

# Local government first

Local  
Government  
Association

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



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## A fresh look for first

**A** very happy new year to you – it looks set to be another busy one. Following December's General Election, we had another Queen's Speech (p8) and a provisional local government finance settlement (p4), and you can find out more about both of these key announcements in this edition of **first**.

You can also find out which local government colleagues have been recognised in the Queen's New Year's Honours (p6), and meet the contestants taking part in the 2020 Local Government Challenge (p10).

We've taken the opportunity of a new year to refresh the look and feel of **first**, and make some changes to the content. The letters page has moved to p31, alongside our regular local elections section, and the Parliament page now follows the news section. We also have a new '60-second interview' slot – this month featuring Rob Curtis, Chairman of the Association of Electoral Administrators (p29).

As ever, all of this edition's content is available at [www.local.gov.uk/first](http://www.local.gov.uk/first), where you can also sign up for the **first** e-bulletin. If you have any letters or stories for **first**, or any comments about the design changes, please email [karen.thornton@local.gov.uk](mailto:karen.thornton@local.gov.uk)

**Cllr James Jamieson**  
is LGA Chairman



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**Local Government Association**

## 'Positive' finance settlement for England

The provisional local government finance settlement will see councils across England receive a share of £49.1 billion in government funding for 2020/21, including an extra £1 billion for social care.

LGA Chairman Cllr James Jamieson said: "We are pleased the Government listened to our call for the publication of this settlement before Christmas, which gives councils much of the certainty they need about how local services will be funded next year."

"It indicates that core spending on vital local services has the potential to increase by £2.9 billion next year, which is good news for councils and shows that the Government has responded to the financial pressures local authorities face in meeting rising costs and demand for services, such as adult and children's social care and homelessness support."



"The further addition of £780 million to the high needs block of dedicated schools grant to fund the rising costs of meeting special educational needs brings the total of potential additional resources to more than £3.5 billion, as announced in last year's Spending Round."

"This includes £1 billion government funding for social care, which will help ensure councils can continue to help older

***"Core spending on vital local services has the potential to increase by £2.9 billion next year"***

and disabled people live more independently and support our most vulnerable young people."

Councils will be able to increase council tax and levy an adult social care precept next year, giving them the potential to raise £1.6 billion. But this is not a sustainable solution to the social care crisis, Cllr Jamieson warned. "Increasing council tax raises different amounts of money in different parts of the country, unrelated to need, and adds an extra financial burden on households."

"The Government needs to follow through on its pledge to bring forward proposals for long-term reform of adult social care and how it is funded."

## Funding increase for Welsh councils

Councils in Wales will receive a 4.3 per cent increase in their core revenue funding for 2020/21, amounting to nearly £4.5 billion from the Welsh Government.

The Welsh LGA said the provisional local government settlement was "positive" for councils next year as they will receive the first significant increase in their core grant funding for more than 12 years.

Extra capital funding has also been made available for investment in infrastructure.

But the WLGA said the financial outlook remains very challenging, with councils having to continue to make tough decisions to prioritise services, and

on council tax increases, to help meet the funding shortfall.

Cllr Andrew Morgan, WLGA's Leader, said: "I welcome this exceptionally good finance settlement. I am pleased that our positive engagement with the Welsh Government has paid dividends for our services, for our workforce, and for our residents.

"Throughout this year we have met with a number of ministers, who have listened carefully to what we had to say and have recognised the damaging effect that austerity has had on local services and frontline workers.

"Vital local services are essential to keep people well and

out of hospital waiting rooms, and it is crucial that those services receive the funding they need."

Julie James AM, Minister for Housing and Local Government, in a written Cabinet statement on the settlement, said it "provides local government with the most stable platform I can offer for planning budgets for the forthcoming financial year".

She added: "I fully appreciate the pressures local government continues to face following a decade of austerity. This good settlement responds to the pressures local government had been anticipating and offers an opportunity to plan for the future."





## Pledge to seek consensus on social care

The LGA has backed a pledge by the Government to seek cross-party consensus on long-term reform of social care.

In the Queen's Speech, ministers said they would "ensure the social care system provides everyone with the dignity and security they deserve, and that no-one who needs care has to sell their home to pay for it".

Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: "We have long called for a cross-party consensus on how we tackle the adult social care crisis and are pleased the new Government has committed to achieving this."

"While much of the immediate business for the Government will be around Brexit, it should not delay in delivering a long-term funding solution that secures the future of adult social care, alongside reform of children's social care."

The LGA called on the Government to build on previous work to transfer power to local communities and "deliver on its pledge to move away from 'Whitehall knows best'".

Cllr Jamieson added: "Handing widespread powers to local areas and making sure they are adequately funded is essential if all parts of England are to improve vital services, such as housing, transport, and health and social care."

"We look forward to working with government as a vital partner to help deliver its commitment to levelling up powers and investment in local areas across all parts of the country."

Other announcements in the Queen's Speech included: a £7.1 billion increase in schools budgets by 2022/23 and an additional £780 million for council high needs budgets to support children with special educational needs and disabilities for 2020/21; a fundamental review of business rates; and legislation to bring forward the next business rates revaluation from 2022 to 2021 and to move business rates revaluations from a five-yearly to three-yearly cycle.

● See p8, p22

## In brief Councillor MPs

More than half of the new MPs elected in December's General Election are current or former councillors, according to LGA analysis. Of the 155 new MPs, at least 81 come from a local government background – including three members of the LGA's policy boards. Sixteen new MPs have participated in the LGA's various leadership programmes, part of its sector-led improvement offer, see [www.local.gov.uk/SLI-offer](http://www.local.gov.uk/SLI-offer).

## Homeless funding

The Government has announced £263 million to help councils tackle homelessness. The funding can be used, for example, to employ specialists to give practical advice to vulnerable people, to ensure they meet their rent payments. David Renard, LGA Housing Spokesman, said the Government was listening, but called for greater funding and powers, including reforms to Right to Buy so councils can "resume their historic role as house builders of affordable homes". He added: "Restoring local housing allowance rates to cover at least the lowest third of market rents when the current freeze ends in 2020 would also protect families in the private rented sector at risk of becoming homeless."

## Fake alcohol warning

**As partygoers prepared for the busiest night of the year on New Year's Eve, the LGA issued safety advice warning people to avoid cheap and dangerous counterfeit alcohol being sold by rogue retailers.**

Alcohol fraud is reported to cost the UK around £1 billion a year. Illegal alcohol is not only a serious danger to health, but it also harms legitimate retailers and threatens livelihoods, with the counterfeit market funding organised criminal gangs.

Some counterfeit bottles of vodka are said to contain industrial-strength levels of alcohol, which can lead to vomiting, permanent blindness, kidney or liver problems, and – in extreme cases – death.

The LGA urged shoppers to look out for tell-tale signs that bottles are fake.

These include unfamiliar brand names, crooked labels, spelling mistakes on the labels, and very low prices that are 'too good to be true'.

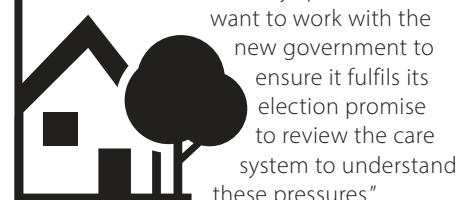
Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: "It's appalling that rogue traders selling illegal alcohol are willing to play roulette with the health and wellbeing of their customers by prioritising quick profits above safety."

"Councils target businesses selling fake alcohol all year round, but generally step up operations in the run-up to the festive period, when rogue sellers often seek to exploit demand."

"We will always seek to prosecute irresponsible traders, and encourage the public to report any suspicious business activities."

## Living away

Four in 10 children in local authority care live away from their home area, according to a report from the Children's Commissioner for England. Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "The welfare of all children is of the utmost importance to councils. Placing children outside of their home area may sometimes be needed to give them a new beginning. Councils will always try to place children in a home near family members if it is safe to do so. However, soaring demand means there aren't always places. Councils



want to work with the new government to ensure it fulfils its election promise to review the care system to understand these pressures."

## In brief

### Website accessibility

Regulations were introduced last year to ensure all public sector websites and apps can be accessed by as many people as possible. This includes those with impaired vision, motor difficulties, cognitive impairments or learning disabilities, deafness or impaired hearing. The Government Digital Service (GDS) has published guidance on the requirements and will monitor public sector bodies' compliance with them. The LGA is working with GDS to explore how we can help councils with compliance. See [www.gov.uk/guidance/accessibility-requirements-for-public-sector-websites-and-apps](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/accessibility-requirements-for-public-sector-websites-and-apps) for the guidance.

## A showcase for innovation

Applications are open for the LGA's Innovation Zone at its annual conference in Harrogate, from 30 June to 2 July. There are spaces for more than 30 contributors to show how their innovations are benefiting individuals and enhancing communities. The sessions aim to encourage discussion and to explore how councils can be more innovative. The deadline for applications is 12 February. To find out more or to apply, email [Lusi.Manukyan@local.gov.uk](mailto:Lusi.Manukyan@local.gov.uk). The LGA also has 1,200 examples of good practice and innovation at [www.local.gov.uk/case-studies](http://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies), where you can submit your own council's innovations for inclusion.

## Open to scrutiny

The Centre for Public Scrutiny is offering a series of one-day courses for councillors and officers involved in scrutiny. These include an introductory course for those new to scrutiny; advice on chairing skills for more experienced and leading scrutineers, aimed at helping them become advocates for transparency and inclusion, and to work effectively with executive members; and a session on questioning skills, designed to help new and experienced councillors get the answers and evidence they need to make a difference to local people's lives. To find out more, visit [www.cfps.org.uk](http://www.cfps.org.uk)



## Smoke alarm 'failure' rate

**Almost 40 per cent of battery-powered smoke alarms failed to activate in residential fires in England in the past year – a level that has remained virtually unchanged in nearly a decade, according to LGA analysis of official figures.**

Latest figures show a fifth (21 per cent) of mains-powered smoke alarms failed to operate in residential fires in 2018/19 – but this 'failure rate' is almost double (38 per cent) for battery-operated alarms, and has stayed between 38 and 40 per cent since 2010/11.

