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Councils on the frontline

Councils are doing an amazing job in leading the community response to the coronavirus crisis. But in this fast-changing environment, I urge you to look out for our daily bulletins, check www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus, and follow #LGAcomms and #LGAnews on Twitter for our latest updates, as much of this month's **first** may already be out of date by the time you receive it. Some of our content not related to COVID-19 may also now have been superseded by unforeseen events.

In this month's **first**, we report on the latest Government COVID-19 announcements (p5); additional crisis funding announced for social care, homelessness, and housing benefit (p7); and on emergency legislation (p9).

You can also find out what the LGA is doing to support you in your vital frontline work (p8), what actions other councils have been taking (p11), and the LGA's new COVID-19 guidance for councillors (p10).

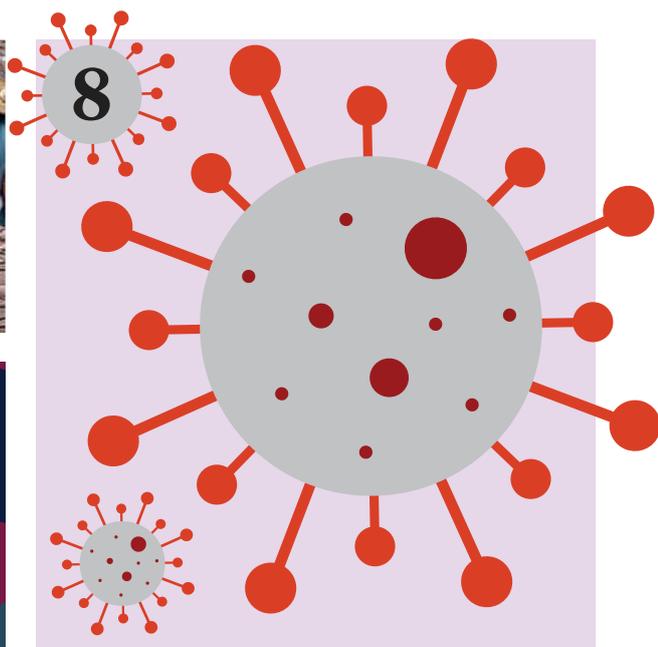
It seems a long time ago now, but Chancellor Rishi Sunak delivered his first Budget last month (p14). While much of the funding he announced then (and since) has been for tackling coronavirus, there was welcome additional spending on local priorities.

Cllr James Jamieson
is LGA Chairman



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Budget unveiled

An extra £30 billion of public spending was announced in last month's Budget – much of it aimed at local priorities including homes, roads, digital connectivity, flood resilience and devolution.

While coronavirus dominated the Chancellor's statement (as it has his subsequent announcements), LGA Chairman Cllr James Jamieson said it was "encouraging that the Budget

signalled a shift towards more spending on local priorities".

Long-term investment in public services is desperately needed, with the LGA estimating councils face an overall funding gap of almost £6.5 billion by 2025, just to meet inflationary and demographic pressures. Key announcements in the Budget included:

- £240 million for new city and

- growth deals
- £200 million for flood resilience and defences
- a new plastic packaging tax
- £1 billion more to remove unsafe cladding from residential buildings
- an extra £1.15 billion of discounted loans for local infrastructure projects
- £9.5 billion for the Affordable Homes programme
- £400 million for local areas to develop homes on brownfield sites
- a £1.8 billion deal for a West

Yorkshire mayoral combined authority Cllr Jamieson said: "With local control over how funding is spent, councils can play a key role in providing genuinely affordable homes, fixing the nation's roads, delivering high-speed broadband and high-quality mobile connectivity, boosting local economies, and tackling environmental challenges.

"There is clear and significant evidence that lives are improved, and the country gets better value for money when councils have the freedoms, funding, and maximum flexibility to make local decisions, so we are pleased to see further progress on new and improved devolution deals.

"This should trigger renewed momentum around the devolution process to all parts of the country so councils can do more to help the Government grow local economies and improve the lives of their communities."

A business rates review announced in the Budget has been delayed because of COVID-19, as has the Comprehensive Spending Review.

- See p14.

Tenants have received discounts of nearly £5 billion to help purchase their council homes under the Right to Buy (RTB) scheme since the size of the discount was increased in April 2012, according to new LGA analysis.

While Right to Buy has helped many families get on the housing ladder, the LGA said the scheme faces an uncertain future unless councils are given the flexibility to set discounts locally and retain 100 per cent of sales receipts to fund the replacement of homes sold off under the scheme.

The national RTB discount, set by government, currently averages 42 per cent of market value, meaning council properties can be bought for almost half price. Since the Government increased the RTB discount in April 2012, the average

Right to Buy discounts top £5bn

discount on a property has increased by 137 per cent to more than £63,000.

Consequently, the LGA estimates that tenants have received £4.9 billion in Right to Buy discounts to buy their own home.

The size of the nationally set discount has led to a surge in the number of homes sold under RTB – with 79,119 homes sold between 2012/13 and 2018/19.

With councils only able to use a third of each retained RTB receipt to build a replacement home, they have only been

able to replace around a quarter (21,720) of the homes sold. This loss of social rented housing risks pushing more families into the private rented sector, driving up housing benefit spending and rents, and exacerbating our homelessness crisis.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Housing Spokesman, said: "Right to Buy continues to enable many families to achieve the dream of getting on the housing ladder and owning their own home. Without reform of the scheme, future generations will not enjoy the same opportunity."

LGA: 'Call up retired care workers'

As first was going to press, the LGA was calling on ministers to consider how they could help retired care workers who may want, or be able, to return to work.

While the Government has introduced measures for doctors and nurses to come back to the NHS and social workers to social care to help frontline services during the coronavirus outbreak, it has not yet extended its thinking to care workers.

Bringing back experienced care workers to the profession would help support people discharged from hospital to free up beds for those being treated for COVID-19, according to the LGA.

It would also enable councils to better support the 1.5 million vulnerable people identified by the Government as most at risk from coronavirus and needing to stay at home for 12 weeks.

Even if some of these staff were to return to work, it would significantly strengthen the ability of the social care

workforce to provide the much-needed support vulnerable people will require in the coming weeks and months ahead.

The recently retired would not need much in terms of refresher training. And the sector could set up regional contact groups so that returners could join other employers if their original employer didn't need them.

Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Making sure older and vulnerable people get the care and protection they need to stay safe and well is priority number one for councils.

"The coronavirus outbreak will severely test and stretch our social care workforce, who already do a tremendous job in the face of extreme pressures.

"But supporting retired care workers to return to work could be a significant booster measure for the sector, to get through the highly challenging weeks and months ahead."

Shielding the most vulnerable

The Government has issued guidance for local authorities and local resilience forums on the system to support those who are medically extremely vulnerable to coronavirus.

It sets out the role of local resilience forums (LRFs) and councils in supporting 'shielded' patients – those who are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 because of a serious, underlying health condition, and who have been advised to stay at home and avoid all face-to-face contact for at least 12 weeks.

Councils will be able to use emergency food supplies for 'shielded' people in immediate and urgent need of basic foodstuffs before food parcels start being delivered to their homes.

They will need to continue working with their LRF, NHS and voluntary and community sector partners, and each other, to support not only the shielding, but also to provide help

for others isolating at home who have no-one to help them.

Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "There has been a remarkable community response in villages, towns and cities across the country as people look out for family, friends and neighbours during this public health crisis.

"Councils have responded rapidly. We are ready to coordinate and lead local partners in each community to ensure that there is support for our most vulnerable residents who find that their family and neighbours can't meet their particular needs."



In brief

Council tax relief

Ministers have confirmed a £500 million hardship fund, which will enable English councils to reduce the 2020/21 council tax bills of working age people receiving local council tax support by at least £150 each. Councils will also be able to use the funding to provide further discretionary support to vulnerable people through, for example, local welfare schemes. Cllr Richard Watts, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said: "We are pleased that councils will now be able to provide much-needed support to many households on the lowest incomes by quickly reducing or removing the need for them to pay council tax."

Free parking

NHS and social care staff have been given free car parking in hospitals and council parking bays. Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: "These critical workers are all doing vital and highly-valued work to support the most vulnerable in our society and councils want to do all they can to support them."

Annual conference

The LGA's annual conference, due to take place in Harrogate this summer, has been cancelled due to the COVID-19 outbreak. All other LGA events have been postponed or cancelled until the end of August. Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: "It is very disappointing to have to cancel this year's conference, but the health and safety of all our attendees is our highest priority. We apologise for any inconvenience and look forward to welcoming you back to LGA events as soon as possible."

Burdens lifted

The LGA has welcomed the postponement of the 2020 Comprehensive Spending Review as it allows government and councils to focus on the response to COVID-19. Meanwhile, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman has become the latest watchdog to suspend its investigations to help reduce burdens on councils, following similar announcements by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and Ofsted.

In brief

Critical workers

Local government workers in roles “essential to the effective delivery” of the COVID-19 response or delivering essential public services, including payment of benefits, were among those named as ‘critical workers’ by central government earlier this month. Because their work is vital, these staff are able to put their children in school and use public transport to get to work. Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: “This is justified recognition of the vital local role our staff are playing to try and minimise the spread of infection, protect the most vulnerable, support our local businesses and bring together our communities.”

Fire service aid

Firefighters in England and Wales will be able to deliver food and medicines, drive ambulances and retrieve dead bodies during the coronavirus outbreak, after an unprecedented agreement was reached between the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), fire chiefs, and Fire and Rescue Employers. Firefighters will continue responding to core emergencies, such as fires and road traffic collisions. Cllr Nick Chard, Chair of the National Employers, said: “Fire and rescue has always played its role in meeting seemingly insurmountable challenges and this crisis is no exception. We can immediately step up our assistance to support our over-stretched public sector colleagues, especially ambulance services.”

