



10

Party conferences

Making the case
for local leadership

- 13** **Net-zero innovation**
Councils and universities addressing climate change together
- 16** **Children's services**
Councillors have a crucial role to play as corporate parents
- 23** **Leadership of place**
Taking a long-term view of what it takes to strengthen a local area
- 27** **Rent to buy**
Help for first-time buyers frees up social housing for those in need

LGA Annual Conference and Exhibition

4-6 July 2023

Bournemouth
International Centre

www.local.gov.uk/conference



LGA Annual Culture, Tourism and Sport Conference 2022 (Hybrid)

Tuesday 11 October 2022, London

The process of recovery from COVID-19 is firmly underway with levelling up, economic recovery and reducing inequalities at the heart of council recovery plans. But addressing the effects of the pandemic on communities and places, as well as the increasing impact of rises in the cost of living, will require a radical rethink of how services are viewed, valued and delivered.

Join us to hear from councils who are taking innovative approaches and from experts on the challenges facing the sector and how we can best harness the power of culture, tourism and sport to support our communities and places.

Book now: www.local.gov.uk/events



CONTENTS



Conference politics

The autumn conferences of the three main political parties give the LGA the opportunity to make the case for local leadership on some of our most pressing national issues – not least the cost of living (p10).

In this month's **first**, we also hear from Helen Morgan, the Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, ahead of her party's conference in Brighton from 17-20 September. There will be previews of the Labour and Conservative events in next month's edition.

The LGA's Independent Group conference, for members of smaller parties and none, takes place on 28 October this year.

Elsewhere in the magazine, we look at: the LGA's Net Zero Innovation programme, which funds partnership projects between councils and universities to help tackle climate change (p13); hard-to-decarbonise social homes (p15); and some of the data about councillors in our latest census of elected members (p30).

The South West also features heavily, with Torbay Council reporting on how it has turned round its children's services (p16), the chief executive of Exeter City Council discussing leadership of place (p23), and Plymouth showcasing a rent-to-buy scheme that is helping low-income first-time buyers onto the housing ladder (p27).

Cllr James Jamieson
is LGA Chairman



29

FEATURES

- 10 Party conferences**
Making the case for local leadership
- 12 Lib Dem 'firsts'**
Delegates to discuss rural inequalities and adult social care
- 13 Net-zero innovation**
Town and gown tackle climate issues
- 15 Decarbonising homes**
Reducing emissions from social housing
- 16 Children's services**
Councillors crucial as corporate parents
- 17 Support for fostering**
Free enrichment activities for children
- 19 Better than cure**
The benefits of preventing illness
- 20 Wellbeing guardians**
Helping care staff with mental health issues
- 21 Promoting diversity**
LGBT+ inclusivity in the fire service
- 22 Demystifying digital**
A new digitalisation framework for councils



19



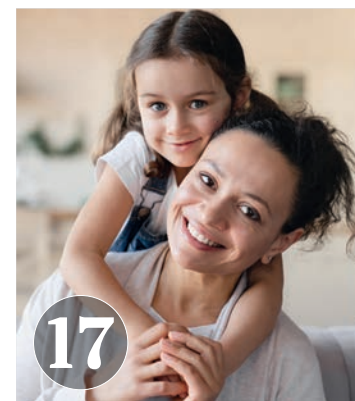
21

COMMENT

- 23 Leadership of place**
A long-term view on improving local areas
- 26 Independent living**
Social care needs met closer to home
- 26 Scaling up retrofit**
Support for councils
- 27 Rent to buy**
Helping low-income first-time buyers
- 27 Community join-up**
Becoming less hard to reach
- 28 Sherwood Forest**
From Robin Hood to 5G connectivity
- 28 A connected future**
Building a 'smart city' in Sunderland
- 29 Transforming lives**
Digital innovation is critical to levelling up

REGULARS

- 04** News
- 09** Parliament – select committees
- 24** Chairman and group leaders
- 30** Councillor – latest census data
- 31** Local by-elections



17



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Local 
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Homelessness warning for Ukrainians

Six months since Russia invaded Ukraine, the LGA has warned that homelessness rates among new arrivals from the war-torn country are set to continue to rise.

The number of Ukrainian new arrivals owed a duty by councils to either relief or prevention of homelessness rose again in

July, with 1,335 accepted 'duties', including 945 households with dependent children.

While councils are continuing to work hard to help new arrivals settle in the UK and those already in their communities, the LGA said the homelessness figures could continue to rise as the initial six-month

sponsorship period under the Homes for Ukraine scheme ends in September.

Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman, said: "Councils, sponsors and Ukrainian guests all need to know what the options are as we get closer to the end of the six-month initial placements period, so they can start planning.

"There is a significant risk that – even if rematching is available – many Ukrainian families may need to present as homeless because of a lack of sponsors or other options."

The LGA says that joint work is urgently needed, and that hosts and their guests need to be clear about the challenges of finding affordable housing across the UK.

Recent Office for National Statistics data suggest that the rising cost of living is affecting hosts' abilities to continue support.

The LGA has called for an increase in the £350 payments given to sponsors, to encourage people to sponsor long term, and is working with government to achieve this.

Cllr Jamieson added: "We support the Prime Minister's agreement that those arriving through the Ukraine Family Scheme should be able to be re-matched with a sponsor and access existing funding, rather than be forced to present as homeless if they can no longer stay with their family.

"Work is needed on how councils can work with government and the community, faith and voluntary sectors, so those offering their homes can be quickly matched with a family in need, regardless of their route to the UK."



Extreme weather alerts to be improved

The Government has announced it will launch a new public emergency alerts system in the autumn, to improve its ability to 'warn and inform' people where there is a risk to life.

The system will focus on extreme weather, such as flooding, with alerts sent direct to people's mobiles via text messages, explaining what to do and how to seek help.

Kit Malthouse, Lead Minister for Resilience and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, has also announced that the Civil Contingencies Secretariat – the Cabinet Office's emergency

planning and response team – will work on longer-term planning and to improve future responses to emergencies.

The announcement comes after a summer that saw the UK's first-ever red heat warning in July. This was followed by drought across much of England at the same time as flood alerts were issued as the heatwave broke up with thunderstorms and torrential rain in August.

LGA Chairman Cllr James Jamieson thanked councils "for working to protect your communities and adapt services during this period".

Councils have been making extra checks on those who are more vulnerable, including those receiving adult social care; providing extra support for rough sleepers; adapting waste collections; and working with others, including local fire and rescue services, to protect vital local infrastructure.

The LGA's severe weather hub provides resources, briefings and guidance designed to help councils prepare for, and react to, extreme weather, and ensure effective communication with residents – see www.local.gov.uk/severe-weather



LGA calls for deferment of social care reforms

The LGA has called for some aspects of the Government's adult social care reforms to be deferred, in a letter to Health and Care Secretary Steve Barclay.

The letter requests a six-month deferment, to April 2024, of implementation of the care cost cap, changes to the financial means test thresholds, and to Section 18(3) of the Care Act, to allow time to learn from the local authority 'trailblazers' piloting the charging reforms.

It also seeks a 12-month delay to the implementation of the new social care assurance process.

While the LGA and councils support the Government's ambition to fix social care, they feel the reforms are underfunded and run the serious risk of exacerbating significant ongoing financial and workforce pressures, including considerable vacancy rates across the sector.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "The reforms

as they currently stand will make services worse, rather than better, if pushed through without the correct time and resource.

"Our recent survey found that 86 per cent of lead members think that some or all the reforms should be delayed (see **first** 674).

"In response, we have written to the Secretary of State with our requests for reasonable adjustments to the implementation timetable and to stress the unavoidable relationship between underfunded reforms and increased pressure on an already overstretched system.

"Social care's lack of capacity to deliver the care that people need has been evidenced time and time again, and the Government needs to step in.

"If it doesn't, we can expect one of the most challenging winters in recent times, with knock-on effects that will continue to impact on people and their loved ones."



Reports urge action on social care workforce 'crisis'

Two significant reports have highlighted the ongoing social care workforce crisis and advocated for further funding for councils and care providers.

'Long-term funding of adult social care', from the Commons' Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee, found that the sector needs an immediate boost of at least £7 billion a year, and recommends the Government publish a 10-year strategy for the adult social care workforce. The LGA gave oral and written evidence to the committee's inquiry and is quoted throughout the report.

'System on a cliff edge: addressing challenges in social care capacity', from the NHS Confederation, looks at how 'steep' vacancy rates and problems recruiting and retaining social care staff are affecting patient discharges from hospital.

It says staffing gaps and a lack of capacity are putting the care and safety of NHS patients at risk, and calls for a social care 'rescue package', including a fully-funded pay rise and improved career progression opportunities.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Developing a strategy for the social care workforce, with a requirement of working towards parity with the NHS, is something the LGA has long campaigned for, and could be transformative for social care in changing perceptions of the critical role of care work and increasing capacity in the workforce.

"Investing in social care now will create long-term savings throughout the NHS, as well as the overall public purse, giving patients and people who draw on care better services and treatments, while improving the wellbeing of our communities."

● See p20



Help for councils with cost of living

With inflation hitting a 40-year high, the LGA has launched a new cost-of-living hub, to share best practice and help councils support their residents.

The rate of Consumer Prices Index inflation rose to 10.1 per cent in July, the highest since 1982, according to the Office for National Statistics.

Inflation is expected to fall back a little in August; however, according to estimates, it could soar to 13.3 per cent in October, when the energy price cap rises again.

Meanwhile, some forecasts suggest energy bills for a typical household could rise to £4,200 in January, and that two-thirds of households could be in fuel poverty by then (defined as when energy costs exceed 10 per cent of a household's net income).

The LGA's cost-of-living hub includes a series of case studies, resources and data to help councils deliver support to residents, and covers areas such as food insecurity and poverty, fuel and energy, and money and debt (see www.local.gov.uk/cost-living-hub).

The LGA will also be launching a new Cost Pressures Bulletin, which will include additional information and updates from Westminster and Whitehall (see bit.ly/3bZpnkH to sign up).

LGA Chairman Cllr James Jamieson said: "Councils are working tirelessly to ensure those most in need are supported as they struggle to cope with rising prices, while also trying to manage the impact of inflation and rising energy costs on their own budgets."

● See p24-25



'Fund physical activity from sugar levy' – LGA

Money raised from the soft drinks industry levy should be reinvested in council-run initiatives to boost physical activity, the LGA has said.

The levy, designed to reduce consumption of sugary drinks, has raised around £1.2 billion since its introduction. However, it is no longer ringfenced to be spent on efforts to tackle obesity and physical inactivity.

Earlier this year, the Government cut funding for locally commissioned adult weight-management programmes, meaning a number of councils have had to cancel vital support programmes designed to help local residents lose weight.

By reinstating this funding and devolving sugar levy funds, the Government would ensure councils can continue to provide vital services, such as tackling childhood obesity and encouraging greater physical activity in their local areas, said the LGA.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "The whole country has been incredibly proud of the achievements of our Lionesses and Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games champions, many of whom started their journeys into elite sport at council-run sports facilities.

"If we are to capitalise and ensure a lasting legacy from these successes, we've got to get as many children active as we can.

"The sugar levy has been used as one of many tools to tackle growing levels of obesity across the country. However, it is concerning that it is increasingly unclear how the revenue generated from this is spent.

"It is vitally important that money raised through the levy is reinvested in physical activity programmes in local communities and other support to tackle childhood obesity."

Lenient guidelines 'leading to low fly-tipping fines'

The LGA is calling on the Government to update the sentencing guidelines for fly-tipping so that taking criminals to court is worthwhile.

Fly-tippers prosecuted in court for the worst waste dumping offences were handed an average fine of just £335 in 2020/21.

Analysis of the latest figures by the LGA shows that average fines issued by courts following criminal proceedings averaged £65 less than the £400 fixed penalty notice councils can issue as a civil action.

