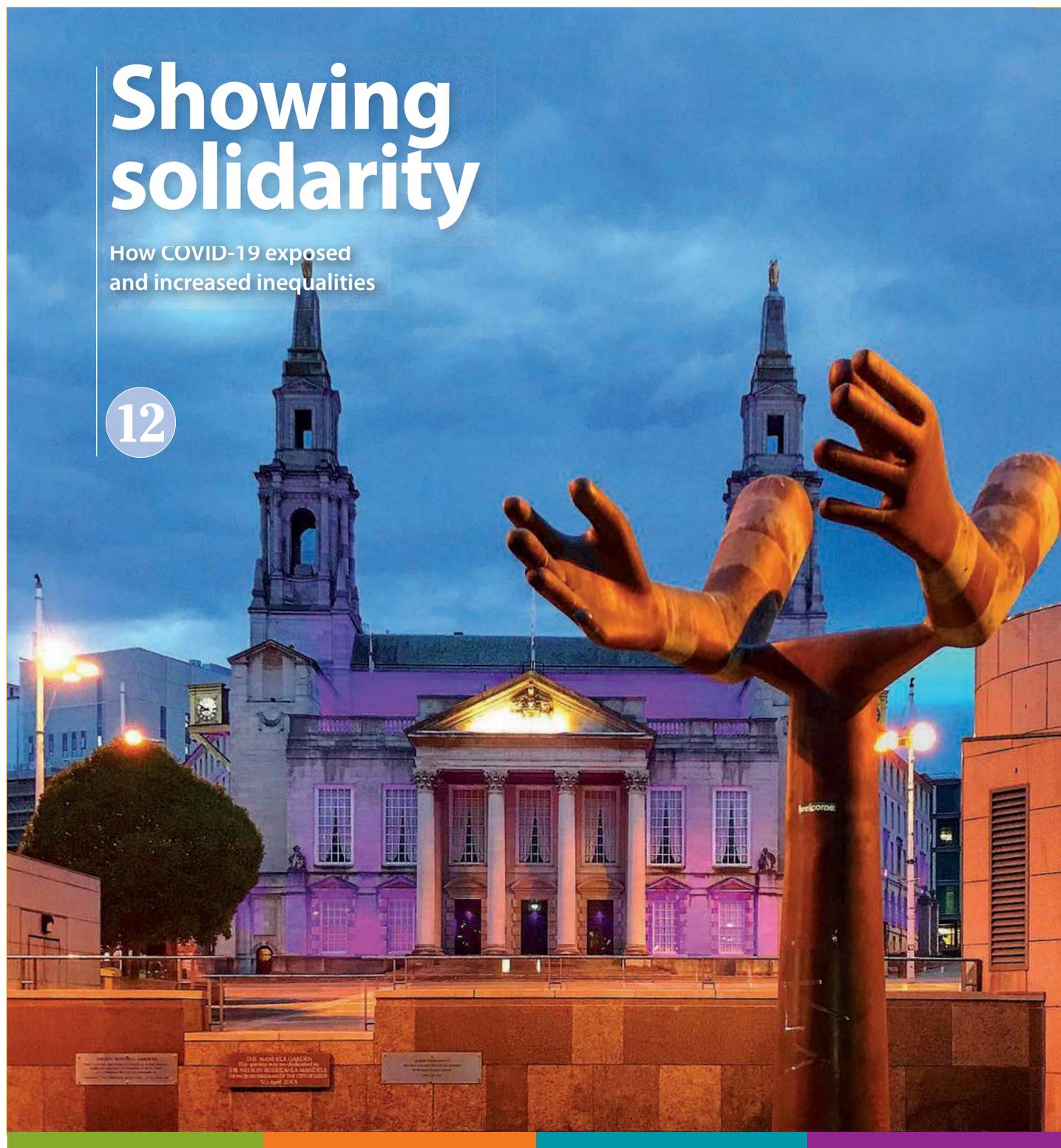


Showing solidarity

How COVID-19 exposed and increased inequalities

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Top ranking

Resident satisfaction with councils is at its highest level ever, according to the LGA's latest polling – a well-deserved recognition of all the hard work going on to support local communities and businesses through the current pandemic (p4, p10).

Other reasons to feel positive include our new report suggesting that more than a million jobs could be created in England's low-carbon and renewable energy economy as we move towards net zero carbon emissions (p5, p15).

We also take a look at delivering a green recovery in our city regions (p26) and the more immediate impact of the coronavirus crisis on reducing transport emissions (p16).

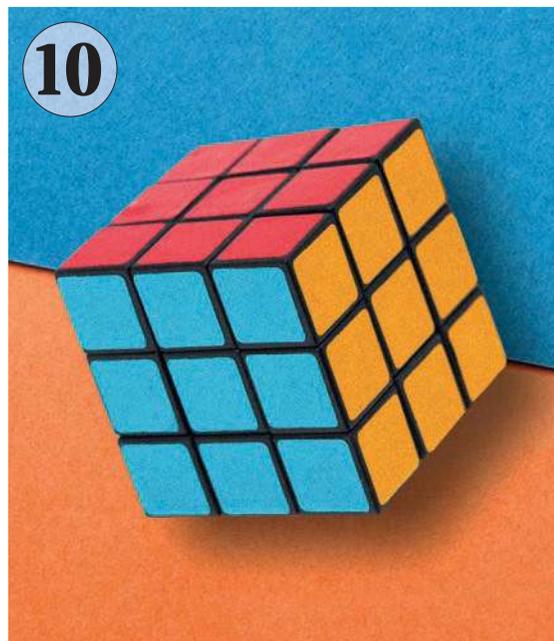
Council finances are under the spotlight, as ever (p13), and we would like to hear your views on our new model code of practice for councillors (p14).

Cllr Peter John, Chair of London Councils, writes about support for vulnerable people during the pandemic (p21), and the National Association of British Market Authorities highlights what good markets can bring to our town centres (p24).

And, as we emerge from lockdown, we will all need to pay attention to the mental health of our communities (p29).

With events moving so fast, please keep checking www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus for our latest updates.

Cllr James Jamieson
is LGA Chairman



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Satisfaction with councils 'at record level'

Three-quarters of residents are satisfied with their local councils – the highest figure the LGA has ever recorded in its quarterly polling.

There were also significant increases in residents being satisfied with their local area (87 per cent positive); trusting their local authority (71 per cent); councils

demonstrating value for money (57 per cent); acting on residents' concerns (68 per cent); and keeping them informed (69 per cent).

In separate polling on satisfaction with councils' response to the coronavirus pandemic, seven out of 10 people were 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with the way their local council is supporting them, their household

and local community through the crisis.

Roughly half said their local council was keeping them informed about COVID-19, and most said they trust the information they are receiving from it. A third think their local council/councillor is best placed to help their local area recover after the lockdown is over.

Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said the LGA would use the figures to build the case for local democratic leaders to play a "bigger role".

"Since the LGA was created more than 20 years ago, we have consistently made the case that bringing power and resources closer to people is the key to delivering better outcomes for communities and inclusive growth across the country," he said.

"Councillors and their councils have the democratic mandate, expertise and local insights to change our communities for the better. We have shown that we can respond quickly and efficiently to be there for our communities in their time of need, and demonstrated our willingness to prioritise tackling this pandemic head on and to play an even bigger role in supporting national efforts.

"With the right powers, sustainable funding, and enhanced flexibilities, local government can build on the positives we have achieved in the past few months and ensure our communities prosper for the future."

● See p10

Free school meals extended

More than a million young people entitled to free school meals will get free meal vouchers over the summer holiday, after a campaign by Manchester United and England footballer Marcus Rashford.

Mr Rashford, 22, wrote an emotional open letter to MPs drawing on his own experiences of relying on free school meals and food banks growing up in Manchester.

Downing Street confirmed that all children eligible for free school meals in term time in England will benefit from a

£120 million COVID-19 summer food fund. Scotland and Wales will also continue with the voucher programme.

In England, the support works out at around £15 per recipient, with families issued with electronic vouchers or gift cards to spend at supermarkets.

Official data shows that almost 1.3 million school children in England – 15.4 per cent of state-educated pupils – were eligible for and claiming free school meals in January 2019, rising to between a quarter and a third of all pupils in in parts of

London, the North and Midlands.

The LGA, which campaigned for an extension of the voucher scheme over the Easter holidays, said it was pleased the Government had committed to "this lifeline for many families".

Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "No young person should have to go hungry and ensuring vulnerable pupils, including

those on free school meals and with special educational needs and disabilities, are provided for is a top priority for councils and schools.

"The coronavirus pandemic has shown that listening and working together can lead to policies that have positive outcomes for our most vulnerable communities, including children and young people from low-income families."

COVID-19 care bill 'could top £6.6bn'

Providers of adult social care services may face more than £6.6 billion in extra costs because of the coronavirus crisis by the end of September this year, according to new analysis commissioned by councils and social care directors.

Maintaining safe staffing levels and providing personal protective equipment are the biggest drivers of these extra financial pressures, as well as the need for enhanced cleaning of care homes and other care settings, the figures show.

Councils and social care providers are struggling to meet these escalating costs, as well as seeing their income levels fall. While extra government funding has helped, it is still far short of what is expected to be needed.

Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "These figures highlight the sheer scale of the financial pressures facing councils and their social care

provider partners as we look to get through the next few weeks and months of this crisis.

"Councils are working closely with providers to support their financial resilience. Of the £3.2 billion of emergency funding given to councils to deal with the immediate impact of the pandemic across all local services, 40 per cent has been allocated to adult social care.

"People who use and work in social care are at the heart of our concerns about this. This analysis needs to spark a fundamental debate about the ability of the care market to respond to the pandemic and what more can be done to support it.

"We look forward to working with government on finding a solution to the immediate pressures facing the sector, including a significant further injection of funding, as well as agreeing a long-term, sustainable funding settlement for social care once this current crisis is over."

'Green' jobs could aid recovery

Nearly 700,000 jobs could be created by England's 'green' economy by 2030, rising to 1.2 million by 2050, a new LGA report reveals.

The study shows that demand for green jobs will increase rapidly as the UK transitions to a net zero carbon economy and could help counter the unprecedented job losses arising from the pandemic (see p22).

The LGA is urging the Government to work with councils to develop post-COVID-19 economic recovery options, including a jobs guarantee programme.



It is also reiterating its long-standing call for national skills and employment schemes and funding to be devolved to councils and combined authorities, enabling them to work with businesses and education providers to train and retrain people of all ages so they can benefit from green growth.

Cllr Sir Richard Leese, Chair of the LGA's City Regions Board, said: "Councils are driving the climate change agenda at a local level, which is beginning to influence local economic growth plans and skills programmes.

"With its local knowledge and expertise, local government is best placed to ensure the workforce in every region of the country can successfully surf the new wave of employment opportunities.

"To help meet national climate change targets and capitalise on the green jobs revolution, councils need to be given long-term funding, devolved powers and easier access to complex government funding pots to help realise the Government's target of being carbon neutral by 2050."

● See p15, p22

In brief Welfare fund

An additional £63 million local welfare assistance fund is being made available for councils to offer food and basic necessities to those in need, the Government has announced. Cllr Richard Watts, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said: "Councils have responded quickly and effectively to the complex challenges faced by local communities and this funding will help them continue to provide much-needed crisis support to households who are struggling to afford food, fuel and other essentials. Many households are likely to be economically vulnerable for some time to come and it is vital that the Government puts local welfare funding on a long-term, sustainable footing."