Elections postponed

The Government’s “swift” decision to postpone this year’s local council and police and crime commissioner elections was “very helpful”, the LGA has said. Local by-elections have also been cancelled or postponed. Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: “We have been raising a number of issues with government including the possible impact of coronavirus on local elections. Councils will now continue to put all of their efforts into supporting their local communities as the nation tackles COVID-19.” Professors Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher offer their analysis of what may be this year’s last by-election results on p26.

Councils warn of rise in coronavirus-related scams

Self-isolating older and vulnerable residents are at risk of being exploited by strangers and cold callers posing as helpful neighbours in order to scam them, councils up and down the country have been warning.

Fraudsters are playing on the fear created by COVID-19 and the need for the elderly and vulnerable to reduce social contact.

Councils have already seen coronavirus-related scams involving fraudsters knocking on the doors of older people asking for cash upfront in exchange for running errands; or impersonating council officers



or health officials offering mandatory coronavirus testing. More elaborate scams include gaining access to savings or stealing a person’s identity.

Not only are those who are self-isolating at risk of falling victim to these fraudsters, but by letting people into their homes, unsuspecting victims are at greater risk of catching coronavirus.

Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chair of the LGA’s Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: “Keeping the elderly and those with underlying health conditions safe is every council’s top priority, and councils will do everything in their power to prosecute fraudsters and seek the toughest penalties for criminals taking advantage in this despicable way.

“Councils have plans in place for dealing with the very challenging circumstances presented by the coronavirus outbreak. They will continue to review how best to use their staff and mobilise community resources to ensure that the elderly and vulnerable are given the support they need.”

SEND guidance issued after school closures

Children’s Minister Vicky Ford has written to councils and other partners, setting out the Government’s plans to ensure support can continue to be provided to children and young people with SEND following the closure of the UK’s schools.

The letter gave details of how the emergency legislation in the Coronavirus Act will balance the needs of children with SEND to receive the support they need with managing the demands on councils and health bodies to respond to COVID-19.

The Department for Education (DfE) has also published guidance on early years and childcare setting closures, which includes details of financial support available to providers.

As first was going to press, the number of children attending partially closed mainstream schools looked set to be lower than expected.

All schools were closed from 23 March, as part of wider efforts to limit the spread of

COVID-19. However, many are staying open to provide childcare for critical workers, such as NHS staff, social care workers and frontline council workers.

Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA’s Children and Young People Board, said: “It is important that schools will be kept partially open to provide childcare for parents unable to work at home because they are leading local efforts to tackle the coronavirus crisis.

“Councils and schools will continue to do all they can to try to ensure vulnerable pupils, including those on free school meals and those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), can continue to be provided for.”

For the latest information on children and schools, please visit the LGA’s coronavirus hub at www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus, and email coronavirus.enquiries@local.gov.uk to let us know if there are any issues you would like us to feed into DfE and MHCLG colleagues.



£1.6bn care boost to free hospital beds

Patients who no longer need urgent hospital treatment will be helped to return home, making at least 30,000 beds available during the coronavirus outbreak, after councils received £1.6 billion in extra funding.

The LGA has been working with the Government on the need for extra resources for adult social care services to cope with the crisis. The funding, allocated from the £5 billion previously set aside for coronavirus in the Budget, will help free up essential NHS hospital beds by ensuring that people who are fit to leave hospital get back home, or to a community-based service, as quickly and safely as possible.

Councils will also be able to use this funding for other services helping the most vulnerable, including homeless people.

Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "This extra funding will be crucial to support the tireless

efforts of council social care staff to continue to support and protect people who rely on them.

"Councils are leading local efforts in their communities to tackle the coronavirus outbreak. Their absolute priority is continuity of care and protecting the most vulnerable from this virus. This funding boost will help councils do everything they can to ensure people vulnerable to the virus are able to access vital supplies."

Another £1.3 billion will be available to speed up the NHS discharge process, and will cover follow-on care costs for adults in social care, or people who need additional support, when they are out of hospital and back in their homes or community.

The LGA said that, to maximise the impact of this funding, councils will need to target it towards the pressures in their particular local area, including support to the care provider market.

Support for homeless

As **first** was going to press, councils were being asked by government to urgently support rough sleepers and vulnerable homeless people into accommodation – even as many councils were continuing to experience issues with placing homeless households in hotels and B&Bs.

Hotels, hostels and B&Bs were among the businesses required to close earlier this month, to help reduce the spread of COVID-19, but were told they could remain open if providing rooms for homeless people.

Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: "Councils have been working hard to identify rough sleepers and homeless people, get them off the streets and into suitable accommodation and help protect them from the coronavirus.

"This will be a huge task given the shortage of accommodation available with many councils now affected by the recent closures of hotels and the difficulties some have faced where rough sleepers refuse to engage or take up the offer of help.

"To help these efforts, some councils will need to call on the Government for urgent help to find accommodation and enforce this, and have access to funding, if they need it, to cover additional staffing and support costs."

The Government set aside £3.2 million of emergency funding to help councils support rough sleepers to self-isolate. Across the country, they are making significant efforts to ensure that people experiencing homelessness – including those sleeping rough and in night shelters – are safely housed and, where needed, isolated as part of wider efforts to contain COVID-19.

But homelessness services remain under huge pressure as a result of rising demand driven by a historic shortage of social housing.

Further guidance on homelessness is expected to clarify the roles of local structures, including local resilience forums, NHS and public health services, homelessness teams, and accommodation providers.

Housing benefit boost

The local housing allowance (LHA) freeze has been reversed as part of the Chancellor's £7 billion investment in the welfare system, aimed at protecting jobs and incomes during the coronavirus outbreak.

LHA (including for Universal Credit claimants) will now cover the lowest 30th percentile of market rents – effectively reversing the impact of the then Chancellor George Osborne's 2016 freeze on the benefit, and boosting housing benefit rates.

Cllr Richard Watts, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said: "The LGA has long-

called for a lifting of LHA rates to address the growing gap between income and rents. It is great the Chancellor has acted.

"Restoring LHA rates to cover at least the lowest third of market rents will deliver more of the security that tenants need during this coronavirus crisis and support households who need help to meet their housing costs.

"Alongside the additional resources that have been announced for Universal Credit and the welfare benefits system, this will play an important role in relieving pressure on local services and hardship support at this crucial time."



Mutual support

The LGA is doing everything it can to help councils as they respond to the COVID-19 crisis



Councillor James Jamieson is Chairman of the LGA

Local government has been unstinting in its support of national efforts to minimise the spread of coronavirus, while protecting our most vulnerable residents, supporting our local businesses and bringing together our communities.

We have always been a highly trusted part of the public sector and are clearly demonstrating, during these unprecedented times, why we're worthy of that trust. In the Prime Minister's press conferences, the leading role local government is playing has been made clear time and time again.

Thank you for everything you and your teams are doing – it is an honour to work alongside you.

The LGA, as your national membership body, is doing everything it can to represent the priorities of councils on the national stage and ensure you get the support you need to continue your vital work.

Our councillors and officers are having regular meetings at the highest level of government, including with the Prime Minister, Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick MP, Health Secretary Matt Hancock and Helen Whately, Minister for Care.

We are working with government, providing advice on the best way to implement new measures and on

changes to legislation that will make it easier for councils and their partners to refocus their work and respond effectively to the coronavirus crisis.

We have reassured ministers that councils want to do everything they can at this crucial time – but that we must be treated as equal partners and properly resourced to perform the essential roles that are expected of us.

The Government has committed to doing this, and ministers will continue to make announcements on the detail of what they are asking councils to do in the coming days and months.

We are also doing a huge amount of work directly with you. Council leaders, chief executives and directors of communications should be receiving a daily bulletin from either myself or LGA Chief Executive Mark Lloyd, with the latest updates and developments.

If you are not receiving this email, please contact info@local.gov.uk. You can follow us on Twitter at [#LGAcommms](https://twitter.com/LGAcommms) and [#LGANews](https://twitter.com/LGANews) for the latest updates.

