

## Bracing for a second wave

Support for self-isolators

10



**16** | **Spending review**  
LGA: bring power  
and resources closer  
to people

**19** | **Levelling up**  
Tackling embedded  
inequalities is key to  
community recovery

**21** | **Engines of growth**  
How libraries  
are supporting  
innovation

**23** | **Revitalising rural**  
The importance of  
rural areas to the  
national economy

# LGA 21

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## The LGA Independent Group Annual General Meeting 2020

The LGA Independent Group will hold its 2020 AGM on **Friday 6 November**, between **10.00am and 12.30pm**. For the first time our AGM will be held virtually, via Zoom.

Attendance at the AGM is free of charge for councillors in group membership.

Members submitting Notices of Motion to the AGM must be available to join the meeting via zoom to talk to their motion or send a nominated Independent Group member as a substitute to speak on their behalf.

**Deadline for submission of motions is Friday 9 October 2020.**

**To submit a motion** please contact Sarah Woodhouse on [sarah.woodhouse@local.gov.uk](mailto:sarah.woodhouse@local.gov.uk) or 020 7664 3206 for the form.

**If you wish to contribute to our Speaker's Corner**, please email [independent.group@local.gov.uk](mailto:independent.group@local.gov.uk)

Sign up to our AGM and other  
conference sessions via our  
conference webpage:

[local.gov.uk/lga-independent/events](http://local.gov.uk/lga-independent/events)



# CONTENTS



## The spending review

**A**s **first** was going to press, the Chancellor had postponed his November Budget, but was still progressing with a spending review. You can read about the LGA's submission in this edition of **first** (p4, p16, p24).

Sadly, rising rates of COVID-19 infection mean more restrictions have been introduced to curtail the spread of the virus. We have updates on recent developments (p5, p10), but also look at lessons learned from the pandemic in respect of local government's greatest asset – its workforce (p11).

The autumn party conferences have gone 'virtual' because of COVID-19. Cllr Howard Sykes, Leader of the LGA's Liberal Democrat Group, outlines the work of local councillors at his party's event (p14), while Shadow Communities and Local Government Secretary Steve Reed MP writes about Labour's work with its local members (p15).

We look at how councils are marking Black History Month (p18) and the LGA's work on addressing inequalities, including having an equalities advocate on our policy boards (p19). Cllr Cecilia Motley, Chair of the Rural Services Network, also reports from its annual conference on the importance of rural areas to the national economy (p23).

For the latest coronavirus updates, visit [www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus).

**Cllr James Jamieson**  
is LGA Chairman



9

## FEATURES

- 10 A second wave?**  
The latest on the pandemic
- 11 Workforce renewal**  
People really are councils' biggest asset
- 12 Public health**  
Local leaders must help shape reforms
- 13 Just do it**  
Articulating the value of sport and physical activity
- 14 Lib Dem conference**  
Planning reforms and climate emergency
- 15 Local renewal**  
Labour learning from council achievements
- 16 Spending review**  
The LGA's submission
- 18 Black History Month**  
The contribution of black communities
- 19 Levelling up**  
The LGA's work on tackling inequalities
- 20 The graduates**  
Bringing fresh talent to local government
- 21 Engines of growth**  
How libraries are supporting innovation
- 22 Reducing emissions**  
New guidance on decarbonising transport



12



16



21



27

## COMMENT

- 23 Revitalising rural**  
The interdependence of rural economies
- 26 Future first**  
Alumni networks for state schools
- 26 BIMBY not NIMBY**  
Asking residents to shape where they live
- 27 High-street heritage**  
Repurposing historic buildings for growth
- 28 Member support**  
Why all councillors need it

## REGULARS

- 04 News**
- 09 Parliament** – influencing committee inquiries
- 24 LGA chairman and group leaders**
- 29 Councillor** – chairing remote meetings
- 30 Local elections** – multiple votes in May 2021
- 31 Letters**

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## ‘Shelve 75% business rates retention’ – LGA

**Ministers should shelve plans to allow local government to keep 75 per cent of business rates income until the Treasury’s business rates review has reported, the LGA has said.**

The call comes as part of the LGA’s evidence to the first part of the

Government’s fundamental review of the business rates system, launched at the Budget in March.

In its evidence, the LGA warns local economies are facing an unprecedented crisis, with high street footfall down more than 43 per cent on last year, and internet

sales now making up nearly 33 per cent of all retail sales.

This is having a knock-on effect on business rates income at a time when councils need clarity and certainty about how local services will be funded over the next few years and beyond.

The LGA had previously supported the increase to 75 per cent business rates retention from April 2021 but says local government’s confidence in business rates as a reliable income source with a future has reduced.

The next revaluation of business rates will also be highly controversial, regardless of when it happens.

Cllr Richard Watts, Chair of the LGA’s Resources Board, said: “Given the economic shock caused by the pandemic, the steady increase in reliefs and the belief of many that business rates pose too great a burden on business, we believe that the move to 75 per cent retention should now only be revisited, if appropriate, once the Treasury’s business rates review concludes.

“The attention needs to shift towards developing new sources of finance for councils and different ways of incentivising growth.

“Business rates account for around a quarter of all council spending power. Money raised is used to pay for vital local services, such as caring for older and disabled people, protecting children, fixing potholes and collecting bins.

“Councils want to see a reformed business rates system that commands confidence. Any reform must therefore recognise the importance of this income stream for funding key local services.”



## Billions needed to plug council funding gap

Councils will need billions in extra funding to address growing funding gaps, a new independent report finds.

Commissioned by the LGA, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) independently reviewed the future funding outlook for councils, including ‘business as usual’ pressures, cost impacts of the pandemic, and the potential long-term impact of economic changes on local income such as

local taxes, sales, fees and charges.

Taking the pressures estimated by the IFS together, councils face an estimated funding gap of £5.3 billion by 2023/24 which could rise to £9.8 billion due to continuing uncertainty around COVID-19.

As **first** was going to press, the Budget had been delayed and there was speculation that the Government’s planned Spending Review may now cover just the next financial year. However,

the LGA’s submission urges the Government to commit to a three-year local government finance settlement and sets out the additional funding councils need to sustain services at 2019/20 levels, address growing cost pressures and improve the services they can provide to their communities.

Cllr Richard Watts, Chair of the LGA’s Resources Board, said: “The IFS report will support our firm

case to government that councils need certainty over their medium-term finances and adequate funding to tackle day-to-day pressures and the lasting impact of COVID-19 on income and costs.

“In the coming weeks and months we will be setting out how, with the right funding and freedoms, councils can provide local services which communities rely on and grasp the opportunity to address the stark inequalities the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed, develop a green recovery, address skills gaps and rebuild the economy so that it benefits everyone.”

● See p16, p24

# Cash to help people self-isolate

Councils have been given powers to ensure pubs and restaurants take their customers' contact details, and will administer new support funding for people on low incomes to help them self-isolate.

With coronavirus cases rising, the Government has made a series of announcements on new COVID-19 restrictions and support for those affected by the pandemic, including a new wage support scheme to replace furlough when it ends on 31 October.

Following calls from the LGA (see **first** 651), hospitality businesses are now legally required to collect customer contact information to help with track and trace in the event of an outbreak, and councils can bring prosecutions for breaches of safety guidance (which are now legal obligations) and issue fixed penalty fines.

Cllr Nesil Caliskan, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: "While most businesses are implementing the necessary measures to protect people's safety,

we are pleased the Government has acted on LGA calls for councils to have powers to take action when rules are being flouted.

"These measures will mean they can act quickly and proactively in cracking down on places that flout COVID-19 guidance, instead of only being able to act when it is too late."

The Government has also created a new legal duty for people to self-isolate if they have tested positive for COVID-19 or have been traced as a close contact of someone who has.

Those on lower incomes who are self-isolating and cannot work from home, and who would consequently lose pay, will receive a payment of £500. Councils will be responsible for distributing the payments and for administering a discretionary fund for vulnerable individuals who fall outside the scheme.

The LGA has warned that "urgent clarity" is needed on how councils will be reimbursed for the costs of setting up these schemes.

● See p10

## 'Ensure care workers get flu jab'

**Councils are being urged to make sure their health and social care colleagues get their free flu vaccination this year, as COVID-19 cases continue to rise.**

The LGA is supporting Public Health England's (PHE) campaign to encourage all frontline health and social care workers to protect themselves, their patients, residents and families from the flu.

This year's vaccination programme includes the option for all social care workers

to visit their GP or pharmacy for their free jab. Pharmacists can also deliver the vaccination to residential care staff.

Cllr Paulette Hamilton, Vice-Chair of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "It is absolutely critical for all health and social care workers to get themselves vaccinated, to protect themselves and the people they look after, including our older and most vulnerable people, from a potentially devastating second wave of infections."

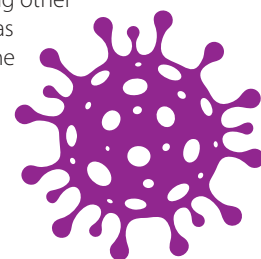
She also expressed the need for council directors of public health to oversee the wider rollout of the flu jab in their areas, as they have the local knowledge and expertise to ensure that as many people as possible are vaccinated.

Councils can download campaign materials, including posters, leaflets and information sheets, from Public Health England's resource centre, see [www.campaignresources.phe.gov.uk/resources/campaigns/92-health-and-social-care-workers-flu-immunisation-resources](http://www.campaignresources.phe.gov.uk/resources/campaigns/92-health-and-social-care-workers-flu-immunisation-resources)



## In brief Infection control

The Government's Infection Control Fund has been extended to March 2021 and an extra £546 million made available to care providers to help pay full wages of care staff who are self-isolating, and enable them to work in only one care home. Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "We are pleased the Government has accepted the calls from councils and care providers for this funding to be extended. This extra funding, and regular testing of those who use and work in social care, needs to be supported by addressing other important issues, such as ensuring everyone in the community who needs a test can receive one, together with a consistent, reliable supply of PPE for frontline staff."



## NHS app and QR

Designated businesses and council-run facilities – including museums, galleries and public libraries, swimming pools, lidos and indoor sport and leisure centres, village halls and youth/community centres – are now required by law to display QR posters to collect customer contact information (see [www.gov.uk/create-coronavirus-qr-poster](http://www.gov.uk/create-coronavirus-qr-poster)) via the new NHS COVID-19 app. Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chair of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Councils were among those who first piloted the app and it is right that they continue to have a pivotal role in managing the local, as well as national, response. This new tool will complement and work alongside existing local contact-tracing efforts."

## Affordable housing

The Government has published its prospectus inviting bids for its £12.2 billion investment in affordable housing. The LGA has been calling for an affordable homes programme, and welcomed a consultation on how homes can be made more accessible for older and disabled people. Cllr David Renard, LGA Housing Spokesperson, said: "It is vital that we build more housing for social rent, and we look forward to seeing more clarity around how this will be delivered."



## 'No plan' to deal with unsafe cladding



Re-cladding work in progress on a block of flats in Stratford, London

Just a third (155 out of 455) of high-rise buildings with Grenfell-style flammable cladding have had it replaced, the Public Accounts Committee has warned.

Its report said the Government has "no convincing" plan to ensure work is done by the end of 2021 and had not done enough to address spiralling insurance costs and "nil" mortgage valuations, which have made homes unsellable.

The committee is calling for "vigorous enforcement action" against any building owners whose remediation projects are not on track to complete by the end of 2021. It also said a further £1 billion government fund to fix other kinds of high-rise cladding was inadequate given the number of buildings affected, and that up to £3.5 billion was likely to be needed.

Lord Porter, the LGA's Building Safety Spokesperson, said: "Social landlords have been quick to address the issue, but progress in the private sector continues to be unacceptably slow.

"Leaseholders and residents have suffered enough. The Government has accepted that the building safety system has failed for decades and it must now deal with the consequences, which includes funding remediation in full and pursuing those responsible through the courts.

"The LGA would like to see the establishment of a fund to cover remediation costs and recommends that stakeholders examine how the industry might contribute to such a fund. This should allow building owners to spend the money in the most cost-effective way to ensure residents' safety, for example by installing sprinklers."

