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# 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 to discuss some of the challenges and opportunities facing council culture and tourism teams across the country.

Speakers include:

**Sir Laurie Magnus**, Chairman, Historic England

**Cllr Abi Brown**, Leader, Stoke-on-Trent Council

**Arike Oke**, Managing Director, Black Cultural Archives

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



# LGA Annual Fire Conference 2020

10-11 March, Grand Hotel, Blackpool

This 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 and the final tranche of inspection reports 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 funding to provide a service fit for the future. The 2020 Fire Conference provides an opportunity to consider these issues further.

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



# CONTENTS



## Growing our own talent

**F**ebruary kicks off with two national events of significance to local government – Children's Mental Health Week and National Apprenticeship Week.

To mark these events, this edition of **first** includes a report on LGA-commissioned research setting out how early intervention can mitigate the impact of poor mental health on children and young people (p10); and highlights councils' impressive record on nurturing talent, with 10,000 more apprentices than two years ago (p12).

Elsewhere, we have an update on business rates (p13), review the recommendations arising from the first full cycle of fire and rescue service inspections (p15), and look at issues around climate change (p16-17).

We also hear from the Welsh LGA's new Leader, Cllr Andrew Morgan, on election reforms (p27), and from County Councils Network Chairman Cllr David Williams on the local government finance settlement (p23).

Our 60-second interview is with one of the UK's youngest elected members, Cllr Oliver Freeston, Chair of North East Lincolnshire Council's Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel.

You can view this month's content and previous editions of **first** at [www.local.gov.uk/first](http://www.local.gov.uk/first). Please email karen.thornton@local.gov.uk if you have any letters or ideas for stories.

**Cllr James Jamieson**  
is LGA Chairman



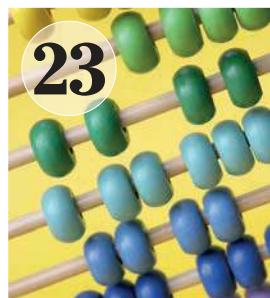
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**Local**   
**Government**  
**Association**

## New building safety measures announced

**The building height at which sprinklers are required and combustible materials are banned is set to be lowered, the Government has announced.**

The move is part of a package of measures to improve building safety announced by Housing, Communities and Local Government Secretary Robert Jenrick MP ahead of the start of phase two of the Grenfell Tower fire inquiry last month.

The measures include a new regulator established as part of the Health and Safety Executive, and government support to help councils develop ways of enforcing remediation works where building owners have not set out clear plans for removing dangerous cladding.

The Government is also consulting on lowering the combustible materials ban threshold from 18 metres to 11 metres, lowering the height at which sprinklers are required in new buildings, and has issued a call for evidence on other risk factors.

Lord Porter, the LGA's Building Safety Spokesman, said: "It is good that the Government is looking at lowering the height requirement at which combustible

cladding is banned on new buildings and accepted our call to ensure that building safety reforms protect residents in all vulnerable buildings, such as hospitals, residential schools and care homes.

"The height of a building does not provide any indication about the risk to its safety, as has been proven by recent dangerous fires in buildings below 18 metres.

"Height alone should not determine whether sprinklers should be fitted, as

some buildings, such as care homes, house particularly vulnerable people. We urge the Government to make this change as quickly as possible and fund the retrofitting of sprinklers using a risk-based approach."

The LGA is also calling for funding to support the removal of other dangerous cladding systems, and for councils and fire and rescue services to be given a leading role in ensuring any new building safety system works.



## Affordable homes lost to office conversions



**N**ew LGA analysis has found that more than 13,500 affordable homes could have been lost in the past four years because of rules allowing offices to be converted into housing without planning permission.

In some areas, office conversions under 'permitted development' amount to nearly half of all new housing.

Latest figures show that since 2015, 54,162 new homes have been converted from offices in England. Potentially, this has led to the loss of 13,540 affordable homes, based on the average council stipulating a requirement of 25 per cent affordable housing on new developments.

While office conversions amount to 6 per cent of all new homes nationally, in some areas a significantly higher proportion of new housing is office-to-residential conversions. For example, in 2018/19, more than half (51 per cent) of all new homes in Harlow were office conversions, with 48 per cent in Norwich, 43 per cent in Three Rivers, 39 per cent in Spelthorne, and 35 per cent in Slough.

The LGA wants permitted development rules to be scrapped and local communities allowed to have a vital say on new developments in their area.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Housing Spokesman, said: "Serious

concerns remain over the high numbers of homes that continue to be converted from offices without planning permission.

"Permitted development rules are resulting in the alarming potential loss of thousands of desperately needed affordable homes.

"Planning is not a barrier to house building, with councils approving nine in 10 planning applications. By scrapping permitted development rules, the Government can give councils and local communities the ability to shape the areas they live in and ensure homes are built to high standards with the necessary infrastructure in place."

# Homelessness services 'at breaking point'

**M**ore than two-thirds of council homelessness services in England spent more than they planned to on support last year.

Figures collated by the LGA have found that seven in 10 councils overspent as a result of rising levels of demand and the increasing cost of using expensive bed and breakfast accommodation to house families.

The LGA is warning that homelessness services are being pushed to breaking point due to high demand driven by a severe shortage of affordable social housing and huge gaps between rents and housing benefits, leaving housing unaffordable for low-income families.

Councils are being left with no choice but to place more and more households into temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfasts.

LGA analysis shows that 69.3 per cent (226) of councils responsible for housing in England (326) overspent their homelessness budgets. Councils planned to spend a total of £502.7 million in 2018/19. Yet they ended up overspending by a combined total of £140 million – almost 30 per cent more than they had budgeted for.

The LGA is urging the Government to use the Budget to provide councils with sustainable, long-term funding to prevent

homelessness in the first place.

It says government needs to give councils the powers and funding to spark a genuine renaissance in council house building to provide the social homes for rent that are desperately needed to help boost affordability, home ownership and reduce homelessness.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Housing Spokesman, said: "Councils want to work with government to be able to prevent homelessness before it happens, but as a result of unprecedented funding pressures, they are becoming increasingly limited in what they can do."

"With adequate funding and powers, councils can boost efforts to prevent homelessness and get back to building the affordable homes the country needs."



# Housing allowance freeze to end

**Around 900,000 people could receive more housing benefit from April after the Government confirmed it will be lifting the four-year freeze on local housing allowance – a means-tested support for private tenants.**

Cllr Richard Watts, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said the announcement was a step in the right direction, but that more should be done to help meet the challenges renters and councils face.

"Since local housing allowance (LHA) rates were frozen in 2016, they have fallen, on average, to just the 13th percentile of market rents. This means that in many parts of the country there are no properties available to those entitled to full support

with their housing costs," he said.

"Without investing in LHA rates to cover the true costs of renting, the gap many people face between their incomes and the cost of rent risks continuing to push many into financial hardship, in-work poverty and homelessness, and further stretches councils' housing, homelessness and local welfare services."

"Councils want to work with the Government to deliver the security that tenants need and support households who need help to meet their housing costs. As part of its forthcoming Budget, the Government should restore the LHA rate to at least the 30th percentile of market rents, something the LGA has long called for."

## In brief Roof checks

**T**he LGA is urgently advising councils to check whether any buildings in their estates have roofs made of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC), following two significant roof failures that occurred with little or no warning. Members should ensure that relevant staff are aware of the information available on the LGA's website, at [www.local.gov.uk/information-reinforced-autoclaved-aerated-concrete-raac](http://www.local.gov.uk/information-reinforced-autoclaved-aerated-concrete-raac). RAAC is a lightweight form of concrete used primarily for roofs from the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s, in offices, schools and other buildings.

## Housing design

**T**he design of new housing developments in England is overwhelmingly 'mediocre' or 'poor', with less-affluent communities the worst affected, according to an audit conducted by University College London for CPRE, the countryside charity, and the Place Alliance. Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Housing Spokesman, said: "Councils want to work with the Government over the critical need for renewed national leadership on standards for new homes, which would give certainty to councils, developers and communities. These standards should future-proof all new homes, ensuring they are accessible for all ages and are environmentally sustainable."

## Benefit payments

**F**amilies are facing the prospect of becoming homeless because of the way some local authorities are dealing with appeals against housing benefit claims, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman has warned. In a recent report, it suggests there are problems with some councils' understanding of their duties towards claimants and of correct procedures. Cllr Richard Watts, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said the report highlighted important learning for councils and government, and "rightly identified the importance of ensuring the best possible accuracy within the housing benefit system, and ensuring that councils respond fairly and effectively when mistakes occur".

## Bus journeys hit 10-year low

Local buses are travelling nearly 150 million fewer miles than they were 10 years ago, dropping to their lowest level since the mid-1980s, according to new LGA analysis.

Annual figures reveal that buses in England travelled a distance of 1.18 billion miles in 2018/19 – down from 1.33 billion in 2008/09.

The last time bus travel was lower was in 1986/87. Bus passenger journeys have also dropped by 318 million between 2008/09 and 2018/19.

The LGA says an increase in fares – up 71 per cent in real terms since 2005 – and a £700 million annual funding gap for the concessionary fares scheme are contributing to the reduction in services and bus usage.

Unless this funding gap is addressed, nearly half of all bus routes in England that currently receive partial or complete subsidies from councils will remain at risk.

Councils want to work with the Government to protect local bus services, which can be a lifeline for vulnerable residents, and to 'level up' bus usage across the regions. Figures show that 25 per cent of overall bus mileage is in London.

The LGA is calling on the Government to use March's Budget to hand all councils oversight of local bus services so they can maintain and improve them, and to fund the concessionary fares scheme fully.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Transport Spokesman, said: "The funding gap faced by councils in providing the concessionary fare scheme is severely impacting their ability to step in and prop up bus routes that are otherwise at risk of ending altogether."

"Councils want to work with the Government to make sure every community in all areas of the country is able to access a local bus service."



## Two-thirds of leisure centres 'outdated'

**New analysis by the LGA shows that nearly two-thirds of leisure centres are outdated and need urgent new investment.**

Up to 63 per cent of sports halls and swimming pools are more than 10 years old, according to figures shared with the LGA by Sport England. Nearly a quarter of all sports halls and swimming pools have not been refurbished in more than 20 years.

Central government funding for leisure infrastructure reduced by a third over the past decade. The LGA is calling on ministers to use the forthcoming Budget to introduce a £500 million funding pot for councils to redesign, upgrade and renovate facilities to the standard needed to support healthy, active communities and transform the nation's health.

Council-run leisure facilities – swimming pools, gyms, football pitches and sports halls – are vital to local communities as they contribute to physical and mental wellbeing. The NHS spends millions of pounds a year treating preventable diseases that could have been avoided by access to sports facilities.

Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson, Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, said: "Local leisure facilities play a vital role in ensuring our communities remain healthy, but too many are now in desperate need of being updated and refurbished."

"Council-run leisure facilities provide thousands of people with access to affordable gyms, swimming pools and exercise opportunities they would otherwise not have."

"Under-investment has meant that many councils have not been able to provide the necessary refurbishments to some outdated sports facilities."

"Where refurbishments have been possible, they have been shown to save an average of £500,000 a year, so investment pays for itself."

"With desperately needed investment, councils can improve our leisure facilities and help use the upcoming Commonwealth Games to inspire our communities to become healthier and more active."

## Skills mismatch 'costs billions'

Six million people in England risk being without a job or in work they are over-qualified for by 2030, new research for the LGA suggests.

The Learning and Work Institute, which authored the report, estimates that not meeting the skills needs of employers could lead to a potential loss of £120 billion in economic output by the end of the decade.

The current centrally governed skills and employment system, which sees £10.5 billion a year spent by eight government departments or agencies across 20 different national schemes, is creating a confusing and ineffective system.

The LGA is calling for the Government to use next month's Budget to devolve all back-

to-work, skills, apprenticeship, careers advice, and business support schemes and funding to the local areas in which they are used.

Cllr Kevin Bentley, Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board, said: "Millions of people face a future where they have skills mismatched for jobs at a huge cost to people's lives and the local and national economy."