The LGA says tougher sentences are needed to deter fly-tipping, which costs councils more than £50 million a year for clearing up.

Councils take fly-tipping extremely seriously and are taking increasing enforcement action against the criminals responsible. However, prosecuting fly-tippers often requires time-consuming and laborious investigations, with a high threshold of proof.

In addition to the low fines, councils are

often left out of pocket from court action, as their costs are not fully repaid.

The LGA is calling on the Government to work with councils on reviewing guidance to the courts, to ensure the worst offenders face tougher fines and that councils have the funding needed to investigate and prosecute fly-tippers.

Councils want courts to look at fly-tipping as an offence first, rather than at the individual and their ability to pay, and make more use of suspended sentences, or custodial sentences for anyone convicted of a second fly-tipping offence.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Environment Spokesperson, said: "Fly-tipping is criminal activity and is a blight on our public spaces. The individuals responsible for it must be held accountable and prosecuted.

"Magistrates need new sentencing guidelines for fly-tipping, to make court action more worthwhile for councils and, in turn, reduce fly-tipping in our communities."

Water pollution plans 'must strike balance'

Agencies must come together to stop river pollution at its source, the LGA has said.

The Government's new plans to safeguard natural water resources must balance the needs of communities with protecting our rivers, and it is right that more onus is placed on water companies to stop pollution occurring in the first place.

LGA research found that the previous plans would have prevented 17,000 homes a year from being built (see **first** 673). These new measures will mean some areas will be able to build homes again.

However, much still needs to be done to keep rivers and other water assets clean and allow them to be thriving natural habitats.

Cllr David Renard, the LGA's Environment Spokesperson, said: "Councils want safe, clean, thriving natural environments alongside the sustainable development of housing, growth and jobs.

"It is important to strike the balance between ensuring councils can provide new homes for local people alongside protecting our environment, such as our rivers. Councils have always been clear that limiting new developments alone will not be



enough to improve the state of English rivers.

"Councils are at the centre of this ambition and it is vital that the Government and its agencies, house builders, the agricultural sector, and water companies all come together with councils to continue to find short-term solutions, while doing everything we can to reduce pollution at source."

Fresh calls for solution to housing shortage

Almost 200,000 children have spent the summer holidays in temporary accommodation – equivalent to more than 4,500 primary school classes of children.

The LGA has warned that a national shortage of housing is to blame, and has set out a plan of action the Government can take to prevent further homelessness and to reduce the number of people in temporary accommodation.

This includes powers for councils to acquire empty homes, reform of the Right to Buy scheme, and bringing forward the pledge to end 'no-fault evictions'.

It's also essential that there is sufficient protection through the mainstream benefits system, that debt management is strengthened, and that funding and use of discretionary housing payments is reviewed.

The need to provide housing, particularly for children, is even more crucial now following disruption to children's schooling, home lives and social lives as a result of the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns.

Cllr David Renard, LGA Housing Spokesperson, said: "Living in temporary accommodation can cause great disruption for children and families. After two years of disruption to our children's education and social development, it is crucial we make

addressing the chronic housing shortage a priority.

"As well as looking to find suitable housing for those already homeless, we must ensure everything possible is being done to combat the rising cost of living and prevent further homelessness, which will inevitably lead to more children in temporary accommodation.

"The Government's upcoming cross-departmental rough sleeping strategy must also look at wider homelessness issues, including family homelessness, and consider the impact that the cost-of-living crisis is expected to have on homelessness services."



More children waiting for a place in a secure home

Latest figures show the number of children in England waiting for a place in a secure children's home (SCH) has doubled in a year.

The LGA said the figures underline the urgent need for the Government to tackle the lack of provision to support some of the most vulnerable young people in the country.

Government data shows that, at any one time, around 50 children each day are waiting for a place in secure accommodation – an increase from 25 each day last year.

The LGA is calling for an overhaul of the system used to place children in SCHs, with the introduction of a national commissioning service for coordinating placements.

SCHs provide care for some of the most vulnerable young people, who have very

complex or challenging needs. Councils have been raising concerns for some time about the challenges in finding suitable homes for children who need to live in secure settings.

Cllr Anntoinette Bramble, Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board, said: "It is absolutely vital that we have sufficient places available to provide what is essential, very specialised support. Without this, the impact on children can be devastating.

"This is why we are calling on government to work urgently with councils to deliver a fresh approach to secure children's home provision, by creating a national commissioning service that best meets the needs of young people who need support the most."

In brief

Inflation warning

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) has warned that the Government would need to find £12 billion simply to achieve what it was intending to do with the £24 billion household support package announced in May. This is largely because, in May, energy prices were forecast to increase by 95 per cent in 2022/23, but are now expected to go up by 141 per cent. The IFS also said that, under latest inflation forecasts, out-of-work working-age benefit claimants are now set to see a drop in their real income of £620 over the course of the year.

Polio jabs

The UK Health Security Agency has announced a polio vaccination rollout for children aged one to nine living in London, as a result of the virus being found in sewage samples in the area. Vaccinations will take place in schools in Barnet, Brent, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, Islington and Waltham Forest. Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Although cases of polio have been exceptionally rare, we cannot afford to let our guard down. Councils and their local directors of public health urge parents to ensure their children are vaccinated against polio and that they come forward for a booster if they are offered it."



Household support

More than 70 Labour council leaders and around 1,000 councillors from across England have written to the Prime Minister urging him to double the Household Support Fund. Cllr Shaun Davies, Leader of the LGA's Labour Group, said: "Councils provide essential support for so many around the country. Measures like increasing and extending the Household Support Fund must be put in place now, so councils can plan how best to help this winter. The fact that so many councillors have put their name to this letter underscores the vital importance of this issue."

In brief

Swimming pools

Councils across the UK lost 65 swimming pools through either temporary or permanent closure in the past three years, according to a Freedom of Information request. UKactive, a not-for-profit industry association, attributed the closures to a lack of staff, rising energy costs and chemical shortages, and warned of further closures before the end of the year.

Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson, Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, said: "Councils are working incredibly hard to prevent centres from closing, and understand that many people are facing rising individual costs, so have no desire to increase prices if it can be avoided."

Drug deaths

The number of drug-related deaths in England and Wales for 2021 has increased, an Office for National Statistics report shows. The new statistics show a 6.2 per cent increase from the year before, with the highest death rate among those aged 45 to 49.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board, said: "Every death to drug misuse is a tragedy and councils are absolutely determined to ensure people have the right support. Many drug overdose deaths are preventable. Ensuring robust practices are in place, along with the policies or protocols to support those at the greatest risk, can prevent fatalities."

Council pay offer

The National Employers for local government services have written to the Government about the pressure on this year's pay offer arising from projected increases in the National Living Wage, and the impact this will have on local authorities seeking to balance their budgets. A pay offer for council employees of £1,925 from 1 April 2022 was announced in late July. This equates to an increase of 10.5 per cent for the lowest paid, currently earning £18,333 a year. Unions are consulting on the offer, which will affect around 1.5 million employees in 350 local authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

'Ban HGV drivers from using car sat navs'

HGV drivers should be banned from using standard car sat navs that are leading them to crash into bridges or get stuck down narrow local roads that specialist lorry sat navs avoid, councils are urging.

The LGA said communities are being blighted by incidents where lorries have blocked streets, got stuck, and crashed into bridges as a result of driving down routes not suitable for their size or weight, often after being taken there by a sat nav.

It is calling on the Government to take urgent action and use its forthcoming Transport Bill to require all HGV drivers, by law, to use specialist sat nav devices.

These are devices that include bridge heights, narrow roads, and roads that are unsuitable for trucks.

They also allow the driver to input the lorry's dimensions – height, width, weight and load – so they are only guided along suitable roads.

Making them mandatory will support HGV drivers to carry out effective route planning, especially the new HGV drivers coming into the industry to support the vital role lorries play in the economy.

Cllr David Renard, LGA Transport Spokesperson, said: "The spate of accidents we continue to see involving lorries blocking streets, damaging local areas and crashing into bridges on an all too regular basis are causing major disruption to local communities.

"There are a minority of drivers who continue to follow sat nav systems that take them down routes that are totally inappropriate for the weight and height of their vehicle.

"By making it mandatory for anyone operating an HGV to use a specialist sat nav device, the Government can help to reduce the risk of accidents and keep our roads moving."

Councils complying with ombudsman's guidance

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman made 1,848 service improvement recommendations to councils last year, focusing on policies, procedures and staff training.

Almost all councils (99.7 per cent) complied with these recommendations, with Ombudsman Michael King highlighting the "significant role" of elected members in "holding officer decisions to account and striving to achieve the best outcomes for the people they represent".

In 2021/22, the ombudsman received

15,826 complaints and enquiries about council services, and made recommendations to put things right in 2,231 cases.

It upheld around two-thirds of complaints it investigated, with the highest uphold rates in education and children's services (77 per cent).

Cllr Peter Fleming, Chairman of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board, said: "Councils continue to deliver the crucial services that communities rely on, while also managing the ongoing cost-of-living crisis and the challenges it brings to their areas.

"We are pleased to see the recognition of the important role that elected members play in the integrity of the complaints process.

"It is positive that, in 99.7 per cent of cases, councils are implementing recommendations made, showing that local authorities are determined to make sure these issues do not occur again.

"Local government is one of the most trusted parts of the public sector, with polling consistently showing high satisfaction rates. Councils are always striving to do the best for their residents and deliver first-class services."



PARLIAMENT

Spotlight on select committees

Giving evidence to parliamentary inquiries allows the LGA to lobby on local government's policy priorities

As the national voice of local government, a vital part of the LGA's activity is working with parliamentarians to shape the national policy agenda and scrutinise government decision-making on the issues that matter to councils and the communities they serve.

Influencing select committees is key to that engagement. These provide one of Parliament's main tools for holding government to account, by facilitating effective scrutiny of Parliament and policy making.

They comprise cross-party groups of MPs or Lords (or both), charged by Parliament to examine the administration of specific departments and government performance, or to scrutinise legislation.

Select committees undertake inquiries, encourage written evidence, question witnesses, publish reports, and call for matters to be debated in Parliament.

Examples include the all-powerful Public Accounts Committee (PAC), described by constitutional expert Professor Peter Hennessey as "the queen of the select committees", which has a unique remit to scrutinise all Whitehall departments and public spending.

Elsewhere, the Liaison Committee is a super-committee comprising the chairs of all the other select committees, and is the only committee that can directly question the serving Prime Minister.

Mark Lloyd CBE, the LGA's Chief Executive, gave evidence to the committee in 2019, as part of its efforts to identify how select committees could improve their scrutiny of government.

Through their powers to call witnesses, select committees provide opportunities for people beyond the 'Westminster bubble' to engage directly with Parliament.

In recent years, appearances from actors Hugh Grant and Steve Coogan, comedian Russell Brand, media tycoon Rupert Murdoch, businessman Mike Ashley and ex-Barclays Chief Executive



Officer Bob Diamond have all made headline news.

Away from the celebrity circus, the LGA engages with select committees by providing written and oral evidence through the appearances of senior councillors and officers.

This offers an opportunity to lobby on the policy priorities of local government and promote the outstanding work of councils as leaders of place.

The 'LGA in Parliament 2021/22' report, on our parliamentary engagement over the past year, highlights that the LGA continues to be one of the organisations that engages with parliamentary committees the most, providing thought leadership on a range of issues.

LGA representatives appeared before 30 parliamentary inquiries, with 47 written submissions to inquiries to help inform a wide range of recommendations in parliamentary reports.

Given their cross-party, scrutinising role, select committees are highly influential. For example, the recommendations in 2017 – from both the Treasury Committee and the then Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee – that councils' housing borrowing caps be lifted, led to that policy being introduced after years of campaigning from councils.

