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## Fighting your corner

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# LG Inform Plus

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## Crisis comms

**C**ouncils continue to do a remarkable job in responding to the coronavirus crisis. I am immensely grateful to you and your staff for all your efforts on behalf of our residents.

In this month's **first**, we update you on your key concerns we are raising with ministers (p8); look at how adult education is supporting people in the community (p10); and offer guidance on communicating with residents at this difficult time (p12).

Cllr Andrew Morgan, Leader of the Welsh LGA, writes about how local services remain a constant beacon for us all (p15), while Cllr Cecilia Motley, Chair of the Rural Services Network, looks at the impact of COVID-19 in rural areas (p16).

Other contributors include Cllr Sharon Taylor, Chair of the Cooperative Councils Innovation Network (p17), Nicole Jacobs, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales (p19), and Lord Woolley, Director of Operation Black Vote (p23).

As some of this month's **first** may already be out of date by the time you receive it, we have started sending weekly **first** COVID-19 email updates. You can sign up for these at [www.local.gov.uk/first](http://www.local.gov.uk/first). Please also check [www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus) for our latest updates.

**Cllr James Jamieson**  
is LGA Chairman



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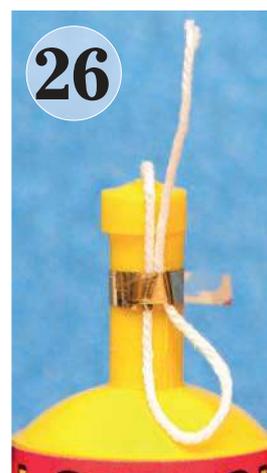
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## Action plan for social care

**The Government has launched an Action Plan for Adult Social Care, setting out the four key areas that underpin its approach to supporting social care during the coronavirus pandemic.**

These are controlling the spread of infection, supporting the workforce, supporting independence and people at the end of their lives, and responding to individual needs.

The plan also explains the steps being taken to address challenges including the supply of personal protective equipment (PPE), testing and workforce capacity.

The LGA said it was vital that the arrangements set out in the plan were urgently translated into reality on the ground.

Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Social care services are playing a vital role during

the coronavirus crisis and the plaudits for the dedicated staff working on the frontline in care homes and people's own homes are well-deserved.

"The challenges faced by these staff every day are huge, as they strive to keep vulnerable people safe and to care for those who are infected with the coronavirus in settings and circumstances that do not always lend themselves to managing isolation.

"Access to sufficient PPE and testing are vital to the safety of staff and the people they care for and we are pleased this plan provides assurance that these will be available.

"The current arrangements for accessing PPE by councils and care providers are not fit for purpose and are failing to provide what is needed on the frontline. It is vital that the arrangements set out in the plan are urgently translated into reality on the ground."

In a Number 10 press conference, Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock MP thanked care staff for their courage, and announced plans for a single brand for social care to symbolise the entire profession.

Wearing a 'care' badge in place of his usual 'NHS' one, he called for social care workers to be given the same benefits as those working in health, such as priority access at supermarkets. Mr Hancock spoke about valuing the profession, promising to strengthen the national recruitment campaign and to pay for induction training.



## Latest ONS statistics

Around one in six coronavirus-related deaths occurred outside hospitals – including in care homes – according to the latest Office for National Statistics figures.

The figures, for the week up until 10 April, show deaths in England and Wales had nearly doubled, hitting a 20-year high. There were 18,516 deaths – about 7,996 more than the five-year average.

Overall, a third of deaths were registered as relating to COVID-19, but deaths from other causes also rose. Coronavirus accounted for more than half of deaths in London (53.2 per cent), and more than a third (37

per cent) in the West Midlands. The number of deaths in care homes doubled by 2,456 deaths (up 99.4 per cent); and were up by half (51.1 per cent) in private homes (1,392 deaths).

Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "These sad and shocking figures highlight just what a severe challenge we face in care homes and other community settings.

"Data on all deaths from COVID-19 needs to be published promptly and accurately, so we can have full confidence and transparency in these figures as part of our plan to defeat this deadly virus.



"We are also yet to see the peak of the stress on the social care system, due to the delay between hospital admissions and discharge, which will require

the need to start thinking about shifting capacity across from hospitals and into the community to meet a surge in demand."

# More funding for councils

**Councils in England will receive a further £1.6 billion for their response to the coronavirus, taking total funding from government for the pandemic to more than £3.2 billion.**

The announcement will also mean another £95 million for Welsh councils.

Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick MP has pledged to provide the resources local government needs and has written to all councils praising the sector's 'unsung heroes'.

His announcement of additional funding came after the LGA warned that coronavirus-led demand pressures and a loss of income risked combining to push councils towards financial failure.

Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: "Councils across the country are leading efforts to support communities through the unprecedented coronavirus crisis we face. They continue to do an amazing job.

"We are pleased the Government continues to recognise the huge efforts

councils and our staff are making and has responded quickly to our deep concerns about the financial strains being placed on them by providing more desperately needed new funding.

"Alongside previous money and measures, this will give councils breathing space.

"It is also reassuring that the Secretary of State has reiterated his promise that councils will get all the resources they will need to cope with this pandemic. This commitment needs to be rock solid and consistent so councils can stay focused on leading the local response to the greatest challenge we have faced as a nation for decades.

"The pressures facing councils are significant, wide-ranging and vary from place to place and this funding will need to reach all councils. It is good that councils will be able to decide locally how best to spend it on the specific pressures they face in their local area."

## Frontline worker tests

All essential workers in England - and members of their household - will now be eligible for coronavirus tests, it was announced as **first** was going to press. The



Government had previously confirmed, following extensive lobbying from councils, care providers and the LGA, that it would offer COVID-19 tests to people living and working in social care settings.

All symptomatic care home residents will be tested, as will patients discharged from hospital before going into care homes and social care staff and the people they live with.

While the prioritisation of social care for testing is a positive development, councils have raised concerns about how the testing will operate in practice, including the use of regional rather than local centres and the need for staff to travel by car, often long distances.

Nadra Ahmed, Chairman of the National Care Association, has warned that some care workers are travelling hundreds of miles to attend the (currently) nine drive-through testing facilities. The National Care Forum reported that only a quarter of care workers eligible for coronavirus tests had managed to access them.

Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "We need urgent access for all social care staff to rapid and comprehensive testing, and greater support with staffing and other equipment, if we are to defeat this disease."

## In brief

### Council pay offer

More than one million council employees have been offered an improved pay increase of 2.75 per cent from 1 April 2020, plus an additional one day's leave, which would increase the minimum entitlement from 21 to 22 days per year (plus public holidays). The National Employers, who negotiate pay on behalf of 350 local authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, hope the unions accept this final offer so that employees – who are providing such critical support to their communities during the current national emergency – can receive a well-deserved pay rise as soon as practicable.

### Protecting the vulnerable

The LGA has published guidance on how councils can help coordinate support for vulnerable residents, to ensure those who need it have access to food, medicine, shelter and social contact during the coronavirus crisis. 'Protecting vulnerable people during the COVID-19 outbreak; a briefing for councils' provides an overview of the system for supporting vulnerable people; of vulnerable groups and how they can be identified; types of support; key considerations for councils in coordinating local support; and supporting resources. The LGA is emphasising the need for national arrangements to complement rather than cut across what already exists locally. The briefing can be downloaded free at [www.local.gov.uk/publications](http://www.local.gov.uk/publications)

### 'At risk' children not in school

Recently released data shows only 5 per cent of vulnerable children are attending school or childcare. Many families report concerns about the public health risks of sending their children to school, and social workers and schools are working together to encourage attendance and maintain oversight of these children. The LGA is working with the Department for Education and directors of children's services on monitoring and encouraging the take-up of school places, and spreading best practice in maintaining contact with vulnerable families.

## 'Suspend academy conversions'

Academy conversions should be suspended to help overstretched councils focus on supporting schools and nurseries to stay open, the LGA has said.

The LGA is concerned that council time is having to be spent on 594 academy conversions in the pipeline, which involve the transfer of staff and assets (including land and property), and financial agreements.

This is undermining council efforts to coordinate sufficient school places for vulnerable children and the children of key workers, as well as appropriate space for emergency food and medicine supplies.

Academisation also includes a legal requirement to renegotiate contracts with suppliers, which goes against the Government's current advice that schools continue to pay suppliers during the coronavirus crisis, and if a school has a deficit when it converts, the council will have to pick up the bill.

The LGA has raised these concerns with the Department for Education and is urging the Government to temporarily suspend this non-essential work.

Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "Councils' number one priority is to help keep schools open and support families in need, including those with vulnerable children on free school meals, at risk of abuse or with disabilities.

"Council staff are working flat out at reduced capacity, and taking council teams away from their primary duty of care to see through applications for academy conversions is clearly not in the interests of either councils or schools during this unprecedented time.

"We want to work with the Government to ensure that schools are given the support they need over the immediate term, and this includes urgently placing a temporary pause on academy conversions during this time."



## Councils 'helping firms access funding'

**Councils have been working 'at pace' to identify and contact eligible businesses to support them to apply for government funding since 1 April, and continue to distribute the cash as quickly as possible.**

Some councils have set up dedicated teams and redeployed staff to make sure they can quickly process applications, according to the LGA. They are also using websites, social media and local media to reach the businesses that they do not hold details for but are eligible for funding.

As **first** went to press, examples included:

- more than eight in 10 eligible businesses in Telford and Wrekin receiving grant payments of more than £14 million
- Oxford City Council distributing £1 million a day in support to businesses
- 10,000 Cornish businesses paid a total of £116 million by Cornwall Council within two days of the local authority receiving government funding

- Stroud District Council distributing £10 million to businesses in just one day
- more than £6 million in grants paid to businesses by Wychavon District Council.

Wiltshire Council is providing seven-days-a-week support for local businesses affected by the coronavirus outbreak with approximately 60 members of staff – the majority of whom have been redeployed from other roles within the council – being mobilised to help verify and assess the grant forms being submitted by local businesses for vital funding.

Cllr Richard Watts, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said: "Councils are leading local efforts to support communities and businesses as they try to cope with the coronavirus outbreak.

"Government grants are a vital lifeline to businesses struggling at this time and worried about the future. Councils are working fast to ensure businesses eligible for this money are receiving it as quickly as possible."

## Boom in digital library usage

Libraries across some parts of the country have seen an increase in newly registered users of more than 600 per cent since lockdown measures were introduced, the LGA has reported.