"Councils are ideally placed to lead efforts to help the Government bring growth and jobs to all parts of the country and ensure everyone is fully equipped with the skills they need to compete for future jobs."

Stephen Evans, Chief Executive of the Learning and Work Institute, said: "We now need a decade of investment, in order to boost life chances, economic prosperity and to level up the country."

# New guidance on adoption

**The Government has written to directors of children's services across England with new guidelines on the care system, urging councils to prioritise adoption.**

While the LGA agrees with the Government's ambition to make sure children in care have stable, loving homes, it does not believe any form of permanence is superior to others.

Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "What is most important is that children's needs and their voices are at the centre of any decision made about their futures.

"Whichever option is best for a child, it is vital that all parts of the system are working well together, from councils and adoption agencies to the family courts, and we are keen to work with the Government to make sure this operates as well as it should.

"Councils have long welcomed applications from people of all backgrounds who are interested in adoption, and will continue to support those who are able to provide a loving, stable home for a child in care."

She added: "Additional funding for

regional adoption agencies to recruit prospective adopters is good news, as is the extension of the Adoption Support Fund, which has helped so many families. We urge the Government to consider also investing in the recruitment and support of foster carers to make sure that we have the most suitable placements available for all children."



## Care figures hit 10-year high

The number of children in care has reached a 10-year high with the system reaching breaking point, according to the LGA.

New figures show that the number has risen by 28 per cent in the past decade, with 78,150 children now in care, up from 75,370 in 2018.

The LGA is warning that this huge increase in demand is combining with funding shortages to put immense pressure on the ability of councils to support vulnerable children and young people, and provide the early help that can stop children and families reaching crisis point in the first place.

The Government's election manifesto promised a review of the children's social care system, and central to it must be securing the financial sustainability of children's social care services, the LGA said.

This is the only way councils can deliver their legal duties, protect the preventative services that support families before they

reach crisis point and improve the lives of children and families.

Councils were forced to overspend on their children's social care budgets by almost £800 million last year to try to keep children safe, despite allocating more money than the previous year to try to keep up with demand.

Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "This is unsustainable.

"Councils need to be given a seat at the table for the care system review, alongside children, families and partners, to make sure this looks at what really matters and what can really make a difference.

"It needs to ensure that children's services are fully funded and councils can not only support those children who are in care, but provide the early intervention and prevention support that can stop children and families reaching crisis point in the first place."

## In brief Vaccination strategy

The Government should publish its long-awaited vaccination strategy as soon as possible to help reverse a dramatic decline in take-up and protect young and vulnerable people from deadly infections, the LGA has said. The strategy was first announced in the Prevention Green Paper last summer but was delayed because of the General Election. Councils have continued to find innovative ways of raising immunisation levels in their communities, and the LGA wants them to have a greater role in bringing the wider system together and holding local partners to account, to ensure vaccination programmes have the widest possible reach.

## Social care pledge

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has promised to bring forward a plan for social care this year, to be completed within this Parliament. Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "People of all ages should be able to live the lives they want to lead and we are pleased to hear the Prime Minister's pledge. Every pound invested by the Government in council-run services helps relieve pressure on other essential services. The Budget is an important opportunity to address this crucial issue of funding while looking ahead to finding a longer-term, cross-party solution to adult social care, which we at the LGA are happy to play our part in."

## Nudge funds

The latest round of the LGA's Behavioural Insights Programme has awarded £20,000 each to eight councils. Part of the LGA's sector-led improvement offer, the programme encourages innovation in local public services with the aim of changing behaviour to reduce demand on overstretched services as well as improving residents' lives. Behavioural insights is a scientific approach that helps people to make better choices for themselves and society through interventions or 'nudges'. Last year, Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council increased the uptake of assistive technology by 27 per cent by using targeted mail to those with Blue Badges and assisted bin collections. See [www.local.gov.uk/behavioural-insights](http://www.local.gov.uk/behavioural-insights)

## In brief

### Air pollution deaths

More than one in 19 deaths in the UK's largest cities and towns is now linked to air pollution, according to the think tank, Centre for Cities. Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Transport Spokesman, said: "For air quality plans to be successful, they need to be underpinned by local flexibility and sufficient funding. Local powers are needed to further tackle air pollution, particularly with regard to moving traffic offences, and robust national action to help the country transition to lower emission travel, including cycling and walking and an effective national bus strategy." The LGA held its first climate emergency conference in January and has developed resources for councils, see [www.local.gov.uk/climate-change](http://www.local.gov.uk/climate-change), and p16.

## Mobile coverage

The LGA wants the Government to give Ofcom the power to independently verify mobile phone coverage before signing a new deal with mobile operators to create a Rural Shared Network. The deal would commit operators to pooling resources to ensure mobile coverage reaches 95 per cent of the UK by 2025. But the LGA is concerned that users have been unable to make calls or get online in areas where coverage is already supposedly fast and reliable. Cllr Kevin Bentley, Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board, said: "We want to work with government to ensure that we can properly measure whether mobile operators are achieving coverage that improves mobile signal in the real world, rather than numbers on a spreadsheet."

## Digital inclusion

Big technology companies must open up data and help fund digital inclusion as the UK economy moves away from cash in the 2020s, according to a report from think tank IPPR. Cllr Peter Fleming, Chairman of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board, said: "Councils are trying to embed digital inclusion into the heart of everything they do. The LGA's Digital Inclusion Programme is helping councils to provide a vital service for residents who don't have the access or confidence to use digital." See [www.local.gov.uk/digital-inclusion-programme](http://www.local.gov.uk/digital-inclusion-programme)

# Dodging business rates 'costs councils £250m'

**Business rates avoidance is costing local services an estimated £250 million a year, a new LGA survey reveals, with eight in 10 councils saying they do not have adequate powers to tackle the problem in their local area.**

Income from business rates accounts for about a quarter of council spending power and the LGA is calling for tougher legislation in England to close loopholes and tackle avoidance, along similar lines to those proposed in Scotland and Wales next year.

The most frequent method of avoidance was short-term periods of occupation (37 per cent), which sees businesses minimally occupying a property for around six weeks (42 days) before vacating and being eligible for three months' empty property exemption from paying business rates. This can be done multiple times.

More than a quarter (26 per cent) of responding councils reported firms using insolvency to avoid paying empty property rates, while others reported difficulties in establishing ownership, such as claims that another person has taken over a business,

false tenancy agreements or 'phoenix' companies where the stock is held in third-party names.

The LGA said councils need new legal powers to enter and inspect non-domestic properties to verify information relevant to billing and to request information from ratepayers and third parties.

Councils also need the freedom and finance to set discounts and reliefs locally so they can restrict reliefs to businesses they strongly suspect of avoidance. The period of temporary occupation, which leads to repeated business rates relief cycles, should also be extended from 42 days to six months.

Cllr Richard Watts, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said: "Every penny lost through business rates avoidance is money that could be spent on adult social care, children's services, fixing roads and other vital community services.

"Councils want to work with government to explore how to better protect the system and the powers needed so they can collect money owed for local services."

● See p13

## Call for bigger fly-tipping fines

Only 5 per cent of court-imposed fines for fly-tipping offences in England in the past six years were above £1,000, and only a sixth of them above £500, LGA analysis shows.

This is despite fly-tipping incidents soaring by 50 per cent over the same period, up from 714,637 in 2012/13 to 1,072,431 in 2018/19.

The LGA says tougher sentences are needed to deter fly-tipping, which is costing councils £58 million a year to clear up. Only two people have been given the maximum £50,000 fine by the courts since the Government introduced new guidelines in 2014.

Councils took action on nearly half a million incidents in 2018/19 – up by nearly 75,000 in six years. Successful prosecutions are at their highest level since 2011/12, while fixed penalty notices

– issued for smaller cases – and seizure of vehicles are also at record highs.

The LGA wants to work with government on reviewing sentencing guidelines, and ensuring councils have the funding needed to investigate incidents.

Meanwhile, the District Councils' Network (DCN) has warned of a 'fly-tipping farmageddon', with the number of incidents on agricultural spots increasing by two-thirds in the past seven years – from 888 in 2012/13 to 1,473 in 2018/19.

While the majority of fly-tips seen by district councils are on public highways, council land, footpaths and alleyways, the DCN says that farm land is a growing target. It, too, is calling for the courts to issue bigger fines for more serious offences.



# PARLIAMENT



Councillor **David Simmonds** CBE MP is a member of Hillingdon Council and a former LGA Deputy Chairman



## From council to Commons

More than half of the new MPs elected in December were councillors, and Parliament needs their expertise

**Many of us involved with the LGA will have spent years working with MPs and lobbying Parliament on local government issues.**

Becoming an MP has been like joining an old-fashioned council, heavy on ceremony and tradition and with sometimes baffling processes for getting things done. Many of my new colleagues have local government experience, and we all share that sense of focus on finding how to make progress on the issues that took us into politics.

In my case, I saw the opportunity to contribute by making my maiden speech on the amendments to the EU Withdrawal Bill about child refugees, an emotive subject on which I have worked with the LGA and my home council, Hillingdon, for two decades.

The amendments would have compounded the pressures with which councils are already struggling, and added life-and-limb risk to the journey

of refugees to our country. So I aimed to shine a light on the practical reality, as opposed to the sentiment, of how this works – and the contribution was well received.

Over the coming months, there will be new legislation important to councils, on issues including the children's care system review, adult social care, planning, building safety, devolution, and finance.

It is incredibly useful to the sector to have many new MPs who really understand the detail behind these issues – and with a government laying the foundations for an ambitious, long period in office, we have the chance to shape policy in a way that will lead to real, positive change.

So many councillors have expressed frustration that announcements on, for example, finance turn out to be window-dressing. The experience of a positively spun finance settlement that left us a significant net loser in Hillingdon was one example, and the Prime Minister was surprised to find that his own patch was seeing a cut, despite the headlines.

Parliament needs to use Brexit as a catalyst to unleash the potential of local authorities as leaders of their place, and there will be plenty of us making the case for that leadership as part of an ambitious, progressive, and forward-looking country.

### The Queen's Speech

The LGA briefed MPs ahead of several days of debates on the Queen's Speech (see first 643), highlighting local government priorities in the legislative year ahead.

During a debate on education and local government, Andrew Gwynne MP, the Shadow Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, highlighted our analysis of the pressures on children's services.

Mr Gwynne also referred to comments on the provisional local government finance settlement made by Cllr Richard Watts, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board.

Closing the debate, Housing, Communities and Local Government Secretary Robert Jenrick MP promised to level up funding across the country and make Whitehall work for local communities.

In another Queen's Speech debate, on the green industrial revolution, several MPs spoke about the work councils are doing locally to tackle climate change, including Conservative MP Gillian Keegan, who highlighted that her local council is developing solar panels.

Responding to the debate, Transport Secretary Grant Shapps MP said that the new Environment Bill will introduce a system of legally binding, long-term targets for councils.

Labour MP Helen Hayes highlighted our analysis on the shortfall in funding for social care. In that debate, MPs from all parties expressed a willingness to begin cross-party talks to find a sustainable future for adult social care.

Concluding the debate, Health Minister Edward Argar MP highlighted the Government's cash boost to the NHS and said ministers were working to address the 'injustices' in social care.

# Improving children's mental health

New research sets out the challenges of delivering better outcomes for children and young people – and how councils can mitigate these by acting early to resolve issues before they escalate

**B**uilding on the success of our Bright Futures campaign, the LGA commissioned Isos Partnership to research how local government is supporting children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing. Its report demonstrates what role local government can play in improving services and outcomes for youngsters and their families.

Helping children and young people to fulfil their potential is a key ambition of all councils, but too many are not receiving the support

they need to have good mental health.

Despite increased investment and focus on mental health services for children and young people, the number requiring support is going up, thresholds for accessing support remain high, waiting times are long and there is significant difference in provision between different local areas.

We know that about one in eight children and young people is affected by mental health problems, which can have a damaging impact on their future life chances if not tackled quickly and effectively.

