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## The LGA's Budget submission

Long-term reform and investment in local services

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**Cllr James Jamieson**  
is LGA Chairman



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**Local**   
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**Councils have overspent on children's social care budgets by more than £3 billion in the past five years, as unprecedented demand and funding shortages have put them under increasing pressure, the LGA has warned.**

It wants ministers to use the forthcoming review of the children's social care system to work with councils to understand what is driving demand and how councils can provide vital care for our most vulnerable, but also invest in early help and prevention services.

There are now more than 52,000 children subject to a child protection plan – an increase of 53 per cent since 2010. The number of children in care (78,150) has increased by 28 per cent in the past decade.

This sharp rise in need for urgent child protection services has coincided with reductions in central government funding for councils. This has increasingly meant funding being diverted from the early intervention and preventative services, which help families and young people before they reach crisis point, into services to protect those at immediate risk.

For example, councils spent 25 per cent less on children's centres in 2017/18 compared with 2014/15.

LGA analysis reveals that councils have tried to protect budgets for children, with these rising by an average of more than £600 million a year over the past five years. Despite this, councils have still had

## £3bn overspend on children's social care

to overspend each year, and by a total of £3.2 billion over the same five-year period.

Extra government funding will help meet demand and cost pressures this year, the LGA said. It is looking to this year's Spending Review for long-term, sustainable funding for children's services.

Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "Councils need

to play a lead role in the Government's review of the care system, alongside children, families and partners, to make sure it looks at what really matters and what can really make a difference.

"A long-term sustainable funding solution would enable councils to protect children at immediate risk of harm while also supporting early help to prevent problems escalating in the first place."



## Under-16s 'to be banned' from unregulated accommodation



The Government is consulting on plans to make it illegal to put children in care aged under 16 in unregulated accommodation, amid concerns that some are being left at risk of exploitation.

Minimum standards would also be introduced for unregulated accommodation, which provides accommodation but not care.

The LGA has warned that making unregulated settings illegal for under-16s will not solve the problem unless the Government works with councils and providers to ensure there are enough high-quality,

registered places for children.

Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "The welfare of all children is of the utmost importance to councils, and they do all they can to find the right accommodation and support for all children in their care.

"Good-quality, unregulated settings can be the right accommodation for some young people as part of their transition to independence. The increasing use of unregulated settings is being driven by shortfalls in places in registered children's homes and other

settings, particularly for young people with more complex needs.

"The funding crisis facing children's services is also hindering efforts to develop and maintain the right provision locally that meets the needs of young people."

She added: "Providers of unregulated settings must work with councils, the police and other partners to ensure the safety and wellbeing of young people. We want to work with the Government to make sure this happens.

"It is vital that the Government uses this consultation to better understand the pressures on accommodation for children in care, and provides appropriate funding and support to ensure that the right homes in the right places are available for all children, whatever their needs."

# Concern about viability of children's care companies



Six of the 10 largest independent groups of providers of children's residential and fostering placements had more debts and liabilities than tangible assets last year, raising concerns about their viability, according to LGA-commissioned research.

The LGA is concerned that this is placing at risk the stability of placements for children in care. It is calling for greater national oversight of such companies, similar to the role the Care Quality Commission (CQC) holds for adult social care provision.

Nearly three in four children's homes and almost a third of fostering places are now provided by private organisations. The research also shows that, in just three years, eight of the

biggest providers merged to become the three largest groups. The six largest independent providers of children's social care services made £215 million in profit last year, with some achieving more than 20 per cent profit on their income.

Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "A varied market for homes for children in care helps councils make sure these children get the right homes for their needs, and both in-house and independent provision are key.

"Fewer providers are now dominating that market. Much of their growth has been fuelled by enormous loans, which will need paying back at some point, yet this research shows many of them do not have the assets to do that.

"An oversight scheme is needed to help catch any providers before they fall and ensure company changes don't risk the quality of provision. Providers should also not be making excessive profit from providing placements for children.

"The Government's review of the children's care system needs to look at how the market for children's social care placements is impacting on children's outcomes. It should also consider how we can work with councils and providers to improve transparency of costs."

## Skills gaps warning on immigration

**Reform of the UK's immigration system provides an opportunity to tackle skills gaps and workforce challenges in specific sectors, such as construction and social care, the LGA has said.**

It is calling for councils to be involved in the development of the Government's new, points-based immigration system, which comes into effect from 1 January 2021.

The system will assign points for specific skills, qualifications, salaries or professions. Those looking to live and work in the UK will need to be qualified up to A level or equivalent, speak English, and have a job offer with a minimum salary of £25,600.

Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: "Councils know their local communities and local economies best.

"Involving councils in the development of a new system would mean they can assess demand for skills locally, ensure it takes account of the varied needs of employers, and help the Government achieve its ambition to level up all parts of the country.

"Salary thresholds should be variable across sector and region, to reflect the needs of different employers, alongside a reformed and devolved skills and employment system to tackle the existing national skills shortages."

He added: "As a country, we face significant skills challenges. The social care system faces one of the most serious challenges and any reforms need to ensure the social care workforce can be maintained."

## In brief

### Health inequalities 'widening'

Life expectancy has failed to increase across the country for a decade and health inequalities have widened, according to a new report. 'Health equity in England: the Marmot report 10 years on' also found that life expectancy has fallen among women in the poorest 10 per cent of areas. Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "This report is a wake-up call about the need to tackle the widening health inequalities across the country. Councils want to work with government on closing this gap by focusing on the social causes of ill health, such as early years development, education and employment opportunities, and improving services for older people. Sustainable, long-term investment in councils' public health services is also needed if we are to reverse reductions in life expectancy and tackle health inequalities. We have long argued that reductions to the public health grant (down £700 million in real terms between 2015/16 and 2019/20) have been a false economy."

### 'Consult on border checks'

Border checks on EU imports and exports after the Brexit transition period ends on 31 December will have a "significant impact" on councils that act as port health authorities, the LGA has warned. It wants government to consult on the likely impact on transport infrastructure. Cllr Kevin Bentley, Chairman of the LGA's Brexit Taskforce, said: "Some councils are legally responsible for checking certain imports, including live animals, as they enter the country. Currently, products arriving from Europe do not receive the same checks as imports from the rest of the world. Introducing equivalent checks for EU imports will have a significant impact on the number of checks required and on the way these services operate. The sooner councils receive clarity on how these border controls will apply, the better they will be able to plan for them. They will also need additional resources and capacity, particularly environmental health officers and veterinary staff"



## £5 billion for buses and bikes

The Government has announced “a much-needed boost” of £5 billion for bus and cycling services.

The money aims to overhaul bus and cycle links for every region outside London, and promises simpler fares, thousands of new buses, improved routes and higher frequencies.

This will include at least 4,000 new zero-emission buses, new priority schemes so buses avoid congested routes and services in the evenings and at weekends, and more ‘turn up and go’ routes, where people will not have to rely on timetables to plan journeys.

The LGA said it was pleased the Government was investing in bus and cycling provision.

Details of the five-year funding package will be announced in the upcoming National Bus Strategy, to be published later this year.

The proposed cycling improvements include more than 250 miles of new cycle routes and safe junctions in towns and cities, designed to tough new safety standards, plus new ‘Mini-Holland’ schemes. These will see pilots of low-traffic neighbourhoods where the Government will work with councils to reduce lorry traffic and make side streets safer to walk, cycle and play in.

This announcement follows the allocation of a £170 million fund to improve bus services and make journeys greener. As part of this, local areas will be invited to apply to become Britain’s first fully electric bus town – receiving up to £50 million to make the switch.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA’s Transport Spokesman, said: “We are pleased the Government has pledged a much-needed boost in funding for bus and cycling services.

“Councils want to work with the Government to improve bus provision, which can be a lifeline for older and vulnerable residents, and play a key role in tackling congestion and reducing greenhouse gases.”

## Public support for tourism levy

**More than half of residents in England think their council should have powers to introduce a local tourism levy, an LGA survey has revealed.**

New public polling by Populus for the LGA found that 53 per cent of those surveyed think their council should be able to charge tourists a small fee to help fund local services that support tourism in their area.

Councils have faced an unprecedented decade of funding and demand pressures on their legal duties. They have had to halve direct funding for tourism and reduce spending on cultural services by 45 per cent in the past decade.

In its Budget submission, the LGA sets out how the Government can introduce measures to hand local areas more freedom and control over their own finances, and greater ability to grow their own economies.

It is calling on the Government to

use its Tourism Sector Deal prospectus to invite local areas keen to become a tourist zone to make the case for piloting a local tourism levy.

LGA research found that a pound-per-night levy could raise up to £7 million a year, depending on the local area.

Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson, Chair of the LGA’s Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, said: “Councils are best-placed to boost visitor economies and are trying to find innovative ways of supporting and boosting culture and heritage. Significant funding and demand pressures are hampering these efforts.

“The time has come for a national debate about what a tourism levy could look like, how it could be successfully introduced across the country, and how money raised could be reinvested locally to help councils create places where people want to live, work and visit.”

## ‘Scandalous’ car seat waste



The LGA has called on manufacturers to recycle the child car seats they produce and, alongside retailers, offer take-back services so parents can return them instead of throwing them away.

It comes as more than 250,000 child car seats reach their safety expiry date in the UK every year, with 90 per cent of them ending up in landfill – the equivalent of up to 2,000 tonnes of mostly recyclable material.

LGA Environment Spokesman Cllr David Renard said: “Councils are reducing waste sent to landfill and want to increase recycling rates, but child car seats are too hard to recycle, and can’t be accepted by re-use shops at local authority waste sites for safety reasons.

“Having to treat child car seats as waste is scandalous and is extremely frustrating for councils and parents who want to dispose of these seats responsibly.

“To reduce the impact on the environment and help parents do the right thing, manufacturers need to set up their own recycling schemes for child car seats.

“Retailers and manufacturers should also follow the lead of other countries in helping parents avoid waste by offering take-back services, where old car seats are recycled into new products as part of a circular economy.

“We want to work with the Government and manufacturers to achieve a viable, long-term solution to recycling them.”

# A million homes 'not yet built'

New analysis by the LGA has found that more than a million homes granted planning permission in the past decade have not yet been built.

Latest government figures show that 2,564,600 units have been granted planning permission by councils since 2009/10, but only 1,530,680 have been completed.

The number of planning permissions granted for new homes has almost doubled since 2012/13, with councils approving nine in 10 applications. While, in some cases, there will be a time lag between permission being granted and homes being built, new-build completions have only increased by half as much in that time.