It called on the Government and publishers to work together to unlock an additional £5 million in investment to enable libraries to increase their capacity to loan more e-books and audiobooks.

All council libraries have closed because of the coronavirus outbreak, but residents are still able to access digital library resources.

Councils are providing additional online access to resources under the hashtag **#LibrariesFromHome**, extending online memberships for no extra fee, and waiving fines incurred as a result of the closures.

Consequently, there has been a boom in new digital users. For example, Hampshire



County Council has seen a 770 per cent increase in new digital users, Cornwall Council 630 per cent, and Hertfordshire County Council 332 per cent.

Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson, Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, said: "Council libraries provide a vital service for residents and act as community hubs in normal times. Their online digital contribution has now become equally important as people turn to them to help pass the time at home.

"Councils are doing everything they can to protect their residents' wellbeing during this difficult time. Extra funding would help libraries extend their licences and meet this growing demand."



## Support for arts and culture

The LGA has joined forces with Arts Council England and other partners to ensure there is a joined-up approach across the sector to supporting culture through the COVID-19 crisis.

Arts and culture add more than £10.8 billion to the UK economy every year and the coronavirus outbreak poses serious risks to the country's network of cultural organisations.

Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson, Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, said: "Unprecedented times require a joined-up response. All our organisations and teams are struggling to make sense of a new world that poses severe risks to many of our crucial local cultural and creative organisations.

"By advancing payments, relaxing monitoring requirements, and offering letters of comfort, councils across the country have been working closely with key partners to support vital cultural services for their communities.

"It is important to extend any available

support packages to include partners.

"By working together, councils, industry and the Government can ensure that every organisation and individual has the best chance of securing the support they need."

Meanwhile, some cultural and sports organisations have risen to the challenge of providing services in new ways to keep people engaged and inspire creativity, despite leisure centres, libraries, museums, theatres and community hubs all being closed to the public.

Much of this new offering has been digital, including online workouts, library e-books, and live-streamed arts performances.

Not everyone has access to the internet though, and the LGA is keen to hear about any 'offline' activities taking place in your area – such as front doorstep cuppas, poetry readings, singalongs, dance-alongs and improvised 'art galleries' in the windows of people's homes.

Please share your ideas and examples by emailing [lauren.lucas@local.gov.uk](mailto:lauren.lucas@local.gov.uk)

## In brief

### Fly-tipping up

Incidents of fly-tipping have soared since the start of the lockdown, according to the ClearWaste app. This is despite almost all councils continuing to collect residual waste and recycling (99 and 97 per cent respectively), according to the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport's third weekly survey on local authority waste services. LGA Environment Spokesman Cllr David Renard said: "Alongside government, the LGA is exploring ways in which, on a limited basis, recycling centres can be reopened, but until such time... we must insist people keep their waste."

### Domestic abuse

With reported rises in violence and calls to domestic abuse helplines during the COVID-19 lockdown, the LGA has published guidance on tackling domestic abuse (see [www.local.gov.uk/publications](http://www.local.gov.uk/publications)). It gives a brief overview of domestic abuse and sets out how councils can provide the right support during the pandemic, and tackle perpetrators' abusive behaviour. Meanwhile, the Home Office is asking for councils' help to promote its #YouAreNotAlone campaign, which aims to reassure domestic abuse sufferers that support is available during the lockdown. ● See more on p19.

### Open spaces

Parks and cemeteries must remain open and close family can attend loved ones' funerals, Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick MP has said. Mr Jenrick said people must observe social distancing and not congregate in groups. Most parks and green spaces are open, in line with government guidance issued last month. Cllr James Jamieson, Chairman of the LGA, said: "Councils want to give every opportunity for people to say goodbye to their loved ones during this difficult time, but we can't police every cemetery. We want to keep every cemetery and park open but are very reliant on the public to take a sensible approach."



## 'End care-health divide'

**The coronavirus crisis proves the artificiality of the funding divide between the NHS and social care, according to a recent research note from the think tank Policy Exchange.**

'Ending the divide' argues that the Government's recent promises on social care – cross-party talks and a manifesto pledge that "nobody needing care should be forced to sell their home to pay for it" – must now be strengthened.

Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Social care as a whole has been desperately underfunded for decades and we have been consistently calling for a cross-party consensus on the future of care and how we

pay for it, long before the coronavirus crisis.

"This report echoes our own calls about how social care should be on an equal footing with the NHS.

"People of all ages should be able to live the lives they want to lead and we are pleased the Government previously announced it was to begin cross-party talks, as part of finding a long-term, sustainable solution for adult social care.

"What we also need more immediately is urgent access for all social care staff to reliable and ongoing supplies of quality personal protective equipment, increased rapid and comprehensive testing and greater support with staffing and other equipment, if we are to defeat this disease."



# Fighting your corner

The LGA is your voice on the national stage throughout the COVID-19 pandemic



Councillor James Jamieson is Chairman of the LGA

**A**cross the country, local government continues to show the nation that councils are there for our communities in our times of greatest need.

As leaders of place, councillors have protected the vulnerable, supported our businesses and kept our highly valued services running – all while doing our utmost to minimise the spread of infection.

It hasn't been easy for any of us – professionally or personally – as the pandemic has dramatically reshaped local areas and changed the way we live, work and socialise. Councils are doing a remarkable job, and I am proud to work alongside you.

The supply of personal protective equipment (PPE), safely accommodating those experiencing homelessness, ensuring vulnerable children receive the care and support they need, and supporting the wider group of vulnerable people with food parcels and other assistance are just a few of the issues

that I know you have been dealing with.

The LGA, as your national membership body, is continuing to amplify your voice on the national stage and ensure you have the support you need at this time. Our councillors and officers continue to push for the powers, flexibilities and funding you need at the highest levels of government. Positively, our concerns are being heard.

Before this crisis, the financial pressures facing councils were already a significant issue. Having delivered an extraordinary and unprecedented range of support for our communities in such a short space of time, the issue of immediate funding has been at the top of councils' worry lists. The Government is listening and has provided councils with billions of pounds in funding to help you cope with this crisis.

Ensuring our workforce is kept safe and well is at the forefront of everyone's minds, particularly those who are supporting our residents and keeping communities running. The LGA has continually and consistently lobbied for a sustainable supply of appropriate PPE for everyone who needs it.

All essential frontline staff, and members of their households, can now access COVID-19 tests. This will give our staff more peace of mind about

their own safety, that of their families and of the residents they serve.

The pace and scale of the challenge we face is unprecedented. With councils redeploying staff and refocusing their efforts to tackle these new challenges, the LGA has been supporting councils as you look to do things differently (see right).

The Government and other organisations recognise councils' efforts and have implemented changes to reduce the red tape you face. This has included the ability to conduct meetings remotely, the

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*“The pandemic has dramatically reshaped local areas”*

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Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman suspending casework activity, the deadline for publishing draft accounts for inspection and publishing audited accounts being extended, clarification around data sharing, and a new time-limited, emergency permitted development right to support local authorities' immediate response to COVID-19.

As we look towards the recovery period, we know that life will have changed, and things will be different from how they are now. Remote



## Reshaping our support to councils

The majority of the LGA's work is now focused on helping local government address COVID-19 and its consequences

The LGA has re-focused its support offer to councils to reflect the issues around the pandemic that you are identifying and sharing with us.

As your needs continue to evolve, our support offer will change, but it currently covers leadership, financial resilience, adult social care, children's services, workforce and communications support, digital connectivity and much more.

The scale of the challenge that councils face requires strong, responsive and resilient leadership. To address this, our leadership support offer has been improved so that councillors and officers have access to learning resources and a forum in which to share their experiences with their peers.

We have invested in online leadership tools that will enable councillors to continue to play their vital community leadership role in this national effort. A series of webinars will be available, with the first on the role of ward councillors in responding to COVID-19.

Looking ahead, there will be specific content on the roles of cabinet members and finance portfolio holders. The webinars will combine pre-recorded short videos and live discussions.

We are also investing in our existing councillor e-learning platform, with new modules to support councillors during these unprecedented times. The next will be 'Holding council meetings online' – which you can read about on p25.

Our workforce team has been equally busy supporting councils. They have been working closely with Social Work England and the Government on Social Work Together, a campaign to encourage former social workers to return to the profession to support councils. This campaign runs parallel with the existing Return to Social Work programme.

As **first** was going to press, more than 1,000 former social workers had registered their interest.

In line with the Government's social distancing guidance, responding to the COVID-19 threat in a way that protects residents and staff has been a serious challenge. That is why the LGA has been making the case for more digital flexibility, such as the ability to hold meetings remotely.

With the majority of council staff working from home, and with councils putting in place digital solutions – such as befriending schemes, to tackle isolation – digital connectivity is more important now than ever.

We continue to work with mobile and broadband operators on your behalf to identify the issues that poor connectivity is having on our workforces and communities.

This is just a snapshot of how the LGA is continuing to support you during the current climate. Please use the link below to find out more.

working and the huge upsurge in voluntary working and community support is something I would personally like to keep.

Having demonstrated the importance and success of councils in delivering for our local communities, together we need to ensure local government is at the forefront of future developments in the months and years ahead.

I hope our staff will continue to be valued as equal to those in any other public service, that our contribution to supporting the wider group of vulnerable people we serve will be recognised, and that we will be funded sustainably now and into the future.

In the coming months, the LGA will continue to represent the priorities of councils in our discussions with ministers and officials. To help keep you up to date with all the latest developments, we have set up a coronavirus hub ([www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus)) with links to resources, guidance, public health advice and other useful material. You can also follow us on Twitter at [@LGAcomms](https://twitter.com/LGAcomms) and [@LGAnews](https://twitter.com/LGAnews) for regular updates.

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](mailto:coronavirus.enquiries@local.gov.uk). Your insights help inform our engagement on your behalf.

 **For more information** on the LGA's COVID-19 support offer, visit [www.local.gov.uk/our-support/lga-covid-19-support-offer](http://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/lga-covid-19-support-offer)

# Keeping adult learners on course

Adult and community education is providing a vital lifeline during the pandemic – but more funding is needed to help councils run extra courses virtually



Councillor **Kevin Bentley** is Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board

**C**ouncils across the country are doing everything in their power to support their residents throughout these unprecedented times, and what that support looks like has had to change in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

They are providing additional care and emergency food supplies for the vulnerable, more support for the unemployed and businesses, and delivering services in ways they haven't before.

One such service is adult and community

education run or commissioned by councils in communities nationwide.

