport networks and widely accessible digital connectivity. But it also means looking to the future, where mobility will be key.

We face a combination of increasing public concern for the environment, the pressing need to decarbonise and the pressure on service provision faced by all local authorities, with the added challenges of the risks and opportunities of Brexit.

As place shapers, we have to tackle these challenges with constrained budgets and high public expectations. Place leaders are at the coalface of our changing world, finding a balance between delivering universally accessed services with fewer resources today, against the need to plan for, fund and deliver the places of tomorrow.

Our November conference, 'Well-connected places in a changing world', was a much-needed opportunity to explore and debate these challenges with our corporate partners, key influencers and wider membership.

In uncertain times, we are working to create thriving, resilient and sustainable communities. We are creating policies that support the environment, health and wellbeing and the growth of the green

economy, and that deliver climate change adaptation and mitigation schemes.

Our policies need to encourage clean growth and deliver the highways of the future, where autonomous vehicles and 'mobility as a service' (MaaS) will revolutionise how we get around. Equally, the adoption of 5G, on which much of our future connectivity will depend, demands a new approach to enabling modern digital infrastructure.

From our work developing the next generation of aspiring place directors to our programme of thought leadership, we are working to ensure that our members are equipped for the challenges ahead.

ADEPT has been meeting these challenges head-on. Our response has been to innovate, to build partnerships, strengthen our networks and take the lead in creating and sharing best practice, influencing government and shaping policy.

Our £22.9 million SMART Places Live Labs programme, funded by the Department for Transport, is a testbed for innovation. SMART objectives are specific, measurable, available, relevant and time-bound. Eight labs, led by local authorities working with corporate and academic partners, are creating and testing scalable projects across local roads

using SMART mobility, energy, materials and communications. They are already sharing their work with ADEPT members and the wider transport sector.

We need to explore more opportunities for knowledge-sharing and innovation and this means inclusivity, whether this is working with our diverse communities, our corporate partners or with each other.

We live in increasingly febrile times where the public is looking for solutions to seemingly intractable issues, all heightened by Brexit. Inevitably, there will need to be a period of reconciliation, when our communities can come back together.

Local leadership has never been so important. It is impossible to look at any of these huge issues in isolation – they are all interconnected and impact on each other. Place is ultimately about people, and the pressures of funding one aspect of local authority provision affects all others.

This is why the key local authority professional associations are coming together to speak in one voice about the issues that face us all, both as service providers and as colleagues. This conversation has just begun, so watch this space as we develop our ideas going forward.

“It is impossible to look at any of these huge issues in isolation – they are all interconnected”

parliament

Call for alternatives to business rates

Before Parliament was dissolved for the General Election, the influential Treasury Select Committee published a wide-ranging report on the system of business rates in England and Wales.

It has called for an urgent review on alternatives to be launched by the time of the next Spring Statement, with a warning that rates are high, complex and place an unfair burden on high street shops and businesses as opposed to those that operate online.

The committee also criticised a backlog of 16,000 appeals against business rate decisions and called for the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) – which values properties for the purpose of council tax and for non-domestic rates in England and Wales – to be properly staffed.

The report follows an inquiry that saw the LGA submit written evidence, and LGA Resources Board Chair Cllr Richard Watts give oral evidence to the committee.

During its inquiry, the committee said it had been presented with numerous alternatives to the current system, including a land value tax, online sales levy, profits tax, single consolidated tax and hybrid tax.

It said further work is needed before it could recommend any proposal as a clearly better alternative but insisted it should not be left up to business to develop and evaluate detailed proposals.

The report also made a series of further recommendations, including a call for the Treasury to review all business rates reliefs to ensure that they remain necessary. It said the number of reliefs that are needed for business rates to work indicate “a broken system”.

It also concluded that the fact there are still business rates appeals outstanding from the 2010 listing is “unacceptable” and must be resolved as a “matter of urgency”.