## Formula 'will see fewer homes built in the north'

**An updated government algorithm for setting house-building targets will lead to a stark variation in where new homes are required, without regard to the wider levelling-up agenda, the LGA has warned.**

It says the new formula for setting targets on the number of homes to be built in councils' areas will lead to a housing boom in London, the Midlands and the south of England, while swathes of the north will see fewer homes built.

The new methodology will also disproportionately impact on rural, rather than urban, areas. In some of the most rural places in England, there will be a requirement for a 59 per cent increase in homes on the number needed under the current algorithm, compared with a 20 per cent increase in major urban areas.

Under the new national targets, London will be expected to have a 161 per cent increase in housing. A 57 per

cent increase in new homes will be expected in the South East and 39 per cent in the South West.

Significantly fewer homes will be built in northern cities, with the new formula resulting in a 66 per cent decrease on the number of those built in Newcastle in recent years, a 59 per cent decrease in Liverpool, 20 per cent in Sheffield and 16 per cent in Leeds.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Housing Spokesperson, said: "Algorithms and formulas can never be a substitute for local knowledge and decision-making by councils and communities who know their areas best.

"If we are to truly fix our chronic housing shortage, the Spending Review needs to ensure councils have the tools, powers and flexibilities to plan for and deliver the quality homes and places our communities need."

## Social care winter plan

The Government has published its adult social care winter plan, setting out the ambitions and challenges for social care later this year, including key actions for councils, care providers, NHS England and national bodies.

The plan's four themes cover preventing and controlling the spread of infection in care settings; working across health and care services; supporting people who receive social care, the workforce, and carers; and supporting the system.

The Social Care COVID-19 Support Taskforce also published its report setting out the progress and learning from the first phase of the pandemic.

The LGA said that councils and care providers have been working constantly throughout the pandemic to support our elderly and most vulnerable people,

despite facing significant pressures.

LGA Community Wellbeing Board Chairman Cllr Ian Hudspeth said while it is understandable that government wants oversight of the developing situation, further monitoring requirements should not place any unnecessary burdens on providers and councils' vital ongoing work.

He also said the plan's free supplies of personal protective equipment is good and the right distribution needs to be in place to make sure this reaches the frontline on time.

Cllr Hudspeth added: "Funding should also be kept under regular review, to make sure councils and providers are in the best possible position to respond to a potential second wave and able to increase capacity for care at home, which will be essential to meet demand through the winter."

# Children's care referrals fall during lockdown peak

The number of children referred to children's social care services for support fell by almost a fifth during the height of the COVID-19 lockdown, according to LGA analysis.

Latest figures show children's social care teams received 41,190 referrals between April and June – around 18 per cent lower than the same period over each of the past three years.

They come as funding pressures and increased demand for child protection services prior to the pandemic led to councils being forced to scale back or cut universal and early help services altogether.

The LGA is calling on the Government to use the forthcoming Spending Review to ensure councils have long-term, sustainable funding to invest in preventative, universal and early help services so children, young people and families receive the practical, emotional, educational and mental health support they need.

Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "The impacts of the pandemic will be far reaching for some children, young people and their families. As this becomes clearer, more children and their families are likely to need support and councils expect to see a significant rise in referrals to children's social care and demand for wider children's support services.

"Some children and their families will need

significant interventions, but others will just need some extra help to get through a difficult period. It will be essential that the right services can be there to support them and help them cope.

"It is vital that councils have the funding they need to support children, young people and families during the current phase of the crisis and beyond. Investment in crucial preventative services would mean help can be available when it is first needed and not when families and young people reach crisis point."



## Oversubscription risk for secondary school places

**New analysis by the LGA has revealed that up to a third of local areas in England risk being oversubscribed for secondary school places within five years, leaving almost 80,000 young people and their families at risk of missing out on a place.**

The LGA said with two-thirds of secondary schools now academies, councils need powers to tackle the looming places crisis by having the power to open more secondary schools or direct academies to expand to meet demand.

It found that failure to create more secondary places will mean 11 councils will face a secondary school place shortfall in 2021/22, rising to 50 council areas in 2025/26 – 77,085 places.

Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's

Children and Young People Board, said: "Councils have an excellent track record of fulfilling their legal duty to ensure every child has a school place available to them and want to work with the Government to meet the challenges currently facing the education system.

"It continues to make no sense for councils to be given the responsibility to plan for school places but then not be allowed to be open schools themselves.

"Councils do not want any families to have to face uncertainty over securing their child's secondary school. But the number of pupils is growing at a far faster rate than the number of places available and councils need to be given the powers to help solve this crisis."

## In brief

### Pension credit take-up

Low take-up of pension credit is costing health and care services £4 billion a year, according to a report by Independent Age. This significantly outstrips the annual cost of ensuring that all older people who are entitled to pension credit receive it, the charity said. LGA Community Wellbeing Board Chairman Cllr Ian Hudspeth said it is essential that older people are able to access all the benefits they are eligible for. He said: "This helpful report should be considered by government as it develops its proposals for the future of adult social care."

### Public health funding call

Greater investment in public health services is needed to meet rising demand for addiction treatment, according to a report by the Royal College of Psychiatrists. Analysis of coronavirus data by RCPsych found more than 8.4 million people are now high-risk drinkers, up from only 4.8 million in February. Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "It is clear that public health funding for councils, which provides drug and alcohol prevention and treatment services, represents value for money and helps to relieve pressures on other public services such as criminal justice and the NHS, further down the line."

### Social care complaints review

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's annual review of social care complaints showed the number of complaints and enquiries received remained broadly the same as last year, at 3,073. Of these, only 430 were from people who arranged their care privately with independent providers, which the Ombudsman said was disproportionately low. The LGA said councils and care providers have been working hard to support those who use and work in adult social care, despite funding and demand pressures. Future reforms must apply the lessons learned from coronavirus, as well as address the issues of fairness in how we pay for these vital services.

## In brief

### Support for renters

Councils remain concerned that the ending of the ban on evictions could see a rise in homelessness, despite the support set out by government for renters this winter. Cllr David Renard, LGA Housing Spokesperson, said: "It is good the Government has set out measures to support renters, which will go some way to helping to protect tenants struggling financially and at risk of eviction. To give further protection to households, the Government should bring forward its pledge to end 'no fault evictions' as well as commit to maintaining local housing allowance rates at the lowest third of market rents beyond the period it has committed to."



### Pavement parking

The Department for Transport has launched a consultation on pavement parking and making pavements accessible to all. Cllr David Renard, LGA Transport Spokesperson, said: "The LGA has long called for the ban on pavement parking to be extended to all areas of England, with councils able to make exemptions, so we are pleased government has launched this consultation."

### Cargo bikes

A new report on transport decarbonisation by the LGA says delivery companies should consider swapping large vans for cargo bikes where possible to cut carbon emissions, improve air quality and reduce congestion. Courier bikes can replace up to 10 per cent of conventional vans in areas where the final delivery route is no more than 2 km, without changing the overall network efficiency. Cllr David Renard, LGA Transport Spokesperson, said: "We need to look at how we manage online deliveries in the future and consider new delivery options that are more climate and road-friendly. Swapping large vans for cargo bikes is one way in which we can make a really positive difference to our environment and help achieve the country's carbon reduction targets." See [www.local.gov.uk/decarbonising-transport](http://www.local.gov.uk/decarbonising-transport) and p22 for more information.

## Attacks on firefighters up 66%

**Tougher sentences are needed to help tackle a rise in attacks on fire crews, the LGA has said.**

Latest government figures show that attacks on firefighters in England have surged by 66 per cent in four years, from 578 in 2014/15 to 961 in 2018/19, with the number injured up 175 per cent, from 24 to 66.

The attacks, which have increased during lockdown in some areas, put firefighters at risk of serious injury, and can cause a vehicle to be withdrawn from service.

Cllr Ian Stephens, Chair of the LGA's Fire Services Management Committee, said: "The senseless, violent actions of a minority of people put firefighters at risk of injury or even worse and can also stop them from attending an emergency where lives may be at risk.

"Increasing the maximum sentence for assaults on firefighters will show that these attacks will not be tolerated."

Meanwhile, the LGA is calling for government to work with it to ensure fire and rescue services have enough funding for prevention work, as new figures show more than two million homes in England – almost one in 10 – do not have a working smoke alarm, while only a quarter of those with an alarm test it every month.

Fire and rescue services have experienced a huge increase in demand for prevention and protection work and safety checks following the Grenfell Tower fire, while the workforce has fallen alongside reductions in government funding.

The LGA says this is unsustainable unless the new provisions or expectations on fire and rescue services arising from the Hackitt review are treated as a new burden and funded separately.

"Extra funding to help with the increase in prevention work will help firefighters increase the rate of working smoke alarms," said Cllr Stephens.



## Call for sports recovery fund

Leaders from more than 100 sport and physical activity bodies have sent a letter to the Prime Minister requesting an urgent support package for the sector – or risk fuelling physical inactivity and related illnesses for a generation.

The letter, led by Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson DBE, Chair of ukactive, and Andrew Moss, Chairman of the Sport and Recreation Alliance, highlights a report published by Sport England and Sheffield Hallam University last month that showed every £1 spent on community sport and physical activity generates nearly £4 for the English economy.

Councils are responsible for a third of swimming pools, 31 per cent of grass pitches, 13 per cent of sports halls and almost one-fifth of all health and fitness facilities.

Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson, Chair of the

LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, said:

"Councils across the country are providing their communities with access to sport and leisure facilities to encourage healthier and more active lifestyles.

"However, COVID-19 and the need to socially distance has undermined their ability to generate income, and risks seeing many close permanently.

"The LGA has been making the case for long-term funding to ensure leisure facilities can continue to provide vital services for low income communities.

"As we look to recover from the coronavirus crisis, it is essential for the Government to provide funding to ensure that all communities have access to quality sports facilities and activities."

● See p13



# PARLIAMENT

## Evidence and influence

The LGA is raising key local government concerns with parliamentarians ahead of major decisions affecting the sector

**Giving evidence to parliamentary select committee inquiries offers a valuable opportunity to put councils' ideas, proposals for reform and key issues to MPs and Peers.**

Our evidence often forms part of the recommendations to national government contained in the committees' final reports, so this work is especially important when it comes to major policy developments.

As we head towards some big decisions on a government Spending Review, devolution, social care and planning, to name a few, the LGA has been pressing councils' concerns at a series of recent committee hearings.

For example, Sarah Pickup, the LGA's Deputy Chief Executive, gave evidence to the Health and Social Care Select Committee, outlining the value of adult social care and the importance of its local dimension.

Ahead of the Spending Review, she set out the funding needed to maintain current levels of service and made the case for investment to tackle other challenges, such as unmet need.

She also highlighted the need for a new deal for care workers, and for lasting reforms to put care and support on a sustainable long-term footing.

Giving evidence after her session, Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock MP recognised the important contribution of the adult social care workforce and the need to reform the care and support system.

Meanwhile Cllr Kevin Bentley, Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board, gave evidence to the International Trade Committee's inquiry on freeports. He said freeports should provide a stimulus for regeneration and flagged the importance of local government



*“Councils need to be enabled to innovate and create services tailored to their communities”*

being involved in their development.

He noted some councils' concerns that government's proposals do not address how regulatory standards are to be upheld. Cllr Bentley also highlighted our work on promoting a green and sustainable recovery, which will be important when considering the environmental impact of freeports.

In another example of councils influencing parliamentarians, Cllr Roger Gough, Leader of Kent County Council, gave evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC).

Cllr Gough highlighted how councils are supporting Kent during the current influx of UASC and the need for the asylum system to be adequately funded.

He welcomed a consultation on the National Transfer Scheme as recognition of the importance of finding an urgent,

sustainable and long-term solution to supporting UASC.

Finally, Cllr David Renard, Chairman of the LGA's Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board, gave evidence to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee's inquiry on flooding. He pushed for the resources councils need to play an effective part in local flood management, given government grant funding is due to run out at the end of the financial year.

Committee Chair Neil Parish MP agreed that flood management funding should be made available to local authorities and promised to take this directly to George Eustice MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

All of these issues and more will feature in the LGA's campaign around the Spending Review and our calls to 'Re-think local'.