Care task force

A social care task force has been launched to tackle coronavirus infections in care homes and protect residents and staff as the lockdown is eased. It will be led by David Pearson, a former President of the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services. Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "We all want to see people working in all care settings receive the support, training and resources they need, which is also a real opportunity to tackle persistent issues facing the sector including staff recruitment and retention."

PPE portal

The Government's online personal protective equipment (PPE) portal will now only operate as an emergency top-up system, with users being invited to register and limited to one order per week. The LGA has said this is disappointing, as originally the portal was expected to form a key element of the PPE supply route. The LGA continues to raise councils' concerns and lobby for a robust and sustainable supply of PPE. The news came as wearing face coverings on public transport and in hospitals became compulsory.



Increased help for child asylum-seekers

The Home Office has increased financial support for councils who look after asylum-seeking children, including a targeted 25 per cent uplift for local authorities looking after the highest numbers of such children.

Chris Philp, Minister for Immigration Compliance and the Courts, said: "Protecting vulnerable children is a key priority for this Government, and local authorities across the UK continue to provide invaluable support."

Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chair of the LGA's Asylum, Migration and Refugee Task Group, said: "We are pleased that government is providing additional funding for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

"This is positive recognition of the valuable role councils play in providing support to children and young people starting a new life in the UK.

"This funding will help to reduce the funding gap between what councils pay to support unaccompanied children seeking asylum leaving care and what they receive from the Government.

"It will also make it easier for the councils who want to play their part in supporting unaccompanied asylum-seeking children to step forward and support other areas with large numbers of unaccompanied children and care leavers.

"As the Government continues to work with councils and partners on revising the current national transfer scheme, it must recognise responsibilities for supporting unaccompanied children to quarantine immediately on arrival in the UK."

There are currently more than 5,000 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children being cared for in the UK.



'Catch up' tutoring for vulnerable pupils

A £1 billion COVID-19 'catch up' package for school pupils, to tackle the impact of lost teaching time, has been announced by the Government.

It includes an extra £650 million for schools in England, plus £350 million in subsidies for a one-year national tutoring programme to help the most disadvantaged children. Primary and secondary schools will be able to purchase low-cost tuition for pupils.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson also reiterated his commitment to getting all children back to school in September and promised to bring forward plans on this as soon as possible.

Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "Councils want to work with schools and government to help children catch up on any school work they may have missed, and ensure as many pupils as possible return to school in September, as it is absolutely vital that children do not fall further behind in

their development.

"We now look forward to seeing the guidance for this plan."

Various reports have highlighted the impact of school closures on children, particularly the most vulnerable.

School closures, social distancing and lockdown measures have seriously affected the ability of local services to support children and their families, according to a recent report from the Early Intervention Foundation and Action for Children.

School leaders believe that around a third of primary and secondary pupils are not engaging at all with work set to do at home via remote learning, according to a survey carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research.

Pupil engagement is lower in schools with the highest levels of deprivation, with school leaders reporting that 23 per cent of their pupils have limited access to IT at home.



Early years funding warning

Additional funding is needed to support all early years' providers for the period of the coronavirus crisis if enough childcare places are to be available for families who need them, the LGA has warned.

More than 69,000 early years providers have temporarily closed during the coronavirus pandemic, with many citing financial difficulties as a key reason. Among those that have remained open, many are operating at a loss.

Early years settings have been asked to provide the same support to vulnerable children and key workers as schools. While schools are fully funded, however, early years settings are not because much of their income comes from paid parent fees. These fees have fallen dramatically as most parents have kept their children at home.

Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "Childcare providers have been a vital part of the nation's response to coronavirus and councils have been working closely with them to ensure that vulnerable children and critical workers have the childcare they need.

"While providers have been asked to step up in the same way that schools have, their costs have not been covered in the same way.

"Having enough childcare places will be essential to support families and get the economy moving again as emergency measures are eased. It is, therefore, vital that the Government urgently provides additional funding at a national level to ensure early years providers can remain open."

Higher COVID risk for BAME people

People from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities are more likely to catch coronavirus and die from it, according to a report from Public Health England.

Its figures show that, after accounting for the effect of sex, age, deprivation and region, people of Bangladeshi ethnicity had around twice the risk of death when compared with people of white British ethnicity.

People of Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, other Asian, Caribbean and other black ethnicity had between 10 and 50 per cent higher risk of death when compared to white British people (see p12).

Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said it would work with councils to make sure the report's lessons are learned and acted upon, adding: "We know councils are wholly committed to ensuring that no one in their communities is left behind or cannot be supported to combat the effects of this dreadful virus."

Meanwhile, the Equality and Human Rights Commission is undertaking an

inquiry into the impact of COVID-19 on ethnic minorities, which will develop clear, evidence-based recommendations for urgent action to tackle entrenched racial inequalities.

David Isaac, Equality and Human Rights Commission Chair, said: "This inquiry is part of our long-term strategic approach to tackle the structural inequalities that the coronavirus pandemic has laid bare. This is an important step towards ensuring that the deep-rooted inequality faced by ethnic minorities is meaningfully addressed as we rebuild."

Equalities Minister Kemi Badenoch is overseeing a government commission addressing inequality in the UK.

● Councils across the country have pledged to review monuments and statues after the pulling down of a statue of Bristol slave trader Edward Colston. The LGA has issued an advice note for councils to help them ensure all sections of the community feel heard by decision-makers as part of such reviews, see www.local.gov.uk/topics/community-safety/statues

Lockdown restrictions easing

As first was going to press, the Government was working on a review of the two-metre social-distancing rule, which was expected to report by 4 July.

The review was announced as some lockdown restrictions were eased, allowing non-essential shops and places of worship to reopen – as long as social distancing is observed – and the return of Premier League football.

Councils across the country worked with retailers to widen pavements, remove parking bays and street furniture, and reallocate town centre road space for pedestrians, to create space for queuing outside shops, as well as providing signage and guidance for shoppers.

The Government is encouraging councils and other providers to open public toilets, wherever possible. The LGA has said councils are taking individual local decisions about public toilets based on a risk assessment and whether social-distancing measures can be maintained.

Bars, restaurants and pubs could be open from 4 July, but have warned they will struggle to make a profit if the two-metre rule is still in place by then.

Meanwhile, single adult households or single parents with children under the age of 18 are now allowed to form 'support bubbles' with one other household. They can spend time with each other inside their homes, and do not need to meet outside.

But it is now mandatory for public transport users and people visiting hospitals and other NHS settings to wear face coverings.



In brief

Loan sharks warning

People desperate for a loan should steer clear of illegal loan sharks who typically charge exorbitant interest rates and rely on harassment, the LGA has said. Since the lockdown started, millions have seen their income fall or have lost their jobs, with the number of people claiming benefits having risen by 1,000 per cent. The LGA is calling for tougher sentences for illegal money lenders and says the Government should fully fund council services supporting low-income households with debt and repayment worries. Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said anyone struggling with debt problems should contact their councils, rather than "illegal money lenders who profit from other people's misery".

Care home deaths

The proportion of deaths linked to COVID-19 in care homes in the week of 22 May was approximately a third (32.5 per cent) of all excess deaths, compared with 37.2 per cent in the previous week. Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said every death is a tragedy and that the total number of excess deaths in care homes was worrying. "Councils are doing all they can to protect those in care homes, as well as those receiving care in their own homes," he added.



Domestic violence

More than 100 domestic violence charities will receive a share of £8.1 million in government funding. Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, welcomed the move, adding that "councils can't tackle domestic abuse alone". He continued: "To help prepare for an expected surge in demand for support from victims as lockdown measures ease, we would like the Government to engage more with police, councils and the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, and to create a Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Strategy for England and Wales."

● See p9, p28

In brief

Care homes an 'afterthought'

Years of failed efforts to integrate NHS and social care hampered the response to the coronavirus crisis, the National Audit Office has said. The financial watchdog found that 25,000 hospital patients were discharged to care homes at the height of the pandemic – sometimes without being tested for COVID-19 – and highlighted a “problematic” relationship between social care and the NHS. Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: “As this report highlights, the sector has risen to the unprecedented challenges it has faced from this pandemic, but now needs certainty about how it will continue to operate and be paid for in future.”

Finance plan

The Government is working on a “comprehensive plan to ensure the financial sustainability of councils this financial year”, Local Government Minister Simon Clarke has told MPs. Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, urged the Government to bring forward details. “Councils have a legal duty to balance their budgets each year. Confirmation of future funding – including compensation for all lost income as a result of the pandemic alongside extra cost and demand pressures – is vital if councils are to avoid taking measures, such as in-year cuts to local services, to cope with funding shortfalls.” ● See p13.

Building safety

There are still 2,000 high-rise residential buildings with some form of dangerous cladding on them, according to a report from the Commons' Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee, which was published ahead of the third anniversary of the Grenfell Tower tragedy in June. Lord Porter, the LGA's Building Safety Spokesperson, said: “The LGA shares the committee's view that, three years after the Grenfell Tower fire, the remediation of dangerous buildings is proceeding too slowly. Social landlords have been quick to address the issue, but progress in the private sector has been unacceptably slow.”

'Plan needed to keep homeless off streets'

The Government needs to bring together a comprehensive national strategy to prevent rough sleepers and homeless people returning to the streets after the pandemic, according to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee.

Research by homeless charity Crisis has raised similar concerns, revealing that more than half of frontline services have seen a rise in homelessness resulting from the coronavirus crisis.

The Government has since promised to make 3,300 homes available within 12 months for rough sleepers housed in emergency pandemic accommodation.

Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick MP said the Government will bring forward £160 million of its £381 million, four-year rough-sleeping budget to be spent this year.

As part of the package, 6,000 'housing units' will be built, and rough sleepers housed and provided with support for mental health or substance-abuse issues.

Separately, the Government also announced that there will be a two-month extension on the ban on evictions from social or private rented accommodation.

Responding to the Crisis research, Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Housing Spokesman, said: “Councils have faced significant challenges housing large numbers of homeless people in a short space of time. However, thanks to a monumental effort, the overwhelming majority – nearly 15,000 – of rough sleepers and homeless people have been found accommodation, while councils have also worked closely with those tenants who are experiencing financial difficulty to help them remain in their homes.

“While the recently announced funding for councils to support rough sleepers is positive, we still need clarity from government on what additional practical support will be available to councils to help them move people out of hotels and temporary accommodation, and into housing.”

Leisure 'in a crisis'

Leisure centres closed because of the coronavirus crisis may never re-open unless the Government brings forward a financial rescue package to save the sector, according to a new survey.

Leisure centres have a fundamental role to play in the national recovery from the pandemic by improving physical and mental health, and tackling health inequalities. But the District Councils' Network (DCN) says that leisure centres could be hit with a £305 million bill this year, which would be enough to send many of them out of business.

Those that do survive could be forced to offer reduced services or hours, while the need to social distance, and the implications for customer confidence and footfall, could undermine the sector's ability to bounce back.

Cllr Dan Humphreys, DCN Lead Member for Enhancing Quality of Life, said: “The sad reality is that our leisure centres are in a crisis right now. Their

income has plummeted, and some may never recover without a lifeline from government that helps stabilise leisure centres in the short term.