Councils recognise the shortage of housing and the need to build more homes, but the backlog of unbuilt homes shows the planning system is not a barrier to house building, says the LGA. It is calling for the forthcoming Planning White Paper to give councils powers to take action on unbuilt land which has planning permission.



This includes making it easier to compulsory purchase land where homes remain unbuilt, and to be able to charge developers full council tax for every unbuilt development from the point that the original planning permission expires.

Cllr David Renard, LGA Housing Spokesman, said: "The number of homes granted planning permission has far outpaced the number of homes being built. No-one can live in a planning permission, or a half-built house where work on a site has not been completed.

"Councils need powers to tackle our housing backlog and step in where a site with planning permission lies dormant and house building has stalled.

"It is also vital that the planning process is protected, so that councils and communities can ensure we realise the Government's ambition of building beautiful homes, which includes the necessary infrastructure and affordable housing."

● See p17.

## In brief Grenfell immunity

Anything said by witnesses to the Grenfell Tower inquiry will not be used to prosecute them over the fire, the Attorney General has said. The second phase of the inquiry has been on hold for several weeks, as many witnesses threatened to stay silent without a guarantee. The LGA has previously expressed concerns about such a move. Lord Porter, the LGA's Building Safety Spokesman, said: "We are particularly concerned to ensure that the truth is fully exposed as swiftly as possible to assist councils, fire authorities and the Government in our joint efforts to remediate dangerous cladding on hundreds of buildings across the country."

## Council pay offer

More than one million council employees have been offered a pay increase of 2 per cent from 1 April 2020. The total increase to the national pay bill would be £364 million (covering the period to 31 March 2021). The offer does not apply to council chief executives, senior officers, teachers or firefighters, who are covered by separate national pay arrangements. The three unions representing council workers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland have rejected the offer – they submitted a 10 per cent wage rise.

# 'No knife shop' pledge

Retailers, including online businesses, need to stop selling knives by default to help tackle the knife-crime epidemic, the LGA has said.

It is urging retailers to become 'no knife shops' by pledging not to sell knives unless it is a core part of their business, such as hardware and DIY shops and suppliers of kitchenware.

This would help reduce the availability of knives in local communities and the risk of them being used in violent crime. Latest official figures show recorded knife crime in England and Wales is at a record high, while hospital admissions because of knife-related injuries have risen by 41 per cent since 2014/15.

In some areas of the country, six out of 10 retailers have been found to be breaking the law, with shop staff caught selling knives to children as young as 14.

The LGA is also urging government to extend the Home Office Prosecutions

Fund – set up as part of the Serious Violence Strategy, but due to expire this year – which has helped some councils prosecute retailers for blatant breaches of knife-sale laws.

It also wants to work with government on taking a public health approach to tackling knife crime by investing more in early intervention and prevention initiatives, including targeted youth services, on which councils have been forced to cut back in recent years because of funding pressures.

Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: "For many retailers, particularly smaller shops such as convenience stores and corner shops, knife sales typically generate a tiny fraction of overall business income.

"By becoming a 'no knife shop', businesses can make a bold statement of commitment to community safety, and help stop kitchen and DIY knives falling into the wrong hands and being used as deadly weapons."

## Finance settlement

The final local government finance settlement was published in February, and included extra funding for social care, council-tax raising powers and the continuation of key grants – but not for a rise in the National Living Wage. Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: "We look forward to working with the Government to ensure its forthcoming Budget and Spending Review provide a funding settlement that allows councils to improve services and not just keep them going. With long-term investment, councils can protect local services, meet the significant ongoing pressures they face now and in the future, and make a huge difference to the lives of our residents and communities."

● See p10.



## In brief

### Devolution parliament

The think tank IPPR North, supported by the LGA, has published a report calling on the Government to deliver a 'devolution parliament'. Sir Richard Leese, Chair of the LGA's City Regions Board, said: "There is clear and significant evidence that the country gets better value for money when decisions over investment and how to run local services are taken closer to communities and businesses. We urge the Government to publish its promised Devolution White Paper as soon as possible, and to reignite the process of handing councils the freedom and resources they need to get on and deliver for their communities."

## Preventing HIV

The LGA is warning that councils' already overstretched public health budgets – which were reduced by £700 million in real terms between 2015 and 2020 – will struggle to meet the cost of rolling out the anti-HIV drug PrEP. It is calling on government to guarantee to meet any extra and unforeseen costs of providing the drug. Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "This is a potentially life-saving drug that can help us achieve the Government's ambition of getting us closer to zero transmission by 2030. While councils share this ambition and want to see this drug made available to everyone who needs it, they will struggle to afford to provide it while their existing public health services continue to be under such strain."

## Domestic abuse

The Government has announced £16.6 million for 75 projects across England to help fund domestic abuse refuge services. Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, welcomed the announcement. He added: "With long-term, sustainable funding, councils can work with the Government and partners to further safeguard individuals and families from the physical and psychological harm of domestic abuse and prevent it happening in the first place."

# Flexibility needed on First Homes scheme

**The Government has launched a consultation over its First Homes scheme, which proposes to cut the cost of some new homes by a third for first-time buyers.**

It aims to give people the opportunity to buy a home in their local area, saving eligible first-time buyers around £100,000.

The discount will be prioritised for veterans and key workers such as nurses, police officers and firefighters.

The scheme will see the discount applied in perpetuity, so when the home is sold in future, the new local buyer will also be able to buy at a discount.

However, the LGA says councils need discretion on the number of First Homes required in new developments to ensure a mix of homes are available, as not everyone is ready to buy.

Cllr David Renard, LGA Housing Spokesman, said: "Councils support measures

to enable home ownership. It is important that this does not come at the expense of providing truly affordable homes for rent.

"Not everybody is ready to buy and we will be making the case in this

consultation that local areas will need discretion on the number of First Homes required in new developments. This will allow councils to ensure a mix of homes – to rent and buy – are available and affordable to people that need them.

He added:

"A genuine renaissance in council house building would increase housing supply, boost home ownership and reduce homelessness.

"For that to happen, the Government needs to use the forthcoming Budget to reform Right to Buy, by allowing councils to keep the receipts of homes sold under RTB in full and to have the flexibility to set discounts locally."



## Commercial investments 'to generate income'

Some local authorities in England have invested an estimated £6.6 billion in buying commercial property over the past three years, mostly with the aim of generating a financial return, according to the National Audit Office.

Consequently, debt has increased for many of these authorities, with a small group seeing significant increases in the amount they owe and in repayment costs.

Cllr Richard Watts, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said: "An unprecedented period of funding and demand pressures has stretched local services to the limit with councils losing almost £16 billion in central government funding in the past decade.

"Councils have faced a choice of either accepting funding reductions and cutting services or making investments to try to protect them."

Councils follow strict rules and assessments to ensure they invest wisely and manage the risk of their investments appropriately.

The report acknowledges that in many cases, investment decisions also support local regeneration and growth objectives.

The LGA is concerned that the recent rise in Public Works Loan Board (PWL) interest rates has increased the revenue costs of all new borrowing for councils, throwing into doubt the viability of new capital programmes that help deliver on key government priorities such as housing and regeneration.

It wants the Government to introduce a borrowing scheme for councils for crucial projects, and to reinvest any profit made by the PWLB rate rise in local government.

# PARLIAMENT



## New committee chairs

The LGA will be continuing its engagement work with new select committee chairs to ensure local government priorities are heard and represented in Parliament

**The new chairs of 27 influential Commons' committees – including 20 departmental select committees – have been announced.**

Among the committees relevant to local government, LGA Vice-President Clive Betts MP (Lab, Sheffield South East) was returned as the Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee and pledged evidence-based scrutiny of housing, local government and social care.

Jeremy Hunt MP (Con, South West Surrey), the former Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, will chair the Health and Social Care Committee. He vowed to “fix social care”.

Meg Hillier MP (Lab, Hackney South and Shoreditch) returns as Public Accounts Committee Chair, promising to scrutinise education funding, including special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Most committee chairs are elected by the whole House. If there is more than one candidate, the election is by a single secret ballot, using the alternative vote system. MPs rank the candidates, and the votes of those with the lowest number of first preferences are successively redistributed until one candidate has more than half

the votes. If there is only one candidate, he or she is automatically elected.

Nominations for committee chairs must be made by 15 MPs elected for the party to which the chair is allocated, or 10 per cent of such MPs, whichever is the lower. Up to five MPs from other parties may also back a nomination.

Much of the work of the House of Commons and the House of Lords takes place in these committees, which

examine issues in detail, from government policy to proposed new laws.

When a select committee report is published, the Government publishes a response to it, either agreeing to take forward some of the recommendations, or rejecting them. Either way, it offers the opportunity for Parliament to influence government policy.

This is why the process of submitting written and oral evidence remains a key part of the LGA's parliamentary engagement. According to House of Commons' research, the LGA is the top written evidence provider to select committees in the country.

As committees start launching new enquiries, we will once again be engaging with them on a range of important issues, making sure the priorities of local government are heard and represented in Parliament.

## Cabinet reshuffle

The resignation of Sajid Javid MP as Chancellor was the biggest shock in the long-awaited post-Brexit cabinet reshuffle last month.

Mr Javid was replaced by former Local Government Minister Rishi Sunak MP, who was promoted from the role of Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

Robert Jenrick MP remained in place as Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. In his team, Christopher Pincher replaced Esther McVey as Housing Minister, Simon Clarke replaced Jake Berry as devolution lead, and Luke Hall returned as Local Government Minister.

