



16 Be a councillor

Increasing the diversity of local candidates

10 **Testing and tiers**
How councils are delivering locally on COVID-19

11 **Youth jobs crisis**
Urgent measures needed to help young unemployed

14 **Procurement power**
Getting more social value from public contracts

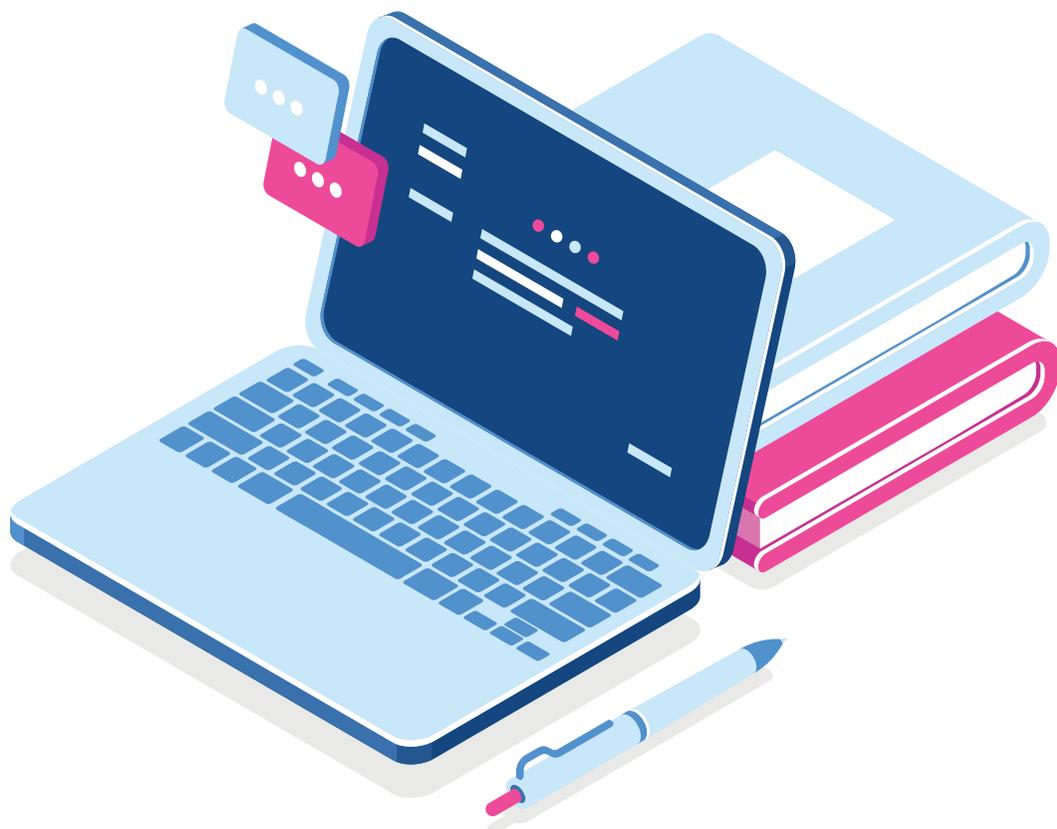
29 **Councils need mums**
People advocating for the services they use

LGA virtual events programme

As we can't meet in person, the LGA will continue to run a virtual events programme. And it's never been easier to join us!

The events cover a wide range of local government issues including lessons from COVID-19, children's services, construction, climate change, cyber security, digital, funding, housing, licensing, planning, public health as well as communication events on test and trace.

Hosted on the Zoom platform, the events are free to attend for all councils and government departments.



To see what's coming up next and to book online, please visit the LGA's events pages www.local.gov.uk/events

CONTENTS



Helping young people

C OVID-19 continues to dominate our lives and work, with Wales in lockdown and much of England subject to tighter restrictions as **first** went to press (p10).

With youth unemployment rates high and rising as a result of the pandemic, the LGA has called for devolution of careers advice, post-16 and skills budgets and powers to local areas so councils and their partners can work together to help young people get on in life (p11).

We also want to see children at the centre of the recovery, with more investment in the universal and early help services that vulnerable children and their families will need to get them through the current crisis (p13).

Elsewhere, we hear from Cllr Izzi Seccombe, Leader of the LGA's Conservative Group, about the Conservative Party's virtual annual conference (p15). And we look at the LGA's Be a Councillor campaign, which aims to increase the diversity of those standing in local elections (p16).

Finally, I hope many of you will be able to take part in our #CouncilsCan tweetathon on 10 November, highlighting the vital work you are doing to keep our communities running through the pandemic (p20).

Cllr James Jamieson
is LGA Chairman



4



11

FEATURES

- 10 Testing and tiers**
Adjusting to more COVID-19 restrictions
- 11 Youth jobs crisis**
Emergency measures to help the young
- 13 Children first**
Early help services need proper funding
- 14 Procurement power**
Social value from public contracts
- 15 Tory conference**
Supporting jobs and creating opportunity
- 16 Be a councillor**
More diversity among local candidates
- 18 Lasting change**
Tower Hamlets' work on inequalities
- 19 Planning reforms**
Affordable housing under threat
- 20 #CouncilsCan Day**
Delivering during the pandemic
- 21 Fire services**
Councillors' vital role in improvement
- 22 Return to work**
Recruiting planners, ICT and legal staff
- 24 Get connected**
Help to digitally join up local areas

COMMENT

- 25 Vulnerable children**
Funding for early help is critical
- 28 The Box**
Making stuff happen for culture
- 29 Mums in politics**
Why councils need mums

REGULARS

- 04 News**
- 09 Parliament – the Spending Review**
- 26 LGA chairman and group leaders**
- 30 Local elections – the gender gap**
- 31 Letters**



22



24



31



Editor Karen Thornton
Design & print CPL www.cpl.co.uk
Advertising andy.shields@cpl.co.uk

Write to **first**: Local Government Association
18 Smith Square, London SW1P 3HZ

Email karen.thornton@local.gov.uk
Tel editorial 07464 652610
Tel advertising 01223 378 005

Circulation 17,900 (October 2020)
first is published online at
www.local.gov.uk/first at least two days
before the magazine. To unsubscribe
email first@oscar-research.co.uk

Photography Getty Images and
iStock.com

The inclusion of an advert
or insert in **first** does not imply
endorsement by the LGA of
any product, event or service.
Contributors' views are their
own and do not necessarily
reflect the opinions or policies
of the LGA.

Local 
Government
Association

Fragmented funding ‘adds up to poor VFM’

English councils received at least 448 individual government grants between 2015/16 to 2018/19 in an increasingly “fragmented and reactive” use of public funding, a new LGA study reveals.

For the first time, analysis commissioned by the LGA has mapped out the grants issued by central government to councils, combined authorities, and fire and rescue authorities in England between 2015/16 to 2018/19.

This found that in any given year, councils received around 250 grants, compared with around 61 main grants paid to local authorities in 2013/14. More than a third were discontinued from one year to the

next – creating negative impacts on staff retention, long-term strategic planning, and joint commissioning.

Almost a quarter of grants issued each year were worth less than £1 million, equating to less than 0.25 per cent of the budget for a typical metropolitan district or London borough.

Around a third of the grants were awarded on a competitive basis, with councils often spending more on preparing bids at short notice than they stand to receive back.

The LGA is calling for the Government to end this fragmented and reactive way of funding vital local services and tackling

demand pressures. Instead, helpful additional funding for councils should be delivered through primary sources of local government funding rather than individual programmes.

Cllr Richard Watts, Chair of the LGA's Resources Board, said: “The use of short-term grants is increasingly representing poor value for money. Councils need certainty to plan local services without the added burden of navigating a complex and fragmented funding landscape.

“If fragmentation and ringfencing of grants is reduced, councils can provide much better value for the same amount of funding and provide services that prevent crises from happening, rather than simply managing them when it is too late.

“The Government needs to radically re-think public spending in a way that is fit for the future and empowers councils to deliver on the ambition for our communities that central and local government share.”

LGA: ‘Restore £1.7 billion early intervention funding’

The LGA has called for £1.7 billion in government cuts to early intervention funding to be reversed, as councils prepare for a surge in demand for support for children and young people who have “disappeared” during the pandemic.

Councils are bracing themselves for a rise in referrals for support that would have normally been made when children were being seen regularly by social workers, schools and health workers.

The Early Intervention Grant

fell from £2.8 billion in 2010/11 to £1.1 billion in 2018/19, forcing children's services departments to cut back on early help services that can help tackle and prevent emerging problems before they reach crisis point.

In a new report, ‘A child-

centred recovery’, the LGA calls for restoration of the lost £1.7 billion and for the Government to work with councils and providers to increase the availability of care placements for looked-after children and young people.

Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: “Children's services were already under strain prior to the pandemic, but those pressures have been exacerbated by COVID-19 and these services are now even more crucial to help families get through difficult periods.

“Support for significant interventions, including child protection plans and children entering the care system, will be needed, alongside proper investment in both children's mental health services and vital youth services to help a generation hit hard during the crisis.

“The Government's review of the children's care system needs to begin as soon as possible, but we want to work with ministers ahead of this on increasing provision for care placements so councils can continue to best support and protect our most vulnerable children.”

● See p13 and p25



Spending Review shortened to one year

The Chancellor has decided to only conduct a one-year Spending Review in order to prioritise the response to COVID-19, and focus on immediate support to create jobs.

Multi-year NHS and schools' budgets will be set, however, alongside key infrastructure projects. The precise date for the Review has yet to be announced, but the Government said it will be in the "last weeks of November".

The LGA said it is "hugely disappointing" that councils will only get a one-year funding settlement for the third year in a row, saying it is a "missed opportunity" for the Government to draw a line under inefficient short-term budgeting, that leads to higher costs to the public purse.

It said councils will face a £4 billion funding gap next year just to keep services running at today's levels and need urgent certainty about how to set budgets and to plan any measures they may be forced to take to cut spending.

LGA Chairman Cllr James Jamieson said: "Only with sustainable and certain long-term funding can councils protect and improve services and play a leading role in addressing the stark inequalities the pandemic has exposed, developing a green recovery, tackling skills

gaps and rebuilding the economy so that it benefits everyone.

"We urge the Government to publish this Spending Review as soon as possible as the end of November is incredibly late for councils to find out how much money they will have to provide services next year. Before the Spending Review is announced, the Government must confirm that the resources councils have this year will not reduce and there will be no business rates reset next year.

"Many councils were in a difficult financial position before the pandemic hit after a decade of central government funding reductions. They will continue to face demand pressures on day-to-day services – some pre-existing and others made more significant by the impact of COVID-19 – amid substantial income losses, such as from local taxation, fees and charges.

"The Government has provided some much-needed support, but significant challenges remain. It is vital that the Government addresses in full the financial challenges facing councils as a result of COVID-19, including all lost income and local tax losses, and provides further investment so councils can protect and improve local services next year."

● See p9

Test and trace needs to be local

Local councils should be given the funding, real-time data and personnel to help reach all those who have been in contact with people testing positive for coronavirus, the LGA says.

Test and trace statistics published weekly have consistently shown that local health protection teams are reaching close to all cases assigned to them, with the latest figures for the week ending 14 October showing that 94.8

per cent of contacts were asked to self-isolate.

By comparison, for those cases handled either online or by call centres, only 57.6 per cent of close contacts were reached.

It comes as the overall number found through the system is at its lowest weekly rate since NHS Test and Trace began, dipping below 60 per cent for the most recent week.

Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "It is hugely concerning that the national test and trace system is going backwards in the number of close contacts reached of those who have tested positive for coronavirus.