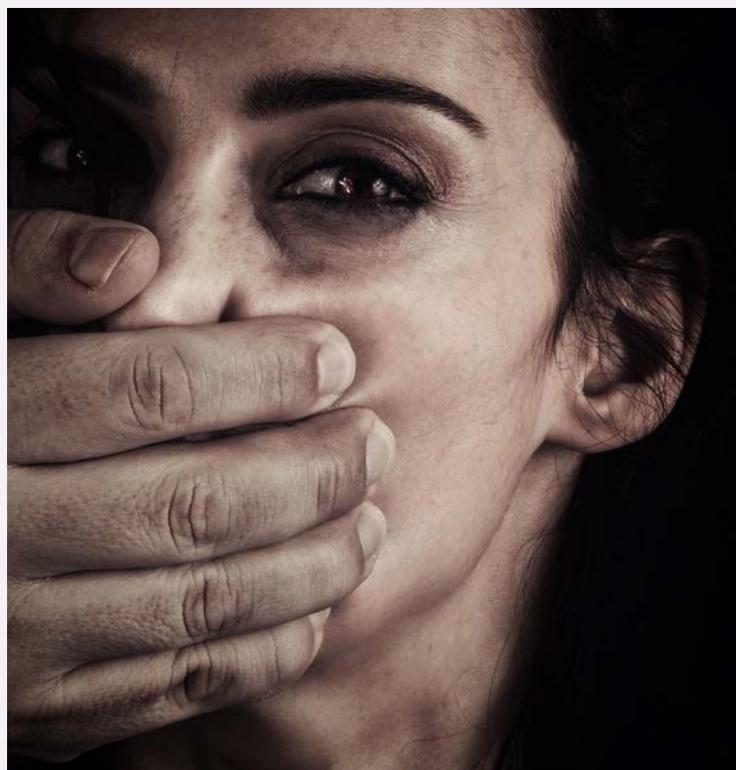
“Leisure and sport will be critical to improving the health of people from all ages and backgrounds as we emerge from this crisis. As destinations in themselves, they also draw people into town centres, creating community spaces and support for local businesses.

“We should now come together to create a leisure and sport service that plays its full role in the national health and economic recovery.”



Speaking up for victims of domestic abuse

The LGA calls for a range of support and interventions as Bill resumes its passage through Parliament



With so many of us confined to our homes during the coronavirus pandemic, domestic abuse helplines have, alarmingly, reported a significant increase in cases of domestic violence.

Prior to COVID-19, the LGA had been working with parliamentarians, the Government and the Office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner to provide additional support to domestic abuse victims and to prevent it happening in the first place.

The Domestic Abuse Bill, which was first introduced before the lockdown, is one of the first Bills to resume its passage through Parliament. As part of the LGA's ongoing parliamentary work, Cllr Simon Blackburn, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, gave evidence to the Public Bill Committee, which is responsible for scrutinising the Bill.

The Bill aims to introduce important measures that will help to raise awareness of domestic abuse and its impact on victims. It is intended to: focus on prevention and early intervention measures to prevent abuse; provide additional support to victims and challenge the behaviour of perpetrators by bringing more of them to justice; further improve the effectiveness of the justice system; and

strengthen the support for victims of abuse and their children.

In his evidence, Cllr Blackburn was clear that the LGA and councils have a key role to play in tackling domestic abuse and want to work with all parties involved to reduce it. He made the case that we need to offer a broad range of support to victims, as well as different interventions for dealing with perpetrators.

Domestic abuse is abhorrent in all its forms, and how councils respond to abuse will depend on the individual circumstances of each case. This is why the LGA is calling on Parliament to consider not just crisis interventions and criminal justice, but also a cross-government response, incorporating health, housing and education.

We are also calling on the Government to introduce a National Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Strategy to enable us to address the root causes of abuse.

In addition to the measures in the Bill, a long-term and sustained investment in early intervention and prevention programmes, and wider

community-based support, is needed. Additional duties on councils need to be fully funded. The focus in Parliament on domestic abuse comes at a time when, regardless of the financial impact of COVID-19, local government's services – and particularly children's services – are already facing unprecedented demand.

Alongside the £10 million the Government has committed to domestic abuse charities, the Bill is a really important step in the right direction. It is evidence of the Government's commitment to addressing the devastating impact that domestic abuse has on victims and their families, and local government has already been vocal on this issue.

The Domestic Abuse Bill is one of several Bills and policy papers that are now coming forward for scrutiny in Parliament. In the coming months, we will be working to highlight local government's role in the economy's recovery from COVID-19 through the Fire Safety Bill, the Building Safety Bill, the Devolution White Paper and the review into children's services. Through our campaigning, we will be highlighting that, with sustainable finances and greater powers, councils can continue to deliver for their communities. You can contribute to our online conversation by using the hashtag #CouncilsCan.

i For more information about the LGA's work in Parliament, please visit www.local.gov.uk/parliament. See p28



Councillor James
Jamieson is
Chairman of the LGA

Local solutions to national challenges

Councillors and their councils have the democratic mandate, expertise and local insights to change our communities for the better

The past few months have seen unimaginable changes to our local areas.

In many ways, the situation we have found ourselves in has helped solve some of the issues that councils were always ambitious to tackle but results at this pace and scale never seemed possible.

We have seen rough sleeping virtually eliminated, cleaner air in our towns and cities, an explosion in green forms of travelling and an unprecedented surge in community action.

At the same time, coronavirus and its disproportionate impact on different communities has highlighted those issues that have remained stubbornly resistant to change – including the precarious state of adult social care, and long-standing public health and other systemic inequalities based on wealth, poverty and ethnicity.

People and organisations across the country have adapted to new ways of operating, with councils demonstrating their leadership and taking on new responsibilities such as supporting those who are clinically extremely vulnerable, while navigating a new environment of more remote working.

The breadth and depth of this international crisis means there have undoubtedly been challenges for governments across the world. In the UK, the sustainable supply and distribution of personal protective

equipment (PPE), monitoring the spread of infection by testing and tracing, protecting staff, residents and patients in care and health settings, and ensuring all our children continue to have the best start in life have been just some of the issues it has been difficult to get right.

We know that COVID-19 is best understood as a pattern of local outbreaks, rather than a national pandemic with a similar impact in every community. No other organisation can understand local areas better than councils.

The highly valued services we deliver – public health, adult social care, children's services, homelessness support, provision for the vulnerable and those in financial hardship – have been crucial to the initial response by protecting lives and livelihoods. We are ambitious for our communities, and always stand ready to offer local solutions to the national challenges we face.

Similarly, different areas of the country will require a unique and coordinated response as we move towards the recovery period. The effective delivery of the next phase will depend on all agencies working in partnership at the local level, and councils are best placed to convene this work.

As we continue to work through the COVID-19 response and plan for the next phase, there is much we can learn from our work in recent weeks and months.

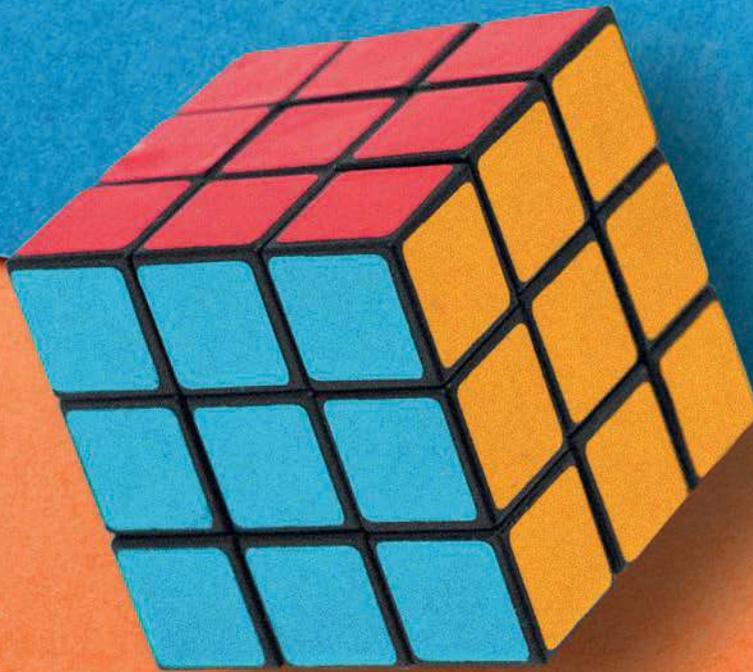
Looking at residents' satisfaction with the support offered to them, their families and their communities – alongside their confidence in the messages they are receiving from local and central government, and their views on post-lockdown recovery – will provide valuable information to help guide our work.

For this reason, the LGA has undertaken two public polls to look at residents' views on how councils have supported their communities and their response to COVID-19. This insight is intended to complement local intelligence and the work you are doing at a local level.

In particular, our regular reputation tracker has seen a significant increase, with residents responding positively about councils across all the indicators. The overall satisfaction level with local councils – 75 per cent – is the highest we have ever recorded in these polls.

This includes significant increases in residents being satisfied with their local area (87 per cent positive), trusting their local authority (71 per cent), and councils demonstrating value for money (57 per cent), acting on their concerns (68 per cent) and keeping residents informed (69 per cent).

This helps us build a case for local democratic leaders to play a bigger role in the months and years to come. Since the LGA was created more than 20 years ago, we have consistently made the case that bringing power



“With the right powers, sustainable funding, and enhanced flexibilities, local government can build on the positives we have achieved and ensure our communities prosper”

and resources closer to people is the key to delivering better outcomes for communities and inclusive growth across the country. Councillors and their councils have the democratic mandate, expertise and local insights to change our communities for the better. We have shown what is possible and demonstrated our willingness to prioritise tackling this pandemic head on, and to play an even bigger role in supporting national efforts.

We have already secured billions of pounds of funding and new measures that have helped us support our residents and businesses in the initial response. And we have shown that we can respond quickly and efficiently to

be there for our communities in their time of need.

With the right powers, sustainable funding, and enhanced flexibilities, local government can build on the positives we have achieved in the past few months and ensure our communities prosper for the future.

In the coming weeks, the LGA will be exploring with councils your ideas as to how we can achieve a long-term transformation of the economy.

This could include local ownership of the employment and skills agenda; fiscal decentralisation; a new way of funding adult social care; capital investment in housing and infrastructure; or accelerating a

sustainable economic recovery through a focus on green jobs. You can read more about our recommendations on the latter on p15.

We know we need the Government to set the national fiscal and policy framework that will support councils to deliver on this agenda, and want to help you make the case to secure that.

As always, to help keep you up-to-date with all the latest developments, we are continually refreshing our coronavirus hub (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 the latest updates.

Starmers and Jenrick to speak at LGA virtual annual conference

Labour Leader Sir Keir Starmer MP and Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, are among the confirmed speakers for the LGA's virtual annual conference, taking place in late June and July.

The series of webinars kicks off on 30 June, with the launch of 'Re-thinking local: a vision for the future', an LGA discussion paper that will set out ideas for locally led regeneration and rejuvenation. Speakers include LGA Chairman James Jamieson, the LGA's four political group leaders, and council chief executives.

Sir Keir will be speaking on 1 July and Mr Jenrick on 2 July, followed by Acting Liberal Democrat Leader Sir Ed Davey on 7 July,

and LGA Vice-President and prominent Crossbench Peer Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson on 8 July.

All these webinars are free to all councils. To find out more and book your place, please visit www.local.gov.uk/lga-annual-conference-webinars.

As part of the conference, we are also hosting a series of 'Spotlight on...' improvement webinars, which will showcase some of the incredible work that councils have done in response to COVID-19 and consider what lessons we can carry into the future.

To find out more about these sessions, please visit the email address above.

Communities at risk



Councillor **James Jamieson** is LGA Chairman

COVID-19 has replicated, exposed and increased health inequalities affecting ethnic minorities

As we all seek to do our utmost to minimise the spread of infection, it is vital to understand more about how and why the virus may impact different communities in different ways.