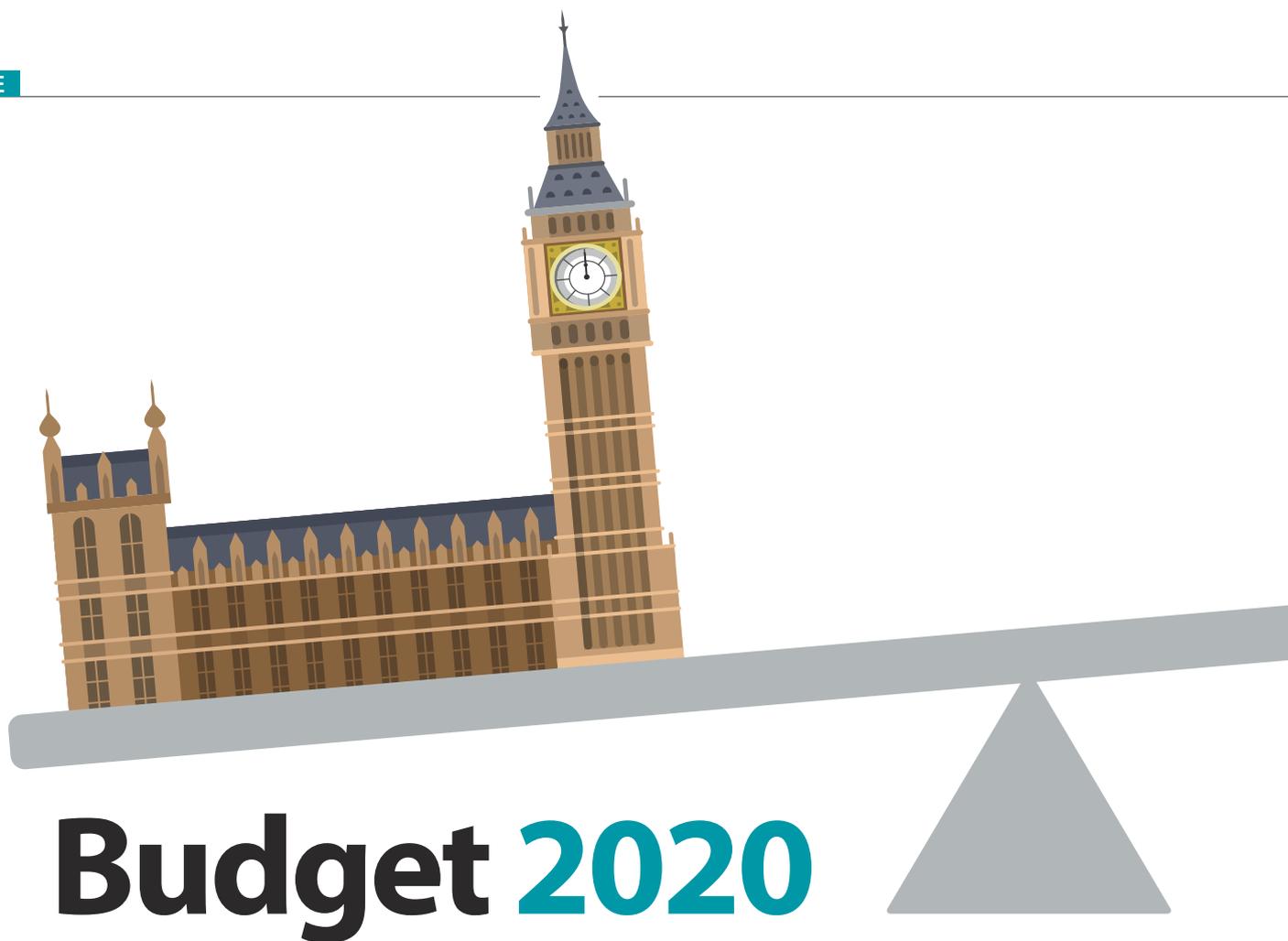
There was speculation ahead of the

reshuffle that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport could be scrapped, or the Home Office and Ministry of Justice would be combined. This did not arise, and overall, the machinery of government stayed near enough the same, apart from the closure of the Department for Exiting the European Union at the end of January.

As **first** was going to press, the reshuffle was still ongoing, with further ministerial appointments expected, along with the publication of responsibilities and portfolio areas for some ministerial teams.

We are monitoring this closely as we look towards our future political engagement.

The LGA's chairman and board chairs have written to all the key appointees to set out councils' priorities.



# Budget 2020

Based on feedback from councils, the LGA's Budget submission focuses on getting the right funding to improve services and people's lives through public service reform

**T**he upcoming Budget will be the Government's first after the General Election and since the UK left the European Union. It provides an opportunity to ensure councils play a key role in kickstarting the delivery of national domestic priorities and reforms.

High-quality services, maximising the growth potential of their local areas, and supporting national priorities, such as providing new housing, are what councils are ambitious about achieving. What is needed to help do this are the appropriate powers and funding from government, alongside decisions about long-term reform and investment.

This includes long-term investment to allow councils to play a key role in fixing the nation's roads, tackling environmental challenges, delivering high-speed broadband and extending high-quality mobile connectivity to all parts of the country.

The LGA's Budget submission also calls for reform of Right to Buy, investment in technology to reshape services, and more opportunities for councils to borrow for housing and infrastructure projects at favourable rates.

After the UK's exit from the European Union, it is vital that the Budget signals the start of the consultation process for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund – the intended successor scheme to EU funding. This will help councils and their partners boost local growth.

Devolution can support national ambitions to improve local public services by bringing the decisions that matter closer to local people and helping councils to build sustainable and inclusive local economies.

The repatriation of powers from Brussels must not stop with Whitehall, and the LGA's submission contains proposals for empowering local areas in England. The Budget should

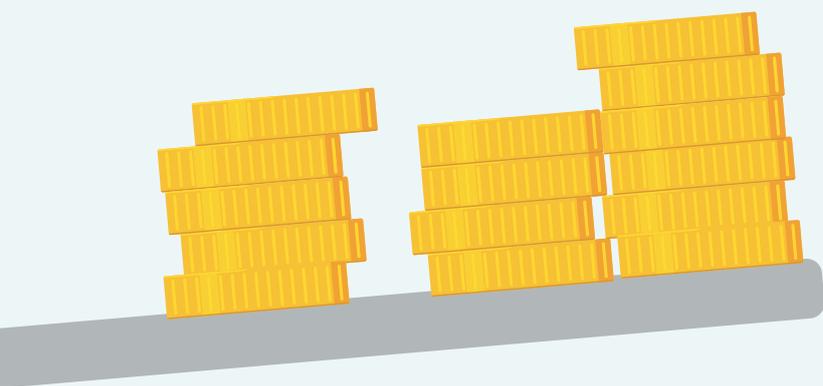
be used to add more detail to the Government's plans on devolution, announced in the Queen's Speech.

Certainty over funding is crucial for councils to set new long-term strategies, to make the most of taxpayers' money. The Government should work with councils on their financial planning by setting out the direction of travel for 75 per cent business rates retention, together with its review of relative needs and resources.

The business rates review is also an opportunity to give councils more power over local taxes, simplify the appeals process, and tackle business rates avoidance.

The additional funding announced for 2020/21 in last year's one-year Spending Round is helpful, but councils continue to face significant pressure. Local government has lost nearly £15 billion of core government funding over the past decade, and nearly a quarter of staff since 2012.

The Spending Review later this year must also provide sufficient funding and certainty for councils in the long term, including a sustainable solution for funding adult social care. Ambitious investment and public service reform must be built on a stable financial foundation.



### Adult social care



Securing the sustainable future of adult social care is one of the major issues facing society. With councils receiving 5,245 requests for support each day, the Budget and Spending Review are important opportunities to build towards the long-term reforms that are needed.

**LGA view:** *We need practical and workable proposals to secure social care for the generations to come. This requires additional funding over the short- to medium-term, as well as introducing reforms to improve access, embedding greater fairness in the way care is paid for and funded, and realising more fully the Care Act's intentions to focus on wellbeing and prevention.*

### Local government finance reform

In the 2019 Spending Round, the Government announced a one-year delay to the introduction of 75 per cent business rates retention and its review of the Fair Funding Review. This gave certainty to councils planning their budgets for 2020/21, but there has been little chance for work to progress since autumn.

**LGA view:** *The Government must publish a timetable for the coming year, setting out dates for further consultations and timings of when key decisions on the reforms will be made. The Fair Funding Review results should be introduced with additional funding and appropriate transition mechanisms, to ensure no local authority's funding is reduced.*



### House building

Council house building and reforming Right to Buy are both critical to boosting the supply of new homes, providing good-quality homes to rent, reducing homelessness, and tackling councils' housing waiting lists.

**LGA view:** *Councils must be able to retain 100 per cent of Right to Buy receipts and be given the flexibility to set discounts locally to invest in new and existing stock.*



### Local roads

The number of miles travelled on council roads each year increased by 3.3 per cent between 2009 and 2017. During the same period, expenditure on highways and road maintenance fell by 32 per cent.

**LGA view:** *With a £9.8 billion backlog of repairs on local roads, reinvesting 2p of existing fuel duty, worth around £1 billion a year, in local roads would make serious progress on the pothole backlog, and support government ambitions for the national transport network.*



### Children's social care

Over the past decade, there has been a 139 per cent increase in serious cases where the local authority believes a child may be suffering, with cases up by 117,070 to 201,170.

**LGA view:** *Councils need long-term sustainable funding and solutions to deal with unprecedented demand for child protection services.*

### Climate change



Our research into 100 councils' activities found more than 182 projects related to tackling climate change, including the installation of vehicle charging points, waste prevention schemes, and long-term investment in renewable energy projects.

**LGA view:** *To speed up and scale up the work of councils, we are calling for a joint local and central government task force on climate change that reaches across government.*



### Broadband

Local government has been a key player in the rollout of improved broadband connectivity to the hardest-to-reach areas over the past five years. The announcement of a Shared Rural Network is positive, but the measure of coverage used to judge the success of the network should match consumer experience on the ground.

**LGA view:** *The Government must use the National Infrastructure Strategy to consider how public funding could help address the significant mobile connectivity digital divide and ensure all communities have high-quality 4G connectivity as a minimum.*

**i** The LGA's 2020 Budget submission can be read in full at [www.local.gov.uk/lga-2020-budget-submission](http://www.local.gov.uk/lga-2020-budget-submission)



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

# Fuel for thought

The transition to electric vehicles offers important benefits but needs local infrastructure solutions



**T**he Government has announced it intends to bring forward its deadline for the end of the sale of petrol and diesel vehicles from 2040 to 2035 and possibly even sooner.

This reflects the fact that new vehicles tend to stay on the road for 10 to 15 years and if we want to have reached net zero carbon by 2050 we need to have been selling non-tailpipe emission vehicles for some time beforehand.

Setting this target shows that the Government is serious in its commitment to our national net zero goals. It is a transition we need to make if we are serious about doing our bit to constrain global temperature rises. However, simply setting a target does not make things happen.

The Government is consulting about what this target will mean in practice, how it will be enforced and what steps we need to take to make it a reality. At the LGA, we have been thinking for some time about the future of transport.

Personal motoring will almost certainly continue to be a necessity for many of our communities, no matter how much we improve active and public transport. Electrification offers important benefits: zero emissions from the exhaust pipe will help improve our air quality; it is more efficient and easier to maintain, which will help boost growth; and it could dramatically reduce carbon emissions from transport. This last point depends on the extent to

which we can decarbonise electricity generation and car manufacturing, and develop other technologies such as hydrogen.

This switch will also require a change in our fuelling infrastructure. Currently, councils effectively have no role in the provision of petrol and diesel to motor vehicles – that is left to the private sector. However, electrification and hydrogen filling stations could deliver important external benefits that will improve our communities.