The Health and Social Care Committee's report into social care funding and workforce highlighted LGA analysis of the funding gap in adult social care services, and echoed councils' calls for a long-term, sustainable funding solution for adult social care.

The PAC's report into test and trace also recognised the invaluable work of councils throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, stating that councils' early involvement in the programme could have led to a more effective system.

i For more information about parliamentary inquiries and to read 'LGA in Parliament 2021/22', please visit www.local.gov.uk/parliament, or sign up to the LGA's Communications and Parliamentary Network for regular updates by emailing publicaffairs.team@local.gov.uk

Party politics

The autumn conference season is an opportunity to make the case nationally for local leadership

The political party conferences will be in full swing this autumn, with all three events – Liberal Democrat, Labour and Conservative – taking place in-person for the first time since 2019.

As party activists and others descend on Brighton, Liverpool and Birmingham respectively, the significant challenges facing the nation over the past few years will be at the forefront of people’s minds.

Whether it be saving lives and livelihoods on the frontline of the pandemic, bringing together communities to welcome new arrivals fleeing conflict, and, more recently, supporting residents through the cost-of-living crisis, local leadership has ensured that councils remain the fabric of our nation.

But it is only with the right powers, freedoms and flexibilities – matched by adequate long-term funding to cover increased cost pressures and invest in local services – that councils can play their full part in transforming our local areas for the better, tackling the climate emergency and levelling up all parts of the country.

The conferences take place just a few weeks after the UK gets a new Prime Minister and Government in early September, which presents the national parties with the chance to set out their stall for the future of the UK and plans for economic recovery at a time of spiralling living costs and rising inflation.

This is also a key opportunity for the LGA to highlight the leadership role of councils in boosting economic growth, reviving local areas, and equipping people of all ages with the

skills they need to succeed, to ensure no-one is left behind.

LGA Chairman Cllr James Jamieson and the LGA’s political group leaders, Cllr Shaun Davies (Lab), Cllr Izzi Secombe OBE (Con) and Cllr Joe Harris (Lib Dem), will be joined by many other councillors in delivering the message of local leadership throughout the conference season.

LGA Independent Group Leader Cllr Marianne Overton MBE will also be joining councillors from the smaller political parties to take that



LGA events at the party conferences



Liberal Democrats conference

Brighton
17-20 September 2022

- **LGA Liberal Democrat Group evening reception**
Sunday 18 September, 7.45pm to 9pm
Ambassador and Sandringham, Metropole Hotel, Brighton
- **LGA debate, sponsored by Google**
'Supporting communities through the rising cost of living and into economic recovery'
Monday 19 September, 1pm to 2pm
Alexandra, Grand Hotel, Brighton

Speakers include: Cllr Joe Harris, Leader of the LGA’s Liberal Democrat Group and Cotswold District Council; and Sir Ed Davey MP, Leader of the Liberal Democrats

Speakers include: Helen Morgan MP, Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities; examples from Lib Dem councils on tackling the cost-of-living crisis; Vinous Ali, Director at Public First (confirmed); representative from Google (tbc)

These events make the case for empowered local government

message of local leadership to their party conferences.

The LGA will again be hosting its own debate at each conference, with high-profile speakers, including representatives from government and opposition, senior councillors, influencers from think tanks, and our sponsor, Google.

We will consider the impact of the cost of living on our communities and how, with the right funding and freedoms, councils can play a leading role in supporting their residents and make them more resilient in the future.

Our councillors will also debate a range of topics – including levelling up, affordable housing, adult social care, children's services, public transport and boosting local economies – at events organised by stakeholders, including charities and think tanks.

This ensures councils have a strong voice in policy discussions throughout the conference season.

The 2022 Liberal Democrat conference will be held from 17 to 20 September in Brighton, with Sir Ed Davey looking to build

on his party's successes in the May council elections and the recent by-elections.

In Liverpool (25-28 September), Sir Keir Starmer will look to steer the national policy agenda towards tackling the rising cost of living and creating stronger public services, as he sets out his party's plans for the country as the next general election draws closer.

Meanwhile, the Conservative Party will be meeting in Birmingham (2-5 October), where the new Prime Minister will articulate their vision for creating an economic recovery that benefits all.

Conference season will draw to a close on 28 October, at the LGA's Smith Square offices in London, with Cllr Overton leading the LGA Independent Group's conference. This is free to attend and open to all independent councillors and councillors from small political parties.

All of these events will be vitally important in making the case for an empowered local government. We will be working with councillors, parliamentarians and other change-makers to make the positive case for localism as the answer to the challenges the nation faces.

i For the latest **information on LGA events at the party conferences**, please visit www.local.gov.uk/parliament/party-conferences-autumn-2022



Labour Party conference

Liverpool
25-28 September 2022

- Association of Labour Councillors evening reception**
Sunday 25 September, 8pm to 9.30pm
 Hall 2H, Liverpool ACC
- Speakers include:** Cllr Shaun Davies, Leader of the LGA's Labour Group; Sir Keir Starmer, Leader of the Labour Party (invited); and Lisa Nandy, Shadow Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (invited)
- LGA debate, sponsored by Google**
 'Supporting communities through the rising cost of living and into economic recovery'
Monday 26 September, 1pm to 2.30pm
 Auditorium 1B, ACC Liverpool
- Speakers include:** Cllr Anntoinette Bramble, Deputy Leader of the LGA Labour Group (Chair, invited); Cllr Shaun Davies, Leader of the LGA Labour Group (invited); Tracy Brabin, Mayor of West Yorkshire (invited); Lisa Nandy, Shadow Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (invited); Olivia Bailey, Director at Public First; representative from Google (tbc)



Conservative Party conference

Birmingham
2-5 October 2022

- LGA Conservative Group welcome reception**
Sunday 2 October, 3.30pm to 5pm
 Hall 8, ICC, Birmingham
- Speakers include:** Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman; Cllr Izzi Seccombe, Leader of the LGA's Conservative Group; and a representative from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities ministerial team (tbc)
- LGA debate, sponsored by Google**
 'Supporting communities through the rising cost of living and into economic recovery'
Monday 3 October, 3.30pm to 5.00pm
 Concerto, Hyatt Hotel, Birmingham
- Speakers include:** Cllr James Jamieson, LGA Chairman (Chair, confirmed); Cllr Izzi Seccombe, Leader of the LGA Conservative Group (confirmed); Andy Street, Mayor of West Midlands Combined Authority (invited); a representative from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities ministerial team (tbc); representatives from Public First (tbc) and from Google (tbc)

A conference of 'firsts'

Rural inequalities and adult social care will be among the issues discussed by the Liberal Democrats



Helen Morgan is the Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

The Liberal Democrats return to Brighton from 17-20 September for autumn conference – four fantastic days developing policy, taking part in training, and attending fascinating fringe events.

It will be a conference of 'firsts': the first in-person conference in more than two years; the first in-person party conference for our Leader, Sir Ed Davey; and the first time almost half of our parliamentary party is attending conference in-person as MPs – including myself!

As Spokesperson for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, I am excited to see local government high on the agenda. I will be moving motion F19 – 'Standing up for rural communities'.

Communities such as mine are too often overlooked by the Conservatives. Many homes use oil as their primary source of heating, which is not protected by the price cap; childcare providers are closing at a worrying rate; and we face dangerously long delays across the emergency services.

I will be proposing a package of support to reduce rural inequalities that would see £2 billion of investment in local services, the rollout of nationwide hyper-fast broadband – with rural areas first in line to get connected – the introduction of a new price cap on off-grid fuels, and the doubling and expansion of the rural fuel duty relief.

The Liberal Democrats continue to lead the way in tackling issues in adult social care.

Our policy proposal is ambitious

but essential, underpinned by the belief that everyone has a right to high-quality care, and that this right should be as infallible as healthcare or education.

We will ensure everyone, regardless of ability to pay, has access to social care, expanding the system first introduced in Scotland in the Liberal Democrat-Labour administration. No more tweaking a failing system – we will empower local government to integrate care services.

I am pleased the motion will deliver meaningful change in the social care workforce, too. That means a real living wage, investment in skills, and establishing pay bands that offer clear career progression.

The motion also recognises the work of unpaid carers by proposing their inclusion in the list of protected characteristics in the Equality Act, and by giving all young carers a legally enforceable education guarantee.

Before we venture to Brighton, the Conservatives will select a new Prime Minister. I believe that, with so many crises all at once, the country deserves a say in the direction in which we go,

and that decision should not be made by Tory members alone.

We need a general election. It is time for a battle of ideas to decide who can lead our country through this difficult time.

There is no sign that either candidate is willing to let the people have their say. That's because they are waking up to the truth that their reign will be short-lived.

People are fed up with the sleaze, and an out-of-touch government that offers no support to the millions struggling to make ends meet.

Neither Liz Truss nor Rishi Sunak has offered a vision for Britain that tackles the challenges ordinary people face – but that is hardly surprising.

Much like Boris Johnson, they are in this for self-service, not public service, with each believing that it is their turn to be Prime Minister. Never before have there been two people so desperate to captain a sinking ship.

© GETTY/
DAN KITWOOD

i See next month's first for previews of the Labour and Conservative party conferences



Liberal Democrat Leader Sir Ed Davey MP

Councils can apply for LGA funding to support joint projects with universities on addressing climate change

Net-zero innovation



Councillor **Liz Green** is Chair of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board's Climate Change Working Group

Across England, councils have declared a climate emergency, seeking to lead action at a local level to reduce carbon emissions, adapt to climate change, increase biodiversity, transition to net zero, and, ultimately, improve the local environment and quality of life for their residents.

The LGA's Net Zero Innovation Programme (NZIP) brings together partnerships of university researchers and council officers across all regions in England, and supports them to define challenges and co-create solutions – and develop projects – that could begin to address these issues.

Universities have been working in the climate-change space for a long time and have invaluable research that can help councils in achieving their ambitions. Councils are place-shapers and implementers in their local communities.

Together, these partnerships create a clear opportunity for knowledge exchange, delivery of evidence directly into policy making, and practical delivery at local level.

Since April 2020, the LGA has been delivering the NZIP in collaboration with University College London (UCL).

So far, we have supported 24 council and university partners with developing their collaborations, as well as delivering innovative projects that are now widely available to the sector via our website (see information box for details). For example, in the 2020/21 programme, we supported

a collaboration between Colchester Borough Council and the University of Essex, called Go Green Schools (see bit.ly/3p8xaPP).

This project documented the extent to which primary schools in Colchester have embedded environmental education and action into their ethos, practices and operations.

Throughout delivery, the partnership faced challenges, such as delays relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. But they were able to finalise the project through continued communications with one another and the NZIP team.

“The positive experience of the Go Green Schools project is one factor that has contributed to strengthening

Colchester Borough Council and University of Essex climate-related partnerships over the past year,” the project team commented.

Earlier this year, the LGA and UCL presented other case studies from the NZIP at a showcase event (see bit.ly/3BX6ol4).

Three partnerships demonstrated the learnings from the programme and how their final projects – on retrofit skills, procurement tools to measure and reduce carbon emissions, and a climate change and health-adaptation tool – could be used by other councils across the country.

Applications are now open for the next round of the Net Zero Innovation Programme.

The scope of the programme is broad, and partnerships could address challenges from decarbonising transport or improving air quality, to reducing climate impact on vulnerable communities and improving wellbeing through green spaces.

Practical tools and solutions could include development of training, toolkits, mapping documents, or calculators. Partners may also wish to bring in an industry partner to contribute to the work and add a wider perspective.

The cohort will be given free training, funding, and time to work on their projects, at times feeding back into the larger NZIP network with their progress and to gain wider support.

Up to 12 partnerships, with evidenced ideas for scalable tools, will receive £10,000 worth of funding to create their tool, training or guide. The council will receive the money from the LGA.