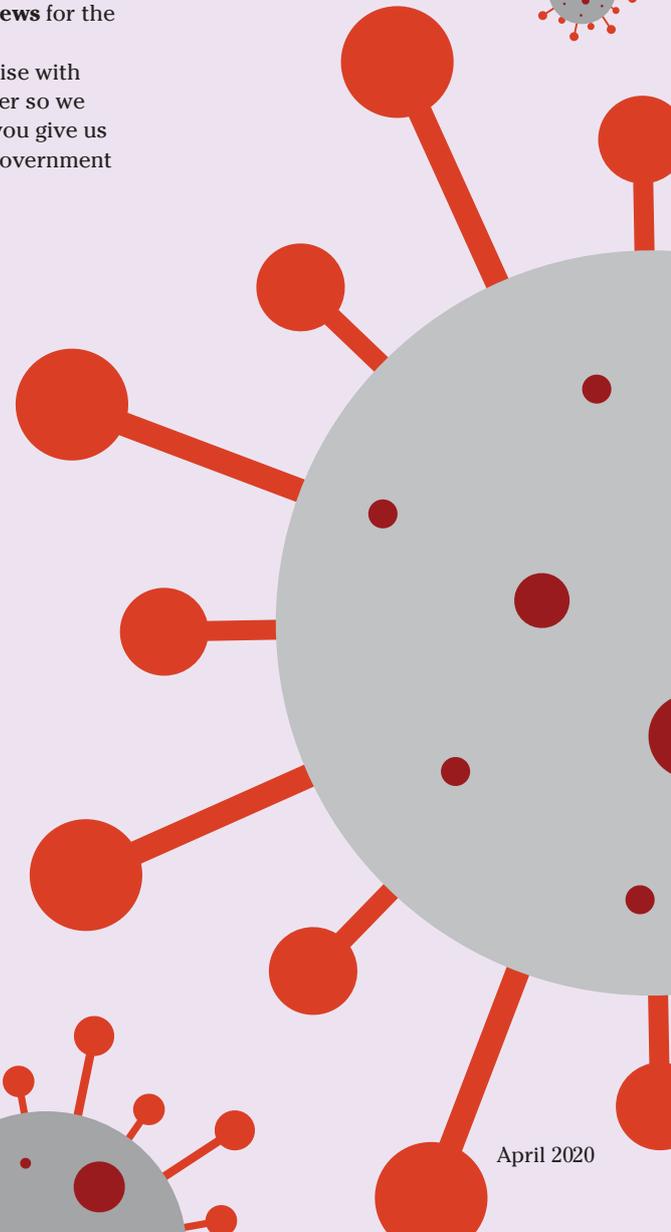
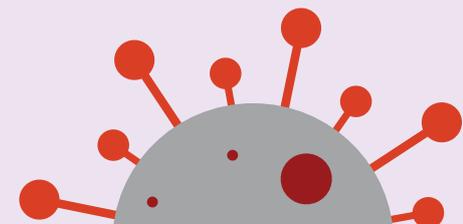
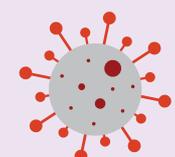
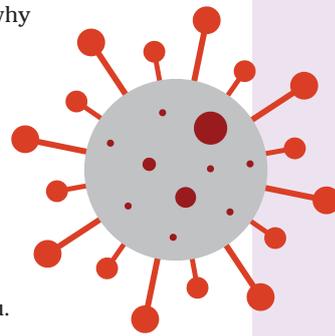
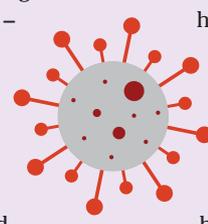
Please continue to liaise with your LGA principal adviser so we can use the intelligence you give us in our discussions with government

and in determining how we best support councils.

We have also set up a coronavirus hub (www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus) with links to important updates, resources, national guidance, public health advice and other useful material.

These include, among many other things, new LGA guidance for councillors on their role as community leaders during this public health emergency (see p11); and communications resources (including templates) put together by the LGA and councils from around the country to help us communicate effectively with a wide range of stakeholders, from residents and businesses to at-risk groups and employees.

Do please let us know what else we can do to help, or raise your questions and concerns with us directly, by emailing coronavirus.enquiries@local.gov.uk



Councils are playing their part in supporting the national effort to tackle COVID-19 by re-designing services to shield the most vulnerable and support communities, while also continuing to support their local businesses, which face very significant risks at this time.

The Coronavirus Act passed by Parliament last week is positive as it provides assistance with cutting unnecessary burdens and freeing up capacity.

Councillors will be able to attend council meetings remotely and cancel meetings altogether, if needed. These freedoms are needed to ensure councils can continue to take decisions as the coronavirus emergency progresses, and protect the functioning of local democracy.

The 329-page Coronavirus Act sets out wide-ranging powers enabling the Government to restrict events, close premises and enforce social

Emergency powers

The LGA has helped shape the new Coronavirus Act to ensure councils can act as a fourth emergency service and design new ways to support communities

distancing rules, among other things.

It also includes measures aimed at reducing the pressure on local government and other frontline sectors, such as relaxing rules around detention under mental health laws and the provision of social care for older and disabled people.

For example, for the duration of the 'emergency period', the Act makes provisions for the Secretary of State to ease councils' responsibilities under the 2014 Care Act, which would mean not having to comply with various duties including around needs assessments (including for carers), financial assessments and the preparation of care and support plans.

This allows councils, supported by national government, to make decisions to prioritise resources, services and support to those with the greatest needs.

The LGA worked closely with ministers, MPs and Peers as the Bill passed through Parliament and influenced it to ensure that councils have greater flexibilities

to support their communities at this time.

The Government amended the Bill to include our proposals around the holding of council meetings. The Secretary of State can now lay regulations so that councillors can attend, speak at, vote in, or otherwise participate in local authority meetings without being together in the same place.

This should allow councils to both postpone meetings and engage in decision-making and voting remotely. This applies to all tiers of local government including parish councils, joint boards and fire and rescue authorities. We have pushed this very hard and we think it will give councillors the flexibility required to serve their local communities in these times.

The Act also provides protection from eviction for renters, as landlords will now have to give a warning period of three months.

And it allows for the emergency registration of social workers, so additional staff can be drawn in quickly, mainly from those who have retired recently or people who have nearly completed social work training.

Parliament is now in recess until 21 April, but the legislation will be debated and voted on every six months to ensure MPs are content for it to continue.

It is essential, both now and for the coming weeks, that councils are supported by national government to do things differently and support our communities. The Coronavirus Act will help councils do this, and the measures are welcome.

Community leaders

Councillors are providing visible and responsible local leadership on COVID-19

The LGA has issued guidance to help elected councillors as their local authorities grapple with the worst public health crisis we have experienced in a century.

It focuses on specific issues relevant to your involvement in leading and protecting our communities, as well as in delivering the full range of our normal services. In addition, it highlights the helpful and strong role that individual ward councillors can play in supporting their communities through these difficult times.

Councils are category one responders under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, which sets out the legislative framework for responding to emergencies such as the COVID-19 outbreak. As part of local resilience forums (LRF), councils work with local partner organisations to plan and activate their emergency responses. Given the nature of this emergency, there will be a greater focus on the work of councils and health partners than on the 'blue light' services.

The role of councillors within this context is to provide vital local leadership, rather than to become involved in the operational response led by officers. Ward councillors will be among the people who know their

areas best, and have an important role to play by:

- acting as a bridge between councils and communities
- amplifying consistent messaging through disseminating council and government information
- identifying local vulnerabilities – particularly of residents, but also businesses – and feeding this intelligence back into councils
- working with local voluntary sector groups to provide support and advice to local communities
- offering reassurance to, and offering support for, residents.

Your council should have a mechanism for keeping you informed about developments and national and corporate messages. This should make it clear how regularly you can expect to be updated, given that your council's overall priority will be supporting local communities.

In some recent emergencies, councils have found it helpful to designate a senior councillor as a first point of contact to take the lead role in engaging with other elected members.

The LGA's guidance covers: understanding the emergency response framework and your role; community leadership; using social media; community mapping; enabling community resilience; facilitating support for residents; empathy and reassurance; community cohesion and monitoring; and your own wellbeing.

Key messages for councillors include:

- Take a responsible approach to the information you share and the messages you give by following guidance from your council and using confirmed messages from official sources.
- Consider collating your local knowledge and ward contacts, and seek advice from officers about how this intelligence can be shared.
- Try to engage with the many neighbourhood groups that have been established to support

local residents, to share official messages and find out about local concerns and vulnerable residents.

- Provide empathy and reassurance – residents and your officers need it!

More than ever before, our role as civic and community leaders requires us to offer visible, responsible leadership that links community-led support with council structures, to help build and sustain our overall resilience.

Finally, it is undoubtedly the case that the coming months will make huge demands on all of us connected with councils, as well as a great many other people in our communities. Please take the time to balance your hard work with the need to maintain your own health and wellbeing.

i 'COVID-19 outbreak: councillor guidance' can be downloaded for free from www.local.gov.uk/publications. The LGA will continue to update councillors with further guidance, as appropriate, and via our website, www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus. You can email coronavirus.enquiries@local.gov.uk with your questions or concerns





Rising to the challenge

Councils are demonstrating their role as leaders of place by stepping up to the unprecedented challenges that COVID-19 brings

have been identified. It advised that, where possible, household waste must be put in a plastic rubbish bag, tied when full, then placed in a second bin bag and tied. No waste should be put in any bin less than three days before the bin is due to be collected.

Volunteers

Many councils have been working with local partners to coordinate the work of volunteers.

The London Borough of Bexley and Bexley Voluntary Service Council are working together to support residents who are able to give their time to support vulnerable people. Local residents can register to help charities, community groups and people who need assistance, through a volunteering scheme.

Enfield Stands Together, coordinated by Enfield Council and Enfield Voluntary action, has brought together key local partners – the NHS, Enfield Carers Centre, Age UK, Citizens Advice, and many more – to help residents volunteer and register for extra help.

Transport and parking

Charges in all public car parks run by Hart District Council have been suspended until the end of June. The council will maintain parking enforcement services to ensure people continue to park properly, but it will not issue any new or replacement residents' parking permits during this period.

The West of England Combined Authority has extended the hours when concessionary bus passes can be used, so residents can visit supermarkets opening just for older people or those with a disability for the first hour of their business day.

Cultural services

Hampshire County Council is encouraging its residents to read and access its wide range of digital content through their phones, tablets and computers. The council has released more content on Borrowbox – the free app that has hundreds of audiobooks and e-books for children and adults.

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council's culture and leisure venues, along with libraries, have been closed to help reduce the spread of coronavirus. Library books can be renewed online, but any library fines incurred as a result of these closures will be waived.

Similarly, any fines for overdue library materials and overdue notifications have been suspended by Gloucestershire County Council. Expiry dates for library cards will be extended so that users can continue to access online materials.