"If we are to prevent this second wave from escalating further, we need the system to meet the recommended 80 per cent benchmark if it is to have any chance of success."



In brief

Extra COVID-19 funding

Councils in England will be provided with an extra £1 billion of government funding to address the wider cost pressures associated with COVID-19. Further financial support will be available for areas under 'very high' restrictions, to help with local test and trace, enforcement compliance and support for the clinically extremely vulnerable. The Government has also provided £30 million to help all councils support compliance and enforcement of COVID-19 rules and has asked local authorities to consider using this money for the development of COVID-19 secure marshals, or their equivalents, to help businesses and communities follow the latest guidance.

Helping the vulnerable



Updated government guidance on councils' support to people deemed "clinically extremely vulnerable" has been published. Shielding measures may be introduced in the very highest risk areas, based on clinical advice and for a limited time period. Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said alongside effective testing and contact tracing, councils need the necessary funding, data, information and personnel on the ground to support their communities, to help protect vulnerable people during the second wave of coronavirus.

Care settings

The Department of Health and Social Care has sent a letter to councils' directors of adult services, about the requirement for designated care settings for people discharged from hospital who have tested positive for COVID-19. Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Councils and care providers will work closely together to identify the most appropriate care homes, with the priority being that any measures must be designed to keep everybody, including both those who work in and receive care services, safe and to avoid the spread of infection."

In brief

Sugar reduction

Public Health England has published its third annual report on industry action to reduce sugar levels in food and drink popular with children. The LGA said it is encouraging to see sugar reduction in some products, including a 44 per cent fall in sugary drinks since the Soft Drinks Industry Levy was introduced, but it is clear more needs to be done faster if we are to tackle childhood obesity head-on. Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "It is vital that councils are able to decide how the hundreds of millions of pounds raised from the levy is invested, to ensure that our children get the greatest start in life."

Social care provider worries

An NHS Providers survey of trust leaders found that 83 per cent were worried that insufficient investment is being made in social care in their area. Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said social care deserves parity of esteem with the NHS and that social care services will play a vital role in relieving pressure on the NHS this winter and minimising the second wave of coronavirus. He said that councils and care providers have been working constantly throughout the pandemic to support the most vulnerable people, despite facing rising demand and significant financial burdens.

Unpaid carers

Unpaid carers are providing additional care for loved ones with increasing needs while experiencing reduced support services, according to a survey by charity Carers UK. Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said the pandemic "has further highlighted the incredibly valuable role played by unpaid carers and the difficult circumstances they face". He said councils assess and support thousands of unpaid carers every year and could do even more with the right resources, which the Spending Review needed to address.

Social care winter plan

Social care in England needs an extra £7 billion a year as an urgent "starting point" to avoid potential collapse of the market, MPs have said.

A Health and Social Care Committee report said an immediate funding boost is needed to keep existing services going, but this figure would not address growing levels of unmet need, with the full cost likely to run into tens of billions of pounds.

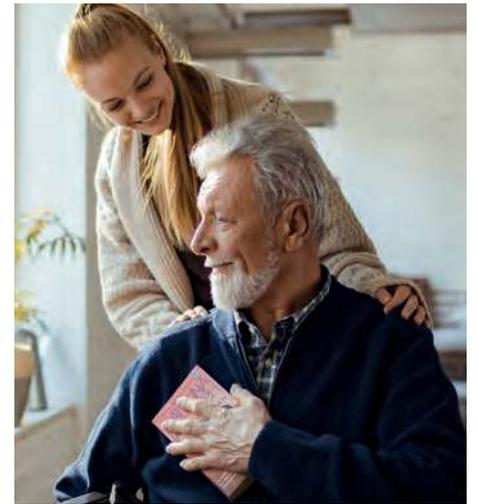
The LGA said cross-party agreement is needed on the future of adult social care, which addresses issues such as unmet need and care staff pay.

The Care Quality Commission has also published its State of Care report for 2019/20, which gives an annual assessment of health and social care in England. It outlines that pre-COVID-19, care was generally good, but with some specific areas of concern such as lack of investment and workforce planning.

The report also highlights that coronavirus has magnified inequalities in health and care systems and that it is critical that such services are designed around people's needs. The LGA said the unequal impact of COVID-19 on people using and working in social care needs to be addressed as part of future reforms, as well as building on the importance of closer working and local approaches.

In addition, independent charity Skills for Care's social care workforce report showed there are still about 112,000 job vacancies and very high turnover rates in social care.

Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the Community Wellbeing Board, said: "The Spending Review must provide councils with the extra funding they need to help shore up social care ahead of winter and get through the second wave of COVID-19, while also using this as the basis for future reform of social care to place it on a long-term, sustainable footing."



LGA: Action needed to save 'lost generation'

Today's young people face becoming a "lost generation" unless the Government develops a COBRA-style response to boost skills and job opportunities, the LGA has warned.

It said this should include appointing a new youth minister to lead efforts to tackle youth unemployment.

An LGA report said the current COVID-19 crisis has turned "a bad situation into a dire one" for young people.

It has urged the Government to use the Spending Review to devolve careers advice, post-16 and skills budgets and powers to local areas.

The LGA is also calling on the Government to work in partnership with councils to deliver the Kickstart Scheme and grant apprenticeship flexibilities to

increase the number of young people who can benefit from schemes.

Cllr Kevin Bentley, Chair of the LGA's People and Places Board, said:

"The unemployment crisis that many of our young people now face has become even more starkly apparent.

"Councils want to ensure every young person realises their full potential. Without action to address our fragmented national employment support system, we risk creating a lost generation of young people.

"Devolving careers advice, post-16 and skills budgets and powers to local areas, would allow councils, schools, colleges and employers to work together to improve provision for young people so that they can get on in life."

● See p11

School exams delayed

Most GCSEs, AS and A levels will be held three weeks later next year to help address the disruption caused by the pandemic, the Department for Education has announced.

The summer exam series in England will start on 7 June and end on 2 July for almost all AS and A levels and GCSEs, and will be underpinned by contingency measures developed in partnership with the sector, according to the Government.

Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "We appreciate greater certainty being given to exam dates next year, but further consideration needs to be given about whether a single exam is still the fairest way to assess pupils who have been most adversely affected by not being able to go to school.

"Equality of access to laptops and the internet for online learning has been an issue for pupils, while the closure of schools will have an impact on all children.

"A fair and comprehensive assessment is essential in this most extraordinary year. Previous results and teacher assessments need to be taken into account to ensure children don't miss out because of a virus

over which they have no control, while the possible impact of local lockdowns and self-isolation levels on the quality of pupil education also needs to be considered.

"The needs of young people who have fallen behind in their schoolwork through no fault of their own should be our first priority.

"Councils have worked hard with schools to keep pupils learning in the classroom and at home during the pandemic and want to ensure every young person's exams are subject to a fair grading system given the unprecedented circumstances. We look forward to seeing further details on the contingency measures outlined in the announcement."



Funding for new domestic abuse duties

Councils are to receive £6 million in government funding to help prepare for the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Bill, which from April 2021 will place a duty on councils to support victims of domestic abuse.

Cllr Nesil Caliskan, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: "Tackling domestic abuse is an issue that councils take very seriously, so we are pleased that government has agreed to provide funding to help local authorities prepare for the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Bill, which the LGA has supported.

"With rising demand for support during the pandemic, the need for comprehensive domestic abuse services and effective perpetrator interventions could never be more crucial to prevent

and eliminate this appalling crime.

"The new statutory duty in the Bill has only been placed on councils, but they cannot tackle this crime alone. Councils will need the cooperation of other public services, including the police, to work together on this.

"As well as fully funding the new duty, we are calling on the Government to use the Spending Review to provide long-term and sustained funding for early intervention and prevention programmes and wider community-based domestic abuse support, and the introduction of a National Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Strategy.

"This funding needs to be similar in scale to the Youth Endowment Fund, which is £200 million over 10 years."



In brief

Adoption 'bureaucracy'

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson has called for a reduction in "barriers" to adoption, with prospective families too often facing a "bureaucratic system with too many boxes to be ticked", he said. Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said that "councils are committed to finding loving homes for all children who need them, including encouraging people of all backgrounds and circumstances to come forward to adopt". She said adoption delays had been cut significantly and urged the Spending Review "to fully resource children's social care to ensure every child can be found a loving, stable home, whatever their needs."

Vulnerable children

A comprehensive recovery package is needed to tackle a rising tide of childhood vulnerability caused by COVID-19, according to a recent report from Anne Longfield, the Children's Commissioner for England. Her recommendations include greater investment in local authority early help services and more support for schools to reduce educational disparities between disadvantaged children and their wealthier peers. Cllr Judith Blake, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "It is vital that children's needs are at the heart of future planning to ensure that they are safe, happy and have opportunities to thrive."

Digital champions

The National Audit Office has warned that the Government may find it challenging to meet its 2025 target for superfast broadband roll-out, leading the LGA to call for local digital champions to help solve problems. Cllr Mark Hawthorne, the LGA's Digital Connectivity Spokesperson, said: "During the COVID-19 pandemic, more and more communities are reliant on having a fast and reliable connection to support home working, continued education and to keep friends and family in touch. The Government should use the Spending Review to empower councils to place a digital champion in every area to help facilitate delivery and support providers to install gigabit-capable broadband as quickly as possible."

In brief

Affordable homes

Communities could have missed out on nearly 30,000 affordable homes in the past five years if proposed government planning reforms had been in place, new LGA analysis reveals. Ministers are considering removing the requirement for developers to build affordable housing on small sites. Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Housing Spokesperson, said: "With rising housing waiting lists and record numbers in temporary accommodation, we desperately need to be building more affordable housing, not less." See p19.

Housing support

The Government has announced new funding for supported housing pilots and a new National Statement of Expectations, setting out what it expects to see in standards, quality and value for money. There will be £3 million for pilots in Birmingham, Hull, Blackpool, Bristol and Blackburn, which will run until the end of March 2021. Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "It is good the Government has set out measures to improve housing support for vulnerable people, with a national statement of expectation. This is an important first step to addressing councils' concerns about the quality, costs and oversight of some supported housing accommodation. We also look forward to seeing the detail of the pilot work."

Private renters



A report by Shelter has found that only half of private renters feel safe in their home during the coronavirus pandemic.

The charity says this demonstrates why decent, affordable social homes are needed. Cllr David Renard, LGA Housing Spokesperson, said: "With more than one million households on council housing waiting lists, the Spending Review needs to give councils the powers and tools to get building council homes again, which would not only help to meet the Government's annual 300,000 housing target, but reduce homelessness, get rough sleepers off the streets and support people's wellbeing."



Surge in lockdown recycling collection

The amount of household recycling collected during the COVID-19 pandemic has soared by as much as 100 per cent in some council areas, with eight in 10 seeing an increase, hiking up costs to keep services running.

Councils have already seen the cost of waste collections rise during the pandemic, because of additional cleaning of vehicles, staff shortages due to COVID-19 and routes being disrupted by more cars parked on the roads.

With many continuing to work from home and coronavirus cases rising, these recycling rates are not likely to return to normal soon, and the LGA is calling on the Government to use the Spending Review to ensure all extra cost pressures are met.

Councils and the waste industry also need urgent clarity on the timetable for implementation of the Government's waste and recycling reforms, which

would charge the producers of packaging the full cost of dealing with waste.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Environment Spokesperson, said: "Councils have kept waste and recycling services running during the COVID-19 outbreak, working hard to keep staff safe and deal with high volumes of household waste normally only seen at Christmas.

"This has led to additional cost pressures which must be met in full for councils to be able to maintain services and cope with this increase in the amount of recycling collected.

"The COVID-19 outbreak has interrupted progress on the Government's waste and recycling reforms, due to be implemented from 2023.