COVID-19 has demonstrated that, to achieve the best outcomes, councils need to be enabled to innovate and create services that are tailored to their communities and localities, with government departments supporting councils. Local democratic control and sustainable funding for councils will achieve better outcomes.

We will be making all these points as we continue to work with parliamentarians on local government's agenda for building back better.

**i** For more information about the LGA's work in Parliament, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/parliament](http://www.local.gov.uk/parliament). See [www.local.gov.uk/re-thinking-local](http://www.local.gov.uk/re-thinking-local) for our 'Re-thinking local' campaign



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

# Bracing for a second wave

Councils and councillors continue to work tirelessly to support residents and local businesses through the pandemic

**A**s **first** was going to press, it was clear that we have reached another critical phase in our battle against coronavirus.

With the number of people testing positive for COVID-19 now at levels last seen in early May, we need to redouble our efforts to minimise a second wave.

Colleagues in central and local government are working hard to implement new and targeted restrictions to slow the spread of the virus. In addition to local restrictions, we are now seeing new national restrictions.

These include: a 10pm curfew on pubs and restaurants; licensed premises required to operate a table service only; a tightening of the 'rule of six'; extended requirements for wearing masks; and a direction to work at home, where possible.

Large-scale sporting events and business conferences will not be able to operate from 1 October, as originally planned. The Government is working on what can be done to support these sectors.

The penalty for failing to wear a mask or breaking the 'rule of six' has doubled to £200 for the first offence, and police and councils will be provided with the extra funding they need for enforcement.

People are also now required by law to self-isolate if they have tested positive for coronavirus or have been traced as a close contact of someone who has. This will be enforced by the police, backed up by new fines starting at £1,000.

We are pleased that the



*"While additional funding is always welcome, councils also need the right enforcement tools"*

Government has recognised that people on low incomes who cannot work from home may need additional help with self-isolating – they will be supported by a payment of £500. These payments will be administered by councils, alongside discretionary funding to support people in need who fall outside this scheme.

The LGA is working closely with government departments on the

details, but setting up these schemes from scratch in a matter of weeks will be challenging.

It is vital that government works extremely closely with councils so they can prepare and have immediate access to test and other data, to get support to those people who need it.

Given the ongoing and significant funding pressures they face, urgent clarity is needed about how councils will be reimbursed for the costs of setting up these schemes and the payments themselves.

As ever throughout this crisis, the LGA continues to work closely with government, and to emphasise the need to ensure maximum flexibility for councils to spend any additional funds in a way that has the most impact locally.

While additional funding is always welcome, councils also need the right enforcement tools, as well as a pragmatic approach to helping them manage competing priorities and the demands that have been placed on them in recent months.

Councillors and their councils have been true leaders during the pandemic. When rapid action was needed, they have delivered for residents and remain best placed to understand and respond to the complex challenges faced by local communities.

They continue to work tirelessly to support residents and businesses through this pandemic, keeping local services running and playing their part in supporting the national effort.

It is vital they have the resources they need to lead and protect their communities, and to minimise the impact of a second wave of this deadly virus.



For the latest updates for councils on COVID-19, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus](https://www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus)



# React, respond and renew

Local government's workforce has been at the heart of helping us through the coronavirus crisis



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

**C**ouncils, and our staff, have worked at breakneck speed and pulled out all the stops to protect communities and support the most vulnerable in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

But how has the national emergency changed work and what does the future of work look like for local government?

From the moment lockdown was announced, councils needed to prioritise vital local services. Huge

numbers of staff started working from home, while critical and frontline workers were adapting to social distancing guidelines, hand washing and personal protective equipment (PPE).

Managers had to swiftly adapt to managing frontline and remote teams while trying to implement a tidal wave of new government guidance on service delivery and working practices.

This 'react' phase was intense, but the local government workforce proudly rose to the challenge and

**i** For more information about the work of the LGA's Workforce Team and its support for councils, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/our-support/workforce-and-hr-support](http://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/workforce-and-hr-support). If you are interested in working with us on these issues, please email [workforce@local.gov.uk](mailto:workforce@local.gov.uk)

found new ways to support their communities through the crisis.

It's becoming clearer we won't go back to exactly how things were pre-pandemic. That's why, after our own 'react' phase – dealing with terms and conditions and new ways of working – the LGA's Workforce Team started to think about how we could capture the workforce experience and identify what issues we should consider to proactively shape the future.

We've now published our paper, 'React, recover, renew', which aims to capture this strange snapshot in time, and help stimulate that thinking. This paper provides a workforce narrative to the journey through recovery and points the way to renewal.

For example, we may have been surprised about which roles emerged as being critical during the pandemic, and we have a lot to learn about what this has taught us about workforce planning, skills shortages and reshaping jobs.

We're also talking so much more about diversity and inclusivity – we must ensure that we equality-proof the future. So when we're talking about increasing home-based working or interviewing people via digital means, for example, we will need to be careful that we're not excluding candidates or allowing unconscious bias to drive our decisions.

We've set out considerations about home-based working and, while we suggest it's too early to declare the office is over, things are clearly going to change.

One outcome of this crisis will be more emphasis on developing behavioural and values-driven leadership, and we're discussing how the LGA can support councils to embed this throughout their organisations – look out for our inclusive leadership webinar later in the autumn.

Another key theme that's clearly here to stay is employee wellbeing. There are already signs that COVID-19 has taken its toll on the nation's mental health. Managers will need to be compassionate and develop a strong framework to support employees' mental health, so that will also become a key part of our support offer.

If the crisis showed us anything, it is that people really are the biggest asset in local government. Whatever the future holds, local communities are going to need to be confident that we're getting this right. We are here to support you in doing just that.







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

# Public health reforms

**T**he timing and rationale for the dismantling of Public Health England (PHE) are a significant concern at a time when we need absolute stability, clarity and consistency in our public health services.

The past six months have been extremely challenging, and working effectively with PHE has been absolutely mission critical for local government in tackling COVID-19.

There will be time to reflect on how national government and its agencies responded to the pandemic, but, for now, our focus must remain firmly on how best to prevent and manage a possible second wave in the weeks and months to come.

What matters now is ensuring that the new National Institute for Health Protection (NIHP) works, and it will have to prove itself at lightning speed.

Local government needs answers from the Government, and quickly, about what the short, medium and long-term future holds for public health – in particular, how the whole 'public health system' will be structured and work in future.

We have a vested interest in making sure that the public health system in England is match ready for whatever comes its way.

The establishment of PHE and the transfer of public health to councils were born out of the Health and Social Care Act 2012. This transfer to local government from the NHS remains one of the most significant extensions of its powers and duties in a generation.

It continues to represent a unique opportunity to change the focus from treating sickness to actively promoting health and wellbeing.

The rationale for a local government lead is unchanged: that the greatest impacts on health are in the circumstances in which we live – employment, education,

## Local leaders must play a part in the design of a new public health service that improves and protects our health

environment – and the impact of socio-economic inequalities. Local government can certainly have more of an impact on these factors than the NHS.

Bringing public health back into local government was never a 'drag and drop' exercise. It was, and continues to be, about building a new and enhanced, locally led, 21st-century public health service, where innovation is fostered and promoted, supported by the expertise of professionals and key partners.

It is worth reminding ourselves that, before the transfer of responsibility to local government, public health was not in the best of condition. There was too much reliance on top-down targets that limited local initiative.

Too many different organisations with a public health remit confused, rather than clarified, core messages. It became clear very quickly to those of us working in local government that public health services would have benefited from greater scrutiny by commissioners, an injection of local accountability and a relentless

drive to offer better value for money to the taxpayer.

Councils and councillors all over the country have shown real leadership during the coronavirus crisis and what can be achieved when responses are rooted in the local community. Despite funding pressures, councils have created new services, pulled together partners and instinctively protected the most vulnerable.

These same leaders must now play a part in the design of a new public health system, a system that not only protects us, but reduces health inequalities, and the core purpose of which is to improve the health of the public.

The LGA will be working to amplify these voices and messages in the coming months.

**i** This article forms part of the LGA's 'Re-thinking local' series of think pieces, see [www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/re-thinking-local](http://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/re-thinking-local)





# Just do it

Sport and physical activity have a key role to play in supporting and leading communities through COVID-19



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

**T**he coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the positive impact of sport and physical activity on local residents' lives.

The Government's urging of individuals to exercise during the crisis, coupled with more free time, encouraged 30 per cent of people to be more active during lockdown, making widespread use of parks and green spaces.

However, the services that will help sustain these increased levels of activity have also suffered badly from COVID-19. Barely half of the public leisure estate has reopened, with 20 per cent of memberships already cancelled.

This has a major impact on leisure providers, with more than two-thirds saying their future is insecure and facilities are at risk. One in four community clubs report they may close, with more than half of those

most at risk located in deprived areas.

The LGA and Sport England have developed a COVID-19 response programme to give local government officers, leisure trusts and active partnerships the leadership skills needed to address these new local challenges.

Early discussions from this programme have offered valuable insight into the future challenges and opportunities facing public leisure, and why investing in physical activity is important in a post-coronavirus world.

Deprived communities and black, Asian and minority ethnic groups have been most affected by COVID-19, and these groups are more likely to have health conditions that put them most at risk.

Conditions such as diabetes and obesity can be prevented and managed through physical activity, but lockdown highlighted that not everyone has access to a garden, online classes or parks and green spaces.

While the sector adapted to online delivery, those with no or limited access were left behind. Participants on our programmes shared how new partnerships with public health and local charities were quickly forged, enabling new routes into communities felt to be most at risk.

As facilities reopen, we must enact a bolder vision for encouraging inclusivity and narrowing health and social inequalities. This means maintaining the benefits of an online offering while ensuring that residents have access to an integrated option of local leisure facilities, green gyms, GP health referral and social prescribing schemes.

We must also change our programming to support new behaviours, such as an increase in families exercising together. Similarly, blended in-person and at-home classes will help people sustain new behaviours, while also integrating those who prefer or need to exercise in a facility.

This new vision brings opportunities to explore delivering sport and leisure services outside of traditional facilities, and cementing its value in wider council agendas.

Councillors play a key role in articulating sport and physical activity's contribution to national and local priorities, such as reducing obesity, mitigating climate change, active travel, high-street regeneration, and reducing pressures on adult social care services.

Officers will need to be strategic with financial planning over the immediate to longer term, using data insights to demonstrate value and seek new funding opportunities.

Recent research demonstrates how investing in sport and physical activity boosts the economy, levels up inequalities, creates stronger and healthier communities, increases consumer expenditure and productivity, improves educational attainment, and reduces crime. For every \$1 spent, \$3.91 is generated.

The LGA is lobbying the Government for an emergency funding package to stabilise the leisure sector – but we also want to create space and time for people to think about the longer-term vision for public leisure.



Please visit [www.local.gov.uk/topics/culture-tourism-leisure-and-sport](http://www.local.gov.uk/topics/culture-tourism-leisure-and-sport) for the latest insight, events and information about our work, and to sign up for our CTS bulletin. **Sport England's report, 'Social and economic value of sport and physical activity'**, is available at [www.sportengland.org/news/why-investing-physical-activity-great-our-health-and-our-nation](http://www.sportengland.org/news/why-investing-physical-activity-great-our-health-and-our-nation)

# Stop the power grab!

Liberal Democrat councillors have been challenging government proposals on planning and local government reorganisation at their virtual annual conference



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

**J**ust before lockdown in March, we were planning a busy local government presence at the Liberal Democrats' spring conference in York. That event was quite rightly cancelled, while our autumn party conference, held late last month, was a 'virtual' one.

A key theme of the LGA Liberal Democrat Group's work ahead of and during this 'online' conference season has been 'stop the power grab'. On both forced local government reorganisation and planning changes, we, as a party, see a common theme emerging: it is a power grab by central government.

Ahead of conference, we worked with our partners in the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors to table an emergency motion making clear our opposition to the Government's 'Planning for the future' White Paper. We are defending the right of local communities to have a say in planning matters.

I was delighted to speak to Sir Ed Davey MP just after he won the Liberal Democrat leadership election. Ed reinforced the importance of the local government family to the party, and how next May's local and regional elections were top of his agenda.