We also encourage councils and universities to think about what match funding they may be able to bring to their projects.

i For more information about the **LGA's Net Zero Innovation Programme**, including case studies of previous projects, frequently asked questions, and information about the application process and timescales, please visit www.local.gov.uk/net-zero-innovation-programme, or email climate@local.gov.uk to discuss the programme further. The deadline for applications is 9 September.



Hydrogen CHP: The Future of Net Zero is Now

Electricity alone is not a solution, but we're already well set up for CHP to be a viable alternative

The challenge of reaching net zero while simultaneously meeting the demand for high energy production may initially appear daunting; however, achieving this goal could be easier than perceived because most large energy consumers already have the necessary equipment in place.

Combined heat and power (CHP) systems already supply large proportions of an organisation's electricity and heat, while providing considerable financial savings. It is possible to ensure the energy supplied is net zero simply by changing the gas input to green hydrogen.

It is widely known and understood that the development of hydrogen as a fuel source provides one of the most viable pathways to a net-zero world. The hydrogen economy will require hydrogen to be phased in while natural gas is phased out.

A significant trend in decarbonisation is electrification; however, even with massive reinforcement of the electricity Grid, it would not be able to cope with the substantial additional energy supplied already by gas. With the intermittent nature of most renewables, and the energy density constraints of battery storage, it means that electrification alone cannot be a solution.

2G Energy has been installing and operating 100% hydrogen CHPs worldwide since 2012, providing large proportions of an organisation's electricity and heat, while helping them reach their net-zero goals. Running with hydrogen above 40% simply requires the gas to be injected into the cylinder, rather than going through a conventional gas mixer, which meant we could use our standard engines just with a slight hardware addition. The hardware

upgrade for hydrogen operation can be completed on all new 2G engines, even to a huge portion of the ones already installed on sites. For existing 2G CHPs, these systems are already in place, so there is no need to have a new system designed and installed to use this zero-carbon energy. With no major infrastructure changes, an organisation will not have to make fundamental changes to the operation of its assets.

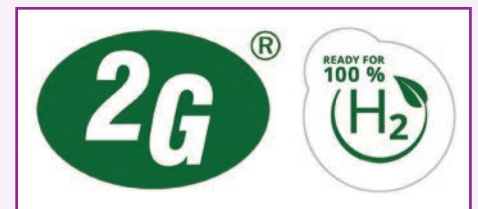
The Energy Networks Association (ENA) announced that the UK's gas grid would be ready for a 20% hydrogen blend from as early as next year to decarbonise the gas infrastructure. All five gas grid companies are on track to complete the necessary pipe upgrades to deliver a 20% hydrogen blend across the country by 2023.

Even though there are already 2G CHPs operating on 100% hydrogen worldwide, there is no need to go entirely 100% hydrogen straight away. Our standard engines can take any blends of hydrogen up to 40% before we need to do the engine modification. As the gas grid introduces higher percentages of hydrogen, the engine will not be impacted; simply, the energy supplied will have a lower carbon

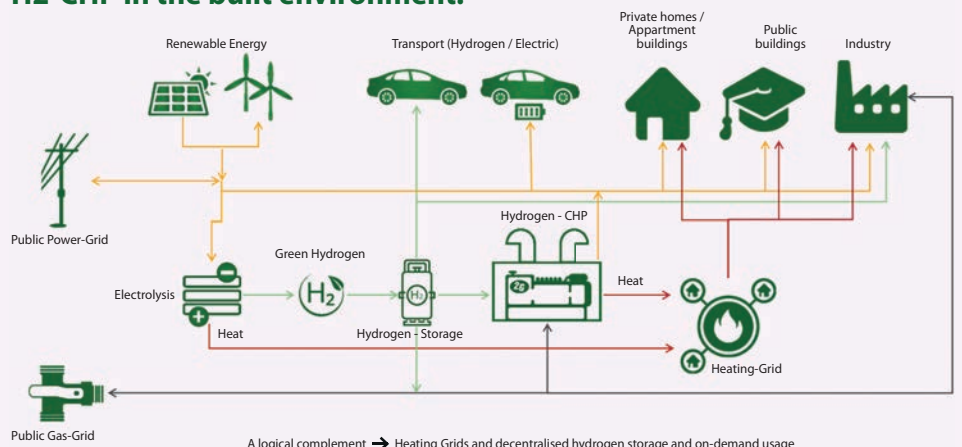
footprint. Once the gas grid is higher than 40% hydrogen, then the engine can be simply modified.

Even if you do not already have a CHP system, you can still benefit by installing one now to run on natural gas immediately. With the high spark spread – the ratio between gas price and electricity price – the return on investment is typically between two and four years, with the equipment having a lifetime of 15-20 years. It is an investment that repays quickly, sets you up for the zero-carbon journey, and ensures that your CHP is considered a future-proof, carbon-free infrastructure investment.

2G Energy AG is one of the leading international manufacturers of combined heat and power plants (CHP) for the decentralised generation and supply of electricity and heat. Our product range includes CHP systems with an electrical output of between 20kW and 2,500kW, for operation with natural gas, biogas, other lean gases, biomethane, and hydrogen.



H2-CHP in the built environment.



For more information, please visit 2-g.com

Decarbonising social homes

An LGA report sets out some practical steps for reducing carbon emissions from social housing

For the UK to meet our legally binding target of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, it's necessary for social housing providers to cut the emissions of homes they manage to zero.

Decarbonisation of social housing stock is, therefore, a key strategic challenge for all social housing providers, including councils.

The LGA and the National Housing Federation (NHF) recently commissioned a report to help registered providers better understand why some homes are harder to decarbonise than others and the practical steps necessary for those that are 'hard to decarbonise'.

'Hard to decarbonise social homes' also looks at what changes in policy could help reduce the risk of homes being disposed of on the private market, or demolished when there is potential for them to be decarbonised, given that retrofit or renovation is almost always a lower-carbon alternative to rebuilding.

Around 93 per cent of social homes are ready to retrofit, but more than 300,000 are classified as hard to decarbonise and will require significant investment to reach net-zero targets.

This includes 220,000 that require at least £20,000 per home to reach decarbonisation targets, because of building characteristics that make it expensive: they are usually old, detached bungalows or houses,

with solid brick walls and little or no loft insulation.

The bill to decarbonise these homes – defined as a home that is electrically heated, ideally using heat pumps, and has "enough" insulation – could be at least £6 billion overall.

A further 88,000 properties require more bespoke interventions to reach heat-demand targets when accompanied by a heat pump.

This can be because of the age or size of the property, materials used in construction, or planning restrictions because of its location in a conservation area, or World Heritage site.

✧ *We must be honest about the challenges facing our sector* ✧

Funding is likely to be the biggest single barrier for social housing providers looking to decarbonise the homes they manage.

Financial assistance can reduce the number of hard-to-decarbonise homes based on the investment required. A 10 per cent reduction in heat-pump cost reduces the proportion of homes with high investment by 45 per cent.

Adjustments to regulation and technological innovation are also required to make homes easier to

decarbonise. Many of these changes would help social housing providers implement large-scale retrofit schemes, as well as help to treat homes that are hard to decarbonise.

A skills shortage is also a concern, and proposals to partially scrap Section 106 agreements have the potential to remove one of the only mechanisms for driving apprenticeships and training for local workforces, something integral to heat-pump installation.

The LGA and the NHF want to work with government to address these barriers while retaining and improving desperately needed social housing. Given the cost-of-living crisis, it's also vital that this transition does not end up penalising residents already struggling with their bills.

The two organisations are committed to the goal of decarbonising our homes and for social housing to be at the forefront of the country's drive to net zero. The opportunities it presents, to not only help avoid catastrophic climate change, but also to make our homes more comfortable and affordable, speak for themselves.

But we must be honest about the challenges facing our sector, and work with government on long-term plans to deliver the change needed.



'Hard to decarbonise social homes' can be read in full at www.local.gov.uk/publications. See p26

Local leadership



Councillor **Cordelia Law** (Lib Dem) is Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Councillor **Judith Mills** (Ind) is a Member of the Corporate Parenting Board at Torbay Council



Councillors have played a crucial role as corporate parents in the transformation of Torbay Children's Services

Elected members can play an intrinsic role in driving forward positive changes, and the transformation of Torbay Children's Services is a clear example of this in action.

The visionary leadership of members, matched with corporate alignment, has delivered better outcomes for the communities they serve. In a landmark judgement published in May this year, Ofsted

judged the council as 'good' in all four areas of inspection, stating that "services for children in Torbay have significantly improved", and acknowledging this as an "impressive achievement".

After receiving an 'inadequate' rating in the previous two inspections, and years of underperforming historically, the report added that this was a "remarkable transformation".

This was a change driven by a clear and ambitious improvement plan, with strong backing from members and the corporate commitment needed to drive forward the changes required.

We started to view the challenges as the whole council's responsibility, not just those working in children's services.

Children may only represent 23 per cent of the population of Torbay, but they are 100 per cent of the future.

Our role as a corporate parent is one that we take extremely seriously and are proud to uphold.

The Ofsted report described Torbay Council as "a highly ambitious corporate parent". It noted that our corporate parenting board was well attended by a variety of relevant partners and elected members who showed a determined vision for wanting the best outcomes for Torbay's cared for and care experienced young people.

The board works hard to create more employment opportunities for care leavers through the local authority and its partners.

In addition, members take an active role in making sure children's voices are heard and expressed within the board, by meeting regularly with the cared for children's group, The Voice.

Meanwhile, the decision of Torbay's partnership administration to make improvements in children's services a top priority has led to reduced costs in frontline agency staff and independent residential care provisions.

With a tighter grip on finances, the council has been able to invest in other areas to enable communities to thrive.


Children's services make up almost a third of our overall budget, so future-proofing the financial stability of this service has been key to our long-term success. This financial astuteness has, in turn, released resources that we have been able to invest in our place-based services.

As local families are facing challenging times, we want to instil confidence that we are running a local authority that offers value for money for all residents – and a whole-council approach empowers the whole community to prosper and thrive.

What this success story of an improvement journey shows to our wider community is a message of hope, of the positive change that comes from working alongside one another and from a steadfast passion for delivering better outcomes for children, young people and families.

This improvement journey has captured the hearts and minds of the whole council, and it is with this whole-council approach that we will continue to strive forward to become rated as 'outstanding'.



 See www.torbay.gov.uk for more information



Councillor **Steve Darling** (Lib Dem) is Leader of Torbay Council

Recognising and retaining foster carers

Torbay Council works with communities and local businesses to provide free enrichment activities for cared for children

With tears of joy in our eyes (and with tears of joy in some inspectors' eyes), we learnt in May that Ofsted inspectors rated Torbay Children's Services as 'good' after years of underperforming.

To be acknowledged as finally making a positive difference to the lives of our children and their families was a fantastic and humbling achievement – and, most importantly, what our community deserves.

Being a father and adopted makes this a topic close to my heart.

It is unlikely that I would have had the same life chances if I had not had the loving support of my adoptive family. I want all children to have the same opportunities that I had.

As part of our children's services improvement journey, we took a proactive approach in recruiting a strong and growing foster family network. This means we are not reliant on costly residential care and can provide safe, loving homes for vulnerable children in our care.

On the day the 'good' rating was announced, we celebrated through

our very first Children's Services Celebration Awards, which were held with our foster carers during Foster Care Fortnight.

This was a wonderful event, and an opportunity for children's services colleagues and foster carers to reflect together on the successes of the past year, be inspired, and celebrate the outstanding achievements of individuals and teams.

It was a poignant reminder that we must never doubt how a collective group of thoughtful people can change a child's life.

Making real improvements to Torbay Children's Services has been a huge aim of mine and of Cllr Cordelia Law, our Cabinet Member for Children's Services.

Part of the Ofsted report recognised the importance of free enrichment activities to the wellbeing of cared for children and how this enhanced their peer relationships.