Industry figures show that one in 10 homes does not have a working smoke alarm, while more than a fifth (22 per cent) of households never test their smoke alarm.

Missing or faulty batteries account for a fifth (20 per cent) of battery-operated

smoke alarms failing to activate. The main reason for a smoke alarm failing to activate is because the fire does not reach the detector (45 per cent of cases).

The LGA is urging people without a working smoke alarm to buy one and test it regularly to check it is functioning, changing batteries when necessary.

It is also advising people to install more than one detector in their homes, with at least one fitted on the ceiling of every floor.

Cllr Ian Stephens, Chair of the LGA's Fire Services Management Committee, said: "Smoke alarms are proven life-savers, but these worrying failure rates are a reminder to people to test their smoke alarms regularly and change batteries where necessary."

"Smoke alarm ownership has risen over the years to more than 90 per cent, but this encouraging trend is being dangerously undermined if they don't activate because of faulty batteries."

"Many fire and rescue services can fit smoke detectors for free as part of a home fire-safety visit."

## Honours for councillors and local government officers

Several councillors and local government officers have been honoured by the Queen for service to their communities and local government.

Cllr Russell Goodway, currently Cabinet Member for Investment and Development at Cardiff City Council – and formerly Leader of South Glamorgan County Council – was made an OBE in the New Year's Honours.

Cllr Philip Davis (Lab) has been rewarded for his work as a Heritage Champion with Birmingham City Council, while Cllr Neil Dallen (Residents' Association) is recognised for services to young people at Epsom and Ewell Borough Council. Both become MBEs.

Vivienne Rees, recently a member of South Lakeland District Council, received a British Empire Medal for services to the community in Cumbria.

Also recognised were former and current

council chief executives Thomas Riordan CBE (Leeds City Council) and Lesley Seary CBE (formerly Islington Council), for services to local government; Kersten England CBE (City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council) for services to the economy and community; and Wallace Sampson OBE (Harrogate Borough Council), for services to business and the community.

Melanie Dawes, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, becomes a Dame.

Nine foster carers have become MBEs, including Maureen and George Hughes, who have looked after children in Leeds for 16 years, and Carl and Diane Mitchell, from Blackpool, who have cared for more than 90 children across 20 years.

**i** For the full 2020 New Year's Honours list, please visit [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

# Legal victory saves £1.5bn

The LGA and member councils have saved an estimated £1.5 billion after winning a legal case against NHS trusts that were trying to claim charitable business rates relief.

The foundation trusts attempted to claim a discount on their business rates and rebates, on the basis that they should have been classified as charities. The LGA has been supporting 47 councils since 2015 in defending this action, as the decision affects all councils.

The High Court ruled against the foundation trusts and ordered them to pay the councils' full costs. The judge refused leave to appeal, but there is still the opportunity for the foundation trusts to apply directly to the Court of Appeal for permission to appeal.

The LGA said: "The High Court's ruling is good news for councils and the local services our communities rely on across the country."

"Councils, supported by the LGA, are pleased this common-sense decision will not see them



having to pay NHS trusts and foundation trusts an estimated £1.5 billion in backdated business rates relief nor see them eligible for 80 per cent relief going forward.

"Business rates, alongside council tax, are an extremely important source of income for local government so this would have huge implications for residents and the vital local services they rely on."

In a separate case, the Court of Appeal has concluded that councils can recover the costs of monitoring and enforcing driver conduct as part of the fees they charge for taxi driver licences.

This ruling is particularly significant as lack of clarity in the legislation has meant that many councils have not been recovering these enforcement costs and instead have subsidised them through other funds.

The LGA intervened in the case given the wider impact on councils and is pleased that a clear legal basis has now been established.

## LGA campaign wins award

**The LGA's #CouncilsCan campaign has won a national communications award for best collaboration.**

Through the campaign, the LGA continues to work in partnerships with its member councils to make the case that investing in local government and giving them the right funding and powers is good for the nation's prosperity, economic growth and overall wellbeing.

#CouncilsCan won for best collaboration in the Comms2Point0 national communications awards, which recognise creativity, innovation and solid results in the communications and digital industries.

It was commended as "an excellent example of mass collaboration to influence funding for public services", following last September's Spending Round in which the Government announced more than £3.5 billion for council services. This was the biggest year-on-year real terms increase in spending power for local government for a decade.

The Spending Round announcement followed months of intense and strategic campaigning, highlighting how LGA member councils – from all parts of the country and all political groups – have continued to deliver, innovate and improve, despite a significant reduction in government funding.

Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: "Through the #CouncilsCan campaign, the sector came together to tell the story that local government matters. Our members' achievements were put in a wider national context, successfully making the case for continued investment in local services.

"Thank you to all the councils who helped make this happen by sharing your local stories. By joining up and speaking as one, our voice was heard loud and clear at a critical point in time.

"The result was a record win that will make a genuine difference to all councils and, more importantly, millions of people."

## In brief Homeless families

The number of households living in temporary accommodation in England rose 60 per cent between 2012 and 2018, according to figures from the Office for National Statistics. Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Housing Spokesman, said: "Councils want to work with the new government to prevent homelessness from happening in the first place and support those affected. Government can help to address this by adapting welfare reforms to protect families at risk of becoming homeless, by restoring local housing allowance rates to cover at least the lowest third of market rents when the current freeze ends in 2020. It should also give councils the powers and funding to build desperately needed affordable new homes."

## Active kids

Children's activity levels are on the rise. Sport England's second annual Active Lives Children and Young People Survey reports that in 2018/19, the number of children in England doing 60 minutes or more physical activity a day was up 3.6 per cent. The increase was driven by more out-of-school activity – including increases in active play, team sports and walking. An LGA spokesperson said: "Council-led initiatives, such as exercise referral schemes and offering free or reduced-cost to play sport, create more active opportunities for young people. However, more needs to be done to reduce the gap between the most and least deprived."



## FGM cases

There have been 22,500 new cases of female genital mutilation (FGM) identified in just over four years, according to the latest official figures. Cllr Anita Lower, the LGA's FGM Lead Spokesperson and Chair of the Advisory Board at the National FGM Centre, which the LGA runs in partnership with Barnardo's, said the figures highlight the "size of the challenge facing all agencies seeking an end to this form of abuse, which is destroying the lives of children and young people in communities across the country".

# PARLIAMENT

## The Queen's Speech

The Government announced more than 30 bills as Parliament returned following December's General Election

**Measures to deliver Brexit, protect tenants, improve building safety, increase funding for schools, reform business rates and find a long-term solution to social care were among the many proposals announced in the pre-Christmas Queen's Speech.**

By building new homes, creating jobs and school places, providing dignified care, and boosting economic growth, councils are a vital part of our democracy and the delivery of frontline services to communities.

It is positive therefore that the Government has listened to the LGA's calls, as part of its #CouncilsCan campaign, for a new devolution settlement to empower councils to transform their local areas, and to see this Queen's Speech make commitments on a variety of issues which are important to residents.

Delivering Brexit will occupy a lot of parliamentary time in January. The UK's departure from the EU is an opportunity for government, the LGA

Government's thinking as it brings forward proposals that will shape the future of our constitution.

Building new homes and preventing the tragedy of homelessness will be another priority for the new Parliament. The Queen's Speech included plans to abolish 'no fault' evictions, build at least a million more homes and end rough sleeping in five years. It is key that we build houses of all tenures to provide people with safe and secure homes, and councils will continue to play an important role in the nation's new home building programme.

The Queen's Speech also made important announcements in relation to NHS funding and social care. NHS funding will increase and we believe this will only be maximised if there is an equivalent investment in social care, public health and prevention services that improve people's health, wellbeing and independence. It is also vital that there is cross-party agreement on the long-term future of social care.

Meanwhile, it was positive to see the Queen's Speech commit to ensuring that all children have a high-quality education. The Government announced it will increase schools' 'high needs' budgets, giving councils more certainty when it comes to supporting children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). In the longer term, all schools should become more inclusive so that they can provide appropriate support to more SEND children.

Other proposals of interest to councils include a tough new building safety system enshrined in law, in response to the Grenfell Tower fire; a review of business rates; White Papers on planning and social housing; a national infrastructure strategy; the reintroduction of the Environment Bill; a Domestic Abuse Bill; and a Constitution, Democracy and Rights Commission.

**"Brexit must lead to further powers for local communities"**

and councils to work together to ensure that, through local government, communities have a greater say over their futures, new opportunities are identified to grow local economies, and the risks to local areas are managed carefully.

Brexit cannot mean leaving Brussels only to consolidate power in Whitehall, Holyrood, Cardiff Bay and Stormont. Instead, it must lead to further powers for local communities through local government. Devolution to local communities through councils should be at the heart of the



### Education

- An extra £7.1 billion for schools up to 2022/23.
- An extra £780 million for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) next year.
- Local authorities legally required to deliver minimum per pupil funding locally.

**LGA view:** "Local flexibility allowed under the existing 'soft' National Funding Formula plays an essential role in allowing councils to work with schools locally to make sure that available funding addresses local needs and priorities. This flexibility should remain."

### Social care

- An additional £1 billion for adults' and children's social care in every year of this Parliament.
- 2 per cent council tax precept to raise £500 million for adult social care in 2020-21.
- Cross-party talks on long-term social care reforms.

**LGA view:** "Securing the sustainable, long-term future of adult social care and support is one of the major issues facing society. Proposals will need to be practical and workable so that adults of all ages are supported to live the lives they want to lead."



## Business rates

- Fundamental review of business rates.
- Next business rates revaluation brought forward from 2022 to 2021.
- Revaluations to happen every three, rather than five, years.