But the story of more children requiring support is not just about rising need. It is also about the pressure and strain on core universal services as a result of shrinking resources.

With reductions to pastoral support staff in schools, targeted youth services, children's centres, health visitors, school nurses, and so on, the collective capacity for universal services to provide additional support for children, young people and their families experiencing turbulence and emotional distress has been diminished.

Despite the very challenging national context for supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing, fieldwork in eight contrasting councils shows just how much local government can do.

Through working closely with key partners, councils can help mitigate the effects of some of these challenges, and deliver better outcomes for children and young people.

Nine key themes recurred in the research as critical elements in

establishing an effective partnership-based approach to supporting young people's mental health. These include leadership and vision, self-reflective partnerships, integrated commissioning, promoting good mental health for all children and young people, and developing the children's workforce.

Embedding child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) in other key services and supporting families were also key.

The research highlights three areas, beyond the issue of underfunding, that were impeding the most effective use of resources and the workforce. The first is that the complexity and fragmentation of the system means it is difficult to see a clear national direction.

The second is the lack of capacity and poor wellbeing of those delivering mental health support, reflecting: staff shortages in key professions,

*"There is a lack of focus on early support and intervention"*

such as educational psychology and children's psychologists; the lack of join-up between these professions; and reduced capacity of staff in universal services, such as schools or health visiting.

The final issue is the lack of focus on early support and intervention. Arguably, the orientation of the whole system – from where funding is directed to the targets that are set – incentivises a set of behaviours that prioritises specialist and complex treatment at the expense of earlier intervention and prevention.

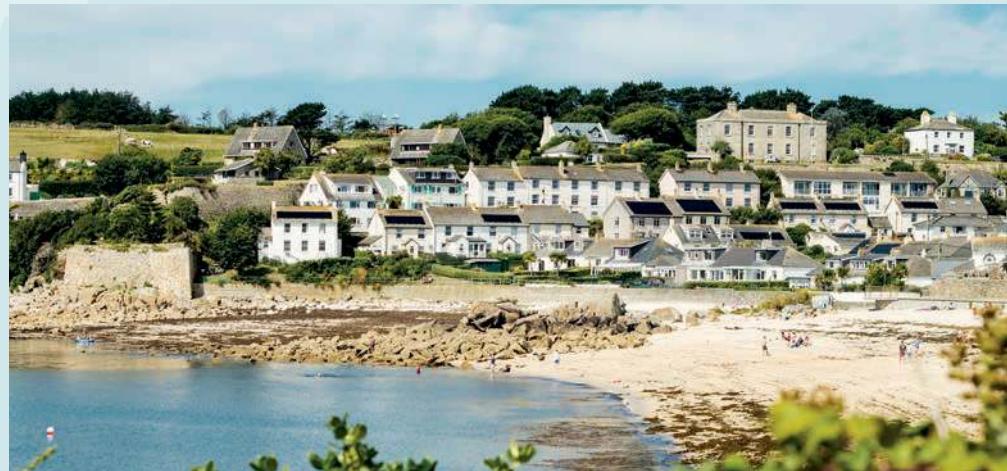
It is revealing that all the national targets that relate to children's mental health revolve around access to specialist treatment rather than outcomes experienced by children and young people. Where these were securely in place, local areas felt that they were able to deliver better and timelier access to support, earlier intervention and prevention, and more efficient use of resources.

Essentially, this is about working together to improve the mental health and emotional wellbeing of all children and young people by acting early to resolve issues before

they escalate, and by providing timely, accessible and joined-up care for those with more complex needs.

Those councils embracing these critical elements can – together with their partners – make sure all children and young people have the bright future they deserve.

**You can find out more about the research** by visiting [www.local.gov.uk/supporting-good-mental-health](http://www.local.gov.uk/supporting-good-mental-health) The eight councils that took part were Bedford Borough Council, the London Borough of Camden, Cornwall Council, Dorset Council, Hertfordshire County Council, the Council of the Isles of Scilly, Liverpool City Council, and Salford City Council



## A whole-community approach

**The Isles of Scilly, off the southwest tip of Cornwall, are constructing a different offer of support for children and young people, focused on preventing poor mental health from escalating and using the resources already available on the islands to provide help.**

In 2015, there were 18 young people, out of 420 children and young people on the islands, receiving child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). Not only was this a high proportion of young people given the small size of the population, but – because of the islands' location – young people had to fly to Cornwall every two weeks to attend appointments with a clinician, which was disruptive and gave little anonymity.

Lynn Plummer, the incoming Children and Family Services Manager, asked young people what would make a difference. The overwhelming reply was someone to talk to in school. With this in mind, the council decided to take a different, whole-community approach.

Staff across children's services and the archipelago's one school were trained in mental health first aid and emotional resilience. An experienced family support worker was also employed, and he and another member of school staff trained to become THRIVE practitioners. THRIVE is an approach to emotional and social resilience based on targeted interventions.

*"You need to be in the right place at the right time"*

The family support worker was critical in bringing about a change of culture in the school, and in developing the mental health and emotional resilience of families. "It's about being there every day, picking up on the little nuances that can make a difference," he says. "By hanging around the school gate at the beginning of the day, asking people if they are OK, you can see if someone's late or has slammed the car door. You need to make sure you're in the right place at the right time."

Monthly meetings champion a new, multi-agency way of working called Bloom, making better use of skills and resources. They provide

an opportunity to discuss a child or young person, putting their needs and that of their family at the centre and then deciding on a course of action that best fits their challenges, with specialist advice from CAMHS.

Bloom offers a different way of thinking about a child, providing early help to prevent the escalation of problems and reduce the need for a referral for treatment.

People are more trusting of children's services. By building a relationship with their health visitor or school nurse, they then feel supported through the referral process, rather than seeing it as something that is done to them. Today, there are only three young people accessing specialist CAMHS treatment on the Isles of Scilly.

# Apprenticeships: investing in staff



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

Councils have an impressive record of nurturing talent, with apprentice numbers up 10,000

**N**ational Apprenticeship Week (3-9 February) is always a highlight in the local government calendar.

It's a great time for us to come together to celebrate the work that council apprentices do up and down the country.

For an individual, a good apprenticeship offers the skills and experience to help them get into – or get on in – work. For an employer, it offers the opportunity to invest in their staff, address skills gaps and develop a new pipeline of talent by 'growing your own'.

For our residents, apprenticeships allow us to improve the way we deliver services and help get people in our communities back into work.

**i** Please visit [www.local.gov.uk/topics/employment-and-skills](http://www.local.gov.uk/topics/employment-and-skills) for more about the LGA's work on employment, skills and apprenticeships

Since the Government introduced the Apprenticeship Levy almost three years ago, it has not always been plain sailing for local government. Relevant apprenticeship standards often haven't been ready in a timely fashion, training provision isn't always consistent, and procurement is an ongoing challenge.

Despite this, many apprentices are flourishing, and councils have an impressive record of investing in and nurturing talent.

In 2018/19, local government created more than 16,000 apprenticeship starts – 10,000 more than we managed two years before and our second consecutive year of substantial growth. Four out of five councils had more apprentice starts than they'd had the year before, surpassing many expectations.

Councils have started apprentices on more than 140 standards, highlighting the wide range of services councils provide and the breadth of

apprenticeship qualifications now available. We've done all this despite the headcount of the sector falling by 8 per cent over the past two years – testament to local authorities' amazing ability to continue to adapt and deliver, whatever the circumstances.

Examples of innovation, good practice and the positive effect that apprentices have on their councils abound. Addressing skills gaps is a big priority for many councils, such as Thurrock, which is using apprenticeships to upskill its adult social care team, and Barnsley, which has used apprenticeships to develop a future leaders' programme, while Hampshire has led the way in working with its maintained schools to get apprentice teachers in place.

Other councils are using apprenticeships to open doors to help people back into work. In North Tyneside, the council has invested in pre-apprenticeship programmes to help looked-after children and care leavers into apprenticeships.

The London Borough of Camden has piloted part-time flexible apprenticeships to help parents return to the workplace, while Birmingham is demonstrating that apprenticeships are for anyone – no matter their age or position – with new starters and senior managers signed up to its programme.

The apprenticeships system is not perfect and there are still challenges to overcome – from trying to secure more flexibility on how levy funds are spent to finding a solution to the upcoming switch-off of the popular Level 2 Business Administration apprenticeship, which accounted for a quarter of all apprenticeship starts in local government in 2018.

This National Apprenticeship Week, however, we should all take a minute to appreciate the success of our apprentices, and the value they bring to each and every one of our councils.





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



# Business rates, reliefs and retention

**A**s we all know, business rates are an extremely important source of income for local government, accounting for around a quarter of all council spending power.

Collectively, councils currently keep half of the business rates collected in England, and this is shared to help councils that are less able to generate business rates.

This money is used to pay for vital local services, such as caring for older and disabled people, protecting children, fixing potholes and collecting bins. The remaining half goes to central government to redistribute as it sees fit.

The amount of business rates income kept by local government nationally is proposed to increase to 75 per cent from April 2021, with redistribution continuing across the sector. This is happening at the same time as central government funding to councils is being phased out.

As a result, funding for local services will be even more intrinsically linked with business rates – a source of funding where central government sets bills and most discounts and reliefs.

So it is imperative that the Government works closely with councils as part of its review of the business rates system. The impact on how local services are sustainably paid for must be a central consideration of the review.

Business rates are complex. Under the business rates retention system, local authorities have the opportunity to grow their business rates as a means of generating additional income. At the same time, this will have to be balanced with growing needs across the sector as a whole.

Maintaining this balance involves resetting business rates baselines (BRBs) regularly, but whether these will be full or partial resets has yet to be resolved.

Greater retention of business rates may come with additional responsibilities. But meanwhile, one of our key cost drivers – adult social care – is growing faster than business rates, and the review will need to address this. The business rates system needs to be modernised and improved – for example, to ensure sectors such as online businesses make a fair contribution. The review should also consider new sources of funding for local government, such as a tourism levy, an e-commerce levy and new local enterprise zones.

While it is right that a business can challenge its valuation, the sheer scale of appeals is heaping further

**The business rates review must take into account how the tax helps fund local services**

financial pressure on councils. More than one million businesses have challenged their business rates bill since 2010, with 55,000 appeals still to be decided and councils having to put billions aside to cover the financial risk and uncertainty. Tougher powers are also needed for councils to tackle business rates avoidance, which our recent survey found is costing local services £250 million a year (see p8).

Councils recognise the need to reform business rates, but this should not be at the expense of their own finances and funding for local services; government needs to guarantee it will compensate for any impacts.

With financial stability and long-term investment, councils can protect local services and work with the Government, businesses and other stakeholders to grow local economies and improve high streets.

Our communities cannot afford further financial uncertainty as one of the main methods of funding local services is dragged through years of debate and wrangling.

**i** See [www.local.gov.uk/topics/finance-and-business-rates](http://www.local.gov.uk/topics/finance-and-business-rates) for information about the LGA's work on local government finance



Weston-super-Mare

# Making the most of your heritage

Cultural activity brings a host of benefits but takes time and money



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

**H**as there ever been a more important time for councils to think about the local role of culture and heritage?

We know engagement in cultural activity brings with it a host of benefits, from its impact on educational outcomes, mental and physical health and social inclusion, to the way in which high-quality facilities boost economies, attract visitors, develop workforce skills and support regeneration.

We also know that investing in this activity takes time and money. At a time of increasing financial pressure and rising demand, we need to think more carefully about the role of cultural investment and how it shapes local

identity and economic futures.

Local government is one of the biggest single investors in arts, culture, tourism and heritage. As a sector, we spend more than £1 billion directly on culture and heritage, with roughly £650 million annually on libraries, and approximately £430 million on museums, heritage and the arts.

But that funding is under pressure. Our spending on culture and related services fell in real terms by 45 per cent in the nine years between 2009/10 and 2018/19. For every pound spent on culture and heritage in 2009/10, 61p was spent in 2018/19; for library services, the figure was 58p.