Trading standards

Trading standards officers at North Yorkshire County Council are encouraging family and friends to help protect residents from potential scams during the coronavirus outbreak. They are offering free call blockers to residents who are victims of phone frauds.

Lancashire County Council has warned suppliers and retailers not to seek to profit from the coronavirus outbreak, after reports about some companies setting excessively high prices for protective items such as face masks, as well as other sanitisation and safety goods. It is working closely with the Competition and Markets Authority to monitor the situation and take action to address consumer protection issues.

Since the beginning of the coronavirus crisis, councils have been adapting and prioritising their work to ensure vital local services continue and vulnerable residents are not left isolated.

Here, we highlight just some of the initiatives taken in the first few weeks of this unprecedented public health emergency. Please send us examples of your work and good practice so we can share them with other councils, by emailing coronavirus.enquiries@local.gov.uk

Waste

South Ribble Borough Council issued guidance for residents to change the way waste is handled at properties where possible cases of coronavirus

Unlocking the potential of places

Five visionary local authorities will be able to take part in the 2020 Future Place programme



Lucy Carmichael is Director of Practice at the Royal Institute of British Architects

Future Place provides an opportunity for local authorities to work intensively with national agencies and bodies to accelerate their visions and build their capacity to unlock the potential of their places.

A package of tailored support to meet the specific challenges and needs of the place will be drawn from the relevant partner bodies – the LGA, the

i Due to the coronavirus outbreak, the application process for Future Place 2020 has been delayed.

However, you can find out more about the programme, including the selection criteria, at www.architecture.com/future-place, and read an overview of the 2019 programme and case studies from the first Future Place councils

Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), Local Partnerships, Homes England, Historic England and the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI).

This might include a placemaking strategy developed by a RIBA Chartered Practice, and expert advice from Local Partnerships on matters ranging from effective governance structures to housing delivery vehicles. The expansion of the partnership in 2020 to include Historic England will bring even greater breadth and depth to the offer.

Last year's initial round of the programme has provided evidence that targeted collaborative support can bring a new impetus to placemaking as the focus for a diverse range of local authority priorities.

The first five Future Places – Bradford, Exeter, Gateshead, Great Yarmouth and North Northamptonshire – positively advanced their original visions through participation in the programme. The architects commissioned to work with them all uncovered hitherto unidentified challenges and opportunities, and plans are now in place to build on the placemaking strategies developed.

For example, an illustrated toolkit for diverse community engagement has been developed for City of Bradford

Metropolitan District Council, which will help its officers to ensure that previously unheard voices feed into the process of updating the City Plan and emerging projects.

A methodology for designing higher-density, car-free, sustainable neighbourhoods in Exeter is being refined and tested by Homes England and the city council, with a view to informing future policy development and the creation of masterplans for key sites.

A high-level masterplan created to reimagine the potential of Gateshead town centre is also acting as a catalyst for a public engagement campaign and to update the urban core delivery plan.

Local or combined authorities interested in applying for the 2020 Future Place programme will need to demonstrate how they will deliver their wider policy ambitions through placemaking, with a focus on sustainability and climate resilience, health and wellbeing, and inclusion – as well as housing, employment and high street regeneration.

The selected Future Places will have a thorough understanding of their place-based challenges and will clearly articulate how participation in the programme will provide a catalyst to advance their vision.

Submissions that demonstrate collaborative working – across departments, the public and private sectors, and adjoining local authorities within strategic planning areas – are particularly encouraged. The final selection will seek to achieve a representative balance of places across different regions, administrations, markets and contexts.

Cllr David Renard, Chairman of the LGA's Economy, Environment, Housing and Transport Board, has welcomed the scheme: "After the successful work of the five Future Places in the first year, the LGA and Local Partnerships are delighted to continue the partnership with RIBA, Homes England, Historic England and the RTPI, to support and champion the roles of councils to achieve their placemaking ambitions."





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



Diversity in political leadership

Political leaders should reflect the communities they serve, to ensure everybody's views are heard in the policy-making process

Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people are still significantly under-represented in political positions.

The LGA's 2018 councillor census revealed that BAME individuals held just 4.2 per cent of councillor positions in England – a minimal increase from 3.5 per cent in 2004 – despite making up 13.5 per cent of the general population.

More work needs to be done to ensure that councillors across the country are representing the diverse communities that they serve. The LGA is advocating for the recruitment and retention of BAME councillors, but the reality is that more strides need to be made to reach equality of representation.

So why is diverse and inclusive leadership vital for local communities? It is important that political leaders reflect the communities they serve to ensure that everybody's views are listened to, reflected on, heard and represented in broader policy discussions.

Beyond this, the under-representation of BAME individuals in the wider political sphere is deemed to be a catalyst for political distrust and apathy among BAME communities.

With more BAME people taking on political leadership positions,

therefore, we can fulfil broader national objectives of increasing trust, engagement and participation of BAME individuals in politics.

The end goal is a thriving, inclusive democracy and representative legislative system, which absorbs the views of everybody, regardless of their background.

The LGA has been vocal about the need to address diversity in local politics and, increasingly, it has become a prominent theme running across the LGA's political and managerial leadership programmes.

From the beginning of their political journey, the LGA's 'Be a Councillor' campaign supports councils to recruit a diverse range of councillor candidates. Once elected, a whole series of successful training and development programmes offer spaces for diverse groups of councillors to develop their leadership, skills and personal abilities in workshops covering a range of portfolio areas.

The LGA's 'BAME weekender' exclusively offers a chance for BAME individuals to openly address and

overcome the specific challenges faced by councillors. But this sort of challenge and support isn't new. In 1996, Lord Simon Woolley established Operation Black Vote (OBV) – the first initiative focusing on the black democratic deficit in Britain.

Building on its foundation of promoting equality and human rights of black people, its entire ethos is underpinned by political education, participation and the representation of BAME individuals in politics. Through councillor and MP shadowing schemes, plus various other leadership programmes and initiatives, OBV pushes for greater political involvement of BAME communities, locally and nationally.

With a shared vision to increase civic engagement among BAME communities, the LGA and OBV are pulling together their resources and networks to not only promote the positive role that BAME individuals can play in civic and political life, but also to build the confidence and familiarity of those already in political settings.

Standing together with a common agenda, this evolving partnership provides a meaningful channel through which to discuss openly the challenges, and to address the issues faced by BAME communities.

In doing so, the agenda of diverse and inclusive leadership required in local government will become stronger and louder – because when those in political positions reflect the cultural diversity of society, positive change that makes a difference will become a reality, and our local communities will be strengthened.

i See www.beacouncillor.co.uk/ for more about the LGA's **Be a Councillor** campaign, and www.local.gov.uk/our-support/highlighting-political-leadership for information about our support for political leadership

More spending on local priorities

An extra £30 billion of spending was announced in last month's Budget, much of it aimed at dealing with the coronavirus outbreak

Building homes, boosting connectivity and filling potholes were among the local priorities to benefit from announcements in Rishi Sunak's first Budget as Chancellor.

While Mr Sunak's statement was dominated by measures aimed at combatting the coronavirus outbreak, there were some encouraging signs of a shift towards more local spending, with significant and welcome investment in infrastructure and public services.

The Chancellor announced more than £600 billion for road, rail, housing and broadband projects over five years; an additional £360 million for the Welsh Government; £240 million for new city and growth deals; and £200 million for local communities in England to build flood resilience, with a promise to double investment in flood defences.

There were also announcements on business rates, devolution, the spending review, adult social care, air quality and reducing plastic pollution.

However, according to the LGA's pre-Budget analysis, councils in England face an overall funding gap of almost £6.5 billion by 2025, just to meet demand and inflation pressures, before any consideration of service improvements or investment needed in preventative services.

We are therefore looking forward to working with the Government on its (delayed) Comprehensive Spending Review, to ensure it provides a sustainable, long-term

funding settlement for councils. This will allow councils to protect and improve local services, grow our economy and make a positive difference to the lives of our communities.

Business rates account for around a quarter of all council spending power, and money raised is used to pay for vital local services. Councils agree the system needs to be modernised and improved, and we will engage with the Government's (delayed) business rates review.

This is an opportunity to ensure online businesses make a fair contribution, tackle business rates avoidance, reduce the risk of appeals on councils and provide local government with a sustainable income stream. Urgent clarity is needed on how this review will impact on reforms that will allow local government to keep more business rates income from April 2021.

It was pleasing to see further progress on devolution, with the announcement of a £1.8 billion deal for a West Yorkshire mayoral combined authority and the promise of a White Paper.

There is clear and significant evidence that lives are improved and the country gets better value for money when councils have the freedoms and funding to make local decisions. All councils should have the opportunity to progress with devolution. Developing new deals will require different approaches for different areas, including how they are governed.

Flooding

- Spending on England's flood and coastal defences will double to £5.2 billion over the next six years.
- £120 million to repair assets damaged by this winter's storms.
- £200 million over the next six years for a place-based resilience programme for areas where flooding and coastal erosion is inevitable.

LGA view: "We will be working with government to ensure councils are able to access funding for their local communities."

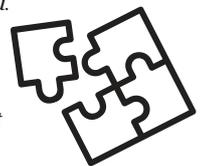


Planning

- Proposed reforms to be set out shortly, followed by a Planning White Paper in the spring.
- Greater government intervention where planning authorities fail to meet their local housing need.

LGA view: "The planning system is not a barrier to house building, with nine out of 10 applications being approved.

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



Waste and recycling

- A new plastic packaging tax from April 2022.
- An additional £700,000 to establish the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme.
- £2 million to improve evidence on where fly-tipping happens and the best ways to deter it.