In April, Public Health England (PHE) was asked to investigate the disparities in risk and outcomes of COVID-19, including the impact on people from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities. PHE submitted its report in mid-June. It gathered insights from more than 4,000 people representing BAME communities and highlights that work still needs to be done to ensure people from BAME groups are not disproportionately affected by the virus.

This report confirms that COVID-19 has replicated and exposed existing health inequalities in these communities and, in some cases, increased them. Worryingly, there is clearly an association between belonging to some ethnic groups and the likelihood of testing positive and dying with COVID-19.

This is backed up by the data that shows the highest age-standardised diagnosis rates of COVID-19 per 100,000 population were in people of black ethnic groups, and the lowest were in people of white ethnic groups.

After accounting for sex, age, deprivation and region, people of Bangladeshi ethnicity had around twice the risk of death compared with people of white British ethnicity. People of Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, other Asian, Caribbean and other black ethnicity had between 10 and 50 per cent higher risk of death

compared with white British people.

On suggestions for change, the stakeholders that contributed to the report have called for further work on the socio-economic, occupational, cultural and structural factors, including racism, discrimination and stigma, that are influencing COVID-19 outcomes in BAME groups, both within and outside the health sector.

The report includes a series of recommendations on research and data, policy change, and improvements to communications, particularly around public messaging campaigns.

Specifically on local government, the report praises the work of councils in supporting vulnerable people, particularly in response to the challenges of the crisis. It recognises the financial pressures we face, in terms of wider funding and public health reductions, which impact on our vital prevention

work, and calls for greater resources to “meet the growing and pervasive needs that will emerge post-COVID”.

It suggests that local government officials, including public health teams, have a unique opportunity to provide advocacy for vulnerable groups, and to tackle racism and discrimination within the health and care system, including improving diversity leadership at all levels.

Fairness, equality and social justice flow through everything local government does, so we know councils are wholly committed to ensuring that no-one in their communities is left behind or cannot be supported to combat the effects of this dreadful virus. We will join you in looking carefully at these important recommendations, and at what more can be done to make sure the lessons of this report are learned and acted upon.



Showing solidarity

Councils around the country lit up civic buildings in purple to show their support for Black Lives Matter last month, following the death of George Floyd in the United States. Pictured is Brent Civic Centre.

In a statement, the LGA’s chairman and political group leaders said: “It’s vital that we are all part of the much-needed conversation on how we can all confront and end racism. Local government is listening. Racism has no place in our communities or in our lives.”

i For PHE’s report, please see www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-understanding-the-impact-on-bame-communities. See also p31

The cost of coronavirus

Further funding and financial flexibilities are needed to avoid in-year cuts to vital local services during the pandemic



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

It is councils that have led local communities across the country through the coronavirus crisis.

As they continue to work day and night to protect the most vulnerable, support local businesses and bring together communities, many councils have seen increased cost and demand pressures as a result of the pandemic, at the same time as a significant drop in income.

Early payment of some grants by the Government and deferring payment of business rates by councils to the

Treasury has helped with immediate cash-flow issues. The £3.2 billion of emergency funding provided by government so far has helped meet the financial impact of COVID-19 over the past three months.

The Government initially promised that councils would get all the resources they needed to cope with this pandemic. Our analysis of the May financial returns to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) shows councils could need as much as £6 billion more this financial year. Almost two-thirds of further funding needed would be to cover lost tax income (council tax and business rates) and non-tax income (mostly sales, fees and charges), and the rest would be to cover extra cost pressures.

However, councils desperately need certainty of further funding. Financial freedoms and flexibilities are needed, alongside access to short-term Public Works Loan Board loans, to ease immediate cash-flow pressures and to avoid short-term loans at expensive rates.

Without further funding and financial flexibilities, many councils will have to take measures in anticipation of future funding shortfalls. This could mean in-year cuts to vital local services that communities are relying on to get through this pandemic.

We are already starting to see this being borne out in town halls of all political colours. Wiltshire Council has warned of a £50 million funding gap this year – 15 per cent of its net budget. Manchester City Council is gearing up for an emergency budget, while Luton Council has begun seeking views from its residents on how to make in-year savings.

Norfolk County Council has warned that COVID-19 budget pressures are set to increase the county council's £38.9 million budget gap next year, while Leicestershire County Council has written to local MPs for help to secure its financial sustainability.

All of this is a distraction from the vital role councils are playing in leading communities through this crisis and supporting national efforts to beat this disease.

As **first** was going to press, councils were preparing to submit the next set of detailed financial returns to MHCLG, which deserves credit for showing a commitment to fully understanding the financial pressures that councils are facing as a result of COVID-19.

This cannot, however, just be a tick-box exercise for government. Within those spreadsheets is robust evidence of a looming financial crisis that cannot be ignored.

Only with ongoing and consistent funding in the weeks and months ahead can councils keep supporting

i For more information about the LGA's work on **finance and business rates**, please visit www.local.gov.uk/topics/finance-and-business-rates

“Robust evidence of a looming financial crisis cannot be ignored”

communities, local economies, the care sector and health service during the COVID-19 crisis.

The scale of the economic, environmental and community challenges that we will face should not be underestimated. It is vital that councils can support the economic recovery as emergency measures are lifted and we come through this crisis. This is essential if we are to ensure that all communities can contribute to and benefit from this recovery.



Code of conduct

The LGA is consulting on a revised model member code aimed at supporting councillors in the face of new challenges



Councillor **Izzi Seccombe** OBE is an LGA Vice-Chairman

The role of councillor in all tiers of local government is a vital part of our country's system of democracy.

In voting for a local councillor, the public is imbuing that person and position with their trust. As such, it is important that, as councillors, we can be held accountable, and that we all adopt the behaviours and responsibilities associated with the role.

The conduct of an individual councillor affects the reputation of all councillors. We want the role of councillor to be one to which people aspire and in which they want to participate. We want to continue to attract individuals from a range of backgrounds and circumstances, who understand the responsibility they take on and are motivated to make a positive difference to their local communities.

As councillors, we represent local residents, and work to develop better services and deliver local change. The public has high expectations of us, and entrusts us to represent everyone in our ward, town, city and parish, taking decisions fairly, openly, transparently and with civility.

In taking the decision to look again

at the LGA's model member code of conduct, we quickly agreed that the code should be about councillors feeling pride in their role and what they have achieved in being elected.

It should be about helping councillors understand and undertake their role, and, in turn, helping their residents understand what they can expect from their councillors. Importantly, it should also set out how councillors can expect to be treated.

More and more communication is taking place online and via social media, particularly as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, so we want the code to help councillors navigate tricky modern-day questions, such as how best to use online and social media. We want it to empower them to stop – and, in the most serious cases, report to the police – online conversations that may become abusive or threatening.

The LGA and Welsh LGA published a 'Councillors guide to handling

intimidation' last year. If you want to know more about this issue, see www.local.gov.uk/councillors-guide-handling-intimidation.

As local politics has evolved over the past decade, it has become apparent that demonstrating integrity and high standards has grown from transparency of decision-making and avoiding conflicts of interest, to include good and respectful debate, interaction and behaviours. These are key elements of our programme on civility in public life (see www.local.gov.uk/civility-public-life).

We also see the revision of the LGA's model code of conduct as part of our work on encouraging more people to put themselves forward to become councillors through our 'Be a Councillor' campaign (see the link to this at the web address above).

The code, of course, still needs to be simple, easy to understand and straightforward, and follow a common-sense approach. Members have individual and collective responsibility to maintain these standards, support expected behaviour, and challenge behaviour that falls below expectations. This code, therefore, has been designed to protect our democratic role, encourage good conduct, and safeguard the public's trust in local government.

All councils are required to have a local member code of conduct. This model code has been developed in consultation with the sector and is offered as a template for councils to adopt in whole or with local amendments.



i To read and respond to the LGA's model code of conduct consultation, please visit www.local.gov.uk/code-conduct-consultation-2020. Questions and narrative responses can be sent via email to ModelCode@local.gov.uk. **The consultation closes on 17 August**

Rising demand for green jobs



Councillor **Sir Richard Leese** CBE is Chair of the LGA's City Regions Board

The economic recovery from the pandemic offers a real opportunity to create jobs and protect the environment

As we come to terms with the damage coronavirus has inflicted on our communities, our economic recovery presents a real opportunity to rebuild, and councils are already developing post-COVID-19 economic recovery options.

Millions of people have been put on furlough or fallen into unemployment through no fault of their own, while, at the same time, the closure of businesses and factories has resulted in a significant – if short-lived – reduction in carbon emissions.

As the Government turns its focus to recovery, creating jobs and protecting the environment must both be key parts of any recovery plan.

This isn't new to council leaders, who have the experience of dealing with local economic shocks in the past and who worked closely with the Government on the Future Jobs Fund directly after the 2008 recession.

The LGA has long called for national skills and employment schemes, and funding, to be devolved to local areas, while, at the same time, driving the climate change agenda at a local level. At the LGA's annual conference last year, 230 councils declared climate emergencies and committed to reducing carbon emissions to zero in their communities.

Research commissioned by the LGA from Ecuity Consulting reveals that demand for green jobs will increase rapidly as the country transitions to a net-zero economy, which will help to counter the job losses that are likely to increase further when furlough ends from October.

In 2018, there were 185,000 full-time workers in England's green economy. Nearly 700,000 direct jobs could be created by 2030, rising to 1.2 million by 2050, and the growth is expected to benefit every region in England.

Many councils already have detailed plans in place. Kent County Council intends to extend the wind farm off the coast of Thanet, making it one of the largest producers of renewable electricity in England, while Portsmouth City Council is developing a hybrid electric ferry service to the Isle of Wight.

During the pandemic, councils' role as leaders of place has been emphasised as never before, leading local efforts to trace the virus and providing billions in financial support to businesses.

Councils have been trusted to deliver, and this local approach should be extended to devolving national skills and employment schemes to them and to combined authorities. This would enable them to work with businesses and education providers

to train and retrain people of all ages so they can benefit from the green jobs revolution.

Demand for green jobs will require a diverse range of skills and expertise to roll out clean technologies, install energy efficient products in our homes and workplaces, and build wind farms. Local areas need to be able match skills supply and demand through effective local targeting to bridge skills gaps, so that the local workforce is equipped to meet emerging demand

In doing so, the Government will also need to improve uncoordinated and limited funding streams by engaging with councils to understand how new funding for skills can be devolved to better meet and respond to local need, to support the creation of new jobs and develop a pipeline of skills at a local level.

With greater decision-making and funding powers, councils can begin to lead from the front on the nation's green agenda, at the same time as creating new jobs and inclusive economies. We look forward to working with the Government on this issue, which affects us all.



For more information and to download the LGA-commissioned research on green jobs, please visit www.local.gov.uk/lga-over-million-new-green-jobs-could-be-created-2050



Reducing transport emissions

How can we engineer a 'climate smart' recovery from the COVID-19 crisis?



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

So much has changed since the LGA commissioned the University of Leeds to produce some guidance for local government on how to tackle the climate emergency (see **first** 644).

The effects of COVID-19 and the associated lockdown put huge parts of the economy and society on pause. As the restrictions are, bit by bit,

relaxed, thinking turns from emergency planning to recovery planning.

How, then, to make the recovery a 'climate smart' one?

While in many respects everything has changed, some guiding principles remain the same. From a climate emergency perspective, the requirement for rapid annual emissions reductions from transport every year are still there. The broad categories of intervention remain the same: we can reduce the amount we have to move around to live daily life, shift to less carbon-intensive forms of transport, and improve the emissions performance of the motorised travel that remains. COVID-19 calls for a re-emphasis of these

priorities, which are discussed below.