**LGA view:** "We are pleased that the next business rates revaluation will be brought forward and that future revaluations will be more frequent, but this must be introduced alongside measures to significantly reduce the backlog of appeals. We are concerned that reliefs lower the business rates tax base. Introduction of new reliefs is one of the issues to consider as part of the move to further business rates retention."

## Building safety

- Enhanced safety framework for high-rise residential buildings.
  - A stronger voice for residents.
- LGA view:** "Residents deserve to be safe in their homes, and reform of our failed building safety system is urgent. However, in designing the new regulatory framework, we must avoid creating a two-tier building safety system."

## English devolution

- Communities to have more control over how investment is spent locally.

**LGA view:** "The UK's departure from the EU must lead to further powers for local communities through local government. It is essential that a bold English devolution settlement is delivered in this Parliament."

## Housing and planning

- Abolish use of 'no fault' evictions.
- Build at least a million more homes over this Parliament.
- Renew the Affordable Homes Programme.
- End rough sleeping in five years.

**LGA view:** "No fault evictions have been the major cause of homelessness and abolishing their use will be an important step. Councils want to encourage home ownership, but not at the expense of social housing and other affordable housing that meet local needs."

## The environment

- A new Office for Environmental Protection.
- More local powers to tackle air pollution.
- New charges for specified single-use plastic items.
- Ban on exports of polluting plastic waste to non-OECD countries.

**LGA view:** "We welcome the reintroduction of the Environment Bill. Many of our powers are decades old and need to be reformed to fit with modern sources of emissions. Additional resources will support councils to deal effectively with environmental protection."

## Domestic abuse

- Statutory definition of domestic abuse, including coercive, emotional and economic abuse.
- Establish post of Domestic Abuse Commissioner.

**LGA view:** "There needs to be a greater focus on prevention and early intervention measures to tackle the root causes of domestic abuse and support more victims."



This is an edited version of the **LGA's 'Queen's Speech – on the day briefing'**, which can be read in full at [www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses](http://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses)

# Local Government Challenge 2020

**A new batch of contestants is preparing to do battle for a £10,000 scholarship and the chance to implement their own local project**

The LGA's Local Government Challenge seeks out the best and brightest council officers to compete in a series of real-life challenges around the country.

Ambitious problem-solvers who are passionate about delivering the best for the residents they serve, the latest LG Challenge contestants

(pictured, right) will come up with innovative solutions to challenges faced by local government.

Previous challenges, hosted by councils from across the country, have included developing strategies to bring visitors back to Salisbury after the 2018 Novichok poisonings; tackling the lack of affordable housing on the Isle of Wight; and creating a district identity for residents in Kirklees.

Starting in February, our 10 new contestants will tackle five tough, real-life challenges, working across areas including frontline services, financial, creative, and community engagement. They will develop and hone their leadership and political management skills, business acumen and presentation techniques while

gaining invaluable media experience – all with the aim of delivering better services for the local community, as well as giving their CVs a substantial edge.

The competition will culminate in a final challenge at the LGA's annual conference in Harrogate (30 June to 2 July 2020), and the award of the prestigious £10,000 Bruce-Lockhart scholarship to the winner.

The scholarship, funded by Kent and Essex County Councils and set up in memory of former LGA Chairman and Kent County Council Leader Lord Sandy Bruce-Lockhart, provides the LG Challenge winner with a unique opportunity to translate their own ideas into reality and make a real difference to their local area.



## LGA Annual Licensing Conference

5 February 2020, London

The Local Government Association's annual licensing conference provides an unrivalled opportunity to discuss all the key strategic and practical developments that can be expected to affect councils' licensing committees and teams over the year ahead.

The conference will examine the government's plans and expectations for licensing as well as explore the challenges facing licensing authorities, highlight innovative work being undertaken by councils and their partners and discuss how we can build on best practice.

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



# 2020 contestants



*"I have coordinated and observed problem solving on some of the most challenging strategic issues that the local authority faces. What I hope to get out of being an LG Challenge contestant is a chance to lead on problem-solving myself, push forward my own ideas and navigate the political complexity that comes with that."*

**Hannah Futter, Business Manager, Surrey County Council**



*"I enjoy learning and experiencing new activities and working with different people from different divisions. I know that the LG Challenge will be enjoyable – and possibly stressful at times – and I want to push myself into new situations to hone my skills."*

**Stephen Bahoushy, Senior Commissioning Manager, Croydon Council**



*"This will be a great opportunity to develop me as an officer and to learn from amazing people. It is a wonderful opportunity to work on challenges around the country, see what other councils do and make a real difference through the challenges."*

**Emma Shepherd, Disability Strategy Lead for Employment, Croydon Council**



*"I applied for the LG Challenge to expand my horizons and to gain a greater exposure to the challenges faced by local authorities on a national scale. I was also drawn to the incredibly exciting opportunity to work in a team environment with like-minded people from across the country that all have different backgrounds and experiences."*

**Rose Hampton, Communications Officer, Staffordshire County Council**



*"The LG Challenge presents a unique opportunity to work with colleagues from across the country in a structured programme that will test and develop my competencies further. I am confident that taking part will enable me to effect positive change, inspire others and deliver improved outcomes in local government."*

**Lewis Sheldrake, Senior Commissioning Manager, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham**



*"I applied to take part in the LG Challenge because I believe it will present situations that both challenge my intelligence and problem-solving skills. I am looking forward to meeting people from various backgrounds and walks of life. The opportunity to experience different councils and authorities around the country is interesting and exciting."*

**Felicity Robson, Functional Firefighter, Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service**



*"I am keen to learn about how others approach problems and issues, particularly ones that are potentially out of the scope of the work of a borough council. As someone who is passionate about developing my skills, I hope I can bring back a new skillset that will be of benefit to the businesses and residents of Basingstoke."*

**Jack Kennedy, Economic Development Manager, Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council**



*"The LG Challenge will enable me to grasp a personal ambition to promote Cumbria, to establish valuable contacts, develop innovative proposals and solutions to strategic problems, and test my personal drive for results for people and places."*

**Hani Cox, Policy and Scrutiny Officer, Cumbria County Council**



*"I'm excited to visit new places and work with new people. I know it won't be easy, but I'm ready to step out of my comfort zone to build resilience in myself, my teammates and the sector. I expect to finish the challenges teeming with ideas and insights about how we can come together to deliver fantastic value for our residents."*

**Zoe Galvin, Carers' App Project Officer, Kent County Council**



*"The opportunity to collaborate with fellow contestants from across the country and gain understanding from their perspectives and lived experiences, is one I wanted to seize. I am proud to be representing Calderdale in the LG Challenge. Let's see what 2020 has in store – I'm sure it'll be an exciting journey!"*

**Joe Kinsella, Transformation Officer, Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council**



For more information about the Local Government Challenge 2020, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/lg-challenge](http://www.local.gov.uk/lg-challenge)

# A safer ticket to ride



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

The new government needs to legislate on taxi licensing to help ensure safer journeys for customers and fairness for drivers

**T**his year is set to be another significant one across a number of different areas of licensing as the new government moves forward with its commitments.

One key area that councils will be watching with interest is steps ministers will take to update outdated taxi licensing laws.

Early last year, government accepted the need for new legislation to reform key aspects of the licensing framework, following recommendations from a cross-sector working group of which the LGA was a part.

Ministers committed to introducing national minimum standards for taxi and private hire vehicle (PHV) licensing, new national enforcement powers for councils, and a national licensing database – all things that the LGA has been lobbying for over a number of years. There was also a commitment to look at how to resolve cross-border issues in more detail with a view to legislation.

**“Councils have been doing what they can to raise standards”**

Councils welcomed this move and the LGA has urged government to bring forward new legislation as soon as possible, especially given recent figures that showed the number of licensed vehicles and drivers has reached a record high (see **first** 642).

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.

Bringing forward changes to the law is a real opportunity to make significant progress in creating a system that not only provides safer journeys for the public but also fairer business for drivers.

In the absence of new legislation, councils have been doing what they can to raise standards and improve safeguarding. The LGA's annual licensing conference, on 5 February, will be an opportunity to hear about some of these initiatives and the work going on at the local and regional level.

Approaches from Greater Manchester and St. Helens Council will be shared at the conference and are outlined right (see box, right).

The LGA has also been working to support councils around information sharing, and last year launched the National Register of Revocations and Refusals (NR3).

The register allows licensing authorities to record details of where a hackney carriage or PHV drivers' licence has been refused or revoked, and check new applicants against it.

This should help prevent people found not fit and proper to hold a

licence in one area from securing another somewhere else through deception and non-disclosure.

Ultimately, the LGA wants to see outdated legislation overhauled as soon as possible.

## Local alignment

The 10 local authorities in Greater Manchester have taken steps to align licensing standards at a regional level.

The common minimum standards will cover driver standards, vehicles standards, operator standards and local authority standards, as well as supporting the region's requirements to tackle air pollution across the region.

Councils are due to consult on the new standards later this year.

St. Helens Council has developed a two-pronged approach to improving passenger safety and maintaining the high standards it has set locally.

This includes the development of a compulsory safeguarding course for drivers and a new public awareness campaign, #KnowYourRide, highlighting the benefits of taking a St. Helens' taxi.

**i** **The LGA's annual licensing conference takes place in London on 5 February.** For more information and to book your place, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/events](http://www.local.gov.uk/events)



Councillor **Elise Wilson** (Lab) is Leader of Stockport Council and Greater Manchester Combined Authority's Portfolio Lead for Digital

# A digital journey

Stockport is designing its services for a digital age through the eyes of its residents



**A**nyone who knows me knows that I'm not a tech expert. But that doesn't matter, because our digital transformation programme is as much about culture change as technology. It's how we are shaping our organisation for the future and ultimately ensuring we are fit and able to respond to whatever is around the corner.