These enrichment activities have been made possible by partnering with local businesses, including Torquay United Football Club, Dartmouth Steam Railway, Splashdown Water Park, Torquay Big Wheel, and Paignton Zoo.

Last year marked the second successful year of the Dartmouth Steam Railway's Christmas Train of Lights experience for Torbay fostering families, with a record 1,000 excited passengers taking part.

This heartwarming and inspiring evening helped to create happy memories for some of the most vulnerable children in Torbay, and was a shining example of community spirit.



One Torbay foster carer said: "Our little girl absolutely loved every minute; it was a magical experience for her. I think that because of last year's lockdown she hadn't really experienced the joy and excitement of Christmas before.

"This was the perfect start to her first real Christmas."

The fostering team takes a proactive approach to creating these partnerships and making them accessible to all family members. These local business partnerships have also opened new channels of communication to reach out to new foster carers.

Ultimately, the real impact lies in the strengthened and meaningful relationships that children are building with foster carers, developing trust and hopeful futures.

We are now galvanised to build upon these successful foundations with our foster carers, and to partner with local business, to continue to help strengthen relationships and create happy memories.

We remain committed to keeping children and families at the centre of all that we do in Torbay.

Alliance Leisure named **Supplier of the Year** 2022

Firm secures title at the ukactive awards in recognition of delivering transformational projects that create engaging active environments to support healthy, happy and prosperous communities

For more than 20 years, Alliance Leisure has worked with local authorities and facility operators up and down the country to design, procure and develop leisure transformations that deliver outstanding community value.

During this time, the company has delivered 192 projects representing investment of more than £250 million.

Projects have ranged from multiple new builds across entire leisure portfolios to outdoor gyms, pump tracks and 3G pitches.

Every project is unique, and is designed to address the bespoke needs of the community it serves.

Constantly innovating, Alliance Leisure is focused on helping clients achieve their objectives, to deliver maximum benefits to its partners, clients and active communities.

The company understands that people want to move in different ways and creates facilities that provide an opportunity for everyone.

To date, Alliance Leisure has delivered

£265 million of completed leisure developments and is on track to deliver a further £90 million by the end of 2022 – with more to open in 2023.

That's around one-third of £1 billion, which was the rallying call from ukactive in 2016. A large number of recent developments have been delivered through the innovative UK Leisure Framework, which is managed by Denbighshire Leisure.

But it's not just about the buildings and spaces. Alliance Leisure also supports operators in the promotion of their facilities and services through its creative marketing and training brand, TA6.

TA6 is focused on creating sustainable revenue streams, investing in staff development,

i For more information about the UK Leisure Framework, visit www.LeisureFramework.co.uk. Meet the Alliance team at www.allianceleisure.co.uk



and improving the health of local communities.

The brand worked with more than 70 leisure operators in 2021 and was directly responsible for delivering marketing campaigns that generated more than 50,000 membership sales (worth around £15 million of revenue).

In the past 12 months, TA6's digital adverts have generated more than 100 million impressions to an estimated 10 million people (approximately 19 per cent of the UK adult population), resulting in almost 1 million visitors to its clients' websites. And despite COVID restrictions, TA6 has delivered training and coaching to more than 3,000 leisure staff.

Paul Cluett, Managing Director, Alliance Leisure, says: "This award reflects the hard work, dedication and experience of our team.

"Even through tough economic times, we have continued to work with councils to find ways to fund and deliver projects that are essential to community health, cohesion and prosperity.

"We look forward to continuing this journey, creating sustainable, active environments that encourage more people to be more active, more often."





Councillor **David Fothergill** is Chairman of the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board

Better than cure

Preventing illness and premature death will generate economic as well as health benefits

It is estimated by the World Health Organization (WHO) that almost one-third of the disease burden in industrialised countries can be attributed to four main behaviours: smoking, alcohol intake, poor diet, and lack of physical activity.

But when considering the cost of that burden, it is not just the bill for treatment and care that should be taken into account.

The economic consequences of premature death and preventable illness are considerable too. These can include loss of productivity in the workplace, and lead to poor mental health.

The LGA has consistently argued that the current social care and health system is unsustainable, and will buckle under the weight of demand unless we re-engineer our planning and service provision to protect health, prevent sickness, and intervene early to minimise the need for costly hospital treatment and care.

Trying to fix this by focusing on treatment alone is not the answer. We need preventative strategies that mitigate or defer the need for costly interventions and, at the same time, deliver better outcomes for individuals.

As the industrialist Henry Ford said: "If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got."

It is just plain common sense that investing in prevention is necessary to help reduce the long-term cost of treatment and to maintain a sustainable health and social care service. But why is this so challenging in reality?

When local authorities are under



pressure to make savings within reduced budgets, making the case for investment of any kind can be difficult.

Making the case for investment in activity that can't always guarantee immediate cost savings, and may not reap a return for a number of years, might seem impossible. But that doesn't mean it isn't the right thing to do.

We do not actually know what the

It is also difficult for local authorities to build a business case to invest their scarce resources in initiatives where the financial benefits accrue to other agencies, such as the NHS or the benefits system, or where the financial return won't be realised for many years

As local politicians, we need to consider more than just an economic case. As decision-makers, we have to balance a range of priorities that, on the face of it, may not always appear logical, and we will all view present and future benefits differently.

Population-wide interventions that require a high level of political commitment – for example, the introduction of seat belts, oral contraception, raising the smoking age, food labelling – can be highly effective, compared with interventions that require low political commitment but considerable individual effort.

The health needs of the future – especially people with long-term conditions – and the challenge of closing a growing funding gap mean that we can't go on with business as usual.

✧ We need to *consider* more than just an *economic case* ✧

whole health and social care system currently spends on prevention. A figure of 5 per cent is typically quoted for England, which roughly reflects the money spent on the public health grant as a proportion of total government spending on health.

However, that figure masks the range of secondary prevention activities undertaken within the NHS.

A recent WHO report stated that, on average, around 3 per cent of national health sector budgets are spent on public health and prevention.

Social care staff need more help with wellbeing and mental health issues

Could you be a wellbeing guardian?



Health and wellbeing in the workplace have never been more vital – not least in social care, where long-term and deep-rooted issues of stress and burn-out have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a workforce survey undertaken by the Department of Health and Social Care in December 2021, 70.6 per cent of respondents said maintaining staff morale was challenging, with clear implications for staff retention.

Not only could supporting the mental health and wellbeing of the workforce be crucial in retaining critical social care staff, but it could also help deliver better quality care, supporting and enabling people to live as independently as possible.

There are many facets to ensuring the workforce is healthy, happy and supported. But what role could the council and its political leadership play?

The practice of creating 'wellbeing guardians' is a relatively new, emerging, cross-sectoral practice. Many aspects of practice could indeed be adopted by

portfolio-holding councillors, ensuring councillors have greater input into, and influence on, the wellbeing of the social care workforce.

The role will vary according to the needs, strengths and opportunities of each council, though there are common functions that a wellbeing guardian is likely to undertake in fulfilling an assurance, challenge and leadership role.

These include:

- representing the mental health and wellbeing of the social care workforce at political level
- providing strategic direction in how the council supports the mental health and wellbeing of the social care workforce
- ensuring there is active leadership in mental health and wellbeing for the social care workforce
- embedding an organisational culture of wellbeing
- convening partners that support the mental health and wellbeing of the workforce
- influencing the council's commissioning work to consider

providers that support staff mental health and wellbeing.

Wellbeing guardians have already been embedded into the NHS, mostly sitting as non-executive directors. Primarily, they have a challenge and assurance role, though this is tailored according to the needs of each organisation. We also see similar roles already embedded in local government.

In 2013, the then Dorset County Council and the London Borough of Lambeth were the first councils in England to appoint a member champion for mental health, with high-level responsibilities to champion mental health in the community, reduce stigma and improve understanding.

Similarly, Torbay Council is in the process of developing a wellbeing guardian role that will represent staff wellbeing at board level and embed wellbeing throughout the organisation, though it is being incorporated into the director of public health's role.

Ultimately, the form, functions and roles of wellbeing guardians will be specific to each council. Nevertheless, given the likely roles, it is a function a portfolio-holding councillor could lead, shape and mould.

In what feels like a time of ever-increasing uncertainties, the role could be invaluable in ensuring the social care workforce can better deal with pressures at work, be better equipped to provide high-quality care, increase workplace fulfilment, and, subsequently, improve retention rates.

Is this, therefore, a role that political leaders might want to explore further?

i The LGAs' **'Top tips for embedding a wellbeing culture'** is an online resource to help councils and partners embed wellbeing for social care staff, see bit.ly/3BWeJpq. For more information or support on embedding wellbeing within your council, please email nathan.brewster@local.gov.uk

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service is the UK's second-most LGBT+ inclusive workforce in the UK



A commitment to diversity



Mark Cashin is Chief Fire Officer of Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service

I am immensely proud that we are in second position given the broad range of establishments that took part in Stonewall's 2022 survey – 403 employers from across the public, private and third sectors, with nearly 80,000 employees responding to the questionnaire.

Achieving this status signifies our commitment to ensuring we can meet the diverse needs of the communities we serve and that staff know they can

© FLICKR / CHESHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

For the first time ever, Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service was the highest-performing public sector organisation in Stonewall's Top 100 Employers for LGBT+ people this year.

We came second overall, and the service has now been the top-performing emergency service in the UK for six years in a row.

✧ We strive to inspire people from all backgrounds to consider us as an employer ✧

Firepride Allies

Staff at Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service who don't identify as LGBT+, but want to show their commitment to making the service and the community more inclusive, are invited to become a Firepride Ally.

Allies are invited to learn more about the inequalities, challenges and issues faced by LGBT+ people, be available to talk to colleagues about LGBT+ issues, signpost people to relevant policies, guidance and support – internally and externally – and provide support at Pride and other events.

Station Manager Hannah Caulfield is

a staunch Firepride Ally and was named 'Exceptional Allies Award' winner in the 2022 Women in the Fire Service Awards.

Hannah, who joined Cheshire in 2007 as a firefighter, works hard to make new staff feel supported and puts processes in place to improve the job for female firefighters.

She is passionate about gender equality and has made many positive changes in the service in this area, as well as across maternity, menopause and welfare facilities.



For more information, please visit www.cheshirefire.gov.uk

be themselves at work – feeling safe and able to meet their full potential.

Take Kerry Baker, a member of the LGBT+ community who joined the service in 2018. Initially, she started off as a home-safety adviser, fitting smoke alarms and helping people stay safe.

Over time, she has worked as a community safety advocate, supporting residents who are particularly vulnerable to fire, and has qualified as a technical fire-safety inspector.

Kerry, who lives with her girlfriend Lindsay, has just completed training as a full-time firefighter through the service's high-potential development scheme, which supports ambitious employees to reach the role of fire station manager within seven years.

"The fact that the service is so committed to inclusion really matters to me. Its LGBT+ and women's staff networks help to create a culture where there are no barriers to people progressing if they want to," says Kerry.

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's LGBT+ network, Firepride, is for staff and volunteers.

It has been the driving force behind our work to ensure everyone who works, volunteers and engages with the service is treated fairly and with complete respect, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

By having a diverse workforce that is fully inclusive, we are better prepared to meet all the needs of everyone in our communities.

Additionally, by actively promoting LGBT+ inclusion, our recruitment catchment is vastly broadened as we strive to inspire people from all backgrounds to consider us as an employer.

In our latest round of firefighter recruitment, more than 12 per cent of applicants identified as LGBT+, more than double the number five years ago.

Demystifying digital

A new outcomes-based framework can help councils on their digitalisation journeys



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

Local government has been leading the way in developing innovative digital services to meet the needs of local communities and respond to the pressures sparked by COVID-19.

Overnight, in response to the pandemic, councils became hybrid organisations, delivering services in both physical and virtual environments.