First, how much will people travel, and how much of this is an opportunity or a threat? Road traffic levels in England reduced to 40 per cent of their usual weekday levels during lockdown, with bus and rail travel collapsing to less than 10 per cent of usual demand.

There is no doubt that lockdown has made many businesses accelerate the shift to online working practices, although this is not open to all sectors of the economy. Capturing and supporting these changes to reduce the number of days some people commute

i Professor Marsden is an expert in climate and energy policy in the transport sector. For more information, please visit www.environment.leeds.ac.uk/transport. For LGA climate change resources, please visit www.local.gov.uk/climate-change, and for transport see our dedicated pages at www.local.gov.uk/topics/transport

to work will accelerate a trend that was already there, and potentially offer benefits to firms and employees, as well as the climate.

We can anticipate a wider reduction in demand to travel more generally, as a result of reduced physical capacity in shops, sports centres, restaurants and bars, and schools. The anticipated recession will also dampen demand, with the four years after the 2008 financial crisis seeing reductions in car travel.

So, for a mix of reasons – both good and bad – we can expect traffic levels to be suppressed. This has been the experience so far in the early release from lockdowns in Paris and Milan, for example.

Second, the picture on shifting people onto different modes of transport – ‘mode shift’ – is also very different now than in February 2020. There has been a major response in towns and cities across the world to accelerate the provision of improved cycling facilities through, initially, temporary road space reallocations. Across the UK, major pots of funding have been brought forward to encourage this.

Other road space changes have

“Lockdown has made many businesses accelerate the shift to online working practices, although this is not open to all sectors of the economy”

been necessary for maintaining safe physical social distancing at two metres, with an ongoing likelihood of people needing to queue outside shops and venues. This will need to continue for the foreseeable future.

Mode shift to cycling is attractive right now, as more people are trying cycling and travel horizons are more locally focused.

By contrast, the short-run picture for public transport is poor, with capacity on services limited to 10 to 20 per cent of pre-lockdown levels. There is no escaping the very negative impacts of the messaging on the safety of public transport on its position as a mode of choice in the future.

The finances of the industry are now almost entirely dependent on

government and this will impact on the capacity for joint investment in cleaner and newer fleets. It is, however, critical to see the long game here: cities simply cannot move the numbers of people they need to without a healthy public transport system.

Finally, measures to improve the efficiency of vehicles remain as important as before. One of the opportunities to be seized by any green stimulus funding is to put in place the infrastructure to enable the acceleration of the adoption of electric vehicles. However, the shift to electric was not going to get us to our carbon reduction targets quickly enough before, so it is critical to avoid a growth in car use to back-fill reductions in public transport use.

The choices confronting local government before COVID-19, to get to zero carbon, were all difficult. Some are more challenging now. However, the mass exposure to streets with less traffic and more localised living, and the realisation that our globalised lifestyles bring risks as well as benefits, also provide a new space for developing policy packages that build towards a climate smart recovery.



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

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INTERVIEW

The man from the co-op

The community response to coronavirus shows how trust in our political system can be rebuilt, says the Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

When Steve Reed MP was Leader of Lambeth Council, he helped develop a new model for local government based on local leadership, co-operation and community empowerment.

Now, the Co-operative Councils' Innovation Network, of which he is Honorary President, numbers 30 councils among its membership, all committed to reforming the way they work by building

an equal partnership with local people.

Despite having been an MP longer than he was a council leader, Mr Reed insists he remains passionate about local government and committed to his cooperative principles.

"I genuinely believe that the UK is so over-centralised that it damages trust in our democracy because our decision-making system doesn't take into account the views of people and communities that are affected by those decisions," he says.

"We need to open up our politics so it's more responsive, accessible, participative, and people genuinely feel that their voice can be heard in the decisions that affect their lives, communities and regions."

The Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government – appointed to Sir Keir Starmer's first shadow cabinet in April – sees these issues being played out in the response to the coronavirus crisis, and says he is "amazed" by the work of councils during the pandemic.

He points to service collaboration and services shifted online "at pace", and the development of community and mutual aid groups providing support to residents during lockdown.

"That's an amazing transformation in just weeks. I don't believe national government could act that quickly, even if it wanted to," he says.

"It's very important that professional politicians respect councils on the frontline enough to listen to their experiences in this crisis, because they are the ones engaged in delivering services that are really making a difference.

"It's important that councillors use this time to assert their own voice and what they're learning from this crisis about how we need to change our decision-making system and our government structures afterwards to make them more effective."

Mr Reed adds: "There's something about the response to this crisis at the level of the community that shows us how we can rebuild trust again. A big part of that, as politicians, is showing we trust people, rather than always expecting them to trust us.

"Everyone is horrified by the number of deaths we've seen, the isolation and loneliness, the vulnerable. But people will also tell you there are some things they want to keep.

"One of the things I hear them talk about a lot is this sense of neighbourliness, the sense of being a society again. That is something we can hold onto as we come out of this crisis, but we need to make sure that we are listening to and learning from the mutual aid groups, and working with



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them to see what role they can take on as society comes back to life."

In contrast, he is critical of the Government's centralised approach to the crisis.

"There is a general tendency to over-centralise rather than rely on the insight and expertise on the frontline, and that has made the Government's response to the COVID-19 crisis less effective. They are getting it wrong – on personal protective equipment (PPE) distribution, testing and shielding – because they are not listening to the frontline.

"They got it wrong going into the lockdown, where they were too slow. I think they got it wrong on easing the lockdown; they seem to have gone too fast, even though we don't have a track and trace system up and running to keep us safe."

Mr Reed adds: "Look at Germany, which has had a really effective response to COVID-19. If you listen to German ministers, they will tell you that the fact they have more decentralised power, more local control, is the reason they've managed it so much better.

"I believe that's true. Local councils know their local communities better, they know how they move around, they know where they congregate, they know where the challenging issues will be located and how to address them, they have the people in their public health teams who already have the contact-tracing expertise. So of course it's going to work better if you localise it."

He also thinks it is "extraordinary" the Government hasn't done more to understand the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on different groups in society.

"It's very clear that black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities are suffering more than other communities," he says.

"There are a number of factors contributing to that, but we don't understand all of them. Many people in low-paid, customer-facing jobs are from BAME communities and they can't work at home, they can't self-isolate, they've been out there exposed to the risk of infection more.



"BAME communities are quite often more concentrated in areas of low-quality, overcrowded and multi-generational housing that makes it harder for people to self-isolate and protect more vulnerable members of the community from contracting disease.

"Underneath all of those issues lie the structural inequality of poverty. And poverty affects BAME communities more than it affects other communities.

"If you really want to challenge the disproportionate impact of COVID-19, we need to be looking at the structural inequality of poverty in our society and why some groups are less able to get access to the opportunities that other parts of society take for granted.

He adds: "There are some really big questions we have to ask ourselves here. I see the Black Lives Matter movement as being part of that. Clearly what happened to George Floyd was absolutely shocking. Nobody could have watched that video

"The Government is getting it wrong because they are not listening to the frontline"

and felt anything other than absolute, desperate outrage and anger over what is going on there.

"But previous incidents of that kind have not sparked this kind of anger globally. For me, it's not a coincidence this is happening at the same time that COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting precisely those communities.

"It's drawn such a sharp focus on the unfairness of the system that we, collectively, have allowed to grow up, and which curtails the lives of so many of our fellow citizens. We have to stop that, we have to remake society better than the society we had going into this crisis."

A key part of the solution, argues Mr

Reed, is an anti-poverty strategy, but for the past 10 years “we’ve had the opposite”.

“As a result of the Government’s decisions, more families and more children are living in poverty today than when it first came to power. We are now facing a recession or depression that will further deepen poverty but it’s not going to apply equally, it’s going to affect some communities more than others, and we know which communities it will be.

“We have to have a strategy that seeks to eliminate the root causes of poverty. Now we can see the inequalities of wealth and opportunity around our society, we need to tackle them.”

Local government has its own issues with diversity, and councillors should be “visibly representative” of the community that elects them, says Mr Reed – but he wants to go beyond that.

“I don’t think we should always be thinking about how we can empower politicians, I think we should be thinking about how we can empower people as well.

“If the Government’s idea of devolution is just shifting power from one tier of politicians to another, it’s not going to be enough. We need to be looking at how we genuinely and directly empower people in their communities to have a bigger say over the services that they use and the things that affect them where they live.”

Tapping into communities’ insights and experiences opens up new ideas and innovative ways of resolving the problems they face, that can be more cost-effective and provide better outcomes.

He cites the example of Camden Council’s ‘family group conferencing’ model for children’s services. Families with challenging needs invite influential people in their networks – faith or community leaders, or simply their friends – to meetings to discuss the interventions they need, with professionals advising and supporting.

The interventions the families decide to adopt are more likely to tackle the real problems in their lives than the ones the professionals might have come up with without directly involving them. Families also feel they are in control and are therefore much more likely to accept the interventions rather than resist them, says Mr Reed.

“Every councillor or council leader

reading this interview will have some of these examples for themselves. We need to take this agenda and put it right at the centre of a renewal of our politics.”

It’s a vision he hopes will figure in Labour’s next manifesto, albeit work on policy positions is at a very early stage with a General Election a long way off.

“The policy document for housing, communities, local government and transport is asking those very questions, about how should we tackle inequalities of power; who should be taking decisions; who should be involved; how can we make sure that vulnerable people get the support they need to have a voice in the decisions that affect them; what should the relationship between national and local government be; and what does a fair funding system look like – so local government isn’t always existing on the whim of whoever happens to be the Secretary of State at any given moment,” says Mr Reed.

Ministers need to deliver on their pledge to fund councils “to do whatever is necessary to get communities through this crisis”, he says, citing the LGA’s own warnings that local government needs another £6 billion on top of £3.2 billion of additional central funding already received to meet loss of income and additional costs arising from the pandemic.

Mr Reed is concerned that councils, “facing a funding gap of a fifth of their budgets”, are now having to consider frontline job losses and cuts to vital services to balance their budgets.

“That is not good news for communities, who will need to rely on the support their councils can offer them both to get the high streets back open, to get the local economy moving, and to keep vulnerable people safe and protected.”

Mr Reed is sceptical about the Government making any progress on its promised Devolution White Paper or on putting adult social care on a sustainable footing, despite the devastation wrought by the coronavirus on a care sector already in financial crisis.

“On the care situation, we have got an ageing population and we don’t have the resources to make sure older people are properly looked after,” he says.

“We do need to have a national conversation about how we identify the resources to make sure that all of us in our own old age and our parents and grandparents are properly looked after. The Government has not initiated that conversation in the past 10 years, they’ve just ignored it.”

“If the Government’s idea of devolution is just shifting power from one tier of politicians to another, it’s not going to be enough”



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COMMENT

Local government's proudest achievement over the past few months? Playing a leading role in the national response to coronavirus by making it possible for millions of vulnerable people to stay at home for 12 weeks, shielded from any potential contact with COVID-19, by delivering food, medicine and social care to their doorsteps.

Alongside the rest of the sector, London's 32 boroughs and the City of London Corporation welcomed national government recognition that hubs providing services for shielding residents would need to be led and embedded on a local level.

At the time of writing, London boroughs have contacted and triaged the needs of more than 198,000 people and used local community hubs to deliver around 84,000 food parcels. Officers have made just over 232,000 outreach attempts – emails, calls, letters or texts – to vulnerable Londoners, and more than 41,000 visits to people's homes.