Council services have often evolved over time, responding to new legislation, technology, studies, insights or learning, resulting in service experiences that aren't always cohesive or reflective of individuals' needs.

In Stockport, we are now putting people at the heart of what we do, so services are experienced and designed through the customer's eyes.

We talk about customers, but people often have no choice but to interact with the council. We also know they are often used to very slick service experiences elsewhere in their lives, so it's our responsibility to ensure council services meet 21st century expectations.

Digital weaves through this but, in Stockport, our focus is on designing with people for a digital age, meaning that we look at all aspects of people's experience of dealing with the council, to see how we can improve our services.

A great example has been our work

*"Our digital transformation programme is as much about culture change as technology"*

on fostering where we have improved our fostering web pages, online enquiry form and case management system, based on insights from research and testing. This included interviews with foster carers and staff, competitor analysis, and the use of 'empathy maps' and 'personas' to understand how we could better meet our internal and external users' needs ([see bit.ly/34kuyM6](https://bit.ly/34kuyM6)).

What started as a digital transformation programme has evolved into organisational-wide change. We are redesigning our services and changing the way we work with our residents, businesses and communities. This is everyone's responsibility, from elected councillors to strategic managers and frontline staff.

In Stockport, our Digital Inclusion Alliance has already helped more than 5,000 adults to build their basic digital skills and develop the online confidence they need for everyday life (pictured, above).

We are helping to build the workforce that Stockport needs now, when 90 per cent of jobs require basic digital skills, as well as giving our residents the ability to adapt to future opportunities and specialist digital

roles in the technology industry across Stockport and the broader Greater Manchester region.

We've invested in building the technology skills of our own workforce to give us the capability to address future changes and support further transformational change. We've learned 'agile techniques' and 'lean thinking' to create IT processes that are fast moving, and we have placed user need at the heart of everything we do.

We signed up to the Local Digital Declaration and collaborate with other public bodies, such as Essex County Council and Leeds City Council, pooling our collective ability and resource, to overcome common challenges to better effect for all.

I'm really passionate about the journey of change we are taking with the people of Stockport. Councillors are on the frontline with residents and have a huge role to play to champion both the council's online services and advocate learning digital skills.



**Cllr Wilson will be talking about digital transformation at one of a series of free LGA local government data and digital transformation masterclasses** in January and February in Bristol, Manchester, Newcastle and London. To find out more and book your place, please visit <https://bit.ly/34phN91>. For further information about Stockport's digital journey, or to get in touch if you would like to collaborate, please visit [www.digitalstockport.info](http://www.digitalstockport.info)



## TRANSFORMATION AND INNOVATION EXCHANGE

Practical transformation and innovation support, together in one place

Our new self-assessment tool helps councils consider their approach to transformation and innovation. Following council feedback the tool has been simplified and now allows authorities to complete the modules which are of most use to them, from leadership of place; financial planning; the use of digital and technology; the use of data and intelligence; and procurement and commissioning.

**Councils want to be able to continuously challenge themselves so they can do their best for the people that they serve.**

Please encourage your senior management team to try the tool. For more information or support email [transparency@local.gov.uk](mailto:transparency@local.gov.uk)

**Part of our sector-led improvement offer of support**  
[www.local.gov.uk/transformation-and-innovation-exchange](http://www.local.gov.uk/transformation-and-innovation-exchange) | #TIEx

# Going greener



Councillor **Edwina Hannaford** (Lib Dem) is Cornwall Council's Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Neighbourhoods

I am proud that Cornwall Council has one of the country's most detailed action plans to reduce the impact of climate change and help Cornwall become carbon neutral by 2030. Carbon Neutral Cornwall lays out operational projects to cut emissions in areas that we can control; facilitation schemes where we can influence and enable communities, businesses, schools, public sector partners, the voluntary sector and others in Cornwall to take positive actions; and a raft of regional and national objectives, including our calls on Westminster to give us more powers and funding to help us meet our aims.

One area under our direct control, and where we can make the biggest impact, is through our decision making. Cornwall Council is the first local authority in the country to use an innovative decision-making tool based on the 'doughnut economics' theory pioneered by the economist Kate Raworth.

This tool enables us to weigh up environmental factors such as greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution and renewable energy with social needs such as health, education and connectivity. We are now using this systems leadership framework in planning all major projects across the council, and other authorities are asking us to share our expertise with them in producing their climate change plans.

As a facilitator, we are funding some major projects to reduce the impact of the climate emergency. We have planted the first trees of our 8,000-hectare Forest for Cornwall across multiple locations (pictured), aiming to capture 38,000 tons of carbon dioxide a year, or one per cent of Cornwall's current greenhouse gas emissions.

Early in 2020, we will pilot a government-supported £4.2 million whole house retrofit project to improve energy efficiency in Cornwall Council homes – which will not only save

**From changing planning processes to planting more trees, councils can make a real difference when it comes to tackling climate change**



***"One area where we can make the biggest impact is through our decision making"***

carbon but also lower heating bills and help reduce fuel poverty for residents on low incomes.

Through our policies, we are tackling the climate emergency by designing a new climate change planning document to strengthen our existing policies in our Local Plan. The initiative will set out new guidance to promote renewable energy, environmental growth and energy-efficient homes, increasing employment opportunities and generating more of our own energy.

This plan informs our policy to stop providing gas as a source of energy in all our new homes, delivering on a government pledge five years ahead of the national target.

Regionally, we are influencing the climate change agenda through

our local industrial strategy, which has a clean growth focus. We have supported two Cornwall schools environmental conferences where our young people have come together to discuss action needed by everyone to reduce global warming.

At a national level, we have partnered with West Midlands Combined Authority to pilot energy innovation zones and secured £23.5 million of government funding for a pilot scheme to reduce bus fares.

I was able to share our ambition to become carbon neutral with other local authorities across the country at a recent LGA Leadership Essentials session. I came away fired up and armed with even more useful information, facts and ideas to tackle climate change for Cornwall.



The LGA's climate emergency conference is on 22 January in London – see [www.local.gov.uk/events](http://www.local.gov.uk/events). Our next Climate Emergency Leadership Essentials Course starts on 29 February, in Maidenhead – see [www.local.gov.uk/highlighting-political-leadership-leadership-essentials](http://www.local.gov.uk/highlighting-political-leadership-leadership-essentials). Visit our climate change hub at [www.local.gov.uk/our-support/climate-change](http://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/climate-change)



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

# Returning to social work

With three-quarters of councils struggling to recruit social workers, the LGA and the Government Equalities Office have developed a national programme to help them fill their vacancies

## The programme

The Return to Social Work programme is an initiative developed by the LGA, in collaboration with the Government Equalities Office, to support councils with social worker recruitment.

Liz Truss MP, Minister for Women and Equalities, said: "No-one should be held back in their career because they have taken time out of their job to care for a loved one."

"Councils need the talent, experience and care these people can bring to this vitally important work. We are investing in returners to work – giving them the opportunity to refresh and grow their skills."

"By acting on this issue, we can fill empty jobs across the country and achieve true equality in our workplaces."

Councils have until 30 April to sign up for the programme, by visiting [www.local.gov.uk/return-to-social-work](http://www.local.gov.uk/return-to-social-work) or emailing [returntosocialwork@local.gov.uk](mailto:returntosocialwork@local.gov.uk). They are also asked to provide placements for candidates, between May and July, and to confirm the dates and social work areas they can offer by 30 April.

In July, councils will be asked to submit the number of vacancies they have. Returners will make their applications and councils will be able to review, shortlist, interview and offer jobs to suitable candidates. For more information, visit [www.local.gov.uk/return-to-social-work](http://www.local.gov.uk/return-to-social-work).

**S**ocial workers and their support staff do one of the most important and rewarding jobs in local government.

Yet, 74 per cent of councils report they have difficulty recruiting social workers, and as many as 60 per cent say they have issues with retention.

The reality of the recruitment challenge is shown through data collected by central government and Skills for Care, the strategic body for workforce development in adult social care in England. They report that in 2018 there were almost 6,000 children's social worker vacancies and approximately 18,000 adult social worker vacancies at any one time over the previous year.

With almost 80,000 children in care and 1.9 million requests for adult social care received every year, hiring and retaining social workers is more important than ever. As a councillor, ensuring people of all ages and backgrounds have access to care is one of my top priorities. By getting more social workers back into our communities, councils can keep offering vital support to vulnerable adults and children when they need it.

The Return to Social Work programme offers councils a free and simple way to hire experienced social workers without the cost or time required to run a recruitment campaign themselves.

The scheme, which was first piloted in three regions in 2017, has already successfully trained and recruited dozens of staff for councils and this year will replicate it on a national scale. The new programme will also extend the offer to individuals who have been out of professional practice for between two and 10 years.



**"Councils are desperate to get good quality, trained professionals on their books"**

We are delighted to open up the scheme again after it proved so successful last year. Councils are desperate to get good-quality, trained professionals on their books, which this programme can support them with. Encouraging your council to sign up to this programme will not only give councils access to a national



pool of skilled, diverse and committed social workers, but will have the added benefit of avoiding costs associated with recruitment drives and hiring agency staff, which cost councils £335 million in 2017/18. Figures from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development show that the average cost of replacing a qualified employee is £30,000. Recruiting and retraining 200 experienced social workers through the Return to Social Work programme could save councils approximately £6 million.

While the LGA will select the 200 candidates for the programme, councils will choose locally who they work with. As part of the course, those looking to return will complete a

short placement with a local authority before they can be re-registered with the regulator. Councils who sign up to the programme will be able to offer a placement as part of the recruitment process before interviewing or hiring a candidate.

The Return to Social Work programme is the first in a series of four 'return to work' schemes that the LGA will be launching in 2020. Based on feedback from councils, these will focus on planning, ICT and legal.

The LGA looks forward to working with the Government Equalities Office on all of our programmes to ensure that communities around the country are equipped with the support they need.