LGA view: "The LGA will be pressing to ensure that the EPR scheme provides additional funding for councils to cover the cost of dealing with packaging waste, including littered and fly-tipped packaging items."



i This is an edited version of the LGA's Budget 2020 Briefing. For the full version, please visit www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/budget-2020-lga-day-briefing

Social housing

- Interest rates for investment in social housing cut by 1 per cent.
- An extra £1.15 billion of discounted loans available for local infrastructure projects.



LGA view: “We called for the implementation of a discounted local infrastructure rate

for crucial projects including housing, which would otherwise be under threat.”

Building safety

- An additional £1 billion to remove unsafe cladding from residential buildings above 18 metres tall.

LGA view: “This announcement is welcome. We have been calling for government action to fund councils and housing associations to remove non-aluminium composite material (ACM) dangerous cladding for more than two years.”



Adult social care



- Commitment to long-term reform of adult social care, with ministers writing to parliamentarians to begin building cross-party consensus.
- £1 billion extra in social care over the next 10 years, as per the 2019 Spending Round.

LGA view: “It is disappointing that the Budget includes no additional new funding for adult social care. Even with this £1 billion investment, we estimate that adult social care faces a funding gap of \$810 million in 2020/21, rising to £3.9 billion in 2024/25.”

Fire safety

- £20 million for fire and rescue services to increase inspection and enforcement capability and build a strategic response to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry’s findings.



LGA view: “The UK has a shortage of fire engineering expertise. This is a welcome start, but needs to be matched with investment in local authority building control.”

Business rates



- The Government is to carry out a business rates review, after the COVID-19 emergency is over.

- An extra £11.5 million to address the appeals backlogs and manage more frequent evaluations.

LGA view: “Councils want to see a business rates system that is buoyant, responsive to local needs and fair to all. The review should consider the full suite of funding options available to finance local services, such as a tourism levy and an e-commerce levy.”

Housing



- An extra \$9.5 billion for the Affordable Homes Programme and \$400 million for local areas to establish housing on brownfield land.
- Confirmation of \$1.1 billion from the Housing Infrastructure Fund for nine different areas.

LGA view: “With more than one million households on council waiting lists, it is vital that the Affordable Homes Programme is re-focused towards support for truly affordable homes, including those for social rent... All councils should have access to funding to support housing delivery on brownfield land.”

Homelessness

- Confirmation of £237 million for accommodation for up to 6,000 rough sleepers.
- A further £144 million for associated support services and £262 million for substance misuse treatment services.

LGA view: “This will help councils’ efforts to get people off the streets and into safe accommodation. It’s essential that the additional funding for substance misuse services is firmly aligned with public health funding provided through the public health grant to local authorities.”





Disrupting modern slavery

The LGA has published new guidance on how to spot and tackle modern slavery in hand car washes and privately rented housing



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

At the end of 2017, the LGA and the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner published the first guidance for councils on tackling modern slavery.

Since then, the LGA has continued to work with our member authorities, partner organisations and the Home Office to strengthen and develop this agenda by identifying the different ways in which local authorities can disrupt slavery and support its victims.

Modern slavery is hidden, but often in plain sight. Hand car washes are a good example of this, and have been a particular focus of our work.

They have become common in our high streets and communities,

but local residents may be unwittingly using victims of exploitation or modern slavery to wash their cars. The industry has been identified by a number of organisations as a high-risk sector for labour abuse. For example, Matthew Taylor, the Interim Director of Labour Market Enforcement, has recently called for a mandatory licensing scheme for hand car washes (HCWs) – administered by local authorities – to try to tackle these issues.

The LGA's view is that before introducing a licensing scheme, there needs to be a debate about where responsibility for this should sit. Any scheme would need to be fully funded by licensing fees, rather than risk creating another under-funded enforcement regime.

In the meantime, however, the LGA has been involved in supporting initiatives aimed at increasing awareness of the risk of slavery in HCWs and raising standards within the sector.

Our latest guidance (see information,

below) is intended to give an overview of this work, highlight good practice, and bring clarity to the role that councils and other organisations can play within the current regulatory framework.

The regulatory regime for HCWs is complex: planning, health and safety, and environmental legislation all apply to hand car washes, so several organisations may have some level of oversight.

Meanwhile, most councils are constrained by resource pressures in the key service areas that may have a role in overseeing HCWs.

In all the case studies in the guidance, multi-agency working with local and national partners was critical. For example, Nottingham City Council, alongside local police and HM Revenue and Customs, supported an operation led by the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority to identify and support potential victims of slavery at local HCWs, leading to one person being referred to the National Referral Mechanism process for supporting victims.

We have also published new guidance aimed at landlords of rental properties. After feedback from councils that it would be useful to have information they could share with local landlords, the document has been developed to provide an overview of modern slavery, and the indicators that landlords should look out for to prevent their properties being exploited.

Potential indicators of slavery in rental properties include: tenants not in possession of their own documents; discrepancies between named tenants and those living at the property; or irregular payments, such as paying the full cost of a tenancy upfront.

The guidance highlights the risks landlords face if their properties become associated with modern slavery – for example, through cannabis cultivation, which can cause significant damage to property. It also sets out some of the steps they can take to try to protect themselves, such as thorough background checks and regular inspection.

i 'Tackling labour abuse and modern slavery in the hand car wash sector: council guidance' and our modern slavery guidance for landlords are both available for free at www.local.gov.uk/publications. If you have suggestions for other guidance that would help you tackle modern slavery, please email ellie.greenwood@local.gov.uk

COMMENT

Investing to improve



Councillor **Shaun Davies** (Lab) is Leader of Telford & Wrekin Council

One of my most memorable experiences as Leader of Telford & Wrekin Council happened just a few weeks ago.

I stood in a room full of officers working in children's social care to tell them the fantastic news that, following our Ofsted inspection in January, we had been assessed as an 'outstanding' local authority.

The response from our wonderful officers who deliver the service with such passion and professionalism was amazing – a real sense of emotion and collective pride. It was an official acknowledgement that we are recognised for making a positive impact on our children's lives and that, in Ofsted's own words, "our children are cared for and they are cared about".

Looking after children is the most important thing we do as a council. It's an absolute priority for me and my cabinet and the reason many of us got involved in politics in the first place. And it's fair to say

we've been on a journey over the past few years. In 2016, Ofsted said we 'required improvement'. Now, it says we're 'outstanding'. There's only one other authority that has made that leap and I'm sure they would agree, it doesn't happen by chance.

That 'requires improvement' rating certainly helped to focus our minds. In my heart, I knew we were better than that. It was time for a different approach.

Despite our government funding dropping by nearly 50 per cent, we made a conscious decision to invest an extra 53 per cent in our children's services. So the £7.5 million additional income generated since 2013 through growth in business rates and council tax, our

investment in our wholly owned letting company Nuplace – that's delivered £3.2 million of income since 2015/16 – and the £200,000 profits every year from our solar farm are absolutely critical to ensuring we can invest in our children's services properly, to make them the best that they can be.

That financial commitment has been backed by our recruitment of brilliant officers, who, Ofsted noted, we truly value and support. Our workforce development, recruitment and retention are particularly strong, and that means we have a positive culture where our social workers can practise safely and effectively.

I'm delighted that Ofsted's report also highlights that councillors, officers and partners work well together and recognises our clear and ambitious vision for children's services. This is a team effort and a priority not only for the council but the borough as a whole.

The rating is important, not just for the plaudits, but because it means our children, young people and their families can be confident that their safety, wellbeing and



To find out more, please visit www.telford.gov.uk/outstandingofsted



"Our children are cared for and they are cared about"

life chances are as good as they can be. They are valued because we care deeply about their future.

As Leader, I will continue to be ambitious and to invest in our children's social care services. We continue working hard to improve outcomes for our vulnerable children and young people and their families. This includes our work on criminal exploitation and reducing exclusion by ensuring our schools continue to be welcoming and places of belonging.

In Telford & Wrekin, we protect, care and invest in our children. And that's what has helped us become one of only 15 local authorities to have achieved an 'outstanding' from Ofsted. We couldn't be more proud.

Council-led coordination protecting millions



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

With the coronavirus crisis continuing to expand, local government is once again proving its importance to the nation.

Councils up and down the country are designing new services and local initiatives to support the efforts to help those at greater risk, all the while maintaining the delivery of key services on which every citizen relies.

As the nationwide lockdown becomes the 'new normal', local government continues to innovate, approaching the crisis with adaptiveness and resilience.

It is only right that I offer my own thanks to the brilliant councillors and

council officers who have gone above and beyond in recent weeks.

The way councils have stepped up has been remarkable, though no-one who has worked alongside local government will have been surprised. Offering immediate, strong leadership, councils have rapidly responded to the pandemic, reducing strain on the NHS and working to reduce the likelihood of vulnerable groups coming into contact with the virus.

The incredible coordination between local authorities, volunteer groups, and the community now offers vital protection to more than a million people who have been identified as high risk by the NHS and are confined to their homes for 12 weeks.

What a shame that it takes such a crisis for so many in government to understand the crucial role of local councils and the incredible

ability of the people who work for them.

While this is not a time for politics or recrimination, it is evident to everyone that the capacity of local government has been clearly reduced by a decade of unnecessary austerity measures.

Council officers have done incredibly well to respond but are being stretched impossibly thin. When we get through this crisis – and we will get through it – and the inevitable public inquiry is held, people will not understand why the warnings about continual cuts to local government were ignored for so long and with no thought to the consequences.

“Local government continues to innovate, approaching the crisis with adaptiveness and resilience”



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

Working tirelessly for our communities

In the middle of what is an unprecedented public health crisis affecting all of us, I want to thank every councillor and council member of staff for their continuing hard work on behalf of their local communities.