Cuts to wider council services also have a knock-on effect on culture and heritage. Planning departments have faced major budget reductions over the last nine years, and Historic



The LGA's annual culture and tourism conference takes place in Portsmouth from 2-3 March. For more information and to book your place, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/events](http://www.local.gov.uk/events)

England has highlighted some of the real challenges faced by the sector as a result of lost expertise in historic buildings.

The Government has to some extent recognised the scale of the challenge. In October 2019, it announced £250 million to be spent on cultural infrastructure, including £90 million for the Cultural Development Fund and £125 million for regional libraries and museums.

Its £700,000 heritage preservation campaign builds on earlier announcements of new high street heritage action zones and recognises the way in which preserving heritage sites can contribute to local economic priorities.

Long term, councils need a sustainable way of securing resources to invest in heritage. The LGA is arguing for a national conversation about a local tourism levy, and this call featured in our response to December's Queen's Speech.

Meanwhile, councils continue their work with communities and developers to explore the unique identity of their places – helping shape their future, promote community cohesion and encourage economic growth.

Some of this work will be featured at the LGA's annual culture and tourism conference in March. For example, North Somerset Council will be discussing how heritage can underpin place-making. Its adoption of Weston-

*"Local government is one of the biggest single investors in arts, culture, tourism and heritage"*

super-Mare as a conservation area, and of a shopfront design guide, supported by a shopfront enhancement grant scheme, has helped the town secure a £1.2 million high street heritage action zone to fund works over four years.

I am delighted to host the conference in my home town of Portsmouth, where we can illustrate the opportunities associated with heritage investment through some exciting projects, including the regeneration of Portsmouth Naval Dockyard, which has been brought back into cultural and economic use.

It is more important than ever that leaders in the sector are able to come together to share best practice and inspire one another. We look forward to welcoming you to the conversation in Portsmouth next month.



Councillor Ian Stephens is Chairman of the LGA's Fire Services Management Committee

# Inspectors call for fire reforms

## Proposed changes to governance could confuse the democratic accountability of local fire services

In January, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) published its first State of Fire and Rescue report. The report is the culmination of the first cycle of inspection of all 45 fire and rescue authorities in England.

The report reaffirmed that the key strengths of the fire and rescue services lie in the dedication of the staff who respond effectively to all kinds of emergencies to help save lives and prevent fires.

The public has great respect for all staff, both firefighters and support staff, and positive collaboration between services can be seen in notable examples, such as 15 fire and rescue services working side by side to deal with the risk of flooding at Whaley Bridge in Derbyshire in the summer of 2019.

However, the report also highlights the need for sector reform, in the face of what the inspectorate calls sporadic improvements; a lack of consensus as to what the role of firefighters and fire services is; and a lack of clarity around operational leadership.

On a more practical level, the report sheds light on out-of-date working practices, including a reliance on paper-based systems and a lack of central strategy around digital and IT improvements.

Most concerning in the inspectorate's report was the lack of diversity and a toxic, bullying culture in some services.

The inspectorate made four recommendations. First, that the Home Office should precisely determine the role of fire and rescue services and the role of firefighters who work in them, and second, that the sector should consider whether the current pay negotiation machinery requires reform.

Both these recommendations are based on the inspectorate's conclusion that delays in the resolution of discussions on the role of the firefighter and longstanding pay disputes are a hindrance to the modernisation of the service.

The third recommendation is that the Home Office should consider the case for legislating to give

*"We want to work with the Government to help it understand the challenges facing fire and rescue authorities"*

chief fire officers operational independence in a similar manner to police chief constables.

However, there is no evidence from the inspections – which

did not look at governance – to support the recommendation to give chief fire officers operational independence. In fact, it would only serve to confuse the democratic accountability of the fire and rescue authorities and could lead to important decisions, such as whether to close a fire station, being made by officials rather than a local community's elected representatives through the fire authority.

The final recommendation is that the sector should develop a code of ethics for fire and rescue services, which should be adopted by every service.

We want to work with the Government to help it understand the challenges facing fire and rescue authorities, and how it can use the Budget in March to ensure they are properly resourced and funded.

However, the report's recommendations will not help individual fire and rescue authorities and services drive the changes they need to make. Unnecessary tinkering with the governance of the fire service and pay negotiation machinery would distract authorities from keeping residents safe and improving the quality of service they receive.



# Investing in energy efficiency

## Declaring a climate emergency means taking the necessary action



Councillor **Clare Coghill** (Lab) is Leader of the London Borough of Waltham Forest

**W**e need to change, not the climate, and the dialogue around the climate is changing.

In Waltham Forest, we have ambitions to be the greenest, most sustainable borough in London, and our track record shows that, with strong leadership and a bold approach, communities, local businesses and authorities can achieve real change.

In April 2019, we announced a climate emergency and have since assembled a Climate Emergency Commission – the first in London – made up of independent industry experts, and chaired by Syed Ahmed, from Energy for London, and Lucy Padfield, from Ramboll, an engineering, design and consultancy company.

Using evidence gathered through our largest ever public engagement, the commission will make recommendations for how we, as a borough, can work together to tackle this huge global issue in a local context.

In Waltham Forest, a bold approach is paying dividends. The Enjoy Waltham Forest programme – road and public realm improvements to promote walking, cycling and sustainable transport – has resulted in 27km of segregated cycle lanes being built, cycle usage increasing by 103 per cent, and car usage falling by 7 per cent. The number of Waltham Forest households exposed to dangerous levels of nitrogen dioxide ( $\text{NO}_2$ ) reduced from 58,000 to 6,300, and children born in the borough since 2013 are expected to live six weeks longer. These hard-fought improvements were vigorously

challenged by residents and businesses alike at the time, long before general public opinion moved toward agreeing that drastic action needed to be taken.

We have invested more than £2.4 million, through the Salix Recycling Fund, on energy efficiency measures in our corporate estate over the past decade, giving us an unprecedented opportunity to deliver huge carbon dioxide ( $\text{CO}_2$ ) savings – 2,721 tonnes a year.

Using the recycling fund model, we have delivered 33 energy efficiency projects delivering environmental benefits and £500,000 of annual savings. Installing more than 1,000 solar panels on council properties, retrofitting more than 10,000 council homes, and reducing gas consumption by 25 per cent – and electricity usage by 10 per cent – have contributed to carbon emissions falling by almost 35 per cent since 2005.

Other measures include: divesting our pension funds from oil, gas or coal stocks, the first government body to do so; the creation of a trial ‘low plastic zone’ in one of our town centres, to encourage small businesses to move away from ecologically damaging single-use plastics; and a tree-planting programme that has resulted in 13,000 new trees being planted since 2005, taking our total to more than 50,000.

Practically, it’s about making sure the green agenda underpins council decision-making, programmes and policies, and balancing the different priorities, including regulations, finance and residents’ needs. It is about tenacious leadership and a willingness to be disruptive to make a meaningful difference.

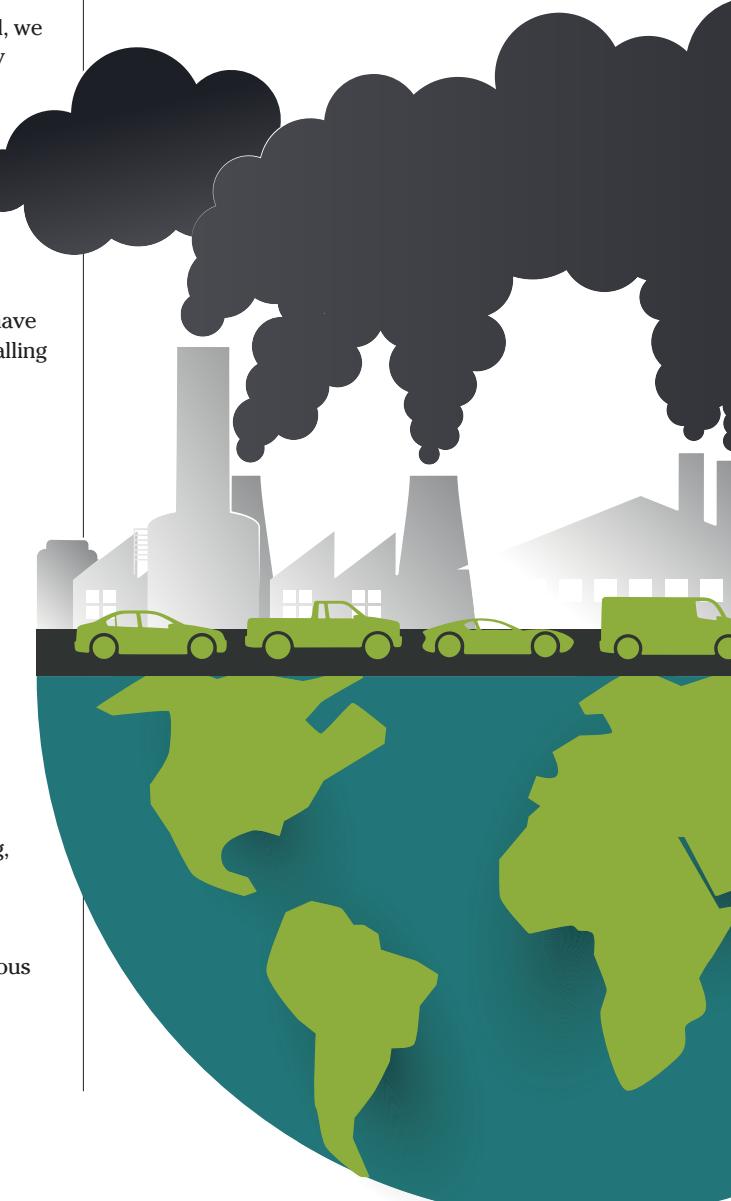
It’s all well and good declaring

a climate emergency – but what really matters is taking the necessary action. We can’t operate in isolation: communities need to be engaged and buy into the response, and borough boundaries must be blurred.

The Government must give practical support, not just wise words, to help councils, businesses, community groups and residents tackle this issue – before it is too late. We need to change, not the climate.



For more information, please visit [walthamforest.gov.uk/cec](http://walthamforest.gov.uk/cec)





**Greg Marsden** is Professor of Transport Governance at the Institute for Transport Studies at the University of Leeds

In 2019, the policy debate on carbon reduction changed for good, with the publication of the Committee on Climate Change's report Net Zero, and rising citizen interest in climate change through the school climate strikes and Extinction Rebellion protests.

Most UK local authorities have now declared climate emergencies. It seems to be accepted, to an unprecedented degree, that to achieve the net zero goals will require action across all sectors and areas of the country.

This is a particular challenge for transport, the largest sector for

# Transport and the climate emergency

emissions in the UK economy. Given the scale of the challenge, the LGA has commissioned work from the Institute for Transport Studies at the University of Leeds, to summarise key policy positions and options for change for its members.

Due to report in late June 2020, the project is asking what could and should local authorities do to move from the declaration of emergencies to taking rapid action. The project will focus on a three-pronged approach, commonly known as 'Avoid, Shift, Improve'.

'Avoid' actions are those that reduce the amount of movement necessary to participate in daily life. The average distance travelled by a UK resident has declined by 9 per cent since 2002, even in the absence of any policies to support this. The reductions are biggest in the wealthiest parts of society. There is scope to accelerate this further through measures such as integrating transport and land use, and providing more services online.

'Shift' actions are councils' bread-and-butter activities, as they seek to encourage more walking, cycling and public transport use. These fulfil multiple policy goals of air quality, congestion reduction and social inclusion, as well as cutting carbon. However, the scale of the carbon challenge means we need to rapidly accelerate bus service provision, not just halt its decline – and authorities with little tradition of cycling in their area will need to change their game quickly.

'Improve' actions are about encouraging a shift to less-polluting transportation for every mile driven. Electrification is a key aspect here, with authorities taking the lead on providing the right charge-point

## Councils can help reduce transport emissions

infrastructure to encourage the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs).