Do we then have a duty to help

require fuelling at a designated location, is the future of electric charging small-and-often top-up charges at home or at the office in a similar way to how we charge our phones? Does that vision of the future really require much public infrastructure at all?

No-one has yet definitively answered these questions. It is obvious the solutions required will be different in different places. In my council area, we've installed electric charging points at our civic office and reviewed our parking policies to ensure we're leading by example. We also have two hydrogen filling stations, but both are provided by private companies.

Councils are, therefore, best placed to reflect on what will work in their area, especially as we are responsible for the local road network.

Finding the right answers will require councils to have thought through the implications for their transport networks and the ambitions they have for them in the future. That is why the LGA is hosting 'In Charge? Councils' role in electric vehicle charging infrastructure' on 24 March. It will be a free, day-long event where we explore councils' role in this transition, as well as practical steps that they can take now.

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*“Councils are best placed to reflect on what will work in their area, especially as we are responsible for the local road network”*

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catalyse the transition and break the chicken-and-egg cycle of consumers being reluctant to invest because they aren't sure where they will charge, and providers being reluctant to install chargers without the critical mass of motorists to use them? If we do have a duty to help get the industry started, when do we withdraw and to what extent should we share in the profits if we succeed or the risks should it fail?

Could we also ask whether we are conceptualising this in the wrong way? While internal combustion engines

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**i** For more information about 'In Charge? Councils' role in electric vehicle charging', on 24 March, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/events](http://www.local.gov.uk/events)

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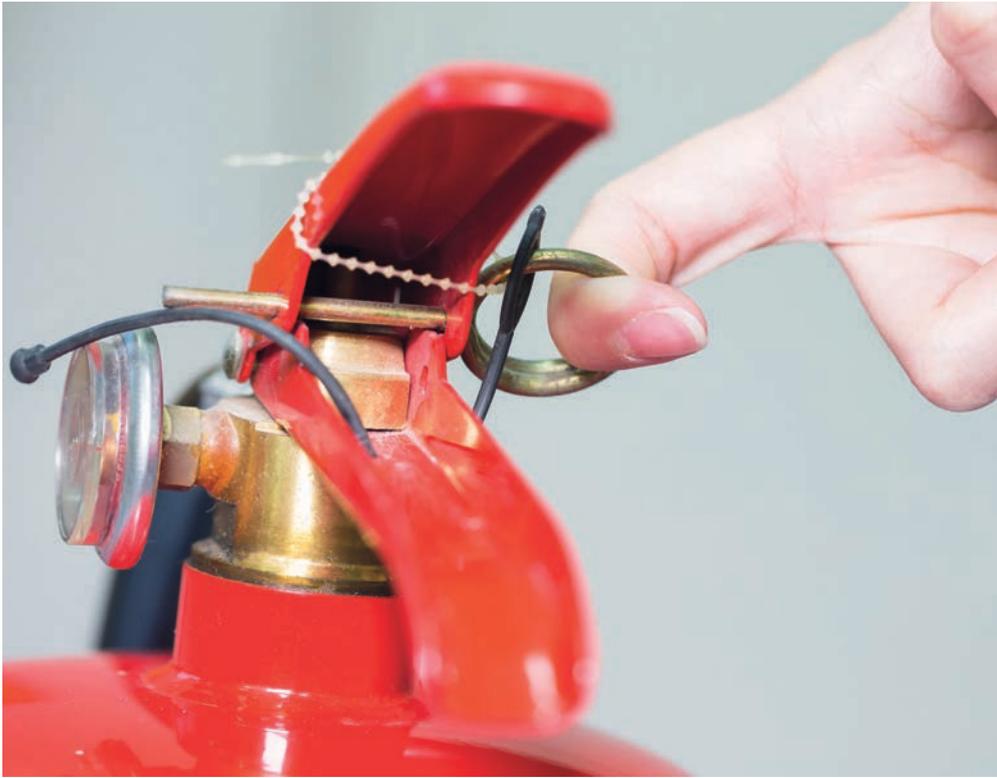
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# Extinguishing emissions

The fire service needs to adapt to reduce its impact on the environment



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

**R**ecent events have highlighted the impact of extreme weather on our communities. From the devastating bush fires in Australia to the flooding experienced in this country, they have all demonstrated the potential disruption we face from such events in a changing climate.

Wildfires, flooding, extreme heat and the subsequent impact on infrastructure all pose risks for the future, particularly for the work of fire and rescue services.

We have already seen that the weather can have an impact on the fire service's work. In 2018, there was a 28 per cent increase in outdoor fires linked to the hot, dry summer, and the Whaley Bridge Dam, which started to collapse following days of heavy rain last August, led to a nationally supported and coordinated fire service response.

These events also have a clear cost to the environment. A 2018 wildfire in northern Scotland released into the atmosphere the equivalent of six days of Scotland's total greenhouse gas emissions, burning for six days across 5,000 hectares.

Therefore, the fire service needs to

**i** For more information about the LGA's annual fire conference and exhibition on 10-11 March, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/events](http://www.local.gov.uk/events)

ask how we, as a sector, are going to meet these challenges.

Fire and rescue services will need to adapt to the challenges posed by current climate change as well as try to mitigate its impact by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Our fire prevention work will be key to this; successfully preventing fires means that we are stopping carbon dioxide entering our atmosphere. We will need to build on this work to ensure that, as we identify new risks to our communities as a result of climate change, we can develop our prevention, protection and emergency response to take account of these risks.

Climate change will also have a clear operational impact on our work. We already assess the risks facing us at a local level, and we will need to be dynamic in the future as these risks shift and change with more extreme weather events.

However, we will also need to look at our wider operations and ways of working to see how else we can seek to tackle climate change – our estates and fleet both have a key role to play in reducing our impact on the environment. Simple activities such as using LEDs and smart lighting controls, through to developing new zero-emission fire engines, can all have an effect. Several fire and rescue authorities have already undertaken these activities and

*“Fire and rescue services will need to be dynamic in the future as risks shift and change with more extreme weather events”*

are working towards targets limiting their emissions.

The LGA has produced a new document for fire services on the climate emergency, to help services to consider their role at a local level. This will be published at the LGA's Annual Fire Conference on 10-11 March.

There will also be wider national conversations for the LGA and our partners to ensure that the sector has the resources it needs to deliver on the Government's targets and meet the needs of our communities.

We still have a way to go as a sector, but at a national, local and individual level we all have a part to play in driving our activity on climate change forwards.

# Supporting women into public office

An LGA toolkit aims to help improve gender equality

**W**ith International Women's Day 2020 coming up this month, we have a great opportunity to recognise and champion the vital role of women in public life.

After the last round of local elections in May 2019, the Fawcett Society crunched the numbers and found that, although there had been a very small shift towards gender equality, women still represented only 35 per cent of all councillors.

While many councils have shifted their balance, 96 per cent still have more male councillors than female. There are far too few women serving as council leaders, and executive functions such as finance are still absurdly male dominated.

So why are these figures important? Because good democratic decisions are usually made in a way that is as inclusive as possible of the voices of those upon whom they impact. This isn't to say men don't play a valuable role as councillors, or that women would necessarily do a better job – it's about the councillors that are elected across the country being representative of the communities they serve.

Interestingly, on the LGA programmes to support councillors, almost half the participants are women! Maybe they are more open to learning than men? I merely speculate!

So how can we improve diverse representation? First, we can encourage more women to stand for public office.

The LGA's 'Be a Councillor' campaign offers resources you can use in your local area, to instigate this kind of conversation with local people. Promoting the role of councillors and encouraging more people to consider standing for election is one important



Councillor **Judi Billing** is the Lead Member for Leadership on the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board

part of broadening the diversity of people who are ultimately elected.

Even where there is good knowledge about the vital role councillors play in our communities,

*“Many women fear what might happen to them in public life”*

there are often particular obstacles that women cite as reasons why they feel they could not stand. One is having caring responsibilities, for children, parents or grandparents.

Responding to this, the LGA has created a toolkit to help women, parents and carers to balance these needs with the requirements of being a councillor, with information about how councils can support them to do this.

Having caring responsibilities should not pose an obstacle – this is a common part of life – and we must work to ensure that the role of councillor

in 2020 doesn't make it into one.

Sadly, we also know many women fear what might happen to them in public life, referencing, for instance, the vitriol and bullying behaviour often targeted at politicians online as another reason why they'd be reluctant to stand for election. It's vitally important that it is made clear that the sector is taking this issue seriously.

The LGA, alongside its sister associations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, is leading on a campaign called 'Civility in Public Life'. This aims to support councillors who are experiencing public intimidation, help councils and their councillors to prevent online abuse taking place, and raise the tone of national debate so that it does not put people off from standing for public office.

While we may not agree with, respect or even like another person, we can conduct our business with them civilly, as community leaders and potential role models, and do what we can to reset the quality of debate in public life.

**i** To find out about our **Be a Councillor campaign**, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/be-councillor](http://www.local.gov.uk/be-councillor) See [www.local.gov.uk/civility-public-life](http://www.local.gov.uk/civility-public-life) for more on civility in public life



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

# The homes agenda

**H**aving enough high-quality, affordable homes that meet people's needs is fundamental to building and sustaining resilient communities.

However, there are a number of issues around the quality and affordability of our existing housing, and a lack of supply of new homes to meet current and future needs. There are also challenges facing local government housing policy, including under-resourced planning departments, restrictions around the Right to Buy scheme, and addressing increasing levels of homelessness. Councils are also working towards future-proofing and retrofitting homes to be adaptable, sustainable, and to decarbonise housing to achieve net zero carbon.

Councils want to work with the Government to ensure existing and new housing meets the needs of communities. It is key that, as a nation, we build homes of all tenures so everyone has the opportunity to live in a safe and secure home they can afford.

There are many opportunities that councils are taking to support the wider

Councils are approving new homes but need more powers and funding to play a lead role in tackling the national housing shortage

development of new housing, including: working in partnership with housing associations and the private sector; using public sector land; building new homes; and bringing empty properties back into use.

One way the Government intends to address the housing shortfall is through its commitment to build one million homes over the new Parliament, with a target of 300,000 homes a year by the mid-2020s. To support this, it intends to make the planning process clearer and more accessible through its upcoming Planning White Paper.

However, the LGA continues to make the case on behalf of its members that the planning system is not the barrier to house building some perceive it to be. The number of homes being granted planning permission by councils far outpaces the number being built. According to latest LGA analysis, more than a million homes have been granted planning permission in the past decade but have not been built. The number of planning permissions granted for new homes has almost doubled since 2012/13, with councils approving nine

*“The number of homes being granted planning permission by councils far outpaces the number of homes being built”*

in 10 applications. Encouragingly, house completions last year were the highest in any single year in the past decade.