So we invited him to one of our fringe meetings to discuss the

Government's power grab. The meeting looked at how to oppose the Government's meddling in our planning system while delivering the homes we need. As **first** was going to press, other speakers expected at the session included Cllr Tumi Hawkins, Lead Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Delivery at South Cambridgeshire District Council, and Baroness Olly Grender, Liberal Democrat Housing Spokesperson in the Lords.

We also ran (virtual) conference meetings on other issues – starting with 'How can we revive our town centres and what are the challenges?' Cllr Emily Smith, Leader of Vale of White Horse District Council, and Dave Hodgson, Bedford's Elected Mayor, were joined by Tim Farron MP and Kirsten Henly, from Kingston First, a business improvement district in Liberal Democrat Kingston.

A number of our Liberal Democrat groups work in partnership with other parties to lead councils across the country, and we used conference to start showcasing more of their work. Leading Liberal Democrat councillors from City of York Council and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council spoke about the challenges and successes in working with other parties to run our councils.

Now that a large number of our councils have declared a climate emergency, what should they be doing next? At another conference meeting,



Sir Ed Davey MP, Leader of the Liberal Democrats

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*"We looked at how to oppose the Government's meddling in our planning system while delivering the homes we need"*

we heard from Wera Hobhouse MP, the party's former Energy and Climate Change Spokesperson, and Victoria Marsom, from Friends of the Earth.

We also heard about the practical steps that some of our councils are taking from Cllr Pippa Heylings, Chair of South Cambridgeshire District Council's Climate and Environment Advisory Committee, Cllr Giles Archibald, Leader of South Lakeland District Council, and Cllr Adele Morris, the LGA Liberal Democrat Group's Lead Member on these issues.

Finally, Cllr Gerald Vernon Jackson, Leader of Portsmouth City Council, led a debate about 'How can the arts and heritage sector recover from COVID-19? And what can local councils do to help?' He was joined by Stephen Crocker, Chief Executive of Norwich Theatre Royal and Playhouse, Cllr Chris White, Leader of St Albans City & District Council, and Baroness Jane Bonham Carter, our culture lead in the House of Lords.

It was a packed agenda and we look forward to continuing our work around these issues in the coming months.

**i** To find out more about the work of the LGA's Liberal Democrat Group, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/lga-lib-dem-group](http://www.local.gov.uk/lga-lib-dem-group)



# Learning from local achievements

Local government is at the heart of Labour's renewal



**Steve Reed** MP is Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

**S**ir Keir Starmer MP was elected Labour Leader determined to rebuild the frayed relationship between Labour nationally and the party in local government.

Labour councils were on the frontline of protecting communities against Conservative-imposed cuts, innovating to find new and better ways to support residents, and attracting investment and jobs into their areas.

While Labour was out of power in Westminster, we were in power in many town halls up and down the country, but too often we didn't harness the achievements and experiences of our councils.

Now, that's changing. Keir is determined that Labour will listen and learn from the best of local government. Labour's leader in local government, Cllr Nick Forbes, is a member of the Shadow Cabinet, and his contributions earth our debates with his broad experience of leading a council in such difficult times.

A council leader sits in every frontbench Labour parliamentary team, advising shadow ministers on key policy issues. These spokespeople are backed up by a sounding board of other leaders with frontline expertise.

Leading shadow cabinet members, including Keir, take part in regular Zoom calls with councillors and council leaders. As the COVID-19 pandemic took hold, this allowed us to listen, learn, and better hold the Government to account for their failings on test and trace, personal protective equipment and shielding, and their broken promises on funding that are now leading to drastic in-year cutbacks.

Labour has forged a new relationship between our MPs and

council leadership that is a real partnership. It benefits us all. It's made us sharper as an opposition, and it's forging a real sense of teamwork that will make us stronger as we head towards next year's expanded set of local elections.

We are ambitious for Labour local government to do even more. Deputy Leader Angela Rayner MP has launched a programme to support more people from under-represented groups into local government – younger people, women, black, Asian and minority ethnic people, disabled people – and to give more of the key workers that kept communities running during the pandemic the chance to run communities as councillors.

We know local democracy works best when it truly reflects the experience of the communities we seek to represent. We want to see Labour councillors open up power to the communities they serve, so people

have a bigger say over the decisions that affect them.

That's not just the right thing to do, it directly contrasts with the Conservatives who are intent on controlling everything from Whitehall despite all the evidence that it leads to failure.

As Labour embarks on the long journey back to power nationally, we know we must learn from our party's achievements in local government.

Whether it's Plymouth's community-led energy generation projects, Greater Manchester's experience of devolved health care, Preston's pioneering work on community wealth building, or Camden's ground-breaking work on diverting at-risk young people away from crime – the local innovation we've seen will shape our party nationally as we renew to win.

With the country in the worst recession in Europe, made all the worse by the Government's failure to get a grip on COVID-19 infection rates, we know it will take the best of Labour local government to lead economic renewal in our communities.

For Labour, local government is now where it always should have been: right at the heart of our party.



**For more information about the work of the LGA's Labour Group**, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/lga-labour](http://www.local.gov.uk/lga-labour)

*"Keir is determined that Labour will listen and learn from the best of local government"*

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# The LGA's spending review submission

Bringing power and resources closer to people is the key to recovery and improving quality of life

**T**he 2020 Comprehensive Spending Review comes at an unprecedented time as we battle to minimise the impact of a second wave of COVID-19 on people, the economy and public finances.

As **first** was going to press, the Budget had been delayed and there was speculation the review could cover just one year. However, it still presents an opportunity to shape the country. And on behalf of councils, the LGA's submission makes the case that bringing power and resources closer to people is the key to improving people's quality of life, tackling deep set inequalities and building inclusive growth across the country.

Recent polling by the LGA shows that 73 per cent of residents trust their local council to make decisions about how services are provided in their local area.

The detailed submission shows how, with the right powers, sustainable funding and enhanced flexibilities, local government can ensure our communities prosper for the future.

However, as things stand, many councils are in a precarious financial position. After a decade of reductions in funding and rising demand, councils

have faced the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their citizens, staff, services and budgets.

Recent independent estimates by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) – commissioned by the LGA – suggest that another £2 billion might be needed this year to meet all the pressures and non-tax income losses that councils have experienced and will experience as a result of pandemic, but that this could rise to £3.1 billion.

Further funding to cover local tax losses, as well as one-off costs that will be incurred to help local areas recover from the impact of the pandemic, will be required as well.

But we also need to look beyond 2020/21 to the next few years.

Councils will continue to face demand pressures on their day-to-day services, some pre-existing, others made more significant by the lasting impact of COVID-19 – all against weaker prospects for income, such as local taxation, fees and charges.

According to further IFS analysis, taking the pressures estimated by the IFS together, councils face an estimated

funding gap of £5.3 billion by 2023/24 – which could grow to £9.8 billion due to the uncertainty resulting from the continued impact of COVID-19.

In every part of the country there needs to be a re-think of public finances with a multi-year financial settlement. This must provide local government with certainty over their medium-term finances, sufficiency of resources to tackle day-to-day pressures and the lasting impact of COVID-19 on income and costs, and that recognises the benefits of investment directed by those closest to the opportunities for shared prosperity.

To achieve this, the Spending Review will need to move away from the traditional drivers of departmental spending towards a degree of fiscal decentralisation, in line with some of the world's most productive economies.

We need to re-think how we fund public services – not try to fit new and bold ideas into old frameworks.

The LGA's submission sets out how local government can act as the driver to achieve shared priorities between central and local government. Together, we can strengthen the UK's economic recovery, level up economic opportunity, tackle social and health inequalities, improve outcomes in public services, achieve net zero carbon emissions and improve the value for money of public spending.



Please visit [www.local.gov.uk](https://www.local.gov.uk) to view the LGA's CSR submission in full. See also p24



# Key asks of the Comprehensive Spending Review

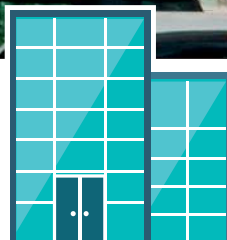
## People

- Provide additional funding to shore up **adult social care** ahead of winter and a potential second wave, and to help address long-standing challenges.
- This funding to be a 'down-payment on reform' that will finally put social care on a sustainable, long-term footing.
- Restore the Early Intervention Grant to 2010/11 funding levels, at a cost of £1.7 billion, enabling councils to reinstate **children's social care** services to tackle and prevent emerging problems and avoid higher costs later on.
- Provide long-term certainty over funding to support children with special educational needs and disabilities (**SEND**) and write off councils' existing high needs block deficits.
- Provide sustainable core funding for **public health**, invest in transformation and strengthen local leadership through devolution.
- Rewire behavioural **health** incentives and raising revenue, for example by levies on alcohol, smoking and sugary products.
- Take an integrated and devolved approach to **skills**, with a multi-year, flexible, outcome-driven local funding pot combining careers advice, back to work, training support, some apprenticeship funding and UK Shared Prosperity Fund to allow local partners to make swift decisions for their local businesses and residents.
- Provide a national focus on **homelessness** prevention work and funding that enables councils to help residents before they reach a crisis point.
- Fully restore core, separately identified funding for local **welfare** schemes to ensure all communities are fairly and effectively supported.



## Places

- Allow councils to retain 100 per cent of Right to Buy receipts and give them the flexibility to set discounts locally to invest in new and existing **housing** stock.
- Properly support and resource councils to make locally-led **planning** decisions for their current and future residents – including being able to set planning fees locally and be involved in the design of any new system for securing developer contributions for infrastructure and affordable housing.
- Work with councils to bring forward the Government's £3.8 billion capital Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund.
- Fully fund new requirements on councils arising from the Environment Bill, such as collecting a consistent set of materials for **recycling** and mandatory food waste collections.
- Allow councils to determine locally how **waste** is collected and to continue to charge for garden waste collection.
- Allocate the £3 billion outstanding funding announced in February for **bus** improvements.
- Provide additional funding to address the £11 billion backlog of **road repairs**.
- Provide councils with an extra £500 million to invest in supporting social prescribing facilities, including **leisure centres and libraries** which support community activities.
- Introduce a local, flexible £500 million Green Parks Fund to help unlock **green space** initiatives.



## Funding and other



- Provide an additional £10.1 billion in **core funding** by 2023/24, to sustain 2019/20 service levels (on top of inflation and 2 per cent annual council tax increases) and to deal with other cost pressures and help councils improve their core service offer.
- Replace the existing, fragmented **school's capital** funding arrangements with a single, locally held funding pot.
- At least maintain current activity and **firefighter** numbers. Further investment and council tax precept flexibility will be needed to build on existing improvement activity, particularly around technological innovation and culture change.
- Delivering **Building Safety** Standards across council housing stock is estimated at £8.1 billion over a 10-year period.
- The Building Safety Bill impact assessment estimates increased staffing costs for local fire and rescue services, such as building control, planning and environmental, of £10-22 million.
- Lift the legal requirement on councils to publish **public notices** in local newspapers, which costs taxpayers up to £20 million a year.



# Black History Month

Events celebrating the contribution and achievements of black people are going online, as councils and the LGA look to improve their own diversity

**C**ouncils across the country are leading efforts to help their communities celebrate Black History Month, by hosting their own programmes of events and activities aimed at commemorating the history, achievements and contributions of black people to their local areas.

Black History Month, which takes place throughout October, is an annual celebration of the outstanding contributions people of African and Caribbean descent have made over many generations.

While the country comes to terms with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, councils are



making use of the opportunity to embrace digital platforms to host the events and bring communities together.

For example, Worcester City Council has called for local black communities to share their stories and experiences of living in the city, with content received being hosted and shared on the Community Worcester Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/communityworchester](https://www.facebook.com/communityworchester)). This will then be loaded onto a new 'Know Your Place – Worcester' digital platform that is due to launch in December.

In recent years, the LGA has been making efforts to improve the diversity and inclusivity of councils through a range of programmes, including its Be A Councillor campaign, development programmes for black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) councillors, and a guide to help councillors cope with intimidation (see p19).