Key to the success of London's community hubs was managing demand. As well as London's share of the 1.5 million vulnerable people identified by the NHS, boroughs realised there would be additional cohorts in need of support, including families experiencing food poverty because of the economic impact of coronavirus.

Boroughs worked hard to ensure all communities knew that hubs were being set up – hugely reassuring in the early days of lockdown, when reports of panic



Councillor **Peter John**
OBE is Chair of London Councils

Protecting the vulnerable

buying were rife. Officers also triaged potential service users to ensure they received the right level of care. This led to hubs eventually encompassing a broader range of support, including medicine deliveries, as these needs were identified locally.

Collaboration was also crucial – between individual boroughs and at sub-regional level, as well as via London Councils and pan-London resilience partners, such as London Fire Brigade and the Army. Organisations shared information on a range of topics, including storage premises and transport providers, so that borough and organisational boundaries did not hinder practical solutions that would benefit vulnerable Londoners.

Another important element was

“Community hubs became a credible coordinating point for stakeholders and built trust among the vulnerable people accessing services”

engaging and working with community, faith group and voluntary sector partners and businesses. This focused the goodwill and energy of these groups, and enabled boroughs to incorporate existing infrastructure and expertise – such as food bank networks – into hubs. When issues emerged with the quality of food being delivered to shielding residents, partner organisations helped boroughs access other food sources to supplement the parcels.

As a result, community hubs became a credible coordinating point for stakeholders and built trust among the vulnerable people accessing services, reassured by the involvement of organisations they knew and the suitability of the content of food deliveries.

Setting up and running community hubs has been a real test of London local government. It has increased financial and service pressures – contributing to a £1.3 billion funding shortfall in borough budgets this financial year – but has also given us a chance to demonstrate our capabilities.

We have shown ourselves to be uniquely placed to work with community partners to create and deliver services. Our reward is not just the satisfaction of a job well done; this will be our calling card with national government as we continue to add value to the national COVID-19 response through local delivery of the NHS test and trace programme, and seek the resources to sustain our vital work.



For more information about London Councils, please visit www.londoncouncils.gov.uk



The Government is delivering on its promises



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

At the beginning of the lockdown, Rishi Sunak, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, said the Government would support jobs, incomes, businesses and do whatever it took to get people and the economy through the coronavirus pandemic. And he has delivered on his promises.

A wide range of support, including the Coronavirus Job Retention scheme, the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme, the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, the Covid Corporate Financing Facility, £1.25 billion in support for innovative firms, and a bounce-back loan scheme of up to £50,000 for small businesses, has been introduced by our colleagues in central government

and delivered by us in local government.

As we begin to move to the recovery stage, the Government recently made another welcome announcement: a new £50 million fund for local authorities to prepare for the safe reopening of high streets and other retail spaces.

This funding will assist councils to provide various safety measures including signs, street marking and temporary barriers, helping to get local economies going again.

In addition, as more businesses start to reopen and people go back to work, a £2 billion fund has been launched to develop cycling and walking infrastructure across the country.

This investment will hopefully make it easier for people to avoid public transport during the current restrictions while also leaving a more long-term legacy by encouraging people to commute to work in ways that are both more environmentally friendly and beneficial to their health and wellbeing.

Finally, in this edition of **first** I would

usually be previewing the many exciting events and meetings taking place at our annual conference.

Sadly, this year's physical event has been cancelled. But the LGA is running a virtual annual conference during June and July that will focus on how local areas can support economic, cultural and environmental regeneration and recovery during and beyond the pandemic.

The conference will feature a range of speakers from national and local government, including our Secretary of State, Robert Jenrick MP (see www.local.gov.uk/lga-annual-conference-webinars). I look forward to seeing you there.

“A wide range of support has been introduced by central government and delivered by local government”



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

Making work local

Recent figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) suggest that the number of workers on UK payrolls fell by more than 600,000 between March and May this year.

Meanwhile, the number of people claiming work-related benefits – which includes people who are unemployed – was up 126 per cent to 2.8 million.

The ONS says that the full effect on employment will not be felt until wage support schemes end in October. Separate HMRC figures reveal that 9.1 million workers are having their wages paid through the Government's furlough scheme.

The plunge in employment figures and surge in furloughed workers because of coronavirus is very worrying for local economies. Taken together, these figures illustrate the importance of councils being empowered to develop post-COVID economic recovery options that ensure every region of the country can benefit from emerging employment opportunities.

At the LGA, we believe the pandemic

provides a real opportunity to devolve skills investment and back-to-work support to local areas so councils can work with businesses and education providers to ensure people are trained and retrained with relevant skills, enabling our diverse communities to have the best possible chance of contributing to and benefiting from any economic reboot.

Our own Work Local programme (www.local.gov.uk/work-local) shows how employment and skills services in England can be improved through local public-private collaborations.

These are points we continue to make in meetings with ministers, including Business Secretary Alok Sharma.

Our recent report shows that more than a million green jobs could be created in England by 2050 as the nation transitions to a net-zero economy, which would help to counter the unprecedented job losses arising from coronavirus.

Empowering councils, with their unrivalled local knowledge and expertise, will ensure the workforce in every region of the country can benefit from emerging employment opportunities.





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

Statues and straw men

Black Lives Matter protests, sparked by the deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor in the USA, have brought the issue of systemic racism to the forefront of conversation in the UK too.

Public statues, most notably the statue of slave trader Edward Colston in Bristol, suddenly became lightning rods not only for Black Lives Matter but also for a lot of other justifiable frustrations.

The civic leadership displayed by Bristol's Mayor Marvin Rees in handling Colston's impromptu removal was highly impressive – while not condoning the method, he memorably described its toppling as 'a piece of historical poetry'.

Colston's association with slavery is very clear, but there will of course be less clear-cut examples that need deeper discussion – and open, respectful public debate can stop disagreements from becoming divisive. So I was pleased to see Labour councils committing to listening to and working with their local communities to review the appropriateness of monuments on council land.

"The diversity of elected councillors in the UK still does not reflect our wider population"

One figure that definitely should be removed is the straw man argument that this is about 'erasing history'. On the contrary, it's about closely examining the legacies of historic figures, and having a mature discussion about whether they deserve celebration in today's very different world.

Local government should not shy away from self-reflection either, as we have our own diversity issues. In particular, it is increasingly obvious that the diversity of elected councillors in the UK still does not reflect our wider population. All political groups have a duty to change this, and we must step up.



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

Making it up as they go along

The ill-thought out relaxation of lockdown, the Dominic Cummings debacle, and poorly considered last-minute announcements have contributed to an increase in the 'R' rate in my neck of the woods and in the South West.

The most worrying thing now is that we are seeing the Government engaging in the 'blame game'. The 'it's not us, guv' attitude seems to be slipping into their announcements. How does that help?

Look also at track and trace, and the role of councils in overseeing 'local lockdowns', for example.

"There is nothing about the additional powers we need to manage this situation"

We must drop everything to put together local plans, but there is nothing from government about the additional powers we need to attempt to manage this situation. And all this as the sector pleads with government to share important data with directors of public health so councils can do the best for our communities.

I welcome the Government's U-turn on the wider opening of schools to more pupils. However, if ministers had just talked and listened, all this real stress on school staff, parents, governors and children could have been avoided.

As I write, I predict the Government will revise social distancing from the current two metres to something like one metre. What has changed? They give all the appearance of making it up as they go along and playing Russian roulette with those vulnerable to the virus. What happened to following the science?

We need less uncertainty and more clear leadership – such as local government is providing. I live in hope, but I am not holding my breath.



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

What to keep after coronavirus?

What are your top issues as we 'recover' from the effects of COVID-19?

As well as securing council finances, the LGA's Independent Group members want our future world to lock in the benefits we have and need.

Can we keep clean air, locally focused economies and strong communities? That means not going back to the rat race, directed to increase GDP, and inadvertently damaging the very quality of life we are seeking.

The answer cannot be more houses, debt and congestion. It is vital communities have a sense of ownership and pride in their local places, led by local, elected leaders who are accountable and in touch.

Our councils are trusted, efficient and effective, while centralising services incrementally breaks local bonds. We need genuine devolution to our councillors, not another layer of bureaucracy with a gravitational pull of powers and funds out of local areas. The larger the organisation, the harder it is for residents to influence, especially if there are fewer councillors.

"It is vital communities have a sense of ownership and pride in their local places"

There are changes and savings councils will need to make, but there seems little point in losing our local identity in the process. The LGA's report on a sustainable economic recovery outlines one of the areas of opportunity – namely, how green jobs will rapidly increase to an estimated 0.7 million by 2030 as the nation transitions to net zero emissions (see p15).

We will be talking about recovery as part of the LGA's virtual annual conference. Our session on 8 July is with Crossbench Peer Tanni Grey-Thompson and will focus on recovery for all.



Support your market



Councillor **Geraldine Carter** is President of the National Association of British Market Authorities

Markets have been an important feature of many towns for more than 1,000 years.

Currently, there are around 1,150 regular, traditional retail markets, and almost 80 per cent of them are operated or licensed by local authorities. But this situation might soon change unless councils support their markets.

COVID-19 has hit all town centres very hard and their future recovery is uncertain. My organisation, the National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA), has recently completed a survey of markets that suggests we could see around 400 disappear in the foreseeable future as a result of the pandemic.

In considering this potential loss, it is important to remember what good markets are able to contribute to town centres. Not only do they offer a significant retail element, which, in the past three months of COVID-19 restrictions, has played a vital role in supporting the food supply chain, but they offer so much more in community engagement, new low-start business opportunities, culture, history, colour and vitality.

Indeed, a good market has recently been recognised as one of the top 25 assets of a successful town centre by the Institute of Place Management.

At the outset of the pandemic, NABMA launched a five-point plan to support markets. We sought support from government for traders and operators. We are delighted that our campaign has had significant success, with traders getting access to various compensation packages and operators having the opportunity to get grants of up to £30,000 to successfully relaunch their markets.

Open-air markets received the 'green light' to open on 1 June and indoor markets followed suit on 15 June. NABMA launched a social media campaign on 22 June to raise the profile of these reopenings and encourage as many people as possible to use their markets.

As a national organisation, we can only do so much, and we need the support of individual local authorities to ensure that the dreadful prospect of losing 400 markets does not become a reality.

How can you help? If you have a market, you can make sure you are a member of NABMA. We have the experience and resources to help your market meet the challenges of COVID-19 and its aftermath. Details of how you can get information about NABMA are given below.

Make sure your market is an

“Good markets... offer community engagement, new low-start business opportunities, culture, history, colour and vitality”

important part of your plans for the future of your town centre and that it is supported with a designated markets champion in the council.

Also, consider whether the current management arrangements deliver the best results. Many local authorities now operate their markets with different management arrangements that include private operators, community and trader involvement, and arms-length company arrangements.

Finally, get down to your market and talk to officers and traders. Find out what they think.

You need to act now, otherwise, in a few months, your market might be listed among the potential 400 casualties. That's something none of us want.

i For more information about the National Association of British Market Authorities, please visit www.nabma.com or email nabma@nabma.com. NABMA is a special interest group of the LGA – see www.local.gov.uk/about/our-meetings-and-leadership/special-interest-groups



Cllr **Neil Prior** (Ind)
is Cabinet Member for
Transformation
at Pembrokeshire
County Council

Learning through crisis

I read recently that, in a crisis, you should “deploy an innovation team alongside the business recovery teams... to capture the novel practice”.