With the right powers and funding, councils can play a lead role in helping the Government tackle the national shortage. This includes councils stepping in where a site with planning permission lies dormant and house building has stalled, and resuming their role as major builders of affordable homes. The planning process also needs to be protected to realise our shared ambition of building beautiful homes, which include the necessary infrastructure and affordable housing.

Councils are working hard to deliver new housing, particularly in light of the lifting of the Housing Revenue Account borrowing cap at the end of 2018.

Ahead of the Budget, the LGA has urged the Government to reform Right to Buy, by allowing councils to keep all sales receipts so they can replace homes sold under the scheme and giving them flexibility to set discounts locally. We also want councils to be able to set their own planning fees to ensure planning departments are properly resourced.

As the Government rolls out new housing, planning and infrastructure proposals, it will be crucial that both central and local government continue to champion and support a plan-led system that takes into account the social, environmental and economic aspirations of our communities.

**i** The LGA's housing, planning and infrastructure conference takes place on 17 March. For more details and to book your place please visit [www.local.gov.uk/events](http://www.local.gov.uk/events)



# Guide to municipal bonds



**June Matte** is Director of the UK Municipal Bonds Agency

Municipal bonds offer councils more control over their debt and are a good way to raise money for local infrastructure

**F**ebruary was an exciting month for the UK Municipal Bonds Agency (UKMBA), with the launch of our very first municipal bond issued for Lancashire County Council.

The deal has enabled Lancashire to borrow close to £350 million at a significantly lower rate than offered by the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB), and on terms that better suit its specific needs.

This first bond issue signals the dawn of a new era in local government finance – one in which, after an initial, confidential credit assessment, UK local authorities can quickly and easily access cheaper and more flexible funding through the UKMBA.

The aim of the UKMBA is to provide an alternative funding vehicle for UK local authorities, one that helps them save money. With 56 local authority shareholders and the LGA, the agency is owned by councils for councils.

It raises money in the bond market through the issuance of municipal bonds. These are issued by local authorities (the ‘issuer’) to raise money to pay for local capital programmes such as infrastructure projects, maintenance of roads, and the construction and upkeep of council properties by local authorities.

The local authority borrows money from an investor(s) for a defined period of time (the ‘term’) at a set interest rate, as you would do with a personal loan. It pays interest to the investor, typically every six months, for the duration of the term, until the investment that was borrowed has been paid off in full.

The UKMBA acts as the issuer on behalf of the local authority and lends the proceeds to the local authority through a standard loan agreement.

Unlike the PWLB, which can suddenly raise interest rates without warning – as was the case last October – the rates offered by municipal bonds are determined by the financial markets, so they are not susceptible to non-market (political) fluctuations. This means local authorities have more control over their debt and are protected from PWLB changes.

Many local authorities across the globe raise money in this way. In the United States, municipal bonds have, quite literally, built the nation since the launch of the first one in the 1800s.

Two out of three local infrastructure projects in the US are funded by municipal bonds, including highways, social housing, hospitals,

schools, and airports. The building of San Francisco’s Golden Gate Bridge was financed by municipal bonds.

More recently, we have seen the arrival of green municipal bonds in countries such as France, funding projects with an ‘eco’ focus – including extending tramway lines, drawing up dedicated bicycle lanes, and constructing energy efficient homes.

The benefit of borrowing through the UKMBA is that we can work with local authorities to design the best funding structure for their specific needs and circumstances, whether that be a single bond issuance – as per Lancashire’s deal – or a pooled issue with several authorities, and short-term individual loans.

It’s quick and easy, and uses standard documents, so there is no need for expensive bespoke legal documents – and it’s cheaper than current PWLB rates.



If you would like to know more, please email June Matte ([june.matte@ukmba.org](mailto:june.matte@ukmba.org)) or Christian Wall ([cwall@ukmba.org](mailto:cwall@ukmba.org)), or telephone 020 3530 7500





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

# Tackling coronavirus

Councils are supporting the multi-agency response to COVID-19 to assess risk, provide advice and prevent it spreading further

**T**he outbreak of coronavirus is a rapidly evolving situation that local authorities in the UK are monitoring carefully. Councils such as Wirral, Brighton & Hove, Milton Keynes and York have been at the forefront of the national response.

At a national level, the LGA has been involved in supporting those authorities directly affected through our conversations with the Department of Health and Social Care, Public Health England, and, in particular, the Resilience and Emergency Division of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

Councils are using tried-and-tested infection control procedures to prevent further spread of the virus. A very extensive and complex contact-tracing operation is under way, with health protection teams around the country diligently talking to people that might have been in close contact with carriers of the virus to assess their risk, offer advice and prevent further spread.

Local councils, through their directors of public health, are providing important public health leadership to local responses both within the NHS and wider local resilience arrangements. Councils are working very closely with public health partners to support the current containment phase and to plan for other emerging scenarios.

As Category 1 responders, local authorities already have a significant role around planning, response and recovery to a range of major incidents, supported by local resilience capacity.

Councils have statutory

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*“Councils are using tried and tested infection control procedures to prevent further spread of the virus”*

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responsibilities around health protection and are active in helping coordinate joint responses across health and local government, particularly the important interface with social care and wider community services.

Councils are responsible for a wide range of services – including adult social care and children’s services – and local community assets, such as libraries, leisure centres, call centres and community centres, which are critical local infrastructure. Areas have well-tested plans in place to manage and

mobilise these resources across a range of scenarios, including pandemic flu. Councils are actively reviewing business continuity plans and looking at how, in the event of increased and sustained pressure on NHS services, we could most effectively deploy these resources.

Learning from major incidents has shown how critical mobilising trusted community spokespeople is to maintaining community cohesion. We have seen a rise in racist incidents linked to coronavirus in several areas, and local authorities are responding rapidly to provide accurate information and strong communication with community leaders.

At a local level, directors of public health are working with directors of adult social care and of children’s services to make sure the right local responses are mobilised and that councils rapidly escalate any significant issues nationally, through Public Health England and NHS England and via local resilience forums to the MHCLG.

We recognise that the current situation calls for clear, careful and consistent communications and that this needs strong liaison across a range of central government departments. This will clearly evolve and potentially become more complex as the current picture develops.

As Health Secretary Matt Hancock MP has reminded us, dealing with this outbreak will be a marathon not a sprint. At the time of writing, the current risk to UK resilience is ‘moderate’ and the risk to individuals remains low. Of course, councils are working night and day to keep it that way.

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**i** For the latest information for councils on coronavirus COVID-19 please visit [www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus-information-councils](http://www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus-information-councils)



# Giving children the best start in life

Public Health England is working with councils and other partners to modernise the Healthy Child Programme



Professor **Viv Bennett** CBE is Chief Nurse and Director of Maternity and Early Years at Public Health England



**T**he importance of early years, and their impact on the physical and emotional health of a child, is well evidenced.

What happens before conception, during pregnancy and in early childhood shapes children's health, happiness and life chances, so getting the Best Start in Life (BSiL) really matters. Our ambition is for all mothers to experience good health before, during and after pregnancy, and for all children to have a happy, secure and healthy childhood – but inequalities remain, and we need to take action to make this ambition a reality.

Public Health England has identified BSiL as one of its 10 strategic priorities for 2020-25. Based on discussions with a range of partners, including the LGA, we are designing a programme of work that aims to reduce inequalities and improve health outcomes for children and families across England. In particular, we will work with partners to reduce inequalities in children being ready to learn at age two and ready for school by age five.

A significant focus of this work will be the modernisation of the Healthy Child

*“We need to work together on an evidence-based programme that helps create healthy communities for families”*

Programme (HCP). Initially published in 2009, the evidence-based HCP remains the public health programme for children and young people. Clearly, the commissioning landscape and workforce surrounding the programme have changed since then, and more new evidence is available to inform its content and delivery.

The HCP encompasses individual interventions, both universal and targeted (including screening and immunisation programmes, parenting support, health and development reviews, and health promotion) and developing healthy places for children and families. The age range of the programme is being expanded – from the current pregnancy to 19 years – to pre-conception to 24 years. The BSiL programme and the modernisation of the HCP will be developed through the two themes of the individual intervention offer and place-based approaches to reducing inequalities. This will be in alignment with the NHS Long Term Plan and its potential to improve outcomes for children.

The HCP will be framed around the provision of a public health offer that

is “universal in reach and personalised in response”. For many families, a personalised response will be a high-quality universal service; for others, early or specialist extra help and interventions may be needed.

PHE is working with partners in other government departments and non-governmental organisations to align national programmes and priorities for children, young people and families, and with partners such as the LGA and Solace to enable strong, joined-up national and local collaborations.

Health visitors and school nurses are the local ‘public health field force’, responsible for leading and delivering much of the HCP, and local councils have the commissioning responsibility for these services. This has given opportunities for closer working across children and families services. The rollout of integrated care systems offers further ways to work with NHS services, bringing together local systems around prevention and support for families.

We need to work together to develop and deliver an evidence-based programme that contributes to the creation of healthy communities for families, brings together local providers and commissioners, and offers services that are responsive to families’ needs. We all share the ambition to enable all children to have positive health and wellbeing, and to achieve their full potential – and, by working together, we can move towards achieving it.

**i** This discussion will continue at a dedicated panel session at the LGA/ADPH's annual public health conference in Brighton on 24 March – see [www.local.gov.uk/events](http://www.local.gov.uk/events). For more information on the Healthy Child Programme, see <https://bit.ly/39QJIXW>

## Delivering district distinction



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

**The District Councils' Network (DCN) Conference in Kenilworth was the biggest, most important such gathering in the local government calendar – the first since the General Election.**

Our timing couldn't have been better. Not only were we fully booked, with more than 250 people registered from well over 100 councils, but we had a waiting list after filling a second hotel.

It was a chance to restate our place in the world and commit ourselves to make, and take, opportunities as they appear.

When the Prime Minister talks about Britain being a global catalyst, it is district councils that are local catalysts that grow local economies into a larger national economy. We provide the building blocks that form local housing, commuting and

health economies with the mandate to work in every community. We are the people who build better lives and stronger economies in a post-Brexit world, one family at a time, one street at a time, one place at a time.

It is the responsibility of districts to redefine, reimagine and rewire what local public services can and should be like, at a geography that makes sense to residents and business.

The new Government has been making a lot of noise around devolution, with a White Paper due in the coming months. 'Levelling up' doesn't mean sitting devolution out. The Queen's Speech spoke to functional economic geographies – the areas over which people live their lives, and from which businesses draw their customers. These are the areas of local bus routes; of travelling-to-work areas; of heading to the shops, going to the park, and visiting your friends. These areas are where families have built strong emotional ties over generations.