Councils want to see more people from BAME communities stand for election and step up to leadership roles in local government to create a working environment that is attractive and supportive for people from all groups and backgrounds.

As we look to help our communities recover from the coronavirus pandemic, it is more important than ever that we help build community cohesion, tolerance and understanding of each unique local history.

Councils are proud to represent incredibly diverse communities that have helped to shape the places where they live, and to be hosting Black History Month events that help celebrate the influence the black community has had on our local areas.



## Stories to shape Black History Month

The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames has asked black people who live, work or study in the borough to share their stories and experiences for a digital exhibition to mark Black History Month.

It is also keen to know more about black residents' experiences with local racism, how well supported they feel, what matters most to them and what barriers they face, so it can improve local services and challenge prejudices and behaviours that impact residents' lives.

This information will be confidential and will help shape a special 'Community Conversation' event at the end of October.

One of those who has shared their story is Euphrasie (pictured), who works at Richmond Council and lived in the borough for 13 years. Her

parents came from the Democratic Republic of Congo and emigrated to Germany when she was two years old.

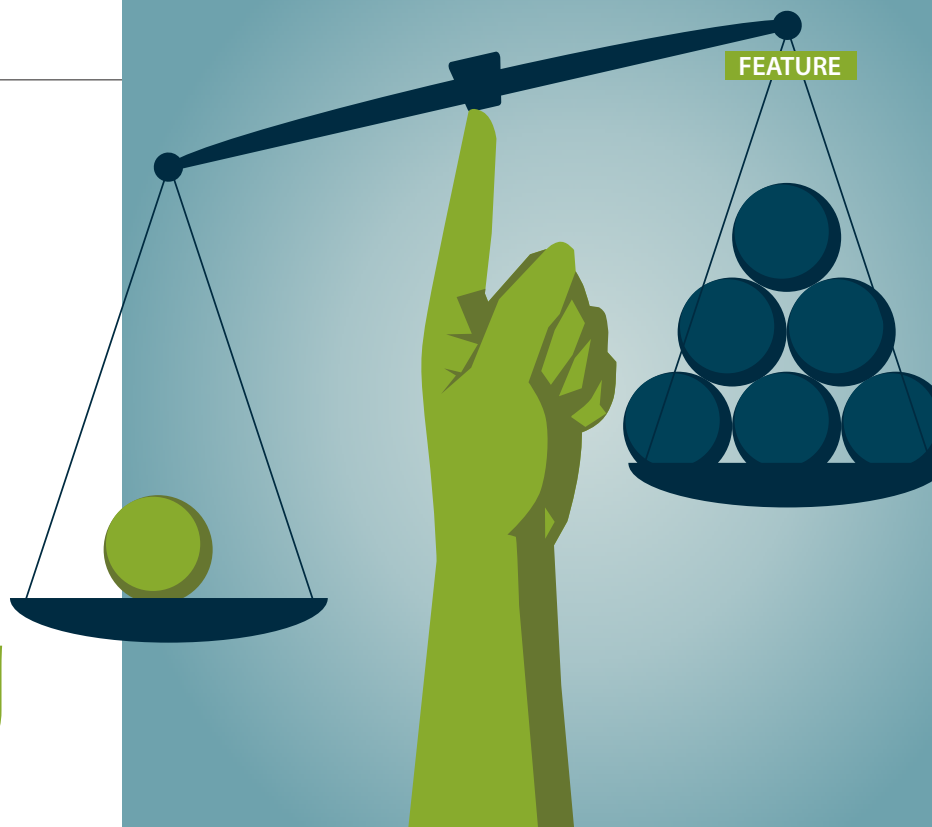
"In Germany, I was the only black child at my school. I joined the secondary school's gymnastics team, after being unbeaten at long-distance running at primary school.

"My coach told me 'Never give up on your dream of what you want to achieve...you can be a trailblazer and lead the way'.

"This was a great encouragement to me, and I've lived by that notion ever since. I challenge myself, aim high and try to smash the 'invisible' glass ceiling."



See [www.richmond.gov.uk/stories\\_to\\_shape\\_black\\_history\\_month\\_in\\_richmond](https://www.richmond.gov.uk/stories_to_shape_black_history_month_in_richmond)



# Levelling up

Tackling the embedded inequalities exposed by the pandemic is vital for community recovery

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic has acted as a magnifying glass, bringing to the fore the impact that embedded inequalities have on our residents' lives and life-chances.

Coupled with the heightened awareness that the Black Lives Matter movement has generated, this has created a growing recognition of the need for genuine change to address inequalities.

Throughout the pandemic, councils have demonstrated the vital role they play in protecting our society's most vulnerable people.

Councils are community leaders, promoting cohesion, and bringing people together in a common cause at a time of uncertainty. They have been advocating for and supporting their staff, many of whom come from communities that have been particularly affected by the crisis.

Councils have continued to provide essential services, while adapting services to meet specific needs, bringing together diverse partners to deliver support, and responding to established and emerging vulnerabilities.

They have been at the forefront of supporting their local economies and businesses, offering preventative services to those at risk of hardship, championing the 'green' economy, and

ensuring the harder-hit places and employment sectors get the support they need.

Evidence shows that there has been, and will continue to be, significant social and economic repercussions from the pandemic. These impacts – health, social, and economic – play out in complex and dynamic ways in local communities, with some groups more at risk of poor outcomes than others.

Councils are working hard to understand and mitigate these impacts and narrow the gap that the pandemic has widened.

Addressing inequalities already intersects with much of the LGA's work, with several programmes that aim to promote equality.

The 'Be a Councillor' programme encourages diversity in those putting themselves forward to become councillors (see [www.local.gov.uk/our-support/highlighting-political-leadership/be-councillor](https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/highlighting-political-leadership/be-councillor)).

The LGA's improvement offer includes the Equality Framework for Local Government and equalities peer review (see link opposite), which are due to be refreshed. The LGA's Workforce Team supports local government as an employer of more than two million people with objectives to improve diversity and inclusion at all levels (see p11).

Community cohesion and empowerment are key elements of LGA focus around creating safe and resilient communities, which is complemented by policy work around specific inequalities.

Underpinning all this, LG Inform makes local and national data accessible, which helps councils design appropriate policy and services for their communities and understand the impacts of their decisions on equality (see [www.local.gov.uk/benchmarking-data-lg-inform](https://www.local.gov.uk/benchmarking-data-lg-inform)).

We recognise more needs to be done to curb inequalities and stop them from being further ingrained, and that councils need support to address these issues.

The LGA has already begun an internal equalities review of its policies and processes and will be reviewing the range of LGA activity around equalities to identify how we can improve. Every LGA Board will now have an equalities advocate who will challenge us to embed equalities in everything we do.

As we move through the recovery phase, we must grow our understanding of how inequalities are perpetuated and help councils turn the tide in a post-COVID world.

**i** For more information and support on equalities issues, including the Equality Framework for Local Government, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/our-support/workforce-and-hr-support/equality-diversity-and-inclusion](https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/workforce-and-hr-support/equality-diversity-and-inclusion)

# Shaping the future

Local government's graduate development programme is bringing new talent into councils to help them improve local communities



Councillor **Kelham Cooke** (Con) is Leader of South Kesteven District Council

**T**his year, South Kesteven District Council has had the privilege to partner with the LGA, to take part in the National Graduate Development Programme (ngdp).

It's a vital scheme that provides a gateway for some of the country's brightest and best graduates to carve out a career in local government.

As one of the country's youngest council leaders, I feel incredibly lucky to have a job I love where I can play my part in making a tangible difference to the lives of local people.

Knowing how rewarding working in local government is, I was determined to give other young people the

opportunity to help shape South Kesteven District Council.

Graduates today want a career that makes a positive contribution to their community and gives them the chance to progress and put their skills and knowledge into practice. The ngdp does exactly that.

It provides participants with the ability to fast-track their career and gain experience and insight that they would rarely gain in other roles, while improving local communities.

A career in local government is immensely rewarding. It is also at times intensely challenging. At South Kesteven, as we battle with reduced budgets, the impact of COVID-19, and impending local government reorganisation, we have needed to adapt and change how we deliver our services at break-neck speed.

Having the right people in the team to deliver this is vital, and I know that the different skills and perspectives that our graduates will bring will

enable us to find new solutions and help us to think differently.

Importantly, it will also ensure that the views of the younger generation are represented at every level within the council.

As we get ready to welcome our first graduates to South Kesteven District Council, I am immensely excited about the opportunities that lie ahead.

On the cusp of launching our new corporate plan to create new jobs, more homes, and improve lives for residents, I know what a vital role our graduates will play in making South Kesteven the best district in which to live, work, and to visit.

## The ngdp

The National Graduate Development Programme (ngdp) provides councils and the local government sector with a pipeline of talent.

Each year, the LGA-run programme whittles down from around 5,000 applicants to find the brightest and best graduate trainees, with real leadership potential, a passion to make a difference, and the capacity to bring new ideas and take on the strategic challenges of local authorities across the country.

As well as recruiting from our diverse, national talent pool, there are also bespoke options to suit any organisation's needs: you can develop existing talent within your organisation, focus on graduates who already live and work locally, or even partner with another local authority to take on trainees.



**Councils and other local government organisations have until the end of March 2021 to express an interest in signing up for next year's intake.** To find out more visit [www.local.gov.uk/ngdp](http://www.local.gov.uk/ngdp)

ngdp trainees at Westminster City Council



*"The different skills and perspectives that our graduates bring will help us to think differently"*



# Supporting economic recovery

## Libraries are acting as innovation hubs for entrepreneurship



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

**T**he economic impact of COVID-19 will be felt for many years to come. In August, the UK fell into recession for the first time in 11 years and the second quarter of the year saw the largest quarterly fall in employment since the aftermath of the financial crisis in 2008.

In these challenging times, councils across the country are working to support their local economies, to mitigate the worst effects of the pandemic and to grow a local, flexible, resilient workforce.

With their offer of access to computers, job clubs, CV writing support, skills training and targeted support for start-ups through Business and Intellectual Property Centres (BIPCs), libraries have an important role to play.

These services are invaluable to many who would otherwise find it difficult to access the job market. According to recent statistics, more than five million adults in the UK do not use the internet, while 12 per cent of those aged between 11 and 18 years have no internet access at home from a computer or tablet.

Nearly a quarter of disabled adults are internet non-users. Meanwhile, occupations requiring digital skills account for 82 per cent of online job vacancies.

Libraries have been taking on this challenge for many years. They offer 26 million hours of supported internet access each year across 40,000 PCs. An estimated 99.3 per cent of libraries provide free Wi-Fi.

There is evidence that these services are proving even more important in the wake of the pandemic. Data for the weeks immediately after lockdown showed that, in one library, nearly a third of those who used the PCs did so for job-seeking.

Libraries can also act as innovation hubs for entrepreneurship and economic growth. BIPCs in libraries provide physical spaces where people can access support in protecting and commercialising a business idea.

The service includes free access to UK and global market intelligence, intellectual property advice, one-to-one support, mentoring and inspirational networking events.

These centres have been extraordinarily successful. Between 2016 and 2019, they have supported the creation of 12,288 businesses – 47 per cent of which were in the North – and helped businesses create an estimated 7,843 new full-time equivalent jobs.

Of the users who went on to start a new business, 55 per cent were women (compared with 22 per cent of business owners nationally), 31 per cent were from a black, Asian or minority ethnic background, and 17 per cent had a disability.

BIPCs generate £6.95 for every £1 of public money spent, which is why we are calling for government investment to roll them out to library services across the country.

The pandemic has demonstrated how quickly libraries are able to respond to a crisis. They swiftly shifted to digital channels, investing in e-books in response to a 600 per cent increase in demand, providing community events and education online, and reaching out to vulnerable customers.

However, for many people – including students who faced difficulties learning at home, people particularly at risk from isolation, and for all those struggling to recover from the effects of lockdown – the library building itself remains vitally important.

As councils tighten their belts in the aftermath of the pandemic, we must all recognise the important role libraries can play in recovery and the levelling up agenda. Libraries Week (5-10 October) gives us an opportunity to explore and celebrate this contribution.