"It is critical for councils to understand how the reforms around consistency, producer responsibility and the deposit return scheme for drinks containers will work together and be funded."

New space standards for permitted development

The Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick MP has announced that new homes delivered through permitted development rights will now be required to meet space standards.

The rights allow existing buildings, such as offices, to be converted into homes without the need for a full planning application.

The Government said this provided 60,000 new homes over the past four years, but that it was introducing space standards because a minority of developers were delivering small homes "without justification".

The Nationally Described Space Standard begins at 37 square metres of floor space for a new one-bed flat with a shower room, and 39 square metres with a bathroom.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Housing Spokesperson, said: "We are pleased the

Secretary of State is bringing in this change, which is an improvement on the current permitted development rules.

"However, fundamental concerns over their impact remain. An independent report commissioned by the Government found permitted development conversions mostly avoid making any contribution to local areas, fail to meet adequate design standards and often create worse quality residential environments.

"It is vital that councils and local communities have a voice in the planning process and are able to oversee all local developments. This is the only way they can deliver resilient, prosperous places and ensure developers build high-quality, affordable homes in the right places and with the right infrastructure."

PARLIAMENT

Influencing the corridors of power in Westminster

Reforms and funding need to help councils support their communities



The LGA continues its work to help shape and influence the national agenda, shine a spotlight on councils' outstanding work, and push for the powers, flexibilities and sustainable funding local government needs to provide much-needed support to our communities now and into the future.

Positively, parliamentarians from all parties consistently highlight the outstanding contribution of councils in protecting lives and livelihoods, particularly as local leaders provide leadership to their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The importance of sustainable funding for local government has also been a common theme in parliamentary debates and questions.

The Government's one-year Spending Review provides a key opportunity to make the case for sustainable long-term funding and certainty for local government.

That is why the LGA produced a detailed and evidenced submission – with input from the Institute for Fiscal Studies

– which highlights both the funding needed to stand still, and the investment required to rebuild our communities in a way that levels up inequalities and ensures every area can prosper.

Alongside the Spending Review, we expect a series of public service reforms in the coming months that will have a significant impact on councils and the communities we serve, and this is a major focus of our parliamentary lobbying.

Given the consultations that propose major reforms to our planning system (see p19), it was positive to see MPs from all sides of the House agree with the recommendations in our briefing on the importance of local and community-led planning.

Meanwhile with new domestic and trading measures expected as the EU transition period comes to an end and the potential for further devolution to local areas, we are supporting the work of the Devolution All-Party Parliamentary Group, which is undertaking a wide-ranging inquiry into the reforms Whitehall can implement to empower local areas.

Fixing social care will also continue to be a major priority for local government. The LGA has published seven principles that should underpin social care and support reform in light of COVID-19.

These principles, including our call for the Spending Review to ensure sustainable funding for care services, have featured widely in parliamentary discussions including in our evidence to the Health and Social Care Committee and in parliamentary debates in both Houses.

Councillors can continue to support us in making the case to national politicians by helping your local MPs understand your councils' priorities and insights, the services that are under the most financial pressure in your areas, and the implications that under-funding could have for residents.

This will help bring to life the real consequences of the crisis we face, and could feature in their speeches, questions and scrutiny of proposals.

Where councils have the capacity, it is always useful for you to submit evidence to parliamentary inquiries that scrutinise national government's proposals and performance and provide recommendations for ministers to consider.

Together, we can use these opportunities to make the case that councillors have the democratic mandate, expertise and local insights to change our communities for the better.

Political briefing

Interested in what's happening in the corridors of power? Want to know when specific subjects are due to face parliamentary scrutiny or receive summaries of key debates for local government direct to your inbox? LGA member councillors and officers, MPs, Peers and their staff can subscribe to the LGA's Parliamentary bulletin at www.local.gov.uk/lga-parliamentary-bulletin-1

Testing, tiers and firebreaks

Councils have demonstrated how they can deliver locally where centrally designed and controlled public services struggle



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

It has been another busy and challenging month for all the councillors and officers responding to the rise in COVID-19 infections across the country, and those involved in negotiations with the Government regarding local and regional restrictions and wider general support for councils.

As always, councils are demonstrating their local leadership as we seek to balance the importance of keeping people safe and well, manage the impact on public services and navigate the significant social and

economic costs of higher restrictions.

As this edition of **first** was going to press, Wales was going into a “short, sharp” national lockdown, with people told to stay at home; pubs, hotels and non-essential shops closed; and meeting with people outside your household banned both indoors and outside.

The Welsh ‘firebreak’ replaced 17 local lockdowns and also closed down Halloween and Bonfire Night gatherings. But primary schools and Year 7 and 8 pupils at secondary

“Councils are demonstrating their local leadership as we navigate the significant social and economic costs of higher restrictions”

schools were expected to return to their classrooms after the half-term break.

In England, more areas were expected to join Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region and Lancashire in the ‘very high’ (level three) category of the Westminster Government’s three-tier system of local COVID alert levels – meaning no socialising with other households indoors or in most outdoor settings, and the closure of all pubs unless they are operating like restaurants and serving substantial meals.

Swathes of the rest of England are in tier two (‘high’), with no socialising indoors with anyone outside your household or support bubble. However, schools and universities remain open in all areas.

I know that increased restrictions will be an adjustment for many of our residents and businesses, and also impact our own personal lives. I would like to thank again the many colleagues who are working around the clock to ensure that we can continue to support our residents and local economies.

As your national membership body, the ongoing need for close and early engagement with councils continually and consistently features in all of our discussions on your behalf with government.

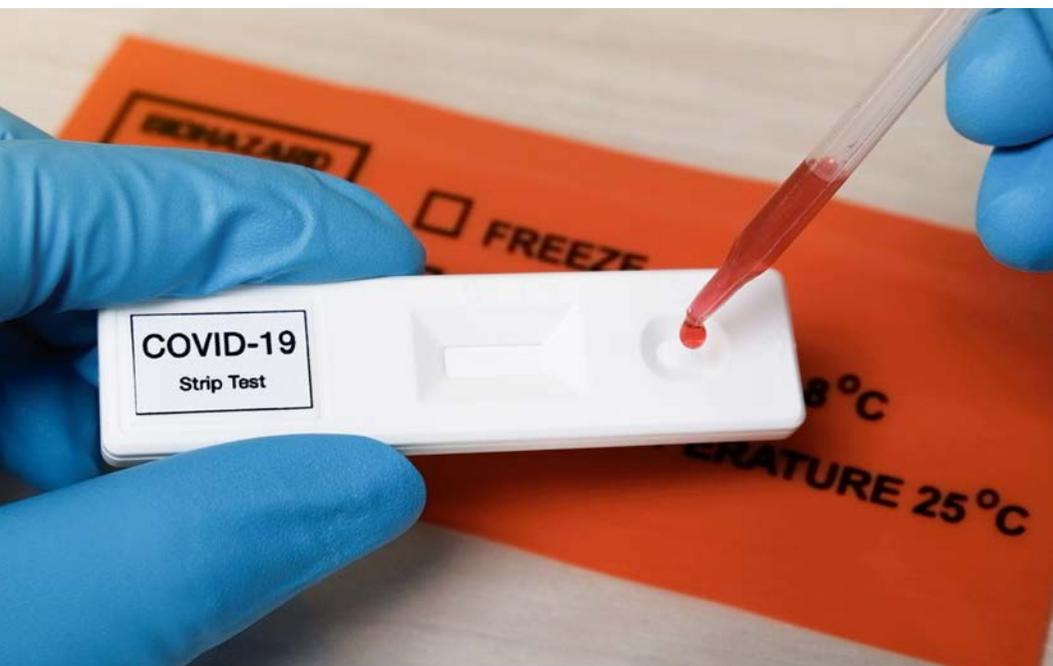
In recent weeks, this has included pushing for announcements to include closer working with councillors and councils and locally led solutions to the challenges we face as a nation.

Councils’ expert skills and knowledge of local areas has been illustrated by recent COVID-19 test and trace figures. These show that cases handled by local public health teams are continuing to reach the vast majority of complex cases assigned to them, with a tremendous 97.7 per cent of people contacted and asked to self-isolate.

This compares with the declining figures for those contacted by NHS Test and Trace, who successfully contacted 62.6 per cent of close contacts for the cases assigned to them.

The LGA has used these figures to highlight the measures that can be taken to ensure councils can more quickly respond to outbreaks.

This performance once again demonstrates that councils can innovate to deliver locally where centrally designed and controlled public services struggle – a point we have made repeatedly and will keep on making loudly.



Young face jobs crisis

The LGA is urging the Government to appoint a youth minister and take emergency measures to prevent a 'lost' generation of young people missing out on training and jobs



Councillor **Kevin Bentley** is Chairman of the LGA's People and Places Board, Councillor **Judith Blake** CBE is Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, and Councillor **Sir Richard Leese** is Chair of the LGA's City Regions Board

As the next generation of workers, young people's engagement in education, employment and training is vital for local areas and the economy.

Children and young people need and deserve the best start in life and helping them fulfil their potential is a key ambition of all councils.

However, we know that for some young people this is not happening, and that is a concern for councils from both an economic and welfare perspective.

Back in August (**first 650**), we highlighted that powers over skills and training for young people need to be localised to avert an employment crisis. The latest official figures show the percentage of young people (aged 16-24) who are unemployed has risen to 13.4 per cent, with some estimates suggesting a further 600,000 could find themselves jobless by the end of the year.

This is a real concern for

councils, not just because of the economic impact but equally the impact on young people's finances, health and wellbeing.

Last year, we set out to develop our policy to improve youth participation in education, employment and training. This work, and our engagement work with the sector and stakeholders, culminated last month in the publication of 'Re-thinking youth participation for the present and next generation: education to employment', which includes case studies of council good practice and a series of recommendations (see below).

The report – agreed jointly by our three LGA boards – calls for a rapid and focused response to prevent a 'lost' pandemic generation. It urges the Prime Minister to appoint a youth minister to work across Whitehall and to have oversight of a new youth employment and skills (YES) taskforce, which would include representatives of government departments, the LGA, business and other relevant organisations.

The Government also needs to use the Spending Review to devolve careers advice, post-16 and skills budgets and powers to local areas. This would allow councils, schools, colleges and employers to work together to improve provision for young people so that they can get on in life.

Local government is best placed to lead on this work. Our stakeholders also share our ambition and drive to improve the system and are proactively supporting our work.

This is a unique opportunity to be 're-thinking local' to unlock the full potential of local and national partners across the country to support economic recovery. The Government must work with us in partnership to deliver its recovery ambitions and the forthcoming devolution agenda. Our Work Local model provides a blueprint for devolution of employment and skills.



Re-thinking youth participation

The Government should immediately:

- set up a youth, employment and skills taskforce and appoint a youth minister
- localise investment for those out of work
- work in partnership with local government to plan, coordinate and deliver the Kickstart Scheme
- give additional powers and resources to councils to extend the September Guarantee offer
- grant apprenticeship flexibilities to increase the number of young people starts
- provide greater investment and incentives for employers to promote the take-up of T Levels.

By 2022, the Government should:

- trial at least one Work Local pathfinder in each region across England
- establish an integrated youth employment and skills (YES) service
- give local government the tools, power and resources to co-design and co-commission a local career offer, and plan a coherent post-16 offer
- provide dedicated careers/transition support funding for secondary schools
- provide a multi-year flexible funding pot to give additional support to secure and/or sustain employment or training.

i 'Re-thinking youth participation' is available free at www.local.gov.uk/re-thinking-youth-participation-present-and-next-generation-education-employment See www.local.gov.uk/work-local for more information about the LGA's Work Local model

The remote learning robot

In need of remote learning tools to reduce costs while increasing hours of education, local authorities are turning to a desktop robot

The harmful lifelong consequences of long-term absence from school are well known. It can be detrimental to education and attainment, and children miss opportunities to develop social skills and make lasting friendships. Long periods away can lead to psychosocial problems such as social exclusion, fear of peer rejection and bullying.