## Social work returners



**Isabella** completed the pilot of the *Return to Social Work* programme in 2016, after a four-year career break.

*"Everybody has their own story as to why they left social work practice and now wish to return. The programme ultimately provided me with that possibility after a four-year career break."*

*"It catered for a high number of my learning needs and enabled me to think about the gaps that needed to be addressed before returning into practice. Initially, I was still unsure about the direction I would be taking in terms of my career path and timing. After completing the programme, I was armed with refreshed knowledge, renewed momentum and motivation, and, for the first time, an informed plan regarding my journey back."*



**Anjali** completed the programme in 2018, after a five-year career break

*"I always enjoyed my work and never thought I would be out of practice, especially for more than five years. The gap in my career was because of a couple of losses in my family and then planning my own."*

*"When the programme was announced by the Government, I became hopeful and went through its selection process. Fortunately, I was a successful candidate. The programme is designed to help social workers like me who need support to develop their confidence and build on their knowledge and skills of social work. In my case, this was made possible by the variety of teaching modes like knowledge-based sessions, reflective supervision, active learning sets and supervised practice".*



**Sia** completed the programme in 2018

*"I left social work because of family commitments. The interesting thing is that, even though I physically left social work, I did not leave mentally and I always knew I was going to return to practice one day."*

*"This programme has given me the opportunity to embark on that journey. I would like to enhance my career and professional development by progressing my specialism beyond children, families and child protection."*

*"I can do this now that I have completed the *Return to Social Work* programme, as I have become equipped with a wide range of resources that are relevant to both adults' and children's social care".*



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



# PrEP: the HIV game changer

Local government has played a key role in helping reduce the number of new diagnoses of HIV – and the roll-out of PrEP could help us reduce infection further

**E**ach year, 1.7 million people across the world are newly infected with HIV – and more than 4,484 in the UK alone.

According to Public Health England, an estimated 103,800 people were living with HIV in the UK in 2018, with 7,500 of those unaware of their infection. It costs almost £380,000 to treat one person with HIV across their lifetime.

In January 2019, the Government committed to ending transmission of HIV in England by 2030, and ultimately ending an epidemic that has affected so many in this country, and millions more across the world, since HIV first emerged in the early 1980s.

Over recent years, we have seen a welcome decline in the number of people diagnosed with HIV, although the decline is slowing or starting to plateau. It has been driven by falls in the number of new diagnoses among gay and bisexual men.

This fall was achieved thanks

**i** For more information about the LGA's health work, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/topics/social-care-health-and-integration](http://www.local.gov.uk/topics/social-care-health-and-integration). To find out about the PrEP trial, see [www.prepimpacttrial.org.uk/](http://www.prepimpacttrial.org.uk/)

*"We have seen a welcome decline in the number of people diagnosed with HIV"*

to the hard work and commitment of many across the system, from local government sexual health commissioners to the activists working in and for the communities they represent, supporting a combination of HIV prevention strategies.

These include condom use, information and advice, including through schools, alongside increasing HIV testing that has led to earlier diagnosis. Once people know they have HIV, they can be linked into care and offered treatment. Successful HIV treatment – 'treatment as prevention' – means people living with HIV cannot pass on the infection to others.

While no single approach on its own is a 'silver bullet', a key part of HIV prevention is pre-exposure prophylaxis or PrEP, a daily medication to help prevent HIV that is recommended for people at high

risk. PrEP has the potential to help us reduce infection still further, getting us closer to zero transmission.

A PrEP impact trial – the largest single study of its type in the world – began in October 2017, and will help inform the potential roll-out of PrEP nationwide later this year. So you need to get ready for PrEP to be made routinely available via your local authority-commissioned health service.

PrEP is also important for broader sexual health. It gives an opportunity for individuals at higher risk of HIV and sexually transmitted infection – some of whom will not have been accessing prevention services previously – to regularly engage with sexual health and health promotion services.

PrEP has undoubtedly attracted some moral panic. Yet the principle is not dissimilar to that of malaria-prevention drugs, and comparable with the function of vaccinations and immunisations.

Local authorities have invested hundreds of millions of pounds in offering sexual health services since taking over responsibility for public health six years ago, and we firmly believe that PrEP could significantly reduce levels of HIV in this country.

While we are pleased that the successful trial of PrEP is to be rolled out, there remain real concerns about the extra costs to already overstretched sexual health services provided by councils.

Through the LGA, we are calling on government to ensure that adequate funding is in place, accompanied by a firm guarantee that any unforeseen costs do not fall on already under-pressure councils.

PrEP is a game-changer in preventing new HIV transmissions and a vital weapon in our prevention armoury, which could bring about an end to new infections within a generation. Is your council ready?



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[scapegroup.co.uk](http://scapegroup.co.uk)

[general@scapegroup.co.uk](mailto:general@scapegroup.co.uk)



## LGA/ADPH Annual Public Health Conference and Exhibition 2020

Brighton, 24 March 2020

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

Join us at our most popular health conference of the year to hear the very latest thinking on key policy and improvement agendas. Put your questions and comments to those involved in shaping them at the highest level and network with your peers to discuss the issues that matter to you locally.

Confirmed speakers include: **Jo Bibby**, Director of Health, Health Foundation; **Michael Wood**, Head of Health Economics Partnerships, NHS Confederation; **Professor Chloe Orkin**, Consultant Physician, Barts Health NHS Trust; **Professor Chris Whitty**, Chief Medical Officer for England; **Dr Gary Fuller**, Senior Lecturer in Air Quality Measurement, Kings College London; **Anna Quigley**, Research Director, Ipsos Mori

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



# LG Inform Plus

## The essential guide to your area

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

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

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

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# COMMENT



Councillor **John Fuller OBE** is Chairman of the District Councils' Network

## Right-sized public services

**All eyes will be on Warwick next month for the District Councils' Network's annual conference, the first major fixture in the local government calendar of the new decade.**

Just weeks after the General Election, this will be the first opportunity for new secretaries of state to directly address council leaders since being elected, now Brexit is 'getting done'.

As the Government considers more ambitious reforms to public services than might have been anticipated just four weeks ago, the stage will be set for district councils to demonstrate our central role in driving the nation forward one local economy at a time – getting it 'match-fit' to compete on the global stage.

Our conference will focus on exploring how all public services can be 'right-sized' around the citizen, using district councils as the essential building blocks to deliver stronger economies and better lives.

It will demonstrate a flexibility to work together across the economic areas around which people live their lives and companies do their business, being ready, agile and focused on the prize.

Conference will recognise that close co-operation across local economies, blind to historic administrative boundaries, is essential if we are to make a compelling case for investing the UK Shared Prosperity Fund – the replacement for EU regeneration funding – in the local infrastructure and passenger transport improvements that drive quality of life and job opportunities for every resident and business in our economy.

If devolution is back on the agenda then we should be in the driving seat, making the case for powers that can be transferred to the individual instead of stopping at the county line. The Government must seize this second chance and get it right, and we must ensure it does.



While never forgetting our representational role, we'll debate recasting services to geographical areas that make sense to the resident and at a scale that will deliver outcomes for their families and businesses, and achieve value for money.

We look forward to a stable financial future for local government, one that allows councils to take advantage of the incentives to grow local areas and that has the freedom to innovate; a future where

everyone can grow a stake in their local society supported by a local council that's on their side.

With all this in mind, districts will be getting the new decade for local government under way next month at our conference in Warwick. What our visiting ministers need to take away is that it is districts – backed by sustainable long-term funding – that are best placed to drive the way forward in the decades ahead.

### Speakers at the District Councils' Network conference

The District Councils' Network's annual conference takes place at Chesford Grange, Kenilworth, Warwick, from 6-7 February. Guest speakers – to be confirmed – include senior ministers, shadow ministers, chief executives, senior councillors and senior speakers from the LGA.

Confirmed speakers so far include Sir John Curtice, Professor of Politics at the University of Strathclyde, a leading expert in political and social attitudes and electoral behaviour who commented extensively on the General Election; Mark Farmer, the Government's Champion for Modern Methods of Construction (house building) and Chief Executive of Cast Consultancy; and Peter Gladwell, Head of Public Sector Partnerships, Legal and General.

The conference will cover a broad range of major issues across two days, such as devolution, housing, the environment, health and commercialisation. For more information, please visit <https://districtcouncils.info/events/dcn-annual-conference-2020/>

## Time to focus on domestic issues



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

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many thousands of Conservative councillors throughout the country whose tireless campaigning during the General Election, often in horrendous weather, played such a key role in securing the election of a majority Conservative Government and our best result since 1987.

This campaign confirmed what we have always known: that Conservative councillors are the backbone of the voluntary party, that they play a key role in grassroots campaigning and that they are the voice of Conservativism in their local communities.

Around 100 Conservative councillors contested this election and I am delighted that a significant number were elected as MPs, including our own LGA Deputy Chairman, Cllr David Simmonds.

I have written to all our newly elected MPs who are councillors to congratulate them on their successes, and the LGA Conservative Group will be doing all that we can to support them as they embark on their Parliamentary careers.

With a majority of 80, the Brexit gridlock of the past three and a half years will now be broken and we can begin to focus on the many other issues that need to be addressed, including getting more homes built, putting social care on a sustainable long-term financial footing and giving children and young people the best possible start in life.

As such, I was delighted that the Queen's Speech, which was published just before Christmas, brought forward

proposals on a range of key issues for local government, including business rates, health and social care, building safety, infrastructure, preventing serious violence and domestic abuse and protecting the environment.

The provisional local government finance settlement was also published before Parliament went into recess, and as first was going to press.

After such an eventful political year, I am sure that, like me, you were looking forward to a break over the festive period and I would like to take this opportunity to wish you a belated happy new year.

**"The Brexit gridlock will be broken, and we can focus on the many other issues that need addressing"**



Councillor **James Jamieson** is Chairman of the LGA

## Delivering for our communities

**N**ow that we have a new government in place, it is absolutely vital that we get on with delivering on the key issues and opportunities for our communities.