On average, 600,000 adult learners walk through the doors of adult education centres every year. They offer a range of informal and formal learning from entry-level courses to professional qualifications, as well as interview support and confidence-boosting programmes, computer and ICT training, maths and English, to help more people, already in work, re-train, upskill or move up in the workplace.

They are unique because they often take a bottom-up approach to planning provision for educational opportunities for local learners where they live. Local responses to coronavirus have demonstrated how flexible, agile and joined up they can be, working with the grain of other place-based services including employment, regeneration, health and culture, and their capacity to add value to each.

Adult learning has the ability to transform people's lives by supporting the most vulnerable – including the long-term unemployed or those out of work because of furlough, redundancy, ill-health or caring responsibilities – to upskill before they re-join the workforce.

As well as these economic benefits, it reduces isolation and loneliness and makes people

happier, healthier, more confident and more capable – making places smarter and more inclusive.

Adult community education matters, and it is now, perhaps, a more important lifeline than ever before.

Investing in adult skills needs to be at the forefront of the Government's mind now and in the aftermath of the pandemic. With unemployment expected to rise to 3.4 million – equivalent to 10 per cent of the country's workforce – supporting hundreds of thousands of learners now to learn new skills and retrain remotely will be an essential part of

*“Adult community education matters, and is a more important lifeline than ever before”*

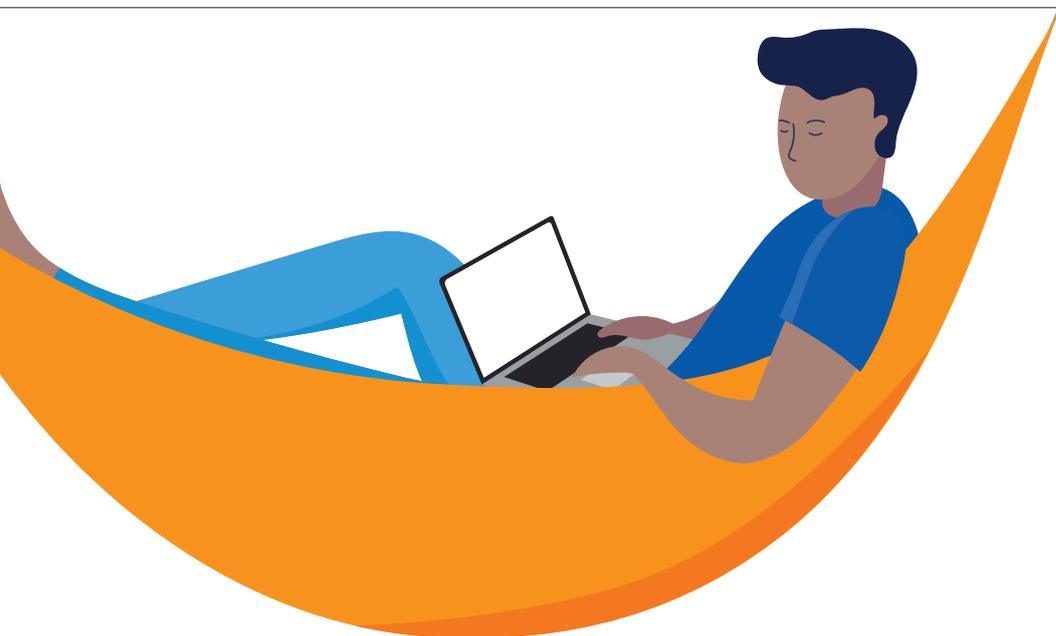
the country's economic recovery in the months ahead. That must include investing in local adult and community education services.

Central government funding for adult skills has already fallen by almost half since 2010 – which has coincided with a 3.8 million drop in adult learners. Just 33 per cent of adults are on courses or in training – a record low since figures began in 1996. This has meant that councils continued to face the prospect of reducing provision or winding down their adult learning centres altogether, even before COVID-19 hit.

Despite these funding pressures, councils have already made great efforts to help adult learners continue their education remotely, despite the pandemic. But the most vulnerable, many of whom cannot get online, are at risk of missing out through no fault of their own.

The Department for Education has already committed to providing emergency funding to colleges and schools that are financially affected by the coronavirus outbreak, to cover





unforeseen costs, but no such support has been offered to council-run adult education providers. Over-stretched councils cannot shoulder the unforeseen cost burdens of the additional support now required.

While the Government has committed to covering the costs councils incur as a result of the pandemic, there will be significant demands on this.

Instead, the Government should commit to provide council-run adult education providers with the same level of support as schools and colleges are receiving, at the earliest opportunity.

This would free up councils to make courses and examinations accessible online, including expanding online content to enable learners to take part, retrain staff for the new climate of online learning, and equip learners who need it with the necessary kit.

Some have already been able to do so, and it helps when decisions about funding can be made locally. There are also councils using adult education to support the coronavirus response (see case studies, right).

However, not all will be in a position to shoulder the costs necessary to ensure that where courses continue, they can be delivered remotely. That's why they should be eligible for urgent grant funding in order to scale up the number of courses they can deliver remotely and the support they provide their learners.

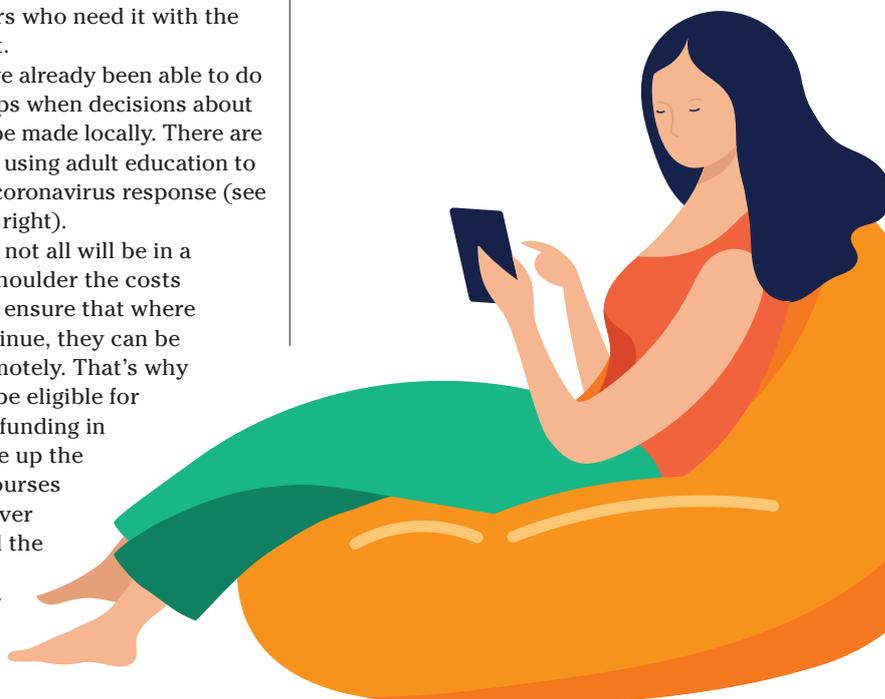
Adult education is a vital lifeline for learners on lockdown and will be even more important as the Government looks toward its economic recovery.

By failing to providing adult education providers with the same level of support as schools and colleges, our most vulnerable are at risk of being left in limbo.

The Government urgently needs to step up to ensure that councils receive the financial support they need to continue to deliver courses remotely and that our most vulnerable are not isolated from their online learning.



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



## Community learning case studies

### London

With support from the Greater London Authority, councils in central London are launching a Keep London Learning website to enable Londoners to see what online courses are available in their areas. This should help them to find employment and retraining opportunities; contribute to their communities and reduce isolation by promoting wellbeing, fitness and health; support their families; and continue to develop life skills to support them in the changing economy over the coming years.

### Lancashire

Adult learners referred to Lancashire County Council's adult learning service by Jobcentre Plus are being supported on a regular basis remotely. Support includes CV writing, online applications and mock telephone interviews. The council's Employability Team is also working with major supermarkets and supply chain employers to scope out job opportunities for adult learners. Lancashire is concerned that a significant number of its learners live alone, and that the lockdown has had an impact on their mental health. As well as improving their digital skills, telephone support is crucial as many learners do not have access to the internet at home.

### Coronavirus response

While developing its own online training package for volunteers in the care sector, tutors at Peterborough City Council's adult education service are using their culinary skills to cook and deliver 140 meals a day to the homeless, adult learners and care leavers.

Adult education staff at Worcestershire County Council are using their skills to teach others how to make their own personal protective equipment from home.

Meanwhile, staff from Adult Learning Lewisham are helping NHS staff, by mobilising volunteers to make and deliver dozens of scrubs to local hospitals.



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



# Communicating with our communities

**A**s guidance issued by government on important issues comes out every day, councils are stepping up to the challenge and ensuring that whether it's hardship funding for businesses or food packages for the most vulnerable, communities can access the support they need.

Continuing to deliver existing services in new ways, or new services altogether, presents local authorities with complex communications challenges.

Councils have had to perform a range of vital and different roles, including raising awareness of public health advice, signposting residents to available support, managing changes to vital frontline local services – such as refuse collections and keeping parks open – and much more.

During this unprecedented time, it has never been more important for councils to communicate well with their residents

As the exchange of information continues at speed, councils are in constant dialogue with their communities to ensure that residents do not miss information that may be important to them. It's good to see that councils across the country are getting on with the job and engaging with residents in new, accessible and creative ways.

As councillors, you also have an integral role to play. Trusted voices in your local community, you are on the metaphorical frontline. Residents want to hear from familiar faces in their local areas, and many of you are already updating residents remotely

through Facebook or other means.

Take Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council as an example. Council Leader Cllr Vikki Slade showed real leadership by holding the council's first ever Facebook live question and answer session. More than 14,000 people tuned in to the broadcast to put more than 100 questions to her directly.

But not all of us have access to the internet, right? That is why BCP Council has advertised its dedicated helpline across local media, put more than 13,500 postcards through the doors of those who do not have internet access, and its councillors

## COVID-19 communications

- Surrey County Council has produced a 'School Superheroes' pack to encourage students to keep up with their school work. As a resource that parents can use at home with their children, the pack includes a colouring book and sticker collection, and encourages children to share their work on social media using the hashtag #Surreyschoolsuperheroes.
- Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council are

working with local leaders who are native speakers in their community languages to film public health advice. The accessible advice is spoken in 31 languages, including Urdu, Bengali, Portuguese and Swahili, and will help harder-to-reach groups access the information they need. View them on Youtube at [www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/coronavirus/coronavirus-campaign-for-communities](https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/coronavirus/coronavirus-campaign-for-communities).