The project is looking to provide briefing notes that help accelerate the uptake of the most necessary and newest policies where there are significant risks. It will also identify places that have adopted early, to share learning on implementation. There is no 'one size fits all' set of solutions and the project will factor this into its analysis.

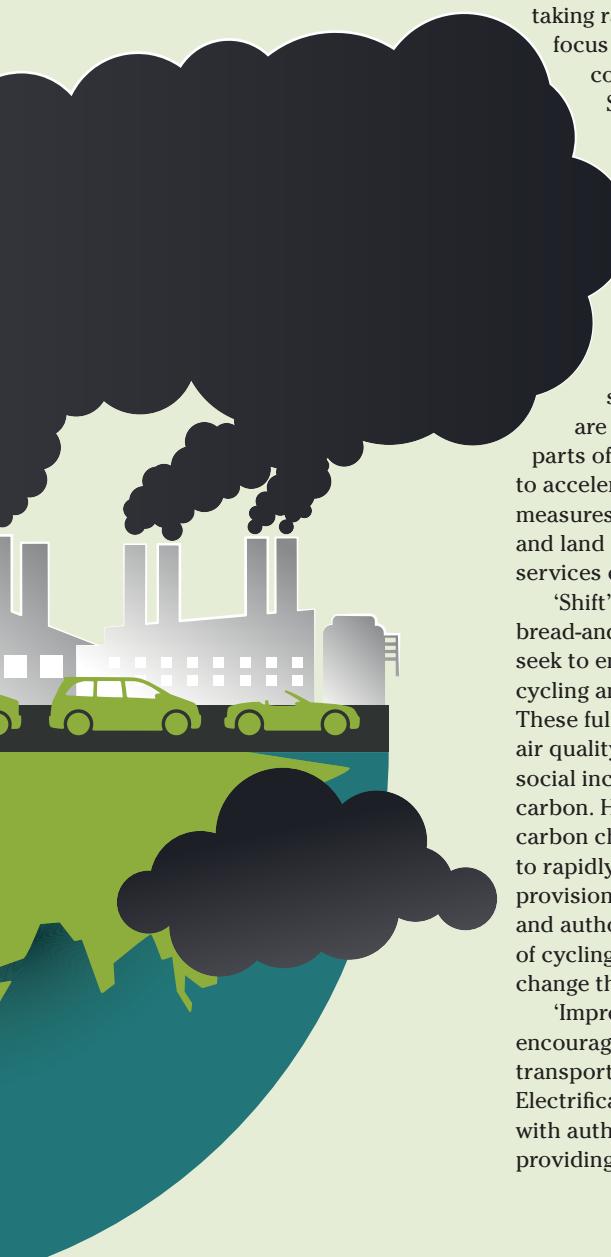
While the project is heavily focused on what local authorities can do, it will also consider what might be required of central government. Despite the emphasis on EV adoption, for example, recent data shows that 37 sports utility vehicles were sold for every one battery electric vehicle in 2018, with the gap widening rapidly.

Vehicle purchase is an area over which local authorities have little control, but what happens is central to whether they can make progress against their climate emergency commitments.

As attention builds towards COP26 in Glasgow in November, this project will be an important resource that identifies how local government can make good on its ambitions for carbon reduction in transport while improving the health, wellbeing and prosperity of communities.



**Professor Marsden is an expert in climate and energy policy in the transport sector.** For more information, please visit [www.environment.leeds.ac.uk/transport](http://www.environment.leeds.ac.uk/transport). The LGA is holding transport workshops on 25 February in London and 12 March in Leeds – email [andrew.jones@local.gov.uk](mailto:andrew.jones@local.gov.uk) to take part. The LGA's conference, 'In charge? Councils' role in electric vehicle charging', takes place in London on 24 March, see [www.local.gov.uk/events](http://www.local.gov.uk/events)





Councillor **Richard Roberts** (Con) is Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care at Hertfordshire County Council

# Recruitment and retention

**Increasing care workers' pay will have a positive impact on those working in care and those who need it**

**S**ocial care matters, and all of us working in local government have a key role to play in celebrating the contribution our care workforce makes to the communities in which we live.

In Hertfordshire, around 30,000 people care for our older and disabled people, helping them to live as happy, independent and fulfilling lives as possible.

This is a highly skilled workforce, there's no doubt about it – and, without them, the whole health and social care system would grind to a halt. Like many other places, however, we struggle to recruit and retain people in the sector.

Alongside the traditional barriers such as poor public perception, especially in comparison to the NHS, and negative press, we have our proximity to London, very high levels of employment, and some massive retailers on our doorstep. It's a testing situation, but we're up for the challenge.

This year, we've taken the decision, subject to approval, to put the extra £12 million we will generate from implementing the 2 per cent social care precept increase into the pockets of our care workforce.

We're aiming for an hourly rate for our home care workers of at least £10.55 (the current level of the London Living Wage) and up to £12.50 an hour. For us it's a no-brainer; an 'invest to save' decision, that we believe will have a positive impact on those working in care and those who need it.

We need to draw more people into home care because that's where we're



**Support Worker  
Samantha  
with John**

*"We need to draw more people into home care because that's where we're feeling the most pressure"*

feeling the most pressure. Roles in home care are hugely challenging, requiring a real mix of determination, empathy and integrity, and we need to make sure that wages properly reflect this.

It's the latest in a series of policy decisions we've made to give those working in social care a better deal. In 2014, we launched the Hertfordshire Care Standard, which signalled a commitment to pay more competitive wages and provide meaningful training and career development opportunities. And our award-winning Good Care campaign shines a light on social care through a series of events and awareness-raising activities.

It takes a special person to care,

and we hear time and again that our care workforce choose and remain in this job because it's a vocation, and they want to make a difference. We want to send a clear message to everyone living in Hertfordshire that we hear this, and that we truly value the work they do.

Our hope is that the extra pay will help us keep the great people we already have, encourage those who have moved into other sectors to come back, and persuade people who may not have been financially able to consider care as a career in the past to come and join us.

Social care touches on almost all our lives – and if it doesn't now, it will do at some point in the future. Remember, our ageing population includes our relatives, our friends and our neighbours.

So, it is vital that we continue to prioritise it, celebrate it and keep pushing the Government to find a long-term sustainable solution for its funding.

**i** For more information about how Hertfordshire County Council plans to use the social care council tax precept to reward its care staff, please email Iain MacBeath, Director of Adult Care Services, [ACS.comms@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:ACS.comms@hertfordshire.gov.uk)



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

In his first speech as Prime Minister, Boris Johnson spoke of “levelling up” society. This will require a renewed focus on tackling the health inequalities that exist between and within local authority areas.

It’s a stark statistic that almost 20 extra years of healthy life are enjoyed by those in the most prosperous areas of the country, compared with those in the most deprived.

We know that those living in the most deprived communities experience poorer mental health, higher rates of smoking and greater levels of obesity than the more affluent. They spend more years in ill health and die sooner.

Reducing health inequalities is an economic and social challenge, as well as a moral one. Since 2013, local government has been responsible for public health in England and has special responsibilities to tackle health inequalities, as well as improve the public’s health overall.

Local authorities and their public health teams have been on a journey together to understand how we can use councils’ traditional functions in conjunction with our newly acquired public health expertise to maximise our contribution to closing the unjust health inequalities gap.

Of course, central government has to play its part in reducing poverty and breaking the link between deprivation, ill health and lower life expectancy. But there is much that local government can do by reducing harm from what we know as the ‘social determinants of health’ – those factors in people’s social, economic and built environment that play the greatest part in determining how long, and with what quality of life, they will live.

When we focus on the social determinants of health – rather than the medical cause of some particular disease, or what health and care services are available locally – we see that local government services are health services.

It is no exaggeration to say that, without local government, adults and

# Levelling up

## Council services such as housing and public spaces are key to reducing health inequalities

children would die sooner, would live in worse conditions, would lead lives that made them ill more often, and would experience less emotional, mental and physical wellbeing than they do now.

Council services and support – in areas such as housing, skills, employment, transport, parks, leisure centres and public spaces – all have a part to play in deciding our wider public health.

Nonetheless, despite overall gains in life expectancy across all socio-economic groups, health inequalities persist – and may even be increasing – and there is always more that local government can do.

Addressing the widening gap in health inequalities entails lifting our gaze from the immediate concerns of pressures on the NHS and social care, or unhealthy lifestyles, and focusing on the causes of ill health.

It starts with the nature of early child development, continues through school and employment, and ends with the conditions in which older people live out their lives.

Ahead of next month’s Budget, the LGA will continue to make the case that every pound invested in council-run services will help relieve pressure on other public services, such as the NHS.

If we are to achieve the stated aims and ambitions in the Government’s Prevention Green Paper, to make sure people are able to live for longer in good health, councils need adequate and sustainable long-term funding for their public health budgets.

**“Local government services are health services”**





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

If you had seven minutes to share your most exciting idea with the world – what would it be?

Local authorities today are facing some of the biggest societal challenges of our generation. Whether they are tackling climate change, building homes for the future, addressing the social care crisis or working to deliver sustainable, inclusive growth for our places, councils are at the forefront of developing local solutions to global problems.

Now, more than ever, it is important to shine a light on the boldest, most innovative thinking, and learn from the brightest minds in our sector and beyond.

The LGA provides an opportunity for councils and partner organisations to come together and share their pioneering ideas as part of the Innovation Zone – a vibrant, creative space and programme within the LGA's annual conference and exhibition (30 June to 2 July in Harrogate).

The zone is a sector-led

# Your ideas in the spotlight

It's time for councils to share their innovative work on tackling local issues and improving outcomes for residents, at the LGA's annual conference

improvement success story and an example of councils continuously learning from one another and giving back to their communities.

In 2019, councillors and officers from across the UK shared some of their most innovative thinking during our very successful Open Mic session. This year, we want to build on this and create a new experience in the Innovation Zone. We want to share your stories of success and failure; ideas that you've tried and tested or those that are at their inception; ideas for the present and ideas for the future.

Through our new 'Spotlight on Ideas' sessions, the zone will provide a platform to those in the sector who don't usually have one – the doers, the mavericks, and the outsiders. You will have seven minutes to sell your idea – the bolder the better – and convince the audience how your innovation

could create real change and progress.

We will be using an interactive online platform to generate an open conversation that will involve the audience during the nine, seven-minute, energetic speaker sessions.

As well as these, our popular interactive sessions will continue to be a space for councils to share their most innovative work and projects that tackle local issues and improve outcomes for residents. During these practical and lively sessions taking place over three days, we encourage participants to bring their innovations to life through demonstrations, honest discussions and informal debates.

Previous examples have included a robotics session from Southend-on-Sea Borough Council, where Pepper the Robot is enriching the lives of people living in care homes (pictured); a perspective from Portsmouth on using nudge theory methodology to improve air quality; and the story of civic experiments from the Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics, Boston, US.