Reasons for absence may vary from life-threatening illness, anxiety, autism and now – because of COVID-19 – shielding.

No Isolation, the ‘warm technology’ company committed to eradicating loneliness, has warned that school absence is increasing, which in turn leads to additional demand for distance learning. The Department for Education has announced that, as of 22 October, access to remote education provisions for pupils unable to attend school is a legal obligation.

Progressive and cost-effective approaches to this problem are available. Based on the needs of isolated children, No Isolation developed AV1, which received its Seal of Excellence from the European Commission in 2016, before securing a £522,142 grant from the Department for Education’s Alternative Provision Innovation Fund in 2018.

AV1 is a small ‘robot’, or avatar, that sits in the classroom on behalf of the child. For example, ‘Emily’ is at home recovering from cancer treatment. She has the AV1 app downloaded on her iPad, and, when she logs in using her secret code, she is connected to a livestream through the eyes of the desktop avatar – AV1 – in her very own classroom. It lights up to show she is

connected, so her classmates wave and say hello. When class begins, Emily looks at the whiteboard and follows the class by adjusting AV1’s gaze. If she wants to ask a question, she activates a flashing light on top of AV1’s head. Two-way sound makes conversation easy between Emily and her teacher or friends but, by using one-way video, she can stay in bed without worrying about being on display. However, she can still show that she is happy, sad or confused, by selecting different facial expressions in the app.

AV1 is available to rent or buy, with more than 450 in use in the UK. The most common reason for local authorities adding AV1 into their education services is that, for as little as £8 a day, it improves wellbeing, motivation to learn and likelihood of reintegration, while also giving students the flexibility to attend up to 25 hours of lessons per week, if their health

permits. Those working in special educational needs continue to search for bespoke learning packages that can best suit each child. Home tutors, for example, provide education for young people at home, but a full timetable is often not possible at an average cost of £40-£100 an hour.

Now more than ever it is vital that remote learning is flexible and accommodating, so children’s futures aren’t jeopardised by missed opportunities. Its intelligent design means AV1 is capable of bridging the gap between home and classroom, making a life-changing impact on their emotional wellbeing and, when the time comes for reintegration, it is as if they never left.

i For more research into child loneliness, alternative provision and AV1 case studies, visit noisolation.com

“(AV1) is a cost-effective way of providing support for young people that other students and staff also love to be part of”

Julie Young, Post-16 Advisor at Somerset County Council



Sources

Impact of AV1 on children with long-term illness and school absence, *No Isolation*, August 9, 2020.

Invisible Children Seminar Report, *No Isolation and Tomorrow Today*, 2020.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and other health concerns on school attendance in the UK in the 2020-21 school year, *No Isolation*, September 2020.

A child-centred recovery

Local safety nets and early help services need to be properly funded to avoid children and their families falling into crisis



Councillor **Judith Blake** is Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an immeasurable impact on all of us, and councils have been at the forefront of local responses since day one.

That has included keeping children safe, working with schools to ensure access to education and providing practical support for the most vulnerable.

Thank you to everyone who has worked tirelessly to deliver these vital services.

Despite this phenomenal effort, the main challenges for children's services are yet to come – as we set out in our new report, 'A child-centred recovery'.

As children return to school, and as the full, long-term impact of COVID-19 becomes apparent, councils anticipate a sharp increase in demand for everything from universal support services through to urgent child protection responses.

Families will need help as they try to cope with mental health challenges, job losses, substance misuse problems, bereavements and more as a result of the pandemic.

Schools are also going to be under significant pressure as they work to put children's mental wellbeing at the forefront while helping children to get their learning back on track.

And there is a real risk that the impact of the pandemic will fall hardest on those children already at a disadvantage, whether economically or socially.

Councils and the Government

need to work swiftly to deal with the immediate challenges to children, young people and their families, if we are to avoid long-term damage to their prospects. And supporting families through the next stages of the pandemic will be key to helping our communities get back on their feet.

We need to make sure:

- mental health support is available, for both children and adults
- local safety nets are properly resourced and well organised to avoid families falling into crisis
- actions are put in place to prevent the disadvantage gap widening further
- long-standing challenges, such as the underfunding of children's social care, are addressed.

Our report says investment in local safety nets should start with the

reinstatement of the £1.7 billion that has been lost from the Early Intervention Grant since 2010.

We also need to shore up the universal and early help services – including mental health and wellbeing services – that children, young people and their families will need to support them through the short and long-term impacts of the pandemic.

Action to prevent the attainment gap from widening should include immediate work to stabilise the early years sector and support children and young people to attend school or to continue learning from home where required. And we also call for a cross-Whitehall strategy that puts children and young people at the heart of recovery.

COVID-19 continues to be an extraordinary challenge, but it has forced us to look again at every aspect of our work. We now need councils and the Government to put children's needs at the heart of recovery, putting their voices at the centre as intended by the Children Act 1989 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

A town, village, city, county or region that works for children and young people works for everyone.

i To read 'A child-centred recovery' in full, please visit www.local.gov.uk/child-centred-recovery-where-all-young-people-can-thrive. See p25



Streamlining procurement

Councils want to harness their spending power to get greater social value from public contracts



Councillor **Kevin Bentley** is Chair of the LGA's EU Exit Taskforce

consultation on reform of the public procurement regime in the coming months, and a new national policy statement for public procurement. This in turn may well result in new legislation.

While our international trade obligations will remain, councils have offered ideas to root public procurement more firmly in a broad set of values that delivers local priorities, assists local businesses and helps to 'level up' inequalities in the UK economy.

The focus of the national debate is expected to centre on creating greater social value from public contracts; creating new businesses, jobs and new skills; improving supplier diversity, innovation and resilience; and tackling climate change and reducing waste.

If these reforms go ahead, the Government is likely to push for a strong focus on commercial delivery and boosting the commercial capability of the public sector, and closer partnership working between councils and public bodies.

The LGA has already been feeding in councils' views to shape thinking in Whitehall. Councils spend more than \$60 billion a year on goods, services and works, according to councils' own published spending data.

The message is that councils need a

simple and efficient public procurement regime that ensures the best value for public money and, crucially, one that respects local decision-making.

Opportunities to introduce new flexibilities and allow stronger support for local economies and jobs are therefore at the heart of the LGA's message, as well as better levers to support environmental goals in line with local priorities.

Also on the LGA shopping list are shorter timescales, lighter-touch advertising requirements and award

“Councils need a simple and efficient public procurement regime that respects local decision-making”

procedures, reduced risk of legal complications, a speedier way of dealing with legal challenges, greater negotiation with suppliers, and an even greater focus on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and voluntary community and social enterprises (VCSEs).

Much still depends on the outcome of discussions over the coming months. The LGA continues to work with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on what the details of trade agreements might mean for councils.

The LGA has been campaigning for many years to allow greater flexibility in procurement rules.

As former EU laws begin to be reviewed, we are beginning to work in partnership with the Government to explore opportunities to refresh the rules that govern how the public sector buys its goods and services.

This doesn't mean that there will be a regulatory 'cliff edge' at the end of the transition period on 1 January 2021. The existing Public Contracts Regulations (2015) will continue to apply.

There is, however, the opportunity to reform the rules for future years while still ensuring that they stay true to their core purpose of delivering full value for public money in a fair and transparent way.

This imperative to streamline the procurement rule book has been championed by councils for many years. Local government has been keen to harness the power of the public purse to help drive sustainable local economic and environmental wellbeing.

As **first** was going to press, the LGA understands that the Government is likely to launch a Green Paper for



For more information about the LGA's European and international work, please visit www.local.gov.uk/topics/european-and-international

Supporting jobs and creating opportunity



“The Prime Minister emphasised his commitment to levelling up and building back our country better after coronavirus”

© ANTHONY DEVLIN / GETTY IMAGES

Conservative councillors heard from the Prime Minister and the Chancellor at their virtual annual conference



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

The Conservative Party Conference is always a special event for us as it provides an opportunity for the Conservative family to get together, discuss various policies and hear from the Prime Minister and other keynote speakers.

This year's conference should have been held in Birmingham. However, due to the pandemic, the party rightly held a virtual conference from 3-6 October.

An elaborate 3D virtual event was created, with computer-generated

auditorium, foyer and fringe meeting rooms, so all delegates could enjoy the full conference experience.

Delegates could visit the exhibition area where they were able to chat with exhibitors and purchase merchandise. It was truly innovative.

During the conference, the Prime Minister emphasised his commitment to levelling up and building back our country better after coronavirus.

He confirmed that the Government will build 40 new hospitals by 2030 and invest in more doctors and nurses.

Additionally, working closely with local authorities, the Government will improve the transport links between all nations and regions of the UK – bringing communities closer together.

I was also delighted to hear the Prime Minister's announcement on the Government's plan to introduce long-term fixed-rate mortgages (with 5 per cent deposits). This new scheme will make it easier for young people to own their own home and help more first-time buyers get onto the housing ladder.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak MP, said his top priority is to support jobs and create opportunity for everybody. He outlined the Government's Job Entry Targeted Support, backed by a \$238 million investment, to support those who have been out of work because of coronavirus.

This was followed by the Kickstart Scheme that the Government has recently launched to help create thousands of new jobs for young people. Backed by a \$2 billion investment, the scheme offers funding to businesses to create job replacements for 16 to 24-year-olds who are claiming Universal Credit or at risk of long-term unemployment.

Moreover, following the party conference, the Chancellor announced a very welcome extension to the furlough scheme for firms that may be required to close as a result of national or local lockdowns, with businesses able to claim two-thirds of staff wages.

During the virtual conference, we also hosted 'Local Government Q&A', a fringe event featuring LGA board lead members including Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Chairman of the Community Wellbeing Board; Cllr David Renard, Chairman of the Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board; Cllr Teresa Heritage, Vice-Chairman of the Children and Young People Board; Cllr Peter Golds, Deputy Chairman of the Culture, Tourism and Sport Board; and Cllr John Fuller, Conservative Group Deputy Leader.

The event allowed me and lead members to discuss the key policy issues and give an insight to delegates about the LGA boards and the important work they do.

We also sponsored the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's Q&A session, organised by the Conservative Councillors' Association and attended by many Conservative councillors.

I would like to thank everyone, especially our lead board members, who facilitated and participated in this unique conference and made it such a success in difficult circumstances.

I hope we will be able to meet in person at the next party conference.

i For more information about the work of the LGA's Conservative Group, please visit www.local.gov.uk/lga-conservatives

Be a councillor

Next year's council elections offer an important chance to improve the diversity of candidates standing to represent their local communities



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

to increase diversity and inclusion and encourage people from all walks of life and experience - predominantly those from black, Asian and ethnic minority (BAME) communities, LGBTQ+ groups and people with disabilities, but also more women and young people - to stand in their local elections.

Representative councils are best able to speak to, and for, their communities and to support the effective business of local government. Democracy, decision-making and good governance are also strengthened when councillors reflect the people they seek to serve and represent.

It's also important for councils to have a broad range of skills and life experiences. Groups made up of people from different backgrounds and with different skills tend to make better, balanced decisions.

For example, skills gained through work, raising a family, caring for relatives, volunteering or being active in their community or faith groups, are all highly valuable to have as a councillor.