I know you are working night and day to help the most vulnerable, prioritise vital local services, coordinate and lead local partners, support our heroic public health services and local NHS, prop up local businesses, and keep everybody safe, as we all battle to contain the coronavirus outbreak.

At the LGA, we are doing everything we can to help you in this vital work, by working directly with government ministers and others, and advising them on how best to implement new measures and reduce other burdens on councils, so you can focus on COVID-19.

We are also providing direct support to you, our members, with daily coronavirus updates available via e-bulletins from myself and LGA Chief Executive Mark Lloyd; a coronavirus hub with information and resources (www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus); and two-way communications and intelligence sharing via principal advisers.

Across the country, councils and their staff – including social workers, transport drivers, community coordinators, public health officials and refuse collectors – are on the frontline in the battle against this disease.

For elected members, our role as community leaders has never been more important, and the LGA has published guidance on how we can best help local efforts (see www.local.gov.uk/publications).

On a practical level, we know our wards best, and can use our local knowledge and contacts to identify people who need help, feeding this intelligence back to our town halls and acting as a vital bridge between councils and communities.

The local services and support that councils provide have never been more vital for the people we serve. I know the coming months will make huge demands of all of us connected with local government. So please also make sure you take time to take care of yourselves.





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

Collaborative working key to COVID-19 crisis

I am sure that **first** readers will join me in saying a big 'thank you' to our amazing local government teams, social workers, public health and NHS staff, who are working so hard to treat those suffering from coronavirus.

They are all doing an outstanding job caring for those affected.

"We will get through this and, ultimately, build stronger and more resilient communities"

This is a difficult time for all of us, with coronavirus impacting on virtually every sector of our public services and requiring us all to work together in a spirit of collaboration to combat this public health crisis.

In addition to several teleconferences with Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick MP, I joined a meeting with him, the Prime Minister and Health Secretary Matt Hancock MP to ensure local government is clear about the need to deliver the Government's agenda in this crisis, swiftly and efficiently.

The support that councils and councillors can offer is particularly important to the most vulnerable. We know our local communities, and are in a unique position to work with partners to provide and coordinate help for those who most need it.

I was also pleased to hear Chancellor Rishi Sunak MP announce a significant package of government-backed loans for businesses, and support for local economies and communities.

There is no doubt that battling coronavirus requires a concerted national effort, but it is in situations such as this that local government always rises to the occasion.

By working collaboratively and helping each other, we will get through this and, ultimately, build stronger and more resilient communities.



Councillor **Ruth Dombey** OBE is Deputy Leader of the LGA's Liberal Democrat Group

Safeguarding 'must underpin support'

As a community, the situation we are facing with coronavirus is unprecedented. This needs an unprecedented response from councils, communities and ourselves, as councillors.

I am fortunate in my area to have a vibrant, well-connected group of voluntary and community organisations, but I know that is not the case everywhere.

It is important to encourage everyone to support local coordinated efforts, and to ensure that safeguarding underpins these efforts. Together, we will do all we can to help keep the residents of our villages, towns, boroughs, local volunteers and colleagues safe and well.

While much of the focus of national politicians has been on the NHS, councils and councillors are working tirelessly to deal with a huge range of issues arising from the crisis – not least, the vital role of ensuring that vulnerable people are looked after safely.

"Councils are working tirelessly to ensure that vulnerable people are looked after safely"

Local councils are on the frontline, providing vital services to the people who need it most, and I'd like to say a huge thank you to all our staff for the excellent job they are doing.

Finally, a reminder that it is vitally important for all councillors to follow public health advice and ways of working that minimise your own risk. This is, of course, difficult when you are doing your best to represent your community and constituents, but your own health is paramount.

Good luck in your important local leadership role over the coming weeks and months – and a big THANK YOU for everything you are doing.



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

Councillors supporting our communities

As we respond to the pandemic facing our country, councillors are doing a great deal to support our communities.

The LGA is busy working on your behalf to collate priorities, provide guidance and raise issues with senior ministers. We are also keeping the LGA website up to date with relevant coronavirus information (see www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus). I hope you find this, and our other updates, a useful resource.

"Members are making sure our local resilience forums have the contacts they need"

Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, is in listening mode and, so far, has agreed to almost all our requests for money and for changes in the legislation to help us do the best job possible at this time of crisis.

We're expecting the emergency Coronavirus Act to help us to work more flexibly as we balance the need to stay safe and deliver local leadership.

In my area, a number of our meetings are now online, staff are down to an organised minimum in the offices, with phones on divert. Bin teams are on staggered times as well.

Locally, members are very busy on the frontline, setting up self-help groups of residents and making sure our local resilience forums have the contacts they need.

It is brilliant how our communities are pulling together.

Thank you for taking a lead in supporting your local communities as much as you can in this time of crisis. Take care, and do let us know if we can help (email independent.groupLGA@local.gov.uk).

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

Just because climate action is recognised as scientifically necessary, it doesn't mean everyone will accept it as politically necessary.

This realisation – that change in a democracy must be community-led – fuelled Oxford's decision to launch a new type of discussion, by holding the first citizens' assembly on climate change by a UK city.

Our challenge was: should the assembly recommend trade-offs to an underfunded council or should it use this historic opportunity to reimagine Oxford by highlighting the 'co-benefits' that arise from climate action?

For instance, can councils spend more on climate action while ensuring nobody has to sleep rough by funding homelessness services? Or should a council be smarter by holding a new type of discussion that identifies how to spend money effectively on climate change to achieve other social and economic policy goals?

In the end, the answer was clear. It wasn't just smarter to prioritise a co-benefits approach, it was the best way to support citizens to cultivate a love of place and the people in it. We discovered that the assembly's focus on climate action would yield insights into the values underpinning society, enabling us to update and 'live' them, and nurture a



Councillor **Tom Hayes** (Lab) is Cabinet Member for a Zero Carbon Oxford at Oxford City Council

Community-led climate action

new patriotism for the city of Oxford.

What did we do? We held two weekends at the Said Business School of the University of Oxford to answer this 'exam' question: should Oxford be more proactive and seek to achieve 'net zero' sooner than 2050, and what trade-offs are we prepared to make?

We followed guidelines set by the public participation charity Involve and the Government's Innovation in Democracy Programme, with Ipsos Mori

recruiting 50 residents, reflective of the profile of the city's population. There was no option to apply to be a member, although many wanted to.

The assembly was designed to provide insights into what all groups in our city value, not just the loudest voices. As the city's representative and democratic body, we reserved the final say over whether to act on the recommendations.

Over the first weekend, we facilitated members to question experts and raise their understanding of the five emission sources that make up Oxford's contribution to the climate crisis. These are buildings (responsible for 81 per cent of Oxford's emissions, according to our data); transportation (17 per cent); waste management; biodiversity and offsetting; and renewable energy.

During the second weekend, members deliberated and voted on ambition levels (low, medium and high) for each of these themes, as well as other statements and the overall exam question, to help guide the council's ambition.

For example, when it came to waste management, assembly members believed that it wasn't just about reducing, reusing, and recycling – 71 per cent believed producers should mostly deal with waste.

All members agreed that the Government should introduce a new national policy to require that new homes are built to net zero standards.

Members prioritised behaviour change encouraging a shift away from car use, a unified strategy for councils and transport providers, and incentivisation of public transport use. They wanted green space and tree planting, seeing this as an 'easy win' to galvanise community action. But there were tensions between setting land aside for green spaces and for building houses.

There was surprise at the council's progress so far on renewable energy (we set up and funded the social enterprise Low Carbon Hub to develop community-

"It's zero carbon citizens that build a net zero carbon city"

Climate change action in Oxford



owned renewable energy projects). Assembly members believed that too much emphasis fell on the individual to take the initiative (a recurrent issue across the themes) and that households need help to transition.

And the aesthetics of, say, installing solar panels on Oxford's historic buildings mattered less than just generating renewable energy.

When it came to the main exam question and ambition levels for each theme, the results were clear: 90 per cent wanted Oxford to reach net zero sooner than 2050 and be a leader in tackling the climate crisis.

Members wanted (and had considered the barriers to) enhanced flora and fauna in the centre; more cycling, walking and public transport, and fewer cars; and better building standards, widespread retrofitting, and sustainable sources for meeting domestic and non-domestic energy needs. A clear majority voted for all the most ambitious visions of a future Oxford across all five themes.

Observing every hour of the citizens' assembly, I felt inspired. Carrying that inspiration into decision-making has been easy. With our new £19 million climate emergency fund, my council will be net zero carbon by the end of this year.



Electric-powered taxi

We're going further and faster on our zero emission zone to restrict polluting vehicle use, encouraging renewable energy growth, enhancing biodiversity, and preparing for an enormous programme of retrofitting our council stock and homes.

The assembly forced members to face a question that confronts everyone once

they learn about the crisis of climate change: what must I do to protect my loved ones now that I know what lies ahead? Members have taken up that challenge by adopting leadership roles. Heroes like Attenborough and Thunberg get the movement going, but it's zero carbon citizens that build a net zero carbon city.



Dr Rosalie Callway is a Partnership Project Officer at the Partnership for Biodiversity in Planning

In the face of alarming reports about global species decline, what can planning authorities do to address the biodiversity crisis?

A new practice advice note from the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), produced with the Partnership for Biodiversity in Planning, highlights key areas on which UK local planning authorities can focus to fulfil their statutory biodiversity duty.

The advice note gives an overview of the obligations and opportunities for planners to promote biodiversity through the four UK planning systems. It offers practical pointers toward integrating biodiversity into local policy, practice and individual developments.