**i** For more information about how libraries can support recovery, please see Library Connected's report 'Libraries: an essential part of local recovery', available at [www.librariesconnected.org.uk](http://www.librariesconnected.org.uk). See also [www.librariesweek.org.uk](http://www.librariesweek.org.uk)

# Decarbonising transport

Practical advice on how councils can help reduce harmful transport emissions has been published by the LGA



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

**L**ast year, the LGA, like many councils, declared a climate emergency. As part of that declaration we have been looking at the decarbonisation of transport.

Transport is now the biggest emitter of carbon of any sector in the UK. If we are going to reach our national target of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 or sooner, we will need a fundamental transformation of the ways we move.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, we commissioned the University of Leeds to convene a series of workshops to discuss what policy options are available to councils.

This work was themed around 'avoid,

shift and improve' – actions that can help us avoid travelling, that can shift journeys onto public transport and active travel, and that can help us improve the technology we are using to emit less carbon (see **first** 644 and **first** 649).

All of our communities will have to do all of these things to some extent, but the balance will be different for each area: some places will need to focus on improving emissions from cars, others will be able to move towards greater use of walking and cycling.

The right combination for each community is best decided locally.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us all to reevaluate how our transport networks operate but they have not altered our commitment to reaching net zero. Recovery from the crisis must be compatible with our decarbonisation ambitions.

Consequently, the LGA has produced a series of briefing notes



that are mindful of both the new reality we are in and the opportunity we can grasp as part of a green recovery.

The briefing notes, developed with experts from the University of Leeds, will help councils with a practical set of actions they can take forward for decarbonisation – from understanding how to set achievable timescales through to implementing measures that will help people change their travel behaviours.

They do not provide a prescription of what must be done, rather a menu of clear options for specific policy areas, from which various measures will need to be combined to deliver change. Councils will need to design the right mix for their own context and areas.

We hope local government finds them useful as we work towards our net-zero goal.

## Decarbonising transport briefings

- 'Getting carbon ambition right' – explains key issues surrounding carbon targets, budgets and emissions reductions.
- 'The role of buses' – looks at how to rebuild confidence in bus services and address shortcomings in reliability and passenger experience.
- 'Accelerating the uptake of electric vehicles' – covers planning new developments, on-street residential charging points and managing council fleets.
- 'Climate smart parking policies' – getting parking right in new developments, working with employers, car sharing and managing on-street parking.
- 'The role of land use, localisation and accessibility' – using planning and design to reduce the distances people have to travel.
- 'Travelling less and the role of online opportunities' – the carbon benefits of home working, online shopping, remote education and localised deliveries.
- 'Growing cycle use' – cost-effective interventions for building an inclusive local cycling culture and safe, healthy facilities.



To download the briefings please visit [www.local.gov.uk/decarbonising-transport](http://www.local.gov.uk/decarbonising-transport)



**Complementing the practical guides, the LGA is holding a series of 'Decarbonising transport' webinars which are free to all councils. These include 'Accelerating the uptake of electric vehicles' on 14 October, 'Climate smart parking policies' on 12 November, 'Land use, localisation and accessibility' on 17 November, 'Travelling less and the role of online opportunities' on 24 November, and 'Growing cycle use' on 10 December. See [www.local.gov.uk/events](http://www.local.gov.uk/events)**

## Time to revitalise rural areas



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

**The key messages from last month's annual National Rural Conference were loud and clear: the importance of rural areas to the national economy and 'revitalising rural'.**

As Chair of the Rural Services Network (RSN), which hosted the conference, I was delighted to see almost 400 delegates from across our membership take part.

The contributions of such a wide range of organisations from our local authority and extended membership across rural England reinforces the importance of rural debate and the rural voice.

The conference emphasised that rural issues cannot be considered in isolation. The rural economy is interdependent with the provision of affordable housing, rural connectivity, transport, and access to health and care services, which need to be fairly funded in rural areas.

The RSN is working to ensure that government incorporates rural needs in its plans for levelling up the country, post-pandemic. RSN's Revitalising Rural campaign, to be launched this autumn, has a series of policy asks to ensure that rural areas have the same opportunities as urban ones to develop and realise their potential.

The conference focused on 'revitalising rural' and five key issues, which form part of the wider range of subjects in the Revitalising Rural campaign. Among the key asks for each policy area discussed in the conference were:

- **Rural economy** – the Government should create a dedicated rural funding stream of a proportionate size within the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
- **Rural connectivity** – the Government should formalise its commitment to bring forward the nationwide rollout of full-fibre broadband networks to 2025,

and use its Better Bus Strategy to improve existing routes and restore valued routes between rural towns.

- **Rural housing** – the Government should rethink proposals that will decimate affordable housing provision in rural areas.
- **Rural environment** – the Government should incentivise homeowners to boost energy efficiency by creating a net-zero retrofit programme.
- **Rural health and wellbeing** – health hubs should be created in rural towns, providing treatments and tests that would otherwise require travel to a main hospital, and the NHS Workforce Plan should address severe NHS staff shortages in many rural areas.

Consultations on proposed changes to the current planning system and the 'Planning for the future' White Paper (see **first** 651)

formed a key theme throughout the week. Delegates were treated to an erudite session, with Lord Best, Chair of the Affordable Housing Commission, sharing his insights on both contentious issues.

Martin Collett, of English Rural Housing, perhaps captured the mood of the conference best with his final thoughts, saying: "We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reimagine and revitalise rural communities."

"If we are creative, collaborative and, with the right policy framework, supported by all levels of government, we can together help rural communities to thrive. But to do this, the most fundamental ingredient is more affordable rural homes."

In his summing up, Graham Biggs, Chief Executive of the RSN, said: "We know that progress cannot be made in rural areas until the Government delivers a fairer distribution of national resources to rural areas and more nuanced policy decisions to reflect the rural context."

*"We have a **once-in-a-generation opportunity** to reimagine and revitalise rural communities"*



**The Rural Services Network is a special interest group of the LGA,**  
see [www.rsonline.org.uk](http://www.rsonline.org.uk)





## A prime minister in waiting



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

**A**lthough very low on the list of sacrifices that coronavirus has forced on people, I was sorry not to have my annual catch-up with local government friends and colleagues from across the UK at the Labour Party Conference.

The online replacement exceeded my expectations though, and the visibility of councillors across the event demonstrated the increasing recognition of our importance to Labour.

The highlight was undoubtedly Keir Starmer's keynote speech. His message was clear: Labour is under new leadership.

He has set out his vision for Britain to be the "best place to grow up and grow old in", and for Labour to champion the values of decency, opportunity,

fairness, compassion and security.

The empty slogans that the Prime Minister is so fond of were notably absent from Keir's speech. Instead, he acknowledged the distinct divisions in Britain and outlined a roadmap for closing these gaps.

These include gaps in academic attainment among school pupils and "the deep injustice that a child's future is determined by their postcode, not their potential", and in the funding of social care and support for care workers who are "under-paid, under-recognised, and under-appreciated".

I have been delighted by the interest Keir has shown in local government, and his recognition of the work of Labour councils and councillors. He has worked with LGA Labour to link lead councillors with our Shadow Cabinet team and created wider sounding boards of leading councillors to improve mutual engagement between national and local politicians.

Britain needs a government that it can trust, and I am proud our new leadership has embodied a progressive patriotism and care for our communities.

Keir has established Labour as a credible Opposition, demonstrating the sort of constructive criticism that is needed in a time of crisis: mature enough to support the Government when they do the right thing, but unafraid to highlight their incompetence when they get it wrong.

I hope the country does take another look at Labour under Keir Starmer – because if they do, they'll see a prime minister in waiting.

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**"I am proud our new leadership has embodied a progressive patriotism and care for our communities"**

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

## Equal partners

**T**hese are unprecedented times in which to conduct a Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) and the Chancellor has already delayed his Budget.

As a nation, we are dealing with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people, the economy and public finances. This is alongside the transitional period, following the UK's exit from the European Union, coming to an end on 31 December.

Many councils are in a precarious financial position with billions of pounds needed to close the funding gaps local government faces (see p4 and p16), and the LGA's submission to the CSR makes the case for sustainable core funding.

But it also calls for councils to be able to bring together budgets of public services across a place to eliminate duplication of effort and drive savings to the public purse.

We need a collective effort to rebuild our economy, get people back to work, level up the inequalities some face and create new hope in our communities.

Responding to the significant economic challenges ahead requires renewed joint endeavour between local and national government as equal partners.

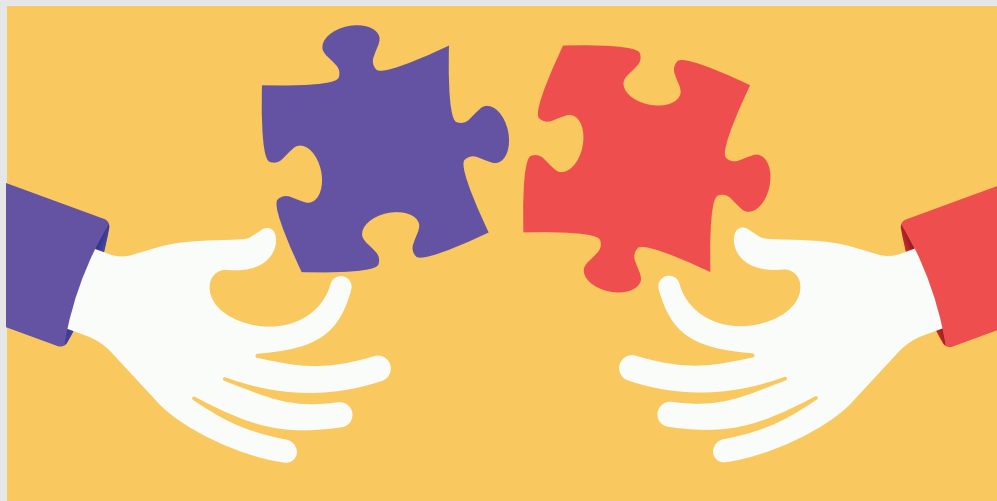
The effective delivery of this next phase will depend on all agencies working in partnership at the local level, and councils are best placed to convene this work.

No other body understands local areas better than councils, and local leaders stand ready to bring government departments and agencies together to deliver locally determined and accountable outcomes.

This will allow us to address the biggest public service challenges that have held our nation back for so long, such as social care, health, and skills and employment. Our paper, 'Re-thinking Local', set out our vision for this new approach to devolution (see **first** 650).

The highly valued services we deliver have been absolutely crucial to the initial COVID-19 response by protecting lives and livelihoods.

As we begin to look forward, bringing power and resources closer to people are key to ensuring our communities prosper for the future.





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

## Looking ahead to the party conferences

Following recent ministerial changes at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, I would like to congratulate Luke Hall MP on his appointment as Regional Growth and Local Government Minister and welcome Kelly Tolhurst MP to the team as Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Rough Sleeping and Housing.

I would also like to thank Simon Clarke MP for all his work during his time in the ministerial team, and in particular for his engagement with the LGA's Conservative Group, including participating in our recent devolution webinar.

We wish Simon all the best and look forward to working with Luke and Kelly in their new roles.

We would normally be preparing to meet up in Manchester or Birmingham for our annual party conference. However, as was the case with the LGA's conference in July, coronavirus means that unfortunately we will not be able to meet in person.

**"I would like to thank Simon Clarke for all his work during his time in the ministerial team, and for his engagement with the LGA's Conservative Group"**

Instead, just as the LGA did, the Conservative Party is holding a virtual conference from 3-6 October, and I would encourage all Conservative councillors to sign up for this via the party's website.

Following the events that we held in the summer, our LGA Conservative Group programme of policy webinars resumed recently with Housing Minister Christopher Pincher MP and Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock MP joining us to discuss housing and planning policy, and public health, respectively.

We are planning further webinars over the coming months, the details of which will be publicised through our fortnightly email bulletin.



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

## Test and trace is a joke

As I predicted, test and trace has become a joke in many parts of the country.

I have seen first-hand how local lockdowns have been handled here in Oldham and across Greater Manchester, with the confused messaging from national government yet again causing distress for families and communities.

The bickering between central government, health officials and local government is not

**"The adult in these conversations is local government"**

helping at all. The adult in these conversations is local government.