They increased the co-production of simple-to-use online services with residents, for the people who needed them most.

These included designing digital services to process support grants for

businesses, distributing food and self-care and medical supplies to vulnerable groups, while using real-time data to assist in emergency planning.

They have also delivered digital inclusion schemes to ensure all our residents are equipped with the essential skills and devices to access services.

But this is just the beginning of local government's digitalisation journey.

Emerging technologies and crises will continue to change the way councils work, and what is expected of them. The public sector digital landscape is only going to get more complicated, and local government will be front and centre of the changes.

We now look to the future to build back stronger in a world where online



To find out more about the LGA's support for digital, including resources, best practice and guidance on cyber security, please visit bit.ly/3SGwWx8. See p29

services and digitally connected places have accelerated rapidly.

Set within this context, and within shrinking budgets and legacy IT systems, few of our senior leaders are digital natives, and even fewer fully understand the security or ethical considerations that accompany new technology.

In response, the LGA, Solace (the members' network for local government and public sector professionals), and Socitm (the network for leaders involved in innovation, technology and modernisation of public services) have come together to launch a new outcomes-based framework to support councils as they embark on their digitalisation journeys.

This framework will promote the use of a common language and shared understanding for local government digitalisation when engaging with central government and with private, voluntary and community sectors.

It will also enable easier identification and sharing of best practice. This will support the design and delivery of modern public services, for councils to operate effectively as digital organisations and champion the digital needs of their communities.

Following input from councils and the sector, the framework identifies 12 strategic outcomes around connectivity, data, democracy, ethics, inclusion, leadership, local productivity, organisational capability, partnership, security and resilience, services, and value for money.

But while an agreed framework is a good start, if we want councils to collaborate and learn from one another, the LGA must use its unique position to enable that learning to be shared.

So, building on this framework, the LGA is commissioning a supplier to launch a new 'Digitalisation almanac' for local government.

It will be informed by extensive consultation and will become a 'one-stop shop' to enable councils to plan and prioritise programmes, respond to national government policy, self-assess capability, understand common challenges, and learn from best practice.

While there are challenges ahead, local government's strengths are in its networks and partnerships.

By working closely together and sharing our learning, we can continue our journey to build back stronger, unlock growth, drive efficiencies, and harness new digital skills for the future in a secure and safe way.



COMMENT



Karime Hassan MBE is Chief Executive of Exeter City Council and Exeter City Futures Community Interest Company

Leadership of place

Many of us in local government are familiar with running an organisation on an efficiency model – a relentless focus on operating costs.

Over the years, the public sector has also encouraged a value model, encouraging the development of the supply chain and delivering local impact.

A place-based model takes a long-term view of what it takes to strengthen or level up a local area and attempts to go further, explicitly recognising that place-based coordination and cross-institutional organising matters.

Exeter has been the second-fastest growing city in the UK for a decade, with strong private sector employment growth and one of the largest travel-to-work areas in the country.

Like all urban areas, it also exhibits inequalities and struggles with many stubborn issues. Councillors, frustrated that not all residents benefited from growth, demanded a different approach – to put wellbeing, resilience and sustainability centre stage in building a vision for place.

In 2016, the council began work with private and public sector organisations to build an environment to support collaboration and innovation, and improve the capability of the city to lead transformational programmes.

Having created Exeter City Futures Community Interest Company as a vehicle to lead change, four areas of focus emerged as building blocks to support change: creating support structures to nurture innovation; developing data and analytical skills; building structures and processes to foster collaborative experimentation and a shared vision; and the need to develop local sustainable finance. These themes continue to weave through city-wide change programmes as Exeter's institutions are encouraged to collaborate for impact.

The many 'wicked' problems places



face require leaders who are comfortable with being uncomfortable, and who are prepared to give up a measure of control to create an environment to innovate, and to harness the collective imagination, intelligence and capabilities of all our institutions and businesses.

Building on work with integrated care, Exeter adopted a whole-system approach to addressing wellbeing and has continued this with supporting active lives, as advocated by Sport England in its 'Uniting the Movement' vision.

It places a premium on collaboration and partnership work.

Wellbeing Exeter has led to substantial investment in asset-based community development, and the focus on physical activity and active travel has led to a fundamental change in the planning strategy. Higher-density housing enables a '15-minute city' that can support car-free developments and where 50 per cent of all journeys are by walking and cycling.

Since 2015, the council has called for the city's institutions to collaborate for local impact.

This includes the wider outcomes of sustainable and inclusive growth, a net-zero Exeter by 2030, building a city of aspiration and opportunity, and supporting wellbeing and culture.

In relation to the university, local hospital trust and local college, this is backed by a Civic University Agreement.

In 2019, the council helped establish the Liveable Exeter Place Board, chaired by Sir Steve Smith, then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Exeter.

The board brings together chief executive officers from leading institutions in the city, across the public, private and voluntary sectors.

The board owns the vision for the city: it is one of a number of examples of local government as the convener of place and of embedding leadership in a collaborative structure.

Winning laurels, not resting on them



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

Cost-of-living pressures are on everyone's mind. None of us will have missed the sight of prices rising in the supermarket or at the petrol station forecourt.

Add in the Bank of England's warning of a possible recession, and it's clear that there's no time for complacency when it comes to the economy.

From cost rises in construction projects to increases in the wage bill in social care, we have been feeling these pressures particularly keenly in local government.

Greg Clark, our new Secretary of State, and his team at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, understand these pressures, and have been working closely with us to help find ways to mitigate them.

And I know that, whichever of our two Conservative leadership candidates prevails in September, they will work with councillors in the LGA's Conservative Group to make sure we can continue delivering for those who count on us.

Against this backdrop, the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games came at just the right time.

In the past few weeks, we have had the spectacle of the Opening and Closing Ceremonies and the pleasure of watching athletes from across the world come to the UK to compete.

The games really have been a

triumph for us – not just on the medals table, but also in the way that communities across the West Midlands have come together to play host.

Personally, I was delighted to welcome athletes to Warwickshire for the lawn bowls and for the women's and men's road cycle races.

All of this comes on top of the great success of the Lionesses in the UEFA Women's Euros: this really has been a great summer of sport!

Whether you stayed at home or headed abroad, let me close by saying I hope you all had – or are still having – a happy and relaxing summer break.

“There's no time for complacency when it comes to the economy”



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

Seasonal storms

While temperatures have dropped, the ongoing impact of this summer's hot and dry weather continues to be felt across the country.

At the time of writing, much of England, from Yorkshire to Cornwall, had been declared in drought by the Environment Agency – at the same time as it issued nearly 20 flood alerts.

Water companies across the country have announced hosepipe bans, and the public and businesses are being advised to use water wisely.

Yet, where we have rain, it is running off the heat-baked ground and causing flooding, rather than replenishing our aquifers and reservoirs.

I know preparation for bad weather is a key priority for councils, with comprehensive plans in place to cope. Thank you, as ever, for your efforts to prepare for the worst, protect communities, and adapt services where necessary.

But while it has been a challenging



summer, the winter looks set to be just as difficult. Many of our residents currently trying to keep cool will be worrying about how they can afford to keep warm this winter, amid warnings that annual bills for typical households could reach £4,200 by next January.

With inflation now at 10.1 per cent – the highest in more than 40 years – and predicted to hit 13.3 per cent in October, when the energy price cap rises again, the cost-of-living crisis means many of our residents are already struggling to cope.

I know councils are working tirelessly to ensure that those most in need are supported through these difficult times,

while also trying to manage the impact of inflation and rising energy costs on their own budgets.

The LGA has launched a cost-of-living hub (see www.local.gov.uk/cost-living-hub), with case studies, resources and data to help councils deliver support to residents living in their communities.

In the coming weeks, we will be launching a Cost Pressures Bulletin, with the latest updates from government and Parliament on the cost of living and council finances, and additional resources to help you deliver support to your residents. You can sign up for it at: bit.ly/3bZpnkH.



Councillor **Shaun Davies** is Leader of the LGA's Labour Group

Time to freeze the energy cap

It may seem strange to be worried about heating your home during one of the hottest summers on record, but these are not ordinary times.

The cost of living is rising at the fastest rate for 40 years, average energy bills are predicted to hit £5,000, and millions of families are frightened about how they'll get through winter.

Ministers should be taking this crisis seriously. But they are too busy competing with each other on who can move furthest from net zero.

Rishi Sunak wants to make it harder to build wind farms. Liz Truss says she wants to crackdown on solar farms too.

“Millions of families are frightened about how they'll get through winter”

Labour Leader Sir Keir Starmer has a plan that rises to the level of this crisis.

Labour would protect families by freezing the energy cap, paid for by taxing the oil and gas producers making huge profits from this emergency.

Because houses in Britain are the least energy efficient in Europe, Labour would invest £6 billion a year to upgrade 19 million homes, slashing the average family bill by another £1,000 a year.

Labour would also invest in the clean, home-grown energy we need to reduce our reliance on expensive foreign gas.

Every councillor can see that working families need protection from this national emergency. Councils of all political stripes are doing all they can, but it's up to the Government to act.

If we must wait until the new Prime Minister has their feet under the table, it may be too late.



Councillor **Joe Harris** is Leader of the LGA's Liberal Democrat Group

Cost-of-living catastrophe looms

Get a grip. That is my message to whoever wins the keys to Number 10 on 5 September.

Get a grip on soaring energy prices, on soaring inflation and on soaring interest rates.

This winter is going to be tough, and neither of the Conservative leadership candidates have offered a policy package that comes anywhere near what is needed to tackle the soon to be cost-of-living catastrophe.

This crisis will spiral: what nobody in government understands is that, for those on less than an average income, surviving the winter will not mean cutting back on non-essentials – it will mean deciding to be indebted to an energy company or a landlord.

The cost-of-living crisis will very quickly become a debt crisis and a homelessness crisis if the next Prime Minister keeps their head in the sand.

I'm proud that the Liberal Democrats are leading the charge on this issue and standing up for those who are struggling to get by.

Our Leader, Sir Ed Davey, has understood the moral duty of an opposition leader to stand up to an inept government and demand immediate support.

“Surviving the winter will mean deciding to be indebted to an energy company or a landlord”

That means a block on the energy cap being raised, a real windfall tax on energy giants, and an immediate emergency budget that provides a package of additional support.

The scale of the challenge we face over the coming months is comparable to the challenge we faced throughout the pandemic, and we need a similar scale of response from government.



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

Building resilience to extreme weather

The high temperatures we have experienced over the summer are unlike anything we've seen here in recorded history, and many more extreme weather events are expected.

We will need to adapt and mitigate for the significant impacts on all aspects of our work, from retrofitting and insulating homes to tackling fire and flood.

“We need to address the fire service's role in resilience against fire, flash floods and winter storms”

Thank you to our councils and their fire services, for dealing with the recent fires and supporting those who were made homeless.

On the hottest day of the year, the London Fire Brigade had its busiest day since World War II. We will all need to address the role of the fire service in resilience against fire, flash floods and winter storms in the future.

Meanwhile, thank you to all our members who have worked hard representing the Independent Group on the LGA's boards this past year, to those who expressed an interest in taking on the work, and to all supporting the work through our busy think tanks.

Thank you to Cllr Ian Stephens for his work as Chair of the Fire Services Management Committee, dealing with ministers, fire chiefs and the public over measures following Grenfell, and keeping the service in local government. Thanks also to Cllr Frank Biederman, now taking on the role with a focus on greater resilience.

We have a very exciting event coming up, bringing together our members for our annual Independent Group Conference on 28 October in London.

To join us at this free event and to find out more, please visit www.local.gov.uk/events

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



Kalvinder Kohli is Programme Director – Prevention and Early Intervention (Adult Social Care) at Birmingham City Council

Happy independent living

The importance of family, friends, places to go and things to do cannot be overestimated in keeping people connected and feeling good about themselves.