Investing proactively in biodiversity can deliver multiple benefits, promoting resilience to climate change, health and wellbeing, local economies, as well as enhancing natural ecosystems and wildlife.

Biodiversity in planning

The advice note highlights a range of good practice already happening throughout the country. Much of this good practice involves collaboration across local authority boundaries and multiple actors. For example, the Mersey Forest Partnership involves seven planning authorities, local business and public agencies in a range of projects. This includes 10 'Friends of the Woodlands' groups who care for their local woods and have planted more than nine million trees since the project began in the early 1990s.

The advice note also refers to a free

i **The Partnership for Biodiversity in Planning is an alliance of 19 conservation, planning and development organisations that promotes the importance of biodiversity for planning and development.** For more information, please visit www.biodiversityinplanning.org. See <https://bit.ly/33ebqGO> for the RTPI practice advice note



© ROSALIE CALLWAY

The Wildlife Assessment Check seeks to help smaller developers consider wildlife ahead of new housing proposals

online tool for smaller developers – the Wildlife Assessment Check – designed to help identify protected and priority species and statutory designated sites that might be affected by a proposed development.

The tool aims to smooth out the planning application process for developers and planning authorities, by helping improve the quality of applications in relation to biodiversity requirements.

Trends suggest we need to be doing much more, and on a greater scale, to protect and enhance our natural world. This joint publication seeks to outline ways that planning can work more harmoniously with nature and stimulate greater local action.



Councillor **David Fothergill** (Con) is Leader of Somerset County Council

Youth Parliament decisions make a real difference

This summer, Somerset County Council's cabinet will be notching up a first when we welcome a group of young people to learn how they have been making important decisions about things that affect them and their peers.

They are all members of Somerset's Youth Parliament who have spent weeks, if not months, deciding who should benefit from a new young people's fund that we have set up to improve people's lives.

They have done a brilliant job and we want to hear their experiences at first hand so we can learn from them.

It all started when I went to one of their meetings and the discussion made me realise that they had so many good ideas but were really powerless to do anything about them because of a lack of any funding.

So we set aside £25,000 for the young people's fund, which was match-funded through our close partnership working with local charity Somerset Community Foundation (SCF) from the #iwill Fund, a combination of government and lottery funding.

It would have been all too easy to deploy the usual grant award mechanisms. But in Somerset we like to do things differently, to achieve the best outcomes for all our residents.

Working with SCF, members of our Youth Parliament went through training so they could learn how the grant-making process works. This was no small task as these are young people who lead busy and demanding lives, coping with the pressures of exams and young adulthood.

But they rose to the challenge with huge enthusiasm and determination. They had to read all the applications that came in for funding and then weigh up the pros and cons before coming to a decision.

As a result, an impressively wide range of projects will benefit – from film-making and environmental projects to a recycled fashion show.

The funding awarded means that children and young people will have the chance to take part in campaigns and projects, or volunteer to help improve the lives of others. This is a fund for young people, decided by young people.

We're currently trying to secure the match funding for next year, and I hope others across the country will follow our lead and give young people the responsibility for making decisions on issues that affect them and their peers.

I am immensely proud of what they have achieved, and I am also delighted that Somerset is pioneering this approach. We have been through some intensely testing times financially but have emerged on a firm financial footing.

We have had to think differently to get to where we are now. Working so closely with our young people is an example of what can be done, given the ambition and some creative thinking.

Youth Parliament members said....

"Having the opportunity to help young people develop in their local communities in Somerset is an honour and I thoroughly enjoyed it."

Hanna Wittek, aged 17

"We were able to help support and create some amazing ideas and I think lots of young people are going to find this helpful to them."

Charlotte Ward, aged 12

"The funding day taught me a lot about decision-making and gave me an awareness of many different social action projects that could affect so many young people's lives."

Jessica Bullen, aged 13





Councils leading communities



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

This is a mission. A national mission. Delivered locally.

I was privileged to attend a meeting of local government representatives with the Prime Minister to coordinate the response of councils to the coronavirus crisis.

Boris Johnson was clear that it is for local authorities to provide leadership in communities and to mastermind the challenge of beating this pandemic.

We are on the frontline – engaging with communities, solving people's problems at street level, administering benefits, improving housing, working with small businesses, and marshalling the local community groups.

As the housing, revenue and benefit authorities, districts will be supporting families through a whole range of difficulties, including through the Hardship Fund. And as billing authorities,

they will be helping local businesses access rate reliefs and grants to get through one of the toughest times in their history.

While this will be led locally by a named individual in your local resilience forum, it is district councils that have a key delivery role to play in the 'last mile'.

We all have a vital part to play aiding our county colleagues to protect the NHS by ramping up the social care support for vulnerable groups – helping health and care services to cope, and to minimise deaths.

There are great numbers of people affected by this virus for different reasons. Some will be served by our health partners, some by us, and some by both – we must work as one team to set up hubs coordinating the local effort.

And we have an almighty important

role in safeguarding our local businesses and protecting jobs.

The Government understands this, and that we have a key job, including to make the Hardship Fund work hardest for those who most need it.

This crisis will be a crucial test of local government's ability to lead the local state – even while our own organisations are grappling with a wide range of financial challenges as a result of this illness.

We need to think creatively, using the staff we have and redeploying them to

“This crisis will be a crucial test of local government's ability to lead the local state”

support volunteers in our own or neighbouring areas, as well as seconding staff to bolster the social care system if that's what it takes.

This is our time. It's why we stood for election and why our officials signed up for the job.

It will be our leadership, resolve and ability to beat this problem – one family at a time, one street at a time, one place at a time.

i For more information about the District Councils' Network, please visit www.districtcouncils.info. For the latest updates, information, resources and announcements for councils on the coronavirus outbreak, please visit www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus



Councillor **Christabel Flight** (Con) is Deputy Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health at Westminster City Council, and Founder of Silver Sunday

Celebrating older people

Silver Sunday – taking place this year on 4 October – is a special day in the national calendar when everyone can come together to put older people at the heart of the community.

It gives older people new opportunities to get out of the house, keep their minds and bodies active, learn new skills, make new friends, and connect

i For more information, including free resources, templates, a 'Guide for local authorities' and the national event map, please visit www.silversunday.org.uk or email info@SilverSunday.org.uk

with the communities and generations around them, via programmes of community-based events and activities across the country.

Much of the growth and success of Silver Sunday since it began in 2012 has been thanks to the phenomenal energy and ambition shown by local councillors and officers.

Whether it is by offering special grants for community groups to organise Silver Sunday events, community engagement collaborations to create local programmes spanning the weeks around Silver Sunday, or throwing one enormous party and welcoming hundreds of older guests – it all helps!

The event is also a "fantastic example of community collaboration in tackling isolation and loneliness", according to Marc Read, Salisbury Community Engagement Manager at Wiltshire Council. Last year's 'Silver Sunday in Salisbury' was a catalyst for further projects there, including a three-year intergenerational project in the city.

One of our most exciting areas of growth in 2019 was our partnerships with youth organisations, including air, army, police and fire cadets, schools, the Girl Guides and the Scouts. We launched



Charity Open Age's 2019 Silver Sunday Dance-a-thon

a Silver Sunday Scout Badge for cubs and scouts to earn by hosting, or volunteering at, Silver Sunday events.

We always had a little inkling that this could be a formula for success, with our intergenerational Silver Sunday events providing small moments of magic and hope for a kinder, more connected and happier society!

We hope your council can get involved by hosting, promoting or helping with tea dances, community days in care homes and other local events – and signposting older people to existing programmes and support.

Added value of handyperson services



Paul Smith is Director of Foundations

For anyone who has either used or managed a handyperson service, the findings of our latest report will come as no surprise. Such services are treasured not just because of the jobs they do around the home, but because of the added value they bring.

Inviting someone with a toolbag into your home is something to which most people are accustomed – unlike other professions, such as social workers or support workers. As they carry out their

jobs, maybe with a cup of tea, the handyperson will also get to know a little about the life of, and maybe some of the difficulties faced by, their client.

Some of these issues they may be able to address directly, such as securing a trip hazard or fitting a draught excluder. Others might be a little more complex and require an onward referral to other services. Either way, the client is left safer, reassured, and in touch with others who can help.

I think of them like a bolognese sauce with hidden vegetables – they may look like an odd-job man from the Yellow Pages, but they come with lots of added goodness. But, of course, this goodness does cost, and I've previously worked for a local authority that decommissioned a

handyperson service primarily because it cost a little more than some of the local traders. But our survey of local authorities in England found that more than half (54 per cent) do still see the value of handyperson services. Although fewer than they were 10 years ago, they are still a vital support service for thousands of people every year who want to remain living in their own homes – or want to return home safely after a stay in hospital.

The challenge for local commissioners is how to make the best use of sometimes competing fleets of vans and technicians driving around an area fixing or fitting things, and making sure they have a little bit of time to chat and gain the necessary trust to suggest further help.



i Foundations is the national body for home improvement agencies. Its latest report, 'Handyperson services: defining the added value', can be downloaded at www.foundations.org.uk/media/6258/20191223-handypersonservicesreport.pdf

COUNCILLOR

Relationships ‘key’ to council performance

It comes as a shock to realise that, however large a majority you have secured to achieve a particular ambition for your residents, you alone are not going to achieve it.

Whether it is a simple project for your ward, or a district or county-wide project, you will not succeed unless you are able to harness the technical expertise, energy and project management of your council’s officers.

I have five golden rules for effective working with officers. None of these is rocket science, but each of them can be easily overlooked in our council work.