A coronavirus spike in Bolton and Trafford prompted council leaders to ask for restrictions to remain in place, a day before they were due to be lifted, creating mass confusion locally.

We are seeing pubs and clubs given curfews. And who is going to enforce these curfews? Another job for local government? The police? Or is the COVID-19 marshal in town!

Doctors and public health experts are telling the Prime Minister that the abolition of Public Health England (PHE) will damage the fight against obesity, smoking and alcohol misuse, let alone the continuing fight against coronavirus. Will he listen? Sadly, I doubt it.

It's hardly "world-beating", and hardly a glowing endorsement of NHS Test and Trace, when the new head of PHE's replacement body has had to apologise because people are being sent more than 100 miles away from their homes to get tested.

If you are bored with the COVID-19 soap, change channels to watch the Brexit mini-series that has just returned for the autumn. You could not make it up!



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

## Deliver on devolved powers and money

September began with a growing number of challenges marching towards us – a forced reorganisation, planning numbers that make little sense, sweeping changes to the planning system that fail to address any current problems in the system, the ongoing fight for funding, a care crisis, climate emergency – and all at a time of a pandemic.

Now, a few weeks later, it seems the Government has realised (as our group clearly said) that now is not the time for a big-scale reorganisation that most councils don't need, and residents don't care about.

What we do need is the devolution of powers and money promised to our local authorities.

Turning to the Government's commitment to its sweeping planning proposals – improvements are sought, but this goes entirely in the wrong direction, centralising planning policy away from important local voices.

Proposals to create local plans without

**"Now is not the time for a big-scale reorganisation that most councils don't need"**

local policies and speedy planning decisions based on computer coding would reduce public engagement, democratic accountability, and public confidence. It also works to reduce affordable housing and facilities.

It fails to address the unhelpful land-banking by developers that undermines our local plans and enables them to control the supply of housing, rather than local councils.

Amid planning consultations and making our case ahead of the Government's Spending Review, we are ready to deal with COVID-19's second wave.

As the Chief Medical Officer has made clear, we all have our part to play. I know, as before, our councillors will be at the forefront of protecting our communities.



Lord **Gary Porter** of Spalding (Con) is Leader of South Holland District Council and a former LGA Chairman

**This has been a very difficult year for our school pupils, especially those taking exams.**

The pandemic has decreased young people's confidence and belief in their futures. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds were already less likely than others to think they could be successful in life, and now the gap has widened.

So it's vital young people have the opportunity to hear from those who've left their school and made a success of their lives.

It's something private schools do extremely well with their alumni networks, and it's vital children in state schools have the same opportunity.

Alumni prove to students that 'someone like me' can succeed – they are role models, show young people a future that can be theirs, and give them a network to help them on their way.

So I'm delighted that my council is partnering with the charity Future First, which is already working with hundreds of state schools and colleges across the country

# Showing young people a world of opportunity



to establish alumni networks and links with local employers for existing pupils.

Together, we are piloting a Crowdfunder project to see if the community in Lincolnshire can help build these networks in local schools. If successful, the project will

be rolled out nationally, so every child in every school will be able to benefit from the experience of former pupils who have left before them and gone on to pursue successful careers.

We know that meeting past students can make a significant difference. It gives the students of today another reason to learn and persevere when the going gets tough.

But creating these networks in every school won't just be good news for pupils – it will be good news for councils too, because these pupils will be the local workers of the future. And with a successful workforce comes economic growth and prosperity.

After all, if I can make it into the House of Lords after a career as a builder there's no limit to what every child, in every school, can achieve.



**Future First is a UK education charity helping state schools reconnect with their former students and is the official charity for this year's MJ Awards.** For more information about the Crowdfunder appeal, please visit [www.crowdfunder.co.uk/future-first-crowdfunder](http://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/future-first-crowdfunder)

## Beauty in my backyard



Councillor **Mark Coxshall** (Con) is Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Strategic Planning at Thurrock Council

**Thurrock sits on the Thames, on the eastern boundary of London. With three international ports, it is the UK's port capital and has huge potential for growth.**

With £20 billion of planned investment in new jobs, homes and infrastructure, there is no limit to our ambition and determination to make Thurrock a great place to live, work and play.

Local communities have to be at the heart of what we do. It is essential that we take the public with us as we take this agenda forward.

Our 'Your Place, Your Voice' community events have been the vehicle for this engagement and, last November, we were awarded government funding to pilot the Prince's Foundation's BIMBY



*"It is essential that we take the public with us"*

(Beauty-In-My-Back-Yard) initiative in Aveley.

Working with the charity, we asked the local community to help us shape where they live, learn and work. We asked residents where community and workspaces, schools, parks, roads, play areas and homes should be built, and what they should look like.

We were then able to develop different options and plans for the town, and engage with the community again.

This approach puts the residents and businesses of Aveley at the very heart of designing and shaping the future of their town. It allowed more than 150 residents to

tell the council what they wanted to see, and which places needed to be protected.

The coronavirus pandemic slowed our progress, but also provided an opportunity to explore other ways we can engage with our key stakeholders. It is essential that developers, councils and communities commit to collaborative discussions that will shape better-quality schemes that enjoy higher levels of community support.

BIMBY has been essential in helping us facilitate those conversations and we hope to roll out this initiative across the whole of Thurrock. That way, we can hold developers and the council to the highest level of the design code, helping ensure we build the right homes in the right places to meet the needs of our local communities, now and for the future.



**The BIMBY toolkit, from the Prince's Foundation,** is available at [www.bimby.org.uk](http://www.bimby.org.uk)



# Repurposing historic buildings

The Haven Bridge and Hall Quay at Great Yarmouth



Councillor **Bernard Williamson** (Lab, Great Yarmouth) is Chair of Great Yarmouth Preservation Trust

**The continuing decline of the high street has been hurried along by the COVID-19 crisis. But in Great Yarmouth, a dynamism and willingness to be innovative, supported by the Architectural Heritage Fund, is helping buck the trend and creating jewels from treasured community assets.**

Since 2014, the Board of Great Yarmouth Preservation Trust (GYPT) has targeted the town's King Street by acquiring historic buildings in a state of severe deterioration and creating viable and sustainable new uses, including an art gallery, artist studios and quality residential housing and offices.

The trust has provided training and engagement opportunities for the community and established a social enterprise company employing people it has trained during the restoration works.

King Street is one of the principle historic and trading streets within the town's medieval walls and the King Street Conservation Area of Great Yarmouth. It is in a most deprived area and many buildings had fallen into a poor condition.

The intervention by the trust has created quality, affordable residential units that have helped to generate and sustain a livelier community.

The first building to be repaired and repurposed was a late 17th century house and warehouse. This has been transformed into an art gallery, four artist studios and a three-bed residential unit above. A robust business plan ensures that income maintains the building and services the loan to purchase it.

Using the same method, a neighbouring Grade II listed mid-17th century merchant's house with two cottages at the rear was saved from extreme deterioration and repurposed as the Neighbourhood Centre (one of the council's three neighbourhood offices), the offices of GYPT and four residential units in the ancillary buildings.

In 2017, using a mortgage loan from the local authority, a Grade II listed former merchant's house dating from the 18th century was acquired. Having been used as an American diner, it required significant and appropriate interventions to bring it back into use.

This now serves as office accommodation for the Sue Lambert Trust, a Norfolk-based charity providing support for survivors of sexual abuse. It also allowed the reinstatement of a three-bed town house and the repurposing of the cellar as offices for a newly formed architects' practice.

The final building – a jettied, timber-framed building dating from 1650 – was subject to a local authority compulsory purchase order and was sold on to the trust in 2020.

The GYPT secured a small loan from the Architectural Heritage Fund to purchase the building and a further grant to create a ground-floor shop with a two-bedroom residential property above. The work will be completed in 2021.

There are many towns in England similar to Great Yarmouth, with an

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***“Redundant and underused historic buildings can play an important part in revitalising towns”***

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evocative, historic past and a strong identity but now facing huge challenges.

The role of the high street needs to be rethought. GYPT and the Architectural Heritage Fund – through its Transforming Places Through Heritage programme – has recognised that redundant and underused historic buildings can play an important part in revitalising towns.

Finding new uses for these buildings can restore civic pride that deepens connections between local communities, their high streets and town centres.

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**i** For more information about the Architectural Heritage Fund and its Transforming Places Through Heritage grant programme, please visit [www.ahfund.org.uk](http://www.ahfund.org.uk)



**Colin Copus** is Emeritus Professor of Local Politics at De Montfort University and Visiting Professor at Ghent University

# Supporting councillors supports local democracy



**England has among the fewest councillors sitting on the largest councils and representing more people compared with our European counterparts.**

Yet more important for local democracy is the role councillors have in linking citizens to local government and effectively representing and working with constituents and communities. The possible creation of new big unitaries could lead to the loss of a large number of hardworking, dedicated councillors. Thus, the workload and time demands for those remaining will increase.

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***“All councillors, including opposition groups, and not just leaders, need parity of esteem and provision”***

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Moreover, it is not just the council that is the focus of councillors' attention, as the public will approach them about a range of organisations and services – the NHS, police and public utilities, for example – making extra demands on hard-pressed elected members.

Exploring the support councillors receive from councils shows a wide range of practices. Some barely recognise that

councillors outside the executive require any support, apart from training.

Even at the other end of the scale, where secretarial, administrative and technology support is provided, the balance is often heavily focused on leading members.

If English local government is to get bigger with fewer councillors, however, it is not unreasonable to look at the support provided to backbench MPs as a basis for underpinning the work of councillors.

A few steps are needed to rebalance the situation and provide all councillors with effective support. For a start, all councillors, including opposition groups – and not just leaders – need parity of esteem and provision. There is a challenge here for officers to refocus their work on meeting the needs of all councillors.

There is a general set of demands councillors across the country present, which forms the minimum basis for support provided and would make their working life on any council more effective. These include:

- Dedicated and focused secretarial and administrative support, along with IT equipment (the latter already common)
- Research and policy development facilities, with officers dedicated to providing research material on any subject

- A link officer to navigate complex council organisational structures
- Officers dedicated to supporting councillors in interacting with complex networks of external organisations
- A case-work centre to coordinate and respond to councillors' ward and divisional work.

While some of the above is provided by some councils, many members are left with inadequate support for their complex, multifaceted work.

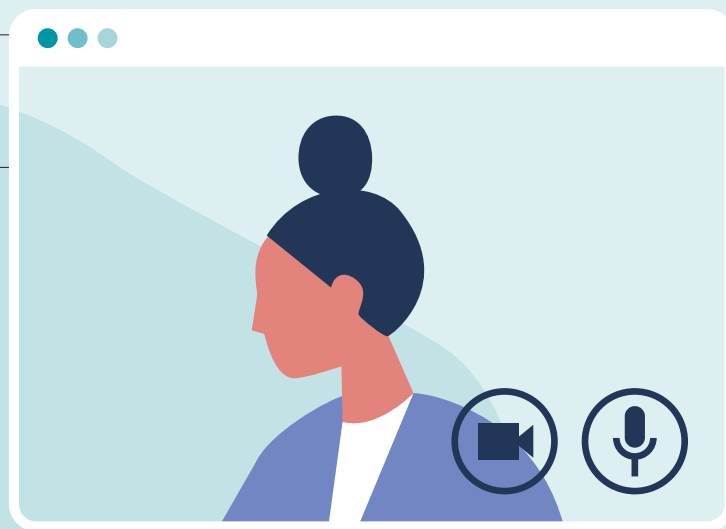
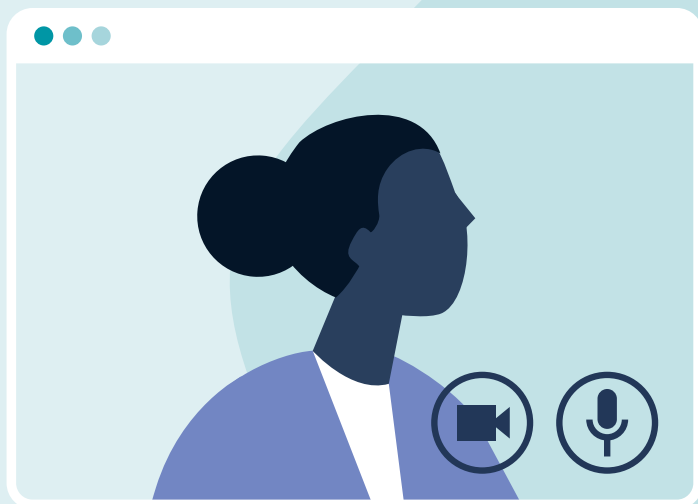
Like the opening scene of the 1960s TV programme *The Prisoner*, when asked what they want, councillors often reply 'information'.