The LGA pushed hard and successfully for publication of the provisional 2020 local government finance settlement ahead of Parliament's Christmas recess. It will be crucial in giving councils the certainty and time they need to plan how to provide the essential local services that our residents rely on for the next 12 months.

We must also work with the new administration and other parties nationally to find a long-term, sustainable solution for adult social care. This includes how it is paid for and what it should look like in the future, to help ensure we can continue to provide essential support services for our vulnerable and elderly residents.

The LGA has already built consensus across local government on this, and

ministers committed to do the same in the Queen's Speech.

Alongside this, we also urgently need reform of children's social care; new investment in the support provided for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND); and to address the desperate need for extra homes of all tenures across the country.

We agree with the Government that we need to get away from 'Whitehall knows best', and the Queen's Speech took some steps towards handing powers and funding to local areas.

The LGA continues to make the case for

investing in local government. Empowering councils by giving them more funding, flexibilities and freedoms will help them create more school places, build more homes, boost economic growth, improve our roads and equip people with the skills they need to succeed. This will make a huge difference to the lives of our residents while reducing demand for public services and saving money for the taxpayer.

Councils are looking forward to working with the Prime Minister and his new government to help deliver on our shared ambitions, for the benefit of all those who live and work in our areas.





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



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



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

## Learn from Labour's local successes

**A**fter our worst General Election result since 1935, it is natural that Labour should want to listen, learn, and reflect on what happened.

But we don't have the luxury of time – there are just five months before the next set of crucial local elections, so it's absolutely vital that we have a new and credible leader in place before then.

Many voters felt completely disconnected from Labour in Westminster, despite retaining a strong connection to their local Labour representatives.

Indeed, what is striking about the results is that many of our biggest General Election losses came where voters still overwhelmingly vote Labour in local elections – think of Sandwell, Durham, and Wakefield.

Similarly, voters in places such as Stevenage, Crawley and Telford consistently place their trust in Labour councillors to lead their council but haven't felt able to vote for Labour in Westminster elections.

**"Labour in local government consistently offers radical, credible, and popular policies"**

Labour in local government consistently offers example after example of radical, credible, and popular policies, and of winning and holding power, but the national party did almost nothing in this campaign to highlight our work and celebrate Labour's local success.

Labour MPs who seek to lead our party and rebuild our vote in these places might want to ask Labour councillors how we do it, rather than treating us as an inconvenience.

## Let's get local government done

**W**e now need to ensure that the promises are kept.

There is no doubt this was a tough General Election campaign – no-one likes knocking on doors on cold and dark nights. I don't know where you were, but it never stopped raining where I was on election day.

The votes have been counted and we know who the Government will be for the next five years.

### **"It's up to us to stand up and fight for our residents"**

I am as disappointed as many of you are with the result – especially after so much promise and hard work.

Local government is still here, for now! It's up to us to stand up and fight for our residents. We need to ensure that the Government isn't just blinkered by one subject.

Loads of promises were made, and it is our role to make sure those promises are now delivered by those in government.

As I write this column, we await another Queen's Speech and a look at what the provisional local government finance settlement holds for us.

We now need concrete action – on the financial crisis in children services, on rebooting devolution across the country post-Brexit, on building more social rented homes and tackling the deepening nightmare that has become social care funding.

I hope you and your family and friends had a restful and joyous Christmas and all the best for the new year!

## Strong support for local candidates

**M**ore than 1,200 Independent and smaller party candidates stood in the General Election, undaunted by the cost and incredibly hard work that goes into running a campaign.

Our members spoke up loud and clear for their communities and the message on the doorsteps was one of strong support for local candidates. But in the final days, it seems we were overwhelmed by a drive to settle Brexit and avoid Mr Corbyn.

Against this tide, the number of votes cast and the gains made in areas like East Devon, Ashfield and Bristol demonstrate just what can be done.

Throughout England and Wales, our members won respect and recognition for sound common sense and commitment to our communities, laying the ground for future elections; no empty promises, just solid local support.

### **"Our members spoke up loud and clear for their communities"**

We at the LGA have already written to ministers and are making clear the vital work councils do, and the investment needed to continue. In this changing world, we're also working to achieve greater civility in public life, where we all both earn and demand respect.

There is a reason councillors are the most trusted politicians – we focus on the issues that matter most to our residents and get things done even in the toughest of circumstances.

I hope you had a well-deserved break over the festive period and wish you a happy and successful 2020.



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

# Managing revenues and benefits

**Like the crock of gold at the end of the rainbow, many councils dealing with revenues and benefits crave a better system for processing customer data.**

Good news! The end of that rainbow could be closer than you think. A small group of councils has set out to discover if it's possible to create an IT system that is easily configurable and cost-effective for local authorities. Now we need your help in the fact-finding phase.

Any system for handling revenues and benefits carries significant costs. We suspect that, like us, many councils find their existing system is becoming clunky and in serious need of improved speed and flexibility.

So we decided to explore if it's feasible

**i** Follow us on Twitter using #rbdiscivery, visit [pipeline.localgov.digital](http://pipeline.localgov.digital) or email [businessimprovement@teignbridge.gov.uk](mailto:businessimprovement@teignbridge.gov.uk)

**"We have set out to discover if it's possible to create a cost-effective IT system for local authorities"**

to develop a bespoke solution. Luckily, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government liked our idea, so we've secured £70,000 for the exploratory phase of the project, to be overseen by government's Local Digital Service.

With five other councils, we've embarked on a 'digital discovery' project to check the viability of creating a customer-focused, configurable and cost-effective modern IT system for processing revenues and benefits data.

Three Devon councils – Exeter City, East Devon and Teignbridge – will be working alongside Basildon Council and



**Amanda Pujol** is Head of Community Services and Improvement at Teignbridge District Council

Brentwood Council, in Essex, and Sedgemoor Council in Somerset, and with Strata Service Solutions. The latter manages the technology needs of the three Devon councils and will bring specialist IT knowledge to the project.

Consortium members comprise a geographical spread of communities, a mix of demographics, and a cross-section of local authority data-handling and technological expertise. Much of the funding will pay for a consultant to research councils' experiences of existing systems.

Our work will include user research, theory testing and customer experience mapping – and that's where you come in. We want to hear from as many councils as possible about their current system, where it falls short, and what their ideal bespoke solution would look like.

We aim to deliver our initial findings by late March 2020.



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



**It's more than seven years since the Localism Act 2011 transferred responsibility for housing management disputes in local government to the Housing Ombudsman.**

This brought almost 1.8 million council-owned homes within our jurisdiction. The impact, though, is much greater – and much has changed.

The role of an ombudsman is to promote positive change as well as resolve individual disputes. So, as the specialist Housing Ombudsman, we are able to share insights and learning across all 2,500 landlords, to the benefit of the five million households who can access our scheme.

We also have a strong focus on facilitating the early resolution of complaints before formal investigation.

We are making a real difference, but our ambition is to make the service faster, as well as more transparent and accessible, and do more to share the knowledge and insights with our members. Last year, we consulted on a revised scheme and new business plan. This year, I would draw attention to three areas.

The first is determination times, the issue ombudsmen are challenged about most. Ours are averaging six months – significantly faster than a few years ago



**Richard Blakeway**  
is the Housing  
Ombudsman

# Learning from housing disputes

## "One complaint can signal a wider problem"

– and our goal now is to reduce this to the fastest average case-handling rate on record for us, moving to effectively half the current rate over the next two years.

This needs to be done in a planned way, with more resource, while simultaneously allowing us to maintain the quality of our decision-making.

However, our determination rates also include the time taken by landlords to submit evidence to us. Here, performance is patchy; evidence is

submitted late in at least a quarter of cases, although we believe the proportion is significantly higher.

We want to work with landlords to address this – it means us being clear about what evidence we really require, but also landlords respecting submission deadlines. Without us addressing this effectively, together, dispute resolution will be unnecessarily prolonged and trust in the process will be undermined.

The second area to consider is that one complaint can signal a wider problem. We want to strengthen our scheme so we can conduct further investigations beyond the initial complaint, to establish whether a failure could be a systemic issue.

Any failing found will be referred to the Regulator of Social Housing, maintaining a clear distinction between our roles. I strongly believe this is an important role for an ombudsman to undertake – but it is also important for us to share lessons to prevent similar issues arising in the future.

This brings me to our third priority – expanding our activities to promote positive change in the sector. I am keen to ensure all councils understand our work to facilitate the early resolution of complaints, and for us to share more of our knowledge through thematic reports, publishing case studies and sharing our insightful data. We will shortly be publishing a new report on leaseholder issues, following a similar report on repairs last year.

Having worked in local government, I know the pressures and its evolving role; for instance, should we expect access to redress for households where the homelessness duty has been discharged into the private sector? What about the growing role of housing companies?

This is the debate we should have, so redress – and learning its lessons – are a core part of a healthy housing system.



For more information about the Housing Ombudsman, please visit [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

**As place directors, members of the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT) are no strangers to doing things differently.**

Local authorities continue to become more innovative and to take a joined-up approach to delivering the universal services that our communities use daily, despite prolonged budget pressures.

We all know that funding essential services for vulnerable people is vital. Over the past few years, we have seen increased demand combined with a changing marketplace and a reduction in available resources.

This means local authorities have often had to make difficult decisions, reducing spend on universal and preventative services to rightly fund social care for our most vulnerable residents.

Our aim, as place leaders, is to create thriving communities, where people are prosperous, independent and resilient, thereby reducing the demand for social care in the future. This is why local authorities work so hard to improve outcomes across skills, economic growth and wellbeing services.

However, there is a risk that reducing spend in these areas could reduce our ability to create resilient communities, with a risk of increased pressures on social care services across the medium and long term.