- Alongside the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership, Devon

County Council is supporting people out of work by holding a virtual careers fair. The fair includes information on companies who are recruiting, support for individuals and businesses, and young people and their families.

- Councillors at Bath and North East Somerset Council are getting hands on and delivering emergency supplies. The council is documenting the work of its Compassionate Communities Hub on Facebook. Visit <https://www.facebook.com/bathnes/> for more information.



## Ask a librarian

Librarians at the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames have set up a livestream on their Library and Heritage Service Facebook page, with story time sessions for children, book reviews and tutorials to help residents who might be self-isolating.

In just one week, their livestreams have reached almost 10,000 people. Like Staffordshire County Council, they are running a series of online events throughout the week and have made the schedule available in advance.

It is no surprise that there has been a boom in new digital library users since the lockdown was introduced in March – with Hampshire County Council seeing a 770 per cent increase in new users, and Cornwall Council recording a 630 per cent rise.

Libraries remain an incredibly valued service and continue to play an important role in supporting learning across all ages.

Why not get the children to read a story with a librarian after their exercise class with Joe Wicks?



## Spreading the word with local celebs

Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council has been working hard to encourage residents to follow the Government's guidance and stay at home.

It has teamed up with celebrities with connections to the local area, such as Harry Redknapp, the former Manager of Bournemouth Football Club and King of the Jungle, to continue encouraging people to stay at home.

Councils across the country have their own local celebs – refuse workers, care workers, teachers – and have been singing their praises.

Doncaster Council told the old tale of a NASA cleaner's encounter with former US President John F Kennedy to celebrate its own unsung heroes and point out how local government staff are playing a vital role in managing and responding to the current pandemic. When visiting NASA headquarters, President Kennedy asked the cleaner, who was mopping the floor, what he did at NASA. The cleaner responded: "I'm helping put a man on the moon."

Council staff have an important role to play in supporting their communities, and it is good to see them get the recognition they deserve, not only from councils but nationwide.

Working with celebrities and singing the praises of our unsung heroes are just two of the countless ways councils are continuing to communicate with their residents.

have used their local knowledge to strategically place posters in shops and notice boards across their wards.

The council is also contacting the most clinically vulnerable who are unable to leave their homes.

Councils are also providing new services at scale and in ways they have never had to before. As is always the case with new services, to get people signed-up to them, they need to know about them.

City of Lincoln Council, for example, is supporting its most vulnerable residents by mobilising staff to support those who are at risk of becoming isolated through a new telephone befriending scheme.

The council identified early on the need for a service to help protect the wellbeing of the elderly and residents who live alone, on top of the emergency supplies many of them will have already received.

More than 1,000 residents have registered their interest in the befriending scheme, and have been matched to members of staff. So far, a third of those people who signed up have used the service.

Like BCP and Lincolnshire, getting our communications right has a real impact on our daily lives. Being crystal clear that people should leave their homes only for essential trips to get food, medicine, exercise once a day, or support others, really will save lives. With the right communication, we can continue to support our communities.



**For communications support, including council case studies**, please visit the LGA's coronavirus communications hub at [www.local.gov.uk/covid-19-communications](http://www.local.gov.uk/covid-19-communications)

# Developing the leaders of the future

The LGA's programme to find the brightest officers got off to a good start and will continue in the autumn

**T**he Local Government Challenge is a unique officer development programme and competition, which forms part of the LGA's leadership offer to councils.

Contestants tackle five real-life challenges hosted by councils across the country, providing leadership development for the officers and consultancy and fresh ideas for the councils.

The programme is on hold during the coronavirus pandemic, but two challenges took place ahead of the lockdown.

In February, 10 officers gathered at Surrey County Council for the first LG Challenge of 2020, which focused on climate change.

Katie Sargent, Surrey's Environment Commissioning Group Manager, tasked the contestants with considering how the council can help mitigate the effects of climate change linked to land use and consumer habits, as part of its work to ensure Surrey is carbon neutral by 2050.

Kent County Council's Zoe Galvin stepped up to lead Team Resilience and Calderdale Council's Joe Kinsella captained Team Trailblazers. With Galvin hailing from the same council as last year's winner, and Kinsella being persuaded to apply by his chief executive, expectations were high.

The LG Challenge is an intense programme. The contestants, meeting for the first time, had only a short team session to plan and strategise before being whisked off to visit local businesses, meet a wide range of experts and talk to members and officers about how the council is recognising the concerns residents have about climate change. They also discussed the council's ambition that 'residents live in clean, safe and green communities,

where people and organisations embrace their environmental responsibilities'.

Working late into the night, the teams pulled together their ideas before delivering presentations the next day. The judges – who included Surrey's Chief Executive Joanna Killian, Deputy Leader Cllr Colin Kemp, and Katie Sargent – declared Trailblazers the winners. Both presentations had impressed, but the strong pitch and more cohesive nature of Trailblazer's approach made all the difference.

The second challenge, at Pembrokeshire County Council, marked an exciting milestone – the first challenge to be hosted in Wales and the most westerly point to which the programme has travelled.

Steven Richards-Downes, Acting Director of Children and Schools, and Rob Hillier, 14-19 Schools Adviser, revealed the task: how can the council support post-16 learners to ensure they are on the right course in the right place

and help achieve the council's vision that every learner achieves more than they thought possible?

Emma Shepherd, from Croydon Council, captained this time for Trailblazers, with her background in training and experience as a school governor. Jack Kennedy, from Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council, and previously the Department for Education, captained Resilience.

Both teams quickly determined a plan of action on this 'number one priority' for Pembrokeshire and a service area new to the rest of the contestants, before travelling across the rural authority to visit education settings and meet students, headteachers and council officers.

After very different approaches to the presentations, the judges – including Leader Cllr David Simpson, Education Cabinet Member Cllr Guy Woodham and Cllr Neil Prior, Transformation and IT Cabinet Member – awarded the win to Resilience for its slick presentation and strong business case outlining its innovative 'Pembr' app.

Leaving the series tied at 1-1, we are taking a break because of COVID-19 and looking forward to re-starting in the autumn.

**i** For more information about Local Government Challenge, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/lg-challenge](http://www.local.gov.uk/lg-challenge), or email [LGChallenge@local.gov.uk](mailto:LGChallenge@local.gov.uk) to register your interest for LG Challenge 2021



# Councils 'needed more than ever'

Elected members are providing much-needed reassurance in their communities and council workers are unstinting in their commitment to public service



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

**T**he world seems a dark and frightening place right now. At the time of writing, 15,464 people have died in the UK from COVID-19, 534 of whom have died in Wales.

Behind these cold statistics are many lives lost and countless bereft families and friends. Many of our most vulnerable residents will be feeling anxious and scared, as all our daily lives have been restricted almost beyond recognition.

But local services remain a constant beacon for us all. Dedicated council staff are playing a vital role in looking after residents in need of support; keeping communities clean and tidy; enforcing stringent new public protection regulations; administering millions of pounds of vital business support grants; providing childcare and

free school meals to entitled children; keeping concerned residents informed of the help available to them; and helping to set up field hospitals and makeshift mortuaries.

Councils are working together with partners, including the voluntary and community sector, to harness the talents and sheer goodwill of the many thousands of people who have volunteered to help.

Never has the demand on our workers been greater. Many council staff have volunteered to change roles in their determination to help. I would like to thank all of them sincerely for their unstinting commitment to public service, and the vital work that they will continue to do in the tough months ahead.

Amid such uncertainty, councillors are providing much-needed reassurance in their communities. People will naturally turn to their councillors for guidance and leadership, and to be signposted to all available support.

This is unlike anything any of us have seen before and it has placed new demands on everyone to adjust to new ways of working. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all my fellow councillors for their invaluable, ongoing contribution.

Through the WLGA, all council leaders and chief executives continue to work closely together to help to

coordinate the national response by collating intelligence, sharing good practice and raising concerns. We continue to hold video conferences regularly with ministers and senior officials from across the Welsh Government, and the Secretary of State for Wales, to monitor and respond rapidly to developments.

While this national work continues, our role as leaders in our communities is just as important. The WLGA is keeping all councillors in Wales up to speed with the latest developments with a daily bulletin, and the WLGA website is being regularly updated.

We hope that these updates are of help to councillors in fulfilling their duties as elected representatives at what is a very unsettling time for us all.

We don't know when this deadly crisis will pass. But it will. And when we eventually start on our journey on the long road to recovery, councils will be needed more than ever: to continue to care for those who most need it; to offer support to hard-hit businesses and regenerate local economies; to help protect, rebuild and stand up for our traumatised communities.

In the meantime, we must all carry on doing everything we can to look after our residents, our staff and each other. And strive for the better days that will come.

**i** For more information about the WLGA and to access its coronavirus resources, please visit [www.wlga.gov.uk](http://www.wlga.gov.uk)

# The pastoral pandemic

The response to coronavirus needs to consider the different issues facing rural areas – from poorer digital connectivity to a higher proportion of ‘vulnerable’ residents



Councillor **Cecilia Motley** is Chair of the Rural Services Network

**T**he effect of the COVID-19 emergency – and the impact of the national responses to it – on rural communities will not be the same as in urban areas. It is essential that government interventions take account of the different factors at work.

The Rural Services Network (RSN) is the national champion for rural services. Its membership includes district, county and unitary councils as well as the wider public services and private, voluntary and community

sectors – all working to support communities and businesses across rural England.

That role is even more important now to ensure that ‘rural’ has a strong voice where and when it matters.

Our rural communities are suffering from a lack of good quality broadband and digital connectivity – so critical right now for businesses, education, community support, and to help combat isolation and loneliness among all ages.

We also have a well-documented higher proportion of older (and therefore ‘vulnerable’) residents who are self-isolating and unable to access goods and services. Many of these people previously played a significant role in sustaining local community organisations. Another unique aspect of rural areas is the high numbers of small businesses and the self-employed.

Together with the chairs of the Rural Coalition, Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) and the Plunkett Foundation (which

helps rural communities establish and run community businesses), I have written to George Eustice MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, raising a number of concerns and offering our support to the Government in the urgent search for solutions to these problems.

Fuller details of the issues we raised can be found on our website, [www.rsnonline.org.uk](http://www.rsnonline.org.uk). The main issues highlighted were:

- adverse impacts on high streets in rural towns and small, independent retailers
- loss of income from cancellation of festivals and events and the severe impact on rural tourism
- the seasonal nature of much rural employment and problems finding temporary workers
- the future for village shops and rural pubs (including supply chain issues)
- the impact on the incomes of community buildings and village halls.