So, at Pembrokeshire County Council, we’ve started conducting ‘learning through crisis’ conversations. Based around a handful of descriptive and reflective questions, it’s been fascinating to hear officers’ experiences of work during the pandemic.

‘What have you done differently?’ is the starting question. For some, this has been complete redeployment, while, for others, it’s been a change in working practice. The most common answer has been to work from home, and this rapid transition wasn’t without its technological hiccups in the early days of the lockdown, but it has settled.

One staff member had moved into registrars after being trained via e-learning and, within a few weeks, was registering her first fatalities; a sobering moment. Another officer had overseen the delivery of one million pieces of personal protective equipment (PPE) with a team of two and a transit van. There was no manual or guidebook, but a clear instruction to get on with it and get the job done. Others had moved into our newly established community hub, with a climbing instructor now managing a team of call handlers.

I was inspired by our officers’ leadership qualities and attitudes. Staff spoke about an increased appreciation of the diversity of local government, and how they felt empowered, enthused and even excited to be part of something so critical to public safety. There was talk about the power of community and how, if you let go a little, you can achieve far greater collaboration.

Despite the early issues with the demand for technology, the virtual team meetings were reported to be more productive and had an increased focus on staff wellbeing. There had been some tensions between people and process, but, on the whole, team working was strong,

including with partners and communities.

From these insights of just a few staff members working through crisis, there are some emerging themes.

Technology: we were in a good place at Pembrokeshire through our investment in ‘smarter working’ and were able to mobilise staff incredibly quickly to work from home. In doing so, we have dispelled the myth once and for all that home working isn’t suitable. It is. It just needs balance and another of those cultural shifts that digital/tech is really all about.

Breaking down the silos: the pandemic has fast-tracked 21st century public servants across the UK, where councils have embraced the generic skills of their workforces. We need to capitalise on that now by rejecting silo working

and collaborating to achieve our goals. This is what I am seeing in action and it’s hugely encouraging.

Working with communities: we’ve seen such an incredible community response, supported by councils, so we need to build on that goodwill. One member of staff spoke of nurturing those community relationships, and the choice of word is spot on.

Coronavirus has changed the way that we work, and councils have led an incredible response. We’ll be needed for the long haul, so I encourage all of us to have more ‘learning through crisis’ conversations now, capture that novel practice, and help make the positive changes stick.

I will be exploring these questions as part of the LGA’s virtual annual conference, in a ‘Spotlight on learning through crisis’ webinar. You can find out more at www.local.gov.uk/lga-annual-conference-webinars



You can read a longer version of this article at www.local.gov.uk/first or read Cllr Prior’s blog in full at www.neilprior.co.uk/blog



“We have dispelled the myth that home working isn’t suitable. It is”

Delivering a green recovery in our city regions



Cara Jenkinson is Cities Programme Manager at low-carbon innovation charity Ashden

UK citizens are eager to see a 'green recovery' from the coronavirus pandemic – a rebuilding based on sustainability and a fair transition to a low-carbon future.

There's an important role for England's nine metro mayor city regions: North of Tyne, Tees Valley, West of England, West Midlands, Greater Manchester, London, Sheffield, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, and Liverpool. But they face a challenging future, with a wide range of urgent demands and funding under threat.

Ashden, a charity showcasing innovative climate solutions, convenes a network of city region sustainability officers. We were delighted to partner with the LGA to host a discussion on the barriers and opportunities ahead.

At first glance, local climate action faces an uphill battle, as the COVID-19 emergency dominates politicians' attention. In many local authorities, officers working on climate emergency action have been redeployed, and councils face reduced revenue.

Social distancing has halted many energy efficiency and renewable energy projects. Public consultation on emerging climate action plans has had to take a different shape – and when energy projects restart, will contractors face a major backlog of work?

While concerned by these challenges, city region officers can see short-term opportunities. The lockdown has got people thinking about what makes home a good place – a cosy, well-insulated flat, access to leafy green space, safe streets for

walking and cycling, or easy access to local shops. But there's a short window to act as the pace of life ramps up again.

Some city mayors are already acting; in London and Manchester, measures to make these cities better for active travel are being fast-tracked. There are calls for government to simplify the traffic regulation order process, so roads can be closed more easily.

Lockdown has kept people in their homes, using more energy and facing higher bills. This may be an opportune time to encourage energy retrofits once social-distancing restrictions have been relaxed.

The coronavirus crisis has also shone a spotlight on inequality. Diseases of poverty, including diabetes and

“Climate change action can improve health and create jobs”

respiratory illness, increase the likelihood of death from coronavirus. People in low-paid jobs often can't work from home and are more exposed to the virus.

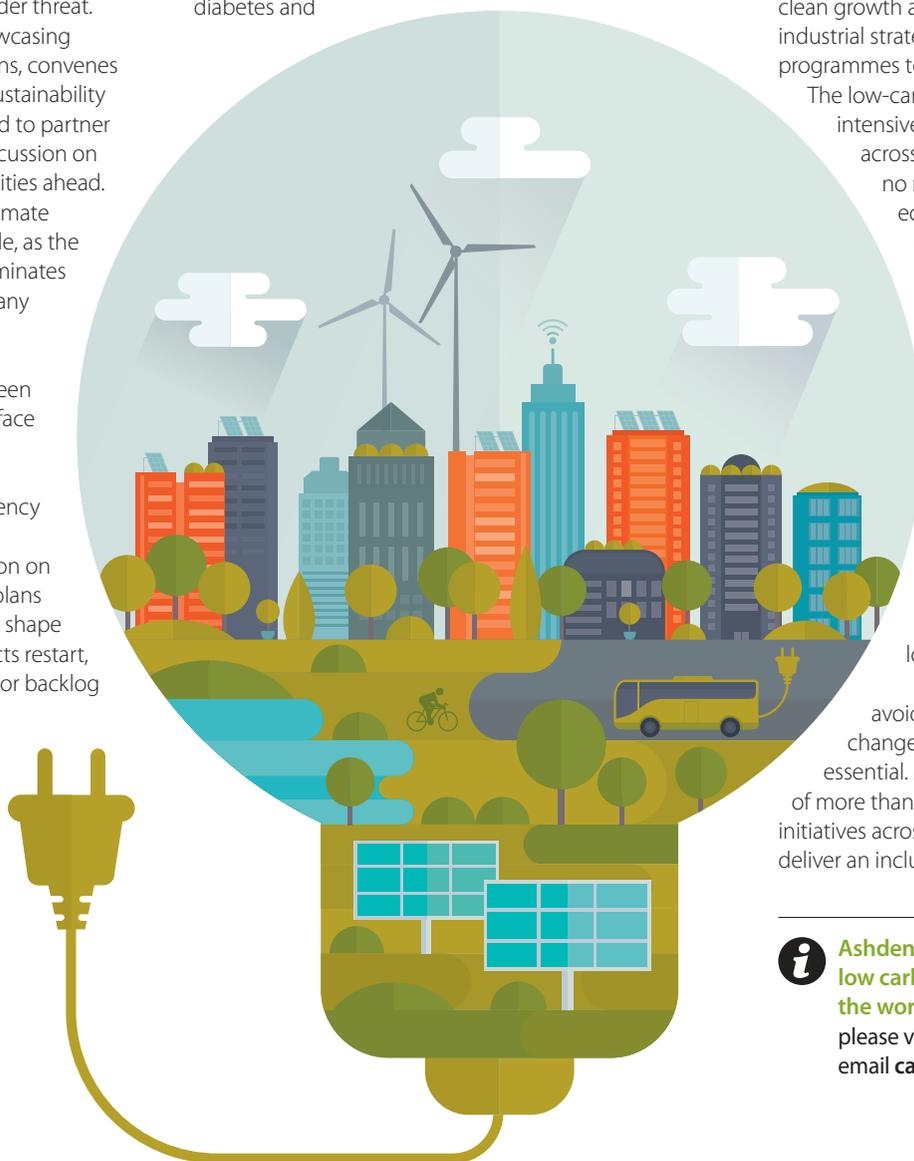
But climate change action can improve health and create better jobs. Insulating homes improves respiratory health and more active travel improves physical fitness, increasing resilience to infectious disease. By working together with local health partners, city regions can deliver these wider benefits.

Many city regions have already made clean growth a key part of their local industrial strategies and are establishing programmes to build the right skills.

The low-carbon sector is labour-intensive and can offer jobs across the country, so there's no need to choose between economic recovery and climate change action.

City regions are in a unique position to lobby government for the right policies to launch a green recovery. To create secure jobs, national low-carbon policy must be consistent and long term. If the Government is to achieve its ambition of 'levelling up', this should be reflected in devolution to empower local leaders to deliver.

With less than 10 years to avoid catastrophic climate change, sharing best practice is essential. Ashden will use its network of more than 90 inspirational low-carbon initiatives across the UK to help city regions deliver an inclusive green recovery.



i Ashden is a charity supporting low carbon innovation around the world. For more information, please visit www.ashden.org or email cara.jenkinson@ashden.org



Nigel Riglar is President of the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT)

Recovery, renewal and place

When I first started thinking about my year as ADEPT President, I knew it was going to be challenging.

A comprehensive spending review, the development of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 26 – now scheduled for November 2021) and the impacts of Brexit have huge implications for place. Now, on top of these, we must manage and recover from COVID-19.

The ADEPT leadership team has been monitoring the impacts on service provision, and working with key government departments to produce guidance and provide intelligence. May's online ADEPT spring conference was our first opportunity to stop, debate and listen to the thinking and experiences of members, and to start mapping out the first steps towards recovery.

I was struck by how conversation revolved around people. Building resilient communities is critical to our work and is at the heart of ADEPT thinking. The pandemic has drawn attention to social inequalities – educational attainment, housing, health and employment – and how, inevitably, they will increase because of COVID-19.

But coronavirus has also highlighted some positives – improvements in air quality from reduced traffic; an increased connection to our local places, with more people working from home; and what it will take to address the impacts of climate change.

How this translates into our work for the coming year boils down to a very simple message: we know our places and communities, we just need the resources to enable us to rebuild and develop clean and inclusive growth.

ADEPT has long been making the case for place and it has never been more important as we plan our way out of COVID-19. We must continue to work with colleagues in public health, and adult and children's services, to ensure the Government understands that the preventative role of place is intrinsic to



long-term health and wellbeing, and coronavirus recovery.

Rebuilding our local economies safely is a huge challenge that, in the short term, must focus on reducing fear and increasing confidence, so that people can re-engage socially and economically. In this new environment, we need to ensure people feel safe in their local places, as that's how we will get our businesses back up and running. It's not enough to insist on social distancing; we need to enable it.

Place directors will be redesigning systems and reallocating spaces, such as prioritising walking and cycling, as part of their recovery and renewal planning. They also need to be thinking through what is needed for the longer term. To support them, we have set up an economic recovery and renewal task force to gather intelligence and evidence, provide best practice and develop a clear offer and 'ask' for place.

Recovery and renewal are not just

“It's not enough to insist on social distancing: we need to enable it”

concepts; they require adequate resources, and that means influencing government. Rather than putting funding together from disparate pots, we have a chance to shape our places for the future. We need an end to intensive, competitive bidding processes, and a joined-up, place-based approach to funding allocation.

All our places are unique and our communities know best what they need. As place directors, it's our job to make it happen, to make our places extraordinary.

i For more information about the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT), please visit www.adeptnet.org.uk



Councillor **Qaisar Abbas** (Lab) is a member of Thurrock Council

Always in lockdown

Being confined to our homes during the COVID-19 pandemic has been very difficult for all of us. We are bored, worried, and want to return to our normal life quickly. Hopefully, after a few more weeks, we will be able to do so.