Districts know these places. We know what makes them tick. It's the local geography that people recognise and

relate to – and we are close enough to these places to shape and enhance local hopes and dreams.

Rewiring also means acknowledging that our administrative boundaries don't make as much sense as they once did. And it's not just our boundaries. The same applies to the NHS and Department for Work and Pensions, among others. We challenged ourselves to map out ways of better serving residents based on our understanding of what works in the real world and that 'bigger' is not better if it means breaking historic ties.

Taking back control doesn't mean giving more power to remote administrative bureaucracies, with power and control located miles away in buildings without a customer centre – or where the computer loves to say 'No'.

At conference this year, the mantra was that we need a responsive local government that takes a global Britain toward 2066, not back to 1066, with a Twitter hashtag #2066not1066 for districts

*“This was an opportunity for district councillors to discuss how we can engage in devolution to rewire public services around the resident”*



Cllr John Fuller (left) and Professor John Curtice

to use whenever we do something innovative or smart.

So conference was an opportunity for district councillors to discuss how we can engage in devolution to rewire public services around the resident. We hope that many will have left Kenilworth with a renewed energy for reflecting on local circumstances and talking with partners about what they want devolution to achieve for their place.

I want to thank all our fantastic speakers from the DCN and the LGA, and the former Chancellor Sajid Javid who sent a video message. I'd also like to thank Sir John Curtice, the man behind the exit poll, and after-dinner speaker Tim Minogue, editor of Rotten Boroughs in *Private Eye*.

This was the most important DCN conference to date. With Brexit done, our message was crystal clear – we must set the direction for districts as champions of community in the years ahead, and help global Britain to look forward, not back.

## Extra cash to support rough sleepers



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

The final local government funding settlement for 2020/21, laid before Parliament in February, confirmed that councils will receive a share of £49.2 billion in funding (a 4.4 per cent real terms increase).

This includes an additional £1.5 billion for social care, which represents a significant lobbying 'win' for the LGA.

One of the most important policy areas that the overall increase in funding will support is the work that councils across the country do to support rough sleepers and prevent rough sleeping.

No-one should have to sleep rough and it was particularly encouraging that

funding for the Rough Sleeping Initiative has been increased to £112 million. This new money will help pay for up to 6,000 new bed spaces and 2,500 support staff to put rough sleepers into safe accommodation, thus allowing councils to proactively support some of the most vulnerable people in our communities.

Following the recent reshuffle, I am delighted that Robert Jenrick MP was re-appointed as the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, and that Luke Hall MP remains the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State.

I would also like to congratulate Simon Clarke MP and Christopher Pincher MP on their respective appointments as Minister of State and Minister for Housing at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

I have written to all MHCLG ministers following the reshuffle and am especially

looking forward to meeting new ministers to discuss how the LGA can support them in their roles.

I would also like to congratulate Rishi Sunak MP, who just a few months ago was an MHCLG minister, on his appointment as Chancellor of the Exchequer. Having only been elected in 2015, Rishi has enjoyed a truly meteoric rise to one of the great offices of state in less than five years.

We had a very good relationship with Rishi when he was at MHCLG and having also written to him to congratulate him on his promotion, I look forward to working with him ahead of the Budget to secure the best possible deal for local government.

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**"This new money allows councils to proactively support some of our most vulnerable people"**

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

## More freedom on finances

This month's Budget will be the Government's first since the General Election and the UK's exit from the European Union on 31 January.

Our submission to the Treasury sets out how the Budget can unlock the ambitions of councils to further deliver

high-quality services, maximise the growth potential of our local areas and help the Government deliver on national priorities.

It explores how local areas can benefit from more freedom and control over their own finances and greater ability to grow their own economies. We are also calling for reform of Right to Buy, investment in technology to reshape services, and more opportunities for councils to borrow for housing and infrastructure projects at favourable rates.

The final local government finance settlement, published last month, confirmed desperately needed new funding for councils this year, extra

council-tax raising powers and the continuation of key grants.

This positive settlement is for one year only, though. Councils have faced an unprecedented period of funding and demand pressures and continue to face significant challenges.

We will continue to work with the Government to ensure the Budget and this year's Spending Review provide a funding settlement that allows councils to improve services, and not just keep them going.

With long-term investment, councils can protect local services, meet the significant ongoing pressures they face both now and in the future, and make a huge difference to the lives of our residents and communities.

Meanwhile, following the recent government reshuffle, I was delighted to see Robert Jenrick MP remain as our Communities Secretary and look forward to continue working with him on getting the best for local government.

It was sad to see Sajid Javid MP leave government, but our new Chancellor, Rishi Sunak MP, is also someone I am sure we can work well with on the need for sustainable funding for councils and the services on which our communities rely, and a long-term solution for adult social care funding.





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

## 'Levelling up' and health inequalities

'Get Brexit done' was an undeniably clever election message, and one which Boris Johnson can credibly claim he has delivered now that the UK has formally left the EU (notwithstanding the pesky business of unwinding decades of trading arrangements, regulatory alignment, and inter-governmental cooperation...).

But 'levelling up' – the latest catchphrase being parroted by the Prime Minister – has no such clearly deliverable endpoint and is likely to hang around the Government's neck like a millstone.

Everyone can see that infrastructure investment is massively unbalanced, with huge regional differences in transport, housing, and flood defences.

England has one of the worst regional productivity gaps in Europe, where those in the 'left behind' areas of the North and the Midlands face lower incomes, and poorer educational outcomes.

But 'levelling up' can only happen if the Government invests tens of billions of pounds more, something that it simply won't do.

Talk of 'levelling up' just further exposes the ever-increasing inequalities in health, wealth, and life chances that the Tories have racked up over the past decade of disappointment.

## "England has one of the worst regional productivity gaps in Europe"

Take UK health inequalities, which are going backwards, having 'lost a decade', according to Professor Sir Michael Marmot. Life expectancy for the poorest women is reducing, while the number of children living in poverty is growing.

How exactly will the upcoming 'Fair Funding Review' – which our analysis shows will take hundreds of millions of pounds in social care funding away from 'red wall' seats and hand it to southern shires instead – level this up?



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

## Protecting children from harm

We need to sort out a long-term plan to enable councils to protect children from harm while supporting early help to prevent problems escalating in the first place.

That's why the LGA's Liberal Democrat Group is helping table this issue for debate at the Liberal Democrat Spring Conference this month (13-15 March), in York.

Recently, the LGA found that more than 52,000 children are subject to a child protection plan to keep them safe from harm – an increase of 53 per cent since 2010. The number of children in care (78,150) has increased by 28 per cent in the past decade.

## "More than 52,000 children are subject to a child protection plan to keep them safe – an increase of 53 per cent"

You won't need me to tell you that this sharp rise in need for urgent child protection services has coincided with reductions in central government funding for local authorities.

Unprecedented demand and cost pressures mean councils have had to overspend on children's social care budgets each year, and by a total of £3.2 billion over the past five years.

More than eight in 10 councils were forced to spend above £800 million more than they planned to on children's social care last year alone – despite increasing their budgets by more than half a billion pounds yet again.

Details of the Liberal Democrat Conference debate, which will be moved by Layla Moran MP and seconded by our Children's Services Lead, Cllr Lucy Nethsingha, can be found at [www.libdems.org.uk/spring-20-agenda](http://www.libdems.org.uk/spring-20-agenda). See [www.local.gov.uk/lga-lib-dem-group](http://www.local.gov.uk/lga-lib-dem-group) for the wider LGA Liberal Democrat offer in York.



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

## Time for a long-term Budget

Our members have been vociferous about what we need to see in the forthcoming Budget. We have had a good settlement but only for one year and we need longer-term certainty.

Councils do a great job and can do more with sufficient funding for essential local services, fairly distributed.

We need new long-term funding for care, both adults and children. Councils are best placed to ensure everyone has access to proper services, being most in touch with residents and used to managing complex delivery of care across large geographical areas.

We have asked for real investment in the climate agenda to enable councils to take the actions they need. The LGA has taken a lead in declaring a climate emergency and there is an explosion of ideas from members – costed and prioritised in terms of the impact on reaching our targets.

This is the year to get our initiatives in place, and the sooner we do it, the bigger our impact.

## "Councils do a great job and can do more with sufficient funding for essential local services"

In waste services, we need proper funding for additional burdens such as food waste collection and to uphold the principle of 'producer pays'.

For housing, we need to retain the funds from Right to Buy and be able to set the prices and discounts. Planning causes huge concern for our members and needs to be properly resourced and locally led.

This is the year to make a difference. The new Chancellor is nothing if not astute. We have provided the evidence to show what's needed and how much more councils could do. Let's see how he responds.

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

# Supporting housing diversity



**Bryony Harrington** is Head of the Right to Build Task Force

**For three years, the Right to Build Task Force has been advising local authorities on creating more custom and self-build housing.**

As head of the task force, my challenge is to help stakeholders recognise the opportunities that owner-commissioned homes can present as part of wider housing delivery. These include key concerns for housing, such as SME house builders, small sites, place making, community, and housing diversity.

Planning authorities face unique challenges when working with innovative approaches to house building. Our experts

can support this by offering solutions for including custom and self-build housing as part of planning and housing strategies. To date, we've helped 5,000 new homes move into the planning pipeline.

We also run training events, and are currently funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to deliver these for authorities with which we've yet to work.

Enshrined in law, the Right to Build is a powerful tool. Some councils still see it as a threat rather than an opportunity, which is where we can help.

The law requires all councils to maintain a register of anyone interested in self-building, and councils must then consider this demand when fulfilling their wider planning duties.

Last year, we reviewed all existing and emerging local plans in England. We welcomed the fact that 58 per cent provided for custom and self-build.



The analysis revealed emerging examples of good practice and found that policy was most effective at bringing on new custom and self-build housing when it included at least one of the following planning practices: land allocations for larger sites; affordable housing policies; and 'percentage policies', where, for example, 5 per cent of all medium to large sites must be set aside for custom and self-build.

Where local planning policies include several of these elements, it creates a 'package' approach that the task force identified as most effective for ensuring sites come forward.

**i** To find out more or apply for support, visit the Right to Build Task Force's website at [www.righttobuildtoolkit.org.uk](http://www.righttobuildtoolkit.org.uk)



## SOME THINGS JUST ADD UP

FireWatch®, Prevent + Protect® and your Dispatch System integrate to provide a more connected working environment.