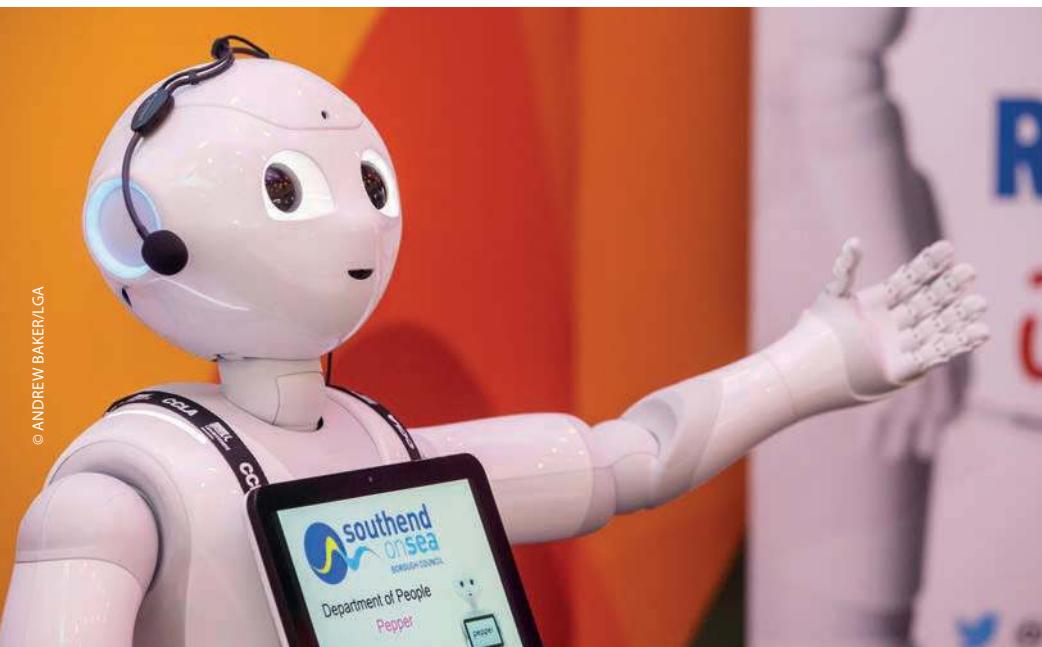
Last year, Sheffield City Council shared their Placement Game – a training toolkit and board game designed by children in care to try to improve placements for all children in care. And Bracknell Forest Council and Dogs for Good invited Lexi the dog to help demonstrate the benefits of animal-assisted intervention in mainstream social care provision.

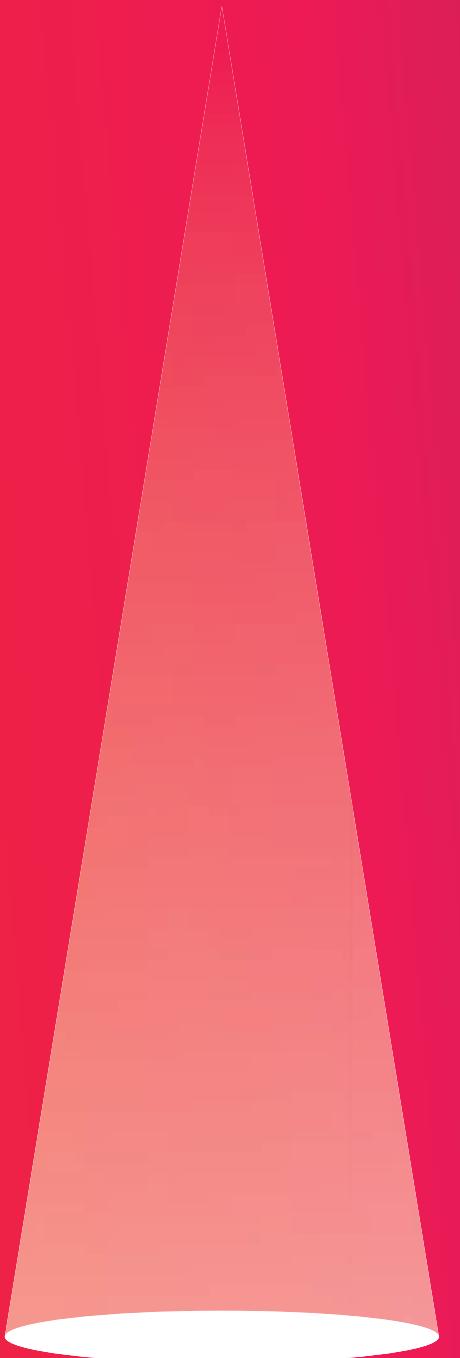
So, this is your opportunity to share your innovative thinking. We want ideas that can create ripples of positive change across the country, inspire fresh thinking, and challenge and generate new solutions to old problems.

Submit your applications by Friday 21 February for a chance to take part in this fantastic festival of ideas.



**For more information about the Innovation Zone or to submit your ideas, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/innovation-zone-2020](http://www.local.gov.uk/innovation-zone-2020) or email [innovation@local.gov.uk](mailto:innovation@local.gov.uk)**





# SPOTLIGHT ON IDEAS

## SHOWCASE YOUR PROJECT AT THE LGA'S INNOVATION ZONE

**The Local Government Association's Innovation Zone at our annual conference is a vibrant, creative space for councils and other organisations to showcase and discuss how they are using innovation to address local issues.**

This year we are looking for innovative projects to be showcased, as well as engaging speakers for our **SPOTLIGHT ON IDEAS** sessions. To include the latest, most exciting examples from across the country we need your input. If you are interested in showcasing your work, please apply on our website by **21 February 2020** providing brief information on:

- your innovative project
- the difference it has made
- the savings the project has delivered
- its relevance to other councils.

If you are interested in becoming one of our SPOTLIGHT ON IDEAS speakers, please submit a two-minute video.

To apply for a place visit  
[www.local.gov.uk/innovation-zone](http://www.local.gov.uk/innovation-zone)



**2020**

**LGA ANNUAL  
CONFERENCE  
AND EXHIBITION**

**30 JUNE – 2 JULY  
HARROGATE  
#LGACONF20**

# 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.

This keynote annual event features a wealth of expert speakers, participatory workshop sessions and opportunities to network with speakers, delegates and exhibitors from across the public health spectrum.

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.

## Delegate feedback from the 2019 event:

**"The agenda was excellent"**

**"We have identified this as the core event for us around public health due to the people attending"**

**"So many good presentations"**

**"Pertinent, timely, good quality, affordable"**

## Confirmed speakers include:

**Professor Chris Whitty,**

Chief Medical Officer for England

**Jo Bibby,**

Director of Health, Health Foundation

**Duncan Selbie,**

Chief Executive, Public Health England

**Tim Loughton MP,**

East Worthing and Shoreham MP  
and Chair of First 1001 Days APPG

**Anna Quigley,**

Research Director, Ipsos Mori

**Michael Wood,**

Head of Health Economic Partnerships,  
NHS Confederation

**Professor Chloe Orkin,**

Consultant Physician, Barts Health NHS Trust

**Dr Gary Fuller,**

Senior Lecturer – Air Quality Measurement,  
Kings College London

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



# COMMENT



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

## Budgeting decisions

**During the budget-setting period, county leaders and their cabinet colleagues debate some of the most difficult choices they make all year.**

Where can efficiencies be secured or service reductions made? By how much to raise council tax and whether to levy the social care precept? What capital expenditure fulfils strategic objectives and what impact will our decisions have on residents and our staff?

While this year has still been a challenge, the burden has been lessened by the Government's funding announcements for councils last summer, which have now been officially locked into the local government finance settlement ahead of its ratification by Parliament.

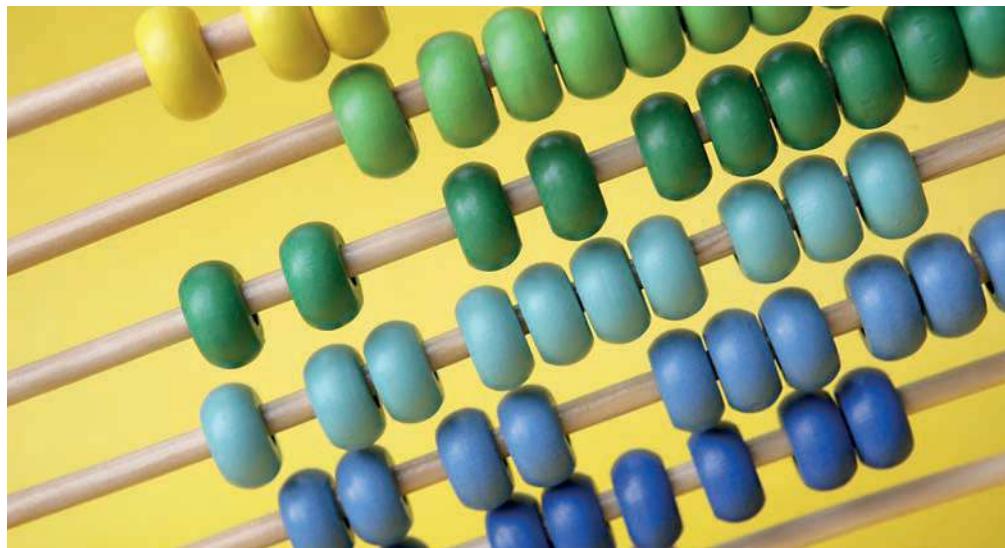
At the time of the announcement, the County Councils Network (CCN) was at the forefront of calling for social care grant funding to be 'rolled over' and for additional resource.

CCN said at the time that this intervention by the Government was hugely significant and made real inroads in bringing down the overall funding gap facing councils.

Of course, each council has its own individual circumstances and priorities. For Hertfordshire, this extra funding and the continuation of the social care precept will allow us to invest in stabilising the local care market – particularly the retention and recruitment of frontline care workers (see p18).

Yet, even if all county authorities in the CCN membership raised their council tax and precept by the maximum allowed, they still face a funding shortfall of £1.3 billion – and over the course of this Parliament, a cumulative gap of £7.7 billion.

Therefore, a focus for CCN will be advocacy ahead of the Government's March Budget. The network will be advocating additional funding in the Budget for all councils, alongside encouraging the Government to publish



its allocations of the £500 million highways maintenance fund. This needs to reflect CCN's analysis, published in January, which shows huge regional disparities in what councils can spend on road maintenance and capital projects.

At the very least, next month's Budget should signal a sustainable settlement for local authorities in the long term. With the future for councils remaining uncertain, and question marks over whether local council tax is a sustainable way of funding public services such as social care, the Government can set out an ambitious funding envelope for local government in the forthcoming Spending Review.

The Fair Funding Review will remain a key priority for CCN, not least after Local Government Minister Luke Hall confirmed the Government's intention to implement the review. We will support ministers in realising the review's revisions to the way in which funding is allocated

**"There are question marks over whether local council tax is a sustainable way of funding public services such as social care"**

ahead of budget setting for 2021/22.

Of course, we recognise that simply shouting on the sidelines for more money isn't going to cut the mustard with this Government. We need to make a persuasive case that investing in councils will create real and tangible change for our communities.

In a new report from Grant Thornton, we will show the great work carried out by county authorities in 'place-shaping' and economic growth – and how much more they can do with fresh powers and resource.

We have a supportive set of ministers, and it is the sector's job to make its arguments as compelling as possible – demonstrating that we can play a major part in the 'levelling up' agenda.



**For more information about the County Councils Network, please visit [www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk](http://www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk)**

## Labour at a crossroads



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

This year's Labour Local Government Conference, in Nottingham on 8 February, is one of the most important we've held in years.

Our party is at a crossroads, and the result of the leadership election will determine whether Labour aspires to be a serious party of government again.

The reaction from the candidates to questions from councillors at our hustings about their view of Labour in local government will also signal whether they understand the new relationship of respect that we deserve.

There are already positive signs that candidates are eager to listen and learn from

local councillors, and some have already started to contact councillors to outline how they intend to work with us. We are working hard to ensure every candidate understands that they must respect and trust Labour councillors and local councils, and that they truly understand the vital importance of councillors to our party's future.

The Tories have their own challenges, of course – and their first major test is coming from the 'Fair Funding' Review, which threatens to demolish their claim to be 'levelling up' all areas.

The LGA Labour Group's analysis of figures published by the LGA has revealed the true impact of the review, with hundreds of millions of pounds in adult social care funding set to be funnelled from metropolitan councils like Stoke-on-Trent and Rotherham towards shire counties.

Overall, Labour-controlled councils would lose a total of £327 million, while Tory councils gain £298 million.

Thirty-seven new Tory MPs – more than 70 per cent of Conservative gains at the 2019 General Election – represent communities that are set to lose out, including the vast majority of the new so-called 'red wall' MPs.

These shifts are predicted to be the thin end of the wedge, with much greater funding transfers in core foundation funding and children's social care likely to emerge from the Fair Funding Review.

Let's hope that our challenge makes Prime Minister Boris Johnson think again, or those MPs will have to decide between standing up for their communities or prioritising their own careers.