First, officers are different from members. They are neither more nor less important; just different. Some officers in your council will excel at the detail that members would find mundane, while campaigning with passion and chancing



Councillor Rory Love OBE (Con, Kent) is an LGA Member Peer

your job in the ballot box feels incomprehensibly risky to officers.

For a high-performance council to function, you need both sets of skills, in harmony. So we members will get the most from our officers if we understand the difference.

Second, officers are an invaluable

“Excellent member-officer relationships need nurturing”

resource. In all of the council roles I have held, the technical expertise, collective memory, candid advice, and innovation of officers who have worked to support me has been invaluable. We should exploit the amazing resource available to us, uniquely, as councillors.

Third, work at building relationships. Excellent member-officer relationships do not just happen; they need nurturing. They should always be professional and appropriate, and based on mutual trust and respect.

If your role means you work closely with one officer, you may wish to set and agree parameters; what you expect from the officer and what they can expect from you. Such a shared understanding can help both parties achieve their ambitions.

Fourth, choose the appropriate level of officer. There will be times when dialogue is robust. It is important to know when to progress your issue from a highly technically qualified, but junior, officer to a more senior manager.

We get the best from our officers by avoiding a conflict between our demands and their objectives, which have been set by their managers. In case of conflict, we need a conversation with the manager, not the junior officer.

Finally, remember that officers are human – and so are we! Officers will put more energy into your project if you motivate them by sharing your vision and enabling them to take ownership of the goal. And they can be pretty good at helping you out of the inevitable trap that we can all fall into. But that is where you can always tell how successful you have been at developing excellent relationships.

Working effectively with council officers can make or break your (and your council’s) ambitions. As part of its Community Leadership offer to councils, the LGA has developed a masterclass, jointly written and facilitated by an elected member and an LGA adviser, to explore these golden rules further. If you would like it to be run in your council, to help you succeed, please get in touch with the LGA’s Leadership Team.



i For more information about the LGA’s Community Leadership offer, including its masterclass on officer-member relations, please contact Alison Edwards on 020 7665 3857 or email her at alison.edwards@local.gov.uk

ELECTIONS

Local party successes



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



Labour's newly elected Councillor Gurdev Singh Hayre will probably be the last to succeed in a council by-election for quite some time.

The election on 19 March in Coventry's Upper Stoke ward went ahead as planned although other elections scheduled for that date were suspended, in response to the coronavirus outbreak. Understandably, perhaps, the contest received little public attention with fewer than one in 10 electors turning out to vote.

However, the recent pattern of success for candidates standing as Independents or for locally based parties continues.

One of the more impressive upsets was caused by Ken Dobson as he broke Labour's near-monopoly of Manchester City Council. His previous experiences in seeking election saw him contesting as a Liberal and as an Independent.

In the 2018 election, he won just 18 per cent of the votes in Clayton and Openshaw, with the slate of Labour winners receiving 60 per cent. Undaunted, he tried again last May, and finished just 12 votes behind the winner. He becomes the only Independent on the council alongside just three Liberal Democrats.

The Ashford Independents registered more by-election success, after Trish Cornish took Park Farm North from the Conservatives, winning 60 per cent of the votes. The Independent group has some form in the area, winning a predecessor ward in 2003, but had not contested this ward last May.

There was a strong list of Independents vying to win Wrexham's Gwersyllt North ward.

Among the eight contestants were three Independents, one a current community councillor, another a former councillor, hoping to join a council where Independents often thrive. But it was

another local community councillor, Phil Rees, standing for Plaid Cymru, who won after polling just over a third of votes cast.

The Liberal Democrats continue to have success in South Cambridgeshire, where the party caused an upset when new boundaries were introduced for the 2018 elections. On that occasion the party ambushed the Conservatives, winning 27 of the 45 available seats.

One of the few Conservative survivors of that battle, Peter Topping, resigned both his district council Whittlesford ward and his Duxford county division. He was himself no stranger to competition with the Liberal Democrats, having unseated the party in his path to becoming a dual councillor.

The Liberal Democrats chose to contest only the by-election for the Duxford division, with its candidate, Peter McDonald, already the incumbent in the smaller district council ward of the same name.

Further Liberal Democrat success was evident in Stratford's Welford-on-Avon ward. The vacancy arose following the death of Frederick Barnes who had once been elected for the party but had left and been elected more recently as an Independent. His former party had subsequently not challenged him at the ballot box, however, suggesting that Liberal Democrat voters in the area had continued to support Barnes.

A third victory eluded the party by just 14 votes in Wiltshire's Till and Wyllye Valley ward. A rare Tuesday poll was brought about by the resignation of Conservative Darren Henry, who won in 2017 by a margin of 211 votes.

Local by-elections

Ashford, Park Farm North

IND GAIN FROM CON
32.2% over Con Turnout 22.1%

Blaby, Millfield

LAB HELD
9.2% over Con Turnout 21.4%

Cambridgeshire, Duxford

LIB DEM GAIN FROM CON
19.2% over Con Turnout 32.5%

Cheshire East, Crewe South

LAB HELD
18.1% over Con Turnout 20.1%

Coventry, Upper Stoke

LAB HELD
23.9% over Con Turnout 9.2%

Hillingdon, Hillingdon East

CON HELD
45.3% over Lab Turnout 22.2%

Manchester, Clayton and Openshaw

IND GAIN FROM LAB
4.3% over Lab Turnout 19.7%

South Cambridgeshire, Whittlesford

CON HELD
10.4% over Lab Turnout 35.7%

South Somerset, Parrett

LIB DEM HELD
30.2% over Con Turnout 36.7%

Stratford-on-Avon

Welford-on-Avon
LIB DEM GAIN FROM IND
13.8% over Con Turnout 32.1%

Wiltshire, Till and Wyllye Valley

CON HELD
1.1% over Lib Dem Turnout 35.6%

Wrexham, Gwersyllt North

PLAID CYMRU GAIN FROM IND
19.7% over Lab Turnout 25.6%

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

LETTERS

Solar farm first

City of Wolverhampton Council has announced plans for its first solar farm, to be developed to power a local hospital with renewable energy.

The farm will be built on an unused landfill site adjacent to an industrial



estate, which is currently subject to anti-social behaviour and fly-tipping.

The new development will turn the south-facing wasteland into a productive solar farm, supplying 6.9MWp of green electricity directly to New Cross Hospital.

We declared a climate emergency last July and have committed to supporting our partners towards making Wolverhampton zero carbon.

During the council's recent climate change consultation, 82 per cent of residents said they would welcome solar farms in Wolverhampton – so this first site is fantastic news for our city.

In addition to making Wolverhampton a greener city, I'm pleased to see the council supporting the local hospital to achieve carbon emission reductions.

Cllr Steve Evans (Lab), Cabinet Member for City Environment, City of Wolverhampton Council

Welcoming Syrian refugees

Ashford will continue to welcome desperate refugee families displaced by Syria's bloody civil war, despite the current government-organised vulnerable persons resettlement scheme (VPRS) ending.

The Government is amalgamating all its refugee resettlement programmes into one, called the global resettlement scheme (GRS), to continue beyond 2020.

Under the old VPRS programme, Ashford welcomed 34 families, totalling 146 refugees, over a four-year period, and has resettled more vulnerable Syrian families than any other district in Kent.

Ashford will continue to support around 10 Syrian families a year under the new GRS scheme, as the council has the expertise and existing infrastructure in place to best support their successful resettlement.

I believe we are making an enormous difference to the lives of some of those most affected by the global refugee crisis. It's important that we carry on this good work and I fully support our continuing efforts to provide this assistance, welcoming vulnerable families into our communities.

We are not using council housing stock. I thank all those private landlords who have already helped and would urge more to join us. The support from Ashford's residents, third sector and voluntary organisations, and community and faith groups is key to enabling successful integration. The response has been humbling and heartwarming and I'm confident that these strong community bonds will continue to develop.

Cllr Bill Barrett (Con), Portfolio Holder for Housing, Ashford Borough 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. Letters may be edited and published online



People & places

Helen Norris is Programme Manager for Smart Energy Greater Lincolnshire, a programme being led by North East Lincolnshire Council

Climate change is a huge concern not only for our local area but worldwide. So it's great to be leading on the Smart Energy Greater Lincolnshire programme, which is a fantastic initiative that is helping public buildings and small to medium-sized businesses reduce their carbon emissions.

We are thrilled to have partnered with world-renowned, leading experts in energy and resource efficiency, the University of Applied Sciences Trier's Institut für angewandtes Stoffstrommanagement (IfaS), based in Germany. They bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise that businesses can benefit from at zero cost.

Our programme offers a wide range of support, including workshops, free advice and grant funding for energy-saving technology such as solar panels.

The workshops are led by IfaS on a monthly basis, and cover topics such as heating and lighting. These have proven really successful and it is great to see businesses engaging with them.

We have also now opened these up to apprentices, as we know that young people in particular are concerned about the environment. We are really proud to be able to support them by giving them the tools they need to make a difference in the workplace.

It's been wonderful to see the response that we have had from public buildings, too. We are on target to save more than 1,200 tonnes of carbon a year through implementing simple energy-saving measures.

We have seen first hand the amazing results it has had on businesses and public buildings by not only reducing carbon emissions, but also reducing their energy bills – by half in some cases!

One business used the money saved to invest in a new apprentice. It's great to see the positive impact that the programme is having in the Greater Lincolnshire area.



Practical transformation and innovation support, together in one place

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

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

Please encourage your senior management team to try the tool. For more information or support email transparency@local.gov.uk

Part of our sector-led improvement offer of support
www.local.gov.uk/transformation-and-innovation-exchange | #TIEx