It is important to remember that COVID-19 followed hard on the heels of two serious flooding events that devastated many rural communities, compounding economic and social difficulties.

The RSN highlighted the deleterious effect on rural councils of dramatically pared-back staffing levels and services because of budget cuts over the past decade. This has left them with weakened resilience to meet the needs of their areas in the current very challenging times. Yet rural authorities are doing their utmost to rise to those challenges.

The RSN is part of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs’ Rural Impact Stakeholder Forum, which feeds into its Rural Impact Cell. The cell acts as a coordination, stakeholder and policy hub for COVID-19 impacts on rural communities and businesses.

Weekly stakeholder forum ‘meetings’ are taking place, where we raise the issues and concerns of our members. As they carry out their essential work supporting their communities, we can be their voice to government while they are our eyes and ears on the ground.

We know that our rural communities are resilient, and that communities and local councillors – who have huge wards to cover – are working together to support their vulnerable residents. We will be sharing these stories with our membership.

**i** For more information about the Rural Services Network, please visit [www.rsnonline.org.uk](http://www.rsnonline.org.uk)



# Community spirit, cooperative solutions

The cooperative councils' approach of co-designing services with those who are going to use them offers a model both for responding to the pandemic and recovering from it



Councillor **Sharon Taylor** OBE is Chair of the Cooperative Councils' Innovation Network and Leader of Stevenage Borough Council

**T**hese are unprecedented times.

In a matter of weeks, we have become a country of self-isolators and self-distancers. We all owe a debt of gratitude to our colleagues working on the frontline, as they risk their health to help others.

However, there is cooperation amid this crisis – the world has united against COVID-19. We have seen local government responding in an extraordinary way, performing their role as an emergency service and literally saving lives.

Emergency planning and briefings have become a part of daily life as we seek to deliver services to all our communities but particularly the most vulnerable.

Now, more than ever, our communities are looking to local councils and to one another, to give the support and guidance they need in order to protect the elderly, vulnerable, carers and those on the edges of society.

Officers and members are working to translate the daily updates on government policy so that financial support and humanitarian aid reaches those that need it, as quickly as possible.

Most of us are already starting to plan for the recovery phase from the pandemic. My fervent hope is that the great spirit that has been generated will lead to cooperative solutions being a real part of the way forward

for businesses, local authorities, organisations and communities.

The cooperation in our communities and the working between partners has been exemplary, and all our councils will be using that as a foundation stone to build for the future as we move beyond the immediate emergency of the pandemic.

We have seen a wave of support for our incredible care workforce, and this must surely result in re-thinking the essential role they have in our communities and ensuring they are recognised properly and paid appropriately.

The Cooperative Councils' Innovation Network is already exploring the use of cooperatives in delivering social care through several policy laboratories so we can contribute to the debate going forward.

We have seen initiatives all over the country to set up community response hubs; collaborate and cooperate with voluntary sector partners in local charities, food banks, homeless shelters; and to support victims of domestic abuse.

All these areas benefit from the cooperative approach of co-designing solutions with those who are going to use the service. As we emerge from the critical phase of this emergency, cooperative solutions have much to offer in shaping a new future both in the delivery of key services and in the deep-rooted engagement of the public in place-based working – on issues from neighbourhood management to tackling climate change.

**i** **The Cooperative Councils' Innovation Network is a special interest group of the LGA.**

Please visit [www.councils.coop](http://www.councils.coop) to find out more.

As our cooperative councils continue to develop a community wealth-building approach to our local economies, we also have a strong contribution to make in re-shaping not just local economies (vital as that is) but the national economy too, so that those who work to deliver the wealth in our country are also those who benefit from that wealth.

We have a new understanding and vision from the past few weeks of just who our key workers are when the chips are down. Let us use that foundation to build a fairer economy for all.

Life, as we knew it, will never be the same again. We will unite, collaborate and use our values and principles to fight this pandemic.

Stay safe and look after each other.



# first is essential reading for councillors and chief executives – the decision-makers in local government

To learn more about how you can promote your products or services in **first** magazine, **first** online or through our **first** e-bulletin, get in touch

Andy Shields / 01223 378 005 / andy.shields@cpl.co.uk

## The Health and Care Political Leadership Offer

Our **free** support offer, funded by Department of Health and Social Care, is aimed at:

- health and wellbeing board (HWB) chairs/co/vice chairs
- portfolio-holders/lead members with responsibility for adult social care
- anyone with any other leading political role in a health and care system.

### Leadership essentials

Warwick Conference Centre, Coventry

These **free** two day residential sessions are an opportunity to reflect on the leadership challenges of these roles.

If you are a HWB chair/co/vice chair or have a leading political role in a health and care system:

**15-16 October 2020**

Reflecting responsibilities across health and social care, the November sessions will run simultaneously, linked by shared speakers, facilitators and a joint dinner to provide a wider networking opportunity.

Please contact [grace.collins@local.gov.uk](mailto:grace.collins@local.gov.uk) for more information.

For more information visit [www.local.gov.uk/hcplp](http://www.local.gov.uk/hcplp) Places are limited and early booking is recommended.

# COMMENT



**Nicole Jacobs** is the Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales

## Improving the **response** to domestic abuse

**Domestic abuse is a devastating crime and an issue to which I have dedicated my whole professional life.**

Local government plays a pivotal role in the response to domestic abuse, and I don't need to tell readers of this magazine that its effects infiltrate every part of life and our public services.

You may have known me previously as the Chief Executive Officer of Standing Together, which runs the Domestic Violence Coordinators' Network and provides the only accredited training for those with strategic responsibility for domestic abuse. I have seen the results when councillors and local authority staff prioritise the support for adults and children subjected to abuse.

Unfortunately, we know that the response is patchy. Competing priorities, complex multi-agency responsibilities and tight resources often get in the way of

providing the best services and using opportunities to identify abuse and intervene early.

That's why the Government established the role of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner. With the passage of the Domestic Abuse Bill, I will be furnished with formal legal powers. Specific public bodies, including local authorities, will have a duty to cooperate with me, and to respond to the recommendations I make to them.

This offers a huge opportunity for me and my office to support local authorities by identifying and sharing best practice, giving advice and – where necessary – highlighting and challenging



See [www.local.gov.uk/domestic-violence-and-abuse](http://www.local.gov.uk/domestic-violence-and-abuse) for information, resources and case studies from the LGA

areas where the response falls short of what is expected.

I will be using the 'National Statement of Expectations' as a starting point but will develop a specific framework for monitoring and overseeing service provision nationally, and will work closely with the LGA and local authorities in creating this.

I will also support councils by holding national government to account and have already given evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee to this end. Where national policies get in the way of commissioning effective services, I will be the first to champion the needs of local authorities and be clear with government as to what must change. It too will be bound by the legislation that means it must respond to my recommendations.

This article comes at an extraordinary time for councils and our country. I know that local authorities, service providers and the Government are working around the clock to support victims and survivors of domestic abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I have been blown away by the dedication of the domestic abuse sector in its efforts to keep services going and increase provision to meet need. I chair a weekly virtual meeting with the domestic abuse sector, government and the LGA. I have heard of the devastating effects that lockdown has had on victims and survivors, as well as the herculean efforts by services to keep going and ramp up support where needed.

I call on all local authorities to give as much support to their local providers as they can – be that offering flexibility on contracts and commissioning processes or offering short-term funding for increased shifts or remote working. It's crucial that service providers can focus on what really matters, which is keeping survivors and children safe during this particularly difficult and dangerous time.

As restrictions begin to lift, I will visit as many local authorities as I can. Together, we can improve the response to domestic abuse, which still affects more than two million people every year.



## Delivering what our residents need



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

**L**ocal leadership is never more important than in a wartime theatre, as we feel we are in now. A huge thank you to all of you supporting our communities in their hour of need.

Our Independent council leaders and LGA leadership team are working well together, providing sound evidence and examples to demonstrate our case and making clear everything councils are doing at this critical time – delivering care, supporting our vulnerable and keeping our waste services running, to name a few.

We have repeatedly called on the Chancellor and Secretary of State to back

up council finances fully, deliver promised personal protective equipment and to allow councils to do what they're best at – delivering what our residents need.

We were told to do whatever it takes and it's reassuring to hear ministers say they're standing with councils. We now need to make sure they deliver on the promises made.

We remain committed to delivering business as usual. Remote meetings, including planning, continue and it is more important than ever for our members to be active representatives of our electorates, to challenge and scrutinise decisions so that when the crisis is over, we do not face challenge or developments we don't need.

Each council will have different ways of working, but your ability to represent your residents should be protected.

While we continue to manage the

day-to-day challenges from COVID-19, we're also thinking about what is needed for recovery – financially, environmentally and socially – for our communities, councils and country.

I will miss meeting you in Harrogate this year at the LGA's annual conference, following the difficult decision to cancel. But we're hoping to hold virtual events, and plans are still in place for the LGA's Independent Group conference in the autumn. I hope to see many of you then, all being safe. In the meantime, our think tanks, bulletins and support continue to keep our group strong and discussions live during this critical time.

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**"It's reassuring to hear ministers say they're standing with councils"**

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

## Stepping up to the challenge of COVID-19

**I** was never in doubt that councils across the country would be able to step up to tackle this crisis, but I continue to be touched by the heart-warming stories I hear about how the local government family has responded to the greatest challenge we face for a generation.

The Government is relying on us to support the national effort and make sure those who need it have access to food and emergency support. So far, we have delivered, and that is something of which we can all be proud.

We are now providing support to more than 1.8 million people who are clinically vulnerable. Our role at the heart

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**"Our role at the heart of our communities means that we're ensuring many more of our residents are safe and healthy"**

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of our communities means that we're ensuring many more of our residents are safe and healthy – including those at risk of homelessness or food poverty, vulnerable children and victims of abuse.

As Leader of Central Bedfordshire Council, I know all too well the spread of challenges we face, but I am reassured by the conversations I continue to have with government.

Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick MP has spoken of the important role local councils are playing, reiterating the Government's commitment that councils will get the resources they need to cope with this pandemic.

I want to pay tribute to all of those who have played their part.

Sadly, you will have heard the stories of members of the local government family that we have lost to COVID-19. Some of you may have experienced losses in your own councils.

I know all our thoughts are with those who have died and their loved ones at this dreadful time.