The steps above, alongside a House of Commons-style library research service in each council, would go some way to meeting that demand. Principal authorities should make the support above open to parish councillors as well.

Finally, stop the cheese-paring, self-denying ordinance on members' allowances. Yes, increases get bad press, but not adequately reflecting the results of independent reviews of members' allowances to assuage the local media – which you will never do – unfairly penalises councillors for the financial sacrifice often made.

A question yet to be raised and often avoided is: do we now need all councillors to be full-time and salaried? Let that debate commence.

# COUNCILLOR



## Chairing remote meetings

**While many of the principles of running good face-to-face council meetings apply to remote meetings, chairing in a virtual world does present some additional challenges.**

With most council staff and councillors working remotely in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are all becoming more technologically adept.

But a good first step in preparing for meetings is to ensure you are familiar with the technology that your council is using – Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Hangouts and Google Meet, Skype – and the different functions it has. You may want to have a

‘test meeting’ for everyone, to check their connections, and/or ask participants to join the meeting 15 minutes early so any technical issues can be resolved before you begin.

Before the meeting, all participants should be made aware of the etiquette of remote meetings – such as joining the meeting promptly to avoid unnecessary interruptions, muting your microphone when you’re not talking, and not checking emails during proceedings.

They will also need to know how to make you aware that they want to speak – whether that’s by switching on their camera, using the ‘raised hand’ facility on some platforms, or via messages to a chatroom.

At the start, welcome people to the meeting and undertake any relevant introductions, including housekeeping. Use people’s names and ask them to speak, to encourage them to take part – and allow more time for responses in case of a slow connection.

If members of the public are allowed to ask questions, ensure they are given the opportunity and that there is time for their questions to be answered.

Committees should have a ‘moderator’

to make notes to create the formal minutes, and this person may be able to help the chair with spotting who wishes to speak at larger meetings.

Voting can be done in two ways. The simplest is for the chair to perform a roll call of all committee members and ask them to state their vote, which can be captured by the moderator or another officer. Or, if all participants can be seen on the video conference, they could give a ‘thumb up’ in favour, ‘thumb down’ to vote against, and a ‘flat hand’ to abstain.

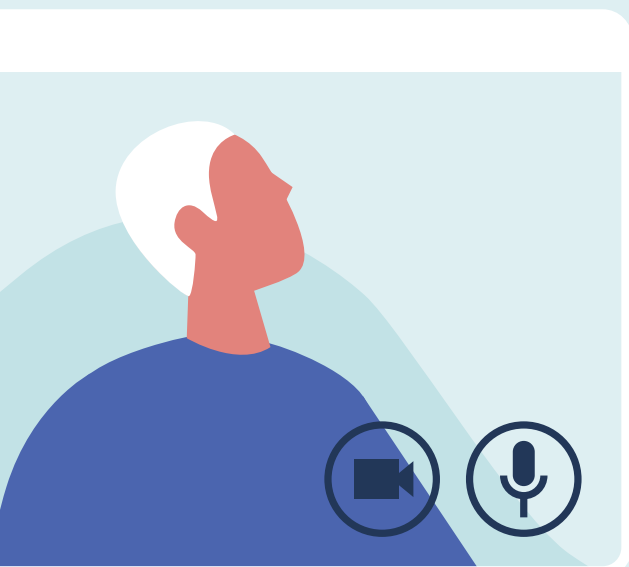
An alternative technological option is to enable participants to write down their vote – for example, by giving them access to a collaborative document, such as Google Docs, which all committee members can edit at the same time.

At the close of the meeting, clarify how any outstanding issues or next steps will be resolved, including who will do what by when. Thank everyone for their time and confirm the date of the next meeting, if there is one.

While the medium of meetings has changed, your role in chairing them – whether remotely or face to face – has not.

Your job is to give your residents or members of the public confidence that the business of the council will be carried out in accordance with the council’s constitution and procedural rules, and to make sure that meetings are run effectively and inclusively, in line with any agreed agenda, to deal with the business at hand.

Remember, you are not alone. Take advice, find out who is available at your council to support you, and work with officers before and at the meeting to make it a success.



**For more information about chairing remote council meetings,** please visit [www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/remote-council-meetings](http://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/remote-council-meetings). The LGA offers a wide range of political leadership resources and course for councillors, see [www.local.gov.uk/our-support/highlighting-political-leadership](http://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/highlighting-political-leadership)



# ELECTIONS



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



## The challenge of combined elections

**Local electoral administrators, unsung heroes of democracy, have become used to conducting combined elections in recent years. But May 2021 will present many of them in England with their biggest challenge yet.**

With county council elections and some further mayoral contests added to those elections held over from this year, many voters will face three ballot papers – one each for district and county councillors, and one for the local police and crime commissioner (PCC).

Where there is a local and/or combined authority mayor, four pieces of paper will be the order of the day. Electors in Bristol and Liverpool, for example, will be choosing councillors, city and region-wide mayors, and a PCC. In Cambridge, it will be representatives for both tiers of local government, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough mayor, and the Cambridgeshire PCC.

Voters will find themselves also following different instructions about how to cast their vote.

Where there are by-elections or all-out elections following boundary changes, voters might be asked to cast multiple ballots in their district ward, but to make a single cross in their county division – while any mayoral or PCC contest will involve them casting preferential votes for their first and second choice of candidate.

The Electoral Commission, local authorities and political parties will all need to provide guidance to electors about how they can participate effectively.

Meanwhile, we can expect heightened interest in the political outcome of next May's local elections – the first significant electoral test in nearly 18 months. More prosaically, Labour and the Liberal Democrats have new leaders who will at last have an opportunity to make themselves known more widely.

The contests originally due in May 2020 will see Labour defend almost half the seats falling vacant, in mainly urban England. Will Sir Keir Starmer MP be able to show evidence that the December 2019 breaches in the 'red wall' are beginning to be repaired?

The 2021 electoral cycle, on the other hand, is dominated by the shire

counties (or their unitary successors), where the Conservatives won almost half the total vote and more than two-thirds of the seats four years ago. That, though, was to prove a false dawn for Theresa May's 2017 General Election hopes just weeks later.

It is possible that a few counties will not hold elections, pending a structural change to introduce more single-tier local councils, but it will be the Conservatives on the defence in most of those that do.

Historically, it has been the Liberal Democrats who have benefited from Conservative electoral disarray in these areas. They have struggled to regain this role since going into coalition with David Cameron in 2010, and Sir Ed Davey's indication that he will tilt his party to the left may make it an uncomfortable home for any disillusioned Conservatives.

One phenomenon to watch out for when the election results are declared is the extent of 'split ticket' voting. A volatile electorate seems to make increasingly nuanced judgements about which parties or candidates are appropriate for each type of local administration. Voting the party line for your councillor at the same time as choosing an Independent for mayor or PCC has happened before, and may be seen with even greater frequency this time round.

### English local elections due in May 2021:

- 149 local authorities electing just less than 5,000 councillors
- Casual vacancies in an unknown number of additional councils
- Greater London Authority election for mayor and assembly
- Seven combined authority and five 'city' mayoral elections
- 36 police and crime commissioner elections.



# LETTERS

## Pros and cons of hybrid meetings

The exchange of views on hybrid meetings raises conflicting issues (**first** 651). It is more likely that ordinary members of the public – whom we would all like to get more involved – might tune into a meeting than trek into the meeting place.

For members, being together in the council chamber, and before and after the meeting, is particularly useful and effective.

However, virtual meetings have highlighted that access to the chamber can be more difficult for some members than others – a problem that will become much more acute if rambling unitary authorities are created for rural areas. This does make the case for selective use of virtual meetings.



The problem with hybrid meetings is two-fold. Because communication between members in the chamber is so easy, with an element of continuity and informality, they would be at an advantage to those participating remotely and only able to speak by invitation. It would be supremely difficult for the chair to ensure 'equal'

participation in discussions, whether chairing in the chamber or remotely.

There would also be the problem, while social distancing is in effect, of accommodating all who would want to attend in person. How would it be decided who should have the places available?

No doubt the leadership would decide, thereby reinforcing the dominance of a small group, especially in a cabinet system, at the expense of ordinary members.

**Cllr Christopher Swain** (Ind),  
Maldon District Council

## Private rentals, planning and pay

**first** is an excellent magazine, and the latest edition sparked my interest on a number of fronts.

Regarding improving the private rented sector (**first** 651), the sector has grown because people, like myself, have no hope of getting interest on our savings. I had built up a sum as a result of working all my life, so purchased a flat that gets me about £350 a month after expenses. The flat cost £80,000 and what sort of interest from the bank would I get for it?

As regards planning, I believe all applications should be started within a year of approval or the land reverts back to original use. We are sat on a massive 'land bank' of houses not yet built.

Finally, the thorny issue of councillor allowances is not going away. I believe there should be fewer councillors, but that they get a living wage. Currently, it is impossible to be a councillor if you have a full-time job and the company you work for will not give you time off. You have to be retired, run your own business, or work for a company that values community initiatives. They are few and far between; Yorkshire Water and Network Rail are the only ones I know that offer that, because most companies in this country couldn't afford to do it.

**Cllr Mike Jordan** (Con), Selby District Council



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



Helping out during the pandemic...  
Cllr David Kendall

## Cleaning through coronavirus

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, I found demand for my carpet cleaning business was very quiet. So I applied for a job with the NHS and, for three months, worked in a 76-bed nursing home in Chelmsford as a cleaning supervisor, in charge of a team of five. What a journey it's been.

I've met some lovely people aged 60 to 99, and all with a story to tell. It has been a real privilege to work alongside the care team and see the brilliant job they do every day. Many of them have been doing it for years, but it's only now that they are starting to get the recognition they so richly deserve.

My admiration and respect for all those who work in the NHS and the care sector has grown even stronger, and I will certainly use my new-found knowledge and experience to give them as much support as I can through my role as a county and borough councillor.

It's also been fun working with the cleaning team and appreciating just how important it is to keep the home as clean as we could.

The nursing home is now empty, with all the residents either back home or in hospital. It's a shame it cannot stay open, because it gave elderly people being discharged from hospitals much-needed time to adjust properly and get plans in place for their return home.

I've now returned full-time to working in my carpet and upholstery cleaning business, and do so with many happy memories. Let's hope and pray that we don't get a second spike and the home is not needed. If it is, I and others will be ready to go if we get the call.

**Cllr David Kendall** (Lib Dem),  
Essex County Council and Brentwood  
Borough Council

# Decarbonising transport

## webinar series

October-December 2020

Transport is the biggest emitter of carbon of any sector in the UK and if we are going to reach our target of net zero emissions by 2050 or sooner, we need a fundamental transformation of the ways we travel.

We are holding a series of webinars during October and December that will discuss practical, innovative and achievable actions that councils can take forward for decarbonisation.

### Accelerating the update of electric vehicles

Wednesday 14 October, 10.30am-12.00pm

### Climate smart parking policies

Thursday 12 November, 10.30am-12.00pm

### Land use, localisation and accessibility

Tuesday 17 November, 10.30am-12.00pm

### Travelling less and the role of online opportunities

Tuesday 24 November, 10.30am-12.00pm

### Growing cycle use

Thursday 10 December, 10.30am-12.00pm

The webinars are accompanied by a toolkit of seven evidence-based policy briefings that are available to download from our website [www.local.gov.uk/decarbonising-transport](http://www.local.gov.uk/decarbonising-transport)

For further information and to book your place on these webinars, please visit [www.local.gov.uk/events](http://www.local.gov.uk/events)