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Councillor **Nick Forbes**  
(Lab) is Leader of  
Newcastle City Council

# The pride of Newcastle

**I was incredibly proud when I learned that Stonewall had named Newcastle City Council its number one employer in the Top 100 Workplace Equality Index. Remarkably, this is the first time any local authority has received this fantastic accolade.**

The award is testament to years of dedicated work, integrating our council values – proud, fair and ambitious – into every part of our organisational culture. As civic leaders in Newcastle, it doesn't stop with us; we are pleased to say that our values are embedding into every community in our great city.

On a practical level, we have worked closely with our LGBT Staff Network to look at our policies, workplace environment and how we engage with the residents of Newcastle, to ensure we are welcoming and inclusive. The work of the LGBT Staff Network has led to positive improvements in our recruitment process and changes to our internal communications.

The positive impact of this group has been felt by all 5,000 of our staff and the wider community. It has delivered an informative reverse-mentoring scheme to senior leaders, which has helped them

increase their understanding of staff, and continues to provide important feedback to the council on issues of inclusion. Their independent, confidential support to LGBT staff has been beneficial for the health and wellbeing of colleagues, and helped them feel welcomed and accepted in our workplace. It is my passionate belief that each and every Newcastle City Council employee should feel this way. A person is able to be at their best when they can truly be themselves.

We continue to lead the way for support for trans staff, service users and our communities, and have worked closely with local trans organisations to raise awareness of experiences in Newcastle. Building on our strong history of partnership work, we joined the NHS and other regional bodies to host a ground-breaking conference in November 2019, the focus of which was to develop an improved understanding of the needs of trans people and local communities.

The LGBT staff and council continue to grow a strong network of allies across the city, which has led to a wide range of community engagement and activities. This included a '7 Days of Pride' campaign in the run-up to Newcastle Pride, and highlighting events such as Bi Visibility Day, the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia, and Trans Day of Remembrance.

One of the greatest strengths of the council's LGBT Staff Network is its ability to transcend LGBT communities in the city and bring together LGBT people of faith, members of the BME community and LGBT people with disabilities. The input, individual lived experiences and support from each group is essential in building the city-wide profile of the community.

This year, I am thrilled that Newcastle will host UK Pride, the perfect celebration to mark this outstanding achievement. Every year, we welcome Pride with open arms, its vibrant, rainbow colours bathe the city and the festival is a true celebration of the safe, welcoming place I am proud to call home.

The recognition from Stonewall is a quality mark of how our values – proud, fair and ambitious – have shaped the culture of not only our organisation, but the whole of Newcastle.

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**"A person is able to be at their best when they can truly be themselves"**

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Councillor **Shabir Pandor** (Lab) is Leader of Kirklees Council

## Keeping it local

**One of my priorities as Leader of Kirklees Council is to help create the conditions for a more inclusive local economy.**

Why? Because a more inclusive economy is one that better supports people to achieve their aspirations, no matter their background or circumstances.

It's one where our partners, especially large public and private sector 'anchor' institutions, are proud to support local aspirations, and where smaller businesses and community groups are not disadvantaged because of their size.

In Kirklees, an inclusive economy means recognising that each place has a distinct set of stakeholders, networks and assets that helps make that place what it is – and that one size does not fit all.

Over the past two years, we've started to move away from thinking in service silos towards people-focused, place-based thinking, looking at how the whole system of council services shapes

the local economy and helps tackle and prevent poverty.

We're focusing more on working with people than 'doing to' them. But we don't start with a blank sheet.

We're building on initiatives such as the Kirklees Living Wage, an investment of more than £1.4 million in our lowest-paid staff; and our Better Off Kirklees campaign, bringing an additional £41 million of welfare payments to some of our most vulnerable residents.

For Kirklees, 'keeping it local' is about ensuring the local economy supports local people, partners and places – with a special focus on the most vulnerable and those who are one pay packet away from poverty.

Our key workstreams centre on procurement, employment, assets, and tackling poverty. We are building an

inclusive economy by increasing investment in the local economy through local and responsible suppliers that deliver social value for people in Kirklees.

We are ambitious about maximising the impact of our spend by spending more locally and helping non-local suppliers to create good local work and support local communities.

We are ensuring that our employment and recruitment practices and policies are inclusive, recognising that our diversity is our strength in Kirklees. We are working across our services to make our land and assets more accessible to communities, with more support than ever for community asset transfers. And we're working to ensure this benefits some of our most disadvantaged residents.

The principles of Locality's Keep it Local campaign really capture our approach to building a more inclusive Kirklees. We are focusing on early intervention by building new people-focused, place-based, local integrated partnerships to tackle poverty and social isolation, and to build community capacity from the grassroots. We're building a simpler, yet more diverse, local care market through support for micro-enterprises and investing in a new, local, adult social care cooperative.

I'm ambitious for Kirklees, for its people and for our partners. We're delighted to be joining the Keep it Local network (see panel), so we can forge a new direction in the way we shape our local economies and learn from other councils on the same path.



Huddersfield railway station

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## Keeping it local

Keep it Local is the campaign being run by Locality – the national network supporting community organisations to be strong and successful.

The Keep it Local network is a growing group of councils committed to building partnerships between local places and communities in preference to large-scale outsourcing of services.

Councils in the network are learning from one another and sharing successes. Each member council has endorsed the campaign's principles, appointed senior political and officer champions, and committed to working with Locality to assess and improve current practice.



To find out more, visit [www.locality.org.uk/keep-it-local](http://www.locality.org.uk/keep-it-local) or contact [policy@locality.org.uk](mailto:policy@locality.org.uk)



Jacqui McKinlay is  
Chief Executive of the  
Centre for Public Scrutiny

# The 'Cinderella' function



The Government's recently published statutory guidance for councils and combined authorities (2019) makes it clear that the role of scrutiny in publicly holding decision-makers to account is critical in building residents' trust in their council.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) recently carried out a comprehensive survey of officers and councillors involved with overview and scrutiny across England and Wales, to find out of how well scrutiny is working in councils.

More than 434 people responded, representing 62 per cent of councils. Both councillors and officers involved in scrutiny told us that they are confident about the impact of their work on the lives of local people, but they need this confidence in the value of scrutiny to be shared across the council.

For example, only 31 per cent of all respondents agreed that 'there is parity of esteem between the executive and scrutiny'. More than half of all respondents feel that scrutiny needs more formal powers to have a wider impact by looking

at the work of partners and other service providers such as local health services. "Scrutiny could do with having a bit more local gravitas; health partners, in particular, tend to see it as a bit of a box-ticking exercise," said one.

More than half of local government scrutineers were positive about the future of scrutiny. However, more than a third of respondents felt that party politics has a negative impact on scrutiny's work: "Having seen a change in political executive recently, the attitude to scrutiny has changed significantly."

Officers also reported that more men have more senior positions on scrutiny committees (as either chair or vice-chair), and the proportion of men taking on these roles has increased since 2015. "I think there's a genuine problem with the dominance of men in chairman roles. The male councillors here have a heroic view of leadership, so an aggressive male always

## Key findings

- **87%** agree that 'scrutiny benefits from direct officer support'
- **37%** agree that 'scrutiny works hard to involve and engage the public in its work'
- **31%** agree that 'there is parity of esteem between the executive and scrutiny'
- **60%** agree that 'scrutiny needs more formal powers to look at the work of partners and other service providers in its area'
- **36%** agree that 'party politics has a negative impact on scrutiny's work'
- according to scrutiny officers, the gender split of chairs and vice-chairs is **65:35** men to women
- **63%** agree that 'scrutiny has an impact on the lives of local people'
- **61%** agree that 'the future for scrutiny is positive'
- **82%** of statutory scrutiny officers feel supported in their role
- scrutiny officers estimate that **82%** of scrutiny recommendations in 2018/19 were accepted, and **65%** were successfully implemented.

steps forward and the female councillors always stay silent," said one respondent.

In the past month, CfPS has published new guidance, 'Taking scrutiny seriously', to help chief executives and senior leaders in councils to address scrutiny's 'Cinderella' status in their council, and to ensure that the function is effective in holding decision-makers to account. Copies will be sent to every council chief executive in England and Wales.



'Taking scrutiny seriously' is available at [www.cfps.org.uk/taking-scrutiny-seriously](http://www.cfps.org.uk/taking-scrutiny-seriously)

# COUNCILLOR



Councillor **Ketan Sheth** is  
Chair of the Community  
and Wellbeing Scrutiny  
Committee at Brent Council

## Health issues for local scrutiny

**There was a lot of national media commentary and coverage about the role of the NHS at the General Election, which was unsurprising given all the commitments major political parties were making – boosting NHS funding, more doctors and extra GP appointments, rebuilding hospitals, and so on.**

However, I think that members of overview and scrutiny committees, of all political parties, know the NHS and health is always a major issue in their areas. And that's not just because of the casework we receive from constituents or because health and the NHS tend to fill up a lot of the space on the work plans of our scrutiny committees.

Local government is part and parcel of NHS structures in many areas, with

directors of public health and of adult social care sitting on the executives of clinical commissioning groups (CCGs).

And let's not forget that many elected councillors are involved outside the local authority in the governance structures of their local NHS providers; I will declare an interest, as I am a lead governor of Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust.

In local government, we have a view of the NHS from the root up and – dare I say – probably a more detailed picture than those operating at a national level. It shows that every area has its own strengths and weaknesses, which may or may not align with the national picture.

Now we are settling back into the business of scrutiny, there are three areas I think many health overview and scrutiny

committees will be focusing on during 2020; they look a little different to the recent national debate.

First, the quality of services, particularly of primary care, is a growing area of importance, alongside access to services. The Care Quality Commission (CQC) publishes ratings for each of the primary care providers in each area, so it's always worth keeping up to date with the local picture and, in particular, how ratings change.

What you will want to see is an improvement in these figures and fewer GP providers being placed in special measures as a result of an inadequate CQC rating. If the statistics are heading in the opposite direction in your area, it might be time to ask why.

Second, working at scale is

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*“In local government, we have a view of the NHS from the root up”*

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increasingly the big challenge for the NHS. On the commissioning side in north west London, there are plans to merge eight separate CCGs into one body by April 2021.

That will mean a single operating model – and, I assume, some commissioning arrangements – working at scale, and commissioning services across many different boroughs. That's something we will be tracking with care.

Finally, workforce is an issue frequently raised at health overview and scrutiny meetings. We've heard a lot about problems nationally of recruiting to specialist posts, as well as vacancy rates for nurses. But is it time to ask about the local pressures on recruitment and retention in the hospitals of the big provider trusts in your area?

Now the national political tremors have settled, let's re-focus on the local health scrutiny issues for 2020. Who knows, they may be very different from the national picture?