I cannot say enough how grateful I am to every councillor, member of staff and contractor who is going above and beyond right now to support our communities.

Whether it be on the frontline in the battle against the virus, or as a cog in the bigger machine that is keeping our local areas running – you are doing an incredibly inspiring job.



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

## Collaborative working has paid off

**A**t the time of writing, we are entering the fifth week of the coronavirus lockdown, with the Government having just extended it for at least three more weeks.

I am delighted that collaborative working with the Government has resulted in several positive announcements for the sector recently. Indeed, just as **first** was going to press,

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**“Local government has received more than £3.2 billion to deal with the coronavirus”**

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Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick MP announced an additional £1.6 billion in funding for councils, meaning that local government has received more than £3.2 billion to deal with the coronavirus.

I would like to record my thanks to Robert and his team for their regular engagement with me and LGA colleagues, which has resulted in other important announcements such as the guidance on holding council meetings remotely and the deferral of £2.6 billion in business rates payments over the next three months.

Looking forward, I believe that it will be important for us to gather evidence of all the costs that we have incurred as a result of the pandemic, while also focusing on how we will support our communities and local businesses during the recovery phase.

Finally, I would like to once again thank you – members and officers – for all you are doing to support your communities throughout this extremely difficult time, and in particular to acknowledge the work of local resilience forums, which have made key decisions quickly and worked collaboratively with other agencies.

As the Queen said, we will succeed in the fight against coronavirus and we will meet again.



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

## Hold government to account on support

**K**eir Starmer's election as Leader of the Labour Party has already seen a refreshing change in Labour in local government's relationship with the party leadership.

We are also delighted to see Morgan McSweeney, the former head of the LGA Labour Group's office, appointed as Keir's Chief of Staff – which will be reassuring to the many councillors who know him well.

Keir was quick to ask LGA Labour to organise a Zoom meeting with all Labour leaders, during which we articulated significant concerns on personal protective equipment, testing, and council finances.

Our concerns on council finances were triggered by Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick MP appearing to backtrack from his earlier pledge that councils should do 'whatever it takes' in tackling the crisis and expect full compensation from government.

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**“Councils have spent huge sums on the immediate impact of this crisis”**

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Such a U-turn would be a betrayal of the hard-working council staff who are dealing with this crisis on the ground and the vulnerable people we are trying to protect. Councils have spent huge sums of money on the immediate impact of this crisis and missed out on even bigger sums in lost income.

Already massively underfunded after a decade of austerity, we do not have the power to borrow to cover revenue spending – so 'sharing the burden' would mean cuts to vital services, less support for the vulnerable, and job losses for the very staff who are keeping our public services going.

All councils should join together to hold the Government to its pledge.



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

## Care homes – the forgotten frontline

**A**s someone who has just come out of hospital, I know how hard our NHS staff work.

I know I would not be here now if it wasn't for them, and my family and I thank them from the bottom of our hearts for all they do.

The work they do under extremely difficult circumstances is heroic in every sense of the word.

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**“Like many, I can only wave to my mum through her care home window”**

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Equally heroic are council staff up and down the country working to fight the virus and maintain services.

The country has come together in a way not seen since World War II, united in its fight to beat this terrible disease.

That is why I am horrified at how our care homes and care workers have become the forgotten frontline in this fight.

Like many people, I can now only wave to my mum through the window of her care home.

The delays in getting personal protective equipment to this critical area and the lack of testing until recently was a major misjudgement by the Government.

In a democracy, accountability is key. We need to be able to hold people to account for the decisions they make at national and local level.

Lessons need to be learnt, so the same mistakes are never made again.

While we are all in this together, we are right to question and challenge. That is what the public expects and do not let anyone tell you any different.



**Rachel Statham** is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Public Policy Research

# Families need more support

**Over the past few weeks, COVID-19 has morphed from an existential threat on our TV screens or newsfeeds into a very personal crisis.**

While stories of care homes, hospitals and protection for frontline staff have rightly dominated headlines, the Institute for Public Policy Research's (IPPR's) latest research has looked at the impact on everyday unpaid care, and how children and their families are experiencing this pandemic.

With schools and nurseries closed, and access to friends and family networks cut off, a normal childhood is out of reach for the foreseeable future for a whole generation of children.

Our recent report, 'Children of the pandemic', argues that we need to assess and respond to the pressures on children and those who care for them during this crisis.

For parents who aren't key workers but are under pressure to go out to work, and for those who've transitioned to working from home, the weeks

ahead bring extra pressure as unrelenting childcare responsibilities are piled on top of the usual stresses and demands of paid work.

Following our report, the Government made welcome steps to clarify guidance for employers accessing the Jobs Retention Scheme, making it clear that employees with full-time caring responsibilities can be furloughed.

We believe parenting should be recognised for what it is: a full-time job. To reflect this, parents and full-time carers should have a right to furlough, including on a part-time basis.

With food and energy bills stacking up as incomes are squeezed, it's clear that families with children will be under pressure on multiple fronts. To ease the financial pressure this crisis is already bringing to bear on families across the country, we need to see decisive action to get money into families' pockets.

To stem a rise in child poverty and financial insecurity for families, the Government should raise the child

element of Universal Credit by £10 a week, alongside scrapping the two-child limit and the benefit cap.

And to ease the pressure on families' budgets as they care for, educate and entertain children at home, we should raise Child Benefit and make a one-off emergency payment for every eligible child.

For many children without a garden or computer at home, the weeks ahead will be all the more challenging. Beyond the immediate impact on young people's wellbeing now, a lack of access to green space or digital devices could have far-reaching effects that stretch long into children's futures.

With health inequalities laid bare by this crisis, it's essential that private green spaces are opened up for children who don't have access to a garden or a park nearby.

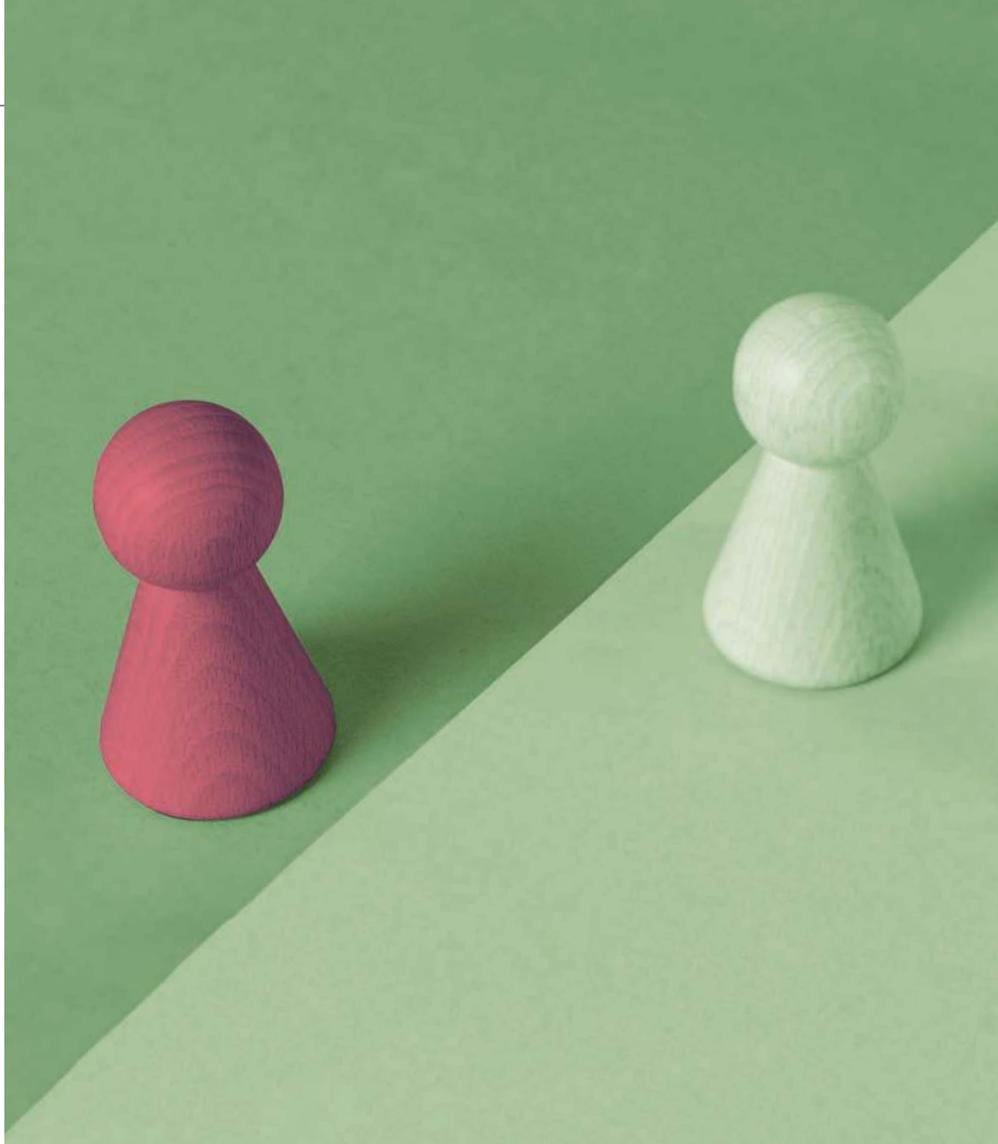
For children trying to adjust to learning from home, access to the internet and a device to learn online is a lifeline, without which we can expect to see education inequalities widen.

That is why we need a Digital Education Access Fund now, and collaboration between government, schools and technology companies to ensure every child can access a device at home.

This generation of children must not become the unseen victims of coronavirus. With action now, the Government can ease the pressure on families during this crisis and ensure health and educational inequalities aren't exacerbated on the other side.

**i** 'Children of the pandemic' can be downloaded at [www.ippr.org/research/publications/children-of-the-pandemic](http://www.ippr.org/research/publications/children-of-the-pandemic)





because of COVID-19 have been from BAME communities. But when a London bus company indicated that 10 of its drivers had died as a result of COVID-19 – all BAME – genuine alarms began to sound.

As we deal with this pandemic, the fundamentals of who has been hit hardest must lead to a comprehensive response that confronts those racial inequalities that see certain communities in poverty, with poorer health, higher rates of unemployment, living in overcrowded housing and earning lower salaries – all factors that accumulate to result in the unusually high death rates among BAME communities.

Public health, jobs and housing are all key responsibilities of local government, which is why councillors – and, particularly, BAME councillors – have a crucial role to play during this lockdown, and in the recovery phase post-COVID-19.