Everyone in local government has a role to play in supporting newcomers. However, it is also important for councils to be realistic about the commitment and challenges that councillors face.

As well as running the national campaign alongside local offerings, the LGA continues to work with its

partners to extend its reach with particular groups to address the imagined and real barriers, which can prevent people stepping forward.

To support councils to run their own local 'Be a Councillor' campaigns and events, the LGA has also produced a range of guides, workbooks and other resources available to download from www.beacouncillor.org.uk

The BAME weekender

The LGA created the UK's first development programme for councillors who are black, Asian, or from other minority ethnic (BAME) communities in 2004.

Supported by Lord Woolley, Director of Operation Black Vote, it is designed to help councillors from this group develop new skills and insights and prepare for leading roles in their communities and councils, and provides a unique learning and networking opportunity.

So far, more than 365 elected members have attended, with some going on to become committee chairs, mayors, cabinet members, deputy leaders, leaders and MPs.



Applications are open for the next BAME weekender event, which takes place from 27-28 February in Warwick. Find out more at www.local.gov.uk/our-support/highlighting-political-leadership/focus-leadership or email grace.collins@local.gov.uk.

Now more than ever, councillors make a huge difference to the quality of life of local people and how local issues are dealt with.

Candidates elected next year will not only lead and help their communities recover and rebuild from the challenges brought about by COVID-19, they will also get to oversee budgets worth millions of pounds, decide how often bins are emptied, where new housing estates are built and what services to provide or cut.

However, the LGA's 2018 councillor census found that councillors remain disproportionately white, male and aged over 60 compared to the populations they represent.

It is vital that the make-up of councils reflects their communities and their experience. It is also important that people feel there are candidates who can represent people like them, who understand their day-to-day lives and the issues facing their communities.

The LGA is working with councils

How I chose to become a councillor



Councillor **Paulette Hamilton** is Vice-Chair of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board and Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care at Birmingham City Council

When I was asked to write this article, I said yes straight away.

It is important that articles like these are written to encourage young people, older people, and women from the black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities to feel confident enough to put themselves forward to enter public life.

I became a councillor in 2004, when I was a qualified nurse. I had worked as a nursing sister in the community

for several years and had recently moved to the Royal College of Nursing as a development officer and was really enjoying it.

I have always liked to challenge things and this role really enabled me to do that and support nurses at the same time. It gave me the opportunity to meet many politicians, supported and encouraged by my then director who really wanted to encourage the development of BAME nurses.

The Labour Party was encouraging people from the BAME communities to apply to become local councillors. A lifelong friend (a councillor) and my director encouraged me to apply – and sometimes you do need that encouragement to take the first steps.

I was a married woman, black, with five children. I had just finished breastfeeding, was juggling childcare

and holding down a full-time job. I never thought I would be suitable, or that I could cope with public life.

Sixteen years on, my daughter is at university, I am the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health in Birmingham and the Labour lead nationally within the LGA, and currently Vice-Chair of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board.

Your start point is not your finish point; never allow others to tell you what you can and cannot do. The role of a councillor can be challenging. It is hard work, especially in the middle of a pandemic, but it is so rewarding.

If you are a woman, from the black and minority communities, can I encourage you to come forward. Things are getting better, regarding childcare, support and work/life balance. We need more women from our rich communities to come forward, to represent our views of the society we live in today.

It is not easy, putting yourself forward to serve. Working in public life you can make a difference, so please try.

Q&A: leading the way

Councillor **Anntoinette Bramble** is an LGA Deputy Chair and Deputy Mayor of Hackney Council

Q Why did you decide to stand for election?

A Representation is important. I rarely saw people who looked like me in politics and so I became the change I wanted to see.

I think it is important for Hackney – a place that is home to a high percentage of black residents – to have positive representations of people who look like them.

I also wanted to be an advocate for my community and see my role as facilitating change that shapes our communities and so many people's lives.

Q What advice do you have for people considering standing for election?

A Focus on what you can bring rather than what you cannot. You don't have to be born into a political dynasty; it's about using the skills you have in your approach to politics.

You may be concerned about people disagreeing with you or receiving abuse from social media but don't let that stop you – you not standing for election won't change that. Standing will help, as working in politics means you're in one of the professions to make change.

The most important thing, if you're going to stand, is to be a strong advocate for your community. You are there to champion



their needs and be their voice, and by working as a team alongside your colleagues, you can help improve your local communities.

Q What is your proudest contribution or achievement in local government?

A Hackney Young Futures Commission. The young people leading the commission listened to more than 2,000 young people about their lived experience in the borough and they made recommendations. Give young people a platform and they provide solutions.

I'm pleased and humbled to be the first black Deputy Chair of the LGA but I certainly don't want to be the last. I am more concerned with building the legacy for future leaders. That means staying focused on the day-to-day work of listening to the community and acting on its behalf.

I am pleased with the Black Curriculum that is starting in Hackney, which is important for all children. Every teacher in Hackney is fully equipped to provide dynamic lesson plans exploring the rich, complex and inspirational history of black Britain.

Black history is British history and through this understanding we can provide knowledge and create compassion, understanding and respect for everyone.



Councillor **Asma Begum** (Lab) is Deputy Mayor for Community Safety, Youth and Equalities at Tower Hamlets Council

A chance for lasting change

Tower Hamlets Council has set up a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Inequalities Commission

The shocking death of George Floyd and subsequent demonstrations across the world brought the subject of racial inequality to the forefront of personal and political discussions.

Tower Hamlets witnessed several Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests in which people of all ages and backgrounds came together in a shared view that the status quo was no longer an option.

We took early decisive action with our partners at the Museum of London Docklands and the Canal & Rivers Trust to remove the statue of slave owner Robert Milligan from where he had stood unchallenged and out of historical context for many years.

He will return, in time, to public view within a more appropriate setting that puts his personal achievements alongside education on the human price paid as a result of the slave trade.

A positive outcome triggered by the BLM protests was local discussions about ongoing levels of racial inequality that continue to adversely affect people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.

This included the fact borne out from studies, including by Public Health England, that people from these backgrounds are significantly more likely to become seriously ill or die from COVID-19.

In response, John Biggs, the Mayor of Tower Hamlets, tasked me to lead a new Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Inequalities Commission.

As we celebrate Black History Month, I'm pleased to say that our



work is well and truly under way. We want to hear the lived experiences from local people but also their great ideas, so that we can bring about a set of practical, tangible and lasting changes.

Equality is embedded in our major partnership plans so that addressing inequalities is a core part of our outlook and the way we deliver public services.

Tower Hamlets is a place that has, for generations, welcomed people from all over the world, and at times has come together in solidarity to stand up to racist attacks from those who wish to divide us.

We're a very diverse borough, and

I'm very proud of my own Bengali heritage. It's a part of my identity, as is being an East Ender, but knowing that a community's life chances might be pre-determined by their background or skin colour needs to be challenged.

We must recognise that there remains much room for improvement to achieve greater equality. We know that racial discrimination means some people have had neither equal access to public services or employment, nor fair treatment and life chances.

The commission's main four focus areas are community leadership, health, education and employment – and they run alongside our aims to:

- engage and operate at the heart of Tower Hamlets' communities to hear about people's lived experience and solutions
- work with institutions to advance and prioritise race equality to achieve an inclusive, cohesive, thriving and representative Tower Hamlets
- influence local, sub-regional and regional leaders who have significant influence on Tower Hamlets, particularly in the development of policy and strategy practices and the allocation of resources.

Despite the major challenges these issues bring about, it's actually a very exciting time for Tower Hamlets, and I'm proud to be involved in this unique opportunity to help deliver real change.

I also look forward to sharing the experiences and progress of the commission with **first** readers in the future.



To find out more, please visit www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/raceinequalitiescommission

Planning reform concerns



Councils know what is right for their local area when it comes to delivering high-quality homes



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

A locally led planning system is vital to ensure that councils and the communities they represent have a say over the way places develop.

Keeping planning local supports the delivery of homes that are built to a high standard with the necessary infrastructure to create sustainable, resilient places and ensures that affordable housing is provided.

Our Keep Planning Local campaign (see www.local.gov.uk/keep-planning-local) stresses how important it is that communities should be at the heart our planning system.

However, the LGA is concerned that proposed planning reforms would result in fewer affordable homes being built and allow developers to 'game' the system.

Among other things, the Government's 'Changes to the current planning system' consultation proposes lifting the requirement for developers to build affordable housing on small sites.

Analysis commissioned by the LGA has shown that if this policy had been in place for the past five years, almost 30,000 affordable homes would have been lost – at a time when more than

a million households are on council waiting lists and almost 93,000 are living in temporary accommodation.

Moreover, the proposed 40 or 50-home threshold could encourage developers to put forward proposals for 39 or 49 or fewer homes, respectively, on sites which are able to take more, to avoid affordable housing requirements.

We desperately need to be building more affordable housing, not less. We need to build homes that are affordable to local people and help to reduce homelessness, rather than contributing additional funds to developers' and landowners' profits.

So, it is vital that any thresholds for affordable housing should be determined by local planning authorities based on assessment of local need. As we recover from COVID-19, this is more important than ever.

Other proposals in the 'Changes to the current planning system' consultation include delivery of a First Homes scheme providing newly built homes at a 30 per cent discount for first-time buyers; extending the current 'permission in principle' to major developments; and changes to the standard method for assessing local housing need (see **first** 651).

The LGA supports the principle of First Homes but not a mandatory requirement for 25 per cent of affordable housing contributions to be First Homes. This would lead to the displacement of other discounted-market products,

including those for affordable and social rent.

And while we have previously welcomed the principle of a standardised, simplified methodology for calculating local housing need, we have stressed that any model should be able to reflect the complexities of different housing markets.

The proposed further changes to the methodology would see fewer homes built in the north and disproportionately impact on rural areas (see **first** 652). A nationally set formula does not – and cannot – accurately reflect local needs, so should be optional for local authorities to use.

The LGA set out last month how the Government can use the forthcoming Spending Review to empower councils to build significantly more council housing and boost the supply of low-cost homes to rent and buy across the country (see www.local.gov.uk/re-thinking-public-finances).

We want to work with ministers on any changes to the planning system, to ensure it delivers high-quality sustainable homes and places for communities by giving councils the power to determine what is right for their local area.

i See www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses for the **LGA's full response to 'Changes to the current planning system'**, available at www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-the-current-planning-system. **Further consultations, on the 'Planning for the future' White Paper**, were closing as **first** went to press (see www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future)

Councils can

Local government has delivered during the pandemic – and could do so much more with the right funding



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

The date has been set for the LGA's second #CouncilsCan Day – an online celebration to highlight the local government heroes of this pandemic.

Councillors and local authority staff are being encouraged to tell the world what they're doing to keep their communities running during this crisis by using the hashtag #CouncilsCan on social media during the day-long campaign – running from 7am to 7pm on Tuesday 10 November.

The LGA will be providing councils with communication resources to help promote the day locally and join the national conversation.

In this time of national crisis, it is council staff and elected members who have kept our communities running and provided crucial local leadership.

Councils have moved at pace, used innovative approaches and worked flexibly to set up completely new services to support the most vulnerable; reshaped and redesigned services such as waste collection to keep them going virtually unaffected; and are central to the economic support provided to residents and businesses.

Central government and local communities trusted them, and they delivered.

Highly valued council services have been absolutely crucial to the COVID-19 response. All across the country, councils have protected lives and livelihoods, and kept their communities running.

While showcasing this vital and fantastic work, the LGA will be using #CouncilsCan Day to highlight that councils can have an even greater impact on the health and wealth of our country with proper and sustainable funding.