# 60 SECONDS WITH...



## Councillor Alexandra Phillips

**Councillor Alex Phillips (Green) is the youngest-ever Mayor of Brighton & Hove and a former MEP for South East England**

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

**A** My mum was in the Labour Party. I remember helping in the run-up to the 1997 General Election – phone canvassing, stuffing leaflets and delivering them. I was about 11. I joined the Labour Party at 16 but left 18 months later over the Iraq war. Then I was politically homeless, looking for the right party. I joined the Green Party mainly for its social justice and human rights policies, but also the environmental side.

**Q** What do you most enjoy about being a councillor?

**A** I got addicted to solving people's casework – it gives me immense satisfaction, because people are so grateful. There is nowhere else you can change people's lives so quickly – just getting their bins moved affects their quality of life in such a positive way.

**Q** What are your proudest achievements?

**A** Where I was elected first, they needed a new primary school. When the

Greens got into administration a couple of years later, that was one of the things we were able to do. We brought in the living wage for all council employees and contractors, and that had never been done before.

**Q** How do we get a more diverse range of people to stand as councillors?

**A** The political parties must take responsibility. I got written into our constitution that at least half of council candidates had to be women – so in a three-member ward you would have two women. People call it 'positive discrimination' but 'assertive action' is a better way of describing it.

**Q** You seem in favour of 'no overall control' on councils?

**A** People are not well served when you have councils that are 90 per cent one party. In Brighton & Hove, we have three parties of decent size, and a committee system, not cabinet. We need to reach consensus because there is no overall control. Collaboration, getting consensus and working together – that's how it should

be. It must be quite frustrating for officers, but overall it's much better having the make-up of a council like ours.

**Q** Why did you stand as an MEP?

**A** In my early 20s, I worked for Caroline Lucas when she was an MEP, and I thought 'this is the place for politicians, particularly green ones'. You can write laws that affect 28 countries and millions of people. When we have global challenges like child poverty, inequality and climate change, they are best fought on a global scale. It's a great loss and very sad that we have left the EU.

**Q** What advice would you give to new or aspiring councillors?

**A** When someone says you are too young or not clever enough or you are not what a politician is meant to look like, ignore that. Everyone brings their own experiences. Just because people have lived longer, doesn't mean they are better qualified. That would encourage younger, more diverse people to stand as councillors, and we certainly need them.

# ELECTIONS

## A look ahead to May's elections



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



**A quiet few weeks for by-elections provide an ideal opportunity, briefly, to look ahead to this year's annual local contests.**

One fly in the ointment is already apparent in their scheduling. The traditional first Thursday in May is now to

be followed by a Friday bank holiday to mark the 75th anniversary of VE Day in 1945.

With almost all councils facing police and crime commissioner elections as well,

the scheduling of counts has become a bone of contention, with several likely to delay totting up the votes into the weekend – and maybe even beyond.

If that happens, the local results will struggle for media attention even more than usual.

Most of the seats falling vacant this time were last fought in 2016, seven weeks before the EU referendum outcome turned British politics on its head.

Both major parties registered a small decline in seats and councils controlled, with the Liberal Democrats being the main beneficiaries.

In truth, though, it was a rather humdrum election, with little indication of the turmoil to come. Our estimate of the national equivalent vote put Labour one point ahead of the Conservatives,

with the Liberal Democrats beating UKIP into third place for the first time since 2012.

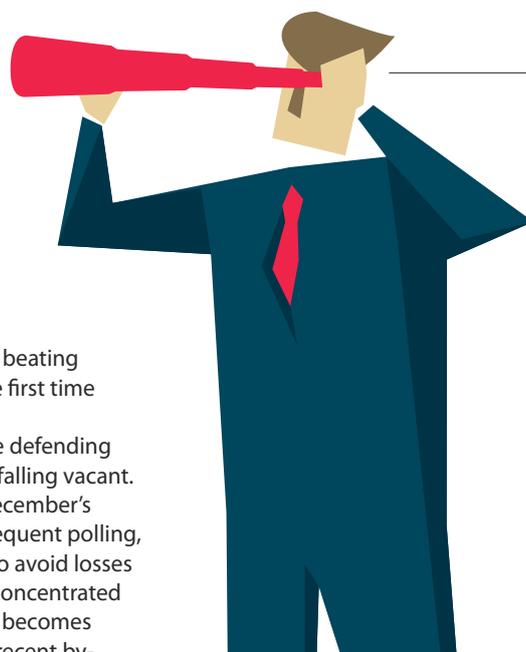
This year, Labour will be defending almost half the 2,700 seats falling vacant. However, evidence from December's General Election, and subsequent polling, suggests they will do well to avoid losses in a set of contests largely concentrated in urban England, whoever becomes party leader. Certainly, the recent by-election result in Middlesbrough gives scant indication that the 'red wall' will be rebuilt any time soon.

Conservative strength in this cycle is somewhat exaggerated by the inaugural elections for the three new single-tier unitary councils – Buckinghamshire, North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire. In each case, the existing county divisions have been retained but will elect three members each. In 2017, the Conservatives won 84 of the 106 seats in those then two counties.

In terms of total councillors, though, the abolition of two more sets of districts – together with the impact of boundary reviews elsewhere – means a further 163 reduction in the number of elected members. England now has 17,000 councillors compared with more than 18,000 just five years ago.

With the Government currently enjoying something of a honeymoon period, there is scope for the Conservatives to add councils and councillors to their tally – and, unusually, it may be the metropolitan boroughs where attention is focused. Having gained constituencies in a dozen boroughs before Christmas, the party will now hope to add significantly to the barely 110 metropolitan seats it is defending.

The third party of English local government, the Liberal Democrats, will still lack a permanent leader in May. They made strong gains in seats and council control last year, and, despite a disappointing General Election performance, will expect again to advance in more prosperous parts of the country where Brexit continues to be mourned.



### Local by-elections

#### Derbyshire, Whaley Bridge

LAB GAIN FROM CON

21.9% over Con      Turnout 41.4%

#### East Staffordshire, Yoxall

CON HELD

57% over Lab      Turnout 24.1%

#### Hertsmere, Borehamwood Kenilworth

CON GAIN FROM LAB

7.6% over Lab      Turnout 23.8%

#### Huntingdonshire, St Ives East

CON HELD

10.8% over Ind      Turnout 23.6%

#### Middlesbrough, Coulby Newham

CON HELD

29.2% over Lab      Turnout 21.6%

#### Suffolk, Newmarket & Red Lodge

CON HELD

32.5% over Lib Dem      Turnout 17.2%

#### Thanet, Cliffsend & Pegwell

CON HELD

22.2% over Green      Turnout 27.3%

#### Warrington, Burtonwood & Winnick

LAB HELD

22.2% over Con      Turnout 25.2%

#### Waverley, Milford

IND HELD

13.9% over Con      Turnout 28.1%

#### West Suffolk, Newmarket North

CON HELD

24.6% over Lib Dem      Turnout 19.4%



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

# LETTERS

## High-speed rail

I welcome the Prime Minister's announcement confirming the delivery of HS2 in full. The North needs significant rail infrastructure investment, which has been sadly lacking for so long. I welcome the acknowledgement that the North shouldn't have to choose between HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) but that both are needed as part of a new rail infrastructure to regenerate the North.

The key decision for Bradford's future is what the Government decides to do next on NPR and the east-west rail connection, which the Prime Minister committed to before the General Election.

Bradford is the biggest city in the

country not on a mainline train line. We have made a strong economic case for Bradford to be a stop on a new line between Manchester and Leeds. Stopping in Bradford city centre on a through line would add £15 billion to the economy of the North.

We will keep working and lobbying on this investment opportunity, which would make a massive difference to the future of the thousands of young people growing up in the youngest city in the UK.

**Cllr Susan Hinchcliffe** (Lab), Leader, City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council and Chair of West Yorkshire Combined Authority



## Local re-greening

We are writing to encourage all councils to help address the climate emergency by planting trees and hedges. Chelmsford City Council will plant one tree for every resident over the next 10 years – more than 175,000 new trees.

A strong start has been made this winter, with council staff and corporate volunteer groups planting more than 5,000 in city parks, and hundreds of local people signing up for two community planting days in February and March.

The world is currently heading for a two-degree rise in temperature over the coming years, with catastrophic impact, such as floods and extreme weather events. We have a chance to reduce this rise to 1.5 degrees, which is enough to greatly reduce the damage. Many studies show that planting trees is the best way to do this – a worldwide tree-planting programme could remove two-thirds of all human emissions.

In local government, we are good at rising to challenges and solving problems, and we need to act on this like nothing we have ever done before.

**Cllr Stephen Robinson** (Lib Dem), Leader, and **Cllr Jude Deakin** (Lib Dem), Cabinet Member for Safer Communities, Chelmsford City 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

**Paul Morris** leads a team of eight environmental enforcement officers at Carmarthenshire County Council

Sorting through dumped rubbish by hand is not something for the faint-hearted, but it's all in a day's work for me and my colleagues.

Dirty nappies, mouldy food, glass, clothes, adult toys and a dead guinea pig are just some of the items that we have been faced with when having to dispose of people's abandoned rubbish.

When we've had a complaint about rubbish being dumped illegally, we go out to visit the site and are often faced with a lot of mess.

It's not only our job to track down the carrier but to dispose of their rubbish appropriately. This means going through each bag and sorting out every item, by hand.

Confronting those found breaking the law, especially after being caught red-handed, goes with the job. Some situations can be quite challenging with officers on the receiving end of an offender's tongue.

All officers work in pairs and are equipped with the latest digital technology, including body and dashboard cameras. This is for the protection of both offender and officer.

The majority are reasonable when we approach them, especially when we tell them we have them on camera committing an offence. People just need to be mindful that we are doing a job, just like they go about doing theirs.

We also deal with all highway offences, such as skips and scaffolding. Abandoned cars are high up on the list of complaints received. However, not all are quite what they seem.

We get calls from people who are not happy that someone living nearby has parked their car outside their property so they tell us it's abandoned, in the hope we can do something about it. A lot of time can be wasted carrying out checks, and, if a car is parked legally, there is nothing we can do about it.



#LGACONF20

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

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

Brighton, 24 March 2020

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

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

Confirmed speakers include: **Professor Chris Whitty**, Chief Medical Officer for England; **Duncan Selbie**, Chief Executive, Public Health England; **Professor Chloe Orkin**, Consultant Physician, Barts Health NHS Trust; **Dagmar Zeumer**, Director of Public Health, Merton London Borough Council; **Michael Wood**, Head of Health Economics Partnerships, NHS Confederation; **Anna Quigley**, Research Director, Ipsos Mori

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