The committee said the VOA’s previous appeals system needed to be replaced



“Councils want to see a business rates system which is responsive to local needs and fair to all”

as it made it too easy for businesses to make speculative appeals and created an unsustainable workload for itself.

No business should be waiting for more than two years into the next rating list for their checks or challenges from the previous rating list to be resolved, it said.

The LGA was pleased that the report concluded that any reform of the business rates system should have to maintain total income for local authorities and to keep the link between authorities and current and potential new businesses in their areas.

In response to the report, Cllr Watts said: “Councils want to see a business rates

system which is responsive to local needs, fair to all and promotes inclusive growth through incentives.

“Local government has a strong interest in a reformed business rates system which commands confidence and where there is local discretion over reliefs.

“We therefore support a more detailed review for an income source which is a secure and reliable source of revenue alongside reforms to the current system. We look forward to being involved in work leading to a consultation on possible alternatives to business rates.”

At the time the report was published, the Treasury said it would respond to the select committee’s report in due course.



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

councillor



Get yourself connected

Digital connectivity is an all-encompassing term used to describe mobile or fixed connections to the internet.

Being connected in this way has become part of the fabric of everyday life – as important to communities and businesses as a water, gas or electricity connection.

With better access to high speed and reliable broadband and mobile connections, local communities can access public services more conveniently and purchase goods online at a lower cost.

People can work from home, cutting out their commute and improving their quality of life. Businesses can grow, become more productive, sell their products in a global market and access a raft of services not available to those offline.

In contrast, areas stuck in the digital slow lane are less attractive places to live, work and visit, and risk being left behind as other areas reap the benefits of our digital revolution.

As a councillor, you will know the real difference you can make to people's lives. You will also be aware of the balance you need to strike between the needs of your area, your residents, community groups, local

businesses, your political party (if you belong to one) and the council. Digital connectivity presents many similar challenges to just about any other issue that you will need to deal with.

Councillors can play a vital role in this area by:

- educating residents, voluntary and third-sector groups, and businesses on the benefits of faster, more reliable connectivity
- bringing communities together to advocate for improved digital connectivity by applying for grants or aggregating their demand to persuade telecommunications providers to build the necessary infrastructure on their road
- helping residents consider where

“Councillors can play a vital role by educating residents on the benefits of faster, more reliable digital connectivity”

it is most appropriate to build new digital infrastructure, such as a phone mast, to improve residents' and businesses' connectivity while conserving local landscapes

- working in partnership with council portfolio holders, officers and other local stakeholders to consider the role your council can play in helping to improve communities' digital connectivity.

While most people in the UK are connected to a basic broadband connection, there remain too many communities where streaming a movie at home or even sending pictures to friends and family via email is considered a luxury.

These poorly connected areas aren't just in out-of-the-way hamlets deep in the countryside. Some inner-city areas such as Rotherhithe in London, Deansgate in Manchester and the Baltic Triangle in Liverpool, have average speeds well below par.

Similarly, while many parts of the country take for granted the existence of ever-present, high-quality mobile connectivity, there are significant gaps in coverage. These gaps are usually found in rural communities, where residents suffer from partial mobile coverage, where not all mobile network operators cover an area, or 'not spots', where a mobile phone will not be able to make a call on any network.

As technology continues to evolve, it is vital that all local areas have the digital infrastructure able to meet the demands of consumers and businesses today and in the future.



You can find out more about the LGA's work on digital connectivity at www.local.gov.uk/topics/economic-growth/digital-connectivity or www.local.gov.uk/. 'A councillor's guide to digital connectivity' can be downloaded for free at www.local.gov.uk/publications

elections

Comparing local results and national polling



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



council by-elections when compared with every year from 2016-2019. Labour's true position might be worse than the national pollsters are suggesting.

We have results from more than 500 by-elections since the June 2017 General Election. For

Council by-elections give insights into the detail of local politics – vacancies caused by incumbents tiring of the struggle to find consensus, parties under tension and breaking apart, issues dividing local communities, personalities battling party organisations.