Most will no doubt have key local intelligence, particularly within their own communities, that could play a critical role in how we best deal with the challenges that the virus presents. Many will know

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**“This pandemic has exposed societal flaws”**

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# The coronavirus and race inequality



**Lord Woolley** is Director of Operation Black Vote and Chair of the Government's Race Disparity Unit Advisory Group

**There is one thing that we know for sure about COVID-19: it does not discriminate.**

This disease cares not if you're the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Health, the future king of the United Kingdom, a bus driver, nurse, or councillor.

However, systems, policies, infrastructures and governments – national and local – can, by default, discriminate.

With the most profound health and social impact on our nation since World War II, this pandemic has uncomfortably exposed a number of

societal flaws – including gross racial inequalities that leave some communities more vulnerable, directly and indirectly, to COVID-19 than others.

Take health itself. Those facing a greater risk if they catch this virus are the elderly and those with underlying health conditions. People from South Asian backgrounds are, for example, six times more likely to have Type 2 diabetes, and those from African and Caribbean backgrounds three times more likely.

Another key issue is that those working in the health and care professions on the medical frontline are disproportionately from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities, particularly in big cities. So, too, are other essential frontline workers, including care workers, bus drivers, shop workers, delivery drivers and minicab drivers.

It's shocking, but perhaps no surprise then, that the first 10 doctors to have died

who the elderly individuals are, who might need extra support with food and medicine, or just someone to talk to. Similarly, how can local authorities use community knowledge to ensure young people who ordinarily have free school meals are still fed, or are linked into online youth services that may keep them off the streets and out of trouble?

Post-coronavirus, BAME councillors, working with their council leadership and organisations such as the LGA, must urgently draw up medium and long-term plans to deal with the ongoing challenges we will face, and the implications for all our communities.

Lastly, looking to the future, councils and the LGA should not relax their work with non-governmental organisations, such as ours, that seek to foster even greater political representation.

If there is to be a silver lining post-coronavirus, it is that we can do things differently. In the weeks and months ahead, representative local democracy will never be more critical.

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**i** For more information about Operation Black Vote, please visit [www.obv.org.uk](http://www.obv.org.uk)



Councillor **Samer Bagaeeen** (Con, Brighton & Hove) is Professor of Planning at the University of Kent

# Re-imagining our citizens' climate assembly

**These are extraordinary times: people keeping at least two metres from each other; schools closed; public gatherings cancelled; government putting together one of the largest economic stimulus packages in history; landlords not collecting rent; the homeless being told to stay put in hotels free of charge; and workers furloughed on full pay, in some cases.**

In Brighton and Hove, we hear that pollution on our streets has halved year on year as people ditch their cars during the coronavirus pandemic. Where is the other half coming from?

Brighton & Hove City Council was set to run a citizens' climate assembly this spring – focusing first on transport – that might have helped answer that question.

We want our assembly to recommend practical actions the city can take to become carbon neutral by 2030 – a headline-grabbing and impossible target, but a good aspirational one.

So I read with interest the article in last month's edition of **first** on the success that

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*“It cannot be business as usual when we are allowed out of our homes again”*

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Oxford City Council has had with its own climate assembly. Oxford's event had three themes, taking a more holistic approach to the climate crisis: how do we use less energy (buildings, transport); how do we make more energy (transform our energy system); how do we improve environmental quality on the journey to net zero (waste, offsetting).

Biodiversity was considered within each of these areas, whereas in Brighton and Hove we seem fixated on rewilding.

A key driver for our assembly is to protect our health. The council says that climate change is the greatest threat to health in the 21st century, and cites a recent study identifying air pollution from transport as a contributory cause of more than 50 deaths a year locally. But how

many of us would still agree, as we sit under a lockdown initiated on account of a health pandemic?

There are calls for us to take a similar approach to the climate emergency as we have to the health emergency. It certainly cannot be business as usual when we are allowed out of our homes again.

As a result of the pandemic, the assembly has been pushed back into the autumn, meaning that the time is right to revisit the idea before we go on any further and spend more taxpayers' money. It is an opportunity for Brighton and Hove, and any other city considering running an assembly, to step back and reconsider options.

With the overnight shift to remote meetings and digital technology, could the conventional future that the city's leadership had imagined only a few weeks ago be changed already?

As some of us, including our school children, are seeing this conventional future merged with a digital one, perhaps we can also imagine more than 50 players (the assembly's members) getting involved. Could we take our citizens' assembly onto a digital platform?

A recent report by Nesta, the innovation foundation, suggested that involving citizens through dry and traditional techniques such as surveys, town hall meetings, and citizens' assemblies could be seen as tokenistic rather than leading to real change. Nesta imagined a future beyond citizens' assemblies involving play, immersion, sensing, creating and deliberating.

Can we? And can we be the leaders for real change? This is the challenge to all of our politicians, and to cities across the country.



Brighton and Hove bikeshare scheme

# COUNCILLOR



## Holding council meetings online

**The coronavirus pandemic has brought about fast-paced changes to the way we live and work.**

The need for self-isolation and social distancing has led to a heightened focus on home and remote working, with councils exploring how to make the most of current technology to enable this.

During this time, for the health and

safety of council staff and residents, all councillors are required to work from home. This makes holding formal council meetings particularly difficult, as until April 2020, the law required a quorum of attendees to be physically present in the same place.

The Coronavirus Act 2020 was introduced to enable necessary

emergency measures to be implemented. Consequently, the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 sets out the overall framework within which formal online meetings will now be able to take place.

Section 78 of the Act enables local authorities to make provision for the manner in which 'persons may attend, speak at, vote in, or otherwise participate in, local authority meetings' without all or any of the people required being together in the same place.

The regulations provide flexibility to councils to amend their standing orders to give effect to remote working in a way that makes sense area by area. This means that you can expect the solutions adopted by your own council to – potentially – look different to those operated by your neighbours.

During this time, it is crucial that councils' democratic functions continue, and that the public council meetings that facilitate this can continue.

The only way to do this in the current climate is to conduct meetings online, using software applications or 'apps', designed for this purpose.

The LGA has developed an e-learning module for councillors that considers the most effective ways in which to do this. It looks at:

- the provisions made by the Coronavirus Act 2020 for local authorities regarding how they hold meetings
- the ways technology is currently used to broadcast council meetings to the public
- how the public needs to be able to engage in council meetings
- how a council meeting can be fully facilitated online with an online meeting app
- some examples of remote meetings from a variety of councils in England.

### Embracing change

"This pandemic shows the need to embrace change and use technology to drive the transformation of the organisation so that we are in control, rather than just reacting to events. Allowing public participation in the current situation is something we see as a necessary and positive move.

"We can deliver this now, because we had taken the decision to do something last year and are able to build on it, rather than being under pressure and having to start from scratch."

*Cllr Tom FitzPatrick (Con), Cabinet Member for Innovation, Transformation and Performance, Norfolk County Council*

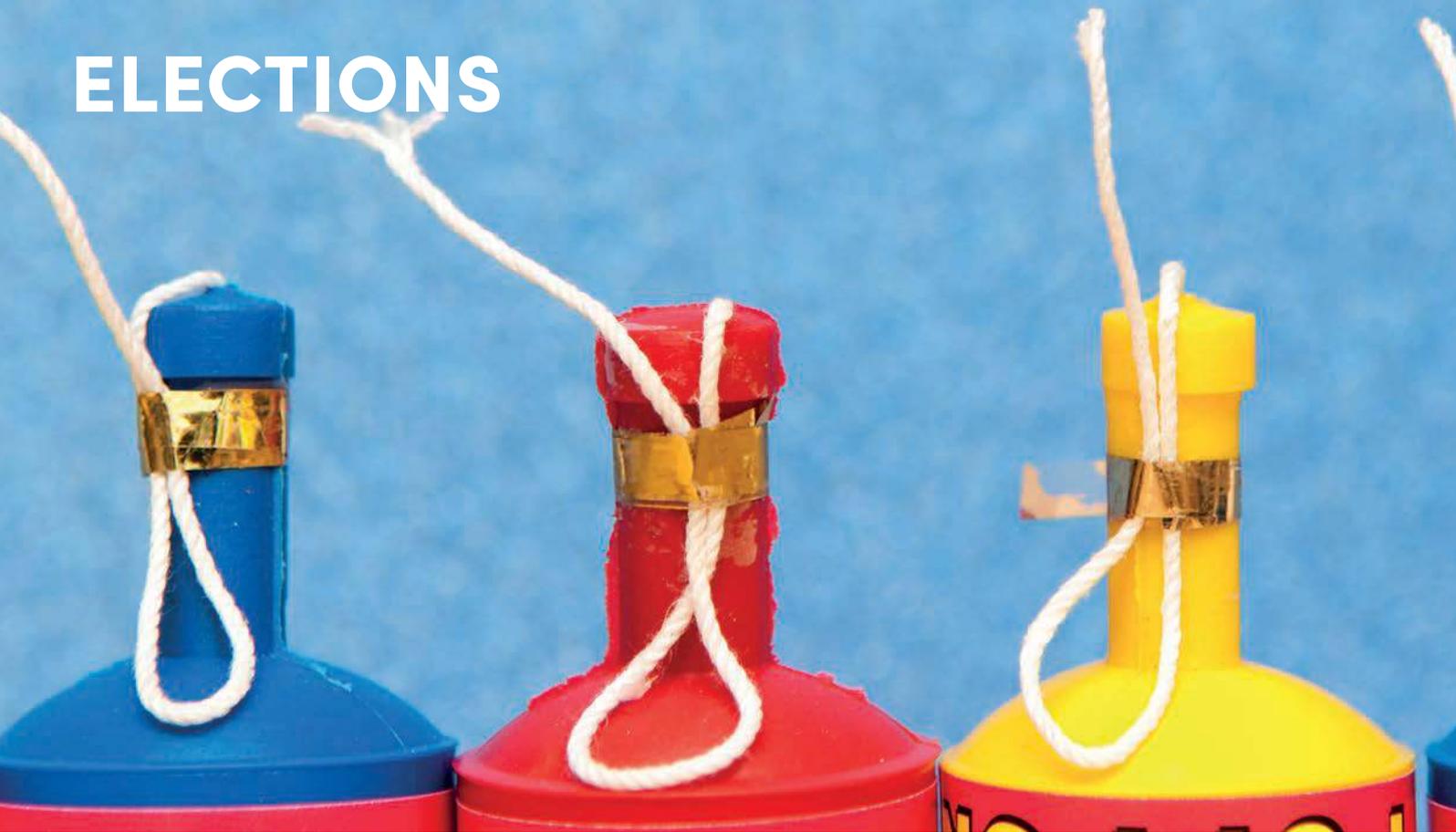
"Meeting online was surprisingly seamless. Because we run the planning committee in a structured way, that definitely lent itself to it. We still managed to cover the ground and had the same length of debate.