It is councils who know their local areas best and must be central to efforts to level up the stark inequalities that have been exposed by the pandemic. Tackling the significant

“Central government and local communities trusted councils, and they delivered”

economic challenges ahead is a huge task that will see different areas of the country needing a unique response in the coming months and years.

The LGA's submission to the Government's Spending Review sets out how bringing power and resources closer to people is the key to improving lives, tackling deep-set inequalities and building inclusive

growth across the country.

Councils stand ready to provide local solutions to the national challenges we face. For this to happen, the LGA says the Government needs to use the Spending Review to radically re-think public spending in a way that is fit for the future and empowers councils to deliver on the ambition for our communities that central and local government share.

It's disappointing, therefore, that the Government has announced its Spending Review will only be for one year rather than three, making it difficult for councils to plan ahead.

The ambition of councils goes way beyond just maintaining services the way they are today.

They want to create new hope in our communities and with the right funding and freedoms, councils can improve the lives of their residents, develop a green recovery, address skills gaps and rebuild the economy so that it benefits everyone.

i To find out more about #CouncilsCan Day, please visit www.local.gov.uk/councilscan-day



In the firing line

Councillors play a vital role in supporting and improving the work of local fire and rescue services



Councillor **Nick Chard** is Chair of the Employers' Representation of the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services

The National Joint Council (NJC) is a UK-wide collective bargaining body where employer and employee representatives negotiate, determining pay and terms and conditions for some 48,500 uniformed employees of fire and rescue authorities from firefighters to middle managers.

Councillors play a vital role in this work, holding most of the 14 employer seats on the NJC.

I am proud to say that annual pay settlements have been reached by agreement for many years, without dispute; important for a sector where industrial relations can sometimes be difficult. This year, agreement was reached on a 2 per cent uplift.

While there have been suggestions by some (such as Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services) of a potential pay review body, awards through many such bodies this year would have been unaffordable.

Having been excluded from decision-making, we would now be considering pay bill and subsequent wider consequences; not to mention how such a change for England alone could be accommodated across the UK.

That's why I believe pay bargaining should remain as close and in touch with the service as possible.

Members are happy to consider evolution, given nothing is ever perfect, but we must always ensure change is necessary and delivers, otherwise the consequences would be wrong for the service.

In difficult times such as the COVID-19 pandemic, we have again proven our worth – quickly putting in place arrangements to support communities in responding to the



challenge. Utilising the already strong working relationship between the National Employers and the Fire Brigades Union, we joined together with the operational expertise of the National Fire Chiefs Council to agree arrangements that to date have seen 14 areas of additional work available to fire and rescue services.

These range from driving ambulances to body removal, delivery of essential items to vulnerable people and personal protective equipment (PPE) more widely, to assisting care homes with PPE training, to name just a few.

This agreement would not have been possible without the involvement of the NJC, specifically employer and employee representatives of the NJC, working to achieve the required outcomes and temporary changes to terms and conditions of employment.

Mindful always of the safety of staff and the communities within which we

work, these additional activities are underpinned by rigorous risk assessments.

Another important area is equality, diversity and inclusion. The NJC-led Inclusive Fire Service Group is working hard to drive forward much-needed improvement. Unique in the fire sector, it comprises national employer and employee representation as well as senior management and trade unions.

The group identified a number of evidence-based improvement strategies, secured the support of fire and rescue services and, having allowed time for the strategies to become embedded, has recently completed a monitoring exercise.

This included a survey of fire and rescue services, employee focus groups (BAME, LGBT and female) and workshops with equality and diversity officers and union representatives.

A detailed report of the findings will be published shortly. However, it is pleasing to see that this work is already starting to deliver improvement.

I look forward to our continued and constructive approach of working together and making progress on this important agenda and all the activities the NJC undertakes.

i See www.local.gov.uk/our-support/workforce-and-hr-support/fire-and-rescue for further information on the NJC, and www.local.gov.uk/topics/fire-and-rescue for the LGA's work with fire and rescue services.



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

Return to Work

With half of councils struggling to recruit planners and facing difficulties finding other key professionals in ICT and legal, the LGA and the Government Equalities Office have expanded a national programme to provide free training for returners

Councils and their staff are at the forefront of driving innovative change to benefit and support local communities.

Yet 55 per cent of councils that responded to an LGA survey reported that they have difficulties recruiting planners, while 24 per cent and 17 per cent struggled to recruit legal staff and ICT professionals, respectively.

In response, we have launched a new set of recruitment campaigns with the Government Equalities Office (GEO) to help councils match their vacancies with people looking to return to their careers.

The three Return to Work campaigns

- focusing on ICT, planning and legal
- will identify skilled professionals and provide them with free training or resources, so they can restart their highly valued roles and support councils with their COVID-19 recovery strategies.

Councils who sign up to the free programme will be given the chance to connect with a carefully selected pool of participants to discuss job vacancies.

As local authorities look to recover from COVID-19, we will complete the recruitment of professionals for them so they can focus on their response to the pandemic until a suitable time to interview and select one of our candidates.

ICT shortages



Richard Carr is Chair of the Local Government Delivery Council and Chief Executive of Central Bedfordshire Council

Return to Work is a great opportunity for councils to access the skills they need in ICT.

We know that ICT skills are at a premium, not just in our sector but in other parts of industry. This is a way to

encourage people to come back to local government.

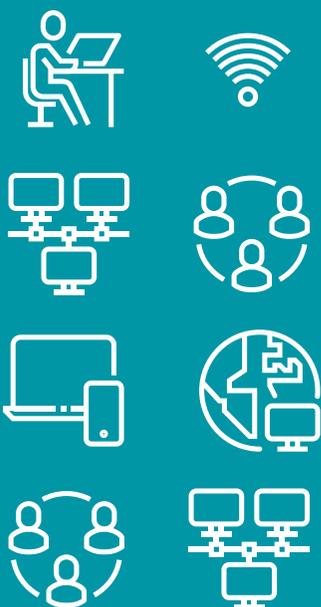
Having someone who has more rounded experience and life experience and has then taken the trouble to refresh their ICT expertise, it seems like a win-win to me.

Working with returners also adds to the diversity of our workforce and we know that with diversity comes the ingredients for greater innovation. So for all those reasons, it's a great programme and it's free so why wouldn't you want to participate?





return to WORK



Councils that sign up will also have the added benefit of avoiding costs associated with recruitment drives and hiring agency staff, which cost councils £335 million in 2017/18.

With funding provided by the GEO, the campaigns aim to support those who have taken extended career breaks to care for someone.

The programme will also consider applications from professionals who have caring responsibilities and have become unemployed because of COVID-19, or from those who have been in long-term unemployment with no caring commitments.

Many people who take career breaks to care for someone struggle to step back into their profession at the right level for their skills and experience. When they do return, they can have a positive impact on diversifying organisations.

According to the Office for National Statistics, 89 per cent of people who are out of paid work because of caring responsibilities are female. A large number of these women have

professional and managerial experience.

Hiring 'returners' can therefore help you expand your female talent pipeline, boost the presence of women in your management teams, and have a positive effect on your gender pay gap. Your age diversity would also be positively impacted, as returners bring with them high levels of experience, maturity and commitment.

Employing a returner can also have a positive impact on your image as an employer, signalling that you are a flexible organisation that supports parents and carers in the workplace.

It can also show that your organisation is open to and accepting of non-linear career pathways and values the role that caring plays in society. These images play a key role in both the recruitment and retention of talented employees.

Our expertly created programmes will support people to gain the skills, confidence and knowledge they need to work in ICT, planning or legal professions, and to shape the areas where they live.

Case studies



Becky,
IT Officer

Apart from the people (who are an amazing bunch of characters and unbelievably knowledgeable), my favourite thing about working in council ICT is that the job is so interesting, and I am constantly learning new skills.

There is rarely a day that goes by that I don't learn something new. It's given me a massive confidence boost realising that I can still learn new skills.

Councils are also really good employers to work for, they always try to ensure that you have a good work-life balance and are treated fairly within the workplace. They have also given me lots of tools and training to help me in the role.



Amanda,
Senior Planner

I took a career break in 2013 to concentrate on family life. A year later I decided that a 'stay-at-home' mum life was not for me and I started to pursue a return to work.

It was a difficult decision as I knew that as a working mum, I would have the tricky balance of trying to make time for my daughter while also delivering the work agenda and I would be very 'tired'!

I found returning to a local authority provided me with a supportive environment, allowing me to take time off around my childcare commitments. As soon as I stepped back into this world there were great people, interesting projects to work on and a genuine enthusiasm to support me in brushing up my knowledge and skill set.



Shelly,
Principal Planner

I left the planning profession to have my children and to focus on my home life for a bit. I'm also disabled and both my pregnancies affected my disability so I ended up taking just under three years out of work.

I decided to come back because I like to think I have a good work ethic and wanted to show my daughters that working is an important part of self-worth. I also craved some adult conversation – anything other than repetitively singing 'Wind the bobbin up'!

It can be daunting returning after an absence, especially if (like me) you are also taking on a new stage in your home life (becoming a parent). But recently councils have been leading the way in supporting flexible approaches to working life.

i Find out more

More information about each campaign can be found on our dedicated webpages:

- Return to Work – Planning: www.local.gov.uk/return-to-work-planning
- Return to Work – ICT: www.local.gov.uk/return-to-work-ict
- Return to Work – Legal: www.local.gov.uk/return-work-legal

Get yourself connected

Councils can help improve the digital connectivity of their local areas with help from the LGA



Councillor **Neil Prior** is Deputy Chair of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board and Productivity Lead Member

Access to fast and reliable digital connections is no longer a luxury, it is a necessity.

It is a component of everyday life and is something residents and businesses expect in their homes and local areas.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated the digital divide being felt by communities across the country and accelerated the need for strong connectivity to deal with the increased demand on networks.

As place shapers at the centre of their communities, councils and councillors across all tiers have a

fundamental role to play in helping enhance the digital connectivity of their areas, whether through local policy levers such as planning and highways, or economic development or regeneration strategies.

The benefits of improved connectivity are well rehearsed. As more of us use faster broadband and mobile services, we have more choice about how and when to make voice and video calls; message friends and relatives; browse the internet; apply for employment opportunities; watch on-demand TV; stream music; shop or work from home; and access local services.

With better connected residents and employees, councils can create environments in which to test and develop ways of shifting more local services online to improve the lives of their communities, while modernising ways of working and living.

For example, Adur & Worthing

Councils installed sensors on a fleet of waste vehicles to help understand and measure broadband connections in their area.

This helped inform their wider digital connectivity programme, which has included:

- wiring up public buildings to high-speed fibre broadband and encouraging commercial providers to come in and expand services to local businesses and residents from these starting points
- the launch of a publicly-owned, high-speed Wi-Fi network that will help more local residents to connect 'on the go', and which provides the councils with the opportunity to create an 'internet of things' network with smart street lighting and smart car-parking.

Therefore, building on previous sector-led improvement programmes that focused on digital transformation and inclusion, the LGA is inviting local authorities in England to apply for match funding of up to £20,000 to develop their digital connectivity capacity and leverage improvements for their communities.

We are looking for projects that focus on improvement strategies, regional partner relationships and connectivity transformation, and which aim to help residents and the workforce interact with the local authority in smarter, easier and more innovative ways.

The councils successful in joining the programme will receive grant funding for their project along with the LGA's wrap-around support offer from our productivity team and policy experts.

The programme will also provide councils with access to a learning community of fellow councils with which to share lessons and resources. We will produce a series of case studies, blogs and videos so the wider sector can benefit from the digital connectivity projects we help fund.