With a £53 million budget deficit for adult social care in 2017 and generally poor outcomes for its citizens, Birmingham City Council embarked upon a bold ambition to move investment upstream into prevention.

The intention? To deliver the good, relational life outcomes desired by our older citizens to live happy, independent lives at home and within their communities.

Our formula was quite simple – to work with what is strong within communities. We moved back to a locality social work model, adopted a strengths-based approach, and replenished the community assets eroded during austerity.

We commissioned 10 voluntary and community organisations to deliver neighbourhood network schemes (NNSs) across the city, connecting our social workers, partners and older citizens to assets within their communities.

Our NNS maps activities within local areas, engages and works with citizens to identify their needs and aspirations, and undertakes hyper-local commissioning through grant-based schemes.

We also commissioned Birmingham Voluntary Services Council to coordinate across the 10 organisations, enabling collaboration, sharing of best practice, and problem solving.

The outcomes have been significant. The multiple stories of difference for our citizens speak for themselves, with people feeling less isolated, more confident, happier and connected.

Our staff are benefiting from a community social work model whereby: meeting the needs and aspirations of citizens closer to home becomes a realistic



goal; our community and voluntary sector partners gain a true, long-term collaboration with the council; and the council shifted from a £53 million budget deficit to a balanced budget in 2022.

So, for the next phase of our journey, we have additional investment to deliver NNS activities for younger adults, and have started talking to our integrated care system colleagues to align joint priorities and further funding.

The success in adult social care is also informing the council's corporate agenda for 2022 onwards – moving from crisis to prevention.

Local action to scale up retrofitting



Sarah Jarman is Director of Grants and Fundraising at MCS Charitable Foundation

Local authorities can play a leading role in retrofitting homes to cut fuel bills and carbon emissions. MCS Charitable Foundation is here to help councils achieve that goal.

Retrofitting – insulating houses and installing renewable energy – is the best way of dealing with the double threat of the rising cost of living and the climate emergency.

MCS Charitable Foundation provides grants and support for innovative projects that can deliver retrofitting at scale and across tenure.

Increasingly, we are working with local councils, because we know that local government has a crucial role in designing and implementing retrofit plans.

Yet, our local authority partners are telling us that they need more support, especially in building capacity, to fully realise the potential of retrofitting at scale.

Councils need support to move from a targeted, but limited, focus on those households in most urgent need, to retrofitting across all tenures, building up local supply chains of trained workers and bridging the skills gap that is holding back the retrofit industry.



Both the ambition of local councils and the extent of the support they need has been demonstrated in the extraordinary response to our recent open call for grant applications.

Councils are applying for grants to deliver everything from training new staff, developing the business case for mobilising the 'self-funded' market, and supporting skills and training provision in the retrofit supply chain.

We are collating these responses to make the case to government and to other charitable funders to increase the finance available to local authorities for retrofit programmes.

A key part of our vision for achieving mass-scale retrofit is the replicability of successful initiatives. That depends on councils working together to share learning.

We have established, together with the UK Green Building Council, a retrofit forum, where councils can benefit from the experiences of their peers and hear about further funding opportunities.

Retrofitting is one of the biggest challenges facing local authorities, but it also offers the greatest rewards for climate, health, and prosperity. With the right funding and sufficient capacity, councils can deliver.

i To find out more about **MCS Charitable Foundation**, please visit www.mcscharitablefoundation.org



Councillor Rebecca Smith (Con) is Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Homes and Communities at Plymouth City Council

Rent-to-buy for families on low incomes

With rents and the cost of living increasing, there are thousands of people across the country who would love to own their own home but can't save any money towards a deposit, even though they could afford mortgage repayments.

Five years ago, Plymouth City Council was one of the first to adopt an innovative, affordable rent-to-buy model to help first-time buyers on lower incomes onto the housing ladder.

At the time of adoption, the scheme was highlighted as a case study of best practice by the Government's Social Mobility Review.

After five years, the first tenants of the scheme are now buying 100 per cent of

their homes with a high street mortgage, where, previously, they had been priced out of the market.

The council took a leap of faith in partnering with a local housing association, developer, and institutional investment funded provider, Rentplus, and it has paid off.

Under the scheme, tenants move into a new house without requiring any deposit. They choose how many years – between five and 20 – they want to be paying an affordable rent before buying the property.

When that period ends, they receive a 10 per cent gifted deposit from Rentplus. In the meantime, the rental is managed by a housing association, which benefits from receiving a new income stream.

In Plymouth, all the tenants were taken from the help-to-buy waiting list. All had a local connection and were first-time buyers.

More than a third of the tenants moved out of social housing, freeing them up for allocation to those in greater need, while around another third had been living with family members.

I am delighted that Plymouth City Council embraced a pioneering spirit and tried something new, rather than just sticking to what is known.

This scheme, the first of three in Plymouth and many across Devon, has fulfilled the dreams of local people on lower incomes to own their own home, something they never thought would be possible.



Joining up and joining in



Sarah Bogunovic is Head of Customer Strategy, Registrations and Coroners Services at Surrey County Council

At Surrey County Council, we recognise the many strengths, skills and assets within local communities, and the vital role strong communities play in improving people's lives.

Building better relationships and supporting improved collaboration and engagement at local level is a priority for us.

We cover a large geographical area, with a mix of rural and towns, and serve almost 1.2 million residents.

While people often perceive Surrey as being affluent and wealthy, not everyone living here has the same opportunities and advantages.

Across the county, our communities face many different challenges.

When we asked how we could make a bigger difference, one clear message was that we needed to be less 'hard to reach'.

Over the past year, we've been addressing this by introducing new engagement approaches that: better connect us with communities and partners; direct multi-million pound investments into community-led projects; and get our teams closer to local communities to make a difference day to day.

A key part has been working with Community Catalysts, a community interest company, and some local district and borough councils to introduce local area coordination in Surrey.

With this approach, service interventions are a last resort. Instead, the focus is on people's strengths and how they

can build better connections within the communities in which they live.

Local area coordinators (LACs) work within a small geographical area and walk alongside people – at their pace – to help them realise their vision of a good life.

There are no eligibility criteria, thresholds or time limits, and LACs work with people of all ages.

Embedded in the local community, they are well placed to help people make connections, share their gifts, and identify the right path to achieve their goals.

We're at the beginning of our journey with this new approach and excited to see where it takes us.

Our ambition is for everyone in Surrey to make the most of the opportunities on offer in our county, both now and in the future, so our communities can thrive and no one is left behind.



We're proud of our legends in Nottinghamshire.

Our county is known worldwide for Robin Hood, Maid Marian, and Sherwood Forest, where the adventures of Robin and his Merry Men took place in the late-Middle Ages.

In the early 21st century, a new adventure is taking place in our forest, making it the centre of cutting-edge technology with the potential to transform diverse sectors of our economy.

We are using Sherwood Forest as a testbed to create the world's first 5G Connected Forest.



Councillor Keith Girling (Con) is Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Asset Management at Nottinghamshire County Council

Sherwood Forest goes 5G

This innovative, £10 million, two-year research programme brings together Nottinghamshire County Council, national government, digital developers and academic researchers to examine how 5G can boost the tourism and environment-protection sectors.

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has provided £5 million from its Rural Connected Communities programme, with our consortium partners providing the rest.

Ceren Clulow pictured with robot dog Eric at the LGA's annual conference in Harrogate in June

© LGA/
GREGG BROWN
PHOTOGRAPHY

We're delighted to have Gooii Ltd on board as a partner. The Nottinghamshire-based company uses its unique skills to test Sherwood Forest's 5G capabilities with an interactive holographic experience called 'An arrow through time'.

This Robin Hood tale is viewed by using mixed-reality headsets.

Another dedicated partner – Birmingham City University – has built two robot dogs to trial data gathering to assess and monitor the health of our forest.

The friendly mechanical canines are called Eric and Gizmo, with Gizmo named by a Nottinghamshire schoolboy in a competition to raise awareness of the 5G Connected Forest.

I'm proud to say we're already receiving plaudits for our programme. Ceren Clulow, who has been leading the programme for the council, recently scooped the Outstanding Individual Contribution Award at the Local Government Chronicle Awards 2022.

The panel of judges praised her drive and resilience. She was also described as a "role model in her field".

The hard work of Ceren and our 5G Connected Forest partners has been pivotal as we join up our legendary, historic green space with some of the finest cutting-edge technology available.

i To find out more about the **5G Connected Forest**, please visit 5gconnectedforest.org.uk

Smarter together for a connected future



Liz St Louis is Assistant Director of Smart Cities at Sunderland City Council

A unique 20-year partnership is equipping Sunderland, its residents and businesses with the means to connect, inspire and succeed, and shape a smarter future.

The city council is working in partnership with global digital infrastructure provider BAI Communications to develop Sunderland as a leading UK 'smart city' and a global centre of excellence.

We're building a 'network of networks' to facilitate a range of technologies that will serve the broadest possible set of social and



economic needs across Sunderland – improving the lives and prospects of residents, while increasing the competitiveness of our businesses and the attractiveness of our city to potential inward investors.

This includes a huge expansion of ultrafast free public Wi-Fi to tackle digital inclusion, giving residents without broadband safe spaces to access the internet for free, while enabling transformational experiences for visitors, supporting provision for businesses, and boosting the local economy.

We are also improving connectivity to facilitate transmission of data from

networked sensors across Sunderland, to: measure and improve city performance; support assistive-living technologies; inform traffic/flood management; measure air quality; underpin city centre and building energy management; facilitate smart waste management; and more.

We also have a private network of small 5G base stations, enabling a cost-effective way for a broad range of organisations to adopt cutting-edge 5G connectivity to boost productivity and improve services.

Our unique public-private partnership with BAI Communications is combining public assets with private sector engineering and digital solution development expertise, and providing the investment to build our networks at scale.

Where others have focused on one or two areas, we've widened the scope, with future needs and challenges in mind, and used layers of different networks and capabilities to create a holistic, all-encompassing smart city for greater benefit now and in the future.

This is allowing us to maximise benefits to communities across the city, leveraging data-driven insights and transforming all aspects of education, health and social care, as well as manufacturing capabilities and business competitiveness – leaving no-one and nowhere behind.

i To find out more, visit www.sunderlandoursmartcity.com



Councillor Abi Brown (Con) is Leader of Stoke-on-Trent City Council

Digital innovation and levelling up

Stoke-on-Trent is very much at the forefront of the national levelling up agenda.

We have secured more than £100 million of government investment, including the largest Levelling Up Fund allocation of any UK city in last year's Budget; we are redefining local government's role in educational improvement and family support; and we have secured 550 Home Office jobs for our rapidly expanding business district.

Digital innovation has been a crucial factor in our levelling up strategy, right from the outset.

Even as we were coordinating the local response to the pandemic, Stoke-on-Trent City Council was also delivering a 113-kilometre broadband network to bring full-fibre, gigabit-enabled internet connectivity to more than 84,000 homes and businesses.

In doing so, we became the first city in the UK to deliver a network of this capability and scale. We seized an unmissable opportunity to get ahead of the curve on digital innovation and give our small but mighty city a massive competitive advantage over other places.

However, this is only the first step towards achieving our ambitious digital vision. The network is in place, but how we use it will make the real difference to our

250,000 residents and our local economy.

Our ambitious Silicon Stoke programme aims to transform Stoke-on-Trent into the most digitally advanced city in the UK through investment in infrastructure, skills and high-growth digital sectors.

Stoke-on-Trent is already forecast to be one of the UK's fastest-growing city economies for gross value added and employment growth by the end of this year, and digital innovation and expansion are set to propel our economy over the remainder of this decade.

Work is already under way to deliver complementary 5G coverage across our

✧ *The network is in place, but how we use it will make the real difference to our residents* ✧

network to enhance its potential and unlock a wide range of opportunities for investment, employment and innovation.