**"Every leadership candidate... must understand the importance of councillors to the party's future"**



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

## Improving building safety

More than two and a half years after 72 people lost their lives in the inquiry into the Grenfell Tower fire has started its second phase, looking at how the building came to be covered in flammable cladding during its refurbishment.

Ahead of the inquiry restarting, Housing, Communities and Local Government Secretary Robert Jenrick announced a package of measures to improve building safety.

These include a new regulator based in the Health and Safety Executive; support from government to help councils develop ways of enforcing remediation works where building owners have not set out clear plans; and announcing the Government's intention to lower the building height at which sprinklers are required and combustible materials are banned.

The LGA has long argued that height is a crude determinant of fire risk, and that

building safety reforms need to protect residents in all vulnerable buildings, such as hospitals, residential schools and care homes – something ministers appear to have now accepted.

Councils and fire and rescue services must be given a leading role in ensuring any new building safety system works, and the enforcement powers and funding they need to ensure dangerous cladding systems are removed from buildings.

**"Councils and fire and rescue services must be given a leading role in ensuring any new building safety system works"**

Lord Porter, my predecessor as LGA Chairman, and LGA officers and colleagues continue to work tirelessly on this issue, to help ensure that all our local residents are safe – and feel safe – in their own homes.

Meanwhile, as *first* was going to press, the LGA was making its submission to government on behalf of local authorities ahead of the Budget on 11 March.

We continue to make the case that every pound spent on local services is a good investment that saves taxpayers' money and reduces demand for other public services.

Adult social care is a case in point, with better provision reducing pressure on the NHS. We are looking forward to seeing the Prime Minister's plan for solving the social care crisis, which has been promised for this year.





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

## Support for new 'local' MPs

The General Election saw the election of 107 new Conservative MPs, 33 of whom were also local councillors, including some prominent figures in local government such as Cllr David Simmonds, our former LGA Deputy Chairman (see p9).

The demolition of the 'red wall' means that the newly elected MPs come from all parts of the country, ranging from Great Grimsby to Truro and Falmouth, from Sedgefield to North Devon, and many places in between.

The election of a majority Conservative Government, and of so many new MPs who have served as councillors, provides the LGA's Conservative Group with a unique opportunity to build relationships with a key section of the parliamentary party, and I was therefore delighted to host a reception for Conservative MPs and Peers in the House of Commons last month.

The meeting was co-hosted by Andrew Lewer MP, the former Leader of Derbyshire County Council and one of our LGA Vice-Presidents. Andrew took the opportunity to highlight the close partnership working between the LGA's Conservative Group and our parliamentarians, something that I reiterated in my own conversations with the MPs and Peers who attended.

**"The election of so many new MPs who were councillors provides a unique opportunity to build relationships"**

The combination of a majority Conservative Government and the fact that we are still the largest party in local government provides a great opportunity for us to work together to secure the best possible outcomes for our communities, and we will do all that we can to support our parliamentarians, old and new, throughout 2020 and beyond.

## Certainty needed on public health funding

As I write this, councils have been left waiting for a record time for national government to tell us how much funding we will get to tackle child obesity, smoking, sexually transmitted infections, and drug and alcohol misuse in our communities.

**"The ad-hoc, short-termist way national government announces funding for local services makes it impossible to plan ahead"**

These are just some of the vital preventative public health services councils are unable to plan for. Year after year, we get left in the dark about what we will get – and this year is the worst ever.

This dithering means we are unable to plan ahead for how and where we can spend money and allocate resources, leading to uncertainty about vital prevention services such as tackling teenage pregnancy, excessive alcohol consumption, and physical inactivity.

It is impossible to plan how we will deliver services to protect the health of some of our most vulnerable residents over the next 12 months. The Government must stop this uncertainty when funding public services.

Hopefully, by the time you read this, the funding will have been announced, but it is a good example of why we need multi-year funding settlements across local government. We have been promised such settlements year after year, and still do not have them.

Deadlines pass and nothing is said. This is no way to run a government, let alone a country.

The ad-hoc, short-termist way national government announces funding for local services creates major challenges for the sector and makes it impossible to plan ahead and put in place good preventative services.

So a plea to government: don't leave us hanging by a thread.

## Best practice on the climate emergency

Since the LGA declared a climate emergency last July, we have been collating best practice from councils and have set up a climate change 'hub' of resources (see [www.local.gov.uk/climate-change](http://www.local.gov.uk/climate-change)).

Work around the country is gathering pace and it was inspiring to see many of you as I opened the LGA's first climate emergency conference in January.

The urgency to tackle climate change was well outlined, as was the need to include the whole life impact of what we use, not just the part as it passes through the council, or indeed through the UK.

The irony of reducing a council's own carbon footprint while giving permission for huge numbers of houses and tarmac has yet to be resolved, but many councils are already rewriting local plans, challenging the rate and types of housing built, and enabling new pocket housing with high levels of insulation.

At the European Local Government

**"Many councils are already rewriting local plans, challenging the rate and types of housing built"**

conference in Orléans, there was a commitment to work collaboratively to tackle the global targets we share. The European Green Deal is coming forward and we will be taking your views to the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR).

I represent all 100,000 local authorities of Europe as the CEMR's Environment Spokesperson. Let's see what we can do in our own patches and, working with others, across the globe to stem the crisis we face.

Our free LGA Independent Group conference on the climate emergency is on 14 February. Do come along, and also respond to our short survey on what's happening in your area (see [www.local.gov.uk/lga-independent](http://www.local.gov.uk/lga-independent) for both).



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



**Tracey Robbins** is Head of UK Delivery at Eden Project Communities

# Cupcakes and community cohesion

**Community connection, cohesion and loneliness are high on the public agenda, making it critical to bring people together informally.**

In November 2019, research found that 48.5 million people in the UK think life feels more uncertain now than five years ago, citing environmental, economic and political factors.

We know community is important, especially when life is uncertain; being neighbourly and feeling part of a community is good for our wellbeing, happiness and even for our economy. We need to breathe vitality back into our communities, but how?

The Big Lunch, the UK's biggest annual get together for neighbours, has campaigned for neighbourly connection for more than 10 years. Now six million people of all faiths, ages, ethnicities and backgrounds join The Big Lunch each year, sharing food and conversation and getting to know each other better. Evidence suggests this simple act of friendship is a step that helps communities to thrive.

Behind the cupcakes and bunting, there is a wide ranging and lasting impact. Last year, 4.5 million people said they felt less lonely because of their Big Lunch, 4.8 million said they felt a stronger sense of belonging, and 72 per cent felt more confident about getting involved in other community activities.

As budget cuts force local authorities to devolve responsibilities, catalysing connections will help neighbourhoods respond.

Even better news, a whopping 98 per cent felt more communities should hold a Big Lunch – surely that's a recommendation any council can get behind!

Council support is vital to the spread of Big Lunch magic to their communities and it doesn't need to cost a lot. There are two really simple ways a council can help:

- spread the word about The Big Lunch to your residents this year with our free downloadable council toolkit



Neighbours at Sneinton Big Lunch in Nottingham



Big Lunch after the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012.

She explains: "It was such a joy to see cohesion happening in our borough – through something as simple as residents getting together to hold Big Lunch events. We got behind the 2012 street parties because of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, but now it's become an important part of our annual calendar."

"Residents wanted it to continue and so do we, as we know that Big Lunches have the power to bring diverse groups of people together – which supports our community cohesion strategy."

The Big Lunch is 6-7 June 2020. We're also working closely with VE Day 75 this year for those who wish to hold their street party celebrations in May and beyond.

**i** Find out more online at [www.thebiglunch.com/councils](http://www.thebiglunch.com/councils) or email Tracey at [trobbins@edenproject.com](mailto:trobbins@edenproject.com) if you'd like to chat about how to bring The Big Lunch to your area



# Improving representation in council chambers



**Councillor Andrew Morgan** is Leader of the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)

## I, like you, believe passionately in the power of local government in our communities.

Having represented my ward on the council in Rhondda Cynon Taf since 2004, I have seen first-hand the difference that our local services can make in people's daily lives. It is exactly that sense of wanting to change people's lives for the better that attracts us all to stand for election as councillors in the first place, regardless of the colour of our rosettes.

It is no secret the pressures that councils have had to experience because of swingeing cuts over the past decade. As we all know, essential local services are integral to keeping people well and away from hospital waiting rooms, and it is crucial they receive the investment they need.

As the new Leader of the Welsh Local Government Association, I was delighted to hear the news that local government in Wales will this year receive its best funding settlement in 12 years. Although the 4.3 per cent boost doesn't cover the entirety of next year's £285 million funding black hole, it is a very welcome step change from Welsh Government and shows a commitment to our public services.

I and my fellow leaders will look forward to continuing to work in partnership with ministers to ensure that we can further build on that commitment.

Despite the ever-present shadow of austerity in recent years, councils have not stood still and have reformed and transformed their services for the modern age.

We have also recently seen a wide-ranging package of proposals for council reform as part of a new Bill introduced by the Minister for Housing and Local Government, Julie James AM, to the Senedd, many of which the WLGA has welcomed.



For more information about the WLGA, please visit [www.wlga.gov.uk](http://www.wlga.gov.uk)

Some parts of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill have been developed in partnership with local government through a working group chaired by Derek Vaughan CBE, and leaders have appreciated the minister's commitment to co-producing and partnership.

The proposal to allow 16 and 17-year-olds the right to vote at local elections has been particularly welcomed by the WLGA. Such a progressive move would be absolutely vital in order to improve engagement with residents in our

**"It is crucial that essential local services receive the investment they need"**

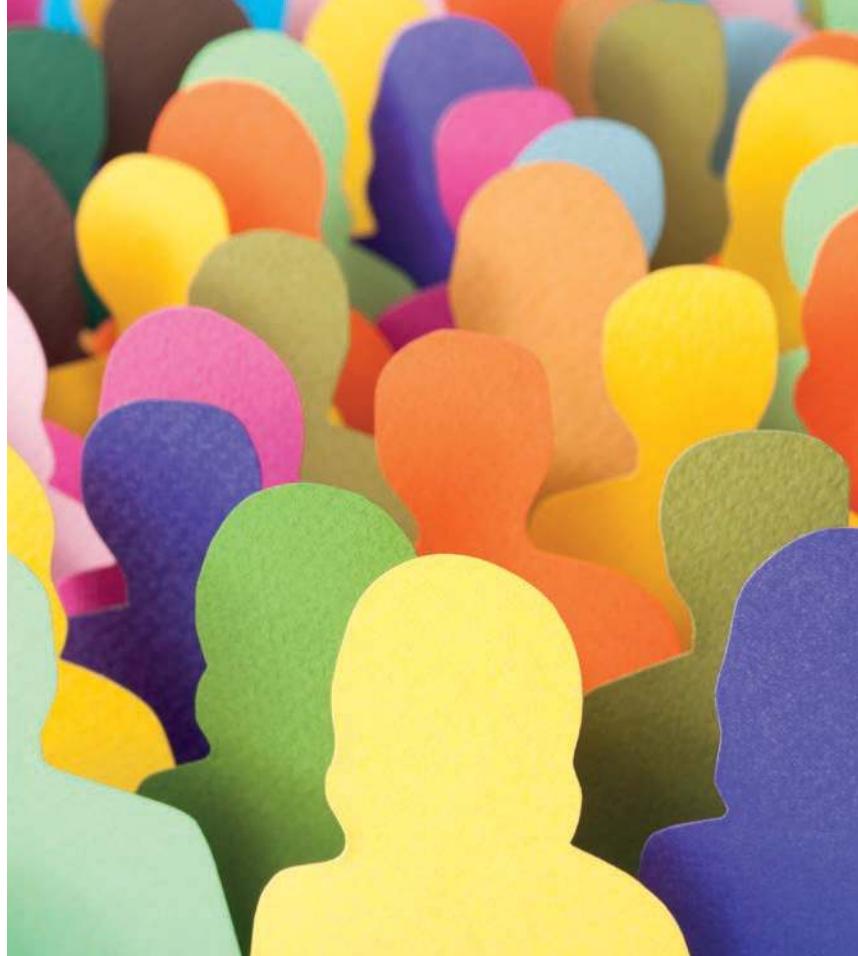
communities and to make sure that our young people feel they are a valued part in local decision making.