Sadly, there are thousands of women and men who will not be able to, because they are trapped inside their homes for years, with no or little access to phones or internet, being verbally, sexually, economically and physically abused.

They are victims of domestic abuse and, unfortunately, there is no escape for them.

Last year, I wrote an article on domestic violence, particularly highlighting this growing and hidden crime within minority ethnic communities. In March, I posted on my social media that “lockdown or coronavirus is not an excuse to commit any crime”, and shared a link for reporting incidents of domestic violence.

In April, the BBC reported that the National Domestic Abuse Helpline had recorded a 25 per cent increase in calls and online requests for help since the lockdown, with other reports identifying an increase in suspected domestic abuse killings.

More recently, I received a call from a new number. The lady on the other end of the line asked if I could speak a certain language. I replied ‘yes’, and she started talking.

“I was born in a very poor family. My parents arranged my marriage and my husband brought me here. I have children from this marriage. After a few years, my husband fell ill and died. He left some money and a house in my name.



“So-called family members tactically blackmail the victims and exploit their vulnerability”

“My life changed significantly after his death. My father and brother-in-law moved into our home and they control every aspect of my life. I am not allowed to go out for more than 20-30 minutes, or to call or visit anyone without their permission.

“They regularly check my bank account, my telephone calls and messages. I cook for everyone and spend almost all day doing domestic chores.

“They are always threatening that, if I will not listen to them, they will take all my money and kick me and my children out of my own house. I am scared that they will hurt my children and we will become homeless.

“I reported this to the police and a local charity, but both told me that I do

not have any proof to support my case and, since then, I kept quiet. This thought is even scarier – that I will not be able to get any help from the authorities. Please help me.”

During this conversation, she was crying continuously and disconnected three or four times, as she heard someone walking towards her room. I reassured her and signposted her to relevant authorities.

This is not just a story; this is happening to so many men and women, trapped inside their homes for years without any help or support. Unfortunately, their so-called family members are the perpetrators who tactically blackmail the victims and exploit their vulnerability. In certain communities, it is considered a taboo to discuss or report these crimes.

We must not stay silent. As local councillors, we can help – by raising this issue, reaching out to our residents, and highlighting the local and national services that can help victims of domestic abuse and violence.

i For more information, please visit www.local.gov.uk/domestic-violence-and-abuse and www.gov.uk/report-domestic-abuse



Councillor **Ed Davie**
(Lab) is an LGA
Peer and Lambeth
Council's Cabinet
Member for Children
and Young People

Rebuilding mentally healthier communities

Mental ill health costs thousands of lives and more than £105 billion every year – an average of £700 million per upper-tier council area in England alone.

If everyone was free of abuse and poverty, living in decent homes, with access – via tree-lined walking and cycling routes – to nearby, high-quality work, community and green spaces, much of this could be avoided.

That may sound ambitious, but the founders of modern local government in Victorian Britain ended cholera by clearing slums and building a massive clean-water system. About a century later, a bankrupt and exhausted post-war UK built the NHS, welfare state and two million homes.

Open sewers and unpayable doctors' bills in this country are long gone, but inequality, air pollution and chronic mental ill health are modern equivalents that need urgent action.

Coronavirus, and the measures taken to counter it, have exposed glaring health inequalities and caused huge health and economic harm. That makes supporting mentally healthier communities even more important. In doing so, we must also tackle the inequalities that lead to black people being four times more likely to die of coronavirus than white people – a disproportionality reflected in serious mental illness rates.

During the pandemic, councils have shown how their local knowledge, relationships and powers can transform services, behaviour and public health outcomes. Now, we must use these tools to tackle the more deep-seated structural problems that cause disproportionate levels of physical and mental ill health among our poorest communities.

As part of that effort, the LGA has produced a councillor workbook on creating mentally healthier communities. Written in partnership with the Mental Health Foundation, it brings together academic expertise and practical experience from the NHS, charities and research, to assist you in your vital work

supporting better mental health in your communities.

The workbook is structured around the World Health Organization's three determinants of health: individual characteristics and behaviour; physical environment; and economic context.

The individual section uses psychological insights to suggest how councils can support better relationships and more exercise, among other behaviours, to improve mental health.

In the physical environment section, we explore how planning and licensing powers can be used to encourage better housing, transport and community relations while reducing crime, air pollution, and access to cheap alcohol, harmful gambling and poor-quality food.

Finally, improving the economic context is going to be the biggest challenge as we enter a deep recession, but

there is much more councils can do to support living-wage-accredited 'anchor' institutions at a time when global supply lines have been exposed as environmentally and socially unsustainable.

Along with the related issue of climate change, tackling inequality – most visible in different health outcomes – is the challenge of our times, with the failure to deal with it seriously destabilising our global and local communities.

From cholera to coronavirus, councils have been at the forefront of tackling many health inequalities. Now, we must turn our attention to creating mentally healthier communities, where everyone can thrive.



'A councillor's workbook on supporting mentally healthier communities' is available at www.local.gov.uk/councillors-workbook-mentally-healthier-places

"Tackling inequality – most visible in different health outcomes – is the challenge of our times"



ELECTIONS

The councils prone to by-elections



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



What factors influence the frequency of by-elections, and are some councils more prone than others to having to fill casual vacancies?

How should we go about answering this question when there is great variation in council size? Richmondshire, for example, has just 24 councillors, but Durham has 126. It is reasonable to assume that larger councils will have more by-elections than smaller ones.

The frequency of May elections, must have an impact too. In normal circumstances, a by-election will be held over if a May election is scheduled within six months of the vacancy. Councils with elections by thirds have more scope to avoid by-elections than those electing members every four years.

Most by-elections occur either because of resignation – accounting for almost 60 per cent of cases – or, sadly, death, which explains more than a third of by-elections. When a councillor dies, local parties have little choice over when

the election is called. Resignations are another matter. Incumbent parties may exercise some control over when their colleague quits, thereby increasing the chance of holding the seat. Of course, when there is acrimony, a resigning councillor may choose the most inappropriate moment.

This is not to say that councils with frequent by-elections are necessarily less stable than those that hold fewer contests, as councillors who defect to other parties are not obliged to fight a by-election.

Examining the frequency of by-elections held since 1983 confirms May as the most popular month – 15 per cent of all vacant seats are contested then. The May totals vary according to the election calendar, peaking in years with county council elections as councillors on the lower-tier districts use the election to stand down.

June and July are also popular. Together, these three months account for 36 per cent of all by-elections. There is another surge between September and November, when another third of contests happen. From December through to February, however, quietness descends on the electoral landscape, with only 16 per cent of contests occurring then.

Followers of by-election results will know some councils appear regularly. Eight councils have had 50 or more of these contests since 1983. Top spot is

shared between Hackney and Lancaster, each with 56 by-elections. But both authorities have reasonably large councils elected every fourth year, so cannot often take advantage of the six-month rule.

Comparing the relative frequency of by-elections means taking account of both council size and electoral procedure. Here, we measure the by-election rate per 10 council seats. Because council size may vary over time because of boundary and structural changes, the median value is used.

Hackney's rate is 9.3 by-elections per 10 council seats, while Lancaster's is 8.7, placing it seventh overall. The overall list is headed by Boston, with 33 by-elections recorded. A median council size of 32 seats produces a score of 10.3. Interestingly, neighbouring North Kesteven lies second, on 9.5, after registering a total of 38 by-elections.

Since Welsh local government reorganisation in the mid-1990s, councils have all moved to a four-year cycle. In the quarter century since then, only 337 by-elections have been recorded. Although Conwy (4.7) and Gwynedd (3.7) have the highest by-election/council size ratio, the scores generally are lower than in England.

The lowest incidence of by-elections is found in Blaenau Gwent, which has held just seven since 1996, the majority of which followed the sitting member's death.

 For a longer version of this article, please visit www.local.gov.uk/first

New equality charter

As a borough, we have seen first-hand the truly devastating impact racism can have on our communities.

One in five of our residents are from black backgrounds and in light of recent events, including the Black Lives Matter protests across the globe, we want to strongly reaffirm our commitment to eradicating racism and discrimination in our society.

Our borough's diversity is one of our greatest strengths. But it is clear that the fight for equality is far from won, and we need to be honest about the inequalities that still exist within our communities.

Last year, the council worked with the Runnymede Trust so we could get an independent assessment of how we were doing as a

borough. The hard truth is that the outcomes for our BAME residents in some areas, such as education, housing and involvement with the police, still raise serious concerns.

We have been working with schools, the police and a wide range of partners to tackle these injustices and will continue to work collaboratively.

We will be launching a consultation on a new Royal Greenwich Equality and Equity Charter, and calling on private, public and voluntary sector organisations as well as individuals, to contribute and help us shape the charter to create a borough-wide commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Cllr Danny Thorpe (Lab),
Leader, Royal Borough
of Greenwich



Online meetings and accessibility

Perhaps I'm a rare breed among councillors in that I don't generally like meetings. So, you might think I'd agree with Cllr Liz Green (first 648), when she wonders about the benefits of continuing with online rather than face-to-face meetings. However, that certainly isn't the case.

For many of us, Zoom or Microsoft Teams represent a whole new world. It was fine as a stopgap but, in the long run, it does discriminate against those who are not technical whizz-kids. And this includes the people we deal with away from the town hall.

Also, a physical meeting usually means the attendance of members of the press, who play a vital role in bringing the council's business to a wider public. When we had our last 'normal' planning committee, my remarks about having a palm tree on Cleethorpes' prom' got picked up by both the Daily Mail and the BBC News website.

On top of this, I want my papers in front of me, as they are underlined in advance with any comments I intend to raise. Having to go from screen to screen while remaining part of a live meeting would certainly be difficult.

I appreciate the environmental argument about not travelling to meetings. Yet as I'm simply another passenger on a crowded bus, I think I'm entitled to say I want physical meetings to continue. After all, they are open to everyone regardless of their technological prowess.

Cllr Tim Mickleburgh (Lab), North East Lincolnshire Council

Racism still rife in UK

It is a great shame that the Black Lives Matter slogan has seen public debate diverted to a great deal of "whataboutery". It has taken eyes off the fact that racism is still rife in Britain, not just in America.

Too many people are still hurting. Real change is overdue.

It goes without saying that all councils aim to treat everyone with dignity and respect, irrespective of their background. At Chelmsford City Council, we are ensuring our own house is in order, while also showing leadership in the wider community.

Every one of us has a role to play in seeking to eliminate racism and hatred, but especially elected authorities and public services.

At Chelmsford Council, we may not have all of the answers now, but we will listen – to our staff and the public.

We have set up an internal reference group for staff – especially those from a BAME background – to check we are not doing anything wrong, and a local stakeholders group chaired by the mayor to encourage the whole community to take a stand against racism.

I would be interested to hear about other initiatives being taken.

Cllr Stephen Robinson (Lib Dem), Leader, Chelmsford City Council



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

ANNUAL CONFERENCE WEBINAR SERIES 2020

RE-THINKING LOCAL A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

During June and July, we will be holding a series of annual conference webinars featuring keynote speakers from local and central government, discussing and debating how our local areas can support the country's economic, cultural and environmental regeneration and recovery during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, we will be hosting 'spotlight on' sessions where attendees can hear and share good practice with colleagues.

Confirmed speakers include:

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government

Sir Keir Starmer MP, Leader of the Labour Party

Sir Ed Davey MP, Acting Leader of the Liberal Democrats

Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson, LGA Vice-President