I know the team is looking forward to receiving your bids and I am excited to see the various and exciting initiatives that will be delivered over the coming year. Good luck!

i Applications for the LGA's digital connectivity programme are now open until 12 November.

For the programme prospectus and application form, please visit www.local.gov.uk/digital



“The pandemic has exposed and exacerbated the digital divide being felt by communities across the country”



Funding for early help 'critical'



Dr **Jo Casebourne** is Chief Executive of the Early Intervention Foundation

As we re-enter a difficult period of rising COVID-19 infections, it's a good time to look back at what lessons we can learn from the first wave of coronavirus for the delivery of services to vulnerable children and families.

Our research found that in the early stages of the pandemic, local authorities faced a number of challenges. School closures, social distancing and lockdown seriously affected the ability of services to support children and families at the very time that these families were facing even greater challenges.

The immediate concerns of service leaders focused on the difficulties of protecting vulnerable children when home visits were severely restricted, and many were not in school or early years provision.

Those we spoke to were also concerned about their ability to identify children who may have become vulnerable as a result of the pandemic, without home visits or other face-to-face contact.

But we also saw real innovation in how councils and their partners responded. We

heard many stories of new partnerships and collaborations being developed, old silos being broken down, and longstanding barriers being overcome.

For instance, we saw schools working more closely with early help services, and many early intervention services mobilising rapidly to enable support and services to be delivered remotely or online, which appears to have benefited some children and families by making support more accessible and engaging.

To make the most of this innovation in the future, the key will be finding out which of these new approaches improve outcomes for children and which don't. This must be about more than users' satisfaction.

At the Early Intervention Foundation, we are now working with councils to test and evaluate these changes, so that the best of these innovations are identified and spread, and so that councils can make evidence-informed decisions about which of these changes to service delivery to keep.

Given the stakes for young lives, and the pressure on council budgets, it's crucial that precious funds are focused on

the most promising new approaches.

But as we hit a second wave of COVID-19, it's clear that early help and wider family support services are facing a double hit, not only from more families needing support to deal with a wider range of problems, but also from the knock-on consequences of fewer children and families having received the support that would usually have been available at key moments in their lives.

Some children are facing increased mental health problems, levels of family conflict and domestic violence, and attainment gaps between the poorest children and their peers will be widening.

Without help, these consequences will leave a lasting mark on the lives of many children and young people. Statutory services cannot simply absorb this increased demand and won't be the right answer for many families anyway.

That's why it's critical that the early help system for children and families is funded to meet this need. We need meaningful investment in children's services – including in universal services provided through public health teams, and early help and targeted services – in addition to crucial investment in acute and statutory services.

We must ensure that there's significant increased support for vulnerable children and families, so that this generation of children doesn't have to live with the legacy of COVID-19 for the rest of their lives.

i **The Early Intervention Foundation is a charity promoting effective early intervention to improve the lives of children and young people.**

See www.eif.org.uk/reports for its research papers on COVID-19 and early intervention

Protecting our environment



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

Without doubt, the coronavirus pandemic has made us re-evaluate our relationship with the environment and has led us to identify the associated threat of biodiversity loss and climate change.

Research suggests large-scale deforestation, habitat degradation and anthropogenic climate change may have provided perfect conditions for coronavirus to flourish and could cause more pandemics if we do not look after the environment.

Therefore, we all need to work together, at national and local levels, to protect our natural environment.

I am proud that my party is committed to tackling environmental issues and was thrilled to hear the Prime Minister's plan, at

the Conservative Party's virtual conference, to make the UK a world leader in green energy by 2030.

The Prime Minister announced that the Government will invest £160 million to upgrade ports and factories across the whole country to increase offshore wind capacity. All homes in the UK will also be powered by offshore wind energy within a decade.

Renewable and clean energy will reduce our carbon footprint and has a much lower impact on the environment.

At a local level, councils are also committed to improving the local environment and helping protect its future. They are working hard to introduce new ideas and strategies in their areas to achieve targets on climate change.

Additionally, working in partnership with community organisations, they deliver environmental projects and inspire residents to play their part in addressing this issue. In fact, councils can drive the environmental improvement agenda

even further if they were given more power and flexibility.

With the Environment Bill having passed its Second Reading and now in committee, there is a great opportunity to set sustainable and well-defined goals to improve our environment and shape the associated policies post-Brexit.

The LGA has broadly welcomed the Bill and, on behalf of councils, has rightly raised some concerns about the implementation of certain provisions and the new burdens that it will impose on local authorities.

I am looking forward to hearing about further developments associated with the Bill in due course.

“Councils can drive the environmental improvement agenda even further with more power and flexibility”



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

Showing leadership in uncertain times

It's been yet another period of rapid developments affecting local government, and I was reminded once again of the phenomenal work that councils have been delivering for months on end, in some of the most uncertain times many of us have ever known.

One of the most rewarding parts of my LGA role is the conversations I have with colleagues across the country as you share your insights, innovations and concerns so we can press your priorities on the national stage.

I am always astounded by the sheer breadth and depth of the incredible work you are doing in your communities and with your businesses – supporting them through the most difficult period in all our lifetimes.

Like never before, councils have provided much needed local leadership in our communities and across other public services. We have demonstrated our agility



and responsiveness by re-thinking what is possible and prioritising what is most valued and needed, while keeping vital services running.

I know the personal toll leadership can take in such trying times and wanted to say thank you to every councillor and officer who has helped to enhance local government's reputation with the nation.

Challenges, of course, remain and for many councils 2021/22 looks like it will bring very significant financial pressures.

The forthcoming Spending Review is critical, despite being reduced from a three to one-year review. The LGA produced a

detailed and evidenced submission (see **first 652**), which highlights both the funding needed to stand still, and the investment required to rebuild our communities in a way that levels up inequalities and ensures every area can prosper.

You can support us in making the case to national politicians for the powers, flexibilities and funding you need, by helping your local MPs understand the services that are under the most pressure in your areas, and the implications that under-funding could have for residents. This will help bring to life the real consequences of the crisis we face.



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

Lack of clarity on tier system

Many in local government welcomed the announcement of the new tier system a few weeks ago, hoping that it would bring simplicity and clarity to councils, residents and businesses subject to restrictions.

But since the announcement was made, the tier system has proved anything but clear. Liverpool City Region was immediately placed into the 'very high' tier three with restrictions including the closure of gyms, while venues such as soft play were kept open.

A few days later, Lancashire was also moved into tier three but with gyms remaining open and soft play venues closed, with no explanation for the reversal.

We've also seen the Government show complete disdain towards areas who want to protect the health of their residents, but also want to protect their local economies as well.

"For the tier system to work properly, the Government must listen to local leaders and communities"

Politicians from all parties in Greater Manchester spent the best part of a week fighting for the funding needed to save jobs and businesses across the region in the event of moving to tier three restrictions, only to have it imposed on them without the funding needed.

For the tier system to work properly, the Government must listen to local leaders and communities about what they need to make it work, and work constructively with them rather than work with a top-down approach.

Only by doing this will we beat the virus and be able to return to some semblance of normality.



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

Three-tier system 'as clear as mud'

We saw the Prime Minister announce last month the new three-tier system, under which every area of the country will be classified as 'medium', 'high' or 'very high' risk during the continuing COVID-19 crisis.

'Medium' means current national rules, 'high' means additional restrictions on household mixing indoors, and 'very high' means no household mixing indoors or outdoors plus business closures.

"With no real consultation with local leaders or their own MPs, it's a joke"

For me in Oldham, it is a relaxation of our local lockdown rules which, when you look at the numbers, beggars belief. I suspect by the time you read this, Greater Manchester will be tier three. We shall see.

I am no fan of metro mayors, as you know, but the Tories must be kicking themselves over how much they are over the media – alongside council leaders – slamming the Government's plans.

With no real consultation with local leaders or their own MPs, and little transparency over data and decision-making, it's a joke. But a joke that is not funny and people will die as a result.

Labour abstentions on crucial matters relating to this issue and the renewal of the COVID-19 restrictions mean it has been left to the Liberal Democrats locally and nationally to highlight the faults and problems of the plans, from focused curfews to confused messages, to arbitrary area and regional boundaries and stupid deadlines.

Interesting times for all the wrong reasons.



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

Working together as Independents

As local lockdowns continue to be put in place, including the whole of Wales, we have again asked the Government to ensure local leaders are at the forefront of decision-making – something ministers have agreed and need to uphold.

No area should be moving tiers or having extra measures put in place unless council leaders agree. Only working together can a clear and credible lockdown be achieved.

New money has been announced to support our COVID-19 efforts but it's less than we need to do the job.

We have demonstrated repeatedly that #Councilscan deliver what's needed to protect our communities and our members are doing a tremendous job as we deal with the second wave, along with impending winter pressures, resourcing our transition from the EU, possible planning changes, reorganisation and not forgetting our day-to-day business.

With so much going on, it is imperative that Independents work together in support of each other, our residents and councils. We do not have a whip that forces us together, but our common approach brings dividends whenever we combine forces.

"Our common approach brings dividends whenever we combine forces"

I'm therefore looking forward to celebrating our members at our annual conference on 6 November. Do please join us for our virtual AGM, from 10am to 12.30pm, and our social event at 6pm.

It will be a unique opportunity to hear from our council leaders, Professor Colin Copus, the LGA's chairman and chief executive – on Independent leadership over the past 18 months and priorities for the future.

Thinking inside the box



Councillor **Tudor Evans** OBE is Leader of Plymouth City Council

It is almost impossible to express how excited I am about the opening of The Box.

It's the culmination of years of planning, committees, long meetings, crazy deadlines and mindboggling logistical headaches – but it's finally here.

The significance of this investment can't be overestimated. When I first pitched The Box to the Arts Council, I told it that Plymouth has so much history it does not know what to do with it all.

But it's all here, in The Box, the largest arts and heritage space to open in the UK this year.

The Box was always more than buildings and regeneration; it is about people, about making Plymouth a fantastic place to live and creating a strong sense of pride among our residents. We wanted to get their stories, their history and we hope we have captured the DNA of this extraordinary city.

Plymouth City Council has form in making stuff happen for culture. We built the Theatre Royal – now regarded as one of the country's top regional theatres. The 'build it and they will come approach' really works.

Like all great ideas, The Box was born out of necessity. We needed a new home for our incredibly important archives. Instead of addressing a single problem, the project team got bolder.

The city's creative sector was growing. With a cross-party belief in investing in arts and culture to support economic growth and raise aspirations, we went for it. For our investment we get the priceless returns of jobs, tourism, inward investment, recruitment, civic pride, marketing and financial leverage.

The Box opened in September, and the timing feels even more important now. It was due to open in May as part of a massive Mayflower commemoration year

for the city. While some events have been postponed, this is still happening.

The Box is a key part of Resurgam, our economic recovery plan. It's Latin for 'I shall rise again'. The word is part of Plymouth's history – it appeared on a wooden sign over the bombed-out St Andrew's Church during the Blitz.

We want to do everything we can to protect jobs in our city and help our residents. We want a city centre renaissance and The Box is literally a stone's throw away from our shopping heartland.

Skills is a key area of intervention and throughout the build, we've had apprentices, work placements and special days behind the scenes to inspire our young people.

We kept spend as local as possible, with 72 per cent of sub-contractors coming from companies with local post codes, as well as employing as many locals as possible (920 construction jobs and 60 permanent jobs).

While the council is the lead organisation and major funder, the project would not have been possible without the University of Plymouth and the National Museum of the Royal Navy. Other major project funders include the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Arts Council England.

It's been an incredible journey. We have all been absolutely committed and excited by the potential The Box has to unlock talent in our communities and provide role models for our children.