Enhanced connectivity and the availability of high-quality, purpose-designed accommodation are making Stoke-on-Trent a more attractive destination for digital and technological

sectors, including digital production and game-making.

We are developing a Digital Innovation Hub to support new and expanding digital businesses.

We are working with our local colleges and universities to develop the best digital education and training offer in the UK – which will fully align with the needs of employers – and we are carving out a unique offer as an emerging national hub for game-making and e-sports.

Our broadband network also offers enormous potential to transform service delivery and outcomes in vital areas such as health and social care through remote access and monitoring technology.

In addition, we are exploring the potential benefits of digital integration in relation to core infrastructure, such as energy and transport networks, as part of our focus on transforming Stoke-on-Trent into a global 'smart city'.

With further targeted investment and support, digital innovation can help to achieve our levelling up ambitions by reducing persistent inequalities, unlocking our economic potential, and transforming life chances for future generations of our residents and university graduates.

Stoke-on-Trent's next great age of creativity and innovation is just around the corner.

COUNCILLOR

Who are you?

The LGA's ninth census of councillors in England provides the most comprehensive, timely overview of local government representation and compares with previous years' data to see how that has changed over time.

The 2022 census was carried out in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on local communities, and explored recent prominent issues of personal safety.

The census focused on three wide-ranging areas: councillors' views on a range of issues; councillors' work; and councillors' personal characteristics.

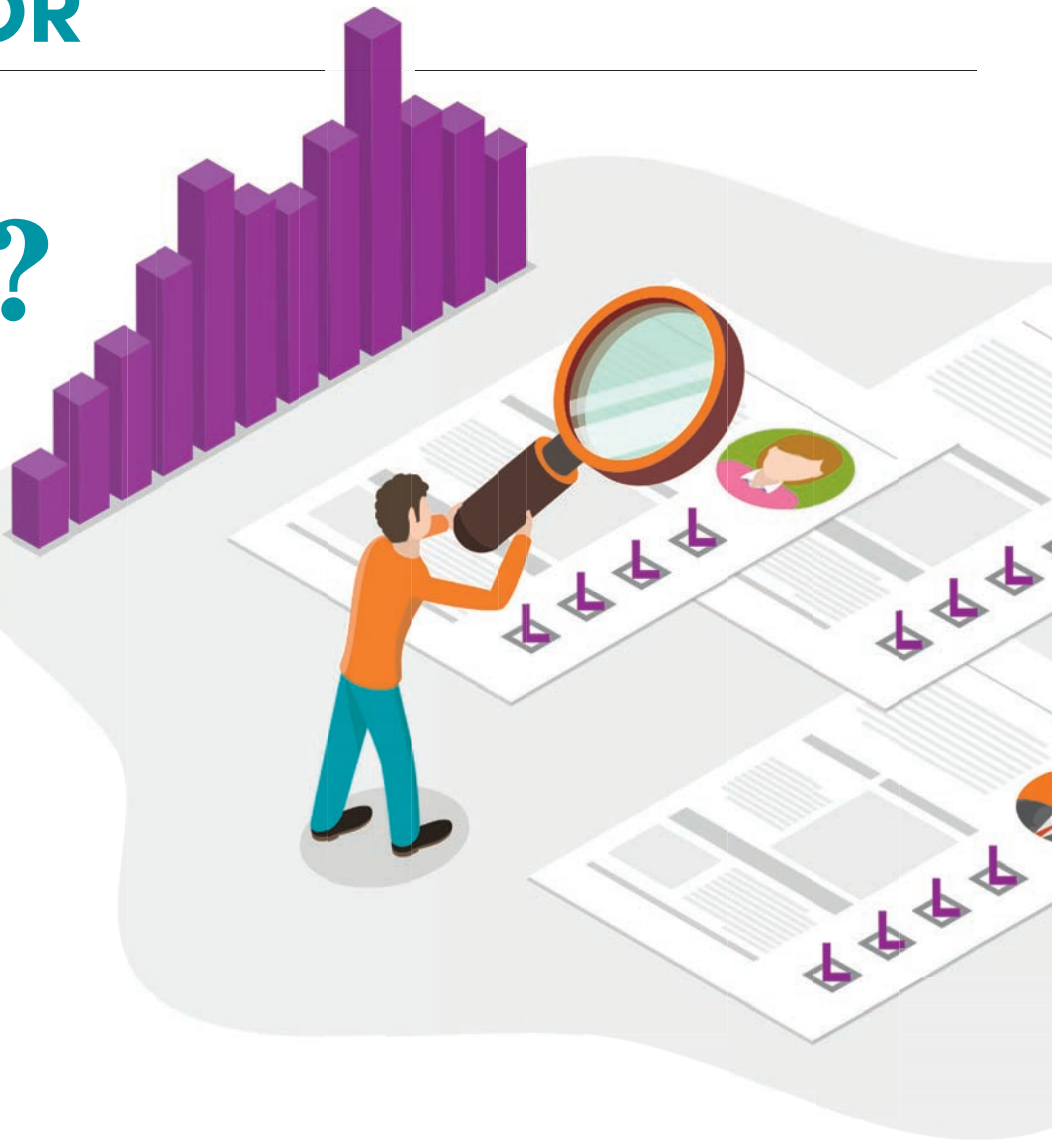
Among the findings were that:

- More than four in five councillors took on the role so they could serve the community (84.8 per cent).
- Nearly two-thirds said the most important thing councillors do is listen to views of local people (62.7 per cent).
- Just less than a third of councillors thought they were "very effective" in their role in the council (31.9 per cent) while 59.6 per cent rated themselves as "fairly effective". Since 2006, the proportion answering "very effective" has increased from 23.5 per cent.
- Nearly eight in 10 councillors said they would recommend the role to others (79.0 per cent).
- Just less than two-thirds of councillors intended to stand at the next elections (64.6 per cent). The proportion not intending to stand (17.8 per cent) was slightly higher than in previous years.

The census also found that most councillors thought their council had appropriate arrangements in place to deal with inappropriate behaviour towards them.

It found:

- About a third of councillors had either frequently or occasionally felt personally at risk in their role (28.1 per cent), just less than half felt at risk rarely (45.1 per cent) and a quarter never felt at risk (26.8 per cent).
- Female councillors were less likely to report never feeling at risk (19.0 per cent) than male councillors (32.2 per cent).



Around seven in 10 councillors had experienced abuse

- Around seven in 10 councillors had experienced abuse or intimidation in their role as a councillor (73.1 per cent).

Social media and the lack of regulation or recourse for councillors online were commonly cited as key issues related to abuse and intimidation of councillors.

Comments about the type of abuse experienced included online abuse from councillors and members of the public, fear of being targeted at home and of home addresses being published, and abuse specifically at surgeries.

In terms of councillors' work, councillors had typically served for more

than nine years on their current authority, while they spent, on average, 22 hours a week on council business – the largest chunk of which was attending council meetings (eight hours).

Elsewhere, the census examined the personal characteristics of councillors.

It found the proportion of councillors describing themselves as white was 91.7 per cent, lower than the proportion reported between 2006 and 2018 (95.9 – 96.6 per cent).

In 2022, 4.0 per cent were Asian or Asian British, 1.9 per cent were mixed or multiple, 1.5 per cent were black, black British, Caribbean or African, and 0.8 per cent were of another ethnic group.

Most councillors (84.1 per cent) described themselves as heterosexual or straight, 4.2 per cent as gay or lesbian, 2.2 per cent as bisexual, 1.6 per cent as other, and 7.9 per cent preferred not to say.

Meanwhile, nearly half of councillors (45.9 per cent) had caring responsibilities, most commonly looking after a child (19.7 per cent).



'National census of local authority councillors 2022', see www.local.gov.uk/publications

ELECTIONS



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



Progressive alliances

After a flurry of seats changing hands last month, these results show a much calmer electoral mood has descended.

The only seat to switch was the Bridgend Independent group win against Labour in Central ward. Last May's election saw the three-member ward split between two Independents and one Labour candidate.

The voting was close, but Labour will be disappointed to lose this by-election by more than 100 votes.

It retains overall council control, but now by the slimmest of margins.

Independents also retained Nethermayne ward in Basildon. The candidate there, Mo Larkin, has had an interesting political journey, first as a Labour councillor and then switching to the Conservatives.

We continue to see evidence that suggests a candidate's local profile has a bearing on electoral success. In Lancaster's Harbour ward, Labour's victor, Margaret Pattison, also represents the ward on Lancashire County Council.

Meanwhile, Susan Howarth, the only one of the three candidates to live in Wychavon's Dodderhill ward, retained the seat for the Conservatives by just 23

votes. Whether it was her residency or the 32 votes cast for the Liberal Democrat that prevented yet another Green gain is open for debate.

There has been some discussion about a so-called 'progressive alliance', espoused by those on the centre-left as a way of shifting the political, not to say, electoral narrative.

One authority where that idea has some purchase is Spelthorne, traditionally run without incident by the Conservatives until a series of internal disputes, splits and external challenges fractured the status quo.

The council has seen a spate of interesting elections where agreement among anti-Conservative parties has affected outcomes.

In July 2021, the Greens resisted the challenge by the Conservatives in Staines ward, helped by both Labour and the Liberal Democrats being absent from the ballot paper.

Last February, Labour gained a Conservative seat in Stanwell North, this time with the Liberal Democrats and Greens choosing not to contest.

Last May, the Greens took a seat from the Conservatives with Labour and the Liberal Democrats absent in Laleham and Shepperton Green.

Now, another by-election in the same ward shows the Greens and Labour making way for the Liberal Democrats, but the tactic failed on this occasion, the Conservatives retaining the seat by a healthy margin.

An anti-Conservative alliance was not in operation in South Staffordshire's succinctly named Penkrige North East and Acton Trussell ward. Electoral contests are a rarity here.

The by-election was prompted by the death of Conservative Isabel Ford. She won her seat in both 2003 and 2007 without opposition.

Local by-elections

Basildon, Nethermayne

IND HELD

46.6% over Con

Turnout 14.0%

Bridgend, Bridgend Central

IND GAIN FROM LAB

8.2% over Lab

Turnout 19.2%

Colchester, Lexden and Braiswick

CON HELD

34.9% over Lib Dem

Turnout 29.3%

Lancaster, Harbour

LAB HELD

6.6% over Lib Dem

Turnout 21.0%

Luton, Dallow

LAB HELD

14.8% over Lib Dem

Turnout 26.9%

North East Derbyshire, Pilsley and Morton

LAB HELD

36.4% over Con

Turnout 28.3%

North Warwickshire, Hartshill

CON HELD

6.7% over Lab

Turnout 23.0%

South Staffordshire, Penkrige North East and Acton Trussell

CON HELD

1.2% over Lib Dem

Turnout 27.4%

Spelthorne, Laleham and Shepperton Green

CON HELD

15.9% over Lib Dem

Turnout 23.6%

Wychavon, Dodderhill

CON HELD

5.7% over Green

Turnout 18.4%

This by-election attracted three candidates and, therefore, the need for a poll. Local Conservative and Labour parties selected sitting parish councillors, and this may have upset the plans of the Liberal Democrats.

Conservative Andy Adams won by a 10-vote margin, with Labour's 45 votes probably making the difference between a hold and a loss for the Conservatives.

Whether or not the idea of a progressive alliance gains wider traction depends on circumstances. Attempts by national parties to enforce agreements will be met by some local hostility.

Party activists who have spent time building relations among their electorate are not going to take instructions that see them stand aside for rivals. Voters, too, may be unwilling to follow the strategy, as evidence about the efficacy of 'tactical voting' at past elections demonstrates.

i For more details of these and other recent by-elections, please visit www.lgafirst.co.uk/local-by-elections

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local.gov.uk/councillor-e-learning