Councils must reflect the communities they represent, which is why the WLGA is currently working to attract more women and people from under-represented communities to consider standing as candidates at the next Welsh local elections in 2022.

Representation in our council chambers has improved significantly. However, the pace of progress has remained stubbornly slow, which is why a cross-party group has been convened by the WLGA to explore ideas to improve representation, including a new website that will be launched in the coming weeks for anyone interested to learn more about how to become a councillor. I am excited to see how this area of work develops as we look ahead to the 2022 election.

There is still a pervasive myth that views councils as being inaccessible, irrelevant ivory towers.

As councillors and leaders, we have a duty to promote proactively the inclusive, collaborative and open nature of modern-day councils to ensure the rich diversity of voices in our communities are represented.



# COUNCILLOR

## The art of chairing meetings

**An important aspect of a councillor's role is the effective chairing of meetings. For both councillors and managers, meetings serve as a forum for discussion and agreement, planning and monitoring, communication and leadership.**

When chaired well, meetings can challenge, inspire, illuminate and inform. Whether it is committee meetings in council or meetings of residents and groups in your local area, meetings are a mainstay of the political management process.

Chairing council meetings can sometimes be a demanding process because of the personalities involved. People respond in different, sometimes unpredictable ways when trying to convince others of their point of view – particularly when this is overlaid with the essential politics of local government.

Arguments are common and conflict is not unusual. This is true enough in one-to-one situations, but is particularly so in group meetings. Here (see right), two of the LGA's member peers consider what makes for effective chairing.



© DUNCAN NICOL ROBERTSON



For further information on the chairing of meetings see our councillor workbook  
<https://www.local.gov.uk/councillor-workbook-chairing-skills>

**Any meeting of more than two or three people will need someone to control and referee it.**

*The chairman should have enough experience and knowledge of the subjects and matters to be dealt with during the meeting, and be well acquainted with the standing orders regulating how meetings are conducted. It is the chairman's job to remind the meeting of those, and the fact that they will be enforced.*

*A good chairman will insist on being involved in putting together the agenda – after all, he or she will need to understand why the meeting is being held and what the objectives are.*

*There should also be a very even-handed or independent way of running each meeting, because if the chairman can be seen as biased they could lose credibility and the respect of the meeting, making it far more difficult to control.*

*Every chairman should be strong, fair, knowledgeable and business-like. But if they can add a little humour at the right time to lighten the mood, it normally benefits the way a meeting reaches its decisions.*

**Councillor Tony Saffell, Independent Group Leader, North West Leicestershire District Council**

**The hardest part of chairing meetings is, of course, managing time and members!**

*Many councillors speak 'off the cuff', jotting down some key words or thoughts as a reminder of the points they want to make. Others write down all they want to say... so in a three-minute intervention, that's about 450 words.*

*In my experience, good chairs build consensus, giving time to the important topics, knowing when to interrupt a speaker straying from the point and, at times, being firm when the need arises but also willing to laugh at themselves as well.*

*We've all been in meetings when tensions run high. A good chair will seek to calm things down and when things are said in the heat of the moment, a gentle encouragement to reconsider and apologise will always be better than a complaint to the monitoring officer.*

*In short, we chair with the support of the meeting: we need to keep the standard high, everyone engaged, a voice to all and an eye on the clock.*

**Councillor Alan Connell (Lib Dem), Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources, Teignbridge District Council**

# 60 SECONDS WITH...



## Councillor Oliver Freeston

**Elected in 2018 aged 18 and now Chair of North East Lincolnshire Council's Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel**

**Q** How did you become interested in politics?

**A** It was because of our local MP – Martin Vickers (Con, Cleethorpes) – I went to Parliament age 15 while still at secondary school and watched what he did, listened to debates, and absolutely loved it.

**Q** How did you become a councillor?

**A** I contacted our local council leader, Cllr Philip Jackson, and he was very welcoming. He invited me down for an interview. It was with five older men. I thought, ‘this is going to be interesting, I’m a young Herbert from a working class background’. Even my Dad – a lorry driver and trade unionist – said: “Don’t be upset if you don’t get it.”

They asked me lots of questions and if I would like to stand in my own ward. It had never been won by a Conservative since it was formed.

We ended up winning it and getting national coverage, in The Sun and other newspapers.

**Q** What was it like winning your home ward?

**A** It made it a thousand times better, being the go-to person in your own town when you know people. They had seen me growing up from a boy kicking a football over the fence, and now I was going to represent them.

**Q** Has your youth been a help or a hindrance?

**A** I don’t think it made any difference. It was the person local people wanted – someone to address the concerns they cared about. My older councillor colleagues have really taken me under their wing. We have now got a mix of youthful ideas and their wisdom – it’s a good combination.

**Q** Why are there so few young councillors?

**A** Probably because politics isn’t cool! Going out and getting drunk or being captain of the football team is cool. I don’t want to jump on a youth bandwagon. People who are older always have life experience.

While it’s important to have a good range of people standing as councillors, it doesn’t necessarily have to be a balance or set ratio – it’s about the right person for the job. If the people vote for them, they vote for them.

**Q** What’s your most memorable moment as a councillor?

**A** There was a lady who had problems for months with potholes in her road. “If you get elected, I want that sorted out,” she told me. I got back from the count at 5am and she rang at 9am to say well done on getting elected – and when are the potholes getting filled in. I talked to the head of works, who said it wasn’t on the road plan. But the next day someone checked it out and the next week they had been filled in. That was when I realised I had entered into public service and that it wasn’t going to be easy.

**Q** What are your political ambitions?

**A** I’m interested in politics. I grew up dreaming of being the Prime Minister, and that would be my ambition.

# ELECTIONS



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



## Who is better at fighting elections?

### **Labour's search for a convincing explanation of its woeful General Election showing focuses mainly on Brexit and leadership.**

Understandably, there are few within the party that dare voice the opinion that its principal rival is simply better at winning elections, and that it should try to discover the reasons for that and alter its own strategies accordingly.

We noted Labour's poor by-election performance throughout 2019 (see **first** 643). For much of the time, its vote was in retreat rather than advancing. It gained just five seats but lost more than three times that number.

Whoever wins the leadership election, however, needs a much broader perspective, encompassing the period before and after the EU referendum and before Jeremy Corbyn took over.

Since the 2010 General Election, there have been more than 2,000 council by-elections. Labour has recorded 158 gains against 108 losses – a net gain of 50 seats in more than nine years. The balance sheet against the Conservatives shows a net gain of 37 seats. Against the Liberal Democrats, there is a one-seat deficit.

Labour's supporters may argue that the main May local elections, not by-elections, offer a better valuation. The national equivalent vote shows Labour below 40 per cent in every year since 2010 and below 30 per cent in two of those years.

In four of the nine years, the Conservatives have finished ahead of Labour with a fifth year tied. By contrast, Blair's New Labour polled 47 per cent and 43 per cent in the two years prior to its 1997 landslide victory.

The situation in terms of councillor numbers and councils controlled again shows Labour under-performing for a party that has spent years attacking the parties of national government.

Currently, it still has 1,000 fewer councillors than the Conservative party. Only around a quarter of councils in Britain are run by a Labour majority administration but more than a third have Conservative administrations.

It is not fashionable in some parts of Labour to refer to the Blair era, but it does expose the party's decline over the past decade. Labour registered its peak in 1996, when it held almost one in every two council seats and ran a similar proportion of local authorities in Britain. Although only one part of the explanation for the following year's General Election outcome, this local government representation demonstrated its fitness for national office in the eyes of many swing voters.

The local electoral cycle means that it will be some years before even a revitalised Labour party can gain enough seats to become the dominant party in local government. Indeed, it faces immediate challenges next May in areas where Labour incumbent MPs were displaced by Conservative challengers last December. The effect on party morale will be severe if council seats follow the same pattern.

But the Conservatives are not the only threat to Labour. Small, community-based parties – some born out of discontent with Labour-run councils – have had success. The Liberal Democrats can never be dismissed, despite the party's failure to break through at the parliamentary level.

All the leadership candidates have promised to reflect upon Labour's current problems; understanding the reasons for its lack of progress in local government should be prioritised.



### **Local by-elections**

#### **Brent, Alperton**

LIB DEM GAIN FROM LAB

9.2% over Lab

Turnout 34%

#### **Brent, Barnhill**

TWO LAB HELD

0.8% over Lab

Turnout 22%

#### **Brent, Wembley Central**

LAB HELD

24% over Con

Turnout 27.6%

#### **Bristol, Brislington East**

LAB HELD

10% over Con

Turnout 23.6%



For more details of these and previous by-election results, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/first](http://www.local.gov.uk/first)

# LETTERS

## Low energy council homes

**N**ottingham is the first place in the UK to pilot the ground-breaking, whole-house renovation approach known as Energiesprong, with 10 homes successfully completed and a further 17 now under way.

The Energiesprong approach, pioneered in the Netherlands, upgrades a home with innovative energy-saving and energy-generating measures, including new highly insulated outside walls and windows, a solar roof, and a state-of-the-art heating system. The end result is homes that are almost net zero carbon.

Our pilot formed part of our winning submission to The Guardian's Public Services Awards 2020, which saw

Nottingham City Council named the UK's Climate Champion.

The pilot is a far-sighted, exciting and highly effective way of tackling old and cold council housing. It's made a huge difference for tenants so I'm delighted we are rolling it out to even more properties (138 in total) where we can also reduce emissions and bills while increasing warmth and wellbeing for residents.

Homes, and especially older homes, account for a large proportion of carbon emissions so tackling this helps us towards our ambitious target of becoming carbon neutral by 2028.

**Clr Sally Longford (Lab),**  
Deputy Leader, Nottingham City Council



## Fire watch

**C**llr Paul Ankers is concerned about how the duties of a 30-councillor fire authority have been given to other committees, believing that this reduces scrutiny of fire services post-Grenfell ([first](#) 643).

The trouble, however, with the traditional fire authority model is that it is usually the only body councillors can sit on that pays an additional monetary sum, amounting to several thousand pounds a year.

Consequently, there is the real danger that poorer councillors will wish to become fire authority members for pecuniary reasons, rather than because they are interested in fire-related matters.

Perhaps the answer is to have elected fire commissioners to replace fire authorities, as happened with the police and crime commissioners and their predecessors.

**Clr Tim Mickleburgh (Lab),**  
North East Lincolnshire Council

**?** If you have a letter, or a story from the frontline of council services for our 'People & places' column, please email [karen.thornton@local.gov.uk](mailto:karen.thornton@local.gov.uk). Letters may be edited and published online



## People & places

**Philip Jenkins** is a Senior Trading Standards Officer at Hillingdon Council and works at Heathrow Airport

**I** deal with the safety of imported goods, such as toys, cosmetics, jewellery, electrical items and even clothing, to protect consumers.

My day invariably starts at the computer. I liaise with several external clients, many of them international; importers, agents, manufacturers and enforcement agencies. It can take several hours to deal with anything that came in overnight – new referrals, enquiries or people asking to clarify my findings. From there, I set my days' appointments to individual cargo warehouses.

Heathrow is unlike other ports – it is fast paced because of air freight costs or the goods being needed yesterday. A consignment will be inspected soon after arrival. I always do a physical inspection. Often goods are mis-described and what we find in the consignment does not relate to what is written on the shipping documents.

I examine a lot of illegal cosmetics. Sometimes, for those you need a strong stomach, both in terms of smell and the little bugs and spiders that may escape.

A degree of persistence is required as the cosmetics can be described as bibles, shoes, picture frames or soaps.

So far, the largest single amount of illegal cosmetics we have removed weighed 2,400kg – that's air freight, remember.

Unsafe goods which we have inspected at Heathrow Airport are destroyed or recycled.



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