The most recent 24 contests illustrate this, with the main parties gaining and sometimes losing seats.

These elections provide something more when a broader perspective is taken. The results show a change in control in almost half. The two main parties each lost four seats, but the Conservatives gained five and Labour just one. The Liberal Democrats took three Conservative seats but lost one in exchange and two others to Independents.

The explanation for some results lies in changing patterns of competition – major parties deciding to withdraw from the fray, Independents leaving or joining the battle for votes, local issue-based parties finding more traction.

But delve deeper still, and something more interesting emerges. Labour is not just losing seats but also vote share. Barely a week into the national campaign, Greg Cook, Labour's former polling expert, tweeted that the party's vote had fallen in 85 of 88 recent

each ward election there is a before and after – the main May election and a subsequent by-election. Cook's comments relate to the difference in vote share across these elections.

The local electoral cycle means that comparisons should be made across different years. County vacancies are compared with the May elections held a month before the last General Election. Some district vacancies being contested now were fought last May. Regardless of the base year, the results are almost entirely bad in Cook's selection of less than 100.

Taking a broader view, assessing the more than 500 contests since the last General Election, tracks the main parties over time. Compared with a May 2017 baseline, the Conservatives are down six percentage points, Labour is down one point and the Liberal Democrats are up five. Set the baseline at May 2018 instead, and the Conservative and Labour vote has dropped by two and eight points respectively while the Liberal Democrats have risen by nine points.

Comparing those numbers with our national estimates of party vote shares in both 2017 and 2018 supports Cook's analysis of the sizeable electoral challenge now facing Labour.

The evidence from council elections runs parallel, with the latest polling showing the party below 30 per cent. As is generally the case, Liberal Democrat support in by-elections is several points higher while Conservative support in by-elections and the polls is similar.

local by-elections

Cornwall, Wadebridge West

IND GAIN FROM LIB DEM

13.1% over Con

Turnout 45.3%

Daventry, Abbey North

CON GAIN FROM LAB

10.5% over Lib Dem

Turnout 17.3%

Eden, Shap

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON

14.8% over Con

Turnout 34.4%

Gravesham, Westcourt

CON GAIN FROM LAB

18.1% over Lab

Turnout 19.9%

Neath Port Talbot, Rhos

PLAID CYMRU GAIN FROM LAB

29.6% over Con

Turnout 34.2%

North Yorkshire, Upper Dales

CON GAIN FROM IND

7.4% over Ind

Turnout 41.4%

Powys, Llandrindod North

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON

12.9% over Lab

Turnout 32.5%

Powys, St Mary

LAB GAIN FROM CON

10.9% over Con

Turnout 41.8%

Torbay, Goodrington with Roselands

CON GAIN FROM LIB DEM

13.9% over Lib Dem

Turnout 31.7%

Tunbridge Wells, Culverden

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON

21.8% over Con

Turnout 33.5%

Worcestershire, Bromsgrove South

CON GAIN FROM LAB

17.4% over Ind

Turnout 23.6%



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

Annual local government finance conference

7 January 2020, London

Our conference will provide the opportunity to discuss the 2020/21 local government finance settlement as well as look to the longer term by focussing on the latest developments in Business Rates Retention, the Fair Funding Review and a multi-year Spending Review which is on the horizon for 2020.

The programme will include plenary sessions with keynote speakers and will give delegates the chance to raise questions and engage in discussions with senior politicians and leading finance professionals from within the sector.

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



Housing, planning and infrastructure conference

17 March 2020, London

Over one year on from the pivotal removal of the Housing Revenue Account borrowing cap and there is plenty for local government to celebrate. There are many success stories and much best practice to be shared from councils.

Join us to hear from leaders across the housing, planning and infrastructure sectors who will share their insights on how working in partnership can help us collectively overcome challenges and maximise opportunities to ensure the homes in this country meet everyone's needs.

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