"As regards participation, public contributions were sent in advance and read out by officers and more people logged in than ever would have attended in person."

*Cllr Alistair Strathern (Lab), Chair of the Virtual Planning Committee, Waltham Forest Council*

**i** You can download 'Holding council meetings online' from our e-learning hub at <https://bit.ly/3eKWjk9>, where you can also find other useful training resources and guidance. The LGA and its partners have also created a **Remote Council Meetings Hub** – a central pool of information, advice and guidance from our partners across the sector, aimed at supporting councils to work virtually. It includes case studies from councils across the country and peer-to-peer support – see <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/remote-council-meetings>

# ELECTIONS



## Measuring electoral volatility



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



### We begin with two questions.

First, considering council by-elections since 1983, which year has seen the largest proportion of seats changing hands – in other words, the greatest electoral volatility? Second, which year has the smallest proportion?

In the early 1980s, we were encouraged by Cris Derby, then editor of the *Local Government Chronicle*, to begin writing about council by-elections. We turned to sources within political parties for our information – this was a long time before the internet.

Tony Greaves, now a Liberal Democrat member of the House of Lords, was particularly helpful in providing results and understandably enthusiastic that we write about his party.

The data was at first collected and

stored on our university's mainframe computer before we acquired an Apple IIe and VisiCalc (visible calculator) that most historians regard as the first spreadsheet program for the microprocessor. Stored on floppy discs – an unreliable technology at the best of times – a spreadsheet was limited to 254 rows.

In time we came to learn, as many party activists had learnt from bitter experience, that conventions about marginal or safe seats had little meaning in the local government context. Local parties were

punished or rewarded for reasons largely beyond their control. Campaigning was deeply frustrating, with candidates harangued on the doorstep for issues and policies of no relevance to the local council.

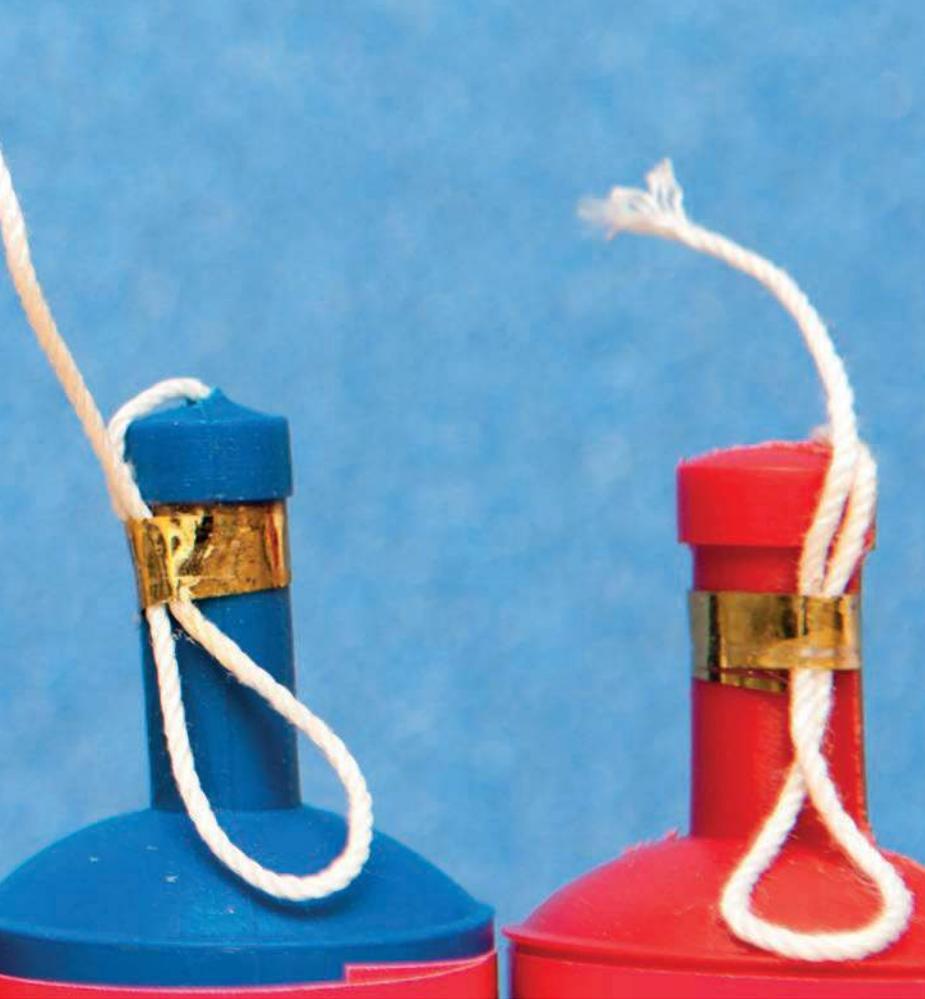
But some results did run against the mainstream; local personalities and issues could and did matter. Councillors who had lost their seats would re-emerge, sometimes for a different party. Parties lost against the national trend because of stances taken on planning approval for or against supermarkets, leisure centres and the like.

Making sense of it all was made easier as cases accumulated. Within six months, we had passed 100 results. By 1986, 1,000 by-elections had been collated.

We now knew how their frequency was conditional on the local electoral cycle. Seasonal factors appeared to affect turnout. Party competition mattered, especially whether it was a Liberal or a candidate from the Social Democrats who fought under the Alliance banner.

In November 2017, we passed another milestone – 10,000 by-elections. Monitoring these results provides an additional and

**i** **As councillors will be aware, May's local elections have been postponed until 2021, and all by-elections are also suspended for the duration of the coronavirus crisis.** In the meantime, Professors Rallings and Thrasher will be delving into local election history books and datasets to address different themes, such as turnout, and the rise and fall of new parties. For information about previous by-elections, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/first](http://www.local.gov.uk/first)



being lost not only to the Liberal Democrats (we described them as Social and Liberal Democrats in those days), but also later in the year to a revitalised Labour under new Leader Tony Blair.

A close second was 1986, when by-election outcomes saw a free-for-all, with parties winning seats from one another with startling regularity. We even had to contend with Liberals and SDP candidates standing separately from the Alliance, although the record shows no seats changed hands between the factions.

The 'great yawn', from commentators' rather than participants' point of view, when few seats changed hands, was more recent. In 2015, only 21 per cent of by-election seats resulted in a transfer.

The number of vacancies was low because of the large-scale council elections that year. Buoyed by their surprise General Election success, the Conservatives held seats and occasionally won them from Labour, Liberal Democrats and UKIP alike.

The nearest challenger for the least volatile election year, 2009, was relatively exciting as one in four vacancies saw the incumbent party defeated.

Labour, now under Gordon Brown, had begun to recover some lost ground; local Liberal Democrats were still fighting and winning against the party soon to be its coalition partner; and we even saw a Liberal gain from Liberal Democrat, an echo from another time.

sometimes alternative insight into the direction of electoral opinion than that available from opinion surveys.

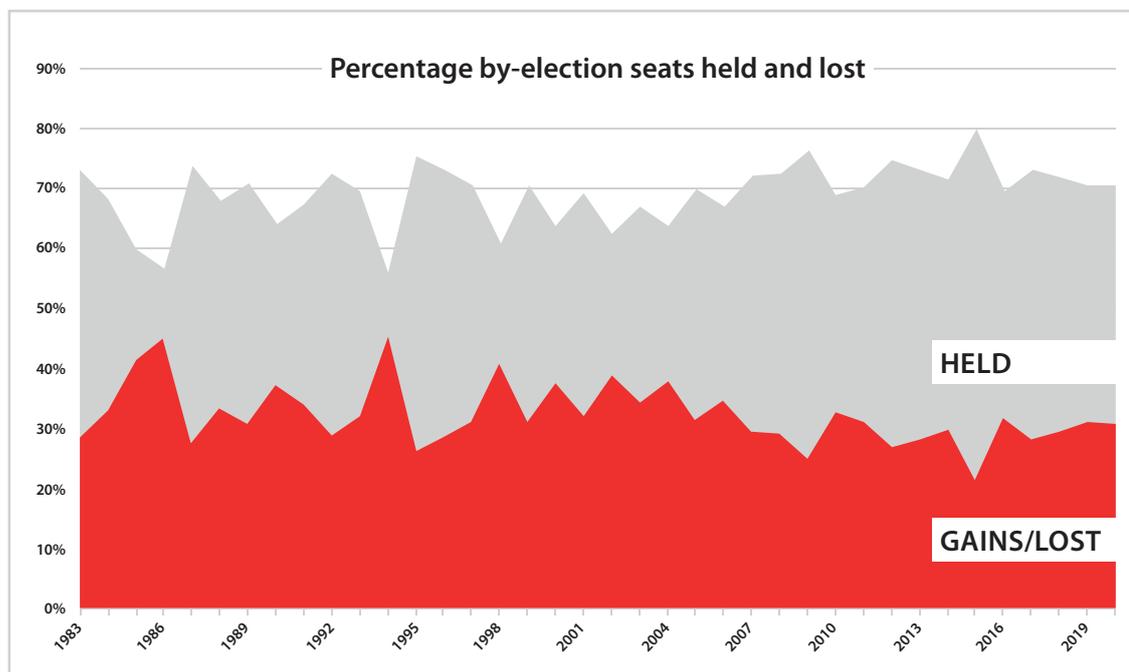
One of the great strengths in these results is that current outcomes must be benchmarked against different points in recent history. Was the ward last contested a year ago, two years, or longer still?

And so to our answers. It was 1994 when the proportion of seats changing

hands reached the peak of 45 per cent – almost one in every two vacancies.

Seasoned Conservatives will have known this, perhaps. They watched seats

*“Making sense of it all was made easier as cases accumulated”*



The chart shows the percentage of seats held – overall two-thirds are in this category – and the remaining third where control changed hands. There are four notable peaks in the range marked in red; 1994, the highest, followed by 1986, 1985, and 1998. By-election upsets are becoming rarer. Over the past decade, incumbent parties have been more difficult to dislodge, especially in 2015.



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

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