On a local level when budgets are set, councils take a big-picture view, working jointly across service provision. I've thought for some time that we need to replicate this approach at the national level, so I'm delighted to say that the presidents of the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, the Association



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

# A unified professional voice on funding

## Policy statement

***Joint statement from the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, the Association of Directors of Children's Services, the Association of Directors of Public Health, and the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport:***

*"We are now at a point where increasing pressures in children's and adults' social care need to be funded properly, but not at the expense of other key preventative local government services that help create prosperous, independent and resilient communities."*

*"It is those preventative wellbeing and place-based economic growth, infrastructure and environmental services that will prevent demand growing exponentially in our care services in the short, medium and long term."*

*"Local authorities can, and do, join these services up at a local level to deliver improved outcomes for communities, but we need the right, long-term resources to continue doing this."*

of Directors of Children's Services, and the Association of Directors of Public Health have come together with ADEPT – and with the support of the LGA – to work on a powerful, overarching

narrative for local government's professional organisations.

As individual organisations, we each have our detailed policy 'asks' that are not going to change. But we have all agreed on one clear message to share with government, partners and peers: that we need to get long-term funding for social care services right, but not at the expense of preventative wellbeing and universal place-based services (see box, above).

Making our unified case, across all the professions, is essential. Until now, we have been focused on our own priorities and I am truly excited that, as professional associations, we have come together in this way.

I hope that it will be the first of many joint approaches that will support the LGA's work in promoting the role and value of local authorities.



For more information about ADEPT, please visit [www.adepnet.org.uk](http://www.adepnet.org.uk)





**Stephen Evans** is  
Chief Executive of  
the Learning and  
Work Institute

# The many benefits of lifelong learning

## Local authorities face some big challenges.

How can we increase people's engagement in their communities? How do we support parents to help their children with their homework? How do we help an ageing population to improve their health and wellbeing? How do we help people to find a good job and build a career?

And how do we do all of this with less money?

The good news is that, while there's no such thing as a silver bullet, lifelong learning is about as close as you'll get. The evidence shows that adults who take part in learning are more likely to be active in their communities, better able to support their children's learning, have better health and wellbeing, and improve their career prospects.

## "Lifelong learning benefits people, their families, communities, and our economy"

Lifelong learning benefits people, their families, communities, and our economy.

The bad news is that the number of adults taking part in learning has been falling, in part because the Government has cut the budget in England by 40 per cent. Meanwhile, stark inequalities in access remain, with those who are most likely to benefit from learning the least likely to participate.



To find out more about the Festival of Learning and make nominations, please visit [www.festivaloflearning.org.uk/2020-nominations](http://www.festivaloflearning.org.uk/2020-nominations)

That's why the Learning and Work Institute has been running the Festival of Learning for more than a quarter of a century. Each year, hundreds of learners, tutors, projects and employers are nominated for an award recognising their contribution to lifelong learning and the difference they have made.

It's always a highlight of my year, getting to meet the inspirational winners, celebrating their achievements at our awards ceremony, and hearing them tell their stories at our annual reception in Parliament. As well as celebrating our winners, their stories can help to inspire more adults to try out learning.

Local authorities play a central role in lifelong learning. That includes delivering and commissioning adult education directly, as well as building links with other local services so that everyone has a pathway into learning and opportunities to make the most of their talents.

Take Vicky Seagars, our 2019 New Directions award winner (pictured). She wanted to get out of the house and make a positive change in her life. The family liaison officer at her child's school suggested she attend family learning courses run by Kent Adult Education.

This first step back into education gave her the courage and support she needed to pursue her dream of becoming a midwife, and she is now in the second year of her training, with her children noticing the difference in her.

Or take Talk English, a project run by Manchester City Council's adult education service, and winner of our 2017 President's award. It brings together local volunteers with people who have low levels of language skills, through visits to cafes, museums, parks, and community centres.

Around 1,000 volunteers have had training that helps their career prospects and have supported more than 16,500 people to improve their English. It's a brilliant example of a local authority adult education service bringing people together, benefiting those who take part and the wider community.

Nominations for the 2020 Festival of Learning awards are now open. You have until 11 February to put forward inspiring learners, tutors, employers and projects. It's a great way to celebrate the brilliant work that your adult education service does, and a fitting way to recognise the achievements of your local residents.

# Community leadership

**As democratically elected representatives, councillors are uniquely placed to develop strategies, shape thinking and take an active role, as leaders, to shape the future of our local communities.**

Being able to deal with the wide range of issues facing our local towns, cities and rural areas – and bringing decision-

**"The nature of politics has changed, people have changed, and we need to adapt to that"**

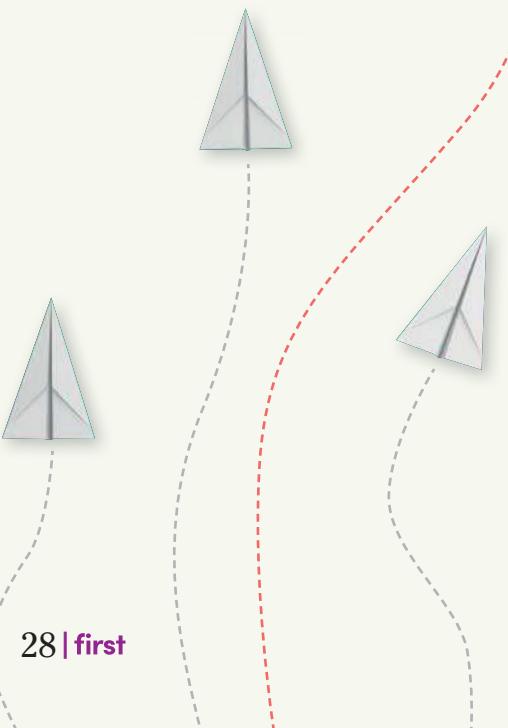
making closer to the people affected – leads to better outcomes and saves money.

Empowering councillors to have greater influence over the services and facilities available in their wards means they are better able to fulfil the aspirations and needs of their local communities as we enter the second decade of the 21st century.

Here, Cllr Mimi Harker OBE writes about how she sees her role as a community leader.

The LGA has a range of community leadership resources to help you in your role as an effective leader of place and community, including a workbook.

**i** See [www.local.gov.uk/councillor-workbook-community-leadership](http://www.local.gov.uk/councillor-workbook-community-leadership)



**Cllr Mimi Harker OBE (Con)**  
**is Vice-Chairman of Chiltern District Council, and its Armed Forces Champion**

*My passion has always been to serve my community. As a councillor, in the truest sense of the word, my job is to serve.*

*I see the fact that I have been elected by people who had faith in me, and voted for me, as the beginning, middle and the end of what I do and how I do it.*

*I have spent 25 years as a community champion and 21 years as an elected member championing my community. I believe passionately in people and in being the voice for the people I represent. I believe in listening and understanding, in reacting when I need to, and in being proactive when I see the need.*

*I love campaigning to fulfil local needs and expectations. I work hard to do my job to the best of my ability, to get the best results possible for my community. I work 24/7, 52 weeks of the year, for my community. This is my work. To paraphrase, this is my day job and my night job. My politics is there, but in the background.*

*The nature of politics has changed, people have changed, expectations have changed, because of the huge number of news outlets and social media platforms – all of which I use to get my messages out – and we need to adapt to that.*

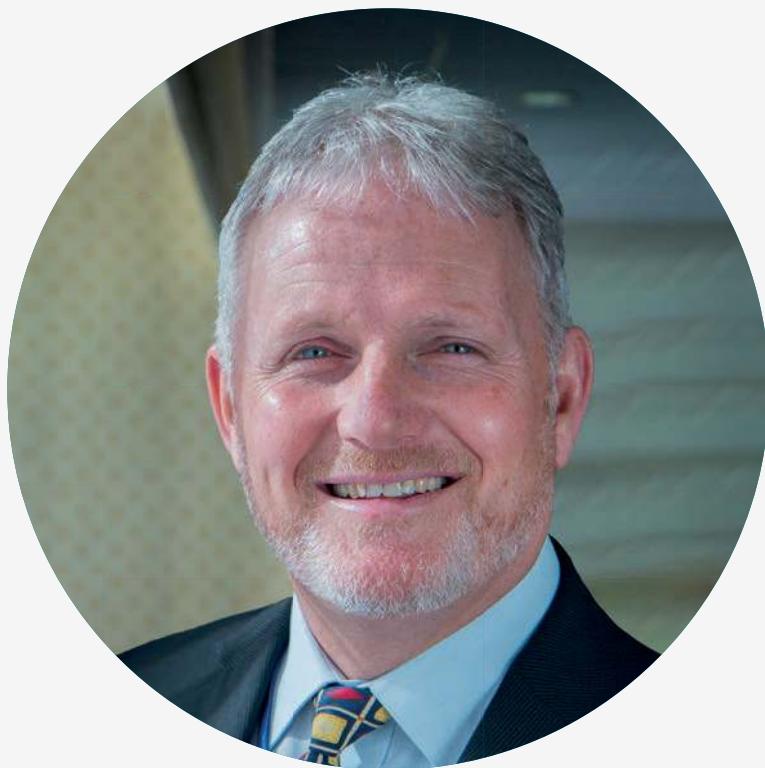
*As local councillors, we are good at adapting to the needs of the communities we serve because they are real and tangible, and we work with them every day. At a national level, we need to be careful not to see people as an amorphous mass, somewhere out there in the ether, that we neither come into contact with nor have to be accountable to on a day-to-day basis.*

*The expectation of the public of what we do, and how we behave, has grown, and it is down to us as elected members to deliver to that expectation. The community respects the councillor who listens to their views, who understands their needs, and who responds to them.*

*A good local councillor builds community networks, is part of the community, and respects that community. We are elected to represent everyone – those who voted for us and those who didn't.*

*As a local councillor, I see my role as a leader in the community I serve. Our public-facing responsibility is to the community that has elected us to be its voice and to represent it. The days of politics first have gone. Welcome to 21st-century leadership, where communities and people come first.*

# 60 SECONDS WITH...



## Rob Curtis

**Chairman of the Association of Electoral Administrators and Head of Electoral Services at the London Borough of Tower Hamlets**

**Q** How was the first December General Election since 1923?

**A** I don't think the weather was an issue in the end – it was preparing for the 'what if?' Everybody understood that if there were six inches of snow and ice and we weren't ready, it could be a disaster. So we were looking at long-range forecasts, making sure we had enough heaters and salt, and that presiding officers owned a pair of gloves! It wasn't so much the cold as the daylight hours – we had to ensure all polling places had adequate lighting, so we were hiring lighting rigs and things we don't need in the summer, all underpinned with risk assessments and project plans.