It is about making culture something for everyone. Plymouth is the place that gave us the Royal Academy through Joshua Reynolds – we're just bringing culture home.



i For more information about The Box, please visit www.theboxplymouth.com

Councils need mums



Councillor **Kelly Grehan** is Deputy Shadow Leader of Dartford Council and a member of the LGA Labour Women's Taskforce

The theory behind local government is a good one: local people, representative of the local population, represent the area.

In reality, 'representative' is not a word that can be applied to most local councils, in terms of demography. As we all know, councils are overwhelmingly populated by white, older men. Statistics published in the LGA's 'National census of local authority councillors 2018' revealed that just 10 per cent of councillors were under 40, just 36 per cent were women and only 36 per cent had caring responsibilities.

People might ask why this matters. It matters because councils make decisions that impact on people's lives and inevitably councillors make their decisions – whether deliberately or not – through unconscious bias.

It is also vital that councils reflect their communities and have experiences that mirror those of the people in the area.

But – probably because of the nature of those who currently serve on them – councils are organised in a way that makes it difficult for people who are in work or have caring responsibilities to fulfil the role.

Then, for those on borough councils like myself who work and have childcare responsibilities, it's constant juggling.

But worse than that are the comments of disapproval that I've often received or witnessed – about how mums should not be asking for maternity leave, breastfeeding through meetings, bringing children to events, or even having children in the background on Zoom meetings.

It's no wonder so many people with family and work responsibilities decide not to stand for election.



“Councils are missing out on people with first-hand knowledge and experience of a lot of services”

As a result, councils are missing out on a wealth of skills and expertise and, significantly, on people with first-hand knowledge and experience of a lot of services. After all, it is those with children who use services such as nurseries, libraries, schools, youth clubs, parks and special education needs services.

Suggesting changes seems to be controversial in councils. Tradition seems to win out over anything else and so meetings and procedures are little changed from generations ago. Even bringing in policies like maternity leave has been difficult in many councils. In 2019, just 20 councils (8 per cent) had a maternity policy in place for their senior, cabinet-level councillors and only 7 per cent had one covering ordinary councillor roles.

Help with costs is patchy and some

councils provide no support at all.

Meanwhile, a third of female councillors have experienced sexist comments from their colleagues, including about their roles as mothers.

Councils and party groups need to ensure that a culture is developed where having caring responsibilities is not seen as a negative or a liability and is actually seen as an asset.

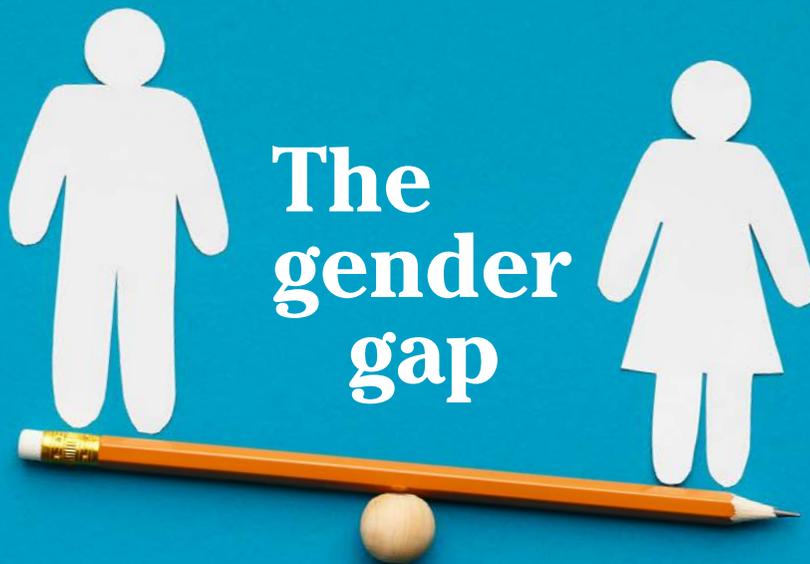
This is partly about bringing in changes such as maternity leave and childcare policies, but it is also about the words we use and gestures – for instance, having changing mats and colouring books in offices for councillors' children.

And it's about us going and making the case to potential councillors about why mums are needed in the chamber – primarily because we need people advocating for the services they use.



The LGA's 'Twenty-first century councils: enabling and supporting women, parents and carers to stand and serve in local government' is a toolkit for councils, available at www.local.gov.uk/twenty-first-century-councils 'For the 'National census of local authority councillors 2018', see www.local.gov.uk/national-census-local-authority-councillors-2018

ELECTIONS



“Progress in improving women’s representation has been made but some will claim it has been slow and should be accelerated”



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



problem. The proportion of women standing at the two General Elections in 1974 was less than half the local government figure, while the proportion elected was less than a third. Women were also notable for

their absence in the professions and in management roles.

But it was another decade before women councillors rose to one in five of councillors elected. To an extent, change was slow because of male incumbents who understandably wished to continue in post.

Another problem lay with the recruitment of more women candidates. Local parties either seemed unwilling or unable to alter the gender balance.

The mid-1980s, however, brought a step-change. How much this was related

to having a female Prime Minister or the much wider debate about women’s empowerment is difficult to say, but the evidence is clear: by the end of that decade, women had risen to three in 10 candidates, although a lower fraction than that were being elected.

The continuing gap between the percentage of women standing and being elected reflected some continuing recruitment issues. Evidence from candidate surveys shows women were more likely than men to stand after being asked by a fellow party member.

Women were also more likely to say that they were standing to assist their party’s ambition of contesting seats – a case of standing without the fear of being elected, perhaps.

The pattern of local parties performing better than the parliamentary equivalent continued until the mid-1990s, when the Labour party’s decision to establish women-only shortlists and take other measures promoting positive discrimination had an impact. There were 101 women among Labour’s tally of 418 MPs following the 1997 landslide victory.

While the overall rise of women candidates had stalled locally, the proportion elected began to improve. A gap between selected/elected of about three percentage points fell to just one point. The 2006 and 2007 local elections saw the percentage of women elected pass the 30 per cent mark for the first time.

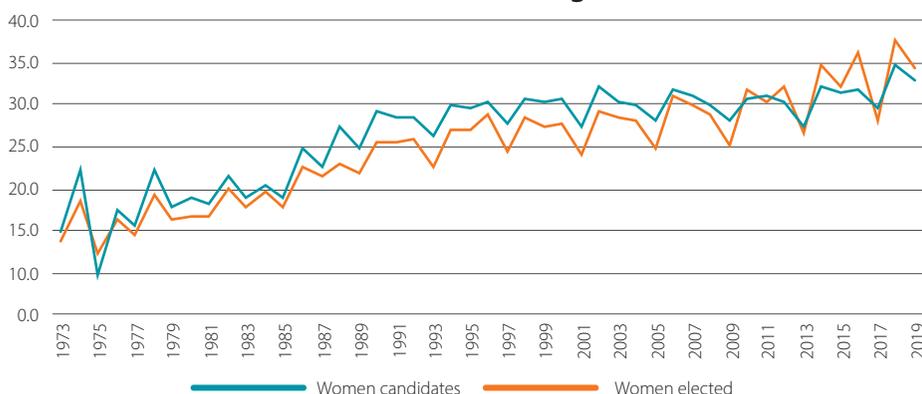
Women’s recruitment examined through the lens of party politics shows

A long-standing issue for local government has been the recruitment of women councillors, with the LGA’s 2018 councillor census showing 36 per cent were female.

Back in 1973, in the first elections to what were newly formed councils, women comprised just one in seven candidates. Since women formed a similar percentage of those elected, the conclusion was that voters did not discriminate for or against women on the ballot paper.

This was not just a local government

Women as % candidates and elected: England & Wales 1973-2019



some interesting developments. During the 1980s and 1990s, Labour locally could not quite match either the Liberal Democrats or the Conservatives. Women elected in 1991, for example, comprised a third of Liberal Democrat councillors, a quarter of Conservatives and just over a fifth among Labour's intake.

Yet, by the time of the equivalent point of the local electoral cycle in 2011, the picture had changed. Now, women were 37 per cent of Labour's elected intake, a figure that was 10 percentage points better than the Conservative's.

Labour's rapid recruitment and placement of women into winnable seats explains the narrowing and eventually the reversal of the percentage gap between women selected and elected.

Some 32 per cent of candidates who contested the 2016 elections were women but among those elected the figure was 36 per cent. Of Labour councillors elected, the proportion of women reached 43 per cent, increasing its lead over rival parties.

Election results from 2019 show the latest picture. The figures for women standing as Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Labour were 30, 33 and 39 per cent, respectively.

A quarter of all Independents were women and among the smaller parties more than a third of those on the ballot were women. In Wales, Plaid Cymru's women candidates formed a quarter of its total in 2017.

However, some 44 per cent of Labour's intake in 2019 are women, further demonstrating the party's desire to redress the imbalance among the sexes. The Liberal Democrats and Conservatives too saw a fractionally larger proportion of women elected compared with those standing.

Progress in improving women's representation has been made but some will claim it has been slow and should be accelerated. This may be easier said than done.

Close examination of the trend reveals another feature of women's recruitment that is related to the electoral cycle. A four-yearly dip in the data corresponds with the English shire county elections, revealing that women are more difficult to recruit to these councils.

If this feature relates to the geographical spread of these authorities, then it may have implications for the practice of amalgamating small districts into large unitary councils.

Prudence on allowances

Cllr Mickleburgh disagrees with the allowances paid to councillors in Kent and pleads reasonableness in respect of his basic allowance of circa £8,000 a year within North East Lincolnshire Council ('Privilege to be a councillor', **first** 651).

Whereas I totally agree that it is a privilege to be a councillor, to draw a comparison, our basic allowance is around £4,800 a year.

Councillor colleagues who chair committees – or indeed full council – only just touch £8,000 a year, regardless of their increased responsibilities.

So, Cllr Mickleburgh and his colleagues receive allowances which are certainly not typical in this expensive district.

I am a councillor within Wealden District Council. I am proud of its achievements, its leadership and management, and the healthy state it maintains because of those factors, and of course its financial prudence.

I hope that equation will continue for the foreseeable future.

Cllr Philip Lunn (Con), Community and Public Health Portfolio Holder, Wealden District Council

Connecting buses and trains

When we get on top of the COVID-19 virus (or learn to live with it), getting public transport back on an even keel will be a major task.

Securing an improved bus service during the crisis might seem like a pipe dream but it happened in a corner of the City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council.

Local councillors campaigned for 10 years to get a railway station at Apperley Bridge. Once opened, it was an instant success – you have to get up early to find a car park space before catching a train to Leeds or Bradford Forster Square.

There is a purpose-built bus turning circle and shelter in the car park but until August 2020 there were only five one-way bus journeys during rush hours – three to the station in the morning and two in the reverse direction for evening commuters.

In 2017, I suggested three options for a serious bus-rail link, one of which was the diversion of the airport bus into the station car park. I was told that it was not possible.

However, after continuing campaigning, a vastly improved service was finally introduced at the end of August thanks to a change of operator. Transdev

(operating under their Yorkshire Coastliner brand) now offer an hourly service into the station car park seven days a week, improving on the former airport service with extra journeys in the early morning and late evening.

The new buses themselves are very impressive. This is a rare bit of good news for the Eccleshill, and Idle and Thackley Wards during a grim summer. I just hope we can exploit the improvements when bus patronage returns to something like normal.

Cllr Geoff Reid (Lib Dem), City of Bradford Metropolitan 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. Letters may be edited and published online

Decarbonising transport

webinar series

November-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 November and December that will discuss practical, innovative and achievable actions that councils can take forward for decarbonisation.

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

For further information and to book your place on these webinars, please visit www.local.gov.uk/events