**Q** You've been in electoral services for 26 years. What has changed?

**A** It's the change from paper to digital – we were grey, bureaucratic clerks in the old days, and public expectations were different. There is now an immediacy of expectation. In my area alone, we had 12,000 digital applications to register to vote on

deadline day. Of those, half were duplicates – people already on the electoral roll – but you still have to deal with every application.

**Q** What changes would you like to see to elections?

**A** We need a consolidation of regulations and legislation, and a radical rethink of how we can move the service into the digital age securely in a way that has the electorate's trust. The expectations of registering to vote and voting are different from 10 years ago, never mind 40 years ago, and young electors expect a digital option when actually voting. People don't realise the declaration is at 5am, not because officers are incompetent and can't count, but because the processes are determined by many other factors, such as the size of the ballot paper and the number of postal votes handed in at polling stations. The issue with change, though, is ideally we would like to say we would do this or that, but we have to tread carefully and we have to make sure that change works – and that the public trusts that it works.

**Q** What does the future hold?

**A** Somebody said to me that elections are a growth industry and this is true to a certain extent, with some areas running several polls at the same time. But we don't just deal with elections. We also have neighbourhood planning referendums and community governance reviews – for example, in Tower Hamlets, we received a petition to create a parish council, which takes a year to administer. Peterborough held the first Parliamentary by-election, following a recall petition; and there are also ballots for business improvement districts and numerous impromptu by-elections that cannot be foreseen all on top of the scheduled elections held every year. It is therefore extremely important we do not underestimate the impact of all this on the teams running elections. The welfare of our members and people who work on elections is paramount. While the camaraderie in electoral services is first class, we have to be very careful because the system as it stands can only take so much.

# ELECTIONS



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



## Local council results foretell General Election

**Throughout 2019, Labour's local vote failed to impress – just five gains were made, only two of which were from the Conservatives. By contrast, Labour lost 18 seats, six of those defeats to the Conservatives.**

The timeline of Labour's struggle leading up to this General Election is illustrated by our by-election model. This uses the change in each party's vote share from the previous May election, adjusting for the year in which the May election was held. Averaging vote share changes across multiple by-elections provides a national equivalent vote – a proxy for the vote intention responses obtained from surveys of public opinion.

The model shows Labour were ahead of the Conservatives in March 2018 but thereafter the situation changed. The party remained relatively competitive with the Conservatives until a sudden and dramatic change of fortune between January and February 2019.

Labour's estimated 33 per cent national vote share in January fell three percentage points in February. This coincided with the defeat in the Commons of the then Prime Minister Theresa May's Brexit deal and a chorus of Labour MPs calling for a second referendum.

By the summer, the model shows the Liberal Democrats overtaking Labour as the Conservative party's principal rival. By late November 2019, the Conservative lead over Labour had reached 11 percentage points, close to the General Election outcome.

Whatever future direction the party takes, Labour must improve its standing in local government. It has been 17 years since Labour had more councillors than the Conservatives, despite the latter being in power for most of the time since then.

Conservative councillors currently form a majority on more than four in 10 councils; Labour, just one in four.

Such was the scale of Labour's defeat on 12 December, it now must set new records next time. A swing of 11.8 per cent from the Conservatives is required for Labour to win the smallest majority. To put that into perspective, it is two points higher than Labour achieved in 1997 and more than double the next highest swing – Margaret Thatcher's when ousting Labour in 1979.

In the build-up to Tony Blair's victory in 1997, Labour amassed an army of more than 10,000 councillors – 1,000 more than the Conservative and Liberal Democrat totals combined. The best opportunity for Labour to progress on this front passed last May when it made a net loss of seats. It will be 2023 before that part of the electoral cycle is repeated.

In terms of by-elections, Labour faces both an opportunity and a threat. The opportunity is that the Liberal Democrats, too, are bruised and battered. The effect on local party campaigning is unknown but Labour should be setting its sights high. The threat is that, in many council areas, there are new Independent groups forming, many of which have appeal as vehicles for protest voting.

Challenging Conservative dominance, both in local government and at Westminster, will be no easy matter.



**Recent by-elections in which a ward changed hands are given on the right.** More than 40 local by-elections have been held since the previous edition of *first*, most of them on 12 December, and the details of these and previous local by-election results can be found at [www.local.gov.uk/first](http://www.local.gov.uk/first)



**POLLING STATION**

### Local by-elections

#### **Cardiff, Llanishen**

CON GAIN FROM LAB

8.6% over Lab

Turnout 27%

#### **Chichester, Loxwood**

CON GAIN FROM LIB DEM

31.9% over Lib Dem

Turnout 29.4%

#### **Hounslow, Feltham North**

CON GAIN FROM LAB

1.1% over Lab

Turnout 53.7%

#### **King's Lynn & West Norfolk, Upwell & Delph**

CON GAIN FROM IND

46.5% over Lab

Turnout 65.5%

#### **Kirklees, Colne Valley**

CON GAIN FROM LAB

12.1% over Lab

Turnout 72.9%

#### **Oxfordshire, Wallingford**

GREEN GAIN FROM IND

10% over Con

Turnout 30.2%

#### **Rhondda Cynon Taff, Ynyshir**

LAB GAIN FROM PLAID CYMRU

10.3% over PC

Turnout 30.5%

#### **Wiltshire, Trowbridge Lambrok**

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON

15.5% over Con

Turnout 29.5%

# LETTERS

## Home education

**H**aving read Baroness Jones' letter on home education (**first** 642), I would like to offer a response. While a child does indeed have a right to privacy and from intrusion into their family life, they also have, I believe, a greater right to a good education that equips them for life.

Any parent home educating their child well should have no problem at all in demonstrating the breadth of education being provided and how their child is growing and developing well. The issue is that, without a thorough process in place, it is too easy for children to slip through the net.

As a society, we must place the child at the centre of this and it is our duty to ensure they are being well cared for and educated to a standard that is acceptable.

While councils are not mandated to check the quality of education being provided, quite frankly, they should be. It is in all of our interests to ensure our next generation is safe and well prepared for life. We must all fight to do better than accept the status quo.

**Clr Carole Jones** (Con),  
Dorset Council



## Scrutiny of fire services

**I**t was interesting to read about the need for greater scrutiny of local fire services in the wake of Grenfell, and other challenging issues from recent inspections (**first** 642).

Returning to the role of councillor in 2018 after seven years, I was shocked by the decline in governance of Greater Manchester's Fire and Rescue Service. A 30-councillor fire authority has been replaced by a footnote; fire services subsumed into other committees; and councillors back at boroughs losing a representative focused on answering fire-related questions.

Recent fire station cuts were not transparent. Issues such as the lack of resource to staff aerial appliances are just not being noticed by Greater Manchester Combined Authority. Notionally, there are 250 councillors on the combined authority (I went to check, thinking it would be about 30!) but the lack of dedication to fire services is a serious oversight.

**Clr Paul Ankers** (Lib Dem),  
Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council

**?** **Welcome to first's new-look letters page!** If you have a letter, or a story for our new 'People & places' column, please email [karen.thornton@local.gov.uk](mailto:karen.thornton@local.gov.uk). Tell us about your personal stories from the frontline of council services. Letters may be edited and published online



## People & places

**Lynne Dejoodt** is Fundraising and Marketing Manager with CHESS Homeless, a charity working with single homeless people in Chelmsford and Essex

**A**'typical day' does not exist working for a homeless charity. We often get people knocking on our door offering donations, as well as homeless people needing assistance.

Chelmsford City Council and CVS fund our four-month Winter Project, which is open to anyone sleeping rough. It offers a bed from 10pm to 8am in a local church. Our outreach service, which began in July 2019, covers Chelmsford, Braintree, Epping Forest, Maldon and Rochford – providing sleeping bags, bottled water, snacks and warm clothes for rough sleepers. We have engaged with 85 individuals since then.

People often think all we do is provide a bed and a meal, but that's only a small part of what CHESS does. To get a place in our nine-bed night shelter a person completes a referral and has an initial chat with a member of staff to find out what their needs are, and if it's more than just homelessness.

Once accepted, it's a 28-day rolling contract for as long as someone needs a room. We have a zero tolerance policy on drink/drugs but everyone gets a support worker to help with counselling, registering with a GP, housing benefit, and so on. Once we feel they are ready, there are five other properties they can move to that offer more independence.

Former resident Peter spoke at our SleepOut event at Chelmsford Cathedral in November. "If I had just been offered a bed, it wouldn't have been enough – I would probably have been dead by now," he said.

"It's the relationship I had with support staff and the help I got from therapy that made me realise I wanted to move on, that I'm not an 'invisible person' and that I deserved and wanted a life."

**i** For more information about CHESS Homeless, please visit [www.chesshomeless.org](http://www.chesshomeless.org). You can read a longer version of this article at [www.local.gov.uk/first](http://www.local.gov.uk/first)



2020

#LGACONF20

# LGA ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND EXHIBITION 30 JUNE – 2 JULY HARROGATE

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

Sponsorship opportunities available, please contact [amanda.spicer@local.gov.uk](mailto:amanda.spicer@local.gov.uk)